

Corinthian

(Christians, Culture, Chaos, and "the" Greatest Gift of All)

Historical Overview

Present-day Corinth, or *Korinth* (Κόρινθος) is a Greek city, on the 4.2 mile *Isthmus of Corinth*. The narrow stretch of land joined the *Peloponnesus* to the mainland of *Greece*. To the west of the isthmus lies the *Gulf of Corinth*. Today *Corinth* sits about 48 miles (78 km) west of *Athens*. The isthmus, was in ancient times traversed from its eastern harbor (*Cenchreae*) to its western harbor (*Lechaeum*), by hauling ships over the rocky ridge on sledges and huge rollers, is now cut and filled by a waterway canal that connects the *Aegean* to the *Adriatic Seas*. It is also the capital of the prefecture of *Corinthia*. The city of Corinth is surrounded by *Lechaio*, *Kalamaki*, *Loutraki*, and the *Geraneia Mountains*.

Ancient Corinth, the original city of Corinth, was founded in the 10th Century BC and was the largest city in ancient *Greece*.

More importantly, *Corinth* was the sole possessor of ancient *Greece's* two richest ports. Ancient *Corinth* was destroyed in 146 AD, and then strategically rebuilt in 44 AD. Like ancient *Corinth*, new *Corinth* would thrive. It's prosperous geographical location always brought thousands of settlers from over all the regions of the *Mediterranean*. *Both before and after the destruction and rebuilding of the city*, enormous personal wealth was to be found in the local ruling classes by trade traffic and merchandise. The ruling class was primarily made up of self-made men, and a surprising number of self-made women, as well.

As I said, the wealth of *Corinth* rested largely on control of the trade of goods, merchandise, and raw material from both sides of the Mediterranean region. In the late 6th century BC, *Corinth* sought to maintain this commercial dominance by mediating and managing the conflicts arising between its neighbors - specifically *Athens, Thebes and Sparta*. It would not last for them, and after several centuries of the philosophy "make money and love - not war" the Greeks (including the Spartans)

eventually became too passive in their ways, and too weak in their will and ability to defend their enormous wealth and resources. Corinth sat at the center of that weakness. Rome was the perfect predator!

Rise from the Ashes (The Battle of Corinth, and the Corinthian Rebirth)

In 146 BC, Ancient Corinth and the Greeks fell to Rome under the hand of Praetorian (Ruling Commander) *Lucius Mummius*. The great ancient city of Corinth was completely destroyed in what history named, "*The Battle of Corinth*." This battle was nothing more than a one-sided slaughter, and a ruthless and dehumanizing siege. Eye witnesses gave account of an arrogant and pitiless *Lucius Mummius* as he entered the city right after battle. "*Mummius rode his horse down the middle of the streets screaming insults and mockery at the fallen Greeks and the citizens of Corinth. He ordered all surviving men beheaded by the sword. He commanded this be done in front of their women*

and children. Mummius then insisted that the women and children be immediately be given to, or sold into slavery to the soldiers and friends of Rome - right there in the streets of Corinth where their dead lie." Mummius then ordered the city of Corinth "leveled and torched." and for this ruthless act of conquest he was given the nickname "*Achaicus*" (*Tribe Conqueror*), signifying him as the conquering commander of the Greeks and the *Achaean League*. Mummius (under order of the Roman Senate) was also to bring back to Rome all Greek art/artifacts and valuable treasures. His indifference to fine and original works of art, and his ignorance of their value is shown by his well-known remark to those who were contracted for the shipment of the treasures of Corinth back to Rome. He infamously said... "*if you lose or damage them, you will have to replace them.*"

For the next one hundred years there is little archeological or historical evidence that there was much habitation or activity in the once great city. And then, in **44 BC**, shortly before his assassination, Roman Emperor *Julius Caesar* the vision and

initiative to began the undertaking of re-founding and rebuilding the city *Corinth* from its ashes. He called it, "*Colonia laus Julia Corinthiensis*."

Caesar naturally employed Rome's tried and true format for subduing conquered populations - *divide, conquer, and the appearance of empowerment*. Caesar gave birth to his vision of a "***new Corinth***" ***by having the entire city*** rebuilt from its ashes before it was ever populated. He then repopulated the "*new Corinth*" with conscripted *Italian, Greek, Spanish, Syrian, Ethiopian, Egyptian, and Judean* freed slaves. More accurately the "*new occupants*" of the "*new Corinth*" were strategically "*drafted*" from among the conquered people groups of *Rome* for their...

- *specific skill sets*
- *cultural strengths and weaknesses*
- *history of hostility in the past*

All Things Corinthian

Under the *Roman rule*, *Corinth* would quickly become the power-seat of the Roman empire's control in Southern Greece or *Achaia*, according to *Acts 18:12-16*.

In what seemed like almost overnight, Corinth once again became recognized for its opportunities for personal wealth, its cultural diversity, luxury lifestyle, and for the immoral and unethical habits of its deeply divided people. Yep, Corinth was back! Only this time it would become more intriguing and narcissistic than ever. As much as *Corinth again* became famous for its wealth, the "*new Corinth*" became even more famous for its wild and promiscuous "*street-life*." *Corinth gained* an empire-wide reputation for *loose and immoral living*. In his first visit to Corinth, the apostle Paul was introduced to a city that not only *never slept*, but was actually used to coin one of the Greek words for the term "*to fornicate*", which was *korinthiazomai*! Kind of sounds like "*Corinthians, oh my!*" or "*What happens in the streets of Corinth - stays in the streets of Corinth*." This well-deserved reputation was based, in part, on the ancient Greek historian Strabo's report that there were at

anytime (night or day) more than 1,000 female "*sacred prostitutes*" as well as a large number of male counterparts working in the streets just outside the *Temple of Aphrodite (Goddess of Love)*. The temple was one of several imposing focal points on the *Acrocorinth*, which was an 1,886-foot hill of solid rock that rose above the city of *Corinth*, just to its immediate south side. In *Corinth*, you could find it all, do it all and of course lose it all. *Everything was for sale and everything was visible, ***Corinth was the ultimate world trade center*** - and anything could be traded for... *food, art, clothing, literature, precious stones, metals, and custom jewelry, wine, fine cloth, weapons, livestock, slaves, sex, opium, medicine, services and labor - on and on*. The streets of *Corinth* both upper and lower districts were alive, crowded - full of opportunity, energy, and evil.

Yes, *Corinth* was once again a city of public and commercial success, however now (*unlike before*) it was filled with a population of diverse people groups who possessed a deep cultural and ethnic hostility for one another. Logic might ask...

how could something like that work? The answer to that question is that it was done intentionally by Rome. And the cultural division and ethnic hostility of a "*global Corinth*" was brilliantly kept in check by Rome's "*use and abuse*" of three of mankind's most powerful forces: ***fear - greed - pleasure***. By these forces the citizens of Corinth were people ruled, moved, and controlled...

- ***Ruled*** by their "*fear*" of Rome.
- ***Moved*** by their "*greed for success*."
- ***Controlled*** by their "*addictive appetite for self pleasure*."

We have been saying that by design, *Corinth* was a "mixed bag" of country and culture, but it's *largest populations (because of geographical proximity)* were *Roman, Greek, and Jew*. And although the populous of the city of *Corinth*, had brought with them a cultural and racial hostility they now worked and prospered together and quickly shared similar appetites for excessive and compulsive behavior. They lived in districts and communities designated of their own kind, but the physical

design of these communities were visible and open - where personal and domestic living could not become secretive or hidden. Language was the one barrier that Rome could not completely control or make open. Unless the people had to learn a common language to succeed at their work or in their pleasure - they did not, and they used language as the one thing they could still use as a tool preservation, hostility and power. Holding on to ones language was a priority among the districts and communities. In fact, at the time of Paul's first visit to *Corinth*, the cities population was just over 130,000 people. Of this 130,000 there were over thirty different cultures, who communicated in at least thirteen different dialects (languages). The common language used among them for trade and commerce was Greek. In the streets of Corinth it quickly became Graeco-Roman vibe, but in districts and neighborhoods first generation Corinthians were still deeply committed to not only their own culture - but to their own language.

Rome itself did not worry about these cultural or linguistic resistances and differences, but rather they masterfully used the differences and the lack of trust to effectively rule and control the people. This was Rome's specialty - *patronal societies*. Rome saw these barriers as a great advantage in their ability to control one the world's most strategic and profitable regions, and to more easily rule a huge non-Roman population who had a history of cultural hostility to one another. As each culture became more and more absorbed and intoxicated by the energy of opportunity and self-pleasure "*Corinthian style*", these hostile and segregated people became more than happy to *use one another for both profit and pleasure*. They lived in their communities where they believed family and culture could be protected and preserved by language and lineage - but that false sense of security and power was just a deception created by Rome's design and a turned head. In reality the essence of what Rome uniquely created from their *patronal model* in Corinth was a **hybrid** - a completely *codependent*

society. To do that it meant they could not waver on two things:

One - These diverse and uprooted people could not become solely dependent on the Empire.

Two - These diverse groups could not unite and push to become completely independent of the Empire.

History tells us that Rome was in large part successful at doing this because in their ***patronal model*** *they never let the weakness of a conquered people control the Empire, rather the Empire always controlled a conquered people with its own weakness*. In Corinth, ***what Rome would create was a third kind of dependency - codependency***. Either by intention or invention, Rome counted on these divided and diverse people becoming ***codependent on lifestyle and each other by use of fear, motivation of greed, and the want for pleasure***. At the time of Paul's arrival, Corinth had become a city addicted to pleasure and material possession - held together and controlled by the *codependent and self-centric living of its citizens*.

Patronal Hedonism - a protected people who are not slaves, but freedmen - yet, freedmen who are slaves to their own appetite and intemperance for pleasure and want.

That is (in part) actually the definition of *hedonism*. The people of Corinth became so predictable in their excessive behavior that in a sense Rome did not have to control or rule Corinth - Corinth controlled and ruled itself. That was the brilliance and greatness of Rome...

The Corinth of Paul the Apostle

"You and I who are still far from wise, must not commit the error of falling into a stormy passion which enslaves us to someone else."

Stoic Philosopher - Seneca

50AD

When the apostle Paul first sailed into the harbor at *Cenchreae* from *Athens* in **50 to 52 AD**, *Gallio*, the brother of *Seneca*, was proconsul (*what we would call mayor*) of Corinth. Corinth was a Roman city, with a strong Greek lifestyle, filled with diverse, divided, and delusional people. As Paul looked up at the great city for the first time, he could see the impressive *Acrocorinth* protectively looming over the harbor. As he got closer to the lower city he could contemplate the glorious Graeco-Roman architecture as his eyes fixed upon the thirty-eight massive exterior pillars supporting the enormous porches of the *Temple*

of Apollo, and the deep-seated godlessness that it had come to represent. As he got off his boat he could hear and feel the noise and energy of the city, and could see the thousands of lost souls within its grasp. And even though Paul was well-travelled and well educated, Corinth must have almost seemed to have a certain intriguing force pulling it's new arrivers into the chaos and energy of the city.

It is quite safe with historical certainty to say that spiritually... Corinth was nothing like Jerusalem. And yet, it was all there for Paul - mission, money, and momentum.

It is of course important to remember that Paul himself was very diverse - in language, education, trade, travel, and religion. But did Paul really know who and what Corinth was? He certainly knew who Christ was, He knew he was, he knew who Rome was, he knew who the Jews were, he obviously knew who and what the Gentiles were. But did he fully know what this evolving new Graeco-Roman hybrid city was?

Needing to raise money for his ministry, and to create the opportunity and momentum for his mission, *Corinth* seemed a

perfect and logical fit. But at the same time, by all accounts of history, Corinth was producing not only the world's greatest opportunities, but also its greatest deception leading to its greatest evil. For Paul's purposes, it seemed the place to be. And so, the trade center of the world, and its surrounding districts would become his home base for the next two years (*Acts 18:1-18*). As a servant and faithful preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul found the streets full both day and night of potential converts and business opportunity. As a master *"leather tent maker"* the potential for Paul to raise lots of money very quickly to support and extend momentum for his mission to preach the gospel of Jesus to all the world (in Paul's day Spain was at worlds end) was available in Corinth. Within a few weeks of his arrival Paul met and became employed and eventual friends with the very well connected and wealthy *Aquila and Priscilla*. This was the first of many relationships in Corinth that would help produce the mission, money and momentum that Paul needed to preach the gospel for the rest of his short life.

Archeological Context - Relationship Interests

Temple of Apollo - Corinth was known as the main place of worship for Apollo, the Greek god of music and also Zeus, the King of the gods. The lower city of Corinth was the location of the Temple of Apollo. The temple originally had 38 columns of the Doric order; 7 are standing today. This temple is one of the oldest surviving temples from ancient Greece. Wilhelm Dörpfeld first excavated the site in 1886. Although the identity of the god for whom this temple was first dedicated is in doubt, it has historically been accepted as the worship place for Apollo and Zeus.

Temple of Aphrodite - The acropolis of Corinth is known as Acrocorinth, and it rises about 1800 feet above the surrounding plain. At the highest summit was the Temple of Aphrodite. Aphrodite, the goddess of love and pleasure was worshipped here. The temple area was a center of religious prostitution. Some ancient authors claimed that as many as 1,000 prostitutes

worked here, and as a result Acrocorinth was notorious for its sexual menu and appetite all over the ancient world. It is a historically proven fact that Paul preached here many times and had many converts during his visits and stays in Corinth.

Acrocorinth - *Acrocorinth is the name of the high point in Corinth that descends in natural terraces to the area of coastal plain by the Gulf of Corinth. It was a fortified citadel and the best in ancient Greece, although too high to be a normal acropolis. The main and lower city of Corinth sat at its base by springs on the hill's northern side. The Acrocorinth has a water supply that Greek mythology explains as a gift from the river god Asopus. A fortress was first built on the hill probably in the second half of the sixth century B.C.*

Poseidon - *The site of the Temple of Poseidon at Isthmia was one of great activity during Paul's time and up until the third century AD. It was the last location of one of the four Pan-Hellenic Games from the sixth century (around 581 BC[6]) to be*

found,[7] and had numerous buildings constructed in its vicinity. These ranged from Roman baths to a theatre and most importantly two temples.

Aquila and Priscilla - a Jewish couple exiled from Rome who were both wealthy and powerful business people. They initially employed Paul for his "tent making skills" and then befriended him because of his passionate message and mission for the gospel of Jesus. Paul lived in their spacious luxury home as a guest for his first few months in Corinth.

Titius Justus - a Gentile businessman who converted to Christianity under Paul's teaching. After his conversion to Christ, He would open his home and resources to Paul for the remainder of his time in Corinth. Ironically Justus lived right next door to the Jewish Synagogue, the place where Paul would frequently visit with his Messianic message. Eventually, Paul was brought to trial by the Corinthian authorities - the result of charges brought against him by the Rabbinical community for preaching the Messianic message in their Synagogue. His

Message - Christ the Messiah had already come, was murdered by His own people, resurrected to life, to become the complete fulfillment of the Law, and the sole mediator and access to God the only Father.

Gallio and Seneca - Gallio was the governor/mayor/proconsul of Corinth at the time of Paul's first visit to Corinth. He sat on the "Beema" (seat of judgment) hearing the complaint of the Jews against Paul (according to Luke's account in the book of Acts). **Seneca** was the brother of **Gallio**. He was a widely popular Stoic / Philosopher. Considered in his day to be a contemporary of Plato, Seneca would also become a philosophical mentor to Nero the sadistic Emperor of Rome, who would eventually turn him and of course have Paul, Gallio and Seneca murdered. Interesting to note that Seneca never stood trial before his brother for any kind of moral charges despite the fact that he lived and died as a known "pederast."

Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus - wealthy Corinthian businessmen who were converted to faith in Christ through the ministry of Paul during his first two years in Corinth. All three

provided considerable resources of time - talent - and treasure to the message, mission, and momentum of Paul.

Crispus, Chloe, Gaius - Converts to Christianity under Paul's ministry who had become leaders and persons of influence in the church community in Corinth.

Troublesome Themes and Contentions

From 1 Corinthians alone we know that the church at Corinth was in constant chaos and conflict. Divided over many issues and concerns, a good deal of the chaos and conflict was the direct result of both its leadership and converts struggling with cultural codependency and very little sustainable apostolic teaching on how to close the distance between what they believed and how they lived. This was a community without the unity - they were pulled towards the kingdom of God through the power of the Spirit, the message of the Gospel, and the idea of a very immanent return of Jesus. And yet pulled on

every level into the intoxicating culture of Corinth. One member of the church cohabited with his stepmother, another brought a lawsuit against another brother before the pagan magistrate, some ate and celebrated idolatrous feasts at the pagan temple, and others had themselves re-baptized for friends and family already dead. Here are some of the troublesome themes that we will sort through in our Corinthian journey.

- ***Unity of the Spirit and the Body*** - (1 Corinthians 1:10)
- ***Patronage - Man or God*** - (1 Corinthians 1:18)
- ***Pride and Prejudice*** - (1 Corinthians 4:6)
- ***Sexual Filters and Appropriateness*** - (1 Corinthians 5:1)
- ***Grievance and Judgement*** - (1 Corinthians 6:1)
- ***Marriage and Celibacy*** - (1 Corinthians 7:1)
- ***Rights and Rituals*** - (1 Corinthians 8:1)
- ***Spiritual Gifts - Uses and Abuses*** - (1 Corinthians 12:1)
- ***Resurrection Reset*** - (1 Corinthians 15:12)

Unity of Spirit and Body - March 16th - 29th, 2014
(1 Corinthians 1:10-17)

I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters. Some of you are saying, "I am a follower of Paul." Others are saying, "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Peter," or "I follow only Christ."

Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course

not! I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, for now no one can say they were baptized in my name. (Oh yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas, but I don't remember baptizing anyone else.) For Christ didn't send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News—and not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power.

Paul starts this text by explaining why the Christian community in Corinth had become divided:

- ***They had their eyes focused on and feelings attached to man, rather than to Christ.***
- ***They trusted and valued the wisdom of men, rather than the wisdom of God.***
- ***They gave more recognition and honor to the exploits of man, rather than honoring the exploits of God.***
- ***They were pitting one spiritual leader against the other using unjust comparisons and unrighteous boasts.***

Later on in the letter, Paul will actually prove that this spiritually unhealthy infatuation with men (*personalities*) was a mark of selfish and short-sighted living, and more than enough evidence to reveal that the self proclaimed "spiritual Corinthians" were actually immature and quite misguided in their relationship with Christ.

Paul clearly identified *four divisions within the Corinthian church*.

Division One - followers of Paul (predominantly mixed Gentile groups, some Messianic Jews); super apostle to the Gentiles.

Division Two - followers of Apollos (mostly converted Greeks and some Messianic Jews); dynamic speaker and charismatic personality.

Division Three - followers of Peter (almost all Messianic Jews); traditionalists for an original disciple of Jesus and a more likable personality. (Gal 2:7)

Division Four - followers of themselves and their own spirituality (mixed Gentile groups); following "*Jesus only*" and rejecting all human leadership.

Addressing **all four divisions**, Paul breaks it down for them....

"Christ is not divided - so you cannot remain divided, and follow Christ." He would also add to that a powerful physical imagery, *"All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it."* (12:27-28) It is easy to see from direct and honest instruction such as this, that the goal and desired outcome would be **Unity!**

"Unity in the Spirit and Unity within the Body"

To become unified "*in the Spirit*" and "*within the Body*" each one must adhere to, and work towards, several **core spiritual and practical truths** that Paul would faithfully instruct them in.

- ***Live and worship each day in the bond of peace - without division. This is in love and obedience to the words of Jesus***

Christ ("**God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.**")

- ***It is Jesus who loved, sacrificed, and died for us - absolving and forgiving us of our sin - not human leaders.***
- ***It is Jesus who freely shares with us the gift of eternal life - not human leaders. This is a grace and gift only He alone can give.***
- ***We are rightly baptized only in the name of Christ Jesus (according to His final commission of Matthew 28), not the names of human leaders. Be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord!***

Personal Connection and Study Points

Commit to "living at peace" with all people within all communities in our life.

***"God blesses those who work for peace,
for they will be called the children of God." (Mathew 5:9)***

- **Personal - Mind, Body, and Soul** - *"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid. (John 14:27-28) "Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)*
- **Family** - *Does anyone want to live a life that is long and prosperous? Then keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies! Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it. The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right; his ears are open to their cries for help." (Psalm 34:12-15)*
- **Neighbors, Co-Workers, and Friends** - *"Whenever you enter someone's home, first say, 'May God's peace be on this house.' If those who live there are peaceful, the blessing will*

stand; if they are not, the blessing will return to you. (Luke 10:5-6)

Commit to "living in unity" (Body and Spirit) within the community of Christ (the Church).

- ***Spirit*** - Faithfully praying **for and with** your brothers and sisters in Christ. Walking for and with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Producing each day the Fruit of the Spirit (evidence) in our lives which rightfully allows us to share the Gifts of the Spirit (service) as a true service and encouragement of God the Spirit which builds up and strengthens each one as needed.

"In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the

responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly. Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone." (Romans 12:6-18)

- **Body** - Generously sharing and sowing your **time, talent, and treasure**, into the Body of Christ, the household of faith.
Being faithful through positive participation and a visible

presence. Placing ourselves continually in a place where faith is possible, truth is taught, the love of Jesus is given and received. The Body of Christ must be an open place - the place to love and be loved, to serve and be served, to be poured out - and to be refilled.

"We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love. (Ephesians 4:14-16) Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the

same body. And "don't sin by letting anger control you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil. If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:25-32)

Patronage and Power

(1 Corinthians 1:18-30)

The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. As the Scriptures say,

*"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise
and discard the intelligence of the intelligent."*

So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.

But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.

Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. Therefore, as the Scriptures say, "If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord."

Two Central Conflict - Power Concepts

From this passage (verses 18-30) in Paul's letter to the Corinthian church, about the Corinthian church, will emerge two central power concepts. According to the gospel of Jesus and the apostles of the first century Christianity, these power concepts will always be in conflict. They have been in conflict since the day Jesus was murdered and hung on a Roman cross by the religion of His own people. I realize that is a lot to process, but we have the time and the need to do it - so lets do it...

Power Concept One: Patronage

Patronage is the support, encouragement, privilege, or financial or economical aid that a government, organization bestows to its people, or that an individual bestows to another. In the history of art, arts patronage refers to the support that kings, popes and the wealthy have provided to artists such as musicians, painters, and sculptors. It can also refer to the right

of awarding office/title or church benefices, or the business given to a store by a regular customer, and the guardianship of saints. The word "patron" derives from the Latin *patronus*, "patron," one who gives benefits to his clients. In the context of Paul and Corinth the term patronage is about the power of Rome, and the codependent control of the narcissistic lifestyle of Corinth. Traditionally, Roman society was extremely rigid. By the first century, however, the need for capable men to run Rome's vast empire was slowly eroding the old social barriers. The social structure of ancient Rome was based on heredity, property, wealth, citizenship and freedom. It was also based around men: women were defined by the social status of their fathers or husbands. Women were expected to look after the houses and very few had any real independence.

Roman society was built as a system of ***patronage***. Members of the upper classes – *the patroni* – offered protection to freedmen or plebeians, who became their "*cliens*." Patronage might consist of money, food, or legal help. Traditionally, any freed slaves became the *cliens* of their former owner. In

return, *patroni* received respect and political favors. During the empire, *cliens* were required to offer daily greetings to their *patroni*, and the number of these greeters helped determine social status. On the frontiers of the empire, Roman generals served as *patroni* for the people they conquered, while Roman provinces or cities often sought out an influential senator to act as *patroni* and oversee their interests in Rome.

Make no mistake - Corinth was under the patronage and provision of Rome, as well as its own addictive appetite for wealth and pleasure. To Paul this patronage represented "*man's wisdom*" (*wisdom of the wise and intelligence of the intelligent*). It was clearly the wisdom of man that controlled city Corinth and a large portion of the believing people of the Corinthian church. Patronage was a ***central conflict - power concept***.

Power Concept Two: The Cross

Historical findings have substantiated the traditional cross. One finding is ancient graffiti dating to shortly after 200 A.D., taken from the walls of the Roman Palatine. It is a drawing of a crucified ass; a mockery of a Christian prisoner who worships Christ. The Romans were no doubt amused that Christians worshiped this Jesus whom they had crucified on a cross. In June of 1968, bulldozers working north of Jerusalem accidentally laid bare tombs dating from the first century B.C. and the first century A.D. Greek archeologist Vasilios Tzaferis was instructed by the Israeli Department of Antiquities to carefully excavate these tombs. Subsequently one of the most exciting finds of recent times was unearthed - the first skeletal remains of a crucified man. The most significant factor is its dating to around the time of Christ. The skeleton was of a man named Yehohanan son of Chaggol, who had been crucified between the age of 24 and 28. Mr. Tzaferis wrote an article in the Jan/Feb. 1985 issue of the secular magazine Biblical Archaeology Review. At the end of the first century B.C., the Romans adopted crucifixion as an official punishment for non-

Romans for certain limited transgressions. Initially, it was employed not as a method of execution, but only as a punishment. Moreover, only slaves convicted of certain crimes were punished by crucifixion. During this early period, a wooden beam, known as a *furca* or *patibulum* was placed on the slave's neck and bound to his arms.

...When the procession arrived at the execution site, a vertical stake was fixed into the ground. Sometimes the victim was attached to the cross only with ropes. In such a case, the *patibulum* or crossbeam, to which the victim's arms were already bound, was simply affixed to the vertical beam; the victim's feet were then bound to the stake with a few turns of the rope.

If the victim was attached by nails, he was laid on the ground, with his shoulders on the crossbeam. His arms were held out and nailed to the two ends of the crossbeam, which was then

raised and fixed on top of the vertical beam. The victim's feet were then nailed down against this vertical stake.

In order to prolong the agony, Roman executioners devised two instruments that would keep the victim alive on the cross for extended periods of time. One, known as a *sedile*, was a small seat attached to the front of the cross, about halfway down. This device provided some support for the victim's body and may explain the phrase used by the Romans, "to sit on the cross." Both *Eraneus* and *Justin Martyr* describe the cross of Jesus as having five extremities rather than four; the fifth was probably the *sedile*.

Now... here in the 17th verse Paul says emphatically *that the gospel, or good news, is the cross of Christ. **This is one of the two most important truth's of Christian mission, message and ideology.*** To human wisdom and logic this seems ridiculous, simplistic, and even offensive. So the process of emptying the cross of its meaning and power for the lost soul and desperate sinner has been ongoing since the day it happened. On the

other side (believers and people of faith) in well intended attempts to defend the cross, have wrongly used the same the same logic of human wisdom and reason. Trying to use art, culture, color, design, and now even digital technology to make the cross appear more beautiful, powerful or meaningful than it already is.

In our day (for the ones not angry or offended by God) most people will only see in the cross of Christ as a great humanitarian act (selfless and compassionate). In doing so they miss the reality of the gospel - that the cross of Christ is God's decisive and determined means for the redeeming of humanity from the curse and destruction of sin and evil. With this sole view of the cross of Jesus, it is reduced to nothing more than a useless symbol or metaphor - no meaning or power. When Paul said, *"Christ sent me not to baptize, but to evangelize, not in wisdom of word so that the cross of Christ may not be without effect,"* it was the same as saying that evangelizing is the cross

of Christ. Without the cross, we take the mission and message of Jesus to mean something else; but it is not the gospel.

Patronage and Power (Part 2)
(1 Corinthians 1:18-30)

The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. As the Scriptures say,

*"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise
and discard the intelligence of the intelligent."*

So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the

world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.

But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.

Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. Therefore, as the Scriptures say, "If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord.

Power Concept Two: The Cross (Continued)

So what is the cross of Jesus these days to us who believe?

That is a huge question. Because the answer to that is so skewed, so diverse, and so varied it might be easier to start by answering what it is not. I'm going to do that much in the same way Paul did to the Corinthians. The cross of Jesus Christ is not a lie - it is the truth. In fact, it is the only truth.

To tackle that kind of absolute truth about the cross of Jesus Christ we need to acknowledge that our world today is pretty much a mirrored reflection of the Corinthian codependent culture and society of patronage. One thing for sure - that even as a mere symbol, we know the cross of Jesus remains

"polarizing and absolute" in what I call a *"hypocritically correct and nihilistically relative"* present day society. Another important thing to know... When there is a mixed group of people, representing opposing beliefs and philosophical differences concerning Christianity and the cross of Jesus all *"hatethiests and hatenostics"* will surely come after you with all of their incomplete arguments and angry talking points. Regardless, the truth remains the same - stay calm don't get angry (*not even righteously - you validate them without challenging them in a healthy and intelligent way*). That is why Paul said to the Corinthians... *"The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is actually the very power of God."* So here is what I suggest if you want to defend the cross...

- ***Do your homework***
- ***Validate your own faith (to yourself first) with study, research, revelation, logic, diligence***
- ***Take the attacks and aggression from enemies of the cross with love and graciousness (its not about you)***

- ***Be passionate in your desire to know and defend the kind of truth that can finally set you free***

Here are some things you must understand and some things that will help you:

- To those who fully and rightly believe - the cross of Christ Jesus is ***logos (Grk)***. This simply means; ***intelligence and expression or word***. In direct context; ***it is the expressed Word of God or simply put - the Gospel of Christ Jesus***.
- To those who do not believe - the cross of Jesus Christ is ***moria (Grk)***. This simply means; ***moron or moronic***. In direct context; foolishness without the capability of logic or reason.

So this morning, to those of us who will those seek, find, and believe that... God in His infinite wisdom "*chose things the world considers foolish in order to correct those who think they are wise - and that He chose things that are powerless to humble those who are powerful - or that He purposely chose*

things hated and rejected by the world - and He then used them to show the world what is most important -

This is what the cross of Jesus Christ is...

- **The Logic**
- **The Revelation**
- **The Hope**

Corinthian

The Message - The Mission

April 27th, 2014

(1 Corinthians 2:1-9)

When I first came to you, dear brothers and sisters, I didn't use lofty words and impressive wisdom to tell you God's secret plan. For I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified. I came to you in weakness—timid and trembling. And my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy

Spirit. I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God.

Yet when I am among mature believers, I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world or to the rulers of this world, who are soon forgotten. No, the wisdom we speak of is the mystery of God—his plan that was previously hidden, even though he made it for our ultimate glory before the world began. But the rulers of this world have not understood it; if they had, they would not have crucified our glorious Lord. That is what the Scriptures mean when they say,

*"No eye has seen, no ear has heard,
and no mind has imagined
what God has prepared
for those who love him."*

Clear Cut Message - Single Minded Mission - Desired Outcome

From our time and teaching into the context and content of the first chapter of Corinthians, we hopefully have learned some fundamental facts about the character and personality of the Corinthian people and Paul.

First - the Corinthians were prone to attach themselves to individual preachers and forget the central character of their faith, the Lord Jesus Christ. **Second** - they concerned themselves with minor doctrines such as baptism, while neglecting the gospel's central theme, the cross of Christ.

Third - they tended to be drawn toward philosophical speculation, failing to see that the gospel was the power of God unto salvation while at the same time fully satisfying to the enlightened mind of the believer.

As we start to understand Paul himself we can begin to see him consistently demonstrate and message the Corinthians that he was unmovable and fully committed to the mission of preaching the gospel to the world just as he believed Jesus had asked him to do. He was a very intensely focused and capable

man who knew how to choose his priorities. He certainly proved this over and over again during his nearly three years of personal ministry in Corinth that a preacher can never accommodate (*cave in*) to the unwise and foolish desires and wants of the people he is trying to reach, but should give full attention and energy to meeting their spiritual needs. The healthy community grows from those priorities and nothing else.

Obviously Paul was an intellectual man who might have been greatly tempted to prove this to the intellectual Corinthians, to get their approval and praise. But what is more obvious is that his experiences and faith in Christ had definitely subdued the need and desire in him to do just that. When he became a follower of Jesus, he learned to give priority (*make what is important - important*) to the message and mission that would meet the need and give opportunity for every sinner to find the true Savior — the preaching of Jesus Christ crucified.

Not that Paul was not interesting, or that he could not speak on a variety religious, philosophical, and social issues. He did take on many of the political and social issues of his day during his ministry, but they were not the central message or the core mission. At times the issues and concerns of his day could actually could be seen as *distractions from the message and the mission* - certainly they could not be his primary concern. What is the use of teaching a person not to steal, or not to degrade and dishonor their body and reputation in sexual sin, when they (like us all) possesses a sinful nature whose natural inclination is to sin? Our first concern should be to love, then to teach/mentor, and then to become a living example of the need and desire for being a better person, and finding a better way to live and love.

I can be better than this - I can do better than this - I can live better than this - there is something out there that is better than this...

That kind of message and mission comes freely through redemption and salvation, and it is found fully and only in the love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Once that need has been realized and the redemption process has begun then all these other issues and circumstances can be unpacked, reconciled and resolved as they move forward in Christ.

Paul was a man of clear goals and purposes, so he used the talents he had to preach only in the context that would accomplish these goals. If you want someone to stop lying, but they have not accepted Jesus and are not committed to living as a follower of Jesus should live, you do not preach honesty to them - but you preach the need of salvation and redemption of their entire being. Stealing is only a symptom of that persons sinful nature.

Corinthian

The Message - The Mission (Part II)

May 4th, 2014

(1 Corinthians 2:1-9)

When I first came to you, dear brothers and sisters, I didn't use lofty words and impressive wisdom to tell you God's secret plan. For I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified. I came to you in weakness—timid and trembling. And my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit. I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God.

Yet when I am among mature believers, I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this

world or to the rulers of this world, who are soon forgotten. No, the wisdom we speak of is the mystery of God—his plan that was previously hidden, even though he made it for our ultimate glory before the world began. But the rulers of this world have not understood it; if they had, they would not have crucified our glorious Lord. That is what the Scriptures mean when they say,

*"No eye has seen, no ear has heard,
and no mind has imagined
what God has prepared
for those who love him."*

Evidence that Validates the Message and Strengthens the Mission

This type of understanding and context is necessary if we are to understand what Paul says in chapter two, which begins, *"And I having come to you, brothers and sisters, come not with the*

superiority of expressed intelligence or of wisdom, declaring to you the testimony of God."

It shouldn't be, but it is a little interesting how Paul calls those responsible for the Corinthian chaos *"brothers and sisters."* He does this in spite of the fact that he had to correct, challenge, and admonish, and at some levels even defend himself to them. It is obvious that Paul believed as his *"brothers and sisters in Christ"* that they were entitled to the rationale of his behavior among them - he was ok with that. Conversely they knew that Paul was fully capable of excellent speech and reasoning when it was needed, but they also knew that he had not been much for lengthy rhetoric and stirring speeches among them. Today we would probably call Paul's style among the Corinthians direct and to the point, or that He just didn't like to play games or distract from the message and mission of the gospel of Jesus when dealing with believing followers of Christ who were self-inflicting conflict and chaos in the community of faith. But Paul was not only capable of those skills of persuasive, he was

empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the message with them in extreme circumstances of hostility and unbelief. That kind of environment was *"in the wheelhouse of his mission"* (to the unbelieving Jew and to the hostile Gentile). In fact, when Luke's account of the apostles described Paul's activity in the synagogue when he first came to Corinth, he said,

"And he reasoned [dielegeto, Grk] in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks" (Acts 18:4).

From the Greek word *dielegeto* comes the root for our English word - *dialect*. In Luke's Greek context and tense we get a much fuller understanding and meaning...

"Every Sabbath Paul was in the synagogue persuading both Jews and Greeks of the message of the gospel with a dialect both engaging and convincing."

Dialegeto is also closely related to the word *logou* (powerful and persuasive word) used in *1 Corinthians 2:1*. And again in *Acts 17:2* the word (*dielegeto*) is used again in the same tense and context to describe the manner of Paul's message and

mission in the synagogue in Athens. Consistency in the message and singleminded lay relentless in the mission.

Some of you who are really tracking might have already thought *"wait a minute, which one is it - powerful and persuasive, or plain and simple?* How can we reconcile Luke's statement in *Acts 18* — that Paul reasoned in the synagogue and persuaded both Jews and Greeks — with Paul's statement in *1 Corinthians 2:1* that he *"came not in the superiority of word and wisdom declaring unto [the Corinthians] the testimony of God"*?

That is a good question but easy to answer. It is both. It is important to use reason, when communicating - and Paul used it everywhere. But it would also be wrong to rely just on human reasoning alone to achieve God's mission. Paul was a emotionally intelligent man, who made good use of his native language skills and discerning intellect. He also used logic, fact, illustration, both big picture and personal application in his speaking, teaching, preaching, and delivering a complete

message. Just read the chapters in the Acts that describe man's efforts to persecute and kill Paul, and note how he used every possible intelligent opposition just to create opportunity to continue to preach the message and to move forward in completing his mission. The reality is that Paul could speak at many levels of understanding and comprehension but it was always determined by who his audience was, and the circumstances in which he was speaking to them. I see him as being capable of saying what needed to be said, how and when it needed to be said, so that the message could be delivered and the mission accomplished.

In *Acts 21:37*, out of nowhere Paul began to speak in a Greek *dialegeto* to the chief captain, completely astonishing him. "*Can you speak Greek?*" he asked. And Paul said, "*I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, not a citizen of an opposing or hostile city: and, I respectfully and humbly ask you, please allow me to speak my message to the people.*" Or we can read about how Paul handled the Pharisees of Jerusalem, by

directing their focus and opposition away from himself and to the Sadducees by saying, *"Men, brothers and sisters, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, on trial because I believe in the resurrection of the dead"* (Acts 23:6). He was so intellectually skillful in how he handled the situation that he quickly gained the support of the Pharisees, which he desperately needed at that critical time for the mission he intended to complete. He knew the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead but the Sadducees did not - brilliant. He turned against one another and not at Paul giving him his opportunity. Finally the Pharisees were the ones who finally said, *"We find no evil in this man"* (Acts 23:9). Earlier when Paul was about to be whipped and beaten by the Roman soldiers, he turned to the centurion and said, *"Is it lawful for you to order a beating for a man that is a Roman citizen, especially one who hasn't had a trial?"* (Acts 22:25). These are just a few examples of Paul's masterful and brilliant managing of many, many dangerous and difficult situations. But that was Paul...

- ***Never compromising truth-full of the Holy Spirit***

- *All about the message of Jesus and not his own*
- *Never losing sight of the goal and the high calling of the gospel of Christ*
- *Up for every challenge and circumstance that directly related to the outcome of the message and mission*
- *Never too early or too late for the message and no moment to big for the mission*

Sunday Takeaway

- *Know and believe the message and not just your own rhetoric.*
- *Make the message clear in the words you speak, then make it real by the life you live*
- *Keep the mission singleminded and always in focus (this is who I am - and this is why I am here*

- ***Equip yourself, humble yourself, and surrender yourself to the Holy Spirit***

Corinthian

"God Revealed in Spirit and Word" (May 11th)

(1 Corinthians 2:10-16)

Corinthian

"God Revealed in Spirit and Word" (May 11th)

(1 Corinthians 2:10-16)

"But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets. No one can know a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit. And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us.

When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths. But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means. Those who are spiritual can evaluate all things, but they themselves cannot be evaluated by others. For,
"Who can know the Lord's thoughts?
Who knows enough to teach him?"
But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ."

Holy Spirit in Us - Reveals God to Us

Our redemption or salvation as some like to call it is found in, and made possible through, Jesus Christ. In the strength of this truth Paul attempts to teach the Corinthians one of the first

theology lessons of the New Testament. Now... before you glaze over pass out, fall comatose, and then code on me please take a minute for me to tell you why this lesson from Paul to the Corinthians is so essential for all of us today. It is far more important than what we think. Lets start with this *"theological truth"...*

"Our salvation and redemption to God through Jesus, is the actual beginning of the process in which God profoundly reveals the mystery of Himself to each one of us in extremely unique circumstances and in very personal ways.

Circumstances, and ways, that frankly can never be completely understood by the carnal mind or human reason alone. The Spirit of God, that has been dwelling in us since the moment we first believed and confessed our faith, is how God has chosen to reveal to us the revelation knowledge of Him that is needed to find and follow Him."

That entire process of course is achieved in Christ Jesus, and that is consistent with the fact that God chose for His fullness to be revealed in Christ Jesus.

“Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything. For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.” (Colossians 1:15-20)

Though Christ is supreme the revelation of the Gospel and the heart of God the Father involves the fullness of God - *God the Father - God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:3-14; 1 Peter 1:2).*

We cannot be redeemed or saved as we say apart from:

- *The Father's sovereign grace (choice, election)*
- *The Son's loving sacrifice (redemption, salvation)*
- *The Spirit's guiding revelation (conviction, regeneration)*

It is not enough for you and I to say, "*I believe in God.*" What God is that? In the Corinthian world as in ours today, there are many gods. The truth that Paul wanted to clarify among the chaotic and doctrinally erratic Corinthians is this... Without "the" God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, there can be no salvation for anyone. (*Ephesians 1:3*)

Having this revelation of the gospel brings the serious follower of Jesus to hear certain doctrinal or theological terms. The first of those is the term "*trinity.*" The trinity aspect of our salvation helps us to better understand and embrace the importance of

what the scriptures would call "*the mysteries*" of our salvation. Many people get confused, overwhelmed or unfortunately disinterested when they hear the terms like *sovereignty, trinity, and mystery*. What we need to know about terms such as that is important and not just unnecessary theological rhetoric. We will use our *Sunday Takeaway* as the means to bring a little interest, insight and life to some very valuable and essential truths.

(Side Note): There are pastors of very influential churches in this city who have no strategy or interest as to what they believe or how they should teach the masses of people who attend each week these essential and eternal truths - so they don't.

Sunday Takeaway

One - Here is a *takeaway* to help us get there in a very mixed and spiritually diverse gathering.

“As far as our faith is concerned we stand on this truth; we are redeemed and saved by the grace of God the Father, when He chose us in Christ Jesus the Son, before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4); but none of us knew anything about that the moment we believed and came to our faith. It was a mystery to us then, but yet it is an essential part of God's amazing and eternal plan for our life. As we seek the word of God, and follow Jesus towards God, this mystery is being revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in us - and that is fullness of God with us.”

Two - Here is another *takeaway* to help us see the importance of our knowing this truth.

“As far as God the Son is concerned, I was saved when He died for me on the cross. He died for the sins of the whole world, yet the whole world is not saved. This is where God the Spirit

comes in: as far as the Spirit is concerned, I was saved in the summer of 1967, at Youth Camp where I saw a dramatic skit about the return of Christ, and heard the speaker share the Gospel. It was at that moment when the Holy Spirit revealed a small piece of His Word to me. I believed it in my heart and confessed it with my mouth, and God saved me. God always knew what I would one day begin to know - and God has always known what someday I will fully know... God the Father, revealed in the God the Son, by the power of God the Spirit.

Corinthian

"God Revealed in Spirit and Word"

Part 2 (May 18th)

"But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets. No one can know a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit. And we have received God's Spirit (not the

world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths. But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means. Those who are spiritual can evaluate all things, but they themselves cannot be evaluated by others. For, "Who can know the Lord's thoughts? Who knows enough to teach him?" But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ."

Centuries later these words would be determined as chapter two of this letter, in it Paul would identify and clarify to the Corinthian church what we can see as ***Four Key Functions of God the Spirit.***

(Note) *The chapter divisions commonly used today were developed by Stephen Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Langton put the modern chapter divisions into place in around A.D. 1227. The Wycliffe English Bible of 1382 was the first Bible to use this chapter pattern.*

Chapter was the beginning of extensive instruction and clarification regarding the presence, working, and evidence of the Holy Spirit to for this group. The growing seeds of gnosticism and patterns of spiritual abuse were more than Paul could take... and so as a result we all have this inspired truth and theological teaching.

Function One - Spirit Indwells Us:

In verse twelve of chapter two, Paul said to the Corinthians, *"The Spirit lives within believers."* The very moment you and I believed, confessed, and trusted Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God entered our physical body and conscious being - and as a living

and active spiritual presence begin to make it His temple (*1 Corinthians 6:19-20*). He baptized you (identified you) into the body of Christ (*1 Corinthians 12:13*). He sealed you (*Ephesians 1:13-14*) and will remain with you (*John 14:16*). He is God's gift to you. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of liberty (*2 Corinthians 3:17*). We have not received the "spirit of the world" because we have been called out of this world and no longer belong to it (*John 17:14,16*). We are no longer under the authority of Satan and his world system. Nor have we received a "spirit of bondage again to fear" (*Romans 8:15*). The Holy Spirit ministers to us and makes the Father real to us. This ties in with (*2 Timothy 1:7*) - "*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound [disciplined] mind.*"

Literally at our finger tips we have direct access to a multitude of spiritual resources because the Spirit lives within us! In reality once we have believed in God and come to know and accept Christ there is no biblical instruction directing us to continue to invite the *Holy Spirit* to come to us or for us... God the *Holy Spirit* is already living in us. I believe like Paul, that as

we grow in our faith in God, and our relationship with Jesus that we should all become more accurate and mature with our daily requests, our natural course of action, our moral choices and our personal interaction with and to God.

Function Two - Spirit Searches Us (May 25th)

It is a fact know that I cannot know the deep things within your mind and inner personality, but you do - your human spirit within you knows. It is also a fact that I cannot I know *"the deep things of God"* (His mind His heart His will) unless somehow I have true insight into God's Spirit. By believing and accepting God through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit I have degrees and levels of access to the heart, mind and will of God. God has entered into my being... my human spirit, and through His Spirit each believer shares each day in the very life of God. The Holy Spirit knows *"the deep things of God"* that I, on my own, apart from Him, do not understand. But when I believe in God, through faith in God, He reveals who He is to me. *1 Corinthians 2:10* makes it pretty clear that *"those deeper things*

of God" are part of the things described as *"what God has prepared for those that love Him"* (1 Corinthians 2:9). God wants us to know today all the blessings of His grace, and the purpose of His will that He has uniquely planned for just us.

Function Three - Spirit Teaches Us

Jesus promised that the Spirit would teach us (*John 14:26*) and guide us into truth (*John 16:13*). There is a healthy order that should be understood: *God the Spirit* taught Paul from the Word, followed by Paul then teaching the believers. *The truth of God is found and confirmed in the Word of God*. And it is very important to note that these spiritual truths are given in specific words. In scripture, we have much more available to us than inspired thoughts; we have inspired words. Do you remember Jesus saying *"For I gave to them the words that You gave me"*? (*John 17:8*)

In our family each of our five adult children has a different vocation. We have a corporate jet pilot, a corporate business

finance manager, a military education advisor, an executive chef, and a ministry leader trying to figure out she is a ministry leader. Each of them has had to learn a specialized vocabulary, culture, and skill set in order to succeed. The only one I really understand is the ministry leader who is trying to figure out that she is a ministry leader... we speak a similar language, we flourish in a similar culture, and we have a very similar skill set. The point is this... *An intentional follower of Jesus who learns the vocabulary of the God the Spirit (Holy), and makes good use of it, will eventually come to know not just God's big and impressive vocabulary of spiritual and religious words such as **redemption, salvation, justification, sanctification, adoption, propitiation, election, inspiration, sovereignty and so on...** But more importantly the intentional follower will come to an understanding through the Holy Spirit's revelation of the heart of God. And even more exciting the answer as to why He would do all of those things and more for us in our completely flawed and sinful condition as human beings. Now that is real - I hope you can feel me on that.*

Function Four - Spirit Matures Us

The contrast here is between the saved and believing person (*called "spiritual" because the Spirit of God lives in them*) and the unbelieving person (*called "natural" because he does not have the Spirit within*). In *1 Corinthians 3:1-4*, Paul will introduce a third kind of person, the *"carnal man."* He is the immature Christian, the one who lives on a childhood level because he will not seek the Word of God and grow in the Spirit of God.

We need to grow in the spiritual realm! The unbelieving person cannot receive the things of the Spirit because he does not believe in them, and cannot understand them. But as the Christian day by day receives the things of the Spirit he grows and matures.

A true sign of spiritual maturity is discernment - the ability to penetrate beneath the surface of life and see things as they really are. Unbelieving people "walk by sight" and really see nothing, they are spiritually blind. The maturing Christian grows

in his spiritual discernment and develops the ability (*with the Spirit's help*) to understand the will and mind of God. The Corinthians lacked this discernment; they were spiritually immature.

To "*have the mind of Christ*" as Paul says does not mean we are infallible, perfect, and become "god" in the lives of other people. To "*have the mind of Christ*" means to

- *look at life from His point of view*
- *to establish His values for and in our life*
- *desire to think like Jesus, and not as the world thinks*

The unbelieving person does not appreciate or understand us Christians and what they believe especially if we back it up with how live; it is two different worlds. But the Christian understands the unbelieving person because the love of Christ not only compels them, but that they too were once an unbeliever. First Corinthians 2:15 does not suggest that unsaved people cannot point out flaws in the believer's life (unfortunately we do), but that the unbelieving person really cannot grasp a full understanding of what the Christ followers

life of faith is all about. I like the New American Standard Bible's translation: *"But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man."* That "no man" includes other Christians as well. We must be very careful not to become spiritual dictators in the lives of other believers, and our own community (2 Corinthians 1:24).

The Corinthian Christians were a group who had become infatuated with the mystical supernatural gifts of the Spirit to the point that they were neglecting the heart of God the Father, the gospel of Jesus, and of course the most essential and more excellent ministries of the Spirit. And in their unhealthy emphasis on the Spirit they did not teach and disciple true and obedient relationship with God through Christ Jesus - big problem. The result - ***chaos - confusion - condemnation - hurt - division.***

Sunday Takeaway

I believe like Paul, that as we grow and mature in our faith in God, and relationship with Jesus that we should become more

accurate and mature with our daily requests, our natural course of action, our moral choices and our personal interaction with and to God. Here are the ***biblical directives*** for the Holy Spirit at work in us.

We can seek for the guidance, wisdom comfort, and the revelation of the Spirit.

- *So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better. (Colossians 1:9)*

We can pray for the discernment, the power, the leading, and the move of the Spirit.

We can desire the life and gifts of the Spirit.

- *So you should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts. But now let me show you a way of life that is best of all. (1 Corinthians 12:31) NLT*

We can measure our walk in the Spirit by the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit produced in our daily life.

- *But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. (Galatians 5:22)*

We can obey the voice, the will, and move of the Spirit.

- *So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are*

not under obligation to the law of Moses. (Galatians 5:16)

NLT

We can live in the freedom and fullness of the Spirit.

- *It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. (John 6:63) ESV*

We can be anointed by the Spirit to preach the gospel of Christ. and to proclaim liberty to the captives.

- *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18) ESV*

Corinthian - June 8th 2014

Spiritual Growth #101

(1 Corinthians 3:1-16)

Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life. I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world? When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I follow Apollos," aren't you acting just like people of the world? After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard

work. For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building. Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ. Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames. Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Growing Up In the Family of Faith - Maturing in the Community of Christ

We know already that Paul has told the Corinthian church that there are **two kinds of people in the world** - *natural* (unbelievers) and *spiritual* (believers). He also gave a healthy insight into the reality that there are **two kinds of spiritual believers**: carnal (mature and immature). The direct advice from Paul for those needing or seeking to grow and mature spiritually was for them to ***allow the Spirit of God (Holy Spirit living working in each believer) to influence, teach, and direct their lives.*** The Spirit of God does this in us by ***loving through - learning from - and living in obedience to - the Word of God.*** Now in the context of Paul's correction and instruction to these particular people in Corinth "*the Word of God*" he spoke of to them could only mean the gospel of Jesus Christ, since their were no bibles, written manuals for discipleship, or formal church protocols. Paul said, "*the immature Christian lives for the things of the flesh (carnal) and has little interest in the*

things of the Spirit." Of course, some of the believers and followers in Corinth were spiritually immature because they had been following Christ for only a short time, but that was not his target for this particular instruction.

Paul was the "*spiritual father*" who planted and brought the Corinthian community of faith together (*1 Corinthians 4:15*). During his nearly two years in Corinth he had tried to feed and disciple his *spiritual offspring* to help them grow and mature spiritually into the faith. His driven and aggressive approach though not always gentle, was certainly decisive, practical, insightful, and consistently sincere, hopeful, and led by the Spirit. Just as in the dynamics of our domestic families; everybody pitches in and helps the young ones grow and mature. But is also essential to every member of the family that a mature and respected *family leader* emerges with *the wisdom* - *experience* - *and courage* needed to at critical and important times step up and...

- ***Make the difficult decisions when they must be made***

- *Provide godly counsel and biblical perspective when needed most*
- *Discipline when appropriate and beneficial*
- *Stabilize and reassure when all seems hopeless and lost*

This kind of leadership reflects the spiritual maturity that Paul spoke of here. It represents the truth about spiritual growth that is far too often not taught or expected in faith-based community. It obviously reflected what was most needed above all of the many other conflicts and contentions going on in the Corinthian church at the time of Paul's letter to them. And as is most often the case the lack of spiritual growth and maturity among the leadership was directly responsible for the chaos and contention in the church community. It was time for the followers of Christ in Corinth to grow up... spiritually. It was time to grow in their shallow understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit among them, and to fully embrace what it meant to have the Spirit of God living in ones being. The temple as Jesus and Paul had called it, was being destroyed by this lack of healthy growth and responsible maturity - it was time to **build**

up and not **tear down** the work that the Spirit of God was doing in the community of faith and within each one their lives. To further make this real this morning for each of us we need to compare how that works in our lives...

To begin we know that the New Testament clearly teaches that *every believer in Christ has and lives by the Spirit*, but it is also very clear that *not every believer in Christ walks by the Spirit*. To walk by or in the Spirit might be defined like this...

"I am inspired, enlightened, compelled, and refined by the Spirit of God in me."

Here is what God's expectation for each of us as followers and believers looks like...

"Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives." (Galatians 5:25)

That is a big concept but it is true, and because this is true, it is also true that when we do not live according to the leading of the God's Spirit we are actively then working against what God is doing, by damaging the spiritual temple that He is building (in us).

What did Jesus or Paul mean by "building a spiritual temple in us"? According the bible that would look like this:

- *the renewing of our mind*
- *the surrender of our will*
- *the discipline of our flesh*
- *the opening of our heart*
- *the encountering of our soul*

To own of this kind of truth with *complete understanding*, and a *genuine desire to learn*, subsequently how we go about *obediently living our life* is the very spiritual growth and maturity needed to lead not only our families at home, but also the family of faith - the community of Christ. That is the work of the Holy Spirit in us!

Sunday Takeaway

Here are a few questions we need to have answered for our Sunday takeaway.

- ***Would you say that you are building or tearing down the work of God's Spirit in you?***
- ***In what ways do you see yourself as God's temple? (1 Peter 2:2-10)***
- ***How do you measure your own spiritual maturity and growth?***
- ***How can I help God build in me what He desires to build?***

Corinthian - June 15th

(Michael Stahl - Teaching)

1 Corinthians 3:18-23

Stop deceiving yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world's standards, you need to become a fool to be truly wise.

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As the Scriptures say,

*"He traps the wise
in the snare of their own cleverness."*

And again,

*"The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise;
he knows they are worthless."*

So don't boast about following a particular human leader. For everything belongs to you— whether Paul or Apollos or Peter, or the world, or life and death, or the present and the future. Everything belongs to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

Corinthian

Sunday (June 22nd, 2014)

Good Steward / Servant Leader (1 Corinthians 4:1-6)

So look at Apollos and me as mere servants of Christ who have been put in charge of explaining God's mysteries. Now, a person who is put in charge as a manager must be faithful. As for me, it matters very little how I might be evaluated by you or by any human authority. I don't even trust my own judgment on this point. My conscience is clear, but that doesn't prove I'm right. It is the Lord himself who will examine me and decide. So don't make judgments about anyone ahead of time—before the Lord returns. For he will bring our darkest secrets to light and will reveal our private motives. Then God will give to each one whatever praise is due.

Identity Reset

Some of the criticism that had gotten back to Paul from Corinth was personally directed at him. Since he had been the spiritual father of the church there it was undoubtedly pretty hard for Paul to not be defensive - especially with his personal knowledge of some of the sources of that criticism. I think his responses are spiritually tempered, but also very human as well. Paul's answer to the critical questioning of his authority and title to the leaders and voices from the various disruptive and negative groups in the church was made clear when he called not only himself, but Peter, and Apollos "***ministers of Christ***" As I consider the circumstances of this text and its chaotic context I see his response as not only an interesting choice of words but more importantly and intentional choice intended on teaching some humility and some much needed principles in servant leadership. The word "***ministers***" translated from its *original Greek* literally means "***underrowers.***" It described the slaves who rowed the huge Roman galley ships. "*We are not the captains of the ship,*" said

Paul, *"but only the galley slaves who are rowing under orders. Now I ask you, is one slave greater than another?"*

Then Paul explained the image of the steward. A steward is a servant who manages everything for his master, but who himself owns nothing. Remember, Joseph the great Jewish leader was a slave and a chief steward in Potiphar's household in *Genesis 39*. The Church is humbly referred to as the *"household of faith"* in *Galatians 6:10*, and ministers are stewards who share God's wealth with the family of faith in *Matthew's gospel 13:52*. *This legacy of service is not only valuable to God, but is essential to effectively leading the Church of Jesus Christ*. Paul called this spiritual wealth *"the mysteries of God."* We talked about the importance of the word *mystery* in Paul's context of *the mysteries of the faith* back in chapter 2, verse 7.

The responsibility of the steward is to be faithful to his master. A steward may not please the members of the household; he may not even please some of the other servants; but if he

pleases his own master, he is a good steward. This same idea is expressed in *Romans 14:4*.

"Who are you to condemn someone else's servants? They are responsible to the Lord, so let him judge whether they are right or wrong. And with the Lord's help, they will do what is right and will receive his approval."

So, the core question for the good steward is not a divisive and immature one like...

"Which leader do we like better?"

"Who is more popular?"

"Is Apollos a better preacher than Paul?"

The core question is...

"Have these men (Paul, Apollos, and Peter), been faithful to do the things that God asked them to do?"

"From this context we take it to understand that we are servants - and not just any servant, we are expected to be

“good servants. And that is our identity in Christ; we are as leaders, mentors, teachers, parents, neighbors, friends and ministers (underrowers) to be a good and faithful servant.”

Jesus had this same thing in mind when He told the parable recorded in *Luke 12:41-48* - *(there are consequences to the servant or steward for his or her actions both good and bad)*.

If a servant of God is faithful...

- ***in personal life***
- ***in home life with family and friends***
- ***in ministry life to the Word of God***

then in the eyes and judgment of God, they are a good man or woman.

If this is true of us or of another brother or sister in Christ then we are right to believe that regardless of man's judgments or criticism we are *“good stewards of the faith”* and the *“gospel of Jesus.”* God will always value and reward faithfulness and service to Himself and to others.

Sunday Takeaway - (Paul Goes Deeper)

The reality of faithfully serving God is this: a servant of God is constantly being judged and watched. And, there is always somebody criticizing, sharing negativity, or giving ill-advised opinions on something we do or don't do. Paul identifies for the Corinthians (and now us) **three judgments** to be faced in the life of a good steward or servant leader.

First (Man's Judgment) verse 3 - Primarily because of his single-minded obedience to the mission and message of the gospel of Jesus, Paul did not completely meltdown when people criticized him. It is pretty obvious that he did struggle at times with his sarcasm and anger, as well as his high expectations of himself and others. Yet in spite of those human struggles, he always pushed his heart and his attitude back into the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to be able to manage and redirect his emotions, anger, and expectations. He did this in surrender and humility as a "*good steward*" and

*"servant leader", so at the end of the day he knew that the judgment of God was far more valuable and important to him as a person and to the outcome of his mission in God's kingdom. It is kind of interesting to note that the scriptural phrase "man's judgment" is literally translated as "man's day." Even more interesting to contrast that with "God's day of judgment" yet to come as already mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:8; 3:13. **To the good steward and servant leader isn't every day, God's day - regardless of what man may think, say, or do with us?***

Secondly (Self Judgement) -The good steward/servant leader should put in place spiritually healthy levels and degree of **self-judgment** (verses 3-4). Paul knew exactly what he had and had not done in his life - both good and bad. He knew who he was "in Christ", and who he was without Christ." He did not make excuses for his humanity, and gave God honor for his ministry. Sometimes we do not really know ourselves and so our self judgment can become self loathing. That is neither healthy or

spiritually or emotionally. To Paul, to the best way to know himself was to know his creator and Lord. In fact, he said one time... *"I am determined to know nothing among you but Christ and Him crucified."* The other danger with self-judgment is with pride and arrogance (self-righteous). There can be a fine line between a clear conscience and a self-righteous attitude, that is why the Holy Spirit is at work in us - ***convicting, correcting, and redirecting. So the good steward evaluates and judges him or herself through the expectations and standards of God's truth and not man's lie.***

Thirdly (God's Judgment) - This is the single most important judgment for all mankind (verse 4). As good stewards and servant leaders we all should have the sense and knowledge that God judges us today through His Word/Truth (*Hebrews 4:12*), and that He judges us in the end by how we have responded to His Word/Truth. *The Spirit of God living in us works moment by moment within our mind, body and spirit to speak into our lives and to navigate us towards the will and*

plans of God. In that context, God will literally use anyone - anywhere - anytime and anyplace to get our attention and capture or recapture our heart. This is in reality the costly grace and merciful judgment freely given to us each day to strengthen us as leaders and good stewards. (Check out Matthew 18:15-17) But the main reference here is to the final evaluation when each Christian stands at the Judgment Seat of Christ (*Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10*). Then the true facts will be revealed and the good and faithful servants will be rewarded. ***So, for a follower of Christ, God's judgment is not only our final redemption, but is also our daily guidance to good stewardship and servant leadership.***

These five verses from Paul to the Corinthians are not intended to cultivate a self-righteous independence of people. The church community is a genuine family - and members of the family must love first, and then learn to faithfully serve in the interest and growth of the others. In that process the

community/family must become a safe place for honest and loving criticism as in...

*"Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."
(Ephesians 4:15-16)*

If the loving critic is right about us, then he or she has helped us. If he or she is wrong, then we have an opportunity to help them. Either way, the truth is validated and strengthened, and we move forward to become good stewards of the faith, and effective and influential servant leaders to our family, friends, and the community of Christ.

Corinthian

July 13th, 2014

Growing Up in Christ

(1 Corinthians 4:10-17)

"Our dedication to Christ makes us look like fools, but you claim to be so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are so powerful! You are honored, but we are ridiculed. Even now we go hungry and thirsty, and we don't have enough clothes to keep warm. We are often beaten and have no home. We work wearily with our own hands to earn our living. We bless those who curse us. We are patient with those who abuse us. We appeal gently when evil things are said about us. Yet we are treated like the world's garbage, like everybody's trash—right up to the present moment.

I am not writing these things to shame you, but to warn you as my beloved children. For even if you had ten thousand others to teach you about Christ, you have only one spiritual father. For I became your father in Christ Jesus when I preached the Good News to you. So I urge you to imitate me. That's why I have

sent Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord. He will remind you of how I follow Christ Jesus, just as I teach in all the churches wherever I go."

The Process of Spiritual Growth and Maturity

An easy mistake for a lot of parents happens when the *"I only want what's best for you"* goes bad. The tendency to either intentionally or unintentionally push their children to become who they themselves are, or wish to be takes over. A good deal of that *"wanting what is best for our kids"* would happen naturally if left alone, but when forced or given no choice it usually ends up causing conflict and resentment. The healthy idea is that if we really love our children, we will want them to learn and to think on their own, and grow up to be who they need to be, and do what they must for themselves - capable to act out of conviction and passion rather than out of fear and force, merely reliving their parents life through their own. We

all know that there needs to be a healthy and unique growth and maturity process that takes place in them on their own.

Now in spite of the fact that he wanted "*wack (smite) and waste (lay barren)*" many of them for their behavior, I think Paul truly loved the Christians in Corinth - they were family, and he wanted what was best for them. He does not merely refer to the fact that they were his *children in the Lord*, but that they were *beloved children*. The word for "*children*" in 1 Corinthians 4:14 is **tékna**, from the verb **tíkta**, which means "*to give birth to.*" Paul had truly sacrificed and poured his mind-body-soul into birthing these diverse and difficult people, within the context that it was through his preaching/teaching that they were born into the family of God through belief and faith in Christ.

Sadly, as we know (as often evidenced in our culture), parents can give birth to a child without ever loving and nurturing them. That was not Paul, he was all in - all the time. He not only gave

spiritual birth to the Corinthians, but he also loved them and continually proved it in both his words and actions. That is why he had earned the right and privilege to challenge them in ways that could lead them to think and do right in the eyes of God. That is what it means to be a father - and that is servant leadership. By leading and loving in this way Paul has earned the right to be called - "***spiritual father***" of the Corinthian church.

Paul uses the adjective from the original text to express his love towards them in this apposition letter (*Hey I'm not opposing you, I'm with you - I'm not against you, I'm for you*). He says, "*but as my children, beloved ones (agapetá)*." He could have used another Greek word, such as *pephileména*, from *philéo*, which denotes the love of mutuals, equals, brothers, or those having common interests. But he didn't; he uses the adjective derived from *agapáo*, which expresses a God-like, serving and compassionate love of the superior for the inferior,

not as one who pities or exploits the person who is the object of love - but for the sake of helping him.

This is the true beauty and glory of what Jesus wants from us as His followers and disciples - it is the only real example of Christian grace. The Corinthians could easily have misunderstood what Paul meant when he wrote to them about a life of sacrifice and privation - some of them did. They might have concluded that Paul was just using ministry to get their money - some did. But that was not what he was after - what he wanted was for them to grow up and to mature in their faith so that they would finally stop being ***hurtful, hostile, and hateful*** to other brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul didn't want their money - that was the farthest thing from his mind. He wasn't admonishing them for his own benefit, but for their own, so that they might realize that there is an inherent and recurring residual blessing available through living a life of service and sacrifice for the sake of Jesus Christ. I call it...

"Growing up yourself, so you can get over yourself, so you can serve and love someone other than yourself."

God Himself does not love us for His own personal gain. He doesn't want us to give of ourselves just so He can have more - He wants us to give of ourselves so that we can experience the fullness of love and joy that we could not have experienced in any other way. A truly loving father doesn't admonish his children so that he may be served and lack nothing, he should admonish so that they will grow up to think, act, and live in a right and good way - *a better way to live and a better way to love*. A loving father should console, counsel and do what he does for his children primarily because he wants to help them become mature, responsible, productive and wise adults. Children can easily see through a person whose instruction and advice has a selfish motive, and usually comply only as long as they are forced to. Then, when the bonds of necessity cease to exist, the bonds of *filial* obedience abruptly comes to an end.

What Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians was to make them think and believe the right way about the blessing of a sacrificial life of faith for the sake of Jesus Christ - (*good stewards and servant leaders*). To be motivated to such sacrifice, Christians must be convicted and inspired from above, not merely shamed into it for the sake of avoiding embarrassment.

Paul didn't want the Corinthians to think of him as a teacher who was merely *going through the motions* in instructing them about what was right. "*I am not a mere teacher in my relationship with you,*" he says in effect; "*I am a father who loves you. One can have many teachers, but only a single father.*" He wanted that singular relationship to be realized by the Corinthians. He knew it in his own heart. He loved them; so he wanted them to learn to think right in their attitude toward the material things of this world. Hence his words in *1 Corinthians 4:15*: "*For you have ten thousand teachers in Christ, yet have you not many fathers.*"

He of course is referring to spiritual teachers, because he uses one of his favorite expressions, *"in Christ."* He recognizes that the Christian life is one of growth, and not of instant maturity. When we are spiritually born again, we are *"infants in Christ."* Just as in our natural life in which we first learn how to speak, crawl, walk, then how to write, and to reason. Each age and growth point has its appropriate teachers. Paul is teaching that something similar must take place in our spiritual life. Just as we would not attempt to teach microbiology and differential calculus to a six year old, we should not expect the young in Christ to grasp all that is implied in Christian doctrine and the expectations in daily life all at once. If we could only realize this discipleship principle in our experience and the lives of others, we would help young believers to grow in a way that is much more helpful and encouraging. Paul knew this. He understood that spiritual frustration can come in two ways: through teaching a young believer what they cannot possibly

understand or learn, and teaching a mature believer what is more appropriate for a new believer.

One of the real time struggles in the Christian Church today is the lack of genuine spiritual growth evidenced in its members. As one pastor friend put it to me, *"In most of our churches the Christians are constantly fed baby food - now that is all they want."* As someone else has truly observed, ***"You are only young once, but you can stay immature indefinitely."***

Sunday Takeaway

One - Shame is not a good end in itself. More often accompanied by evil motives, shame tends to paralyze action, to cause people to turn inward (*entréa*). Paul tells his Corinthian brothers this is not his purpose which is, rather, to admonish, as he would a child.

Two - Admonishment occurs when the Holy Spirit impresses upon us a good role model. Accordingly, Paul appealed to his own life: *"Follow me as (i.e., to the extent) I follow Christ" (1*

Corinthians 11:1). Shame requires little more than an arrogant self-righteous attitude.

Three - The Greek word translated admonish, *nouthetéo*, means to put the mind in its proper place (*that is, to think correctly*).

Paul wanted His Corinthian readers to have the right perspective on wealth, and the true wealth of the knowledge of the power of the resurrection of Jesus. This is "*nouthetic*" counsel, counsel or instruction which changes thinking.

Four - Internal shame is more a reaction to the consequences of evil than it is to evil itself. Only clear and right-minded thinking about evil can produce genuine repentance. ***Grid of Truth***

Five - Paul could write or talk to the Corinthians as his *tékna*; sons and daughters, in the same sense that we could write or speak to someone who we introduced to the gospel or have disciplined to Jesus. He even contrasts this authority *filial* or parental role with that of a teacher in (*1 Corinthians 4:15*).

Six - Christian maturity is a growth process from childhood to adulthood. We all would be far better off by allowing ourselves to be covered and to abide under the *tutelage and mentoring*

of a spiritual father like Paul. Complex and polarizing topics should be tackled only after receiving foundational discipleship training and then understood and experienced through personal and service applications.

Corinthian - July 20th 2014

1 Corinthians 4:18-21

"Some of you have become arrogant, thinking I will not visit you again. But I will come—and soon—if the Lord lets me, and then I'll find out whether these arrogant people just give pretentious speeches or whether they really have God's power. For the Kingdom of God is not just a lot of talk; it is living by God's power. Which do you choose? Should I come with a rod to punish you, or should I come with love and a gentle spirit?"

Power to Overcome

The Greek word for "power" in *1 Corinthians 4:20* is ***dúnamis***. Years ago, an inventor developed a highly explosive and

powerful substance, he used this Greek word to coin a name for it: **dynamite**. This is the meaning of the word "**Power**" in the context of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. As followers of Jesus, we have received power in the reality of the Spirit of God. The power of God is in us. But this is power that works according to God's will for our life - and not our will for our life. It is power targeted at a *better way to live and a better way to love* - it is focused on navigating us towards living a victorious life against sin. It's not our own power but the power of God within us. It's power to live above circumstances instead of allowing those circumstances to toss us around the yard like a football. It's power to live as humble men and women for Christ's sake even when we might have the opportunity to live filled with *the pride of life*.

When Paul made his intended visit to the Corinthians, he didn't want to listen to their proud words but "*to know the power*," he said in *verse 19*. "*For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power*" (*v. 20*). This means to us that if God is King and Lord of

your life, that will not result in boastfulness and arrogance but in humble and faithful service to the kingdom of God and to those that we love.

When Paul speaks of the transforming power of God, he calls it "*the power*," to distinguish it from all other kinds of influential forces. It was *the power* he himself had experienced years earlier as he traveled on the road to Damascus to persecute followers of Jesus. For Paul that power was an overcoming force of God's Spirit that neutralized his arrogance and hostile Pharisaism, and resistance to Christ. This power of Christ manifested itself in the transformation and conversion of Paul and he would never be the same. Because of this *power* he became Paul, the humble and persecuted believer who was ready to suffer anything for the sake of Christ whom he had previously hated. And this same *power* manifested itself in his ministry of preaching the gospel as "*the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth*" (Rom 1:16).

Paul realized that this *power of God* was not only "unto salvation" but was God's gracious gift to the believer to enable him to overcome sin and live like Christ.

Think for just a moment about the amazing changes that took place in Paul's life - then think about the changes that have taken place in your own life as a result of the power of God living in you! Isn't that powerful?

I read about a Hindu woman who was converted by hearing the Word of God. She was terribly persecuted by her husband who had rejected the message. The missionary who presented the gospel to them asked her, "*How do you react to the cruel treatment of your husband?*" Smiling, she replied, "*Sahib, I try to cook better food for him. When he speaks unkindly to me, I answer softly. I want to show him that when I became a Christian I became a better wife and mother.*" In time a change took place in her husband. He had been able to withstand the preaching of the missionary, but he could not withstand the

power of God's love in his Christlike wife. She led her own husband to accepting Christ.

When the apostles received the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, what difference did it make in their lives? What kind of enablement does the power of God bring to men and women who have fully surrendered their lives? First and foremost it enables them to quit certain sins and wrong behavior, and enables them to acquire virtues and behavior that are characteristic of a transformed life and the resurrection power of Jesus Christ in their lives. That is a powerful life changing gain.

But what is lost? What a man or woman loses by receiving such power can be summed up in one word: fear and disbelief. He or she are no longer afraid to do what is right in God's sight although they know it may cost them something in the process. But it is nothing compared with what is gained and realized in Christ. Paul expressed the difference that faith in God and a

relationship with Christ makes in a person's life in *2 Timothy 1:7*, *"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love and of a sound mind."* Where God's power is, fear and disbelief are absent. At one point there was real threat that Timothy would suffer persecution while he served in Ephesus as a result of his Christian testimony and his relationship with Paul who was at that time in jail for preaching the gospel of Jesus. That's why Paul wrote to Timothy,

"Don't ever be ashamed of the testimony of Jesus our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but instead be a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God" (2 Timothy 1:8).

When this power comes upon you, fear and doubt of sharing faith in God and belief in Jesus disappears, and a desire to serve, sacrifice, and suffer for Christ's sake emerges.

Unfortunately, that was not what happened to the Corinthian Christians. They neither served, sacrificed, or suffered for Christ. They were fearful that if they did they would lose the

prosperous and promiscuous way of life they had in Corinth. But as for Paul and Timothy, their testimony was *"For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."*

The Greek word for "fear" in this verse is *deilías (deilía, nominative)*, which is accurately translated in this text as *"cowardice."*

When the power of Christ comes upon us through His Holy Spirit, we cease to be fearful and we can overcome our cowardice. The power of God gives us the courage to stand up to the world and the *anti-christ culture* instead of merely hiding from it, or worse yet compromising what we believe in.

Fear, disbelief, and cowardice always weakens and paralyzes the follower of Christ. Fearfulness leads to both spiritual and emotional impotence,

The man or woman who distrusts himself and faith in God is paralyzed by his distrust and accomplishes nothing. *"I was afraid,"* said the man in the parable of *Matthew's gospel* 25:25... All his strength was drained away by his own hesitance, indecisiveness and timidities.

John Newton who wrote *"Amazing Grace"* wrestled with this problem and came up with the following declaration of faith:
Why should I fear the darkest hour, Or tremble at the tempter's power? Jesus vouchsafes to be my tower. Against me earth and hell combine, But on my side is power divine: Jesus is all, and He is mine.

Corinthian (August 3rd, 2014)

"Ethics and Morals - Difficult, Undeniable, But Better in Every Way" Part 1

(1 Corinthians 6:1-20)

"When one of you has a dispute with another believer, how dare you file a lawsuit and ask a secular court to decide the matter instead of taking it to other believers! 2 Don't you realize that someday we believers will judge the world? And since you are going to judge the world, can't you decide even these little things among yourselves? 3 Don't you realize that we will judge angels? So you should surely be able to resolve ordinary disputes in this life. 4 If you have legal disputes about such matters, why go to outside judges who are not respected by the church? 5 I am saying this to shame you. Isn't there anyone in all the church who is wise enough to decide these issues? 6 But instead, one believer sues another—right in front of unbelievers!

7 Even to have such lawsuits with one another is a defeat for you. Why not just accept the injustice and leave it at that? Why

not let yourselves be cheated? 8 Instead, you yourselves are the ones who do wrong and cheat even your fellow believers.

9 Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, 10 or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. 11 Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. 12 You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is good for you. And even though "I am allowed to do anything," I must not become a slave to anything. 13 You say, "Food was made for the stomach, and the stomach for food." (This is true, though someday God will do away with both of them.) But you can't say that our bodies were made for sexual immorality. They were made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about our bodies. 14 And God will raise us from the dead by his power, just as he*

raised our Lord from the dead. 15 Don't you realize that your bodies are actually parts of Christ? Should a man take his body, which is part of Christ, and join it to a prostitute? Never! 16 And don't you realize that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, "The two are united into one." 17 But the person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him.

18 Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. 19 Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, 20 for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

The Difficulty of Righteous Decision Making (Ethical and Moral)

In the discussion regarding litigation which Christians were resorting to against other Christians before judges of the state, Paul calls secular judges "*unjust*" or "*unrighteous*" (*ádikoi*) in verse 1, and "*without faith*" (*ápistoi*) in verse 6. Both are passive and aggressive descriptions of unbelievers. Secular judges are expected to be the administrators of justice, yet the scripture designates them as *unjust*. This is because their sense of justice is *not of God*, but it is a *social justice* (*díke*) rather than a divine responsibility resulting from *foundational faith* and the new birth in Christ (*Romans 3:22*). To not hurt, harm, or act with hostile intent towards another human is to be righteous according to secular philosophy. In the teaching of Christ, that was the same kind of righteousness as the scribes and the Pharisees, but it was not sufficient to satisfy the righteousness of God (*Matthew 5:20*). Jesus taught that we should go further and love our enemies (*Matthew 5:43,44*). In the mind of an atheist or agnostic, a just person (*díkaios*) was one who neither selfishly nor forgetfully transgressed the boundaries or law set in place for them by the state or government. He gave to

everyone his due, yet he still expected to receive what he conceived to be his right and would not in the least withdraw an assertion of his own claim (*make it fair for me*). According to Paul and to God it is pretty clear that as difficult as it is Christians (*followers of Jesus*) must continually combat such a view. The unbeliever (athiest-agnostic), says, "*My right is my duty.*" On the other hand, the Christian must say, "*My duty is my right.*"

Now... the duty of every Christian is love (1 Corinthians 13).

The Christians in Corinth had ***never*** really given up their worldly philosophy, and resorted to unbelieving judges to claim their rights against even their brothers and sisters in Christ. To obtain what may be legitimate by a way not permissible by divine precept is (*adikia*), unrighteousness. Such a practice and belief may show that we are unjust in our heart (intent and motive) - that is not good or right in the eyes of God. **On one hand we may get our legal rights, but on the other we may be morally and ethically wrong before God, and to those we need to love within the community of God, the household of faith.**

Think Ethically and Morally Before You Act

The noun *entropê*, (*shame that causes reflection*), a turning inward or withdrawal, is one of only three words in Greek which can be translated "*shame*." Another is *aischúne*, (*shame from a sense of one's wrong action or motive having been made manifest*). The third word is *aidos*, (*modesty from a sense of what is right and becoming*). It is the shame that comes from a sense of what one's conduct should be. Of the three words, Paul chose *entropê* which means *reflection unless shame should be brought upon the cause of Christ as represented by the local Christian community*.

This is the principle which is emphasized by Paul in *verse 12*: "*All things are permissible for me, but not all things are best or expedient*." While the follower of Jesus may be free to do certain things, like going to court over a legal dispute with a brother in Christ, ultimately it may not be for the common good

(sumphérei, for the common advantage, to bring together). A person may gain materially by pursuing his personal rights by legal action and judgment, but this may end up being divisive and harmful to the reputation and good of the community of believers and to the cause of Christ. So Paul is saying... take this perspective into consideration; ethically the believer may decide that the pursuit of personal rights is not best for the common good and the glory of God.

The Difficult

- ***(6:1) - Solving Personal Disagreements with Fellow Believers***
- ***(6:2) - The Saints (Righteousness) Will Judge the World***
- ***(6:3) - Believers Will Judge Angels***

(note): What kind of angels Paul is speaking about? Angels are spiritual beings created by God, without corporeal identity.

Although we are not cognizant of them, angels play a

significant role in our lives and in the whole course of history.

They are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14). Angels were created

by God and were witnesses to the creation of the material universe. They were created in, through, and unto Christ (Colossians 1:16), who is the beginning and the end of all things (1 Corinthians 8:6). They are not inferior deities, but fellow servants with man (Revelations 19:10; 22:9) ; therefore, they may not be worshiped. The worship of angels was one of the grave errors at Colossae (Colossians 2:18).

- ***(6:4) - Christians Should Settle Disputes (Legal and Civil) Among Themselves***
- ***(6:5) - We Should Not Shame the Name of Christ***
- ***(6:6) - We Are to Solve Differences among Ourselves***
- ***(6:7) - Do Not Become a Defeated Christian***
- ***(6:8) - Being Defrauded Is Better Than Defrauding Another***
- ***(6:9) - The Unrighteous Will Not Inherit God's Kingdom***

The Undeniable - Hard Truths About Those Who Will Not Inherit the Kingdom of God

Fornicators (verse 9)

*The word "fornicators" (**pórnoi**, the plural of **pórnos**, a male prostitute) is derived from the verbs **peráæ**, to sell, and, in the New Testament, **pipráskae**, to traffic, to sell. The Greeks considered one who prostituted himself for gain as a fornicator.*

Idolaters

*"Nor idolaters [**eidælolátrai**, the plural of **eidælolátres**, idol worshiper]." This occurs here in verse 9 and also in 1 Corinthians 5:10,11 and 10:7. In Ephesians 5:5 and Colossians 3:5, the idol worshiper is equivalent to a covetous person. The idolater is a person who loves anything more than he loves God.*

Adultery

*"Nor adulterers [**moichói**, the plural of **moichós**]." This is a sin which also falls under the category of idolatry (Hebrews 13:4).*

Homosexuality

*"Nor homosexuals [**arsenokoítai** from **ársen**, male, and **koíto**, a bed, meaning a man who lies in bed with another male]" (Romans 1:27; 1 Timothy 1:10).*

*All these shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But they can be born again and become children of God and heirs (**kloronómoi**) of God (Romans 8:17). However, they cannot be both sinners possessed of any of the above sins and at the same time heirs of God's kingdom.*

Covetors

*A covetous person is the one who wants to have more than he already has. He fails to realize that no matter how much he manages to get, it will still not satisfy him. The Greek word is **pleonéktes** from **pléon** or **pleíen**, more, and **échaē**, to have. It can mean a person who has an insatiable appetite for more, a person covetous of something that others have, a defrauder for gain. A covetous person is also one who desires to have more*

than another. But why is that such a great sin? Why does that kind of covetousness keep someone from entering into the kingdom of God? Because such a person, proving that he is selfish, puts himself in first place thus excluding God from being Master (Matthew 6:24).

Thieves

This is logical. The act of stealing is the externalization of covetousness, desiring to have what another has, even if it must be by stealth. A covetous person is a thief in his heart until he finds the opportunity to externalize his inner desire.

Drunkards

Who is a drunkard? Twice in Paul's writings the word "drunkard" occurs. In 1 Corinthians 5:11 we read, "But now I have written unto you not to keep company if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a

railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one, no, not to eat."

Revilers

*The word reviler in Greek is **loídoroi**, the plural of **loídoros**, a reviler, one who verbally abuses or berates. It is an adjectival noun which is found in the list of sinners who will not inherit the kingdom of God while they persist in their wrongdoing (Galatians 5:21). True Christians should not make covenant or contract with a reviler, they will more often than not influence them for evil, while it is far less likely that the believer could influence them for good. So what does a reviler do? What is the poison with which they can destroy God's people? It is evil words. The tongue is their weapon. We are to avoid those who speak evil against others. When we find a conversation turning to hurtful, harmful, and hateful gossip or criticism of others, we*

should not be drawn into it, and should make an effort to lift the conversation to a more spiritual and positive level.

Extortioners

*In the same category with revilers are rapacious persons (**hárpages**, the plural of **hárpax**, an excessively greedy person, an extortioner). An extortioner is a person who by force takes what does not belong to him, and he does it with suddenness. A "snatcher" would be a good translation. These criminals rob unexpectedly in broad daylight by sheer superiority of force. Of course, they will not inherit God's kingdom, but it is encouraging to know that some who were extortioners are not now, having received the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the satisfying substitute for sin of all kinds. This passage shows that no sinner is beyond the grace of God to change through Jesus Christ.*

Corinthian" August 17th, 2014

"Moral Considerations"

(1 Corinthians 6:12-20)

You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is good for you. And even though "I am allowed to do anything," I must not become a slave to anything. You say, "Food was made for the stomach, and the stomach for food." (This is true, though someday God will do away with both of them). But you can't say that our bodies were made for sexual immorality. They were made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about our bodies. And God will raise us from the dead by his power, just as he raised our Lord from the dead. Don't you realize that your bodies are actually parts of Christ? Should a man take his body, which is part of Christ, and join it to a prostitute? Never! And don't you realize that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, "The two are united into one." But the person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him. Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Don't you realize that your body is the

temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

Final Considerations and Takeaways

We know that there was a great deal of ethical and moral sin in the city of Corinth. It was a permissive and narcissistic society with a philosophy similar to what our world has today. The philosophy of Corinthian church was something like this... *Sex is a normal physical function, so why not use it as you please?* Paul with, *God created sex when He made the first man and woman, and therefore He has the right to tell us how to use it.* The Bible is the "owner's manual" and because of our genuine love for God we obey Him.

It is true that God condemns all ethical and moral sins; last week we found out that Paul had no problem naming some of them in verse 6:8-10. In the Corinthian day, idolatry and sensuality went together. We also learned that sexual abusers

and behavior (*both Hetero and Homo*) is not acceptable in God's eyes. In *1 Corinthians 6:10*, Paul also pointed out the Corinthian members guilty of "*sins of the spirit*", those suing and slandering each other because of their covetous attitude. What we must remember before we move forward is this: *Our God can, and will cleanse **all sins** and make all sinners into new creatures in Christ "You are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified" (1 Corinthians 6:11).* The tenses of these verbs indicate a completed transaction. Now, because of all that God had done for them, they had an obligation to God to use their bodies for His service and His glory.

Consider God the Father (*verses 12-14*). He created our bodies and one day He will resurrect them in glory. (*More about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15*) In view of the fact that our bodies have such a amazing origin, and an even more amazing future, how can we subject or use them for such evil and destructive purposes? The Corinthians had two arguments to defend their immoral and unethical sensuality.

First, *"All things are lawful to me" (1 Corinthians 6:12)*. This was a popular phrase in Corinth, but it was based on a false view of Christian freedom and expectation. We have not been set free so that we can enter into a new kind of moral or ethical bondage! As Christians, we must ask ourselves, *"Can, or will this be able to control me? Is this behavior really profitable for my spiritual life and for the people that I love, and who love me?"*

Their **second argument** was, *"meats for the belly, and the belly for meats" (1 Corinthians 6:13)*. They treated sex as an appetite to be satisfied and not as a gift to be cherished and used carefully. Sensuality is to sex, as gluttony is to eating - both are sinful and harmful, and both bring disastrous consequences. Just because we have certain normal desires, given by God at Creation, does not mean that we must give in to them and always satisfy them - that is just plain *narcissism*. All of us can admit that sex outside of marriage is in some form or another always destructive, while sex within marriage because of the approval and blessing of God has the greatest potential to be

fulfilling, meaningful and beautiful to the relationship between husband and wife.

There is obviously temporary physical stimulation, emotional excitement, and even certain personal validations in the sexual experience outside of marriage, but there is not enrichment, there is not emotional or spiritual health and there is certainly not the approval and pleasure of God. Sex within marriage can build a relationship that brings joy and dreams for the future; but sex apart from marriage has a way of weakening future relationships, as any good marriage counselor will tell you.

Consider God the Son (verses 15-18). The believer's body is a member of Christ (*1 Corinthians 12:12*). How can we be joined to Christ and joined to sin at the same time? Such a thought astounds us. Yet some of the Corinthians saw no harm in visiting the temple prostitutes (as we have said there were 1,000 of them at the temple of Aphrodite) and committing fornication.

Jesus Christ bought us with a price (*1 Corinthians 6:20*), and therefore our bodies belong to Him and we are one spirit with the Lord and so we give our bodies to Him as living sacrifices (*Romans 12:1-2*). If you begin each day by surrendering your body to Christ, it will make a great deal of difference in what you do with your body during the day.

Paul referred to the Creation account (*Genesis 2:24*) to explain the seriousness of sexual sin. When a man and woman join their bodies, the entire human personality is involved. There is a much deeper experience, a "oneness" that brings with it deep and lasting consequences. Paul warned that sexual sin is the most serious sin a person can commit against his body, for it involves the whole person (*1 Corinthians 6:18*). Sex is not just a part of the body. Being "male" and "female" involves the total person. Therefore, sexual experience affects the total personality.

Paul did not suggest that being joined to a prostitute was the equivalent of marriage, most of us know that marriage also involves commitment. The man and woman leave the parental home to begin a new home. This helps us to understand why sex within marriage is intended by God to be *"the"* most enriching experience of growth, because it is based on commitment to a sacred covenant to God, and to each other. When two people pledge their love and faithfulness to each other, they lay a strong spiritual, physical and emotional foundation on which to build. The sacred covenant of marriage protects sex and enables the couple, committed to each other, to grow in love and in this wonderful experience.

Consider God the Holy Spirit (*verses 19-20*). God the Father created our bodies; God the Son redeemed them and made them part of His body, and God the Spirit indwells our bodies and makes them as the scripture say, *"the temple of God."* How can we defile God's temple by using our bodies for immorality?

The word *your* is plural, but the words *body* and *temple* are singular (1 Corinthians 6:19). It is safe to say that Paul is describing something not only for the individual believer, but also for each church community.

Each community of faith is a "body" of people united first to Jesus Christ and then to each other. The personal conduct of individual members affects and influences the spiritual life of the entire church.

In both cases, the lesson is clear. "Glorify God in your body!" The Holy Spirit was given for the purpose of glorifying Jesus Christ (John 16:14).

So God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all involved in what we do with our bodies. If we break God's laws, then we must pay the penalty (Romans 1:24-27).

As we consider this entire chapter that Paul wrote to address specifically the ethical and moral sin of the Corinthian

Christians, we can see these kind of sins affect the entire personality and of course the entire community around them. They create the emotional dependence and appetite, leading to addictive and compulsive sin (*1 Corinthians 6:12*). It is frightening to see how sexual sin can get control of a person and then destroy their entire life.

In my own pastoral counseling, I have had to navigate many married couples whose relationships faced difficulty because of the consequences of sexual or immoral sin before and during marriage - it is beyond painful to see their wounds and feel their hurt. It is true that the harvest of sowing to our flesh is sometimes delayed, but it certainly will come (*Galatians 6:7-8*). It is always difficult to live with the consequences of ***forgiven sin***.

Having said all this, we must also realize that there are eternal consequences for people who intentionally and continually live in immoral behavior. In *1 Corinthians 6:9-10*, Paul twice states

that people who practice such behavior will not inherit God's kingdom. A Christian may fall into these sins and be forgiven, as was David; but no Christian would knowingly and intentionally continue to practice such sins (*1 John 3:1-10*).

Finally, remember that there are other sins besides sexual sins. For some reason, Christians have too often majored on condemning the sins of the prodigal son and forgotten the sins of his older brother - he was consumed with jealousy and coveted everything his brother had (see *Luke 15:11-32*). There are sins of the spirit as well as sins of the flesh - Paul named some of them in here *1 Corinthians 6:10*. Covetousness can destroy our relationship with God just as easily as can any moral sin failure.

We must remember always that the grace of God can change the sinner's life - anytime, anywhere, anyplace. "*And such were some of you*" (*1 Corinthians 6:11*). It is truly wonderful how faith in Christ makes a sinner into a "*new creation*" (2

Corinthians 5:17,21). And it is important that we grow and continue to live like those who are a part of God's new creation. We are not our own. We belong to the Father who made us, the Son who redeemed us, and the Spirit who indwells us. We also belong to the people of God, the community of faith-the church, and our sins can weaken the testimony and infect the fellowship. *"Be ye holy, for I am holy"* (1 Peter 1:16).

Corinthian (August 31st, 2014)

"Sacraments, Covenants, Grace and Consequences"

(1 Corinthians 7:1- 33)

Now regarding the questions you asked in your letter. Yes, it is good to live a celibate life. But because there is so much sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband.

The husband should fulfill his wife's sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband's needs. The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife.

Do not deprive each other of sexual relations, unless you both agree to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time so you can give yourselves more completely to prayer. Afterward, you should come together again so that Satan won't be able to

tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command. But I wish everyone were single, just as I am. But God gives to some the gift of marriage, and to others the gift of singleness.

So I say to those who aren't married and to widows—it's better to stay unmarried, just as I am. But if they can't control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It's better to marry than to burn with lust.

But for those who are married, I have a command that comes not from me, but from the Lord. A wife must not leave her husband. But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else be reconciled to him. And the husband must not leave his wife.

Now, I will speak to the rest of you, though I do not have a direct command from the Lord. If a Christian man has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to continue living with him, he must not leave her. And if a Christian woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to continue living

with her, she must not leave him. For the Christian wife brings holiness to her marriage, and the Christian husband brings holiness to his marriage. Otherwise, your children would not be holy, but now they are holy. (But if the husband or wife who isn't a believer insists on leaving, let them go. In such cases the Christian husband or wife is no longer bound to the other, for God has called you to live in peace.) Don't you wives realize that your husbands might be saved because of you? And don't you husbands realize that your wives might be saved because of you?

Each of you should continue to live in whatever situation the Lord has placed you, and remain as you were when God first called you. This is my rule for all the churches. For instance, a man who was circumcised before he became a believer should not try to reverse it. And the man who was uncircumcised when he became a believer should not be circumcised now. For it makes no difference whether or not a man has been circumcised. The important thing is to keep God's commandments.

Yes, each of you should remain as you were when God called you. Are you a slave? Don't let that worry you—but if you get a chance to be free, take it. And remember, if you were a slave when the Lord called you, you are now free in the Lord. And if you were free when the Lord called you, you are now a slave of Christ. God paid a high price for you, so don't be enslaved by the world. Each of you, dear brothers and sisters, should remain as you were when God first called you.

Now regarding your question about the young women who are not yet married. I do not have a command from the Lord for them. But the Lord in his mercy has given me wisdom that can be trusted, and I will share it with you. Because of the present crisis, I think it is best to remain as you are. If you have a wife, do not seek to end the marriage. If you do not have a wife, do not seek to get married. But if you do get married, it is not a sin. And if a young woman gets married, it is not a sin. However, those who get married at this time will have troubles, and I am trying to spare you those problems.

But let me say this, dear brothers and sisters: The time that remains is very short. So from now on, those with wives should not focus only on their marriage. Those who weep or who rejoice or who buy things should not be absorbed by their weeping or their joy or their possessions. Those who use the things of the world should not become attached to them. For this world as we know it will soon pass away.

I want you to be free from the concerns of this life. An unmarried man can spend his time doing the Lord's work and thinking how to please him. But a married man has to think about his earthly responsibilities and how to please his wife. His interests are divided. In the same way, a woman who is no longer married or has never been married can be devoted to the Lord and holy in body and in spirit. But a married woman has to think about her earthly responsibilities and how to please her husband. I am saying this for your benefit, not to place

restrictions on you. I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible.

But if a man thinks that he's treating his fiancée improperly and will inevitably give in to his passion, let him marry her as he wishes. It is not a sin. But if he has decided firmly not to marry and there is no urgency and he can control his passion, he does well not to marry. So the person who marries his fiancée does well, and the person who doesn't marry does even better.

A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but only if he loves the Lord. But in my opinion it would be better for her to stay single, and I think I am giving you counsel from God's Spirit when I say this.

Seven In Paul's Context

First, know this...Paul's teaching on the question of marriage is created in large part by the attitude towards women that was commonly in the world in which he lived. Secondly, the

intensity of what many would describe as Paul's *dogmatic approach* is certainly increased by his own expectations of the ***Parousía*** (*return of Christ*). He was ministering under an assumption and expectation of "*any day now.*" So he instructs... because the time is so short, it is better for people to remain in the external circumstances in which they were when they were converted (*verses 18-20*). A condensed and simple version of that would look like this: *If you are not married don't get married, if you are married, stay married.* To push in further into Paul's context, we need to know that when Paul talks about the desirability or need of marriage, he personally emphasizes the necessity of avoiding any obligation (vows), commitment (*covenant*), or responsibility (*expectation*) from anything that can distract or lessen a Christian believer's ability to serve the will of God and the purposes of His Kingdom. This does make sense for a world that is imminently about to be judged and redeemed by its almighty Creator. That is why in most cases Paul thinks marriage will just create a distraction - so why not just do what he has done - which was to remain celibate. He

does offer a consolation prize, offering that if celibacy becomes a greater distraction than marriage, then Christians should marry. But it is pretty obvious what he personally feels, but does not give the Corinthians any hint that their conjugal relationships within themselves were evil. so we can safely (in context) conclude that apart from the sacrament of marriage, Paul's biggest concern is that the obligations, commitment, and responsibilities of marriage will help or hinder a Christian in the service of God. His views and opinions on celibacy are just that - views and opinions put forward on his own authority. In context, that is not a bad thing.

Now, on the critical point of ending or dissolving a Christian marriage, Paul wisely will defer to the authority of Christ Himself (*verses 10,11*). And, it is very clear from this context, that Paul is not going to waver from, or move off of his convictions or understanding of the authority and teaching of Jesus regarding marriage. In any context, that is a good thing.

Four Core Issues and Themes of Seven

- ***Celibacy (verses 1-2, 25-27)***
- ***Expectations for Sexual Intimacy within Marriage (verses 3-5)***
- ***Keeping a Marriage Covenant or Choosing Divorce (verses 10-24, 39-40)***
- ***Worldly and Eschatological Influence (20-24, 29-35)***

Setting a Biblical Grid of Truth

- ***God's Expectations for the Sacrament and Covenant of Marriage (Mark 10:1-9, Matthew 5:31-32)***
- ***God's Provision of Forgiveness of Sin, Manifest Grace, Restoration and Redemption (Luke 24:44-48, Romans 15-17, Matthew 12:31-32, 1 Corinthians 10:13, James 5:19, Galatians 6:1-5)***
- ***God's Will for Inclusion and not Exclusion (Matthew 25:34-40, Galatians 5:13-15, Ephesians 4:2-6)***

Corinthian Part II - "Sacraments, Covenants, Grace and Consequences"

(September 7th, 2014)

"Four Core Issues and Themes of Seven"

Celibacy (verses 1-2, 25-27)

- Neither marriage nor celibacy should be sought as an end in itself. Ultimately, our commitment to Christ, not our marital status, is what determines our happiness. We should prefer a status that allows us to fulfill our purpose for the Kingdom of God. Paul chose celibacy for himself.
- Paul did not impose celibacy as a superior, universal, ethical expectation the church. No spiritual leader has the right to do this.
- Celibacy was uncommon in the first century and in the post-apostolic period.

- Paul's view of celibacy as preferable was contextualized by, and limited to, "*the present distress*" (verse 26), which must have been intense. Celibacy, then, has some merit under certain conditions; like the intense persecution of Christ followers in Paul's day. In his later writing in what is called the *prison epistles*, Paul would uphold marriage, and say nothing about choosing celibacy, and in his pastoral instruction he teaches marriage as a criterion for leadership.
- The forbidding of marriage is associated with false teachings in the end times (*1 Timothy 4:3*).

Expectations for Sexual Intimacy within Marriage (verses 3-5)

- Husbands or wives have a God-given authority over their partners' bodies. But this authority is held accountable by the Lord's command for both husband and wife to seek primarily to mutually meet both the spiritual, emotional as well as the physical needs of our partner.

- The context, therefore, supports the presence of the qualifying word found in the *Textus Receptus* ("Received Text", is a printed Greek New Testament that provided the textual base for the vernacular translations of the Reformation period), *eúnoian*, which means "goodwill" or "good pleasure." By God's definition and expectation sex should not be self-satisfying but, other-gratifying.
- The emphasis on pleasure, coupled with the obvious absence of any mention to childbearing, gives us *four scriptural reasons for marriage*: 1) to model the marriage of God to His people (the Lord Jesus to His bride, the church) ; 2) to produce godly children; 3) to have pleasure; 4) and to avoid *fornication* and *porneia*.
- The Greek term used by Paul, *exousiázei*; refers to a moral right (not brute power) over the spouses body. Reinforcing the "goodwill" and unselfish motive found in verse 3. There is no God approval for any kind of physical, verbal, or emotional abuse in marriage. Spouses must not force themselves on their partners - that is not love.

- The reverse side of *"render due benevolence"* is now given as *"do not deprive one another."* *"Deprive"* is a compound word in Greek, consisting of *apó*, "from," and *steréo*, a **"3-dimensional body"** from which we get our English word stereophonic, 3-dimensional sound. In context, deprivation is a move away from a full and sound relationship (*emotional, physical, spiritual needs*) needing all dimensions to be met.
- Angered, wounded, selfish, or vindictive spouses sometimes take back their original, unmarried, property rights to their bodies. According to Paul this is unbiblical behavior, except of course for conditions like sickness, abuse, infidelity, and, as we will soon see, mutual consent for fasting and prayer. We should look at the reality - depriving a mate of sex can and does stumble a healthy spiritual life, as well as tear away at the intimacy and trust within a marriage relationship. It is not a healthy long-term strategy for a marriage.

- *Allêlous*, "one another," implies mutuality and reciprocity, an equal regard between the sexes. The problem of deprivation can arise in either spouse.
- Apart from illness, abuse, or mutual consent, there are no valid reasons for marital deprivation. The notion that sex is evil in itself and contrary to our spiritual life is simply not true.

****Keeping a Marriage Covenant or Choosing Divorce (verses 10-24, 39-40) (September 14th)***

- The umbrella phrase, "*those who have married*" (the perfect, *gegamekósi*), includes all combinations of marriages between both believers and unbelievers.
- A legal covenant vow of marriage, confirmed in the eyes of God, is valid between not only two believers, but two unbelievers, or between a believer and an unbeliever. Apart from the exception of various forms of unfaithfulness

(*primarily but not solely fornication*), it should never be broken. This is consistent throughout the Scriptures both Old and New Testament.

- There is no text where Paul would contradict or countermand the moral or ethical teachings of Christ. His apostolic authority did, however, allow him to give some clarity and amplify the deeper and more difficult principles from the Lord.
- The moral and ethical norms of culture and religion sometimes conflict with the teaching of Jesus, forcing those who want to follow Him to choose between higher goods or lesser evils.
- In general Paul said as did Jesus, a woman (wife) must not separate herself from a man (her husband), and a husband must not separate himself from his wife. The verb *choristhênai*, a passive infinitive, is middle in meaning and is addressed to "*those who have been married.*" The middle voice is reflexive, meaning that *the woman or man separates for lawfully justifiable reasons.*

- Biblically we know that there can be, and certainly are, justifiable reasons of **unfaithfulness** for separation and divorce. The interpretation of those reasons has always been a "land mine" for many Christians, as well as the Christian Church in general. **Unfaithfulness** to the marriage covenant comes in many forms, and has many faces; such as adultery, fornication, sexual perversion (*all forms of porneia*), and both physical and extreme emotional abuse. These reasons are valid in that they answer to other ethical and moral principles such as the scriptural commands to sanctify and protect both our minds and bodies, and to love others as ourselves. Nevertheless, in response to the *interpretive acts of unfaithfulness*, the command of Christ to **not** separate or divorce can be, and often is, violated and considered a sin. For a Christian who seeks to keep a right heart, there is great difficulty and pain in making such a life-altering decision as divorce. Often times that decision comes down to choosing between the lesser of two evils - and that is a private matter between each man, each woman, and God.

- *Apolúo* and *Aphíemi*, respectively mean, "*dismiss*" and "*send away*" are both active verbs. Neither verb carries the suggestion of the innocence or guilt of a dismissed party. In reality, that becomes a large part of the spiritual and emotional consequences to divorce. Whether the divorce was justified or unjustified, right or wrong; people, regardless of the facts or circumstances of most divorces will tend to form their own thoughts and opinions - and unfortunately, then begin to issue various judgments. That is part of the disgraceful fallout of a failed covenant relationship, and missing God's desired plan for marriage. Many good people have lived in the shadows of that kind of personal failure.
- Paul's biblical bottom line is this: Husbands and wives should do everything that is righteously possible that they can and should do to prevent the dissolution of their marriage, and breaking of their sacred covenant with God. But if they can not remain married, all of us must remember... ***even though***

God hates divorce - He does not hate us. And there is hope, help, and new life by remaining in Him.

Worldly and Eschatological Influence (20-24, 29-35)

- The decision to marry or remain single should be based on benefits to the Christian community, the church. The Greek word translated "profit" here, *sumphéron*, means "to bring together." Personal or private benefit is expressed by another word, *óphelos*. The profit Paul appeals to is not personal but communal.
- Our best counsel directs others to achieve the highest glory for God through the edification of the entire church.
- Some might be tempted to think that community profit is a snare or noose, *bróchos*, entrapping the individual who wants to marry in spite of the church's corporate needs. Paul answers this by saying that the motive for the mutual profit

of the body of Christ does include the individual benefits of "good form" (*eúschemon*), our outward walk with Christ among believers, and also undistracted (*aperispástos*) inner devotion to the Lord.

- Whether the married or celibate state is the primary detractor from or contributor to Christian form and worship is a private matter, hinging on the dominance of flesh or spirit.
- We cannot isolate Paul's commendations — celibacy for singles and "behaving as though we had no spouse" for married persons — from the "present distress" of (possibly Neronian, which was brutal) persecution.

Conclusion

What is most difficult is when the Bible or scripture does not give us every answer. In the context of the marriage

relationship, divorce and re-marriage this is unfortunately the case. Some rush to judgments that create a standard that they themselves could not live under - that is wrong. Others just decide that the Bible is not relevant or reliable enough to use its moral and ethical principles to navigate the difficulties of sacraments, covenants, and marriages - that too is wrong. What is right however is that we realize that we have something better than a Bible answer sheet. We have a loving and gracious God who has given us an absolute truth with which to navigate all ethical and moral choices and decisions in life. If our heart is right before God, then even when we are unsure or cannot trust ourselves and our decisions, we can still be sure of and trust in Him and who He is. Within that grid of truth we find the mercy and grace to move forward free of the condemnation and judgment of men, knowing that He loves us, and will not forget or forsake us, even when (for whatever reason) others around us have. Chapter seven for all it is worth (which is quite a bit) must be filtered through that grid of truth.

Corinthian

"Culture vs. God"

(1 Corinthians 8:1-8)

Now regarding your question about food that has been offered to idols. Yes, we know that "we all have knowledge" about this issue. But while knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church. Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much. But the person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes.

So, what about eating meat that has been offered to idols?

Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God. There may be so-called gods both in heaven and on earth, and some people actually worship many gods and many lords. But we know that there is only one God, the Father, who created everything, and we live for him. And there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom God made everything and through whom we have been given life.

However, not all believers know this. Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated. It's true that we can't win God's approval by what we eat. We don't lose anything if we don't eat it, and we don't gain anything if we do.

The Plural Name of God

In the Hebrew, the equivalent of "God" is **'Lohim**, which is plural. Yet it is consistently translated in the Septuagint as **Theós**, "God" in the singular and not in the plural as it is in Hebrew. The Greek verbs which indicate God's activity are always in the singular. The reason for this was that at the time the Septuagint translation was made from the Hebrew to the Greek language (about 200 B.C.), Greek idolatry was the prevailing superstition, especially in Egypt under the *Ptolemies*. Their gods were regarded as demons or intelligent beings totally separate and distinct from each other. If the translators

rendered the name of the true God by the plural *theoí* (gods), they would have given the heathen under Greek culture an idea of God inconsistent with the unity of the divine essence and conformable to their own polytheistic notions. However, by translating the Hebrew '**Lohim** as "God" followed by singular verbs, they emphasized the unity of God and at the same time did not deny a plurality of persons in the divine nature.

Unpack the Facts Jack...

(Verse 1)

- *The Corinthian Christians sought apostolic advice from Paul concerning the custom of eating meats sacrificed to idols.*
- *They did not take it for granted that an accepted custom was right to continue as consistent with Christian principles.*
- *Knowing the cultural facts about sacrifices made to idols was not sufficient in itself.*

- *Knowledge of facts makes one proud, because one may think he knows more than another.*
- *There is a further dimension to behavior, and it is that of love. One who is a Christian ought not to ask how much his knowledge will excuse that which benefits self, but how his actions will affect those who look at him as an example.*

(Verse 2)

- *We must recognize that our human conclusions are incomplete, for they are based on partial knowledge of facts.*
- *Only through divine revelation can we have absolute truth about anything.*
- *We know only in part, because we are creatures of the limitations of time and space.*
- *God is eternal and omniscient and is therefore the only One qualified to know the true nature of the things and people He created. This knowledge of His can only be communicated to us humans through faith in Him. We cannot know the*

absolute, but we can believe it as long as the Revealer is trustworthy. Jesus Christ is such a Revealer of truth because of His proven resurrection (1 John 5:20).

- *When we believe in Him, we receive His love and become communicators of it (1 John 5:1).*
- *We love God not because we know Him fully, but because through believing in Jesus Christ, we respond to His love. Belief is a response to His love.*

(Verse 3)

- *We cannot say that we love God and ignore the effects our lives have on our fellow human beings and especially on Christian brothers and sisters.*
- *Our love for God is not a natural love, but emanates from His love implanted in us through faith in Jesus Christ.*
- *Belief in our hearts is acknowledged by God, and we express it not merely in acts of love, but in a transformed nature (2 Peter 1:4).*

(Verses 5-6)

- *God is Father to the believer in Jesus Christ.*
- *The full doctrine of the Trinity is beyond human intelligence.*
- *The Trinity is believable because it was revealed by Jesus Christ who proved Himself trustworthy through His predicted, realized, and attested resurrection.*
- *The '**Lohim** (God) of the Old Testament is the Trinity specified in the New Testament.*
- *God is not only the creator, but the sustainer of all things (Colossians 1:17).*
- *The Trinity is active in the redemption of man. Jesus Christ saves the sinner, the Father receives the saved sinner, and the Holy Spirit makes it all possible.*
- *All three Persons of the Trinity not only cooperate in the work of man's redemption, but all three indwell the believer. They enable him to live for God and to have victory over sin and life after death.*

- *God rules as a Father in the believer's life when Jesus Christ becomes Lord and the Holy Spirit becomes the convicting power.*
- *The resurrection of Jesus Christ is indisputable proof of His unique Lordship.*
- *The spirit of wisdom is given to the believer so that he may accept with illumined intelligence what Jesus Christ revealed God to be: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.*

(Verse 7)

- *There is an explicit moral code of Christian conduct which we are enabled to follow through our new birth. We know, for instance, that we should flee from fornication (6:18) and from idolatry (10:14). A person who is a fornicator or an idolater cannot, at the same time, be a follower of Jesus Christ.*

- *There are, however, in our Christian lives, behaviors that can characterize us as strong or weak, without affecting right standing and our eternal relationship with Christ.*
- *The carry-over habits of the old life can characterize us as having a weak conscience.*
- *The submission to such a weak conscience of the Christian life is a defilement to our Christian conscience which ought to be diligently cleansed by the blood of Christ.*
- *The duty of the Christian is not to do merely what he has the right to do, but what he ought to do in view of his brethren lest he become a stumbling -block to them.*
- *The question to ask in choosing conduct is not whether I can do certain things without risking my eternal salvation, but whether these things will both build myself and others up in our Christian faith.*

(Verse 9)

- *We can never be free enough to be carefree.*
- *If we are not on guard, our freedom may enslave us.*

- *What is within our authority and ability to do, may become the stumbling-block over which another may fall.*
- *As mature and strong Christians, we are responsible for the influence we have, and example we set.*
- *The restraints which Christ places on us are the restraints we, as Christians, should place on ourselves.*

Corinthian - Christians, Chaos, and the Greatest Gift of All

"Lessons Learned" October 26th, 2014

(Corinthians 10:1-11)

I don't want you to forget, dear brothers and sisters, about our ancestors in the wilderness long ago. All of them were guided by a cloud that moved ahead of them, and all of them walked through the sea on dry ground. 2 In the cloud and in the sea, all of them were baptized as followers of Moses. 3 All of them ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all of them drank the same spiritual water. For they drank from the spiritual rock that

traveled with them, and that rock was Christ. 5 Yet God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

6 These things happened as a warning to us, so that we would not crave evil things as they did, 7 or worship idols as some of them did. As the Scriptures say, "The people celebrated with feasting and drinking, and they indulged in pagan revelry." 8 And we must not engage in sexual immorality as some of them did, causing 23,000 of them to die in one day.

9 Nor should we put Christ to the test, as some of them did and then died from snakebites. 10 And don't grumble as some of them did, and then were destroyed by the angel of death. 11 These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age.

Introduction

Chapter Nine, was a continuance of Paul's attempt to instruct the Corinthian believers in the importance of:

One) *Seriously closing the gap between how they lived and and what they preached.*

Two) *Being spiritually and emotionally mature enough to understand that they should not use our freedom in Christ to hurt or stumble other followers of Christ by how they themselves lived their lives.*

Three) *In the mission of helping and serving others, they needed to feel their weakness, in order to help them find and acquire the strength that they needed.*

Four) *In order to help others, they needed to first recognize the condition of those who needed help; and then utilize every positive and productive means to them elevate themselves from the broken from their position of weakness. For Christians today that certainly would mean helping realize that the same strength of Jesus that has elevated us, can elevate them as well.*

And now in chapter ten Paul will circle back to see what these believers have learned (if anything) from the difficult lessons of the past. That would be the only healthy way for them to move forward.

Lessons Learned

- *There are things in the Christian life that we must not ignore: We must not ignore or be embittered by God's favor upon certain people, like Israel, this is a mystery that cannot be understood, but should be accepted (Romans 11:25).*
- *There is a general providence of God which is extended to both the just and the unjust, such as the sun and the rain by which everybody benefits, whether they deserve it or not (Matthew 5:45).*
- *In spite of the fact that God has demonstrated a special grace upon special groups, the opportunity is extended to all, including us.*

- *We realize that in spite of life being full of tribulations and difficulty, God delivers us unto Himself. (**rhúomai**; to deliver by taking unto oneself) 2 Timothy 3:11.*
- *As we examine history, we need to learn from it. We must discern between the providence and provision of God, and we must learn to be thankful for both. We should in a careful and healthy way look objectively at the different events (good and bad) in our own lives to learn from them. Know that seeking to better the conditions of our life is not a bad thing, unless we cannot find peace and fulfillment in Him, and find ourselves complaining and unable to appreciate Him for the things He has already given us.*
- *Idolatry is an abomination to the Lord. It reduces the true God **who is spirit** to things made by hand. As in Corinth, idolatry is such a danger to the Christians of today; that is why Paul advised them to flee from it. Idolatry is always connected with ethical corruption and moral degeneracy. Idolatry does not permit anyone to win the race of life, because it is not a climate of moral self-control.*

Corinthian - Christians, Chaos, and the Greatest Gift of All
"Lessons Learned" (Continued) November 2nd, 2014
(1 Corinthians 10:11-13)

These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age. 12 If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall. 13 The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.

Lessons Learned

In our world of idolatry (*those people places and things that we make a priority and passion above God*) there are common temptations that come to all men and women: Christians are not exempt. The struggle is real.

The temptations that seized the Corinthians of course were like those temptations that people had always faced. Idolatry and indulgence, and these people had a history. The instruction and correction from Paul to them was this...

All temptation could be met, endured, and overcome by turning away from the co-dependent chaotic culture of idolatrous behavior. This could be done simply by turning to, and then depending on God - who is always faithful and trustworthy.

Part of the Corinthian problem, was of course much like our own problem today.

Too many of us, live too much of our lives co-dependently on the very (idolatrous) things that bring us our greatest and most intense temptation.

Our salvation from ridiculousness is that we need to focus our eyes on Jesus, and reach for Him as our way of deliverance and endurance. We then need to move quickly away from using our faith merely as a relative symbol, while we flounder and fall day in and day out in our disobedience and indulgence. No one wants to hear it but let's say it our loud anyway... Our idolatry and indulgence has a high price - one that we can't afford to pay. Yes there is a way out but it requires resisting and turning away from temptation. Christ has certainly forgiven us of our sin - but the consequences of our indulgence to our temptations may in reality end up being more than even we can live with. I love what James wrote in his epistle...

"Surrender completely to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you. Come close to God, and He will come close to you."

Sunday's Takeaways

- Temptation to sin is common to us all.
- Testing of our faith is important and helpful and will happen to those who follow Jesus.
- It is Satan and forces of evil who tempt us.
- It is God in His goodness and wisdom who tests us.
- Satan always tempts us for the sole purpose of causing us to fail God.
- God only tests us to make us stronger in our faith and more effective in His kingdom.
- As Christians, we should never presume that we are standing securely above failure under our own power and ability - when we do, we are one step away from slipping and falling.
- God will not allow us to be tested beyond our human ability.
- God is at all times trustworthy (*1 Corinthians 1:9*).
- No tests will come to a Christian without the God's purpose, permission and providence.

- Each test enables the believer to make progress in his Christian walk.
- Each test provides the opportunity for victory God never liberates us from testing, but He gives us the joy of sharing in His glory.
- The Lord promises endurance, not exemption from suffering and testing.
- God deals with our ability to withstand the testing. We must deal with our willingness.

Corinthian - Christians, Culture, Chaos, and the Greatest Gift of All

"Koininea" - November 9th, 2014

(1 Corinthians 10:14-17)

So, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols. You are reasonable people. Decide for yourselves if what I am saying is true. When we bless the cup at the Lord's Table, aren't we sharing in the blood of Christ? And when we break the bread, aren't we sharing in the body of Christ? And though we are

many, we all eat from one loaf of bread, showing that we are one body.

With this one small passage in his letter to Corinth, Paul begins a big strategic process of correcting the misunderstanding and misuse of Communion by the Christian leaders at Corinth. The starting place for this is very important...

Those who have been forgiven of their sin and washed by the blood of Christ (Revelations 1:5) all constitute a fellowship

what is common to all. The original text of Paul ***Koinonía***; *fellowship with, shared participation*). Or as we like to put it...

"We walk together with Jesus, He walks with us, I walk with you, you walk with me." (Acts 2:42, Galatians 2:9; Ephesians 3:9; Philippians 1:5). The word ***koinonía*** means to share something in common, or to create something in common. In Communion each week when we partake of one cup (*the common cup*), it serves as an outward symbol and public message that says we all have in common one certain thing - *the forgiveness of our sins*, and that forgiveness is made

possible through the sacrifice of Jesus, and His blood that poured from His pierced and wounded body at His death. For anyone who has not truly experienced the freedom and forgiveness of God by grace through faith (*Ephesians 2:8*), no matter how many times they partake of communion, they cannot fully appreciate or understand its true meaning. Among many things, *Communion is not just something we do every Sunday - it is a weekly reminder and message of who we are.*

Some might say at this point... "I don't need communion to remind me of who I am." Well that may be true, but then maybe you need communion to remind you of who He is. Or, maybe you might need communion to simply remind you of who you promised God you would be, because of Him.

Nonetheless, Jesus said that no matter how many times we participate in Communion, we do it to remember Him. But those are the biblically obvious reasons for the importance and need for participation and understanding of Communion. It is

also important to understand that it is not right to believe that there are special graces or salvific powers in the bread, and there is no spiritual mojo in the juice or wine - *even after it has been blessed*. It is also very important to understand that the bread and wine do not miraculously become the actual body and blood of Jesus! We should be careful to communicate to anyone the idea that he or she will experience regeneration by participating in the Lord's Supper. What we need to know is that they are important symbols to remind us always of the message and mission of Christ, and the true miracle of forgiveness of our sin, the love of God, and the new life we have in Him. We must be careful that we never convey to the sinful individual the idea that he will experience regeneration or salvation by partaking of the Lord's Supper. To find deeper meaning and value for Communion we can use the word that Paul used... ***Koinonia***

To make sure that the word *koionía*, is understood, Paul does not say, "all who participate of the same physical cup of the

fruit of the vine." That would be our doing. Instead, he speaks of the participation of the blood of Christ, revealing that Communion is an act of worship and obedience that represents to us the power and love of God shared with us. That would be God's doing. Next, this *koinonia/fellowship* consists of people who have, by faith, purposed and used the blood of Christ as the cleansing agent for their healing their broken hearts and calming their troubled minds by accepting the forgiveness of sin, joining together with Christ, and the people of God from all times, and from all places.

Looking even deeper... notice that Paul does not say "*the blood of Jesus*," but "*the blood of Christ* [the Anointed One]." The usage here is intentional, designed by Paul to refer specifically to the blood of the Son of God, and not simply the Son of Man. Confessing the sacrifice was not just the sacrifice of a good man, it was also the sacrifice of a great God... Jesus Christ the Son of God. To make it more personal, it was not mere human blood that was shed to join us together in a common brotherhood with the experience of our sins forgiven - but it

was the blood of Christ, the eternal Messiah, the Son of God, who forever had been with the Father (*John 1:18*). At the end of the day Christians must know that it is the blood of Christ, and not just the representative and symbolic elements that cleanse us from all the shame and guilt of our sin (*1 John 1:7*).

Every time we believers gather to celebrate Holy Communion, we are declaring in *Koinonia* (common fellowship) that we are members of the spiritual community of Christ through His redeeming blood. We are joined together with Him, and with one another through our common faith in Christ, and it is all due to the love, mercy, and grace provided by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

Sunday Takeaways

- Communion, or The Lord's Supper is called by Paul "the cup of the blessing."
- Only those who have allowed the blood of Christ to cleanse and forgive them from sin should participate in Communion.

- Communion has no spiritual benefit for an unbelieving person.
- Paul will also teach that an unbeliever who participates in Communion does so "unworthily."
- The bread and the cup of Communion *symbolize* the broken body and shed blood of Christ. Each person who eats and drinks these elements bears personal responsibility for so doing.
- The cup of blessing and the bread which we break each week are the symbols of the covenant that personally brings into the heart of the believer God's sacrifice to redeem us from sin.
- In Communion we are spiritually united in *Koinonia* with believers and followers of Jesus from all times and all places because of our common belief, faith, and experiences in Christ.

Corinthian - Christians, Culture, Chaos, and the Greatest Gift of All (November 16th, 2014)

"Setting the Table"

(1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1)

So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 32 Don't give offense to Jews or Gentiles or the church of God. 33 I, too, try to please everyone in everything I do. I don't just do what is best for me; I do what is best for others so that many may be saved. 11:1 And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ.

Setting the Table

"None of us should continue to seek our own selfish good, but each one should seek the good of another who is different."

This is the defining words of what we know today of chapter ten of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. The words are inclusive, direct, personal, polarizing, and powerful. And they were said to "set the table" or "prepare the way" for one of the biggest issues of concern for the culture and chaos in the Corinthian

church - ***elitism*** and all of the destructive mess that comes with it.

In the previous verses of chapter ten, Paul told the Corinthians that while many things may be permissible for them as Christians, it would not be spiritually wise for them to live a life of reckless abandonment to self-satisfaction. To be pleasing to the heavenly Father, a follower of Jesus must pick and choose those beliefs and behavior that build up not only ones self, but also others who are members of the body of Christ, the community of faith.

The practical piece to this was very powerful and personally challenging. And even though the context of Paul's instruction here was about the lingering practice of believers eating certain meats that had been sacrificed to idols in pagan rituals. It is clear that there is a deeper and much more beneficial meaning within the text, for those who want to follow Jesus as more than just a part of the believing masses but as a faithful and obedient disciple. *The deeper meaning is captured within the*

attitude and condition of the heart of each individual who professes the faith and following of Jesus Christ.

"I AM LIVING FOR MORE THAN JUST MYSELF - I AM LIVING IN CHRIST, FOR CHRIST, AND FOR ALL THOSE WHO MIGHT FIND CHRIST BECAUSE OF HOW I LIVE."

How does that fit and feel? For me it was high and tight... but I know that it is the truth that will truly set me free to become the follower of Jesus and leader that I want to be. So I embrace it. This *sets the table* and *prepares the way* for Holy Spirit to deal with all the other issues of my heart, hands, and mind. This where Paul wanted this to go with the Corinthians as well. The illustration of the Christian running a race in *1 Corinthians 9:24-27* applies to the whole tenth chapter, and the whole tenth chapter is setting the table for chapter eleven. In our race, none of us want others to hinder or distract us. The believer is supposed to strive or struggle (*agonízomai*) for victory and to (*egkrateúetai*) exercise self-control for the prize.

However, how well we Christians run to receive the prize (*brabeíon*) depends not only on ourselves, but also on bystanders of life who may throw themselves in the path of the race and become a stumbling block to the runners. The image that Paul wants to present to us as Christians is that we are to run the race with the consciousness that there is a prize to be won, and in order to win it we must not only struggle to win but also exercise self-discipline in doing so. We also remember that it is also our duty of love not to be a stumbling block to others who are running this race with us.

Finally, in setting the table Paul will affirm his message of verses 23 and 24 that he is determined to do not what he has the right to do, but rather to do that which is for the common good of the mission of the gospel and the salvation of mankind. He will not do that which destroys, but that which builds up. He knows that people are diverse and different, and that their diversity and differences need to be navigated by love and understanding, not ignored, rejected, and condemned.

Sunday Takeaways

- *In whatever we do, seek actively to bring honor and glory to God.*
- *Seek each day to live a life of moral and ethical standards that others will know that it is Christ who leads you to do what you do, and to be who you are.*
- *Recognize that there are things which are of themselves sinful, and they definitely should be avoided regardless of how we feel personally about them.*
- *Christians, by our behavior, can become stumbling blocks to other Christians in the race of life.*
- *We must recognize what is offensive and hurtful to others and try to avoid it.*
- *We should take into consideration the cultural background of others who observe us.*

- *Christians are a community unlike all other groups of people and communities in the world.*
- *There is a difference between being a believer in Christ and an imitator of Him.*
- *Imitators of Jesus must reach first to have the nature of God within him; in other words, we must be born again, and committed fully to the values of God.*
- *The believer never quits growing spiritually and maturing in Christ.*
- *Jesus Christ was God incarnate, and although as the children of God we acquire the nature of God, we do not become a god. That there are things that we cannot do that only Christ could and should do - we are not God - there is only One God. Instead of praying that we would be able to do as Christ did, we should ask the Lord what He would have us, as His children, do.*

Corinthian - Christians, Culture, Chaos and the Greatest Gift of All (November 23rd, 2014)

"Men and Women in Life, Order, and Worship"

(1 Corinthians 11:2-16)

I am so glad that you always keep me in your thoughts, and that you are following the teachings I passed on to you. 3 But there is one thing I want you to know: The head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. 4 A man dishonors his head if he covers his head while praying or prophesying. 5 But a woman dishonors her head if she prays or prophesies without a covering on her head, for this is the same as shaving her head. 6 Yes, if she refuses to wear a head covering, she should cut off all her hair! But since it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut or her head shaved, she should wear a covering.

7 A man should not wear anything on his head when worshiping, for man is made in God's image and reflects God's glory. And woman reflects man's glory. 8 For the first man

didn't come from woman, but the first woman came from man.

9 And man was not made for woman, but woman was made for man. 10 For this reason, and because the angels are watching, a woman should wear a covering on her head to show she is under authority.

11 But among the Lord's people, women are not independent of men, and men are not independent of women. 12 For although the first woman came from man, every other man was born from a woman, and everything comes from God. 13 Judge for yourselves. Is it right for a woman to pray to God in public without covering her head? 14 Isn't it obvious that it's disgraceful for a man to have long hair? 15 And isn't long hair a woman's pride and joy? For it has been given to her as a covering. 16 But if anyone wants to argue about this, I simply say that we have no other custom than this, and neither do God's other churches.

Cultural and Spiritual Context

This passage is certainly where we as followers of Jesus in the community of faith in 2014 must be spiritually mature enough to understand that the instruction that Paul is giving here in chapter eleven, verses two through sixteen are directly related to the home life and community worship gatherings of the Christians of Corinth in 52-56 A.D. Within that context Paul is trying to restore some sense of Godly order, origination, and expectations for men and women - husbands and wives moving forward as leaders within their own homes and within the church of Jesus Christ. In all of the original Greek language used by Paul in this letter there is nothing to support or declare the superiority or inferiority of one gender or another. The original language fully supports Paul's intention to restore Godly order and expectation within the context of the home and the local church at Corinth. Neither his intention or theme were meant to be taken completely out of context two thousand years later. Leadership of any kind demands the value and respect of each role and position of authority and responsibility. That does not

mean that one is better or more valuable than the other - it simply means different and distinct. In God's expectations for spiritual authority within the home and within the church community there should be a similar structure and order for leadership. But we must not mistake that to mean that a man is superior and a woman inferior. Nor should we interpret Paul's instruction to mean that a husband does not listen to or respectfully regard the ability, insight, and value of his wife. That is not the message here - the message is this God values order, but order is not God. What God values is His creation and how He alone has made each role of leadership and authority to uniquely compliment and strengthen not only the home but the Church. The people of the Corinth to whom Paul wrote this letter were valuing neither. In verse 8, He cites the example:

For the first man didn't come from woman, but the first woman came from man. And man was not made for woman, but woman was made for man.

The correct context and understanding for this is not that man is of greater value or priority - it is simply placing a role and order for spiritual leadership and authority within the home and church. Listen how he balances this so that this instruction should not be understood and taken out of context.

But among the people of God, women are not independent of men, and men are not independent of women. For although the first woman came from man, every other man (since then) was born from a woman, and everything comes from God.

So there it is - this is not about unfair empowerment, discriminate silencing, gender superiority, or male dominant cultures.

C'mon, bro... who in their right mind should believe that this is about wearing "hoodies" while we worship in public - it is so much bigger and so much more important than that. It is about the righteous roles and authority for Christ following families and the Church of Jesus Christ. It truly is about divine order for godly leadership within our homes and within the community of faith. To interpret it any other way, would be a

stretch and departure from the truth and the valuable lessons needed for the complex anti-christ world in which we are needing strong Christian leadership from both men and women - husbands and wives. This word is for us - but it is not about us.

Sunday Takeaways

- *A woman is not required by God to submit unwillingly to her husband. She should do so because she willingly chooses to do so - from a right and obedient heart. Paul used in his original Greek the word **hupotássomai**, which means voluntary submission. If it is not voluntary, it is not the free exercise of her willing and obedient heart.*
- *Day to day life for both men and women should take on a different meaning and significant purpose when both husband and wife are "faith believing followers of Jesus."*

- *In Christ, there is equal regard and mutual respect between a man and a woman - husband and a wife. There is also a spiritually and emotionally healthy interdependence that God desires for a husband and a wife (male and female) - having needs from one another, but not being needy towards one another other.*
- *God created man and woman in such a way that they would complement and enhance one another.*
- *Believers in Christ should wisely seek to marry fellow believers to help provide a foundation of common faith in God from which to build a right relationship, and to provide the best possible hope for a happy and successful marriage.*

Corinthian - Christians, Culture, Chaos, and the Greatest Gift of All (January 18th 2015)

God's Spirit In Us

(1 Corinthians 12:1-11)

Now, dear brothers and sisters, regarding your question about the special abilities the Spirit gives us. I don't want you to misunderstand this. You know that when you were still pagans, you were led astray and swept along in worshiping speechless idols. So I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus, and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us.

A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

The Gift of the Spirit (Comm-Unity)

We Confess the Same Lord (verses 1-3)

Paul contrasted their experience as unconverted idolaters with their present experience as Christians. They had worshiped

dead idols, but now they belonged to the living God! Their idols never spoke to them, but now God spoke to them by His Spirit, in this context through the gift of prophecy (Grk, *prophetise; revealed and proclaimed truth*). When they were lost they were under the control of the demonic forces and the powers of darkness (*1 Corinthians 10:20*) and were led into deception and delusion ("*carried away*" *1 Corinthians 12:2*). But now the Spirit of God living in them and directing and guiding them (the Spirit of God at work in us).

It is only through the Spirit that a person can honestly say, "*Jesus is Lord.*" A casual, trite, sarcastic or mocking person may mouth the words "*Jesus is Lord*", but what Paul is teaching is that does not qualify to God as sincerity from true confession of faith, repentance of sin, or a surrender of pride and will.

(Perhaps Paul was referring to things they had said when influenced by the demons prior to conversion.) It is important to note that a follower of Christ is always in control of himself when the Holy Spirit is at work in them (*1 Corinthians 14:32*) because Christ is leading that work or manifestation. Any kind

of *"work or manifestation of the Spirit"* that robs a person of self-control is not of God, for *"the fruit of the Spirit is . . . self-control"* (Galatians 5:22-23). If Jesus Christ truly is Lord in our lives, then there should be unity in the church as a result of the working of God's Spirit in us all. Division and dissension among God's people only weakens their united testimony to a lost world (John 17:20-21).

We Depend on the Same God (verses 4-6)

There is what is called a trinitarian (God the Father - God the Son - God the Spirit) emphasis here: *"the same Spirit .. the same Lord - the same God."* We individually may have different gifts, ministries, and methods of working, but *"God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what please Him"* (Philippians 2:13). Here is how this plainly shakes out...

- *the source of the gift is God;*
- *the sphere for administering the gift is from God*
- *the energy to use the gift is from God.*
- *the motive and intent of the gift is from and for God*

Why, then, should the gifts of God the Holy Spirit be used to glorify and promote men? Why would the gifts of God the Holy Spirit be used to allow or cause men to compete with one another over who has what gift and why one is better than the other because of that gift? There is no biblical support for that - in fact, there is biblical instruction to the contrary. Do not use gifts of the Spirit to divide - do not use to disrupt - do not use to create confusion or contention, and do not use the gifts to self promote or self gratify. None of that kind of activity represents the heart of God, the presence of Christ, or the work of the Spirit in the body of Christ the community of faith!

We Minister to the Same Body (verses 7-11)

The gifts of God's Spirit are given for the good will and spiritual health of the whole church. They are not for individual enjoyment, but for the spiritual health and growth of the community of Christ. The Corinthians especially needed this reminder, because they were using spiritual gifts (???) selfishly

to promote themselves and not to prosper the church. When we open ourselves to the working of the Holy Spirit and accept the gifts God chooses for us with humility, then we can use them to build up, to encourage others, and to create a community of faith that is a genuine witness to all unbelievers - and this helps the whole Church - big picture.

The various gifts are listed in Paul's intended context of *1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and 28*, and also in *Ephesians 4:11* and *Romans 12:6-8*. When you combine the lists, you end up with nineteen different gifts and offices of God's Spirit. Since the listing in *Romans* is not identical with the listing in *1 Corinthians*, we may assume that Paul was not attempting to exhaust the subject in either passage but list for the purpose of specific need and context to his target audience (*here is what they need to hear and why*). While the gifts named were more than adequate for the ministry of the church, we should not assume that God is merely limited to these lists - that would be a mistake. Surely we have figured out by now that God can do what God wants to do - when He wants to do it - and why He

does it does not always fit into our ability to understand or reason! I'm ok with that...

A couple months ago we discussed apostles (*1 Corinthians 9:1-6*). In Paul's time, prophets were New Testament spokesmen for the gospel of Jesus. Their mission came from Christ Himself, and the messages came immediately from God the Holy Spirit. Their ministry was to disciple, edify, encourage, and comfort (*1 Corinthians 14:3*). The only forecasting and foretelling of future events that they did centered solely on the return of Jesus... period. Their messages were tested by the listeners to determine whether they were truly from God (*1 Corinthians 14:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21*). *Ephesians 2:20 "Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself."* makes it clear that apostles and prophets worked together to lay the foundation of the church, and we may assume that certain aspects of what they were doing, and why they did it, were no longer needed once that foundation was completed. However, that does not mean that the work and gifts of the Holy Spirit

are no longer needed! They are as relative today as they were then, and are very much needed - but today we trust in God knowing what we need more than us knowing what we want. That is a reliable and biblical grid of truth for the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit God's Spirit today. The Spirit works in us to lead us forward as individuals to becoming like Christ, and to actively leading our homes and the community of faith to do the same. This makes the gifts of the Spirit relative to our context, our need, and to our circumstances.

We Have Experienced the Same Baptism (verses 12-13)

It is unfortunate that the term "*baptism of the Spirit*" has been divorced from its original New Testament meaning God has spoken to us in Spirit-given words which we must not confuse (1 Corinthians 2:12-13).

"And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from

human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths."

Here is in context what we believe and understand here at Reunion. The baptism of the Spirit occurs at conversion to Jesus when God the Holy Spirit enters the believing sinner, giving him or her a new life, and making the body the temple (habitation) of God. All believers have experienced this once-for-all baptism (1 Corinthians 12:13).

"The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit."

Nowhere in the Scripture are we told to seek this baptism after coming to Christ as believers, because we have already experienced the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and it does not need to be repeated.

However... the *"filling of the Spirit"* (Ephesians 5:18) has to do with the Spirit's work in us for complete and obedient control of our lives. In Paul's use of the Greek, *"to be filled by"* means *"to be controlled by."* We are commanded to be filled, and we are to be filled if we surrender all to Christ, and ask Him for the Spirit's *leading, guidance, and control. This "filling" is not an event, but rather a process - a repeated, reoccurring and renewable experience. For we are constantly in need of the leading, the guidance and the control of God's Spirit and spiritual power if we are to live our lives as true Christians who bring honor and glory to Christ - by becoming like Him.* We will revisit this over the next couple of weeks, but as we understand this scripture; to be baptized by the Spirit means that we belong to Christ's body. To be filled with the Spirit means that our bodies belong to Christ.

Corinthian - Christians, Culture, Chaos, and the Greatest Gift of All (January 25th 2015)

The Greatest Gift of All

(1 Corinthians 13:1-13)

"If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever! Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture! But when full understanding comes, these partial things will become useless. When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. Now we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely. Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

Laying the Foundation for the Greatest Gift

Paul finishes what is now known as chapter twelve with some of his most dynamic teaching on the power of the God the Holy Spirit. He says... ***not all have been, not all are, and not all can***

be apostles, prophets, or teachers; nor can all perform miracles, have gifts of healings, speak in tongues, and interpret.

Not only have all not had, and do not have, these gifts, but not all ***have to have them - if so, Christ would have commanded them, and God would have given them.*** Any Christian may lack or not possess these gifts and still be all that God wants us to be. Also, no one may have any one of these gifts exclusively in the Christian church, and then use that gift to act as the single arbitrator of truth - we already have the truth. God exercises His sovereignty in the distribution of these gifts. We cannot seek them. If God wanted to accomplish a specific purpose through any of us, then He would give us what He knows we need to fit us for that service. God can give any gift or gifts to any individual, but God does not always do what He can do, but only what He chooses to do, to accomplish His plan and purpose in us. He uses us (in a good way), not because He cannot do without us, but because He chooses to give us the privilege of being included as His co-workers - important and

valuable parts of His Body. In error, we cannot interpret and judge God's actions in this context, because then we would have to be gods ourselves - and that is just not how God's Spirit works. What we can do however, is to be faithful observers of what God does, and then become powerful witnesses of what we have both seen and heard. And in conclusion of this great chapter Paul gives us an insight, an observation, as to how God the Holy Spirit does His work. *Why He does it this way* is another story - one that may not yet be told, or one we may not yet need to know, but because of our faith and trust in God that is ok. For now lets be faithful to watch and pray - accept and obey. For now lets be open to the work and manifestation of God's greatest gift in us - love. The more we use the gift of love the more fruit of the Spirit is evident in our lives to those we love and who love us - everyone is built up - everyone is encouraged - everyone is included - and everyone is valued. To conclude in laying this foundation for the ***greatest gift*** lets close with these logical and practical truths.

The final verse of chapter twelve is a perfect introduction to chapter thirteen, the hymn of love - the greatest gift. Paul says, *"But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way."* (ESV) Or in the (NLT)... *"So you should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts. But now let me show you a way of life that is best of all."*

What did he mean by this direct instruction? Which are the best gifts? If the bible clearly says we are to seek the better gifts, we need to know which ones they are. Based on the strong context and spiritual relevance of Paul's instructions it is safe to arrive at the following conclusions: ***There must be degrees in the quality of gifts.*** The KJV translates the original Greek word *kratos* as "*strong*." The word in subjective context means means "*stronger, more powerful, superior in strength, better, more excellent.*"

Paul has taken all the guess work out it for us by separating out two kinds of gifts and identifying for us those gifts that are merely good or strong, and those that are *kratos* - superior,

stronger, or more excellent. *Which is the first group?* Ironically, those that historically most will seek after with great eagerness, and sadly they are not as strong or as superior as the other group. ***Here is the first group: seeking to be apostles, prophets and teachers, wanting to perform miracles, healing, speak in tongues, and interpret.*** Another noteworthy irony about this list of gifts - these gifts were precisely the gifts being used to create chaos , and to abuse, divide, and destroy the Corinthian church which Paul was instructing. The gifts in this list are good and are real, but they also are gifts that can more easily confuse, cause doubt, and hurt the body of Christ if not used precisely and correctly by mature selfless Christians only for the glory of God, and the edifying and strengthening of the entire body of Christ. So what is the second group? Well, certainly not those listed in the first group in verses twenty-nine and thirty. They are most all found in chapter twelve as better gifts and inclusive to everyone.

Here is the second group: wisdom, knowledge, faith, prophecy, discernment, helps, service and hospitalities,

guidance or administrations. These should be possessed by all though of course in particular by the church leaders, pastors, elders and ministry leaders because these gifts are better, stronger, and more excellent than the others which are more demonstrative and self-distinguishing. My prayer is that God would give and fill us all with these more powerful and superior gifts - in fact, God give them to all believers and followers of Jesus. According to Paul, these are the strongest gifts of which all of us Christians can have. And regarding these gifts Paul advises, "***Covet them.***" The original Greek *zeloúte* means to "*zealously desire.*"

Corinthian - Christians, Chaos, Culture, and the Greatest Gift of All

The Greatest Gift - What is Love? (February 8th)
(1 Corinthians 13)

If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing. Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever! Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture! But when full understanding comes, these partial things will

become useless. When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. Now we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely. Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

Context and Content

What is love? Is there a question any bigger? Probably no in our world. But Paul under the anointing of God's Spirit gave the Corinthian Christians the most profound explanations ever written. We can start with the context and the meaning of the word. In the English language, this one word is used to express all varieties of love: to God, to wife, husband, parent, child, friend; as well as love of beauty, truth, or human comforts. In the the general sense love is basically a feeling, an emotion, a personal attachment. But the Greeks sought to express more

than the feeling, because they believed that the quality and usefulness of the feeling were determined by its motivation. All people who think and feel love. But for what reasons? The attempt to convey the reasons for love gave the ancient Greeks a need to create four words in the language to indicate a specific reason for love. Those four words were... éros, storgê, philía, and agápe.

- *The noun éros and the verb eráo are mainly used for love between the sexes (male and female). They can be used for such things as the passion of ambition and the intensity of patriotism; but characteristically they are the words for physical love. The word éros is never used in the New Testament.*
- *When referring to family affection, the Greeks use the verb stérgeo and the noun storgê. They describe the love of parents for their children and children for their parents. The word ástorgoi, is used by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:3, where it actually means lack of family love. He uses it in the context of a sign of the last days - the lack of love of parents for their children and of children for their parents. A derivative of these words is used*

by Paul, when he says in Romans 12:10, "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another." The words translated "kindly affectioned" is philóstorgoi in Greek, give the sense that the Christian community should act as members of one great family or community of faith.

- *Next the Greeks used the noun philía and the verb philéo, from which we derive the English words philanthropist (literally, one who loves man) and Philadelphia (City of Brotherly Love). The basic meaning of philéo is "to offer friendship." It does not include a sexual physical love, but rather forms of no-sexual affection both physical and verbal. In Modern Greek, it means "to kiss," while philía means "friendship." In the New Testament, philéo is used in the context of the love of father, mother, son, and daughter (Matthew 10:37). It is used in the context of the love of Jesus for Lazarus (John 11:3,36) ; and once it is used in the context of the love of Jesus for John, the beloved disciple (John 20:2). Jesus Christ as perfect man and perfect God demonstrated both natural affection and divine love, but the*

natural was always in subjection to and in the approval of God the Father.

- *In the New Testament, however, two other words predominate: agapáo and agápe. Agápe is first used in the Old Testament (2 Samuel 13:15; Song 2:4; Jeremiah 2:2). Agápe, then, is a word born within the bosom of God, and there is no trace of it being used in any genre or context of literary style other than religious and biblical. Agápe is primarily God's own unique love, manifested in the life of the Son of Man who came to seek and to save that which was lost, above all by His death on the cross. There is no other love in the history of humankind like it. All agápe is of God (1 John 4:7). God is agápe (1 John 4:8,16). Agápe does not have its origin in man, but originates only in God. It is the downward movement of the self-giving divine love. Éros, on the other hand, in its highest development, is the upward movement of the human soul to seek the divine. Heavenly éros lifts man up, but agápe brings God down to man. Agápe redeems man, thereby indwelling him and making it possible for man himself to love in the sense of agapáo.*

Only through man's understanding and ownership of God's incarnation (coming to us in the flesh) and love can he really experience the divine feeling called *agápe*, love. The love of the Christian for his neighbor is shown by Paul to be simply God's own *agápe* active in the human heart, that is, through the indwelling Holy Spirit. What a thought Paul gives us... the central work of the Holy Spirit in us is *agape* - God's love.

The Greatest Gift - What is Love? (February 15th)

Connection to Content

It is actually God's love in us, the very life of God within, *agápe*. It is the love that comes down from above to dwell in man when he believes in God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is fellowship with God. But it is manifested, as is evident from *1 Corinthians chapter thirteen*, not to God Himself but to our

fellow men. To fully connect with this, and then to add real context we need to take a minute...

It is easy for us to speak of love abstractly and generically, but when it comes to the everyday practicalities of life it is very different and much more difficult. The love we need and the love we want are often times two different things. The love we as followers of Jesus are reaching for is perfect - it is love that is fluid (*active and alive*) and organic (*foundational and fundamental*). Most of us would probably admit that it is not such a big deal for us to love the whole world - but that our biggest difficulty is loving those closest to us, and even our neighbor next door. Is our real problem loving the people with who we live and work; our boss, those who do not agree with us, or those that we compete with? Or are we are having difficulty in simply loving ourselves? Either way, we need desperately to follow Paul's advice and actively pursue love toward them: "*Follow after charity.*"

When I read chapter thirteen sometimes it is as though Paul was saying to the believers in Corinth: ***"You have the love of God dwelling in you through faith. You should manifest this love toward believers and unbelievers as God has manifested His love toward you, both in your lives before you knew Him, and in your present lives since you have known Him. If His love is really in you, it must manifest itself in Godlike ways."***

So how does God act toward this world with this other-worldly kind of love that knows no limits and has no equal? And, how does He expect us to act toward this world with the same kind of love? The answer is simple... He expects us to act out of our love for Him - literally. Again, that love is not just *eros*, *storge* or *philia* love; that is good love but not good enough. It is the *agape* love of grace, mercy, and redemption; the self-giving nature of God coming down to man in the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ. God's holiness and man's sinfulness could not have fellowship in a union that would be agreeable to the

character of either. *Important to understand - God's love is merciful, gracious, and redemptive - but it is not compromising.*

This is how Christian love (our love) should manifest itself toward the unbelieving and watching world. Scripturally it translates like this: *"Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."* (John 13:34-35)

We are to love our friends and our enemies, our brothers and the ones from another mother, our family and our neighbor, not because of their sin, or good deeds, ***but in spite of all of that - we love because He loved us, and we love Him.*** We love others because of what God's love in us may help both of us to become because of it! *God Love* seeks us sinners and saints, not to just to approve of our righteousness, or take pleasure from our sin, but to lead us away from sin and death and to bring us back to our Creator God through Christ Jesus. *"If I do not manifest this love toward my fellow men,"* Paul tells the

Corinthians, *"then any claim I may make that I have the God-given ability to speak in languages of men and of angels is hypocrisy. I am merely acting a part."*

Sunday Takeaways

1. *Agápe is the very life of God in us. It flows through us to our fellow man.*
2. *God's love for the world was manifested in giving Himself in the Person of His Son to die for the sins of every man.*
3. *It is possible to speak every language and not the language of love for others.*
4. *The world judges God by judging us, His called and chosen representatives. We must glorify Him by faithfully representing His other-worldly love for the world.*
5. *Knowledge without love produces nothing; it does not attract, convert, or comfort.*
6. *Above all the love of God is merciful, gracious, and redemptive - but not compromising.*

7. *The true object of faith is God's love which is fully realized in the sending of His Son into the world to take away sins and give eternal life to believers.*

8. *Love is life itself - Love is more than morality but it does include it. Apart from love, morality does not exist.*

9. *Love is the end goal for morals and the spiritual gifts, which are the means. Love, therefore, defines the value and utility of the spiritual gifts.*

Corinthian - Christians, Chaos, Culture, and the Greatest Gift of All

The Gift Prophecy - Edifying All - Encouraging All - Engaging All

(1 Corinthians 14:1-12)

Let love be your highest goal! But you should also desire the special abilities the Spirit gives—especially the ability to prophesy. *For if you have the ability to speak in tongues, you*

will be talking only to God, since people won't be able to understand you. You will be speaking by the power of the Spirit, but it will all be mysterious. But one who prophesies strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them. A person who speaks in tongues is strengthened personally, but one who speaks a word of prophecy strengthens the entire church.

I wish you could all speak in tongues, but even more I wish you could all prophesy. For prophecy is greater than speaking in tongues, unless someone interprets what you are saying so that the whole church will be strengthened.

Dear brothers and sisters, if I should come to you speaking in an unknown language, how would that help you? But if I bring you a revelation or some special knowledge or prophecy or teaching, that will be helpful. Even lifeless instruments like the flute or the harp must play the notes clearly, or no one will recognize the melody. And if the bugler doesn't sound a clear call, how will the soldiers know they are being called to battle?

It's the same for you. If you speak to people in words they don't understand, how will they know what you are saying? You might as well be talking into empty space.

There are many different languages in the world, and every language has meaning. But if I don't understand a language, I will be a foreigner to someone who speaks it, and the one who speaks it will be a foreigner to me. And the same is true for you. Since you are so eager to have the special abilities the Spirit gives, seek those that will strengthen the whole church.

So anyone who speaks in tongues should pray also for the ability to interpret what has been said. For if I pray in tongues, my spirit is praying, but I don't understand what I am saying. Well then, what shall I do? I will pray in the spirit, and I will also pray in words I understand. I will sing in the spirit, and I will also sing in words I understand. For if you praise God only in the spirit, how can those who don't understand you praise God along with you? How can they join you in giving thanks when they don't understand what you are saying? You will be giving

thanks very well, but it won't strengthen the people who hear you.

I thank God that I speak in tongues more than any of you. But in a church meeting I would rather speak five understandable words to help others than ten thousand words in an unknown language.

Dear brothers and sisters, don't be childish in your understanding of these things. Be innocent as babies when it comes to evil, but be mature in understanding matters of this kind. It is written in the Scriptures: "I will speak to my own people through strange languages and through the lips of foreigners. But even then, they will not listen to me," says the Lord.

So you see that speaking in tongues is a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers. Prophecy, however, is for the benefit of

believers, not unbelievers. Even so, if unbelievers or people who don't understand these things come into your church meeting and hear everyone speaking in an unknown language, they will think you are crazy. But if all of you are prophesying, and unbelievers or people who don't understand these things come into your meeting, they will be convicted of sin and judged by what you say. As they listen, their secret thoughts will be exposed, and they will fall to their knees and worship God, declaring, "God is truly here among you."

Well, my brothers and sisters, let's summarize. When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you. No more than two or three should speak in tongues. They must speak one at a time, and someone must interpret what they say. But if no one is present who can interpret, they must be silent in your church meeting and speak in tongues to God privately.

Let two or three people prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said. But if someone is prophesying and another person receives a revelation from the Lord, the one who is speaking must stop. In this way, all who prophesy will have a turn to speak, one after the other, so that everyone will learn and be encouraged. Remember that people who prophesy are in control of their spirit and can take turns. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the meetings of God's holy people. Women should be silent during the church meetings. It is not proper for them to speak. They should be submissive, just as the law says. If they have any questions, they should ask their husbands at home, for it is improper for women to speak in church meetings. Or do you think God's word originated with you Corinthians? Are you the only ones to whom it was given? If you claim to be a prophet or think you are spiritual, you should recognize that what I am saying is a command from the Lord himself. But if you do not recognize this, you yourself will not be recognized.

Commented [1]:

So, my dear brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and don't forbid speaking in tongues. But be sure that everything is done properly and in order.

Context and Content Overview

Within the content of what we call chapter fourteen of Paul's letter to the Corinthian church many Christians and well meaning Christian leaders have fallen into a trap. The trap is in losing perspective for the bigger picture of Paul's message and instruction to a specific group of people with specific issues and concerns. When we interpret this part of Paul's letter as if it were not connected to the rest - then there is a serious loss of context for the readers (such as ourselves) and the intent from writer who was being inspired by the Spirit of God to teach and correct those who he was writing to. My message to us regarding chapter fourteen is this... ***"Don't get lost here - it is not a destination point, it is merely a point of passage."*** The passage is not a theological manifesto or argument for Pentecostalism or for Evangelicalism. It is not purposed or

intended for denominationalism of any kind. It is purposed for maturing, correcting and uniting the body of Christ. The passage from Paul was (and remains to this day) intended for building, encouraging, and understanding the gifts of God's Spirit, as they are used and shared by flawed people with right motives and good hearts. Paul intends for the church at Corinth to lose their selfish, divisive, and prideful behavior - and to become wiser and more effective in their worship and in their relationships with one another as brothers and sisters in the family of God and the community of faith.

The themes remain the same. Love is the greatest gift of the Spirit. Tongues whether they are manifested in diverse ethnic languages, or glossolalic prayer languages do not qualify as a major gift preferred by God to build and edify the Church of Jesus Christ. Paul instructs us all that right after the gift of love the gift of prophecy is most preferred and expected by God.

"Why? Simple. God is love. And in His love, God has chosen to include everyone, and not to exclude anyone. The gift of prophecy includes and can be understood by everyone. That is

the grid of truth with which we must filter 1 Corinthians chapter fourteen. If we do not, we more than likely will fall into the trap of spiritual pride and elitism and maybe never come out."

The original Greek usage by Paul of the word prophecy in chapter fourteen is "*prophetise*." The definition for this word is; *to proclaim the gospel*. In the first century church the gift of prophecy used by those who could and would accurately interpret and proclaim the gospel of Jesus, as it had been told and written by the apostles. The gift of prophecy in the context of the Corinthian church is the correct instruction for a group of people who had lost sight of the love of Christ for all, and proclaiming the message and mission of Christ in a way that all could hear and understand.

Because of that lapse in judgment, the door of sin was opened - followed by confusing behavior, hurtful offenses, chaotic worship, and unrighteous practice of faith.

The truth is that it is much easier to interpret chapter fourteen as a theology for or against tongues, either ethnic or glossolalic language. But that is not the best or most excellent way. The truth really is that Christ has always come against anyone or anyone that does not love enough to include enough and in this context it means communion, teaching, fellowship, and all forms of Godly worship.

Next week we will focus on how Paul's instruction was intended to challenge, correct, and effect change in the hearts and lives of the Corinthian Christians.

Sunday Takeaways

- *Within the Word of God there is the proclamation of the truth*
- *Within biblical context there is accurate perspective for the truth*
- *Within the silence there is the hearing of the truth*
- *Within the Spirit of God there is revelation of the truth*
- *Within the gift of love there is relevance to the truth*

Corinthian

- Christians, Chaos, Culture, and the Greatest Gift of All Communicating Order and Peace in Christian Worship - Chapter Fourteen (March 8th, 2015)

Context and Content

- Who is speaking - Who is being spoken to
- What is being spoken - Why is it being spoken
- How it should be spoken - How it should not be spoken
- What is being heard - How is it being heard

That all sounds like structure, planning, preparation, order, organization, and study. And as much as there are those who do not like such things the truth is that we live in a world that has and needs all of them in order to function and survive.

Most people work within it and others do not, and when those who do not act to the degree that it offends, disrupts, destroys, and violates others then there are moral and lawful consequences that must be faced to restore peace and order.

In Corinthian church this was the worship gathering scenario as described by Paul in chapter fourteen. After thirty-three years of full-time pastoral ministry it is still chaotic mess to me, so I underscored just the instruction and correction of what Paul wrote to see how it would read. It honestly helped me to sort through the personality chaos and theological confusion to a point of interpretive clarity as to what was most important for you and I in 2015. Now, all of what Paul wrote is important for us agreed? But this process led me to what is actually for us. Here is what I got...

*Understandable not Confusing - Encouraging not Discouraging -
Ordered not Disorderly - Peaceful not Chaotic*

Final Context

Two points of theological debate deserve one last look before we move on to bigger and better things in our faith journey.

One - When Paul uses the words *Tongues or Tongue* he has very specific meaning for both and we have to at least look at

the original Greek to get on the same page as him. Obviously he does not mean *tongue or tongues* as a bodily organ used for eating, speaking, salivating, swallowing, or needed part of the human anatomy. What he does mean is this. When uses *tongue* singular, the original Greek refers to an *unknown ecstatic glossolalic language*. When he uses *tongues* he is specifically speaking of *ethnic known language*. The Greek word changes based on singular and plural usage each time in this entire letter.

Two - this theological issue of chapter fourteen is with Paul's instruction for women to be silent in church worship. The original Greek is specific to women as wives with husbands in church worship. It does not mean women in general. During the public worship married women were speaking out in an unknown tongue and in interpretation while others were speaking at the same time - chaotic and confusing! Paul's point - men lead your wives and families spiritually. Get your house in order so that the worship in the Church of Jesus is in order.

Sunday Takeaways

- ***One*** - Judging from the movement and placement of the cosmos or universe, it is safe to say that our Creator is ordered and organized. He is pleased when those who worship Him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23,24) do so in an ordered and organized manner.
- ***Two*** - God has built variety and diversity into His creation. However, it is ordered and each variety was created for a specific purpose.
- ***Three*** - God is a God of peace, and where there is no order, there is no peace - there is only chaos and confusion.
- ***Four*** - Our behavior and responses, especially in God's house of worship, reflects our Lord Himself. How do you rate your representation of your Lord?
- ***Five*** - The final authority for anything and everything is the Word of God (scripture). The bible is worthy of our complete trust based on historical content and human influence, spiritual revelation and power, prophetic accuracy, and global relevance to the words and teaching of Jesus.