

CHURCH UNITY AND DISCIPLINE

For followers of Jesus in
today's world

**A Bible Teaching Commentary
for personal or group study
by Fred Morris**



**1 Corinthians
Chapters 1 to 16**



CHURCH UNITY AND DISCIPLINE

1 Corinthians Part 1, Chapters 1 to 16

- **Thanks for God's mercy and spiritual gifts.**
- **How to avoid disunity in the church.**
- **The church at work in the world.**
- **The world at work in the church.**

- **How to discipline members who live in sin.**
- **How to live lives filled with the Holy Spirit.**
- **Avoiding big decisions in times of trouble.**
- **Helping, not hindering, weaker believers.**

THIS BOOK describes the first of Paul's letters to the church he helped to plant in Corinth, Greece. He is full of joy for their love and faith. He is also full of sadness because they had failed to prevent arguments and acts of sin within the fellowship. He warns against taking brothers and sisters in Christ to the courts to settle disputes. Instead, they must trust the Holy Spirit to bring unity in their meetings. They must also learn how to take action against members who live in sin and who copy the wrong ways of the world outside the church. He reminds them that Jesus has set them free from sin to live holy lives. He says that the bodies of all true believers are 'temples of the Holy Spirit' and we should live as 'slaves to Christ' in these 'last days', using the gifts of the Holy Spirit wisely.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
 Bible reading: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9	7
PAUL SENDS GREETINGS AND THANKS.....	7
 When we repent.....	8
GOD GIVES MANY GIFTS WHILE WE AWAIT THE RETURN OF CHRIST	8
 Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 1:10-31	9
BOASTING IN CHRIST ALONE.....	9
 Water baptism for believers.....	10
JESUS, THE POWER AND WISDOM OF GOD FOR ALL	11
 Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus. 1 Corinthians 1:22-24.....	11
GOD’S PLAN FOR US	12
 Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 2	13
GOD’S WISDOM THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT	13
 The mystery of Christ.....	13
THE PROPHET’S WORDS	14
WE MUST OBEY THE WISDOM OF GOD	15
 Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 3	15
GROWING UP UNDER GOD’S SPIRIT.....	15
EVERYONE’S WORK WILL BE TESTED.....	16
WE ARE THE TEMPLE OF GOD	17
 Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 4	18
A SERVANT MUST BE FAITHFUL.....	18
PAUL WROTE TO HELP THE BELIEVERS	19
 The eight blessings that Jesus taught (Matthew 5:3-10)	20
 Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 5	21
PAUL TELLS HOW TO JUDGE CHRISTIANS LIVING IN SIN.....	21
SINS GROW AND SPREAD LIKE YEAST	21
 Bread without yeast (5:7) and lives without sin	22
 The resurrection life of followers of Jesus Christ.....	23
 Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 6	24
DO NOT TAKE OTHER BELIEVERS TO COURT	24
 What to do when someone sins against you. 1 Corinthians 6:1	24
USE YOUR BODIES TO HONOUR GOD	25
 Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 7	26
RESPECT IN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE	26
WITNESSING TO UNBELIEVING PARTNERS.....	27
THINK OF YOURSELVES AS ‘SLAVES (SERVANTS) OF CHRIST’	27
LIVE AS IF IT IS THE LAST DAYS.....	28
 Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 8	29
ARGUMENTS OVER FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS	29

	Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 9	30
	THE MINISTRY OF AN APOSTLE.....	30
	PAUL'S TRAINING IN MINISTRY.....	31
	WE RUN TO WIN THE PRIZE	32
	Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 10	32
	ISRAEL'S HISTORY AS EXAMPLES TO US ALL.....	32
	DO NOT BOAST: PREPARE TO BE TESTED	34
	THE LORD'S SUPPER AND THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.....	34
	WARNINGS ABOUT SACRIFICES MADE TO SATAN	35
	SEEKING GOOD FOR OTHERS AND GLORY FOR GOD	35
	Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 11	36
	HUSBANDS AND WIVES	36
	GOD'S MARRIAGE LAW.....	37
	RESPECT AND AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH.....	37
	THE PROBLEM OF WEARING VEILS.....	38
	GUIDELINES FOR THE LORD'S SUPPER	38
	WE ARE MADE WORTHY BY THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS	39
	Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 12	40
	GIFTS AND FALSE PROPHETS IN THE CHURCH.....	40
	DIFFERENT GIFTS, ONE SPIRIT, FOR THE GOOD OF ALL.....	42
	The work of the Holy Spirit in a follower of Jesus	42
	ONE BODY, MANY PARTS.....	43
	CHURCH LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION.....	43
	Leaders must be trained	44
	Bible reading: 1 Corinthians 13	44
	DO NOTHING WITHOUT LOVE	44
	God's love:	45
	THE 'AGAPE LOVE' OF GOD	45
	GOD'S LOVE NEVER FAILS.....	46
	Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 14	46
	GIFTS OF PROPHECY AND SPEAKING IN TONGUES.....	46
	THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CONGREGATIONS	48
	Paul's authority in Christ.....	48
	Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 15	49
	PREACHING ABOUT THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.....	49
	THE RESURRECTION OF BELIEVERS IN CHRIST	49
	OUR RESURRECTION BODIES	50
	THE FIRST AND SECOND ADAM.....	51
	THE VICTORY OF THE RESURRECTION	51
	Bible reading: 1 Corinthians 16	52
	MONEY COLLECTED FOR THE POOR.....	52
	CONCLUSIONS	53

CHURCH UNITY AND DISCIPLINE: 1 Corinthians, Chapters 1 to 16 INTRODUCTION

Corinth was a great city in ancient Greece. At the time of Paul's first letter to the Corinthian followers of Jesus, ships came to Corinth from all parts of the world. It was a very wicked city, full of idols, with at least 12 pagan temples, each with their prostitutes. There was also a Jewish synagogue and a congregation of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus.

Paul had earlier preached in Corinth the Good News of Jesus the Jewish Messiah or Christ. Some Jews believed and some non-Jews (Gentiles) believed that Jesus is the Son of Almighty God (Yahweh). When they believed, God's Holy Spirit changed them. Paul's Good News of Jesus as Son of God and Saviour showed them the truth and salvation of God in Christ alone. The Greek name of Jesus, and His Jewish name, Yeshua, means 'God's Salvation'.

Two or three years later, Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthian believers when he was in Ephesus. Their congregation had grown with mainly new Gentile believers. They had many spiritual gifts (1:4). However, some of the believers wrote letters to Paul (1:11; 7:1; 8:1) and told him they had divided into groups. Some said they were following Paul's teaching. Some said they were following Apollos or Peter.

The church had also become weakened by the immoral behaviour of the city. Sadly, there was trouble in their meetings because of all this. Paul's main aim was to clean the church from following false teachings and the evil life of the world around them. Paul also wanted to unite all believers of the One True God, Jews and Gentiles, through the life and teachings of Jesus their Christ and Messiah. He wanted to strengthen areas of weakness and help them to grow in holiness. He was a true pastor with the heart of a shepherd, caring for his sheep.

In this first letter, he explains many things that they were getting wrong in their lives, or did not understand. Because he could not visit them, he wrote a long letter to explain why followers of Jesus must not split into different groups; nor use wrong sexual behaviour in and outside of marriage; also how they should worship and use the gifts of the Spirit; and why loving kindness must be the reason for all they do in their meetings. The resurrection of Jesus defeated death so that we can all begin a "new life in Christ".

Paul gave thanks to God for their salvation and spiritual gifts. However:

- They must put the sins of their former lives behind them.
- They must remain free from the sins of the world around them.
- He told them what to do if a member of the congregation continues to live in sin.
- He also warned against divisions in the church.
- He wanted them to avoid taking brothers and sisters to court to settle arguments.

- They should seek understanding and unity through the Holy Spirit in their meetings.

They must remember that the body of each Christian is “a temple of the Holy Spirit”. Therefore, they must not use their new freedom in Christ for unholy living nor hinder the faith of others. Paul also teaches other important truths from God.



Bible reading: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

PAUL SENDS GREETINGS AND THANKS

Paul put his name at the top of his letter. “I have been chosen to be an apostle of Christ Jesus just as God planned” (1:1). On the way to Damascus, Paul had a vision of Jesus that changed his life for ever. Jesus declared, “I have chosen this man to work for Me. He will carry My name to those who are not Jews and their kings. He will bring My name to the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

Paul wrote, “Our brother Sosthenes joins me in writing” (1:1). All Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ, so Paul called him “our brother”. Paul and Sosthenes had the authority from God to write to the church in Corinth and instruct them about the Good News of Jesus. Later, Paul describes himself as a servant to the church “through whom you came to believe” (3:5).

The Church worldwide is made up of people whom God has chosen to be in His family. They come from every people group in the world. Those who repent and call on the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive their sins will receive eternal salvation.

Paul wrote to “the members of God’s church in Corinth” who were chosen by God and called to be holy. They too were “made holy because you belong to Christ Jesus” (1:2). When God calls us and we answer, He changes us. His Spirit comes to live in us to make us holy. The Holy Spirit purifies and cleans us to make us fit to serve a holy God in His Kingdom on Earth. This is true for all believers in Jesus the Christ, our Jewish Messiah.

Paul intended his letter to be read by all the congregations of believers, not just in Corinth. This is why Paul’s letters were copied and sent out to all “who pray to our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is their Lord and ours” (1:2). He thought of the church in Corinth as part of the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ.

Paul begins this letter with a blessing which is still used today in churches around the world. “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3 NIV). Grace is God’s love and kindness freely given to us. When we receive God’s love, He gives us peace in our hearts (John 14:27). When we sin, we lose our peace. Then we must repent and ask God to forgive us. He will forgive our sins and we will have peace again (1 John 1:9).

Paul thanked God for the believers in Corinth. He had heard some bad reports but he remembered what they were before they received Christ. Now they were ‘in Christ’. When he thought of their faith and their holy lives, his heart filled with praise to God. In Christ they were blessed and had hope for new lives. He thanked



When we repent

When we repent and confess our sin to God, He promises that the blood sacrifice of Jesus makes us clean. Why? God accepts the punishment of Jesus on the cross in place of the punishment we deserve for sin. We are then not guilty before God (1 John 1:7-9). Also, the promised Holy Spirit brings the resurrection life of Jesus to live in us. In this way, God's Spirit shows us our sins, so that we can repent and be made holy before a holy God. We are freely given Holy Spirit power and the compassion of Christ. Believe and receive this new life!

God for saving them and bringing them into His family. God did this work in their hearts. God's grace drew them and they had chosen to follow Jesus their Saviour.

Paul used the words 'in Christ' to mean a person who belonged to Jesus the Christ (1:4). Those who are not 'in Christ' cannot live holy lives. They may change their ways. They may say all the right words, but they will not have God's Spirit at work in their lives. "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ," Paul said in Romans 8:9.

"You have been blessed in every way" (1:5). They knew Jesus Christ. He was their Saviour and Lord and they could tell others about Him and the truth of God.

Paul 'lived the Gospel' and preached it. His Good News about Jesus was proved right because of the witness of the believers at Corinth (1:6).

So Paul begins by thanking God for the good things he hears about the church in Corinth:

- Chosen to be "a holy people because you belong to Jesus Christ" (1:2);
- The grace God had given to them (1:4);
- "You have been blessed in every way because of Him" (1:5);
- They had good teachings and Bible knowledge and understanding (1:5);

They also used all the gifts of the Holy Spirit and lived in hope of the return of Christ (1:7).

GOD GIVES MANY GIFTS WHILE WE AWAIT THE RETURN OF CHRIST

The Corinthian Christians did not lack any spiritual gift (1:7). "There is no gift of the Holy Spirit that you do not have". God's gifts are given to help the whole Christian Church grow strong. Every Christian has at least one gift. We must use our gifts wisely. God's Spirit will use the gifts He has given us. When we invite the Holy Spirit to be freely at work in our lives, we are able to give a good testimony inside and outside the church.

In addition to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, they lived in hope. "As you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to come again (1:7). They were taught to live as if Christ would return at any moment. When Jesus went back to Heaven, He promised to return (Acts 1:11; John 17:24). Jesus told His disciples, "Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come" (Matthew 24:42).

Paul therefore encourages the congregation at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:8-9):

- to believe God will keep them “strong to the end”;
- to be blameless when they meet their Lord at His return;
- to remember that God is faithful towards all who have been called to “share life with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord”.

When we confess our sin, the blood of Jesus makes us clean and God makes us strong in our faith. “Then you will be without blame [before God] on the day our Lord Jesus Christ returns” (1:8). We can be blameless because God gives us His Holy Spirit to live in us. How? The Holy Spirit brings Christ’s righteous life to live in us. Then God’s Spirit shows us our sins, so that we can be made holy when we confess and are forgiven.

Paul called the return of Israel’s Messiah as “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” because it is the day of Christ’s final victory over all His enemies. And it will be a victory day for all who eagerly wait for His second coming and judgement.

“God is faithful. He has chosen you to share life with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1:9).

The New Testament of the Bible reminds us that Jesus is the fulfilment of God’s Ten Commandments (Matthew 5:17). They were given to Moses 3500 years ago, recorded for us in the Old Testament (Exodus 20). As we call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to save us and stop us from further sinning, may we obey all the Ten Commandments in our worship, work and witness of Almighty God. We do not have Moses or Paul to guide or mediate for us but we have Christ Himself, who died to save us. At this very moment He dwells with our Almighty God and Creator, guiding us through His Spirit and mediating on our behalf.

Remember also that Jesus said, “Practise and teach these commands, then you will be called important in the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 5:19).



Talk about this:

1. How were the Christians in Corinth blessed in every way (1:5)? Do you feel “more complete”?
2. How do you know Jesus will come again? What did the angel say (Acts 1:11)?
3. What would keep the faith of the Corinthians strong (1:9)?



Think about this: Do you have the faith in Christ shown by the church in Corinth? Can you see how the worship, work and witness described in the Ten Commandments are fulfilled in Christ our Saviour? Do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah and Christ of Jews and Gentiles?



Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 1:10-31

BOASTING IN CHRIST ALONE

Paul twice referred to the believers in Corinth as his brethren, meaning “brothers and sisters” (1:10, 11). “I ask you to agree with one another. I make my appeal in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then...you will be in complete agreement”

(1:10). Christ Himself was speaking to these Christians through Paul. It was all said in love.

Great men of God had preached in Corinth: Paul, Apollos and Peter. However, some Corinthians said they followed one man, some another (1:12). Paul told them not to follow men but to unite in following Christ and live as His body on Earth. This is why he called them brothers and sisters and asked them to agree with each other.

He also asked them, "Did Paul die on the cross for you? Were you baptised in the name of Paul?" (1:13). His questions showed them how foolish they were to follow men. It was God who called them and saved them. It was God who blessed them and encouraged them to be baptised. Only God, through the Holy Spirit, could:

- plant the seed of faith in a person's heart (Romans 10:9-10).
- save them through the Good News of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:15).
- receive them into His family through baptism (1 Corinthians 12:13).



Water baptism for believers

Baptism shows that I am joined with Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-4).

- I am joined with Him in His death. I die to my old nature, I die to my old sins and ideas.
- I am raised up from under the water. I rise and join with Him in His resurrection.
- Every part of me receives a new life of victory in Jesus.
- I witness to the world that Jesus is Lord of my life and I live for Him only.

That is the baptism Jesus taught and the baptism that Paul taught. It was a Jewish custom used by John the Baptist. He baptized Jesus in the river Jordan at the beginning of His ministry (Matthew 3:13-17). Then men and women believed in Jesus as God's Son and Saviour. They were baptised soon afterwards in a lake or river to begin their new life. Their friends and neighbours watched them go under the water and then raised up. They heard their testimony and knew what they said was true. "Buried with Christ and raised with Him, to walk in His new resurrection life."

Paul saw they were trusting in men, not God, like many Christians do today. They put value on a preacher and whoever baptised them in water. They took their eyes off Jesus and put them on a man. Paul wanted them to give all the glory to God and only boast about what the Lord had done.

Paul said, "Christ did not send me to baptise. He sent me to preach the Good News. He commanded me not to use the kind of wisdom [speech, KJV] that people commonly use. That would take all the power away from the cross of Christ" (1:17). The teaching of the sacrificial life of Jesus was his chief calling from God.

It is important for each one of us to follow God's calling in our own lives and leave other ministries to other faithful believers. Paul knew clearly his own calling from God was to preach the Good News or Gospel of Jesus Christ.

JESUS, THE POWER AND WISDOM OF GOD FOR ALL

Paul began to speak about his Gospel message. He knew that human wisdom was important to the people in Corinth. But Paul said that human wisdom does not understand God. By our own wisdom, we cannot find God. Human wisdom leads us away from God. "The message of the cross [of Jesus] seems foolish... But it is God's power to us who are being saved" (1:18). Paul quoted the words of Isaiah, "God will do away with the cleverness of those who think they are so clever" (1:20; Isaiah 29:14).

The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem thought they were wise. But some of them had rejected Jesus their Messiah and sent Him to His death. Yet that was the sacrifice God planned for the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles.



Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus. 1 Corinthians 1:22-24.

Paul said that the Jews were always seeking after signs and miracles (v.22). The Gentiles, especially the Greeks, were always seeking after understanding and wisdom in life (v.23).

- The Jews sought after divine knowledge but failed to see that God's Holy Spirit power was at work within and around them; the Gentiles sought after worldly knowledge but failed to see that God in His divine wisdom had created everything within and around them.
- Many Jews could not believe that the man they crucified had suffered and died for them and had come back to life; many Gentiles could not believe that a leader sent by God would foolishly offer Himself to die on a Roman cross.

Paul believed that God had chosen Jews AND Gentiles to receive both Holy Spirit power and divine wisdom (v.24). Believers from all tribes and nations now receive these gifts from God through faith and salvation in Jesus, His Son.

Remember that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews and the Christ of the Gentiles. (The title 'Messiah' came from the Hebrew or Aramaic languages spoken in Israel. The same title 'Christ' came from the Greek or Roman languages spoken in most of the rest of the world in the first century after the birth of Jesus.)

Jesus (Yeshua) fulfilled God's promise to Abraham to inherit and bless a worldwide family of believers (Genesis 12:3b). We must therefore respect God's purpose to unite in both power and wisdom the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers. Jesus said, "Father, I pray that all of them will be one" (John 17:21).

As a Jew, Paul had learned all the wisdom of the Pharisees. He had a great mind. He could understand difficult ideas. Before Paul became a believer, he tried to kill the Jews and Gentiles who believed in Jesus. But now he used the words of Jesus to lead people to God. The words of the Gospel are full of life and power (Romans 1:16). He said, "God has made foolish the wisdom of this world" (1 Cor. 1:20).

The Jews looked for a warrior Messiah, a leader who would deliver their nation from the Romans who ruled most of the world at that time. Paul's preaching of the cross was now a 'stumbling block' to them. "The world through its wisdom did not know Him [but] God was pleased... to save those who believe" (1:21).

Paul, a Jewish believer, understood that "Jews require signs; Greeks [Gentiles] look for wisdom. But we preach about Christ and his death on the cross. That is very hard for Jews to accept. And everyone else thinks it is foolish." (1:22-23).

"But for all whom God has chosen, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1:24, KJV). This is why we must unite in love the Jewish Messianic believers and the worldwide Church of Gentile believers.

The believers in Corinth wanted to be people of great wisdom and strength. However, Paul said, "The foolish things of God are wiser than human wisdom" (1:25).

GOD'S PLAN FOR US

"Think of what you were when God chose you. Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many were powerful; not many belonged to important families" (1:26). He asked them to remember what they were when God called them.

God is almighty. He does as He wishes. He planned to choose the foolish things and the weak people of the world to shame the wise and the strong (1:27). "So that no-one can boast" (1:29).

The Good News of Jesus is for all people, for men and women of all positions, education or riches. God does not look to see if a person is rich or poor, weak or strong, sick or healthy, young or old, Jew or Gentile. He looks for those with an open heart, those who want to know His forgiveness and His love. He seeks people who will trust, worship and obey Him and follow His Son, Jesus (Yeshua).

Paul says confidently, "Because of what God has done, you belong to Christ Jesus. He has become God's wisdom for us. He makes us right [righteous, KJV] with God. He makes us holy and sets us free" (1:30). He rescues us from sin. He changes us for the better and we should give Him the glory for our new life.

Paul quoted Jeremiah, "The one who boasts should boast about what the Lord has done" (1:31). God told Jeremiah, "He should boast that he has understanding and knows Me. I want him to know that I am the LORD God Almighty" (Jeremiah 9:24).

Thank Jesus for the confidence we have in Him, seated in Heaven alongside Almighty God our Father, mediating for us.



Talk about this:

1. What was dividing the Christians in Corinth? How could they unite (1:10-12)?
2. What did Paul put first in his ministry (1:17)?
3. What are the foolish things of the world (1:27-28)?



Think about this: Do you trust God's power to save you or are you still trusting in yourself? Ask for the wisdom to receive God's righteousness, holiness and salvation through Christ alone and not through the foolish ideas of mankind. How can you encourage your brothers and sisters in Christ to unite and witness the Good News, using their special gifts from God?



Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 2

GOD'S WISDOM THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

The deep things of God were shown to Paul by God's Spirit (2:13). He was not pretending to be bold or strong. He did not come with fancy words or great wisdom. "I preached to you about the truth [testimony, KJV] of God" (2:1). Remember that Paul was a very learned Pharisee. He studied God's Law in the school of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). But His mind was on one thing only. Paul chose to speak only about "Jesus Christ and His death on the cross" (1 Cor. 2:2). We often call this 'the mystery of Christ'.



The mystery of Christ

- Son of Creator God, born as a human within the womb of a virgin, as Son of God.
- Lived for 33 years as Son of Man who, from the age of 30, demonstrated His Heavenly Father's power to raise the dead and cast out demons.
- Worked as a carpenter and trained as a Jewish rabbi.
- Loves us so much that He was willing for His own flesh and blood to be sacrificed.
- Persecuted so that His punishment became our salvation from sin for those who believe in Him as Messiah (Christ).
- Requested us to remember His injured body and spilt blood when taking bread and wine.
- Persecuted, mocked, beaten and crucified on a Roman cross, then raised from death by God His Father in Heaven.
- Prays for us while seated with God Almighty, whom He left to live on Earth to suffer and die.
- Promises eternal life through faith in Him alone for all who believe and follow Him.
- Sends the Holy Spirit to live in us to experience the power and love of God through His Son.
- Will reign in glory over the Kingdom of God for eternity with all who believe and are saved.

Paul wrote, "When I came to you, I was weak and afraid and trembling all over... [But] as I preached, the Holy Spirit showed His power. That is so you would believe, not because of human wisdom, but because of God's power" (2:3-5).

Paul wanted his readers to know, "Our words are different from the words of the...rulers of the world. People like that are not going anywhere! " (2:6). Paul shared the "secret wisdom of God" with them freely. But he did not use any 'clever words', only the words given through Holy Spirit power. Paul used simple words (2:4) to explain the mystery of Christ which is the truth from God (2:7). May God grant us Holy Spirit wisdom and power to proclaim His truth and deliver us from worldly wisdom.

However, the church at Corinth was not yet mature. Some members did as they wished, because they were controlled by their own desires. Those who have grown up in their faith are more mature and can understand God's wisdom. "God planned that His wisdom would bring us heavenly glory" (2:7). He planned this from the beginning.

The rulers of this world did not know God's plan. If they had known it, they would not have crucified "the Lord of glory" (2:8). They were unwise and ignorant.

THE PROPHET'S WORDS

Paul then quoted from the prophet Isaiah: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has known what God has prepared for those that love Him" (2:9; Isaiah 64:4). This mystery is part of the amazing secret of the worldwide Christian Church:

- It was planned by God before the world began.
- It brings all people of faith in Yahweh God together as Abraham's promised extended family.
- It blesses all believers then and now whose faith is in Christ alone.
- It shows the world God's glory through the wisdom and power of believers, even under persecution and suffering.

"God has shown it to us through His Spirit. The Spirit understands [searches, KJV] all things...even the deep things of God" (2:10). Remember that the Holy Spirit is one of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity of Almighty God. The Holy Spirit works in people's hearts to reveal God the Father's will and bring salvation through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus comes to live in every believer through the Holy Spirit. This is our message of salvation to the world for whoever will receive it. Believe it, repent and be saved!

Paul said, "Only the Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God" (2:11). Therefore, those who now believe "have not received the spirit of the world. We have received the Spirit who is from God" (2:12). "We use words that the Holy Spirit taught us. We use the words of the Spirit to teach the truth of the Spirit"

(2:13). We are the Body of Christ with the mind of Christ (2:16) and the Spirit sent by Christ.

WE MUST OBEY THE WISDOM OF GOD

“The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God” (2:14, NIV). Paul knew how God’s servants think differently and act differently to those who do not seek salvation through Christ alone. Jewish and Gentile believers are under God’s authority and they take orders from above. Those who do not receive Jesus into their lives as the Son of God do not understand this. Our thoughts, beliefs and motives are nothing without the Holy Spirit’s help.

Paul again quoted from the prophet Isaiah to confirm that only those who have the mind of Christ know the mind of God. Without this presence of the Holy Spirit within, non-believers cannot know the mind of God nor the mind of Christ. “Who has known the mind of the LORD God Almighty? ” (Isaiah 40:13). This is why Paul stated confidently that Christians can know the mind of God in any matter because “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16).

By trusting in the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit within us, believers can know what is right and righteous. They learn to understand, and also feel and love as Christ loved, with His compassion. This is possible when they allow the Holy Spirit power to work in them. Jesus promised that His Father in Heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him (Luke 11:13).



Talk about this:

1. How can we have more of the Holy Spirit in our lives (Luke 11:13)?
2. How did Paul learn the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 2:4)?



Think about this: Why are Christians different? How can we show the love and compassion of Christ? How do we have the ability to walk in the light of God’s truth and not be controlled by or hindered by the worldly wisdom of some of the people around us? Pray for God to appoint leaders in church and state who are spiritually strong, and whose wisdom comes from the Holy Spirit, not from ungodly people with persuasive words. Seek how to share the compassion of Christ with Holy Spirit power.



Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 3

GROWING UP UNDER GOD’S SPIRIT

Paul next explains his reason for writing to the believers in Corinth. When he was first with them they were not guided by the Holy Spirit. Now he tells them, “You are not growing as Christ wants you to. You are still like babies” (3:1). He said that the words he spoke to them were “like milk, not like solid food”. He made it clear to them that they were not ready for solid food then and they were still not ready for it (3:2).

These Christians should be growing strong in their faith, but some were weak in faith and behaved badly. They wanted their own way, as children often do. Paul called them worldly, like those who were not Christians. They were “still following the ways of the world... like ordinary human beings” (3:3). They enjoyed the things and ways of the world more than they loved God.

Paul tried to give these believers the solid food of God’s word to help them grow. He wanted to teach them deeper truths, but he could not. They were not ready to receive deeper teaching.

Paul again reminds his readers not to argue about which teacher to follow (3:4). Peter, Paul and Apollos were only servants of the Lord (3:5). God used Paul to plant the seed of the Good News of Jesus Christ. He used Apollos to water the seed in their hearts, but it was God through the Holy Spirit who made it grow (3:6). And God wants to make us into mature Christians. He wants the freedom to do His work in us. “It is God who makes things grow” (3:7), not Paul or Apollos.

“The one who plants and the one who waters the seed have the same purpose. The Lord will give each of us a reward for our work” (3:8). God blesses His servants now and He will reward them later. God will say to each one, “You have done well, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21, 23).

Paul wanted to do only what God called him to do. He wanted to preach the Good News about the power of the cross of Christ (1:17).

EVERYONE’S WORK WILL BE TESTED

Paul told them, “You are like God’s field or building” (3:9). God wants His Church to be ‘farmed’ well or built well. God had given Paul the grace to prepare both the ground and lay a firm foundation. “Now someone else is building on it. But each one should build carefully” (3:10).

Paul said there is no better foundation “than the one that has already been laid. That foundation is Jesus the Christ. A person may build on it using gold, silver...wood or straw. But each person’s work will be shown for what it is” (3:11-13). The day will come when it will be brought to the light and judged by fire (or persecution) to see if it remains strong (Job 23:10). This is why the foundation for our ministries must be built on Jesus our Christ and Messiah who gives us His resurrection power through faith in Him and His name.

Poor work and wrong teaching are like a house built of wood or straw. The house is easy to build but it is soon weakened. It easily catches fire and is burned so there is nothing left. Wood and straw mean bad teaching or bad works:

- it does not bring glory to God;
- it does not show we are a follower of Jesus;
- it is done without the Holy Spirit’s power;
- it is typical of human wisdom, not divine wisdom;
- it is done for a person’s own purpose and glory.

“The work of each person will be shown for what it really is, because on Judgement Day it will be brought to light. It will be put through fire, and the fire will test the quality of everyone’s work” (3:13).

Paul testifies that on the day of judgement, “if the building does not burn up, God will give the builder a reward for his work” (3:14). By this, Paul means that if God’s work is not done in God’s way, it will not have God’s blessing. Their work will not last long and their witness will die out or be destroyed. True believers will be saved, “but only as one escaping through the flames” (3:15).

Paul remembered what God did for him, and he gave thanks. God freely forgave him (Acts 9). Now God freely used him. In Corinth, Paul laid the foundation, which is Jesus Christ. Others were building on that foundation. There is no other foundation, Paul said, and their faith must stand on Christ alone. In this way, their faith was tested, and God blessed their work.

WE ARE THE TEMPLE OF GOD

Paul then asked, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God? God’s Spirit lives in you” (3:16). We must always remember that each believer is built with others into the family of God. Each person is like a stone or brick in a building (1 Peter 2:5). Paul warned, “If anyone destroys [defiles, KJV] God’s temple, God will destroy them. God’s temple is holy and you are that temple” (1 Cor. 3:17).

Paul was very worried that false prophets would destroy the church in Corinth. Paul knew that wrong teaching would turn believers away from the truth. This would make the church weak, locally and nationally.

“Do not fool yourselves”, Paul said. “Some of you think you are wise... The wisdom of this world is foolish in God’s eyes” (3:18-19). Paul added quotations from the Old Testament (3:20). “The LORD God Almighty knows that the thoughts of the wise do not amount to anything” (Psalm 94:11). “God catches the wise in their own tricks” (Job 5:13).

Paul then warned the church, “No more boasting about... Paul or Apollos or Peter! ” (1 Cor. 3:21). What mattered most was, “You are joined to Christ. You belong to Him and He is joined to God” (3:23).

The Corinthian church was blessed by the ministry of Paul, Apollos and Peter, but the believers were taking sides. Some liked one leader better than another and followed that person. This caused disunity and weakened the work and witness of the believers. They failed to share the teachings of Christ Himself and prove that the Holy Spirit was at work in their lives.



Talk about this:

1. What went wrong with the church in Corinth? Why did Paul say they were like babies (3:1-3)?
2. Why is wrong teaching and bad witness like a house built of wood or straw (3:10-15)?
3. What does God think of those who divide His Church (3:16-17)?
4. What matters most in the church of Christ (3:23)?



Think about this: Who plants the seed of God's truth in your church? Who waters and feeds it? Can God be glorified by showing everyone is a follower of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit? Do the things you do bring praise for yourself or praise for God? Do you enjoy the things you do more than your love for God?



Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 4

A SERVANT MUST BE FAITHFUL

All the apostles, pastors, preachers and teachers were servants of God. Paul said, "We serve Christ. We are trusted with God's truth [mysteries of Christ, KJV]" (4:1). But every believer in Jesus is a servant of God. We are all His servants and we work or go out with his message of love and forgiveness. "Those who have been trusted by God must prove that they are faithful" (4:2).

"I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court", Paul told them (4:3). "It is the Lord who judges me" (4:4). "So do not judge", Paul warned. "Wait until the Lord returns" (4:5). We wait for Him to reveal our true faults and our rewards.

Paul also warned them: "Do not go beyond what is written" (4:6). This was a popular saying in the churches at that time, referring to the Old Testament laws, prophets and other writings. When we go beyond what is written in the Bible, we encourage the foolish ideas of the world's wisdom (3:19). Let the living words of God do its work in your thoughts and hearts. Then no-one will fall into sin by following the example of those who did not obey God.

Paul asked, "Why do you boast?" (4:7). We should not boast about what we know or who taught us it, but give glory to God.

These Christians thought they were wise and strong and great! Yet all they had was given by God, so why do they behave like this? "You already have everything you want!" he said (4:8). But some were acting as if they were better than the apostles. Paul said that they were behaving as if they were kings! (4:8).

Paul also said, "It seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the very end of a parade" (4:9). Life was hard for him. Believers and non-believers had wrongly judged him. He was not complaining. The other apostles were also persecuted and even killed for Christ's sake. Often, Paul and his companions were:

- made to feel like criminals, risking injury, even death (4:9);
- serving God as fools, for Christ's sake (4:10);
- hungry, thirsty, and dressed in rags (4:11);
- homeless and forced to work with their hands (4:12);
- treated like rubbish (4:13).

Paul suffered so much "he even thought we were going to die" (2 Cor. 1:8).

"When others call down a curse on us, we bless them. When we are attacked, we put up with it. When others say bad things about us, we answer kindly" (1 Cor. 4:12-13).

PAUL WROTE TO HELP THE BELIEVERS

Paul said these things to show the believers in the Corinthian church how sad he was that they had caused disunity. He also wanted to bless those who persecuted him and the other preachers (4:12).

However, Paul said, "I am not writing this to shame you. You are my dear [beloved, KJV] children, and I want to warn you" (4:14). Many leaders had cared for them, but he was like their father. They were his children in the faith. He had seen them accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour and he had fed them with God's word. He had prayed for them. He wanted only God's best for them. He wanted them to become strong and mature believers, united in serving Christ.

Paul knew there were many believers in Christ in Corinth but they had few spiritual fathers (4:15). He wanted to help them to follow his example in serving Christ (4:16). We must all care for others who have few people to turn to, even though we are struggling ourselves (4:9-13). "That is the reason I am sending Timothy to you... He is faithful in serving the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in serving Christ" (4:17).

What Paul preached about Jesus in the churches, he showed in his life. This was because he knew the Lord Jesus personally. He understood the teachings of Jesus and also the other apostles. Matthew, for example, wrote down eight of the Lord's important teachings on the Kingdom of God. We call them the Beatitudes, which means God's blessings or happiness (Matthew 5:3-10). Jesus taught these blessings to His followers because people will "tell all kinds of evil lies about you because of Me. Be joyful and [exceedingly, KJV] glad. Your reward is in Heaven" (Matthew 5:11-12).

Paul wanted the teachings of Christ and the apostles to be at work in the churches. He knew we must stop grieving God with our disunity, caused by lack of love and lack of respect for each other. He said, "Some of you are so proud. You act as if I were not coming [back] to you! " (4:18).

As soon as God opened the way, Paul would go to Corinth himself (4:19). It did not matter what the proud Corinthians said about him. "For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power! " (4:20).

Paul knew that it is not just preaching in the power of God's Holy Spirit that changes lives. It is about living in the power of the Spirit and showing the love and compassion of Jesus. He asked them, "Which do you want? Should I come to you with a whip? Or should I come in love and with a gentle spirit? " (4:21). Paul wanted the full Spirit of Christ to be at work in the congregation.



Talk about this:

1. When will Christians be judged and receive their rewards (4:5)?
2. What was a popular saying at the time of Paul? Why is this important today? (4:6).
3. How did the sufferings of the apostles compare to the teachings and experience of Christ? (v.9-13).



The eight blessings that Jesus taught (Matthew 5:3-10)

These teachings are called the Beatitudes of Jesus Christ. They were at the beginning of the greatest sermon that Jesus preached to His closest followers (Matthew Chapters 5 to 7). They are important teachings today for us to understand the Kingdom of God and know true happiness.

1. "Blessed are those who are spiritually needy [poor in spirit, KJV]. The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them." Jesus taught us to empty ourselves of the desires of this world so that we can be filled with His Spirit. When we humbly confess our sins and our spiritual needs before our holy God, we lose our pride and gain the joy of His everlasting salvation through Christ.
2. "Blessed are those who are sad [mourn, KJV]. Then they will be comforted." Jesus taught us to mourn over our sinful thoughts, words and deeds. When we repent, we will be forgiven through Christ. This brings comfort and joy in the new life and light of His salvation.
3. "Blessed are those who are humble [meek, KJV]. Then they will be given [inherit, KJV] the Earth." Jesus taught us to become gentle and kind and understanding in our own lives by receiving His new life with spiritual gifts and meeting the needs of others.
4. "Blessed are those who hunger [and thirst, KJV] for what is right [righteousness, KJV]. Then they will be filled." Jesus taught us that God's righteousness leads to true happiness. If we hunger for the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), we can stand holy before our holy God.
5. "Blessed are those who show mercy. Then they will be shown mercy." With Christ's Holy Spirit within us, we will be able to show the kindness and compassion of Christ to others and know even more of God's mercy for ourselves.
6. "Blessed are those whose hearts are pure. Then they will see God." Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul and mind (Matthew 22:37). This should be our holy purpose in life, which God will encourage.
7. "Blessed are those who make peace. Then they will be called the children of God." Jesus came to enable us to make peace with God and then encourage others to do the same without counting the cost.
8. "Blessed are those who suffer [persecution, KJV] for doing what is right. Then the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them." When we share the light of Christ with others, some will hate us and seek to hurt us for honouring God when teaching or living His truth.

Then Jesus added (5:11-12), "Blessed are you when people make fun of you and hurt you because of Me. You are also blessed when they tell all kinds of evil lies about you because of Me. Be joyful and be [exceedingly, KJV] glad. Your reward in Heaven is great. In the same way, the people hurt the prophets who lived long ago."

The apostle Paul experienced persecution and hatred from Jews and Gentiles plus natural disasters (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-33).



Think about this: “We can judge sin only when we separate ourselves from it.” What did Paul say about judging others? What teachings of Jesus were most important to him? Are the teachings of Jesus and Paul important to you for sharing with others? Am I prepared to suffer when using my gifts as a follower of Jesus? Do I share the love and compassion of Christ when I speak and live in the power of the Holy Spirit?



Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 5

PAUL TELLS HOW TO JUDGE CHRISTIANS LIVING IN SIN

Paul then warned the believers in Corinth about allowing sin in the church. This was worse than the sins of unbelievers. “It is reported that there is sexual sin among you. I am told a man is living with his father’s wife” (5:1). He was living an immoral life but claiming to be a Christian. No-one seemed to be ashamed!

Paul said, “And you are proud! You should be filled with sadness instead! ” Paul told them they should put the man out of the church (5:2). They must therefore choose the right thing to do.

“I am not there with you, but I am with you in spirit. I have already judged the man who did this” (5:3). Paul did not judge this man’s faith in God but judged his wrong behaviour. This man was under Satan’s control. He failed to walk away from temptation. Paul believed that this man must leave the church and see for himself the work of Satan in his life. He must therefore choose the right thing to do.

Paul told them when they meet together, they must tell this man he cannot be part of their fellowship. Paul twice makes it clear that decisions to discipline another church member must be approved by the whole church “when you come together” (5:4-5).

Because this man was living an immoral life, he must leave their meetings. When he is rejected by the church and leaves the church, Paul hoped he would repent and be saved. This would allow Satan to test him further (5:5). This would be like giving him over to Satan. But if he repented of his sin, they should ask him to come back (James 5:20). They must keep on loving this man and praying for him, so that his spirit might be saved on the day of the Lord (1 Cor. 5:5). God is full of mercy and grace. Therefore, we do not stop loving sinners, but we must pray for those who fall into sin.

We resist Satan in Christ’s name by using spiritual weapons, such as prayer (Ephesians 6:10-18). Victory comes as we expose and judge sin and separate ourselves from it.

SINS GROW AND SPREAD LIKE YEAST

Paul returned quickly to his other complaint. Some of the church members boasted about who they were in the church or what they did. They also boasted

about whose teaching they followed. Paul said, "Your boasting is not good" (5:6). He said that the sins of pride as well as wrong sexual behaviour are like yeast. A little yeast in bread "works its way through the whole lump of dough".

In a similar way, these sins and other sins of this world, spread quickly through the whole church. Paul wanted believers to convert people of this world to Christ. It was therefore most important for them to avoid worldly sins in their own lives. We must save others, and ourselves, from the sins of the world. Paul said, "Get rid of the old yeast [sins in your life]. Be like a new lump of dough without yeast" (5:7).

If you ignore sin in your church or in your life, it will spread and affect your whole life and the lives of others. There is no such thing as a small sin; all sin is unholy and hated by God. He turns His back on sin. We then quickly lose contact with Him and our Saviour. We also lose the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit within, unless we repent.



Bread without yeast (5:7) and lives without sin

At the celebration of the LORD'S Passover (Leviticus 23:4-8), every Jewish family cleans out their house. All yeast must go out. Then the bread for the Passover Feast is baked without yeast (Exodus 12:15). Paul encouraged the church in Corinth to keep the Passover Feast (1 Corinthians 5:8). But they must not celebrate with the 'old yeast' in their lives. They should use bread made without yeast and celebrate with lives that are without sin. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we remember the sacrifice Jesus made for us to be forgiven so that we can put sin behind us. Jesus therefore invites us to break bread and remember Him with changed lives that are without sin.

When we share bread and wine together at the Lord's Supper, we must be honest and truthful. As true believers, we remember Christ's death as His sacrifice for us. No sin can be left among us. We must remember that "Christ has been offered up [sacrificed, KJV] for us. He is our Passover Lamb" (5:7; Exodus 12:21-27). We must not boast in sin but repent and unite in worshipping Christ together.

Paul reminds the church in Corinth again and again to "stay away from people who commit sexual sins" (5:9, 11). "You must stay away from anyone who claims to be a believer who does these things." Paul also lists other sins. "Stay away from a person who worships statues of gods, or who tells lies...gets drunk or who cheats. Do not even eat with a person like that" (5:11).

To keep their fellowship pure and holy, they could not have such people in their meetings. If such people joined their fellowship, it would spoil their witness. Those outside the church would not see any difference between them and their heathen neighbours.

However, we should not judge non-believers outside the church, but we should pray for them. We must judge ourselves and those inside the church (5:12). "God will judge those outside" (5:13).

"Put your hope in the LORD God Almighty. Live as he wants you to and He will honour you... The LORD saves those who do what is right" (Psalm 37:34, 39).

Church leaders should therefore discipline sinners in our churches, with the agreement of its members and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is a small sacrifice to make compared to the sacrifice of our Lord on the cross for our sins. We should also expect our leaders to be the example of Christ at all times. The mystery of Christ is that He lives in us because of His death and resurrection. We can therefore live holy lives before a holy God if we continue to live in Him.



The resurrection life of followers of Jesus Christ

We now live in Christ through His resurrected life: Christ has died! Christ has risen! Christ is with us! Christ will come again!

Paul knew that many devout Jews wrongly taught that Jesus was Joseph's son, the carpenter from Nazareth. Paul knew, however, that Jesus was God's Son, Israel's Messiah. He was born to Mary through the Holy Spirit, not through her husband Joseph. Jesus Christ is Saviour of the world to those who believe in Him as the Son of God.

The disciples of Jesus were taught by Him in the days immediately after His resurrection. He prepared them to become apostles or messengers of the Good News of God's salvation in Christ alone (Acts 1:2-5). They were filled with the Holy Spirit and with the calling and power of Christ to extend the Kingdom of God throughout the world. This was promised to Abraham and his son Isaac and grandson Jacob (later called Israel). The resurrection power of Jesus continues to change lives today through those who believe He is the Son of God, born to Mary. They repent, receive forgiveness and His salvation. They are baptised and receive the gift of His Holy Spirit to extend the Kingdom of God on Earth before living in glory after death.

Many today, however, still believe Jesus was Joseph's son. Others put their trust in God's promise for Abraham's son Ishmael, not Isaac. True followers of Christ follow the way of the cross through serving Him as Israel's Messiah, promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In doing this, they experience the joy of suffering in this world for the promised glory and salvation of Almighty God in resurrected life, now and forever.

Paul's conversion to Christ on the road to Damascus opened his eyes to the true mystery of Christ through the Old Testament scriptures that he knew so well.



Talk about this:

1. Why did Paul say it was necessary to judge other Christians at times (5:1-3)?

2. Why did Paul instruct the church to hand one of its members over to Satan (5:5)?
3. Why did Paul talk about bread with and without yeast (5:6-7)?
4. What does the LORD's Passover Feast mean to Jews and Christians (5:7-8)?
5. Who will be the judge of all those people who do not belong to Christ (5:13)? Why should we not judge them?



Think about this: How can we, God's people, keep our lives pure and holy before we begin to judge others? How can we begin to judge other believers in a correct way? Why is it important for us to humble ourselves to establish God's righteousness in the land? (2 Chronicles 7:11-14; Jeremiah 7:11-14). Are we prepared to suffer persecution if we witness about Jesus?



Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 6

DO NOT TAKE OTHER BELIEVERS TO COURT

Paul next asks the Christian believers in Corinth what they should do if any of them has a dispute with another believer (6:1). "Should you take it to the ungodly [courts] to be judged? Why not take it to God's people? " Paul was not referring to criminal cases, which would be judged by the government and its laws. Paul did not want church members to take fellow believers to a court of law if they had an argument over church disputes and behaviour or personal sin.

Jesus warned, "Suppose someone has a claim against you and takes you to court. Settle the matter quickly! " (Matthew 5:25). However, "If your brother sins against you, go to him. Tell him what he did wrong [but] keep it between yourselves" (Matthew 18:15). If this fails, Paul told them to appoint their own judges (6:4). They were to judge these cases themselves if possible. They did not need to go to a heathen court of law (6:6).



What to do when someone sins against you. 1 Corinthians 6:1

Paul did not want church members to take fellow believers to a court of law if they had an argument. Jesus said, "If your brother sins against you, go to him... If he does not listen to you, then take one or two others with you... But if he refuses to listen... tell it to the church [whole congregation]. If he still refuses to listen, treat him as you would treat a [pagan] unbeliever" (Matthew 18:15-17). In his letter to the Roman church, Paul warned, "Do not let evil overcome you. Overcome evil by doing good" (Romans 12:21). Therefore, invite the power of the Holy Spirit to work in unity between the followers of Christ.

The disputes and moanings within the church against others showed that their own hearts were wrong. "You... do wrong... to your brothers and sisters" (6:8). They were guilty of judging others but failed to judge themselves. This gives Satan a foothold in our lives. They were also selfish and did not forgive one another.

Paul said it is better to be treated wrongly by others than do what is wrong ourselves. He said in his letter to the church in Ephesus, "Do not give the devil a chance" (Ephesians 4:27). Once you let him lead you astray he will try and take control and spoil all the good things God is doing in your life and church.

"The very fact that you take another believer to court means you have already lost the battle" (1 Cor. 6:7).

USE YOUR BODIES TO HONOUR GOD

Paul gives a list of ten sins that were common then and now (6:9-10). "Do you not know that evil [unrighteous, KJV] people will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be fooled! " Jesus warned that these sins begin inside our hearts and make us unclean (Mark 7:20-23). He said that nothing unclean can enter Heaven including "those who practise witchcraft, also those who commit sexual sins and murder or worship statues of gods, and everyone who loves and does what is false" (Revelation 22:15).

"Some of you did these wrong things", Paul told them. "But your sins were washed away. You were made holy. You were made right with God. All this was done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (6:11).

Some false teachers said that they could use their bodies in any way they wanted. "But not everything is good", Paul said (6:12).

Christians must put God first, even in eating. If we eat more than we need, we harm our bodies. We also fail to share what we have with others in need. They said, "Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food" (6:13). This is true but some thought that their sexual sins did not really matter. It is not true that our bodies were made for selfish pleasure. Paul said, "The body is meant for the Lord and the Lord is meant for the body" (6:13).

"By His power God raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. He will raise us also" (6:14). He added, "Do you not know that your bodies belong to the [risen] body of Christ? " (6:15). We are a part of the body of Christ on Earth. We are joined to Him. God's power has done this in those who believe His Son. We must keep our bodies pure in order to honour Him and not join our bodies [with others] in sin (6:16). "But anyone who is joined to the Lord becomes one with Him in spirit" (6:17).

Paul repeats his warning, "Keep away from sexual sins" (6:18). He then reminds the believers, "Do you not know your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you? " (6:19; also 3:16-17).

The Corinthian believers probably thought that God cared only for their spiritual salvation and not for their bodies. Paul warned them that we are not our own; we were bought at a price. "Christ has paid the price for you", he said. We belong to Him and our bodies must be under the control of His Spirit. "Use your bodies in a way that honours [glorifies, KJV] God" (6:20).



Talk about this:

1. How should a Christian handle a dispute with another believer (6:1-4)?
2. What were the ten sins that Paul listed here (6:9-10)? Do they apply today?
3. What does Paul say to his readers about their old lives and their new lives in Christ (6:11)?
4. When we become followers of Christ, are we free to do anything we like (6:12)? What does Paul say (6:13)?
5. Who must be in control of our spirits and our bodies (6:15-17)?
6. Why does God want us to care for our bodies (6:19)? Are they important to Him (6:20)?



Think about this: Our bodies are “temples of the Holy Spirit”. How do we prevent the sinful ways of the world around us destroying our unity with God? Also our unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ? Why did Jesus warn us about our own sinful thoughts as well as the sins of others (Mark 7:20-23; Revelation 21:8)?



Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 7

RESPECT IN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Times were hard. Many people had lost their jobs because they were Christians. Some were put out of their homes. Others were put in prison and many were killed. Because of the hard times, Paul thought it would be easier for a man not to take a wife. “But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman have her own husband” (7:2).

Marriage has always been God’s plan for a man and a woman (Genesis 2:24). Marriage satisfies our many needs. God planned that marriage should be to one partner, to keep us from falling into sexual sins. Each partner has a duty to the other and each is responsible before God (1 Cor. 7:3). Married people have a duty to give their bodies in sexual union to each other. Without this a marriage is not complete.

As Christians, we need faith and in marriage, we need trust. When a husband and wife put their marriage into God’s hands, the Holy Spirit works to bind them together. The Holy Spirit will increase this trust.

The wife is not her husband’s property. Husband, wife and children are joined in a precious bond together. Blessing comes to our homes when husbands and wives respect each other and their children respect them too.

The wife’s body does not belong to her alone. And the husband’s body does not belong to him alone (7:4). So “do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time... Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (7:5).

It is good to spend time together with God, especially in prayer. If a partner is led to fast and pray in private, encourage them.

Christians should seek God's will in all things. They must know His will for them before they marry. The question is whether to marry or stay single? God does not give the gift of marriage to everyone, so Paul makes no command about it because of the words of Jesus (7:6; Matthew 19:11).

Paul was not married. If he had been married, he was not married at this time. He said that to remain single required the gift of self-control (7:37). Therefore, remaining single without sexual activity is also a gift from God, which we call celibacy.

Jesus spoke about God's marriage law (Genesis 2:24; Mark 10:6-9) He said, "What God has joined, let no-one separate." Marriage is for as long as both husband and wife shall live. This is why Paul wrote: "A wife must not leave her husband. But if she does, she must not get married again. Or she can go back to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife" (7:10-11).

Paul wrote, "the unbelieving (partner) has been sanctified through the believing (partner)" (7:14). Unsaved spouses who remain faithful to their partners are kept from the sin around them. Then their children are also thought of as 'holy' (7:14).

WITNESSING TO UNBELIEVING PARTNERS

If the unbelieving husband or wife leaves, let him or her do so. God has called us to live in peace (7:15). The believer must have a quiet and gentle spirit. He or she must seek God's will. This may take a lot of time and waiting on God. Husbands and wives should pray to God together so that they can agree with what God says to them. What God tells husbands and wives is always the best for their marriage and their life in Christ. No-one but God can tell a wife what to do or a husband what to do.

"If the unbeliever leaves, let them go. In that case, a believing man or woman does not have to stay married." However, many Christians lead their unsaved partners to Christ. This should be our prayer. Paul asked, "How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? How do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? " (7:16).

THINK OF YOURSELVES AS 'SLAVES (SERVANTS) OF CHRIST'

Paul then says four times, "Each of you should remain in the place in life that the Lord had given you" or "each of you should stay as you were when God chose you" (7:17, 20, 24, 26).

He applies this to decisions regarding circumcision (7:18). "Doing what God commands is what counts" (7:19). Also, if you are married to an unbelieving partner, stay where you are and be a witness to Christ. Or if you are working for a master who does not know God, stay where you are and be a witness to Christ.

"Christ has paid the price for you. Do not become slaves [servants, KJV] to human beings" (7:23). Paul means that after yielding our life to Jesus we should

become 'slaves of Christ (7:22). Do not let false teachers or their human or evil ways control you. Jesus Christ paid the price for you with His own life blood. "You are responsible to [abide with, KJV] God" (7:24).

Paul then applies his teaching to single people also (7:25). He said, "I have no direct command from the Lord. But I give my opinion... Times are hard for you right now. So I think it's good for you to stay as you are. Are you married? Then do not get a divorce. Are you single? Then do not look for a wife" (7:25-27). This was how Paul felt. Other men on Paul's team had wives (9:5).

So now "stay as you were when God chose you" until He reveals His purposes for you. Paul wanted to save new believers from mistakes when making important decision in life such as circumcision, marriage, employment and where to live. "I want to save you from that" (7:28). He wanted them to wait for divine guidance.

LIVE AS IF IT IS THE LAST DAYS

Paul then explains further why he advised to "stay as you were when God chose you".

"Brothers and sister, what I mean is that the time is short" (7:29). Paul knew it was hard living under constant persecution. Paul also believed that they were already living in 'the end times' and Jesus would come again soon. "The world as it now exists is passing away" (7:31). "I do not want you to have anything to worry about" (7:32). "I am saying these things for your own good. I am not trying to hold you back. I want you to be free to live in a way that is right. I want you to give yourselves completely to the Lord" (7:35).

It was a time of much suffering and Paul felt strongly about the things he said (7:40). This is why he advised believers, especially new believers, "I think it is good for you to stay as you are."

We do not know what Christians faced nearly 2000 years ago. Even so, Paul believed, whether you are engaged to be married or not, you must know the Lord's will for your life. He even told men to examine themselves to see if they had the gift of self-control. If so, Paul thought it was probably better for them not to marry at that time (7:37-38).

Paul therefore encourages his readers to live as if it is the last days, as 'slaves of Christ'. The apostle John also said "Dear children, we are living in the last days" (1 John 2:18). "But you have received the Holy Spirit from God. He continues to live in You... Remain joined to Christ, just as you have been taught by the Spirit" (1 John 2:27). Paul said elsewhere, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him (Christ) who loved us" (Romans 8:37).



Talk about this:

1. What was the price God paid to save us (John 3:16)?
2. What did Paul advise about marriage and work (1 Cor. 7:17)?
3. What did Paul mean when he said we should live as 'slaves to Christ' (7:22)?
4. What did Paul advise when making big decisions such as circumcision, marriage, work and where to live (7:16, 19, 23, 26-31)?

5. Why did Paul say "stay as you are" (7:26, 35)?



Think about this: How can you build trust between yourself and your marriage or business partner? What dangers do Christians face in the last days before Christ returns? How should we live as "slaves to Christ"? Why does God want you to be a witness to Christ as you are now? How should we live as in the 'last days'?



Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 8

ARGUMENTS OVER FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS

The Christians at Corinth often argued about food offered to idols. So, Paul said, "I want to talk about food offered to statues of gods" (8:1). The heathen Corinthians worshipped idols. They brought their food and money to the temples and offered them as sacrifices to man-made statues. The food was later sold in the markets or eaten at the temple feasts. The question was, "Is it wrong for Christians to eat the food sold on the market that had been offered to idols? "

Paul knew that the believers argued about this so he said, "Those who think they know something still do not know as [much as] they should! " (8:2). We must obey the first of the Ten Commandments to love God. "Those who love God are known by God" (8:3) and will then grow in divine knowledge and wisdom.

So Paul's answer about eating food given to idols was, "We know that a god made by human hands is nothing... We know there is only one God... He is the Father from whom all things came... All things come from Him and we live for Him. And there is only one Lord. He is Jesus Christ. All things came because of Him, and we live because of him" (8:4-6). Yet some people, "when they eat food offered to statues or gods... they have a weak sense of what is right and wrong. They feel guilty" (8:7). Food does not bring us closer to God, if we eat it or do not eat it! (8:8).

It was therefore not wrong to eat food offered to idols, but some new believers did not understand, and assumed it was wrong. It is always important to be convinced by God in your own mind what to do (Romans 14:5). Knowing right from wrong comes from God Almighty (Proverbs 9:10). If new believers saw others eat food offered to idols and they were uncertain if it was right or wrong, then they could become confused. Therefore, "be careful how you use your freedom [in Christ]. Be sure it does not trip someone up who is weaker than you" (1 Cor. 8:9). Paul says later, that if someone says to you that certain food has been offered to idols in sacrifice, then do not eat it, for your sake and for the sake of the one who trusts you (1 Cor. 10:28).

Some people were afraid to eat meat offered to idols. Others felt that they knew what was right and did not worry. We are foolish if we think that we know everything, but if we love others we must avoid confusion or arguments. We must be especially careful to avoid confusion in the minds of new believers.

Beware of people who think they know everything. Some people deliberately ate the food offered to idols to show that they had great faith. We must live to honour Christ. We must not do anything to harm other people's faith in Christ (8:12). Paul teaches us to be careful to avoid using our strong faith and knowledge of God and His word unwisely.

"So, what should I do if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin? I will never eat meat again. In that way, I will not cause them to fall" (8:13). There will be other things we must never do if they cause others to stumble in their Christian walk.

It is good to grow more in knowledge, faith and freedom in Christ. And in doing so, we will grow more like Christ, prepared to sacrifice our freedom for the sake of others.



Talk about this:

1. Why was eating meat offered to idols a problem for the church in Corinth?
2. How does God want His children to care for weaker Christians?



Think about this: How can we grow in knowledge, faith and freedom in Christ? How can we grow in grace, wisdom and restraint to avoid offending new and weak believers? How can we support others to become spiritually strong members of the church?



Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 9

THE MINISTRY OF AN APOSTLE

Some members of the congregation in Corinth said Paul was not an apostle, because he did not ask for pay or accommodation or food. He worked as a tent maker and used his own money for the journeys. So he spoke about his work for the Lord and asked: "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (9:1).

Paul then challenged the people and asked, "Do we not have a right to eat and drink?" (9:4). He said that other apostles and disciples even brought their wives with them as their right. Paul says he and Barnabas have the same rights as the other apostles, to enjoy food and drink and to receive pay for his work.

Paul quoted (9:9) from the Law of Moses not to stop an ox from eating while you use it to separate grain from straw. It can eat some of the grain while it is working (Deuteronomy 25:4). A shepherd is entitled to drink some of the milk from his master's sheep.

Paul did not demand his rights, because he did not want anything to interfere with telling the Good News of Jesus Christ.

"We have planted spiritual seed [grain] among you. Is it too much to ask that we receive from you some of the things we need?...Do you not know that those who work in the Temple get their food from the Temple?...In the same way, those who preach the Good News should receive their living from their work...I am not

writing because I hope you will do things like that for me...I am able to preach the Good News free of charge...I do it to win as many as I can to Christ" (9:11-19).

Preaching the Good News gave him the greatest joy. His life was an example. He did not preach to get money from the Corinthian church. "We did not use that right. No, we have put up with everything. We did not want to stop [hinder, KJV] the Good News of Christ from spreading" (9:12). "I have to preach it. How terrible it will be for me if I do not preach the Good News! " (9:16). It is the love of Jesus which compels us to win others for Him.

The Christians who travelled with Paul gave up their rights, also. They did everything they could to spread the Gospel. Paul and Barnabas did not ask to be paid. Paul's reward was to offer the Gospel freely (9:18). He asked, "What reward do I get?...I do it to win as many as I can to Christ. To the Jews I became like a Jew. To those not under the Law I became like one not under the Law. [But] I am not free from God's Law. I am under Christ's law... I have become all things to all people so that in all possible ways I might save some. I do all of that because of the Good News [of Jesus the Christ]" (9:20-23).

May we all share in the responsibility of caring for each other and meeting the needs of those who travel near and far to spread the Good News of Jesus our Saviour.

PAUL'S TRAINING IN MINISTRY

In order to offer the Gospel freely, Paul made himself 'a slave' to everyone (9:19). He worked with his hands and made tents. He taught without pay. He did it to win as many as he could to follow Jesus."

Paul gave everything he had to God as an example for others to follow. "My God will meet all your needs when you belong to Christ Jesus, " he promised elsewhere (Philippians 4:19). We cannot claim this promise if we have not given God everything we are. It is a promise only made to God's servants who trust fully in His care and supply.

Paul then explains the very important ways that he talks to different people in the churches about the teachings of Jesus. We must learn from this. Paul talked to Jews, who try to obey the Old Testament Law given to Moses. He explains he is a Jew, like them and uses the words they use. He starts with the things they already understand. "I became like one who was under the Law. I did this even though I myself am not under the Law. That was to win those under the Law" (9:20). "To those who do not have the Law, I became like one who does not have the Law... I am under Christ's law. Now I can win those who do not have the Law" (9:21).

God's love in Paul's heart drove him to speak differently to different people. "I have become all things to all people. I have done this so that in all possible ways I might save some" (9:22). "I do this for the sake of the Good News, in order that I may share in its blessings" (9:23). We must be kind and caring to new believers and seekers who do not look, think, dress or even eat like us!

WE RUN TO WIN THE PRIZE

Paul said that the Christian life is like a race. "In a race, all the runners run but only one gets the prize. So run your race to obtain the prize, " he wrote (9:24). This requires strict training and self-control. "We do it (in the belief that we will) get a crown that will last for ever" (9:25).

Keep your eye fixed on Jesus, not on anyone else. Run a steady race. Make every step important. Run with an aim and a purpose, to win the prize (9:26; Hebrews 12:1-2). Watch a good runner! See the purpose in his stride. See the power in his legs.

Followers of Christ run the race of life. They run to win the prize, and to hear God's words, "Well done, my good servant! " (Luke 19:17). As we put ourselves into God's hands, He trusts us with the Holy Spirit power given us by Jesus Christ.

"I train my body and bring it under [my] control. Then after I have preached to others, I myself will not break the rules. If I did break them, I would fail to win the prize." (9:27). This requires discipline and perseverance.

Paul had one goal: to preach Christ crucified for our sins. He pushed himself hard in ministry with the hope of gaining the prize of praise and honour from God for his faithful service. Paul knew there was nothing good in his old sinful nature (Romans 7:18). He glorified Jesus in the power of His Spirit. To win the race:

- Paul did not seek his own rights (9:18).
- He kept his eye on his prize (9:24).
- He kept his body under control (9:27).

He did not want to lose the prize, which was his heavenly crown. He was confident of reaching the finish, but that was not enough. He wanted to receive his prize.



Talk about this:

1. What rights did Paul expect as an apostle (9:11)?
2. What was Paul's greatest fear (9:16, 27)?
3. What did Paul hope to get at the end of life (9:25)?
4. What would make him fit to receive his prize (9:26)?



Think about this: What time and money have you spent on yourself without seeking God? What have you given up for Christ? What helped Paul to keep preaching the Gospel (2 Corinthians 5:15)?



Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 10

ISRAEL'S HISTORY AS EXAMPLES TO US ALL

Some of the Corinthian followers of Jesus were Jewish. Paul reminded them in this chapter that their ancestors were slaves in Egypt. Yahweh, God Almighty, sent Moses to tell Pharaoh, King of Egypt, to let His people go. God did mighty signs

and wonders against Pharaoh, his magicians and all Egypt, so Pharaoh let the children of Israel go to their Promised Land (Exodus 6 to 14).

Going through the water of the Red Sea was like baptism, so Paul said that in a similar way, they were 'baptised into Moses'. The Jewish and Gentile believers at Corinth inherited the same faith as Moses and father Abraham (Romans 4:11-16). "You who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed. You will receive what God has promised" (Galatians 3:29).

Paul said:

1. All the Israelites passed through the Red Sea. God made a path for them until they all passed over to dry land (1 Cor. 10:1).
2. They were all united with Moses in God's pillar of cloud and in the sea (10:2). Following the cloud and escaping through the sea with Moses was like a baptism at the beginning of a new life of faith.
3. "All ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink" (10:3). They ate manna and drank water in the desert. Jesus said He is "the bread of life" (John 6:48-51).

God showed His loving kindness for the people. The cloud and the pillar of fire at night showed them that God was always with them. For food, they gathered manna each day, and caught quails (small birds) for meat. The water from the rock quenched their thirst. Paul said, "They all drank from the Spiritual Rock that was with them, Jesus the Christ [Israel's future Messiah]" (1 Cor. 10:4).

Their enemies were also defeated and their clothes and shoes did not wear out in 40 years (Deuteronomy 29:5). Because they were going through a desert, they had special needs. God will supply all your needs as well through Yeshua, Jesus, whose name means God's Saviour (Philippians 4:19).

In the desert, life was hard for the people of Israel. They also took with them some of the people of Egypt. They complained against God and against Moses. Their evil hearts turned away from God and they wanted to go back to Egypt (Hebrews 3:7-19). That generation of people did not go into the Promised Land because they did not trust God. All except Joshua and Caleb had no faith in His promise to give them the land and they rejected His gift (Numbers 14:33-35; Exodus 12:23).

Paul said, "These things happened to them as examples for us. They are supposed to keep us from longing for evil things" (1 Cor. 10:6). He warned them, "Be careful. When you think you are standing firm, you might fall" (10:11-12). He believed that they were living at a time when God's work was nearing the end. Because of this, Paul said we must be careful and take notice of God's warnings of the Last Days before Jesus returns. The message is clear. Trust God, know His word and obey Him. Do not grumble and quarrel or you will not win the race.

DO NOT BOAST: PREPARE TO BE TESTED

"If you think you are standing firm, " Paul said, "be careful that you do not fall" (10:12). Do not boast. Even mature Christians are tempted and disobey God and fall into sin.

Paul told them to remember that the temptations in their lives were no different from what others experience (10:13).

God blesses those who faithfully live with testing and temptation. Then after, they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him. God never tempts us (James 1:12-13) although He may allow us to be tempted. Paul said, "You are tempted in the same way all other humans are. God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted any more than you can take. But when you are tempted, God will give you a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

God may test us or even put us through a hard trial to prove our faith, but this is always for our good (Romans 8:28). "Your faith will be tested. You know that when this happens it will produce in you the strength [patience, KJV] to continue" (James 1:3). Even Jesus was tempted (Matthew 4:1-11).

Satan tempts us to sin. But we must never forget that God promised to make a way for us to withstand the temptation (10:13). We can overcome temptation when we:

- know how temptation comes to us;
- confess it and ask the Lord how to escape it;
- claim His promises about temptation;

We must learn how to use the things God gives us as armour for protection against Satan and his lies (Ephesians 6:13-18).

In Corinth there were temples full of idols. Paul told the believers that the gods that are worshipped are really demons. Do not go to places where you will be tempted to do wrong things. Do not have any fellowship with demons. "My dear friends, run away from statues of gods. Do not worship them... Judge for yourselves what I say" (10:14-15).

THE LORD'S SUPPER AND THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

Paul then reminds us that when we are at the Lord's Table we all eat and drink together. (He returns to this subject in the next chapter.) We share the bread and wine. It is a sign of our fellowship. "When we give thanks for the cup at the Lord's Supper, are we not sharing in the blood of Christ? When we break the bread, are we not sharing in the body of Christ?" (10:16). We have all been washed clean by the blood of Jesus. We are all one in Christ. "Just as there is one loaf, so we who are many are one body. We all eat from the one loaf" (10:17).

"Consider the people of Israel, " Paul told them. "Do not those who eat the offerings, share in the altar? " (10:18)? When people brought a lamb to sacrifice, the priest offered it on the altar as a burnt offering (Leviticus 1:1-5). The people

shared in the death of the sacrifice when they ate part of the sacrifice (Leviticus 7:15; 8:3; 1 Samuel 1:4).

Jews and Gentile believers, rich and poor, well-educated and unschooled, now eat together at the Lord's table. This is because followers of Jesus the Christ or Messiah are 'one body' worldwide. When we share the Lord's Last Supper with other believers, we show to the world, and the devil, that we are united. We meet together as one body to share bread and wine in remembrance of the Lord Jesus and His death and sacrifice on the cross. Where this happens, the unity is our testimony.

God showed the Jewish believers in the time of Paul that Gentiles were as welcome in their meetings as Jews were. The Body of Christ on Earth is greater than gender, tribe or ancestors (Galatians 3:27-28). All God's children belong to His Body. That is what the 'one loaf' is a picture of (10:17).

God wants us to be united. He wants all members (parts of the Body of Christ) to work in harmony as a healthy human body does (12:12-13).

WARNINGS ABOUT SACRIFICES MADE TO SATAN

Paul wanted them to know that it was wrong to share in offering food to false gods and demons. They were forbidden to share in those meals (1 Cor. 10:19-21).

"Am I saying that the idols or the food offered to them have any power?" Paul asked. "No, but the sacrifices of idol worshippers are offered to demons, not to God" (10:19-20; Deuteronomy 32:17). Paul said that demons were the real power behind all these ceremonies. Satan works through idols and we should not touch any idol or fetish [objects we display or wear with supposed magical powers], nor take any into our homes. We should ask for the power of the blood of Jesus to protect us and others from these evil spirits. God said, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3-5). A person who worships idols or objects cannot also share in the bread and wine (1 Cor. 10:21).

"Are we trying to make the Lord jealous?" Paul asks (10:22). No-one should want to make God angry. The Lord Jesus will not share the Lord's Supper with demons. The two things cannot go together (2 Cor. 6:17).

SEEKING GOOD FOR OTHERS AND GLORY FOR GOD

Paul then quotes what many born-again believers said: "Everything is permitted" (10:23). But not everything is good for us... not everything builds us up! "We should not look out for our own interests [wealth, KJV]. Instead, we should look out for the interests of others" (10:24). It was this truth that guided Paul's life. His conscience was clear.

Paul gives an example for the believers in Corinth that if someone invites you to a meal, eat whatever is offered. But if they say it was offered to idols, then Paul warns his readers to be careful. There are many things we are free to do. Yet these things can cause doubters or young Christians with weak faith to trip and

fall. Sometimes we must be wise and choose not to do the things we are free to do to avoid causing offence (10:27-28).

Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God (10:31). Do not cause anyone to do something they may think is wrong. Paul said, "I try to please everyone in every way. I am not looking out for what is good for me. I am looking out for the interests of others. I do it so that many might be saved" (10:33). "Follow my example, as I [try to] follow the example of Christ" (11:1).



Talk about this:

1. Why did Paul talk about Moses to the Corinthian believers (10:1-11)?
2. Does God warn us and help us when we are tempted? How (10:11-13)?
3. How does Paul describe the unity at the Lord's Table (10:16-17)?
4. Why does Paul then warn believers about idol worship (10:19-22)?
5. How does Paul tell us to use our 'freedom in Christ' (10:23-33)?



Think about this: God's plan for the people of Israel and for the rest of the world at the time of their persecution in Egypt. Think about God's plan for our Messiah's return to establish His Kingdom on Earth during these evil Last Days. How can we live now to bring glory to God? How can we avoid hindering the faith of other believers?



Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 11

HUSBANDS AND WIVES

Ever since Paul wrote these words, many Christians have tried to understand what he meant! Paul was never free of his Jewish traditions (11:13-16). But he was confident and clear with the teachings of Jesus.

Paul wrote about relationships and the way we treat others. The way a believer treats the opposite sex is more important than the words they say. In marriage, Christ is Head of both husband and wife. Under Christ, husband and wife join in a holy union. God created marriage. Therefore, unity in Christ is what people should see when a husband and wife worship and work together. They should see it in their love for each other and for their children. God created marriage between a man and a woman and every marriage should bring glory to His name.

Christ is the Head (11:3). Under Christ's authority, men and women are equal before God (Galatians 3:28). From the beginning God knew that Adam needed a helper (Genesis 2:18). Here is a beautiful record of how he made Eve from Adam's flesh. Adam saw that his partner was "flesh of his flesh" and "bone of his bone" (Genesis 2:23). She was like him and was to share with him in every way. She was created in God's image to reflect the glory of God's creation in humans.

Although she was made from Adam's flesh, Eve was still made in the image of God. They both had fellowship with Him. He gave them both authority over the

world He has created. This comes with a great responsibility for today. Both men and women have to answer to God.

GOD'S MARRIAGE LAW

God gave Adam and Eve His marriage law (Genesis 2:24). In marriage, a man and woman are joined together as one person, in body, mind and spirit. They become one flesh. God means them to be together as long as they live. Two minds agreeing in work, worship and witness, with the desire to bring up children.

Jesus said, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). We do this by trusting, by praying and by putting Christ first in our lives. Because marriage is God's plan for male and female, He will honour every effort we put into our Christian marriages. Paul wrote, "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 [thinks no evil, KJV]" (1 Cor. 13:4-5).

Christ showed His great love for the Church, "by giving Himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). This is an example of how God wants marriage to be. In marriage we give ourselves up to each other. Marriage should make each person mature by giving them a loving, caring place where they can grow and develop in a godly way. Each person's special abilities should be developed.

As each person's gifts and talents contribute to the marriage, the family grows in strength, creativity and service. We share the responsibility for growing together in Christ:

- for the spiritual life of the family (Acts 2:39).
- for guarding the family from evil and danger (Matthew 2:13-15).
- for teaching and leading the children (1 Samuel 3:13).
- for supplying the physical and material needs of each family member (1 Timothy 5:8).
- for God's blessing to pass to the children and grandchildren (Isaiah 44:3).

In many nations, grandparents help in bringing up children and supporting the family. Sometimes 'it takes a whole village to bring up a child' (African proverb). This is because the father of a family may need to seek work a long way from home or may need to help in the army to protect their country. Also, many mothers are left as single parents through death or desertion. Paul's Jewish tradition of family life with the father's role as head could not always be applied among the poor and persecuted early churches, nor can it today.

RESPECT AND AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

"For those who belong to the Lord, the woman is not independent of the man. And the man is not independent of the woman. The woman came from the man, and the man is born from the woman. But everything comes from God" (1 Cor. 11:11-12).

In this way the wife and family are under God's loving care and guidance and not under man's control. They submit to the authority of God through marriage. Paul says that this order in marriage was also to be kept in worship. The roles of men and women were set by their Creator.

In Paul's day, those who were under authority wore a covering on their heads. Slaves wore a hat. Wives covered their heads when they went out of their homes. Many Corinthian women wore veils and had long hair. In churches and congregations today, there is no equal to the veil. A hat is certainly not the same as a veil. In the meetings at Corinth, a veil signified that a woman honoured and respected both her husband and Christ (11:14-15).

When people meet for worship, Jesus is their authority.

The men in Corinth respected and acknowledged Jesus as present in their congregation by not covering their heads. Also, Paul believed that if a man had long hair, it was shameful (11:14).

THE PROBLEM OF WEARING VEILS

There was a problem in Corinth. Some women who worshipped idols had no morals and had no respect for authority and did not wear veils. They showed themselves off. The unveiled woman could be a temple prostitute or false prophet.

Today, in many cultures, breaking from any form of ungodly worship may bring punishment and even death. However, when Corinthian women who followed Jesus were set free from worshipping idols, they kept some of their old traditions and tried to honour God at the same time.

Paul was not against women sharing in worship. But some women went to meetings, prayed and even prophesied without a covering on their heads. He said it was not the custom to do this. It was the custom to cover their heads before men and before God and before angels (11:6-10).

Respect is a very important part of a marriage. A marriage quickly falls apart if there is no respect between husband and wife. Children learn how to respect others when they see how their parents respect each other. Married couples were created to be one flesh.

Since Adam, every man who ever lived was born of a woman (11:12). Men should respect women. A man should remember that a woman gave him birth. Harmony in a marriage comes as the couple work together as a team.

Then Paul turns to the matter of hair length. The Corinthian Christians were arguing about this. In Paul's time, it was the custom that men wore their hair shorter than women. Paul warned not to divide the church by arguing over hair length. The Holy Spirit will show each person God's will for them (11:14-15).

GUIDELINES FOR THE LORD'S SUPPER

Then Paul told the Jewish and Gentile believers, "Your meetings do more harm than good!" (11:17). He said they were not like a fellowship of believers; they acted badly. "You take sides" (11:18-19). They did not eat as one body. When

they met together they divided into groups: the rich and the poor, the important people and the less important ones. The wealthy ones ate what they brought and gave nothing to the poor. They did not share or care for others. Everyone took what they wanted for themselves.

“If you have to behave like this, it is better for you to eat at home”, he told them. “As you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anyone else. One remains hungry and another gets drunk” (11:20-21).

They had showed no respect, even for Christ’s death, when remembering the Lord’s Last Supper. Because they did not honour Christ, they brought judgment upon themselves. Their sin was against the person of Christ Himself.

“I passed on to you what I received from the Lord, ” Paul said (11:23). The Holy Spirit made this truth clear to Paul. He learned about the Lord’s Supper from the apostles. The apostles followed this feast from the Lord Jesus Himself. They passed it on to Paul. Paul passed it on to the congregation at Corinth, but they had forgotten his instructions.

Paul repeated what he had said before. Jesus used the bread as a symbol. It was not His real body because He stood there before them. The bread represented His body which was broken on the cross the next day.

“On the night the Lord Jesus was handed over [betrayed, KJV] to his enemies, He took bread. When He had given thanks, He broke the bread and said, ‘This is My body, which is given (broken, KJV) for you. Do this in memory of Me’ ” (11:23-24). Jesus meant us to remember to keep on doing this until He comes again. Paul said, “When you eat the bread and drink the cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until He comes again” (11:26).

Paul warns, “Do not eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in a way that is not worthy of Him. If you do, you will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord” (11:27).

In the same way, Jesus took the cup of wine from the table. It was the shared cup of wine they had used during the meal. “This cup is the new covenant [testament, KJV] in My blood.” He told them (Luke 22:20).

The wine was a symbol of the blood of Jesus. He said this while He was still with them. Without the sacrifice of His blood there could be no new covenant (Hebrews 9 and 10).

WE ARE MADE WORTHY BY THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS

Paul said, “So do not eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in a way that is not worthy of Him. If you do, you will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:27). Be warned! Do not eat the Lord’s Supper “in an unworthy manner”. If you do, you will be guilty and you will suffer the judgment of God.

We must confess our sin and be made clean before we eat (1 John 1:9). Paul said we must 'put off' all that offends Christ and keep His body, the Church, healthy (Ephesians 4:22-30).

It is God who makes us worthy to come to His table to remember the death of His only Son. He does this when we confess our sin and put things right with Him and with others. Then we can come near to God with a sincere heart, in full faith, holding to the hope we claim, encouraging each in love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:22-24).

Those people who do not examine themselves, refuse to understand what they are doing. They attend the meal of remembrance but eat and drink judgment on themselves rather than blessing. That is why many people had already been judged in Corinth. They had not examined themselves and confessed their sins. They had also failed to understand that the risen Lord Jesus met with them as they remembered His sacrifice of blood.

They were weak and sick in their spirits and maybe in their bodies, too. "A number of you have fallen asleep (died)" (11:30). They had to see and fully understand that Christ's body was broken and His blood was spilt for them. We share in the bread and wine to remember the Lord's death for us and also His resurrection.

Christ's Last Supper was a covenant meal. Their eyes and hearts had to be focused upon Him and obey Him by remembering His sacrifice for our salvation. So must we.

Heavenly Father, help us to judge our lives in the way You see us! May we cry out to You in the troubles we cause so that we can be forgiven! Then we can meet in unity with our brothers and sisters who love Jesus.



Talk about this:

1. Is the 'image of God' the same in a woman as in a man (Genesis 1:27)?
2. What is a woman's role in marriage? What is a husband's role in marriage? (Genesis 2:23-24).
3. What habits and traditions hinder our worship today (1 Cor. 11:1-16)?
4. What habits and traditions hinder us sharing in the bread and wine together (11:17-34)?



Think about this: Before we eat the Lord's Supper (Communion), we must let the Holy Spirit show us what is wrong in our lives.



Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 12

GIFTS AND FALSE PROPHETS IN THE CHURCH

Paul next answers another question the Corinthians asked in their letter to him. "Brothers and sisters, I want you to know about the gifts of the Holy Spirit" (12:1).

The Corinthians thought they owned these spiritual gifts and could use them as they wished. They thought their gifts made them better than others. Paul reminded the Gentile believers that when they were idol worshippers they were easily led astray (12:2). Then Satan ruled over them. Now they were controlled by God's gentle Holy Spirit. The word 'gift' in Greek is the same word as the Greek word 'grace.' Paul said these are God-given 'grace-gifts' which we do not earn or own or deserve.

A 'gift of the Spirit' is a special ability that comes from the Holy Spirit. Spiritual gifts are given only to believers. They help us to do something for God that we could not do with our own strength or understanding.

Every gift is to help the 'Body of Christ' which is the Church, so in order to know if a gift comes from God it is right to ask:

- Is any person trying to use a gift, but living their life in ways that are not good?
- Is any person saying, or doing, things which are not as Jesus teaches us?
- Is everyone trying to bring honour to Jesus and make His followers stronger?
- Is any person trying to control the lives of others, instead of helping them find freedom in Jesus?

Paul gave this test: "You know that at one time you were unbelievers. You were somehow drawn away to worship statues of gods that could not even speak. So I tell you that no-one who is speaking with the help of God's Spirit says, 'May Jesus be cursed.' And without the help of the Holy Spirit no-one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' " (12:2-3).

To say "Jesus is cursed" is blasphemy [speaking without respect for God]. Saul was a blasphemer before he met Christ on the road to Damascus (1 Timothy 1:13). He then changed his name to Paul, or Paulus, which means "little".

In the Greek-speaking Roman empire, Christians were sometimes ordered to say, "Caesar is Lord" and even bow down to his statue. Those believers who refused would say "Jesus is Lord" instead. They did this even when it cost them their lives. True believers lived by the words "Jesus is Lord" and they died with the same words on their lips. Only by the Spirit's power can we truly mean the words "Jesus is Lord."

Those who know Jesus, worship Him as their Lord and King. He guides their acts and their words (1 John 4:2-3). However, Christians need to know that there are sometimes people who claim to bring a message from God who are not true followers of Jesus. 1 John 4 calls them 'false prophets.

Often false prophets try to take control of a church, or of individual Christian members. They may also try to find men or women who they can persuade them into wrong sexual behaviour, claiming that this is what God wants. They may also persuade Christians to give them money. They may even try to become a church leader. But their lives will not show the kindness and love [compassion] of Jesus.

They will just live for themselves, and try to get power and control over other people.

DIFFERENT GIFTS, ONE SPIRIT, FOR THE GOOD OF ALL

“There are different kinds of [God-given] gifts, but the same Spirit” (12:4, 11). Each gift blesses the person and blesses the whole fellowship of believers. The Spirit’s gifts help us to serve Jesus and build up the faith of other people.

The Holy Spirit wants us to have all of Christ’s character. He wants us to show spiritual fruit in our lives that come from God. His Holy Spirit power produces love, joy, peace, kindness [gentleness, KJV], goodness, faithfulness, generosity and self-control for His glory (Galatians 5:22-23). God does not give gifts in order to draw attention to the person with the gift. The Spirit’s gifts draw people’s attention to Christ. When Christ is ‘lifted up’ in this way, people want to come closer to Him. (John 12:32) When a person repents or worships God, Christ is glorified, God is glorified and others see how special Jesus is.

“The Holy Spirit is given to each of us in a special way. That is for the good of all” (1 Cor. 12:7). God chooses how He gives these gifts to believers. We can think of God’s gifts in three ways (12:8-10):

1. Speaking gifts of preaching and teaching, prophecy and wisdom (words of knowledge).
2. Serving and helping with gifts of hospitality, friendliness and welcoming others; visiting and helping people who are ill; doing tasks that support the administration of meetings and activities.
3. Signs and wonders such as praying for ill people to be healed and praying for God to do other miracles; understanding whether something has been done by God’s Spirit or an evil spirit; speaking God’s special words of knowledge about a problem; speaking and interpretation of a special prayer language from God [tongues, KJV].

“All the gifts are produced by one and the same Spirit. He gives gifts to each person, just as He decides” (12:11). We must ask in faith for the gifts that God wants to give us.

Help us Father to reach out for the well-being of all in love, using the benefits of all the gifts available in the Body of Christ!



The work of the Holy Spirit in a follower of Jesus

- prepares God’s people for His work in His way and in His time;
- gives gifts of grace to the people He wishes to do the work;
- makes them bold to speak only the words of truth from God;
- witnesses to the person and compassion of Christ and His name;
- directs the gifts of grace to do only God’s will to build the church;
- brings love, harmony and peace to glorify Christ and not self.

ONE BODY, MANY PARTS

Paul saw problems in the church at Corinth. He wanted to tell them how to respect and care for each other, how to use gifts of the Spirit in a humble way and how each part of the church should work together in love like a single body.

Paul used the human body to explain this. A person's body is a single creation which is made with many different parts: hands, eyes, feet, ears... all make one body. So it is with Christ's Body (12:12).

"We were all baptized by one Holy Spirit into one body" (12:13). "It did not matter whether we were Jews or Greeks, slaves or free people. We were all given the same Spirit to drink. The body is not made up of just one part. It has many parts" (12:13-14).

When we believe in Jesus as the Christ or Messiah, we are baptised into His Kingdom. Then the Spirit of God gives us a changed nature to show that we belong to God. This is the Holy Spirit who lives within each believer and guides their lives (Romans 8:9; Ephesians 1:13).

When you are baptised into the body of Christ, you can be filled with God's Spirit or you can be empty. Jesus told His followers His Father in Heaven would give the Holy Spirit to all who ask Him (Luke 11:13).

God has made our bodies with different parts to work in unity. However, the foot does the work of feet and the hand does the work of hands and in the way God wanted (1 Cor. 12:15). Each person must understand what gifts God has given them, and the way they can use them to work for Him (Romans 12:5).

The weak parts of our human bodies and also the Body of Christ, need the support of stronger parts. The Church of Christ also needs balance and harmony. No part can say to another, "I do not need you" (12:21). The Body is made weak if a member becomes sick or doubts their part in the Body and cannot do their work.

It is also wrong to be jealous of another believer's gifts. And we should give special care and honour to the poor and less educated believers among us. The Body needs them, too (12:23). There should be no caste, class or status among us. If one suffers, all suffer. If one rejoices, all rejoice (12:26).

CHURCH LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION

God has appointed key people (12:28):

- Apostles or missionaries who are called by God and appointed by the local congregation. They are sent out to preach the Good News of Jesus the Christ. They are servants of Christ and the local Body of Christ.
- Prophets who speak God's words of knowledge for the guidance needed and given at the time they lived (Ephesians 3:5).
- Teachers and pastors who apply God's truth for the local needs of congregations to grow spiritually and numerically.

- Administrators, elders and deacons to guide the church activities and to work alongside the other leaders. Paul appointed spiritual members of the congregation to direct this work (1 Timothy 5:17).
- Workers of miracles including gifts of healing (1 Cor. 12:9). Healing gifts were widely used in planting the early Church and still are today (Acts 9:11; Matthew 9:20-25). Jesus gave His disciples His authority to heal sicknesses and cast out demons (Luke 9:1).
- Interpreters who interpret words spoken in different kinds of tongues (1 Cor. 12:10).
- Helpers and carers. Paul said, "By this kind of hard work we must help the weak" (Acts 20:35). Paul was thinking of widows, orphans, disabled and others who need support.



Leaders must be trained

The Holy Spirit gives gifts and directs their use. Leaders must be trained by the Spirit of God to:

- lead others in worship and to pray in public;
- learn the Scriptures and teach and apply them for today (2 Tim 2:15);
- know the mind of the Holy Spirit in making decisions;
- recognize their own gifts and allow God to use them for the blessing of all.

Apostles, prophets, teachers and pastors were given a place of honour or leadership in the early churches. See Ephesians 4:11 and Romans 12:6-8. In the larger fellowships there was also a need for elders and deacons. Paul also said that all the gifts were needed and all gifts had to work together to honour Christ.

"But eagerly desire the greater [best, KJV] gifts, he said. "And now I will show you the most [more, KJV] excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31). He then set an important aim before them (Chapter 13).



Talk about this:

1. What are spiritual gifts (12:8-11)? Can you name some of them?
2. How should spiritual gifts be used in the Church?
3. When we use our gifts, who should get the glory?
4. Who are part of the 'Body of Christ' (1 Cor. 12:13)?



Think about this: How can we avoid using spiritual gifts in the wrong way? What do we understand about 'the Body of Christ' and how it works? How does the Holy Spirit enable us to do God's work?



Bible reading: 1 Corinthians 13

DO NOTHING WITHOUT LOVE

We can see three important messages in Chapter 13:

1. The results of not loving (1-3).

2. The true nature of love (4-7).
3. How love must be used with the gifts of the Spirit (8-12).

There is a danger that we seek the spiritual gifts for our own benefit. In all our service for Jesus, the driving force must be love, love, love. "Love is the most excellent way" Paul said.

Love must come before everything else, and love must control all the gifts. Every meeting, every service for God, must be done out of love: love for God, love for Christ, then love for others.

In chapter 12, Paul named the gifts. In chapter 14 he explains how the gifts must be used in public. In chapter 13, he writes about God's 'agape love', the greatest gift of all.



God's love:

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| • is patient | • is not easily angered |
| • is kind | • keeps no record of wrongs |
| • does not envy | • does not delight in evil |
| • does not boast | • rejoices in the truth |
| • is not proud | • always protects, always trusts |
| • is not rude | • always hopes always perseveres |
| • is not self-seeking | • never fails |

THE 'AGAPE LOVE' OF GOD

The Greek word for God's love used in the New Testament is difficult to translate into English and other languages. The New Testament writers took a little-known Greek word, 'agape love' and used it in their letters to the early Christians. They used it to describe God's love including the love that Christ had for His Church. Few others wrote about 'agape love'. It means a selfless concern for others, as a father and mother should have for their children.

So how are you using your spiritual gifts? Do you know what they are? If so, do you use your gifts in love?

Paul says, "Suppose I speak in the languages of human beings and of angels. If I do not have love, I am only a loud gong or a noisy cymbal. Suppose I have the gift of prophecy. Suppose I can understand all the secret things of God and know everything about Him. And suppose I have enough faith to move mountains. If I do not have love, I am nothing at all. Suppose I give everything I have to poor people. And suppose I give my body to be burned. If I do not have love, I gain nothing at all" (13:1-3).

Paul then describes 'agape love' for the Corinthian believers. Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not want what belongs to others. It does not brag. It is not proud. It is not rude. It does not look for its own interests. It does not easily become angry. It does not keep track of other people's wrongs. Love is not happy

with evil. But it is full of joy when the truth is spoken. It always protects. It always trusts. It always hopes. It never gives up" (13:4-7).

GOD'S LOVE NEVER FAILS

The love of Father God was and is the very centre of Christ's nature. "God showed His great love for us. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). As the Holy Spirit breathes Christ's life into us, we love others. Without Him, our hearts are empty, selfish and cold.

Paul said, "What we know now is not complete. What we prophesy now is not perfect. But when the perfect comes, the things that are not perfect will pass away" (1 Cor. 13:8-10).

Our weak minds know so little of God. It is like looking at God in a mirror. The reflection we see is hazy and blurred. But in Heaven, I will see everything clearly.

In Paul's day, mirrors were made of metal. The metal was hammered flat and polished. It did not always give a good reflection. Paul said we see only a dim picture of Christ's perfect character. But in Heaven, we will also see God and we will understand clearly. What I know now is not complete. But one day I will know everything completely, just as God knows me completely now.

Paul says that "the three most important things to have are faith, hope and love. But the greatest of them is love [charity, KJV]" (13:13). God's wonderful love for us changes us. Then we can trust Him, and love Him and love other people. He gives us a hope to know that we will be kept in His love for ever.



Think about this: Why do you think this short passage has been inserted here by Paul between two chapters on the spiritual gifts? How much do you value its teaching?



Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 14

GIFTS OF PROPHECY AND SPEAKING IN TONGUES

Next Paul advises how the gifts of the Spirit should be used. "Follow the way of love. Eagerly desire the spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy" (14:1). The Corinthians had put the gift of speaking in tongues first but Paul said prophecy is the most important gift. This is one of the gifts of the Spirit to speak words direct from God at the moment it is required. It is not teaching or preaching from previous experience. The Corinthian church had not understood this. The gift of prophecy is greatly needed in the Church everywhere. It helps believers grow in the knowledge of what God wants to say NOW that agrees with His written word.

The gift of speaking in other languages [tongues] is normally used when someone can translate or interpret the words of praise given by the Spirit. "Anyone who speaks in a [unknown, KJV] tongue does not speak to men but to God. No-one understands him. He speaks in a language given to him by the Holy Spirit" (14:2). People have puzzled over the use of this gift of speaking in

unknown languages [tongues]. The gift caused much confusion in Corinth. So Paul told them, "I would like you to, but I would rather have you prophesy" (14:5).

When a person preached or prophesied in the language of the people, all those people present could understand. If the speaker used an unknown language, it was important to have someone else to explain what the Spirit was saying through that person to God. The interpreter would change unknown words into words that the people understood. "Those who prophesy are more helpful than those who speak in other languages. But that is not the case if those who speak in other languages explain [interpret, KJV] what they have said. Then the whole church can be built up" (14:5)

"If I spoke to you in some language you did not understand, how would that help you?" Paul asked (14:6). Paul did not say, "Do not speak in other languages or tongues." He wanted everyone in Corinth to speak in tongues. But some used their gift without an interpreter present to listen to what the Holy Spirit was saying. Some used the gift to show off.

Paul said that the gifts of preaching, prophesying and teaching were needed to build up the body. He used examples to show this (14:6-10). For this reason, if a person speaks in a tongue they should pray also for an interpretation of what God says (14:13).

With our minds we know truth. We respond to God's word first in our minds. When we understand God's truth, it moves our minds and our bodies to action.

"So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind" (14:15). Paul wanted to sing and pray with his mind as well as his spirit.

Paul added, "I thank God that I speak in tongues privately more than any of the rest of you. But in public worship I would rather speak five words that people can understand... than ten thousand words... in an unknown language" (14:18-19).

However, when unbelievers attend meetings, Paul said, "The secrets of their hearts will be brought out into the open. They will fall down and worship God. They will exclaim, 'God is really here among you!'" (14:24-25).

Paul gives us an insight into the meetings in Corinth around the year AD60. He encouraged them to use the gifts God had given them. When they meet together some will sing, another will teach... or speak in an unknown tongue, or interpret the unknown language. Everything that is done must be useful to all, to build you up in the Lord (14:26).

Paul said that no more than three persons should speak in tongues. And they should speak in turn, not all at once. If there was no-one present who could interpret, then the person with the gift of tongues should keep quiet, unless he could interpret the words himself (14:26-28). Each speaker should take their turn. Others should weigh carefully what was said by the speaker. "If someone else receives a message from the Lord, the one who is speaking should stop" (14:30).

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CONGREGATIONS

In Corinth and other places in those days, men sat on the opposite side of the meeting room to women with children. This still happens in many cultures today. We do not know what happened in Corinth and we do not know why Paul said, "women should remain silent" (14:34). Perhaps at Corinth, there were women who called out questions to the speaker or to their husbands on the other side of the room. Perhaps they wanted to discuss something, when it was better to leave this to be done later or at home (14:35).

Some congregations believe verse 34 means that women could not speak in a church meeting. However, Paul encouraged the ministry of women. Paul encouraged gifted women to minister and speak. He had already discussed the role of women praying and prophesying in the church (11:5). Philip, the evangelist, had four daughters who prophesied and Paul did not tell them to stop (Acts 21:9). He said women were to pray and prophesy in the meetings. However, they should not talk to each other and their children in the meetings.

Women also supported Paul in his ministry (Romans 16:1-3, 6, 12). It was the custom for women to provide hospitality for travelling rabbis (teachers). They did this for Jesus and for the preachers and evangelists He sent to spread the Good News after His resurrection.

Women receive gifts of the Holy Spirit the same as men do. Gifted women should be recognized by the elders.

Here Paul was giving instructions on how to keep order at meetings. Both men and women must wait on the Lord for the right time and place to use their gifts. "Brothers and sisters, you should want to prophesy. And do not stop people from speaking in languages they had not known before. But everything should be done in a proper and orderly way" (1 Cor. 14:39-40).



Paul's authority in Christ

- What he writes is the Lord's command (14:37).
- Those who do not live by God's word should not speak in the meetings (14:38).
- "Be eager to prophesy" (14:39).
- Do not forbid speaking in tongues when you meet together (14:5).
- Everything should be done in a peaceful and orderly way (14:40).



Talk about this:

1. What did Paul say about prophecy and speaking in tongues (14:1-4)?
2. Why did Paul say we should seek the gifts of the Spirit (14:12)?
3. How did Paul say we must keep order in the meetings (14:26-32)?



Bible reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 15

PREACHING ABOUT THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Paul here explains how he had preached the Gospel or Good News of Jesus Christ to them. The most important part of his message was the resurrection. Jesus had died and come alive again! This had made His enemies angry and they put Paul in prison for speaking about this (Acts 24:21). He also preached that there is a personal resurrection which contradicted the teaching of some of the Jews.

“Because you believed the good news, you are saved. But you must hold firmly to the message I preached to you. If you do not do this, you have believed it for nothing” Paul told them (15:2; Hebrews 3:6).

“Most important of all is that Christ died for our sins, just as Scripture said He would. He was buried. He was raised from death on the third day, just as Scripture said He would be.” The women followers saw Him first (Matthew 28:9; Mark 16:9). “He appeared to Peter. Then He appeared to the twelve [disciples]. After that, he appeared to more than 500 believers at the same time. Most of them are still living. But some have died. He appeared to [His brother] James. Then He appeared to all the apostles. Last of all, He also appeared to me. I was like someone who was not born at the right time or in a normal way. I am the least important of the apostles. I am not even fit to be called an apostle. I tried to destroy [persecute, KJV] God's church” (15:3-9).

It was a new human body of Jesus that came alive again. All these people saw a real person they could touch, not a spirit. This gives us a ‘sure and certain’ hope that we will also be made alive again with a new real body.

THE RESURRECTION OF BELIEVERS IN CHRIST

Many in Corinth said there would be no resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12). Some were Jews and some were Gentiles. The Jewish Sadducees did not believe in resurrection. Paul, a Jewish Pharisee, said, “If no-one rises from the dead, then even Christ has not been raised” (15:13). “But Christ really has been raised from the dead. He is the first of all those who will rise” (15:20). After His death, “the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life” (Matthew 27:52).

The body of Jesus did not remain dead nor did anyone find His dead body. If Christ is dead:

- “What we preach does not mean anything” (1 Cor. 15:14).
- “Your faith does not mean anything either (15:14, 17-19).
- We would have no hope of anything such as forgiveness, new life now or in the time to come.
- “We would be guilty of lying about God who we know raised Jesus from the dead” (15:15).
- Those who died believing in Christ are also lost (15:17).

“But Christ really has been raised from the dead. He is the first of all those who will rise” (15:20).

“Death came into the world because of what one man [Adam] did” (15:22). All die because “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Death is the last great enemy, but Jesus has won the victory over death. “Death will be thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14).

Death will not have lasting power over followers of Jesus. Their bodies will rise to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). They will live in new bodies that will never die. “All [believers] will be made alive.” (15:22). Believers are ‘in Christ’ so all will rise to new life at the resurrection, when Christ returns (15:23).

“Christ is the first of all those who will rise” (15:20). All those who are in Christ will also rise from the dead. Then the believers from previous ages will surround the throne and cry out, “Salvation belongs to our God. Salvation also belongs to the Lamb [of God]” (Revelation 7:10).

By faith, believers are joined with Christ forever. Just as He rose from the grave, so those alive in Him will rise. “Then the end will come” (15:24).

God gave His Son “all authority in Heaven and on Earth” (Matthew 28:18). When Jesus the Christ has conquered all His enemies, that is sin, death and Satan, He will hand over all power and authority to God His Father (1 Cor. 15:24).

“If there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptised for the dead?” (15:29). We do not know what this means. It is possible that some believers were baptised for those who had died before they received baptism.

Paul asked them why he risked death every hour if there was no resurrection (15:30)? Why would Paul suffer to bring them the Gospel, if life ended in the grave? His suffering would be of no value (2 Corinthians 11:23-29).

Paul said, “I face death every day” (15:31). This is what Jesus meant when He said, “take up your cross and follow Me” (Mark 8:34). Paul submitted to God’s will. He chose to say ‘no’ to his own needs in order to share the Gospel with them

OUR RESURRECTION BODIES

Christians in Corinth asked, “How are the dead raised? ” What kind of body will they have (15:35)?

The apostles saw Jesus alive again after He rose from the grave. They recognized His new body. They knew it was Jesus! (Luke 24:31). They saw Him go back to Heaven (Acts 1:9).

Paul used a seed to teach about this new body. He said, “What you plant does not come to life unless it dies. When you plant something, it is not a completely grown plant that you put in the ground. You only plant a seed... But God gives the seed a body just as he has planned. And to each kind of seed he gives its own body” (1 Cor. 15:36-38). A wonderful change takes place in the seed’s body.

We are all like seeds. In the resurrection of believers, God will raise our bodies to glorious new life. Our new bodies will be spiritual bodies. Paul compared the body we have now with the new one we will have in the resurrection (15:42-44). “The body that is raised from the dead lasts forever. It is planted without honour,

but it is raised in glory. It is planted in weakness. It is raised in power. It is planted as an earthly body. But it is raised as a spiritual body.”

THE FIRST AND SECOND ADAM

“The first man Adam became a living being [soul, KJV], the last Adam (Jesus) a life-giving spirit” (15:45).

God’s plan started with the creation of a perfect sinless man (Adam). But Adam and Eve sinned. Therefore God sent His own Son to the rescue. Why? Because we are all like Adam and Eve, choosing our own selfish ways. But now we have new life as a gift from the second Adam, Jesus. One day, we will have a new perfect body also. How? Our old body will be changed to a new body, the same way as Jesus after He came alive again (Philippians 3:21).

“What is spiritual did not come first. What is earthly came first. What is spiritual came after that.” (1 Cor. 15:46). In every way, we are like the first man Adam. We have all his weaknesses and sins. But we will be like Jesus, the [Son of Man] from Heaven (15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18).

God’s Spirit is changing believers so we show more of Jesus on Earth to other people. After the resurrection, our bodies will also be resurrected like Jesus.

THE VICTORY OF THE RESURRECTION

This passage is Paul’s final argument about the resurrection of the body. “Listen! I am telling you a mystery. We will not all die. But we will all be changed.” At Christ’s Second Coming, “We will not all sleep (in death), but we will all be changed [transformed]” (1 Cor. 15:51). “That will happen in a flash, as quickly as you can wink an eye. It will happen when the last trumpet sounds. The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised to live forever. And we will be changed” (15:52). Then the saying will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, death [grave, KJV], is your victory? Where, death, is your sting? ” (Hosea 13:14).

Paul could not hold back his praise to God: “Thanks be to God! ” he exclaimed. “He wins the battle for us because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done” (1 Cor. 15:57).

Jesus won the victory over death, and so Christians will win this victory too! God gives us this victory because Jesus died for us. That is why Paul could tell them to stand firm in the Lord (15:58).

At the end of the letter, Paul wants to remind his brothers and sisters of four very important things (15:58):

- Stand firm in your beliefs (faith).
- Let nothing move you off your foundation in Christ.
- Give yourselves fully to the Lord’s work.
- Know that your work is not worthless.



Talk about this:

1. How did God's grace [kindness we do not deserve] work in Paul's life (15:10)?
2. When will all Christ's enemies be destroyed (15:23-24)?
3. What change lies ahead for all true believers (15:49)?



Think about this: Pray to God to raise up leaders now who will re-establish His truth in our land with hope of resurrection to meet our Saviour without shame. Meanwhile, how can I 'take up my cross' each day, instead of planning each day with myself at the centre? What did Paul mean when he spoke about death to self?



Bible reading: 1 Corinthians 16

MONEY COLLECTED FOR THE POOR

The Corinthian Christians were collecting money for the poor believers in Jerusalem. Paul wanted them to finish collecting the money before he visited them. He told them, "Do what I told the churches in Galatia to do. On the first day of every week, each of you should put some money away. The amount should be in keeping with how much money you make [as God has prospered you, KJV]... When I arrive, I will send some people with your gift to Jerusalem" (16:1-3).

This was not a command. Christians give because they love God and every good thing comes from God. Paul did not want to take the money himself to Jerusalem. Men from the Church in Corinth would take it to Jerusalem, with letters of recommendation from Paul.

The Law of Moses demanded a tithe, meaning a tenth part of their money, as well as other offerings (Malachi 3:10). Everything we have belongs to God. Christ taught that a full offering comes from a full heart. "God loves a person who give cheerfully" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

"After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you" (1 Cor. 16:5). He wanted them to know he would not come right away. But when he did come to Corinth he would stay for some time if the Lord allowed it (16:7).

"I will stay at Ephesus until Pentecost" he said (16:8). Meanwhile, he encouraged the church to support the teaching of Timothy and Apollos (16:10-11).

"Be on your guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be brave. Be strong. Be loving in everything you do" (16:13-14). This was important encouragement since many in that city opposed the Gospel, but God was at work there. Paul also sent greetings from other believers and congregations (16:19-20). He ends with his own words of love for "you who belong to Christ Jesus. May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you" (16:23-24).

CONCLUSIONS

Looking back through this letter we see how Paul has linked together a number of important lessons, not only for the Jewish and Gentile believers in Corinth, but for us today. He gives thanks to God for their salvation and spiritual gifts. However, he has shown us:

- having different groups in the church who disagree, is very wrong, and will destroy the life and work of the church fellowship.
- to avoid taking brothers and sisters to court to settle arguments. Instead, we should seek understanding and unity under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our meetings.
- the need to stop sinful sexual behaviour.
- how to understand marriage from God's view.
- ways we must change the things we do, if we upset other people or hinder their understanding of God.
- how the Lord's Supper meal is important and must be shared in a right way.
- the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit, and how to use them to help the whole fellowship.
- why a group of Christians is like a body made up of different parts; we are not all the same, and there are many useful ways for us to be part of this body.
- not to make big decisions during difficult times but live as in the 'last days' and as 'slaves to Christ'.
- why love must be like the foundation of all the things we do in our church group.
- to submit to leaders in the church meetings and keep order.
- to learn how to be guided and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit in our ministries.
- that the resurrection of Jesus is at the very centre of the Christian faith and He will return again as the risen Christ and Messiah to Jerusalem as King.

Paul ends his letter with encouragement to the Corinthian believers. They were part of the Body of Christ in the whole area, and must learn to help each other, whatever their background.

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