



UNITED:

BECOMING ONE IN CHRIST

SOUTHEAST INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL STUDIES
2023 LECTURESHIP

The 48th Annual Lectureship

United: Becoming One In Christ

April 23-26, 2023

Director of the Lectureship

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United: Becoming One In Christ

2023 Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies Lectureship

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Lesson 1–United: Becoming One in Christ

THAT YOU MAY BE UNITED

David Sproule

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

1 Corinthians 1:10

Christ Himself prayed for “all” who would believe in Him that they all may be “one” (John 17:20-21). [All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] The *scope* of Christ’s desire is for “all.” (See that same word “all” in 1 Corinthians 1:10.) The *straightforwardness* of His desire is for all to be “one.” (See “no divisions” in 1 Corinthians 1:10.) The *standard* is the unity and “oneness” that exists between the Father and Christ Himself. The *setting* for this unity is only to be found “in Us” (John 17:21).

The Lord’s church in Corinth was dealing with “divisions” (1 Cor. 1:10; 3:3; 11:18), “contentions” (1:11), “factions” (11:19), and potential “schism” (12:25), in direct breach of the prayer and will of Christ. The urgency of the matter (i.e., being “one” in Christ) led Paul to address this matter right at the beginning of his first letter to these brethren. His message was simple, yet direct and demanding.

The Heart of the Message

True, acceptable unity is only found in Christ. Paul opens this letter by emphasizing the “in Christ” relationship. He addresses those who “are in Christ Jesus” (1:30) as the ones “who are sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1:2), who were given “the grace of God...in Christ Jesus” (1:4, NASB) and were “enriched in Him” (1:5, NASB). He closes the letter by saying, “My love be with you all in Christ Jesus” (16:24). In a letter intended to deal with division in the church, it begins and ends with being “in Christ.”

These brethren had been “in Christ Jesus...begotten...through the gospel” (4:15). When they were “washed ... sanctified ... justified in the name of the Lord Jesus” (6:11) upon their baptism “into Christ” (Gal. 3:27) and “in the name of” Christ (1 Cor. 1:13), they became His “saints” “in Christ” (1:2). There is no unity outside of Christ, nor does Scripture approve of any ecumenical

“unity in diversity.” True and acceptable unity is only found “in Christ.”

Being one in Christ requires being united under one authority. Paul’s plea for unity is upon the basis of “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:10). A key word in the book of 1 Corinthians, which is being written to address the danger of division in the church, is the word “Lord.” Division can be resolved when you decide who is “Lord”! Paul uses the term seventy times in this book, and he had already referred to Jesus Christ as “Lord” five times before calling for unity in the name of the “Lord” in verse 10.

There is a vast difference between when “each of you says” (1:11) or “one says” (3:4) and when “the Lord” Himself “says” (14:21; cf. 11:24-25). Man, when he speaks, has no authority, but Jesus Christ, our Lord, has “all authority” (Matt. 28:18). When our Lord speaks, Paul emphasizes that “keeping the commandments of God is what matters” (1 Cor. 7:19). Rather than acting “in the name of” some man (see 1:13-15), for which we have no authority, let us ensure that we “do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col. 3:17; cf. 1 Cor. 1:10; 5:4; 6:11). Being one in Christ is only possible when there is full allegiance and submission to Christ as Lord.

Being one in Christ requires being united in one church. The letter is plainly addressed “to the church of God” (1:2). The Greek word for “church” is *ekklēsia*, which literally denotes those who are “called out.” Having been “called out of darkness” (1 Pet. 2:9), Paul indicates that those in the church of the “faithful” God have been “called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9). This begs the question, “Can one be in the fellowship of Christ and not be in His church?” To ask is to answer!

In an inspired epistle that is devoted to the plea “that there be no divisions among you” (1:10) and that there be “no schism in the body” (12:25), Paul repeatedly emphasizes the singular nature of “the church” (1:2; 6:4; 10:32; 11:22; 12:28; 14:4-5, 12; 15:9), which is also identified as “the body” (12:12, 14, 18-19, 22-25; “the body of Christ,” 12:27). Just as Paul argues that “there is no other God but one” (8:4), even though there are multitudes of manmade “idols” and “so-called gods” (8:1-5), Paul likewise argues that there is only “one body” (12:12-14, 20), i.e., one church (cf. Eph. 4:4; 1:22-23), even though there are multitudes of manmade denominations. Just as the “one God” is not

comprised of all the manmade “gods,” the “one church” is not comprised of all the manmade “churches.”

While many seek to minimize the “one church” today, that is a major theme that permeates this entire book (and others, like Acts, Ephesians, Colossians, etc.). There is only one entrance into the one church—“we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). And when “the end” comes, Jesus will collect His church (Eph. 5:27) and deliver her “to God the Father” (1 Cor. 15:24). True unity now and true unity then can only be a reality when we are united in Christ’s one church.

Being one in Christ requires being united in one doctrine. In order for true unity to exist, we must “all speak the same thing” (1:10). Speaking the same thing will lead to “no divisions.” Paul identifies that which we are to speak as “the gospel” (1:17; 9:14, 16, 18; 15:1-4), “the word of God” (14:36), “the testimony of Christ” (1:6; 2:1), “the commandments of the Lord” (14:37), and “the Scriptures” (15:3-4). And he draws a sharp, permanent, divine contrast between “words of human wisdom,” which “man’s wisdom teaches” (2:4, 13), and “the wisdom of God,” which “the Holy Spirit teaches” (2:7-13). The wisdom of man (and his teachings) is “foolishness with God” (3:19).

We are responsible for being united in that which is “written”! Paul would not teach “anything...except” the one true doctrine of Christ (2:2). In fact, in this letter, he frequently pointed out that what he taught in one place is the same thing that he taught in every other place (4:17; 7:17; 14:33; 16:1). The gospel does not change! May God help us to “learn...not to think (or ‘go,’ ESV) beyond what is written” (1 Cor. 4:6). Then, and only then, can true unity exist.

Messages for Today

- **We must speak where the Bible speaks.**
- **We must develop the mind of Christ.**
- **We must live a holy life, sanctified in Christ.**

We must speak where the Bible speaks. This is not merely a catchy slogan; this is a Biblical requirement. “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11). Let us truly “all speak the same thing”! If we want to help people to be saved and to go to heaven, “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Let us speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible

is silent. To do otherwise forfeits any opportunity for true, acceptable unity.

We must develop the mind of Christ. Paul pleads for Christians to “be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1:10). The word “mind” has to do with one’s way of thinking, and Paul uses the same word in the next chapter for having “the mind of Christ” (2:16). That starts by accepting His revealed word as the final authority in all religious matters and conforming our thoughts to it.

We must live a holy life, sanctified in Christ. In this letter that emphasizes unity in the church, Paul begins by addressing it to “those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (1:2). This is, in part, what is involved in being “perfectly joined together...in the same judgment” (1:10). It is applying in our lives the eternal truths that we know in our “minds.” As a “member of Christ” (6:15), my “body” is “for the Lord” (6:13). Therefore, since Christ “bought” us “at a price” (6:20, 7:23), and we belong to Him (3:23; 6:19-20; 7:22), let us “do all” to His glory (10:31).

A Message of Hope for You

Even in the midst of a harsh warning, there is tremendous hope in this book. Christ does not approve of any divisions in Christianity today any more than He did 2,000 years ago. But the reward of our “hope in Christ” (15:19), when we remain “perfectly joined together” as “one” in Christ, is glorious and exciting. The promise that awaits His saints is the guarantee of being raised from the dead (15:12-20, 38, 42-45, 50-57), inheriting His eternal kingdom (6:9-10), obtaining “the prize” of the “imperishable crown” (9:24-25) and receiving the ultimate and eternal “victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (15:57). Oh, the eternal fellowship that we will enjoy then following the true unity that we have pursued here!

Discussion Questions

1. Why is there such division in Christianity today?
2. How can we keep ourselves from compromising where we must not compromise?
3. How can we respond with Scriptures to those who claim all denominations are part of the “one church”?
4. In John 17:20-21, what did Jesus say would be a result of His people being “one”? What then, by implication, is a result when His people are divided?
5. What are some blessings experienced by the church when it is united?

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Lesson 2–United: Becoming One in Christ

UNITED IN WISDOM

Willie Nettle

We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

1 Corinthians 2:6-7

Even a casual reading of 1 Corinthians reveals that Paul is writing to a divided church, and he is very displeased with the petty quarrels going on there. He spends the first four chapters addressing the problem of divisions in the church reported to him by some from the household of Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11-12). Paul's inspired remedy is to steer the church away from human, worldly wisdom and back to the wisdom of God. He does so by emphasizing the following: (1) it is the wisdom of God that undergirds the gospel that he preached; (2) this same wisdom originates not with man, but comes from the Spirit of God; and (3) it is by means of this wisdom that Christians grow up to become mature, spiritual believers who have the mind of Christ. When the church united around this wisdom, foolish divisions over trivial matters would cease to be a problem.

The Heart of the Message

The first thing Paul does is link the wisdom of God to the gospel that he preached and by which the Corinthians were saved (1 Cor. 1:18-2:5). He respectfully reminds them that they were not saved by worldly wisdom. As proof, they could look among their own number and ponder, "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age?" (1:20). [All Scripture references are from the NIV unless otherwise noted.] Apparently, "the clever people of the world had no time for Christ."¹ Therefore, among those who were called at Corinth, "not many . . . were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth" (1:26).

¹ Duane Warden, *1 Corinthians, Truth for Today Commentary* (Searcy: Resource, 2016), 52.

Most of them were common, everyday people, called out of the world into a redeemed relationship with Christ.

The gospel message of the cross is “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, [it is] ...the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1:23, 24). Jews wanted countless miraculous signs and Greeks desired worldly wisdom (1:22), but Paul preached only “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2:2). He came to the Corinthians “in weakness and fear” (2:3), “not with wise and persuasive words” (2:4), clever speech, and sophisticated learning, so that their faith would not rest on human “wisdom, but on God’s power” (2:5).

Secondly, Paul explains that the Christ-centered wisdom that he proclaimed came from the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:6-13). It was not some secret that he, Apollos, Cephas, or the Corinthians had figured out. Rather, it was God’s mystery, His previously-hidden wisdom (Rom. 16:25-26), “now [being] revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets” (Eph. 3:5) and announcing that redemption is not for the Jews only, but for Gentiles also (Eph. 3:4-6). Once revealed to Paul, he not only proclaimed it, but also wrote it down for our reading, studying, understanding, and application (Eph. 3:2-6). This inspired revelation would help both the local congregation at Ephesus and at Corinth² “to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

Thirdly, Paul plainly teaches that only the wisdom of God, not worldly wisdom, produces mature, spiritual disciples with the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:14-3:4). Paul makes a clear distinction between the *psychikos anthropos* in 2:14 (translated “natural man” by the NKJV; “unspiritual man” by the RSV) and the *pneumatikos* (“spiritual man” in NIV and RSV; “he who is spiritual” in NKJV) mentioned in 2:15 and again in 3:1. While he wants to address the Christians at Corinth as spiritual, he cannot because of their divisive mindset, exemplified by jealousy and quarreling and calling themselves after men. Instead, Paul must address them “as worldly (*sarkikos*)—mere infants (*nepios*) in Christ” (3:1).

² What Paul wrote was to be received at Corinth as “the Lord’s command” (1 Cor. 14:37).

Paul's subject in this section is neither pagans, agnostics, nor atheists;³ rather, he is still addressing Christians at Corinth,⁴ most of whom are unspiritual, worldly, immature, and not yet ready to digest solid, spiritual food. The message he proclaimed is for the mature in contrast to "the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age" (2:6), which led to the crucifixion of Christ.

Such wisdom "is earthly, unspiritual (*psychikos*),⁵ of the devil" (Jam. 3:15). "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (Jam. 3:16).

Some at Corinth had embraced the spiritual wisdom of God and had thereby become spiritual people, having the mind of Christ. Paul includes them, along with himself, in the statement, "we have the mind of Christ" (2:16). "To have 'the mind of Christ' is to repent of sin, to take one's stance beneath the cross, and to renounce pretense and self-sufficiency."⁶ Such wisdom involves laying aside personal pride and carnal thoughts and looking to the Lord for guidance, thereby helping to solve the problem of divisions in the church.

Messages for Today

- **We must continue to proclaim the wisdom and power of God.**
- **We must continue to realize that this wisdom comes from the Spirit of God.**
- **We must continue to allow this wisdom to transform us into mature, spiritual people.**

We must continue to proclaim the wisdom and power of God. This is still the beginning point of our confession and salvation—Christ and Him crucified (15:3). Those who are being saved must glory only in the cross, not in clever, human rhetoric and sophisticated, fleshly wisdom.

³ Warden, 78. See also Richard E. Oster, Jr. *1 Corinthians*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin: College P, 1995), 88.

⁴ The party slogans, repeated in 3:4, are first mentioned in 1:10, showing that Paul is still focused on the same church problem of disunity. See Oster, 92.

⁵ James uses the same Greek word as Paul to describe worldly wisdom and its fruit.

⁶ Warden, 80.

We must continue to realize that this wisdom comes from the Spirit of God. This is the only way to know the mind of God and His perfect, divine secret regarding oneness, unity, peace, and love. We cannot fathom the awesome thoughts and ways of our wise and holy God (Isa. 55:8-9; 1 Cor. 2:11). The best we can do is forsake our evil thoughts and ways (Isa. 55:7) and turn to “what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9), revealed by the Spirit to men who spoke it and wrote it down so we can all be on the same page. Trying to figure God out through human reasoning divorced from Scripture is doomed to failure (1 Cor. 1:21). Doing so is not being spiritual; it is being disrespectful.

We must continue to allow the wisdom of God to transform us into mature, spiritual people. This is the way we take a useful place in the body of Christ, making “every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). Spiritual people can become part of the solution instead of being part of the problem.

A Message of Hope for You

“Paul expected his readers to hear the demands of the gospel, to make choices, to change and grow so they might become spiritual people.”⁷ He knew change was possible because of the faithfulness of God who had “called [them] into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1:9). He was pleased that some of them were spiritually mature and had taken on the mind of Christ.

The problem with unspiritual Christians is that they listen too much to human, worldly wisdom (2:6), they do not accept spiritual things (2:14), and they cause divisions in the church of our Lord (3:3, 4; 1:11-12). Only when we learn to unite around the wisdom of God will we then be able to overcome the problem of divisions in the church.

⁷ Warden, 79.

Discussion Questions

1. Give some examples of how worldly wisdom was dividing the church at Corinth.
2. Give some examples of how worldly wisdom divides the church today.
3. How does Paul describe the “spiritual man” in 1 Corinthians 1-3? Notice the contrasts he makes with the “natural man,” the one who is “worldly,” and the one who is still an “infant” in Christ.
4. Explain how one can be in Christ and not be “spiritual” (cf. Gal. 6:1)?
5. Discuss the claim of many unchurched people today: “I am spiritual, but not religious.”

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Lesson 3–United: Becoming One in Christ

UNITED IN MATURITY

Clarence DeLoach

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food for until now you were not able to receive it and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Our text for this study is 1 Corinthians 3:1-9. [All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] The church at Corinth was plagued with many problems, resulting from a lack of spiritual maturity. Their envy, strife, and divisions among them signified immaturity. Some had developed a loyalty to Apollos, others for Paul, and still others for Cephas. In his first letter Paul described three kinds of men. The natural man is the person who seeks understanding apart from God's revelation (1 Cor. 2:10-14), the carnal man is the Christian who is living like the world (1 Cor. 3:1-9), and the spiritual man is the Christian who has the mind of Christ and is being led by the Spirit (1 Cor 3:1; Gal. 5:16-25).

The Heart of the Message

What can we learn from the Corinthians? So many of our problems are caused by spiritual immaturity. It is one thing to be a babe in Christ, but it's something else to remain one. The milk of the Word is needful, but in time we must grow up. The Hebrews were admonished, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food" (Heb. 5:12). The training received from the solid food would have enabled them to discern between the law and the new covenant.

When Paul came to Corinth, God assured him that He had "many people in this city" (Acts 18:10). And when the gospel was preached, Luke reported, "and many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). Thus, the church was begun in Corinth. Paul remained there for a year and a half, but

the church had a difficult time growing. Much of it was caused by the environment; Corinth was a morally bankrupt city. Being a commercial city, gross immorality and drunken debauchery flourished. Formerly, the converts had practiced those sins: “and such were some of you” (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Satan is our infernal foe. Like the Corinthians, we, too, face numerous challenges that keep us from a life of spiritual growth and victory. We face essentially the same enemies—the flesh, the world, and the devil. Satan’s singular purpose is to deceive and destroy. He uses the flesh and the world to tempt us to live in immaturity thus rendering us weak and unfaithful. For these reasons, Paul exhorted them and us, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

The flesh is our internal foe. Paul charged, “you are still fleshly” (1 Cor. 3:3 NASB). When we were saved through the new birth, we became a new creation, but the flesh was not eradicated. Paul puts all of this in perspective in Rom. 6:12-14 and says, “sin shall not have dominion over you.” To the Galatians he wrote, “For you brethren have been called to liberty, only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

The world is our external foe. We have often thought of the world in too narrow of terms. Paul’s message to the Romans was “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). The “world” in this passage translates the Greek *cosmos*, and means a system, an order, a network of ideas designed to enslave and trap. It has a prince—Satan (John 12:31,32; 14:30; 1 John 5:19). It has a philosophy, a culture of ideas designed to destroy (1 Cor. 2:12, spirit of this world; 1 Cor. 3:19, wisdom of this world; 1 Cor. 7:31, form or fashion of this world; 2 Pet. 2:20, pollution of this world). It has a purpose; it is hostile to the things of God (John 15:18; James 4:4). It has a people; Jesus spoke of the “sons of this world” (Luke 16:8).

Messages for Today

- **One of the greatest challenges facing the church today is spiritual immaturity.**
- **We must be vigilant, aware, and alert.**
- **We need to be firm in the faith.**
- **We must grow up, be brave, and act like men.**
- **We must be strengthened.**
- **We must be motivated by love.**

One of the greatest challenges facing the church today is spiritual immaturity. This is manifest in the great numbers in our congregations that seem content to live in the fringes. They settle into mediocrity. Their participation in the work of the church is minimal. Lessons on greater involvement are ignored, and they settle into the status quo. These never develop a sense of belonging.

Can such a condition be reversed? Paul believed the Corinthians could do better. At the opening of his letter of rebuke and correction, he addressed them as “the church of God ... to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints...” (1 Cor. 1:2). God had not given up on them. Though weak and immature, God loved them. And He loves us and corrects us when we are immature (Heb. 12:5-6).

In the last chapter, Paul gave five injunctions that would correct every problem that plagued the church of Corinth and every problem that plagues us. “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love” (1 Cor. 16:13-14).

We must be vigilant, aware, and alert. The Corinthians were in a state of spiritual stupor. They needed to awaken out of sleep. We are never more vulnerable to Satan’s devices than when we are listless. An unforgiving attitude gives Satan an advantage over us (2 Cor. 2:11). Unresolved anger gives the devil a place (Eph. 4:26,27). We need to be aware of the danger of temptation, the paralysis of indifference, and the seduction of false teachers (1 Pet. 5:8-9; 2 Pet. 2:1; Mark 14:38; 2 Tim. 4:3-5)

We need to be firm in the faith. Faith in this passage entails the truth of the gospel, the body of divine revelation. Like the Ephesians, the Corinthians were being “carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14). They were flippant and vacillating. Far too many Christians today are not settled, established, and standing in “the faith which was once for all delivered to the

saints” (Jude 3). It appears that the Corinthians were filtering God’s truth through the lens of the wisdom of men (1 Cor. 1:18-21). The same error occurs today among those who interpret scripture through the lens of culture. But it is the truth that makes men free (John 8:32, 36).

We must grow up and act like men. The Corinthians were acting like children, but Paul commanded “in understanding be mature” (1 Cor. 14:20). God gives us time to grow, but His people at Corinth were still carnal, i.e. “men of flesh,” and could not receive the solid meat of the word. Maturity is the result of a growing commitment in doctrine, spiritual discernment, emotional stability, personal relationships, and moral purity.

We must be strengthened. The verb here is in the passive voice and literally means “be strengthened.” The implication is that strength does not come from ourselves. It is God who strengthens when we submit to Him in reception and obedience: “be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Eph. 6:10). We have it right when we can say with Paul, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). As we “wait on the Lord,” yielding our spirits to His Spirit, we are “strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man” (Eph. 3:16).

We must be motivated by love. Love never fails (1 Cor. 13:8). It is love that gives balance to everything. It keeps firmness from becoming harsh and strength from becoming domineering. It makes maturity gentle and considerate. It keeps doctrine from becoming dogmatism and right living from being smug self-righteousness. This agape love that Paul extolled and that seeks the best for others is that “more excellent way” that the Corinthians needed, and so do we (1 Cor. 12:13-31).

A Message of Hope for you

Are you a maturing Christian? Do you feel frustrated because your present status is not where you want it to be? Do not lose heart. Even the great Paul could write, “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected, but I press on” (Phil 3:12). To the Philippian church, Paul gave this encouragement, “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). God wants to finish what He commenced in you. God does not give up easily on you. Let your will be yielded to His. Let us be united in our growing maturity.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the background of Paul's visit to Corinth and the nucleus of the church that was begun (See Acts 18).
2. What was the culture and environment at Corinth?
3. What were the attitudes and actions of the Corinthians that indicated their immaturity?
4. Paul spoke of them as being fleshly. What does that mean?
5. Name and describe three kinds of men that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians.
6. Give the five imperatives at the end of Paul's letter that would reverse the immaturity of the Corinthians and us.

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Lecture 4: United: Becoming One in Christ

UNITED IN HUMILITY

Anthony R. Booker

And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

1 Corinthians 4:6-7

Paul explained why he had spoken of himself and Apollos in this manner. He wanted the Corinthians to react appropriately to human leadership in the church, not by taking pride in some association with a leader, but by humbly serving others.

The Heart of the Message

Richard Pratt, Jr. paraphrases our passage as follows: “If the Corinthians would live under the authority of the Scriptures, they would not take pride in one man over against another, damaging the fellowship by causing divisions.... If you are a superior person, and a man fit to be a teacher of others, whence did you obtain this superiority? If you are different from the common people, who makes you to differ? If you are a person of remarkable gifts, how came you to possess them? If all your distinguishing abilities are gifts from God, why do you boast? Why do you exalt yourself? What have you which you have not received? Now, if you received everything as the gift of divine charity, why do you glory as if you had not received it?”¹

Our text contains within itself *a great and comprehensive truth*, namely, that whatever advantages any of us possess over our fellow men are gifts we have received from God. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). [All Scripture references are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.] Paul describes God as “The living God, who giveth us richly all things

¹ Richard L. Pratt Jr, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 7 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 61.

to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17). “He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25). Everything that we are which is not sinful, and everything that we have, which is worth having, we owe to the bounty of our God.²

Messages for Today

- **Pride must be rebuked.**
- **Pride is the opposite of humility.**
- **Pride must be defeated.**

Pride must be rebuked. To prove his point Paul asked if they had anything that they had not received. The Corinthians had many good gifts in their church, but these gifts all came from the Holy Spirit. They had no basis for pride in their spiritual abilities because these were simply free gifts from God. To drive the point home, Paul asked why the Corinthians boasted as though they had not received what they possessed. Those who recognize that they have nothing apart from God’s grace never raise themselves over others as the Corinthian factions were doing.³

Paul asks, “For who maketh thee to differ from another?” (1 Cor. 4:7a). Another way to translate this first rhetorical question is “If there is anything different (or superior) in you, it comes from God, not yourselves.” “You are not superior to anyone else.” “No one has made you superior to others,” or even “No one has given you a higher status than others.”⁴

Who maketh thee to differ? means to differ so that you have an advantage over others. Who in the world gave you a preference over others? Nobody! You only imagine such preference. The full implication is: “Who, by his authoritative acknowledgment, gave you the right to consider yourself superior to others so that they must look up to you and admire you?”⁵

² C. H. Spurgeon, “A Catechism for the Proud,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 24, (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1878), 15.

³ Pratt, n.p.

⁴ Paul Ellingworth and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians*, United Bible Societies Handbook Series (New York: UBS, 1995), 95.

⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), 176-177.

Pride is the opposite of humility. Several passages contrast pride with something else. They show something that is the opposite of pride. In each case the opposite of pride is humility.

The opposite of boasting is humility. Our distinctive abilities are gifts from God. The Corinthians were caught up in playing one person's strengths against another (1:12). Paul says that kind of boasting in man would be impossible if you really understood the truth that abilities are the gift from God. So, the first way to battle pride is to understand this biblical truth and to rest in it and enjoy it. God gives us our powers; so, let him who boasts boast in the LORD, not man.

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. (James 4:6-8)

The opposite of pride here is submitting to God and drawing near to God. Pride wants to be independent, self-governing, and autonomous. They enjoy calling the shots themselves and pulling their own strings. James says stop rebelling and submit because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. (James 4:13-16)

The way boasting shows itself in this text is through unbelief in the sovereignty of God over the ordinary things of life. James says that not believing in the sovereign rights of God to control your life and results in a life of arrogance.

Pride must be defeated. The way to stay humble is to yield to the sovereignty of God in all the details of your life and rest in His awesome ability to work for those who wait for Him.

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand

of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. (1 Pet. 5:5-7)

Peter says that all of us should be clothed with humility. Then he says that one of the things we will do in that humility is cast our anxieties on the Lord.

If there is no humility in our fellowship, our fellowship will be superficial, and ultimately stifled. Pride will lurk at the door, and we will become a self-deceived, sick church.

Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud: for the Lord hath spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness. (Jer. 13:15-16)

The opposite of pride is giving glory to God.

Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord. (Jer. 9:23-24)

Jeremiah says to defeat the enemy of pride by making much of God. Glory in the fact that you know God. Do you want to boast in intellect? Boast in God's. Do you want to glory in strength and beauty? Glory in God's. Do you want to brag on an estate? Brag on God's.

A Message of Hope for You

The word “humble” in Merriam-Webster reads “not proud or haughty: not arrogant or assertive; having or showing a modest or low estimate of one’s own importance.”

People often talk about humbling experiences. What they are referring to is humiliation. Being humiliated is not the same as being humble. Humble is something you are. Humiliation is something you feel.

John Wooden once said, “Talent is God given. Be humble. Fame is man-given. Be grateful. Conceit is self-given. Be careful.”⁶

⁶ John Wooden, <https://www.thewoodeneffect.com/the-importance-of-having-humility/>, 29 May, 2019.

Humility is directly related to our ability and willingness to learn. It is important to stay humble because having humility not only helps you develop a more kind approach to interacting with others, but it also influences how you perceive yourself and the world around you. A quotation often misattributed to C.S. Lewis is “Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it’s thinking of yourself less.”

Discussion Questions

1. What makes you to differ from another?
2. What do you have that God hasn’t given you?
3. If everything you have is from God, why boast as though it were not a gift?

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Lesson 5–United: Becoming One in Christ

UNITED IN MORALITY

Phil Sanders

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

1 Corinthians 5:1-2

How people see sin normally comes from the environment in which they live. What seems a terrible sin to one is casually ignored by others. People who sin tend to downplay the seriousness of their transgression, while the one sinned against understands more clearly the injustice and wickedness of the sin. A culture that widely practices a sin often dismisses the error rather than condemn it. In our postmodern society, where judgmentalism is often considered a greater sin than sexual immorality, confusion as to right and wrong is the norm. This condition was not too unlike ancient Corinth, where the archaic word “corinthianize” was an intransitive verb meaning “live a promiscuous life.”¹

The Heart of the Message

The church at Corinth had failed to deal with a well-known sin among their own. It was such a sin that pagans would not tolerate it, yet the church chose to ignore the evil. A man “has” his father’s wife. This phrase reminds one of the words of Jesus to the woman at the well in Sychar. “The woman answered him ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.’” [All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.] Apparently, the woman was sexually living with a man to whom she was not married, and the man at Corinth was sexually living with a woman that was his father’s wife.

Instead of mourning over the open sin of this brother, the church became arrogant and ignored their responsibility to

¹ “Corinthianize,” *Collins English Dictionary*, 13th ed. (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 2018).

discipline the brother and call him to repentance. “Let him who has done this be removed from among you” (1 Cor. 5:2). Paul determined when they were gathered in the name of the Lord “to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (5:5). He criticized them for boasting and ignoring the sin. “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (5:6-7). When sin is tolerated for one person, the purity of the whole congregation may be lost. If one can sin with impunity, then others will think they pollute can their souls as well.

Paul clearly warned the church “not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one” (5:11). To favorably fellowship a brother or sister who impenitently continues in a sinful practice rather than to judge them creates an environment where sin grows and infects the whole church with apathy toward sin. Once a church accepts sin, they will stop mourning the evil. In time they will become arrogant about it and turn against those who oppose the sin (Ps. 1:1). Permissive attitudes toward sin will divide a church. Paul had to step in at Corinth and say, “Purge the evil person from among you” (5:13).

We must never take sin lightly. Sin is an enemy to our souls, and the wages of sin is still death (Rom. 6:23; Ezek. 18:4). Sin deceives and hardens the heart (Heb. 3:12-13). “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” (Matt. 15:19). Attitudes are infectious, and people may easily be deceived to follow immoral behavior if they are deceived or deceive themselves that their sins aren’t really sinful.

The Lord is the final authority in all things spiritual. No man, group of men, or culture can edit or change the Lord’s morality. The Lord Jesus said, “The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day” (John 12:48). We must not neglect or refuse what the Lord says or drift away from His words (Heb. 2:1-3; 12:25). Should all people truly listen and obey the Lord, they will find unity instead of confusion, chaos, and conflict.

Messages for Today

- **Revering one Lord unifies His people.**
- **What the Lord has spoken remains true for all time.**
- **We must be willing to speak out against sin.**

Revering one Lord unifies His people. Wise men hear the words of the Lord Jesus and do them, while foolish men hear the words but do not do them (Matt. 7:24-27). The true disciples of the Lord Jesus abide in his word, know the truth, and are set free (John 8:31-32). People who call themselves disciples but want to change what God says about sin deceive themselves; they are neither true disciples nor know the truth. Corrupted concepts that twist truth cannot set them free. Many in our culture today listen more to their own feelings and experiences than they do to the Lord Jesus. By doing so they have corrupted their understanding of right and wrong, not realizing their personal convictions will not change what God has said.

Impenitently committing sin cannot lead to salvation. “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Sadly many today, like the Corinthians, deceive themselves that they can live in sin and still inherit a place in the kingdom of God.

What the Lord has spoken remains true for all time. Jesus’ words will indeed judge us all on the last day (John 12:48). The message of the gospel was to last until the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). Jude appealed to brethren “to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Since the Holy Spirit guided the apostles into “all truth” (John 16:13), there can be no further spiritual truths about life, godliness, and salvation. Any change to what was revealed in the first century to the apostles and prophets is surely corrupted and cannot justify sinful behavior. The so-called prophetess Jezebel was teaching and seducing fellow Christians to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols (Rev. 2:20), but she and her followers would suffer unless they repented. She could not change the truth.

We must be willing to speak out against sin. Throughout the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul spoke out clearly against immoral behavior. Some who refrain from sinning themselves will

nonetheless tolerate and overlook the sins of those they love. The Lord Jesus told the lukewarm Laodiceans, “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent” (Rev. 3:19). Paul’s judgment of the immoral man in 1 Corinthians 5 was “so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5). I would rather speak a truth that stings for a time and leads to repentance and eternal life than silently let a sinner deceive himself and lose his soul. One cannot be true to our entrustment with the gospel and remain silent about sin (1 Tim. 1:8-11). Let us be “united in the same mind and the same judgment” when moral issues are at stake (1 Cor. 1:10). Let us speak to one in sin humbly and patiently (Gal. 6:1; 2 Tim. 2:24-26).

A Message of Hope for You

We should want our spirits and the spirits of those we love to be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Since “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:10), let us make it our aim to please him. Let us humble ourselves, repent of sin, and turn to the Lord. When we do so, the Lord will hear our prayers and forgive our sins (Acts 8:20-24).

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss ways people today may ignore the sins of others.
2. How does ignoring the sin of one member of the congregation affect the rest of the church?
3. Discuss how people regard the sins they commit and how they regard the sins committed against them.
4. Why should Christians flee from sin?
5. Why is it important that we speak out against sin?

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Lesson 6–United: Becoming One in Christ

UNITED IN LOVE

Bart Warren

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

The church in the ancient city of Corinth had numerous problems; one of the major issues was a lack of unity. They quarreled, fought, and were divided. So Paul begged them to be of the same mind (1 Cor. 1:10-13). [All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.] They were jealous of each other and forming factions, so the apostle wanted them to see how far from God they were when they acted like this (3:3-4). They were prideful, arrogant, and refused to listen to each other, so Paul pleaded for cooler heads to prevail (4:6, 18-19; 8:1). The sinful division was even affecting their worship (11:18-19). Something had to be done. There needed to be a renewed emphasis on true unity. The church in Corinth had to be reminded what love looked like.

The Heart of the Message

We live in an age characterized by what is known as “expressive individualism.” The self (the individual) reigns supreme. I perform for all to see. I have little to no regard for the feelings or ideas of others. I must express my feelings (whatever they may be) or else I am being inauthentic. My autonomy is all that matters. Love of self trumps love of others.

This is a shallow, hollow, and wicked way to live. There can be no ultimate satisfaction or lasting fulfillment in such a selfish existence. God has called us to something higher and greater. He calls us to a life of unifying love. In fact, love cannot be properly experienced in isolation; it must be encountered and practiced with others.

That being said, there are righteous ways as well as unrighteous ways to express love. It is false to say, “Love is love.” Not all expressions of love are equal. Love must be rightly ordered and prioritized. We should not love what it is wrong to

love. We should not fail to love what should be loved. We should not love too much what should be loved little. We should not love little what should be loved more.

It is clear that the Lord commands us to love Him and each other (Matt. 5:44; 10:37; 22:37-39). But what does this look like in practicality? How does one submit to and obey this command? Love is the desire for the good of others as well as the desire for union with others (Rom. 12:18). This is the pattern modeled and set forth by Jesus: He desires our good (Matt. 7:11; John 3:16; Rom. 8:28; 1 Tim. 2:4), and He desires union with us (John 14:1-3; 17:20-24; 1 Thess. 4:17). Therefore, unifying love is to be the life pattern for the Christian community, the church. In other words, love is to be the very way of life for those who claim to be disciples of Jesus. Love should be the norm rather than the exception. Love should guide the expression of any and all gifts (spiritual or otherwise). The description of love given in 1 Corinthians 13 surely describes the love modeled by Jesus. Thus, it is the love to be demonstrated by husbands and wives, parents and children, co-workers, neighbors, and brothers and sisters in Christ. That is to say, this is the way we should treat each other. Love properly ordered binds us together; it unites us with Christ and one another. 1 Corinthians 13 provides divine insight as to what unifying love is all about.

Love is to be the motivational foundation of all our actions (vv.1-3). Acts performed out of selfishness will eventually leave one feeling empty and hollow. However, deeds done in love profit both the doer and others. Even acts that otherwise look like expressions of love (such as charitable contributions) have no personal redeeming value – they are of no spiritual benefit to us – if they are done without love.

Love is patient (v. 4a). Love does not give up on others easily. Patience born of love will give others the benefit of the doubt. It will give second chances and opportunities to grow. It will assume the best about others and give them plenty of time and space to express themselves without our blowing up in a fit of anger (Gal. 5:20). In short, it means treating others the way we want to be treated (Matt. 7:12). This is the type of love that unifies and solidifies.

Love is selfless (v. 4b-5). It has been said that the key to the nature of love is concern and respect for others. Thus, love is not self-serving and is not preoccupied with the interests of the self. Like Jesus Christ who “did not please Himself” (Rom. 15:3), we

are to “bear with the failings of the weak” (Rom. 15:1). Love is seen in personal sacrifices made in order to lift others up. Boasting and bragging destroys unity. Self-centered attitudes make unity impossible. Love forgives and moves on without keeping score.

Love celebrates truth (v. 6). A modern misconception is that love equates to acceptance and approval. In reality, this could not be further from the truth and is made obvious in this passage. No parent approves of every choice their child makes no matter how deep and sincere their love may be. Love necessitates training and guidance (which entails discipline and correction). It is not love that celebrates sin with the refusal to voice disapproval. In this very letter (5:1-5), Paul rebukes the church for their approval of sexual immorality. Love tells and celebrates the truth.

Love protects (v. 7a). The most common or prevalent translations indicate that love “bears all things.” However, some have translated it as love “always protects.” This is because the word is derived from that which means “to cover” and even has association with that of the roof of a structure. Love bears the weight of pain and ugliness so that the beloved does not have to do so. Hugo McCord memorably rendered the phrase this way: “Love throws a cloak of silence over what is displeasing in another person.”

Messages for Today

- **Unifying love is sacrificial.**
- **Unifying love offers security.**
- **Unifying love is founded on unchanging truth.**

Unifying love is sacrificial. What are we willing to give up to make sure others know we love them? “By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers” (1 John 3:16). We know we are loved when we see someone sacrifice for us. Sacrifice has the power to attract because it is beautiful whereas selfishness is ugly and repels. Unifying love is seen in sacrifice. We must love others this way.

Unifying love offers security. One of the things that makes a home a “home” is the feeling of security that being there brings. Wherever one is made to feel safe, part of things, and important, he or she knows they are “home.” The prodigal son knew he had a place to return once he came to terms with his rebellion and shameful conduct. He needed a place to go after he had wallowed

in the pigpen in the far country of sin, and he knew his father provided for and protected those of his house (Luke 15:11-24). Unifying love offers security. We must love others this way.

Unifying love is founded on unchanging truth. Love and truth are inseparably linked together. Genuine love is submissive to objective standards of right and wrong, good and evil. One cannot abuse others and call it love. One cannot lie, cheat, scheme, or lead astray and call it love. One cannot act in opposition to nature and call it love (Rom. 1:26-27). We must have the courage to tell others they have strayed from the truth. We must have the humility to tell the Lord we have strayed from the truth. Unifying love is built on the truth. We must love others this way.

A Message of Hope for You

Our world desperately needs a deeper and clearer understanding of love. In a world so full of hate and suspicion, we need unifying love. Thankfully, we have one who loves us and perfectly fulfills our every need. It is Jesus Christ who calls on us to love God and each other (Matt. 22:37-39). It is Jesus who modeled love by dying for us (Rom. 5:8; John 3:16). It is Jesus who told us that if we loved Him we would obey Him (John 14:15). And now we love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Discussion Questions

1. What is the biblical idea/definition of love? How does this differ from the world's definition?
2. How does love unify?
3. How do I love others as the Lord would want?
4. How do I love myself as the Lord would want?
5. What does it mean to love what God loves and hate what God hates?

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Lesson 7–Worship in the Assembly

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Craig Ressler

In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

1 Corinthians 11:25-26

*"Worship is the proper response of all moral, sentient beings to God, ascribing all honor and worth to their Creator-God precisely because he is worthy, delightfully so."*¹

The redeemed have an open invitation to enter God's presence and worship. The twenty-four elders of Revelation acknowledged this honor when they fell down, casting their crowns before the throne, saying, "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created" (Rev. 4:11). [All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.]

The honor of *getting* to assemble with the church to worship the one true God ought to be the highlight of our week. God called us out of the world for this purpose. "In fact, the primary reason that God called us into the assembly of the church is that as a corporate assembly we might worship him." ²

The Lord's Supper is one act of worship done in the assembly. After Jesus established the memorial supper, He said, "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29). Jesus was not speaking *literally*, but *spiritually*. He would be with His church when they partook of His Supper. "He sets the table for us. He invites us to the table. We are His guests. And He presides as we gather around the table. As we eat and drink at

¹ R. M. Ashton, R. K. Hughes, T. Keller, D. A. Carson, *Worship By The Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

² Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, ed. Jeff Purswell (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 1003.

the table, we do so to His honor.”³ The Corinthians profaned this occasion.

The Heart of the Message

The Lord’s Supper demonstrates unity in Christ. The assembly is a visual representation of God’s covenant community bound together by the redemption shared through Christ’s death. “What binds us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs, or anything else of that sort. Christians come together because they have all been saved by Jesus Christ and owe him a common allegiance ... they are a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus’ sake.”⁴

Sharing in communion further demonstrates this unity. In 10:16, Paul affirmed the “the cup of blessing which we bless” and “the bread which we break” is a communion [participation/fellowship/sharing] in the blood and body of Christ. The Lord’s Supper brings us into fellowship with brethren gathered at the table and with our Lord Jesus Christ. Sadly, the communion became an occasion for disunity at Corinth (11:18).

The Lord’s Supper can be perverted. The early church had a fellowship meal (Acts 2:46) called a “love feast” (Jude 12). This common meal was followed by the Lord’s Supper. The arrangement sounded good in theory but was a bad idea in practice. Many churches met in the homes of wealthier members. Roman houses had a formal dining room called a *triclinium*. The host likely seated guests and distributed food according to some type of social order. Well-off guests dined in the *triclinium*, while the rest sat in an open court called the *atrium*. This separation only magnified any social class distinctions that already existed. In 11:21, the ordeal turned into gluttonous, drunken revelry (see 2 Peter 2:13) and contempt for poor brethren due to lesser quality and quantity of food. Paul reproved them, saying, “...do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing?” (11:22a).

A feast designed to stress fellowship and mutual affection resulted in division and contempt. What an awful community dynamic to lead into a communal supper! The solemn memorial

³ Dan Chambers, *Showtime: Worship in the Age of Show Business* (Nashville: 21st Century, 1997), 196.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *Love in Hard Places* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 61.

became so perverted that Paul said, “When you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper” (11:20). In effect, he is saying “You may be breaking some bread, passing the cup, and repeating some of Jesus’ words, but what you are doing has nothing to do with the ordinance the Lord instituted. Christ has no part in it.”⁵ Paul chided them, “What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise *you*” (11:22b).

The Lord's Supper is to be taken in a worthy manner. Paul warned against partaking in an unworthy manner (11:27-29). Contextually, this meant eating and drinking in a way that humiliates and demeans others. An unworthy manner can also include partaking while harboring hatred, bitterness, and resentment toward a brother or sister, while clinging to impenitent sin or taking part with your heart and mind disengaged.

The above causes a person to be “guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord” (11:27, ESV), meaning they sin against the very Lord who established the covenant by His blood. “To trample our country’s flag is not to dishonor a piece of cloth but to dishonor the country it represents. To come unworthily to Communion does not simply dishonor the ceremony; it dishonors the One in whose honor it is celebrated. We become *guilty* of dishonoring His body and blood, which represent His total gracious life and work for us, His suffering and death on our behalf. We become guilty of mocking and treating with indifference the very person of Jesus Christ.”⁶ Paul cautions them, “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (11:28). This examination—scrutinizing our motives, actions, and hearts—happens before (not during) eating and drinking. While partaking in unison, we focus on remembering and honoring Christ and reflect on the church’s unity.

Messages for Today⁷

- **The Lord’s Supper has a believer-to-God purpose: worship.**

⁵John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 269-270.

⁶MacArthur, 274.

⁷Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once For All: Bible Doctrine For Today* (Joplin: College P., 2002), 443.

- **The Lord’s Supper has a God-to-believer purpose: edification.**
- **The Lord’s Supper has a believer-to-believer purpose: edification and fellowship.**
- **The Lord’s Supper has a believer-to-unbeliever purpose: evangelism.**

The Lord’s Supper has a believer-to-God purpose: worship. The main purpose is to honor and glorify Christ for His works of redemption. Twice Paul repeated Jesus, “Do this in remembrance of me” (11:24-25). *Remembrance* harkens back to the nature of the Passover as a memorial (Exod. 12:14). Passover celebrated a great temporal and physical deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Christ’s deliverance is infinitely greater, the crushing defeat over sin, death, and Satan (see 1 John 3:8; Heb. 2:14-15). In an act of worship, praise, and adoration, we recall and celebrate who Christ is and what He did for us.

The Lord’s Supper has a God-to-believer purpose: edification. Jesus said, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed *for you*” (Luke 22:20 emp. added). “*For you*” are some of the most precious words in all of Scripture. Christ’s death on the cross was substitutionary. When we say Jesus “died for our sins,” or “bore our sins upon Calvary,” we mean that He put Himself in our place and let our sins and guilt be counted as His own. Jesus did this not only for us and on our behalf, but He did so in our place and instead of us (see 1 Cor. 5:21).⁸ Reflecting on what Christ did *for us* strengthens our faith and causes us to “rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ,” (Rom. 5:11).

The Lord’s Supper has a believer-to-believer purpose: edification and fellowship. Paul said, “...you come together not for the better but for the worse” (11:17). “The better” should have been the building up of one another through love (8:1). When Christ’s diverse, gospel-shaped community gathers around His table and in one accord eats and drinks to Christ’s honor, it is an act of profound fellowship designed to bind Christians together in Christ.

The Lord’s Supper has a believer-to-unbeliever purpose: evangelism. The memorial supper is proclamation of the death of Christ (11:26) for the world’s sake. “Proclaim” (*katangelo*) is often used to describe the ministry of the church to the

⁸ Jack Cottrell, *What the Bible Says about Grace: Set Free!* (Joplin: College P., 2009), 183.

unbelieving world. It is a testimony to the world that we are not ashamed of Christ or His death and that we now belong to Him as His joyful slaves. With one heart and soul we make “the word of the gospel visible.”⁹

A Message of Hope for You

The greatest message of hope comes at the end of verse 26, “...till He comes.” Every Sunday Christians are reminded of Christ’s return and the final consummation of our salvation. Paul says that we “eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Phil. 3:20b-21a). This hope is based on Christ’s own bodily resurrection which Peter refers to as a *living hope* of a future inheritance by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:3). Therefore, Christians “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2).

Discussion Questions

1. “What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?” (v. 22). What is Paul’s point?
2. How are we to understand “in an unworthy manner” (“unworthily” – KJV) in v. 27?
3. Is Paul’s warning in v. 29 of he who “eats and drinks judgment to himself” a reference to temporal chastisement or God’s end time judgment? Explain your answer.
4. Discuss ways we can magnify the importance and significance of the Lord’s Supper in our own minds and hearts?

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⁹ R. L. Pratt Jr, *I & II Corinthians*, Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 7 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 201.

Lesson 8–Worship in the Assembly

A WOMAN'S ROLE

Tim Forlines

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached?

1 Corinthians 14:34-36

Are we guilty of “shackling” women by not allowing them to preach and teach publicly in assemblies where men are present? It seems a growing number of brethren feel this way to the point the subject has become a source of division in the church. Certainly, many women have the ability to preach and teach publicly, but what does the Bible say?

The Heart of the Message

The Scriptures reveal a pattern of male spiritual leadership. The heads of the Israelite tribes were men. The judges, with one exception, were men (indicative, perhaps, of the poor state of men at the time). The kingdom of Israel was ruled by men, with one exception: the wicked usurper, Athaliah (cf. 2 Kings 11). [All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] The prophets who wrote and preached publicly were men; while there were prophetesses, there is no indication they prophesied publicly. The apostles were all men, as were the preachers we read about in Acts and the epistles. The qualifications of elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1) are so stated as to show that men are to serve in these roles. While there were females who “prophesied” (Acts 2:16ff; cf. 21:8-9), again, there is no indication that they did so publicly or in situations placing them in authority over men.

Our discussion concerns the role of women in the assembled church, when both men and women are present. The New Testament information most pertinent to the subject is found in two primary passages of scripture: 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15.

This passage is part of a larger section, spanning three chapters, on the proper use of miraculous spiritual gifts. The

verses we are considering concern times when the church at Corinth had “come together” (vv. 23, 26). While there is debate about the exact nature of these gatherings, they were apparently worship assemblies (cf. vv. 16, 23-25) where the exercise of miraculous gifts was present. It is in this context that three different categories of attendees are told to keep silent (Gr. *sigao*, meaning, to keep completely silent, or to hold one’s peace). One speaking in tongues is to keep silent if there is no interpreter present (v. 28). A prophet is to keep silent if something is revealed “to another who sits by” (v. 30). And in the verses under consideration, women are to keep silent, “for they are not permitted to speak” (v. 34). Paul further commands: “if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church” (v. 35). There is disagreement about the identity of the women being mentioned. Are they the wives of the prophets? Are they contentious women who were prone to speak up inappropriately? Regardless, the prohibition is not based upon mere local considerations, but upon a principle of *submission*, as indicated by what “the law also says” (v. 34). While no specific passage found in the law is mentioned, one cannot help but think of the aforementioned pattern of male leadership found throughout, and specifically, matters related to creation and the fall (to be discussed later). Note further that what Paul is addressing in this passage is universal to the church (v. 33).

The silence urged in this context relates to the matters at hand, regarding speaking up about things being revealed while brethren were assembled. The prohibition should not be taken as demanding silence in general; otherwise, a woman could not sing or make a confession of faith before being baptized, etc.

Since the text mentions miraculous gifts no longer present in worship gatherings, does this mean Paul’s words are not applicable today? No, for at least two reasons: First, as has been pointed out, Paul speaks not merely to local circumstances, but from a scriptural principle of submission. Second, the things said here are consistent with things Paul wrote elsewhere in the New Testament, as seen in the second pertinent passage:

I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women

professing godliness, with good works. Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control. (1 Tim. 2:8-15)

In the beginning of the chapter, Paul exhorted that prayers be offered for all men, including those in places of civil authority (vv. 1ff). Then, in verse 8, he mentions prayer in a way that, along with the following verses, indicates he is speaking of the assembled church and the roles of men and women respectively.

Note the wording of verse 8, specifically the mention of “the men” who are to “pray everywhere.” Paul uses the male-specific *andras*, plural of *aner* (cf. Matt. 14:21), as opposed to the more general *anthropos* (v. 1). This word is used in this context to “distinguish a man from a woman.”¹ As will become clear, Paul is discussing the public prayers that men would lead in the assembled congregation, as there is no biblical prohibition of women praying in general. That Paul is distinguishing men from women is further seen in the verses that follow.

Turning to “the women,” Paul highlights their behavior in the assembly: first, their modesty in dress and deportment (vv. 9-10), and second, their learning “in silence, with all submission” (vv. 11-15). The word for “silence” in this passage is different than that found in 1 Corinthians 14:34. The word here is *hesuchia*: “quietness” or “stillness.” A portrait emerges of a woman sitting quietly at the feet of a teacher (cf. Luke 10:38ff). Lest there be confusion about what is meant, Paul elaborates by prohibiting a woman from teaching or having authority over a man in this setting (v. 12). Interestingly, he uses the same term for “man” as in verse 8 (*aner*). Some assert that the King James rendering, “usurp authority,” leaves room for men to *grant* permission for a woman to preach or teach publicly in a mixed assembly. Other translations are helpful here: “have authority” (NKJV), “exercise authority” (ESV), or “have dominion” (ASV). Men cannot grant a privilege that God has withheld. Note, moreover, that Paul is not speaking of mere local customs or

¹ Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1984), 45

offering his own opinion, as seen in his appeal to the creation and the fall as a basis for understanding the restriction (vv. 13-15; cf. Gen. 2-3). Adam was created first, and in the first instance of sin, Eve was deceived, not Adam.

Messages For Today

- **Men and women, while having different roles, are equal in Christ.**
- **Submission does not suggest inferiority.**
- **Submission requires faith.**

Men and women, while having different roles, are equal in Christ. Some see a woman's more restrictive, submissive role as implying an inferior standing in the kingdom. However, Paul wrote elsewhere about the equality of *all* who are "in Christ" (Gal. 3:28). He also called attention to the great contributions of women to the work of the early church; in Romans 16, he mentions several by name.

Submission does not suggest inferiority. Sometimes those reading passages like the foregoing are bothered by the concept that women are to be submissive to men both in the home and in the assembly. In their minds, such teaching suggests that women are being viewed as inferior to men. While some men (and women) might entertain such thoughts, this idea is foreign to Scripture. Consider what is said about our Lord in Phillipians 2:5ff. Christ is equal to the Father, being divine (v. 6), yet He became submissive to the Father in fulfilling His earthly mission (vv. 7-8). Jesus "became obedient," but He was not inferior. As another example, Christians in a local congregation are to submit to the leadership of elders (Heb. 13:17), yet who would dare suggest that these members are inferior to the elders?

Submission requires faith. Is it not possible that much of the current discussion is a response to pressure from the world? As women take their place alongside men in positions of notoriety and authority in the world, should the church follow suit, especially in the interest of church growth? As women are occupying leadership roles in corporations and in government, the expectation for the church to allow the same is present, with increasing pressure to conform. This is where Christians need to take a step back and ask a very important question: Will we obey men, or will we have the faith to obey God in this matter (Acts 5:29; cf. 1 John 2:15-17; 5:4-5)?

A Message of Hope For You

It is encouraging to know there are many women in our congregations who contribute much that is vital to the spiritual health of the church. These dedicated disciples serve with humility and perseverance throughout the kingdom generation after generation. May we all, men and women alike, aspire to follow their example of faith.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do brethren insist on a non-public role for women in worship?
2. What Scriptures would you use to explain God's will in this matter?
3. Does a woman's submission suggest her inferiority? How do we know?
4. Why do you think some want an "expanded" role for women?

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Lesson 9–Worship in the Assembly

GIVING TO THE LORD

Bill Bryant

On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

1 Corinthians 16:2

A wise man told me many years ago that there are three kinds of people. The first group are the takers. They are selfish, greedy, and uncaring. If you have something they want, they will do their best to take it from you. The second group are the traders. They, in essence, are kind and generous to you if you are kind and generous to them. The vast majority of people fall into this category of sharing, but they have high expectations of compensation. The third group are the givers. They are driven by unconditional love to give what is needed when it is needed. They provide the glue that holds marriages, families, churches, communities, and even nations together.

Our loving God and Father is the ultimate giver. The first phrase of John 3:16 sums it up beautifully, “For God so loved the world that He gave...” [All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] Christianity is the ultimate giving religion, and Jesus Christ is the greatest gift that humanity can ever know and experience. Obeying His gospel opens our eyes and hearts to the generosity of God and compels us to be of the same nature and spirit. It should come as no surprise, then, that the worship of God should come from thankful hearts that want to give Him the honor, glory, and praise that He is due and that want to give to advance His kingdom. The contribution is that aspect of worship whereby His cause, the saving and keeping of souls, can become our cause through our free will offerings. To ensure that this is done “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40), the New Testament provides excellent instruction in an aspect of the Christian faith that can be a unifying experience for members of the church.

The Heart of the Message

The apostle Paul provides not only the divine imperatives for the collection for the saints, but he also provides principles of giving that will also bless the givers. Some may be surprised to

see Paul deal with a benevolence issue immediately following the stirring resurrection narrative contained in chapter 15, but providing assistance to needy Christians is a vital part of the admonition about “abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58). Every Christian must embrace the connection between doctrine and its application in everyday life. A genuine need for financial support had arisen in the church at Jerusalem that could not be met by herself. In Acts 11:27-30, a prophecy was recorded that foretold of a great world-wide famine that evidently had a more devastating effect upon the brethren in Judea. Paul, as an apostle, gave the order to the Corinthian church that contained specific instructions to meet the need. This arrangement order had already been given to the churches of Galatia.

On the first day of every week, each Christian at Corinth was told to lay something aside for Paul’s upcoming collection for the needy saints. Good students of the New Testament soon learn the significance of the first day of the week. The apostle John referred to it as the Lord’s Day (Rev. 1:10). It was the resurrection day (Matt. 28:1). It was the day the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles resulting in their preaching the gospel leading to the formation of the church (Acts 2). It was the day of the week when the early church assembled for worship and took the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7) in order to remember the suffering of Christ for their sins. Since Christians were already gathering together as the church on Sunday, it would be logical to take up a special collection for the Judean saints on that day. Each member of the Corinthian church was challenged to participate in this worthy cause by storing up as he prospered for the Sunday collection to be placed in a common treasury. This consistent practice would certainly prove to be an effective method of collection instead of hurriedly taking up money when Paul came to Corinth. To safeguard the collection, the Corinthian church would then appoint trusted members from their own fellowship to deliver the gift to Judea, with or without Paul’s accompaniment.

When these various churches stepped up to meet this crisis of their Judean brethren, this provided a wonderful opportunity to not only strengthen the bond of unity locally among the brethren in Corinth, but to intensify the bond of love and fellowship between Gentile and Jewish Christians. Paul had already reminded the Corinthian church that “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). Later,

Paul would provide additional guidelines for the proper attitude of mind and heart when contributing funds for the work of the Lord: “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7).

One can only imagine how the hearts of the Judean Christians would be touched when they received the love offerings that would enable them to be warmed and fed. A special and enduring kinship would be experienced all because of their common, but precious faith in the Lord Jesus and the loving acts it prompted from those who saw them as brethren in the Lord. But the greatest blessing would not be to those who received the assistance, but to those who gave it. The Lord said so Himself, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Messages for Today:

- **The contribution must be embraced as a vital part of our worship.**
- **The bond of unity can be strengthened among brethren by our giving nature.**
- **Proper attitudes toward giving will lead to a stronger faith in the Lord.**

The contribution must be embraced as a vital part of our worship. Most Christians are well aware today that the Corinthian brethren had been warned of their abuses of the Lord’s Supper and the improper manner in which they had received its emblems (1 Cor. 11:17-34), but that does not mean that the contribution that usually follows the Lord’s Supper in our assemblies today is to be used as a convenient time to take care of trivial matters such as tending to the children, considering of where to eat following the worship, or allowing the mind to consider other secular things. This should also be a time of personal reflection of how God has poured out His manifold blessings upon us and to consider how we can be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet. 4:10). Every Christian, especially in America, should realize that the amazing standard of wealth and good fortune that is ours has been given to us as God’s vessels, not just for our own benefit, but as a “vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Tim. 2:21).

The bond of unity can be strengthened among brethren by our giving nature. People who are good soil respond well to sincere

and genuine acts of kindness. First John 4:19 reminds us that we love God because He first loved us. His love was demonstrated toward us in His precious Son while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8). Therefore, church leadership should communicate on a regular basis the work and activity that God is doing through the contributions of the local congregation. We should see each other as a “band of brothers and sisters” where all benefit from stirring up love and good works (Heb. 10:24).

Proper attitudes toward giving will lead to a stronger faith in the Lord. When a Christian gives of his means as the Scriptures direct him, it is a declaration that his faith is not in his material possessions, but in the Lord. He is giving to advance God’s kingdom. It is a testimony that he believes the promise the Lord made to provide the basic necessities of life for those who seek first His kingdom (Matt. 6:33). He can empty Himself knowing that God will fill him up again.

A Message of Hope for You

The world around us is in desperate need of givers. Our country is in dire straits because it has forgotten that righteousness, not sin, exalts a nation (Prov. 14:34). It is becoming darker day by day. But the darkness of this present hour is no different than the spiritual darkness of the first century when the church exploded on to the scene. The Lord challenges us to let our lights shine that those around us will see His glory (Matt. 5:16). The light of “Christian givers” made the difference in the first century, and it can do the same today. Let us be about the Father’s business, not only with our hearts, but also with our money.

Discussion Questions

1. What keeps church members today from following the example of the Macedonians who “first gave themselves to the Lord” (2 Cor. 8:5)?
2. Think of some ways in which one might be encouraged to be more thankful for his blessings.
3. What would be a more effective way of administering benevolence funding?
4. What can we do to ensure that business meetings spend more time on church growth than financial matters?

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Lesson 10–Tough Texts

SUFFERING LOSS, BUT SAVED

Dale J. Babinsky

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:10–11

Despite our nation spending \$96 billion on public schools in 1980, the National Commission on Excellence in Education reported the following in April 1983: “The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity.” Additionally, SAT scores had declined. They also stated that 23 million adults in America were “functionally illiterate.”¹ It would not appear that things have improved much since 1983. Forbes magazine reported in 2020 that 54% of the nation’s populace has a literacy rate below that of the average sixth grader.² Our public education system has failed to build the right foundation for students to be successful. Unless, we too, want to suffer from mediocrity in the church, we must strive to follow the admonitions of Paul to build a solid and proper foundation.

The Heart of the Message

Paul stressed the need to build on the right foundation. It is vitally important that we have the right foundation whether we are teaching our children, building a house, or bringing others to Christ. Paul stresses in our passage that there is no other foundation upon which to build than Christ. Any religion that is not based upon Christ is doomed to failure. Popular opinion to the contrary is simply not valid. The Psalmist wrote, “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone” (Ps. 118:22). [All Scripture references are from the New King

¹ G. Curtis Jones, *1000 Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1986), 117.

² Michael T. Nietzel, “Low Literacy Levels Among U.S. Adults Could be Costing the Economy \$2.2 Trillion a Year.” *Forbes Magazine*, Sept. 9, 2020.

James Version unless otherwise noted.] The rejection of the Jews did not stop Jesus from establishing His church with Himself as the chief cornerstone. He is the foundation of the church. If there is no Christ, if there is no resurrection, and if Jesus is not the Son of God, then there is no foundation for the church.

Paul stressed the care needed in how we build. Once the foundation has been laid, in order to have a sound building, care must be taken to continue to build properly. Jesus laid the foundation with His own life (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25). The apostles continued to build upon Jesus as the Holy Spirit brought to their remembrance all that He had said to them (John 14:26; Acts 2:42). We must take heed as to how we build on that foundation or else our labors will be in vain. If we are to lead others to Christ, then we need to lead them to Christ. We dare not convert others to a particular congregation, or worse yet, to ourselves. If we want to seek and save the lost, they must be converted to Christ. That means we teach what Jesus taught, and we say what He said. We cannot alter the word of God because we think that it is too difficult or untimely. Paul encouraged Timothy to “preach the word” both in season and out (2 Tim. 4:2). We need to be diligent about how we build.

Paul indicated that how we build has eternal consequences. In our passage, we can build with precious metals or stones, or we can build with less costly and less durable materials. There is much confusion over this particular text. Some have understood the building materials to be our teaching. Teaching that is true is the precious materials, while teaching the doctrines and notions of men would be the flammable materials that do not pass the test.³ In their argument this would mean that those who teach false doctrine are still saved, though barely, as the phrase “as through fire” would indicate (1 Cor. 3:15).

Interpreting the materials as our teaching, however, does not fit the context of the passage. What is being built up are Christians (1 Cor. 3:5-9, 16-17; 1 Pet. 2:5). What is going to be precious or worthless will be our converts. Either we will convert those to Christ who are going to be faithful, and thus receive a crown of stars upon our heads (1 Thess. 2:19; Phil. 2:16; Dan. 12:3; Matt. 25:23), or they will be exposed on that day and fall

³ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), 145.

away to be lost. In either case, we who have done the *proper* teaching will be saved.

Messages for Today

- **We must build on the foundation of Christ.**
- **Some of our work will endure the fire.**
- **Some of our work may be lost.**

We must build on the foundation of Christ. In order for us to be saved, we must be sure that we are building on the foundation of Christ by teaching and preaching the truth. We cannot claim to be building upon that great foundation if we are presenting our own ideas, teachings, doctrines, and commands. There is no other foundation that can be laid. If we are going to build upon Christ as that chief cornerstone, then we must preach Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).

The Bible instructs us as to the fate of false teachers, and it is not salvation. Regarding false teachers in Ephesus, Paul told Timothy that he had delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan (1 Tim. 1:20). Later, Paul mentioned that Hymenaeus and Philetus were teaching falsehoods concerning the resurrection and overthrowing the faith of some (2 Tim. 2:17-18). Peter said that “untaught and unstable” men twist the scriptures to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16). Paul instructed Timothy to beware of those who teach the doctrines of demons (1 Tim. 4:1-3). Nowhere in this do we see that false teachers will still be saved by the skin of their teeth.

Some of our work will endure the fire. So then, what is this work of ours that will endure? It is not the teachings or a physical building that is being referenced. In the context Paul is discussing the work of evangelism. One wonders if Paul had Jesus and the Parable of the Sower in mind when he stated that he “planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6). Notice in verse 8 that each one will receive a reward according to his evangelistic work. This dovetails with verse 14 where the one whose work endures will be rewarded. Some of our converts will be like precious metal or stones. They will endure the fiery trials of this life and remain saved. Seeing those in heaven whom we have aided in obeying the truth will be a great joy to us in eternity.

Some of our work may be lost. This passage indicates to us that not all of our work will endure the test of time. Paul stated, “If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss” (1 Cor. 3:15), for

someday “each one’s work will become clear” (1 Cor. 3:13). The day of this discovery might be Judgment Day, or it could refer to the light of day, which will reveal whether our work is everlasting or short-lived. Unfortunately, we may do everything correctly in winning a soul to Christ only to have the cares of this world, the trials of life, or a lack of depth in the heart of the believer to cause him/her to become unfaithful (Matt. 13:18-23).

Additionally, the statement at the end of verse 15 about us being saved as if through fire has led some to believe in the doctrine of purgatory. Again, this does not fit with the context. The passage speaks of fire figuratively, which reveals the quality of our work (i.e., the faithfulness of our converts). Fire is not used here in a literal way to indicate punishment.

A Message of Hope for You.

Our salvation depends on the sowing, not the harvest. In both the parable of the sower and our text in 1 Corinthians 3, our responsibility is in the sowing and the watering. Each will be rewarded for what they have done with the Gospel, which is entrusted to us as “earthen vessels” (2 Cor. 4:7). Too often we measure success by the number of baptisms or the number of strong Christians we have created. Notice that it is God who gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6). Our job is to do something with His word.

We need to work. Some of our work may endure and last into eternity. That will be a great reward for us. Some of our work may not hold up until the Day of Judgment. While that would mean we suffer loss, we can still be saved.

Discussion Questions

1. How can we measure success in evangelism?
2. What does a trial by fire reveal?
3. Will everyone we teach become and remain Christians? Why or why not?
4. What are some ways that we can help Christians to remain faithful and be precious metal or stones?

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Lesson 11–Tough Texts

LAWSUITS WITH ONE ANOTHER

Blaine Kelly

To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!

1 Corinthians 6:7-8

Before delving into the details of 1 Corinthians 6:1-8, it should be remembered that there are situations in which it is appropriate, even necessary, to pursue legal action against a fellow Christian. For example, if you or I knew a brother or sister in Christ had physically or sexually abused a child, a spouse, or any other person, we would be in the wrong to use this passage as justification for not handing that person over to the authorities.

Too many stories have arisen in recent years of churches or other organizations that failed to report clear instances of abuse, failed to sufficiently research accusations that were later found to be true, or failed to put proper protocols in place to protect those in their care. While much more could be said on these subjects, we must be clear that 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 does not apply to all legal matters, especially those of a criminal nature. After all, the Paul who wrote 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 also wrote Romans 13:1-7. Nevertheless, 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 does involve a civil matter.

The Heart of the Message

First Corinthians 7 begins a section of the letter that addresses questions presented to Paul by the church. The immorality Paul addressed in chapter 5, however, was something that was reported to him. It seems that the lawsuit from chapter 6 similarly reached Paul by word of mouth, and he was none too pleased to hear of it.

The Corinthian church was becoming known for its materialism. Just as our justice system today provides oversight in adjudicating civil disputes, there were courts in Corinth designated for settling such arguments. You don't have to look far on daytime TV today to watch two parties dispute the pettiest of matters or the smallest sums of money. Whether in the modern United States or ancient Corinth, self-indulgent societies breed a bottomless sense of entitlement and never-ending grievances.

Unfortunately, the church in Corinth was being molded more by its surrounding culture than by the Christ. That reality is often highlighted in sermons and Bible classes addressing the immorality of 1 Corinthians 5. We must not overlook, however, that the greed of chapter 6 is just as grievous of an issue to Paul. That's why he summarizes the entirety of 5:1–6:8 with this reminder: "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-10). [All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.]. The "unrighteous" included the "sexually immoral," "adulterers," those "who practice homosexuality," "thieves," "the greedy," and "swindlers."

Messages for Today

- **Fellow believers should be known for peaceful resolution.**
- **Churches of Christ should be known for wise mediation.**

Fellow believers should be known for peaceful resolution. We do not know the particulars behind this lawsuit. Was one side in the wrong while the other innocent? That is possibly suggested in verse 7 when Paul asks, "Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?" There is also the possibility, however, that each party believed that he was being wronged by the other. Regardless, we know that the two parties were unable or unwilling to discreetly resolve their differences and were now taking it to "The People's Court" of Corinth.

Corinth was notorious for its debauchery, but it was also known for its corruption in legal proceedings.¹ Against such a backdrop, two fellow Christians pursued the worldly path of recompense over the path of brotherly reconciliation. "Among the elite of first-century society it was quite acceptable to institute civil proceedings before a magistrate and jury on trivial matters in order to establish one's social and political superiority over

¹ Clinton E. Arnold, et al., *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*. vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 131.

others.”² The desire to feel superior to others led the Corinthian church to all kinds of problems. Regarding this situation, one or both parties may have claimed, “I have the legal right to pursue this lawsuit!” (1 Cor. 6:12). Having the legal right, however, does not make a course of action spiritually right.

Churches of Christ should be known for wise mediation. In addition to the parties involved in this lawsuit, Paul shames the entire congregation for allowing this lawsuit. To paraphrase 6:5, “How is there not at least one respected figure within the church who could help resolve this matter?” After all, unbelievers should see the church as a model for how to resolve personal disputes, not vice versa. It is with these thoughts in mind that Paul lists a series of rhetorical questions. Let’s consider the two that are most challenging to understand.

The first asks, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” Paul clearly does not refer to saints here as the ultimate judges over other’s souls. Instead it seems that he builds upon the imagery of Daniel 7:22 where “judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.” Jesus also promises in Revelation 3:21 that “the one who conquers . . . [will] sit with me on my throne.” What more the Corinthians understood on this subject is impossible to know. But they certainly should have realized that justice, dominion, and judgment belong to the Most High and his saints, not to the broken systems of earthly courts.

The second (and more challenging) question asks, “Do you not know that we are to judge angels?” Scripture reveals that not all angels are messengers of God. Daniel 10:13 records one of God’s angels meeting the resistance of “the prince” and “the kings of Persia” before “one of the chief princes” Michael comes to the angel’s aid. Michael “and his angels” are also shown waging war against “the dragon and his angels” in Revelation 12:7. Jesus teaches in Matthew 25:41 that “the eternal fire [is] prepared for the devil and his angels.” The devil and his angels continue to wage a spiritual war against us today, “for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present

² Bruce Winter, “1 Corinthians,” In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (4th ed.; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1994), 1169.

darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

A judgment remains not only for the inhabitants of earth but also for those who operate “in the heavenly places.” What that judgment will look like mostly remains unknown, but the images of Revelation 20:1-4 indicate that the faithful will play a role in judging and reigning over Satan. Paul’s question in 1 Corinthians 6:3 could be an acknowledgement of that future judgment.

While there is certainly room for healthy debate as to the exact meaning of these rhetorical questions, Paul leaves no doubt regarding his core instruction: brethren should not rely on the world’s mediation. The faithful are going to reign in the new heavens and the new earth! Why on earth should we turn to the world for righteous judgment today? 1 Corinthians redirects the church to be a fellowship of Christ-followers who work things out instead of letting differences escalate. Such a spiritual posture requires love, humility, and sacrifice—virtues that were in short supply in Corinth.

A Message of Hope for You

The teachings of Christ prioritize reconciliation over vengeance and the sacrifice of ego over personal victories. Matthew 5:23-26 reveals the urgency of reconciliation, even if it comes at personal cost. Real forgiveness demands that one party absorbs the cost of another’s debt. Regarding the situation in Corinth, Paul admonishes all involved that absorbing whatever financial cost was involved would have been far better than dragging personal disputes into the public domain.

It would be spiritually short-sighted to view 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 (or Matt. 5:23-26) as only applying to civil lawsuits between brethren. The greater principles involved here teach us to prioritize quick and quiet peacemaking when differences arise among us. If necessary, the counsel of wise and respected mediators within the church may be called upon (1 Cor. 6:5; cf. Matt. 18:15-20). It is better, however, to sacrifice one’s ego and one’s wealth than to allow grievances to escalate and for the witness of the church to be compromised.

Discussion Questions

1. Beyond the realm of legal disputes, what does it look like to practice the principles of 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 and Matthew 5:23-26 among one another today?
2. How can the prospect of the saints' God-appointed role at the final judgment give clarity to how we handle differences and disagreements among us?
3. In what ways can Christians and churches today rely too heavily on the standards and systems of the world instead of operating by kingdom righteousness?

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Lesson 12–Tough Texts

NOT UNDER BONDAGE

David L. Lipe

But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.

1 Corinthians 7:15

The institution of marriage touches the lives of every one of us. It was a matter of great concern to the early Christians in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul deals with questions from the Corinthians about the subject of marriage. Much insight can be gained from this chapter concerning the marriage relationship. This chapter may be divided into three main sections as follows: (1) principles for married life (vv. 1-9), (2) principles for the married (vv. 10-24), and (3) principles for the unmarried (vv. 25-40). The purpose of this article is to discuss Paul's principles for the married, specifically the principles applicable to Christians in mixed marriages (vv. 12-16).

The Heart of the Message

After discussing matters pertaining to Christians married to each other (vv. 10-11), Paul takes up a consideration of matters relative to Christians in mixed marriages (vv. 12-16). To this group he says, "I say, not the Lord." There are reasons to believe that verse 12, like many others in this chapter, concerns inspired judgment. It is difficult to say unequivocally what the significance of "I say" in verse 12 really is. In any case, whether inspired "judgment" or inspired "instruction," we should try to outline just what he says and abide accordingly.

Apparently, Paul is responding to some such question as "Should Christians married to non-Christians leave them?" Paul's answer is that if the unbelieving wife "be pleased" (from *suneudokei*, "to approve with another") to live with her husband, then he should not leave her. The same is true for women who have unbelieving husbands. Both men and women are governed by the same principles. The reason they are to remain together is discussed in verse 14. The unbeliever is "sanctified" by the believer. To say the unbeliever is "sanctified" does not mean that the person is a Christian. Paul probably has in mind that the unbeliever is sanctified (set apart) in connection with the believer. By their union the marriage itself is sanctified, and the

believer is not polluted by having an unbelieving companion. Thus, Paul assures Christians who were obviously worried about the possibility of an unholy union that their marriage was sanctified in the sight of God. If this were not true, the children of the relationship would be “unclean” (v. 14), i.e., illegitimate. But since the offspring of the marriage is holy (v. 14), the marriage itself must be holy. Though Paul encourages mixed marriages to continue by assuring those in such marriages that their union is legitimate, one should not conclude that Paul encourages Christians to marry non-Christians. The mixed marriage he is discussing resulted from the conversion of one of the spouses in a preexisting marriage.

In verses 15 and 16, Paul answers the question “What if the unbeliever is not content to dwell with the believer?” Paul has just emphasized that a potential separation should not be caused by the believer. But what if the unbeliever deserts the believer? Paul’s answer is “Let him depart.” He gives two arguments appealing to the believer to accept the unbeliever’s decision.

First, Paul says a brother or sister is not under bondage (v. 15). Some brethren contend that this exception to the obligation the Christian has in maintaining the marriage provides the right of divorce and remarriage on the part of the Christian. That this is not the case can be seen from an examination of *chōrizetai* (“departs”) and *ou dedoulōtai* (“is not under bondage”).¹

Chōrizetai is a present middle, indicating that the unbeliever wishes to separate himself, apparently because of the faith of the believer. Paul uses *chōrizesthō* (present imperative middle) to say that the believer may let the unbeliever depart, since the unbeliever wants to separate himself. Those who affirm that the believer has the right to divorce and remarry because of the desertion of the unbeliever make the mistake of overinterpreting the word *chōrizō* (from which *chōrizetai* is derived). *Chōrizō* generally means “to dissociate one’s self, to part,” signifying a separation (without a civil divorce). It can also be used as a technical word for divorce. Support for the latter is found in the papyri, where it “has almost become a technical term in

¹ These remarks on verse 15 are from my article “1 Corinthians 7 Does Not Provide Another Ground for Divorce and Remarriage,” in *Your Marriage Can Be Great!* (Jonesboro: National Christian Press, 1978), 454–59. Used by permission.

connexion with divorce.”² Whatever view one takes, according to 1 Corinthians 7:11, Christians scripturally married to each other should stay together. However, if some type of separation does occur, Paul suggests two alternatives: either (1) remain unmarried or (2) be reconciled to the lawful companion. Accordingly, it cannot be maintained that *chōrizō* justifies remarriage.

The contention that 1 Corinthians 7:15 provides additional grounds (i.e., other than fornication) for divorce and remarriage is also not supported by *ou dedoulōtai* (“is not under bondage”). *Dedoulōtai* is the perfect passive indicative of *douloō*, meaning “to enslave,” and with the negative (*ou*) means “does not remain a slave” or “is not in a state of slavery.”³ The perfect tense indicates a completed action with an existing result. The force is that the Christian has not been under bondage (enslaved) and is not now under bondage (enslaved). *Douloō* is used with reference to the Christian being a slave to righteousness (Rom. 6:18) and to God (Rom. 6:22). The noun form, *doulos*, is used to refer to a Christian being a bondservant of men (1 Cor. 7:23), a slave of Christ (Eph. 6:6), and a slave of corruption (2 Pet. 2:19). Both the verb and noun refer to many other things to which Christians are slaves and may become slaves.

First Corinthians 7:15 simply indicates that the Christian is not so bound to the non-Christian that he is obligated to renounce his Christianity in order to maintain the marriage relationship with the non-Christian. The bond between the Christian and Jesus Christ is greater than all bonds. This bond takes precedence over any other bond (cf. Matt. 10:37; Luke 14:26).

Much of the misunderstanding about 1 Corinthians 7:15 is due to a failure to distinguish between *deō* (“to bind”) and *douloō* (“to enslave”). *Deō* occurs forty-four times in the New Testament, and in the three passages where the bond is unquestionably the

² James H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 696; see Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: U of C Press, 2000), 1095.

³ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 4, *The Epistles of Paul* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931), 128.

marriage bond (1 Cor. 7:27, 39; Rom. 7:2), *deō* is used—not *douloō*. *Douloō* occurs eight times and is never used to refer to the marriage bond (unless 1 Corinthians 7:15 is an exception). If Paul was talking about the marriage bond in 1 Corinthians 7:15, why did he use *douloō* (which is actually a stronger word than *deō*) instead of *deō* (as he did in 1 Corinthians 7:27, 39 and Romans 7:2 when he was talking about the marriage bond)? Evidently, Paul wanted the reader to know that he was not talking about the marriage bond, but rather about yielding to pressure from the unbeliever to renounce Christianity in order to preserve the marriage relationship.

Since (1) 1 Corinthians 7:15 is the only passage anyone has ever used to attempt to prove the believer has the right to divorce and remarry if deserted by an unbeliever, and (2) *chōrizō* (“to depart”) does not imply remarriage, and (3) *douloō* (“to enslave”) does not refer to the marriage bond, then the theory that the believer has the right to remarry if deserted by an unbeliever is false.

Second, in appealing to the believer to accept the unbeliever’s decision to separate, Paul writes, “God has called us to peace” (v. 15). To try to maintain a marriage relationship with an unbeliever who opposes such would bring about the very opposite of peace. In light of opposition to the marriage by the unbeliever, the only way to preserve the peace to which the Christian has been called is to accept the decision of the unbelieving partner.

It might be objected that the Christian should oppose the departure of the unbeliever on the grounds that the believing spouse might ultimately win the unbelieving spouse to Christ. Paul urges against this in verse 16 by saying that the possibility is too uncertain:⁴ “How do you know whether you will save your spouse?” One should not confuse Paul’s point with Peter’s, where he says a Christian wife may convert her unbelieving husband (1 Pet. 3:1). Peter is speaking of cases in which the unbeliever has no interest in dissolving the marriage.

⁴ The opposite interpretation of verse 16 is found in the NRSV, which describes the hopeful possibility of saving one’s spouse (“for all you know, you might save”).

Messages for Today

- **People in mixed marriages (Christian and non-Christian) should stay together.**
- **If an unbeliever does not wish to dwell with a believing companion and departs on his/her own, the believer should let him/her go.**
- **Desertion of a believer by an unbeliever (7:15) does not give the believer the right of divorce and remarriage.**
- **Sexual immorality is the only ground by which one has the right to divorce and remarry (Matt. 19:9).**
- **In order to preserve peace, the believer should not fight the unbeliever's determination to separate.**

People in mixed marriages (Christian and non-Christian) should stay together. Paul is not encouraging Christians to marry non-Christians. All sorts of issues arise in such cases, especially if there are children involved. However, if the mixed marriage resulted from one of the spouses being converted, then the spouses should stay together.

If an unbeliever does not wish to dwell with a believing companion and departs on his/her own, the believer should let him/her go. The bond between the Christian and the Lord is the greatest of all bonds whether it is the marriage bond, the parental bond, or any other bond. One is never enslaved to any bond except the bond between the Christian and Jesus Christ.

Desertion of a believer by an unbeliever (7:15) does not give the believer the right of divorce and remarriage. Matthew 19:9 stands as a universal principle. Jesus says, "Whoever divorces his wife, except it be for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." The significance of "whoever" is all married persons, i.e., Christians as well as non-Christians. The context of Matthew 19:9 indicates that the principle stated is not meant as a new covenant principle but as an interpretation and application of God's first word on marriage. In Matthew 19:5, Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24. Jesus roots the teaching of Matthew 19:9 in the will of God "from the beginning" (19:8). This kind of evidence points away from an application of those under the new covenant only toward an application to all men.

Sexual immorality is the only ground by which one has the right to divorce and remarry. This is plainly stated by Jesus in

Matthew 19:9 when he says that those who divorce and remarry except for sexual immorality commit adultery.

In order to preserve peace, the believer should not fight the unbeliever's determination to separate. In verse 15, Paul says, "God has called us to peace." God wants peace in all our relationships, and here there is a call for peace in the marriage relationship. To maintain a marriage relationship where an unbeliever opposes the decision of a spouse to become a disciple of Christ will never make for peace. Sometimes, the only way to maintain the peace to which the Christian has been called is to accept the decision of the unbelieving partner.

A Message of Hope for You

Marriage was instituted by God for companionship and the procreation of the human race. According to God's instructions, the marriage relationship may be entered into by one man and one woman. The ideal of the relationship is that the man and the woman be committed to each other until separated by death. Sometimes the marriage relationship is broken for frivolous reasons. Other times it is broken because of spousal abuse. For example, if a wife's life is in danger from an abusive husband, she may separate from her husband. Sometimes it is broken because an unbelieving spouse does not want to remain in the marriage relationship. But none of these cases constitute grounds for divorce and remarriage. Only when one spouse is sexually immoral can the other spouse both divorce and remarry. The ideal has always been and will always be that marriage is entered into by one man and one woman until the relationship is ended by death.

Discussion Questions

1. What does Paul say in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 about divorce and remarriage?
2. Discuss whether the unbeliever in a marriage relationship might be converted (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1, 2).
3. Since Paul gives instructions to those in mixed marriages, does this imply that Christians should marry non-Christians?
4. What does “not under bondage” mean?
5. Does desertion of a believer by an unbeliever constitute grounds for divorce and remarriage?

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Lesson 13–Tough Texts

ONLY IN THE LORD

Michael R. Harrison

A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 7:39-40

Paul's first epistle to the Corinthian church was partly dedicated to answering questions issued to the apostle. While answering some of those questions, Paul set forth some valuable principles that instruct the faithful of God's will regarding the Christian and marriage. Among these instructions are some practical ideas that enhance the Christian home and help resolve conflicts (cf., 7:1-11). Since marriage is a universal institution and the laws regulating it are universal, Paul sets forth further instruction regarding the marriage of a believer to an unbeliever (cf. 7:12-13).

Paul offers a final word of instruction for the widow: "A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord" (39) [All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted]. What is the meaning of the expression "only in the Lord?" What is the will of God regarding the Christian in choosing a spouse? Throughout this lesson, we will explore the meaning of Paul's statement: "only in the Lord." This study will also focus on learning how that message is expressed in the broader context of Scripture and how the Bible teacher might instruct others on Christian marriage.

The Heart of the Message

Paul's instruction to marry only in the Lord suggests two possible ideas. Paul may be suggesting that widows who choose to marry must do so consistent with the doctrine of Christ. However, it may be that Paul is instructing Christians to marry only another Christian. There may not be a significant difference between these two ideas. If the phrase "only in the Lord" means that a Christian must marry consistent with the teaching of the New Testament, then the marriage law of Christ is not the only

New Testament teaching that should be considered. If it means a child of God ought to marry only another Christian, then he/she remains obligated to do so consistent with the divine laws regulating marriage.

The apostle Paul is instructing the widow on the category of person she should marry. A widow is free to be married "to whom she wishes." The widow's liberty to choose a spouse is qualified by the following words: "only in the Lord." Since, in the previous phrase, "whom" she marries is under consideration, Paul is instructing the type of person she should marry rather than the conditions of that marriage. The widow may exercise some liberty in whom she chooses, but it is God's will that she chooses a Christian. In their commentary on 1 Corinthians, McGarvey and Pendleton quote this verse and add the following comment: "to a Christian."¹ A. T. Robertson says about Paul's instruction that "every marriage ought to be in the Lord"² refers to the person and not the condition. Jackson notes, "Most of the respected Greek authorities contend that the phrase signifies to "marry a Christian."³ BDAG cites this specific verse and says the expression means to "marry a Christian."⁴

There are certainly objections to consider regarding this view. Would violating Paul's instruction mean repentance requires severing the marriage relationship? The answer to that is certainly "No." Any act of repentance must be consistent with other New Testament instructions. Paul addresses the issue of a believer who finds him/herself married to an unbeliever. Paul's instruction is "...If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her" (1 Cor. 7:14). Repentance requires continued obedience to this marriage law and a change of heart regarding the self-willed disposition that disregarded God's ideal will that lead to the union in the first place.

¹ J. W. McGarvey & Philip Y Pendleton, *Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans* (Delight: Gospel Light, 1916), 89.

² Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1931), 136.

³ Wayne Jackson, *A New Testament Commentary*, 3rd. ed. (Jackson: Christian Courier 2019), 319.

⁴ Walter Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd. ed. (Chicago: The U of C Press, 1979), 260.

It is argued that the expression "only in the Lord" is equivalent to the command for children to obey their parents "in the Lord" (Eph. 6:1). Paul is not at all suggesting that children should only obey Christian parents. Again, this view ignores the qualifying language in the text. In Ephesians, Paul qualifies the word "obey" with the phrase "in the Lord." The apostle makes this point clear when he highlights the OT promise associated with honoring one's mother and father (cf. Exod. 20:12). Thus, Paul qualifies the kind of obedience expected towards the parents, not the parents themselves. While the phrase in Ephesians is similar, the context reveals a very different emphasis.

The broader context of scripture expresses God's ideal will for his people concerning ungodly unions. The Lord had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods" (1 Kings 11:2). Paul instructs the brethren at Corinth, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14). The image of an unequal yoke is taken from an Old Testament reference (Deut. 22:10), where a prohibition is issued against harnessing a clean animal to an unclean animal. Paul uses this figure to illustrate the believer who has been cleansed yoking with the unbeliever who refuses to be cleansed. What business have they under the same yoke? Many a believer accepts the yoke of the unbeliever upon their neck and even imagines that they can maintain faith's yoke.⁵

Following the prohibition of unequally yoking oneself to an unbeliever, Paul issues a series of five self-answering questions that are designed to strike at the heart of the issue of the absurdity of a believer with their neck under the yoke of an unbeliever. What business has the believer in such an unnatural, self-contradictory association? When reflecting on his right to receive compensation for preaching the gospel, Paul advances this thought, "Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife..." (1 Cor. 9:5). Note again that Paul expresses his liberty to take a wife of his choosing, but subjects that liberty to the divine ideal: "a believing wife."

The responsibility placed upon the widow to marry only in the Lord should rest in the heart of every Christian. His divine

⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg), 1078.

ideal is for her good to aid her journey to heaven, and every Christian should make the Christian home their highest priority, which is the practical application of this verse for Christians today.

Messages For Today

- **God’s plan for the spiritual development of souls is the Christian home.**
- **God’s plan for the spiritual development of the church is the Christian home.**
- **God’s plan to facilitate evangelism and soul-saving is the Christian home.**

God’s plan for the spiritual development of souls is the Christian home. Marriage is not just the proper place for the free enjoyment of human sexuality but the plan of God for the spiritual development of Christian character. The Christian life is active and overt, and the mother that teaches the Bible to her children is doing church work. Likewise, the father who takes time to observe what we call “teachable moments” to instruct his children in some godly principle of moral living is doing church work. The Christian home, as God intended, is a place for developing Christian character (Deut. 6:4-9; Prov. 22:6).

God’s plan for the spiritual development of the church is the Christian home. When God created marriage, he did so with the church in mind and ultimately with salvation in mind. The church will never rise above the character and quality of the Christian homes which make up the local body.

God’s plan to facilitate evangelism and soul saving is the Christian home. Church work fills all of life and is the normal outward expression of inner love for Christ. This outward expression manifests in being good and doing good, which is necessary for the gospel to be carried out in communities worldwide. Frequently, this is accomplished in neighbor talking to neighbor. When the preacher takes time to visit, too often he is considered to be doing his professional duty. When a neighbor goes, it strikes others with the admiration of sincere devotion to the Christian life. It is the Christian home that often encourages this work. Thus, the Christian home will glorify the name of Christ as it draws the honest soul to His saving message.

A Message of Hope For You

We must impress upon our young people and drill it into their minds day and night that God's will for them is to marry only in the Lord. Remind all Christians that while we are at liberty to choose our spouse, we should desire to take along a believing mate. Indeed, marriage to an unbeliever could be the undoing of their soul.

Who can measure the value and, indeed, the debt that humanity owes to Christian homes? There is an obvious connection between the home and the functioning fruitful church. As goes the home, so goes the church. When Christian homes are what God intends for them to be, then the local body of Christ will be what God intended for it to be.

Discussion Questions

1. What might be the dangers of marrying an unbeliever?
2. How might the Christian facilitate redemption for their unbelieving mate and children?
3. How can the Christian home be used in evangelism?
4. How can the Christian home be a service institution for the church?

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Lesson 14–Tough Texts

HEADCOVERING

Kevin L. Moore

But if anyone seems to be contentious, we do not have such a custom nor the churches of God.

1 Corinthians 11:16

First Corinthians 11:1-16 is just a small segment of a lengthy letter Paul wrote to the mid-first-century Corinth church. Our purpose is to understand what he communicated to this particular audience, and how it applies in our current context.

The Heart of the Message

You all be imitators of me, as I also [am] of Christ. Now I am commending you because you remember all things of me and are retaining the precepts just as I delivered to you. But I am desiring you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is head of woman, and God is head of Christ. (1 Cor. 11:1-3) [All Scripture references are the author’s own translation unless otherwise noted.]

With no chapter divisions in the original, the first verse of chapter 11 is more closely linked to the previous section about self-denial for the sake of others (10:23-33). Nevertheless, this reminds us that the following verses do not stand alone but are part of a larger discussion. Paul begins the paragraph praising the Corinthians (in stark contrast to v. 17) for remembering what he had earlier taught. The phrase “I am desiring you to know” is indicative of something not previously addressed, namely the relationship between God’s hierarchical arrangement and social decorum.

Every man praying or prophesying having [something] down upon his head disgraces his head. But every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered is disgracing her head; for she is one and the same [thing] as the one having been shaved. For if a woman is not being covered, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is dishonorable to a woman to have her hair cut or to be shaved, let her continue to have her [head] covered. (1 Cor. 11:4-6)

A man in first-century Corinth engaging in Christian activities with something covering his head was dishonorable. Praying is

the act of communicating to God, while prophesying is the proclamation of divine revelation and something not everyone could do (12:10, 28). While both activities were part of the worship assemblies at Corinth (14:1-40), neither was restricted to this setting.

It was disgraceful for a woman in first-century Corinth to have her head shaved or to pray or prophesy without the conventional head-dress. Whatever the men are said to be doing in 11:4, the same is attributed to women in verse 5; thus, the setting under consideration cannot be a mixed worship assembly (cf. 14:34-35). In the early developmental stages of the Christian movement, women as well as men were endowed with the miraculous gift of prophecy (Acts 2:17; 21:9) and were to be teachers (Tit. 2:3-5) and workers in the Christian community (Rom. 16:1; Phil. 4:2-3), though not permitted to function in leadership positions over men (1 Tim. 2:11-12). Paul's directives would therefore apply to any situation in which praying or prophesying was done, such as all-female gatherings (Acts 16:13; Tit. 2:3-5), with emblems of modesty and decorum maintained. The advice is for a woman to continually [present tense] have her head covered or otherwise be disgraced.

For indeed a man is not obliged to be covered continually, being the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man is not out of woman but woman is out of man; for also man was not created for the sake of the woman, but woman for the sake of the man. (1 Cor. 11:7-9)

A man, who is God's image and glory, is not obliged to continually [present tense] have his head covered. But since woman is the glory of man and created for his sake, the impression that may be conveyed by her appearance should not be disregarded.

On account of this the woman ought to have *exousía* over her head: on account of the angels. Nevertheless woman is not without man and man is not without woman in the Lord; for just as the woman is out of the man, thus also the man is through the woman; but all things are from God (1 Cor. 11:10-12)

The words "a sign of" (ASV, NIV), "a symbol of" (NKJV, NASB), or "a veil" (RSV) are not in the original text. The noun *exousía* essentially means "freedom of choice, right," with related nuances including "capability, might, power," "authority, warrant,"

and “domain.”¹ In the three chapters leading up to the present discussion, Paul has been discussing Christian liberty and the importance of exercising it responsibly and in consideration of others (8:9; 9:18; 10:24; 10:32–11:1). Every time *exousía* occurs, it is used in the active sense of liberty, right, or freedom (7:37; 8:9; 9:4-6, 12, 18).

Angels have freedom of choice yet remain in their rightful sphere of subjection; in so doing, God is glorified. If a woman were nothing more than a subjugated slave, forced against her will to submit to man, she would not be a glory to him. It is only when she has the freedom of choice (*exousía*), and exercises that freedom to fulfill her submissive role that she avoids disgrace and is truly the glory of man. Nevertheless, neither woman nor man is totally independent of the other. Both are mutually dependent under God’s authority.

You all judge among yourselves; is it proper for a woman to be praying to God uncovered? Is not even the nature itself teaching you that, on one hand, if a man has long hair it is a shame to him, but on the other hand, if a woman has long hair it is a glory to her? For the hair corresponds to a covering having been given [to her]. (1 Cor. 11:13-15)

The imperative “judge among yourselves” (cf. 10:15) is an appeal to collective judgment and propriety, implying a social norm with which the Corinthians were already familiar. The instruction of “the nature itself” is not applicable to the natural world that allows the hair of both genders to grow lengthy but refers to “a mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature.”² The Corinthians’ natural sense of propriety, based on conventional norms, deemed long hair on a man disgraceful but proper for a woman, illustrating the appropriateness of her head being covered.

“But if anyone seems to be contentious, we do not have such a custom nor the churches of God” (1 Cor. 11:16). The “we,” distinct from “the churches of God,” presumably refers to apostolic leaders (cf. 1:1; 4:9-13; 9:1-5). The pronoun *toioūtos*

¹ Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich (BDAG), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: U of C Press, n.d.), 352-353.

² Joseph Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), 606.

does not mean “other” (NASB, NIV, RSV); it means “such” (ASV, ESV, N/KJV). This was not a mere “practice” but a customary habit (*sunētheia*). The head-covering custom did not originate with the apostles or the churches, nor was it bound by the apostles on the churches. It was not a religious edict. It should therefore not be an issue for religious disputes.

Messages for Today

- **There is a hierarchical arrangement, established at creation, involving the roles of male leadership and female subordination.**
- **It is right and good to live in harmony with customs that are right within themselves.**
- **A Christian’s demeanor must always evidence a genuine concern for purity and decency.**

There is a hierarchical arrangement, established at creation, involving the roles of male leadership and female subordination. Maintaining natural distinctions honors the Creator’s design. Gender egalitarianism disregards the broader context of this passage, while the opposite extreme, robbing women of the respect and dignity they are due, is also erroneous. In the Lord both sexes are spiritually equal and co-dependent, having active roles in spiritual service within the parameters of biblical guidelines.

It is right and good to live in harmony with customs that are right within themselves. The emphasis of our text concerns the consequences of a woman in Corinth uncovering her head, not the express purpose of the head-covering. While society does not set the standard for what is morally right, in certain circumstances it helps determine what is improper and offensive. Christians are to be different from the world but are not totally divorced from their surroundings and should modestly avoid drawing undue attention to themselves (cf. 5:1; 9:19-23; 10:32-33).

A Christian’s demeanor must always evidence a genuine concern for purity and decency. The means of expressing this principle in first-century Corinth included women having long hair and covering their heads, with the opposite applying to men. The underlying principle remains relevant, but the symbols do not, unless one’s cultural conventions are comparable to ancient Corinth. In an environment where being unveiled is not “one and

the same [thing] as the one having been shaved,” the appeal to “let her continue to have her [head] covered” is not applicable.

A Message of Hope for You

The wearing or not wearing of a head-covering is a matter of personal liberty and not a collective work of the church. Whether a Christian woman today is veiled or unveiled in or out the assembly, her dress and demeanor ought to conform to acceptable standards of decency and reflect her God-given purpose.

Discussion Questions

1. How do differing translations of this passage create confusion and misunderstanding?
2. How does the broader context of 1 Corinthians help counter popular misconceptions?
3. Since Paul was trying to avoid contentions over this issue, how can we do the same with respect to current disagreements and disputes?

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Lesson 15–Tough Texts

BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD

Stephen Null

Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?

1 Corinthians 15:29

Two thousand years ago the apostle Peter wrote the following statement regarding his fellow apostle, Paul: “And consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” [All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] Surely Peter’s declaration rings true regarding Paul’s teaching on baptism for the dead. In the one verse that mentions the practice, some forty different interpretations have arisen.¹ How is it possible that so many diverse doctrines could arise from one statement? Contrary to these varied views, Paul’s statement is not as unclear as some would lead us to believe. Let us explore Paul’s teaching and clarify his purpose.

The Heart of the Message

First, Paul’s statement comes in the context of the resurrection. We need to appreciate that every difficult text we encounter in the Scriptures has a context that illuminates its meaning. In our text’s context, Paul thoroughly refutes the claim advanced by some of the brethren in Corinth that there was no resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12). He details at length the evidence for the resurrection, which includes the prophecies of Scripture and the eyewitness testimony of hundreds (1 Cor. 15:1-8). He also draws out the ramifications of denying the resurrection. If the resurrection did not happen, then Christ was not raised up, the faith the Corinthians professed was meaningless, their teachers were peddlers of falsehood, and faithful loved ones were gone forever (1 Cor. 15:13-19). Our text was written to expand on

¹ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011), 449.

these implications to demonstrate the fallacy of denying the resurrection.

Second, Paul's statement concerns unbelievers who obeyed the gospel because of the influence of Christian loved ones who departed this life. Of those forty different interpretations, this is the simplest and most natural within the context. Brethren who were near to death would plead with their unbelieving family and friends to obey Christ's gospel message lest they miss out on the blessedness of the resurrection. Undoubtedly, they would remind them of the seriousness of eternity and the consequences for disobedience. With such an admonition, these unbelievers would give serious thought and possibly submit to immersion in water thanks to the pleading of their dear loved one.² It is not that some of the Corinthians were vicariously—that is, on behalf of another—baptized for unbelievers. One author who suggests this concept even argues that other interpretations are mere conjecture.³ What is true conjecture is forcing a concept that the Scriptures do not teach in any other text by direct statement or implication, which is the observation to which we now turn.

Third, Paul's statement does not contradict plain Bible teaching. While we must always use the context of a given passage for our understanding of it, we must also remember the overall context of the Scriptures in these matters. Paul wrote thirteen of the New Testament's twenty-seven works. In none of these thirteen works did Paul provide instructions for vicarious baptism. However, on many occasions, he wrote about the necessity of baptism and what it accomplishes. In fact, Paul alluded to the fact that the Corinthians' sins were cleansed through immersion in water (1 Cor. 6:9-11). To the brethren in Rome Paul wrote that immersion in water re-enacted the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, which brought the immersed into contact with Jesus' precious blood (Rom. 6:1-4). Paul would go so far as to state that all who are immersed into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27). These passages prove that Paul taught the essential nature of immersion, but how do we know these teachings could *not* be applied vicariously?

² Gleason L. Archer, *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 402.

³ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011), 210.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul hauntingly noted that all people will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). Each one, he says, will receive what they have done in the body, whether good or bad. This teaching speaks of individuals facing judgment, not of one facing judgment for many. If baptism can be vicarious, then that would naturally mean that those for whom the immersed went into the water would not face judgment themselves. It would also indicate that there is a second chance to obey after death, which contradicts several passages, including the words of our Lord concerning Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31). These ideas may gain traction among our denominational friends because of the comfort they provide, but they are not supported by Scripture. To suggest Paul's statement teaches vicarious baptism or any action resembling it contradicts a multitude of passages and would throw everything he taught into question.

Messages for Today

- **The resurrection is central to our faith in Christ.**
- **Immersion in water brings us the hope of the resurrection.**
- **Our example in this life can move others to obedience.**

The resurrection is central to our faith in Christ. The emphasis of our text and of the entire context is how critical the resurrection is to the faith of Christ. Denial of the resurrection is tantamount to denying Christ Himself, for it suggests He was a liar and a deceiver. It also robs us of any hope we would have for the future. By drawing out one of the implications of denying the resurrection in our text, Paul forever proves that the resurrection of Jesus is the lynchpin of all that we know and for all that we hope. Let us allow the resurrection to occupy the central place in our minds as we remember we serve a risen Savior who has work for us to do (1 Cor. 15:57-58).

Immersion in water brings us the hope of the resurrection. When we speak of immersion in water, we rightly emphasize that through this obedient act, one receives the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ. Do we always emphasize the hope such a reality brings? Because of the salvation Christ has enabled us to experience through obedience, we have hope for the future. Billions of people have little to no hope of anything good, but Christians have high hopes because of the resurrection. We have confidence in this hope because of God's promise, knowing that

when that Day comes, we will see our Lord as He is (1 John 3:1-2).

Our example in this life can move others to obedience. Have you given thought to the legacy you are leaving behind for your loved ones? You may be known as a kind, gentle, and lovely person, but do those around you know your faith is in Christ? Too often we concern ourselves with the financial security and worldly possessions those who come after us will receive rather than the spiritual inheritance we could leave behind. That inheritance would offer a reward in heaven for those who accepted it (1 Pet. 1:3-4).

Our actions today can lay the foundation for an enduring legacy that has the power to move those around us to obey. May we all strive to imitate the examples of the heroes of the faith so we may leave a spiritual legacy behind for those who will follow us (Heb. 11:1-40). Though it was written from the perspective of mothers, these stirring words from Alice Leedy Mason's poem, *The Legacy*, can apply to us all: "She could not give them worldly things, but what she gave was fit for kings. For with her faith and books and sod, she made each child aware of God." That is a legacy that will stand the test of time.

A Message of Hope for You

Because of the hope we have in the resurrection, we can influence others to take hold of the same hope. All who name the name of Christ look forward to the resurrection day, for it is then we will see our Savior face to face and enjoy the reward He has promised. That hope ought to encourage and motivate us to help others experience the same. Each day God through His providence sends us opportunities to help the lost find the way. Even in the smallest of interactions we can influence another for godliness. How wonderful it would be to know that because of our legacy of godliness and pure living, one of our dear loved ones obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ. May we all endeavor to spread Jesus' message of hope throughout this world and influence souls for our beloved Master.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the context of 1 Corinthians 15:29 indicate about its meaning?
2. How would an unbeliever be moved to obey by the example of a deceased Christian?
3. Why does the idea of vicarious baptism contradict Scripture?
4. In what ways is the resurrection central to the Christian faith?
5. Discuss the power and significance of a godly legacy.

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Lesson 16–The Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN INSPIRATION

Spencer Strickland

For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

1 Corinthians 2:11-13

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God...” (2 Tim. 3:16a). [All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] No doubt, these words have been read many times by Christians. Intellectually, Christians can have a basic understanding of what these words mean. Experientially, no living Christian understands the intricacies of inspiration.

First Corinthians 2:7-16 gives the reader some insight into how the Holy Spirit worked in inspiration. In writing to the church at Corinth, Paul gave assurance that his message was divinely inspired by God. From this text, four items will be considered that relate to this assurance.

The Heart of the Message

Paul speaks of mystification. “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory” (1 Cor. 2:7). This verse begins with the word “but,” indicating a contrast to the previous verses. Simply put, the wisdom Paul spoke was not of human origin (1 Cor. 2:3-6). Instead, it was “the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 2:7a).

Paul speaks of mystification when he writes “the wisdom of God in a mystery.” The wisdom of God had so mystified mankind that even the rulers and authorities “crucified the Lord of glory” out of ignorance (1 Cor. 2:8). In 1 Peter 1:10-11, Peter stated that the prophets were “mystified” by some things in their predictive prophecies. He further said that the angels longed to look deeper into God’s mystery (1 Pet. 1:12). However, Paul will state that the “mystery” no longer remains in obscurity (1 Cor. 2:10).

Paul refers to the “mystery” often in his letters. The “mystery” relates especially to the theme of unity. The Ephesian letter

makes the connection between the “mystery” and unity clear. Paul told the Ephesian church that the “mystery” resulted in gathering “together in one all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:10). Two groups that became united were Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:11-16). Paul stated that the “mystery” united them into the “same body” through the gospel (Eph. 3:4-6; c.f. Rom. 1:16; 16:25).

In 1 Corinthians 2:9, Paul indicates this mystery was in God’s mind before creation. He shows this truth by quoting Isaiah 64:4. A comparison of this verse and Isaiah 64:4 in an English translation will show some differences. These differences result from the New Testament writers quoting from the Septuagint (LXX). Nevertheless, Paul’s audience could understand from this quotation there was a mystery God had in store for mankind.

Paul speaks of revelation. “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. . .” (1 Cor. 2:10a). The connection between verses 9 and 10 must not be ignored. While there were things that “eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor entered into the heart of man” (1 Cor. 2:9), Paul says those things have been revealed (1 Cor. 2:10). The phrase “But God has revealed them to us” speaks of God’s revelation. The phrase “through His Spirit” speaks of God’s inspiration. In verse 13, Paul will speak more of inspiration. In the meantime, it is sufficient to notice that Paul plainly states God’s mystery was revealed (cf. Eph. 3:4-6).

Paul says the reason the Holy Spirit could reveal the mystery is because “the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God [literally, “the depths of God”]” (1 Cor. 2:10b). This phrase, “depths of God” (see NASB, ESV, etc.) points to what was in God’s mind. Paul illustrates what he means by writing, “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” (1 Cor. 2:11-12). Paul’s point in these verses may be thus summarized: Just as no one knows what is in someone’s mind unless it is revealed, likewise no one knows what is in God’s mind unless it is revealed. Paul’s readers are assured that God has revealed his mystery.

Paul speaks of inspiration. “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Cor. 2:13). Paul was not interested in speaking man’s wisdom. Man’s wisdom had gotten mankind nowhere spiritually (see 1 Cor.

1:21). Instead, faithful preachers in Paul's day were speaking what "the Holy Spirit teaches" (1 Cor. 2:13b). In the age of miracles, the Holy Spirit was "combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*" (1 Cor. 2:13c, NASB). This last phrase describes the essence of inspiration.

What is the difference between inspiration and revelation? Revelation refers to the *message* that God desired to make known to man. Inspiration refers to the *process* of making that message known to man. The revelation of God has eternally existed. The psalmist said, "Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven" (Ps. 119:89). The question becomes: How did God take the revelation "forever settled in heaven" and get it into the hands of mankind? Inspiration answers that question. The Holy Spirit searched the spiritual things in God's mind, combined them with spiritual words, and guided God's chosen writers into all truth (John 16:13). Peter puts this process succinctly, "For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21, ESV).

Paul speaks of distinction. In verses 14-16, a distinction is made. Even though "we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Cor. 2:12), that does not mean everyone wants to know them. Paul makes a distinction between an unspiritual person ("natural man") and a spiritual one. The unspiritual person regards things revealed by the Spirit as foolishness. Consequently, he cannot and will not know them while holding this opinion. However, since the things of God are spiritually "judged" (1 Cor 2:14b, ASV) or "discerned" (NKJV), the spiritual person properly "judges" all things. Consequently, he is not "judged" and found condemned by the things revealed by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:15).

In 1 Corinthians 2:16, Paul concludes with the question posed in Isaiah 40:13, "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" Paul confidently says, "But we have the mind of Christ." The apostles and prophets had God's mind revealed to them through the Holy Spirit's work of inspiration (John 14:25-26; 16:12-13)

Messages for Today

- **It is important to know the difference between inspiration and revelation.**
- **It is never okay to take a Scripture out of context.**
- **Mankind has the completed revelation of God.**

It is important to know the difference between inspiration and revelation. Although these concepts are related, they are different. Consider David Lipe's summary:

Revelation—The message—Embodiment of divine truth.
Inspiration—The manner—Expression of divine truth¹

First Corinthians 2:7-12 relates to revelation. First Corinthians 2:13 relates to inspiration. Paul refers to the Holy Spirit “combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*” (NASB). Paul’s discussion thus harmonizes with his statement to Timothy, “All Scripture [revelation] is breathed out by God [inspiration] and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16 ESV).

It is never okay to take a Scripture out of context. First Corinthians 2:9 is sometimes taken out of context by suggesting that Paul speaks of heaven. Some may say, “Look! No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor entered into the heart of man what God has reserved in heaven for the faithful.” Paul was not speaking about heaven in this verse. We would do well to remember the adage, “[A] passage taken out of context becomes a pretext.”²

Mankind has the completed revelation of God. Peter said, “[A]s His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue” (2 Pet. 1:3). Since mankind has been given “all things that pertain to life and godliness,” there are no modern revelations. The Bible is all-sufficient.

A Message of Hope for You

Jesus said on one occasion, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Today, everyone can know God’s truth. The “Spirit of Truth” has revealed the mind

¹ David L Lipe, *Notes on Christian Evidences* (Henderson: Hester Pub., 2000), 14.

² Thomas H. Holland, *Sermon Design and Delivery*. 2nd ed. (Brentwood: Penman Press, 1967), 18.

of God in the Scriptures. While “[t]he secret things belong to the Lord our God” (Deut. 29:29), God has revealed everything necessary to go to heaven.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between revelation and inspiration?
2. What is Paul referring to in 1 Corinthians 2:9?
3. Why does 1 Corinthians 2:9 read differently than Isaiah 64:4 in our English translations?
4. What does Paul mean by the “mystery” in 1 Corinthians 2:7?

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Lesson 17–The Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN SALVATION

Bob Cowles

For by one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:13

The functional understanding of the Godhead for many Christians, as Gordon Fee points out, could be stated something like this: “I believe in God the Father; I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s Son; but I wonder about the Holy Spirit.”¹

“Holy Spirit.” Just the mention of these two words will raise eyebrows of interest and stir the hearts of many with questions. No other subject intrigues the New Testament Christian more, and such is understandable when the gravity of this theme is considered. No other biblical subject is enshrouded within speculation and misunderstanding like that of the Holy Spirit.

The Heart of the Message

In 1 Corinthians 6:11, Paul says, “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” The apostle resorts here to his “before-and-after” illustration to highlight the contrast between their prior exclusion and present justification. They are now washed, sanctified, and justified. At least two doctrinal issues are often discussed in relationship to 1 Corinthians 6:11. The first regards the meaning of “washed” and its relationship to the words “sanctified” and “justified.” The most logical interpretation relates washed to the believer’s participation in water baptism. This view builds upon the frequent association of water baptism with imagery of washing in the New Testament (Acts 22:16; Eph. 5:26; Heb. 10:22).

“Sanctified” is a prevalent term in Paul’s writings and is clearly a work of God, through his Spirit, in the life of the believer. Just as baptism was a demarcation between the “before” and “after” phases in the life of the Corinthian believer, so, too, was

¹ Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 37.

the work of God, through his Spirit, in the life of the believer. The lifestyle of the wicked is no longer acceptable for those upon whom God has begun His spiritual work.

People who have been sanctified are set apart for God's use. How the Holy Spirit is involved in this sanctification process is best explained by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, "...from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." [All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.]

The gospel is the instrument of the Holy Spirit to bring people to belief in the truth and subsequent salvation. The sanctification performed by the Holy Spirit is accomplished through, or by, the word.

Paul says that by one Spirit all the believers in Corinth were baptized into the body of Christ. It is exceedingly clear in 1 Corinthians 12:13 as well as in the surrounding verses that Paul does not have in mind here any kind of special baptism or any kind of special spiritual experience available only to a certain group of believers. The baptism to which Paul refers is one that was experienced by every believer in the church of God at Corinth.

There has been much debate about what Paul means by his phrase "all were given the one Spirit to drink." It seems that this is just an additional metaphor used by Paul to refer to the initial experience which all believers participated in when they came into the body of Christ. This interpretation would be in harmony with other metaphorical uses that Paul employs when discussing baptism. When Paul says in the first part of 1 Corinthians 12:13 that Christians have been baptized by the Spirit and at the end of the verse says they have drunk one Spirit, Paul is working within the same field of images.

Messages for Today

- **The Gospel: Source, Scope, Strength.**
- **The Church: Oneness, Equality, Unity.**
- **The One Baptism: Instruction, Sanctification, Justification.**

The Gospel: Source, Scope, Strength. The *source* of the gospel is the instruction of the Holy Spirit. Before Jesus' ascension into heaven, the Lord declared the Holy Spirit would come to reveal

the will of God to the apostles (John 16:13-15). When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, he revealed the will of God to the apostles and prophets (Eph. 3:1-5) and inspired them to speak (1 Cor. 2:10-13) and record (2 Pet. 1:20-21) the word of God.

The *scope* of the gospel is the whole world (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15). Salvation was made available to all men (Tit. 2:11). “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:27-28).

The *strength* of the gospel is that it educates as implied in the reference to the Holy Spirit’s instruction. “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The Church: Oneness, Equality, Unity. The church is *one* body (Eph. 4:4-6). The body of Christ is identified as the Lord’s church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). There is only one New Testament church. It should also be remembered that salvation is limited to the faithful within the Lord’s church (2 Tim. 4:7-8; Eph. 5:23).

There is *equality* of the body’s members. The body, though singular in number, is composed of many members. Each member is important and is equal in the sight of God. Such is true because each member obeyed the same instruction, became members of the same body by the same means of entrance, and enjoy the same blessing as derived from such obedience.

The church is *united* in its design. Paul says that “there should be no division in the body” (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10-13; Phil. 1:27). Such results in mutual care, mutual suffering, mutual honor, and mutual joy (cf. Rom. 12:9, 10, 15-16). Again, it should be remembered, that this unity is the design of God and is recognized only in the one New Testament church.

The One Baptism: Instruction, Sanctification, Justification. The command to be baptized for remission of sins is the *instruction* of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:4, 38; Gal. 3:26-27; Eph. 5:26; 1 Pet. 3:20-21). Baptism results in the *sanctification* of the one body. All who have been baptized into the one body are sanctified, or set apart, from the world (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 6:14-18). This one baptism results in the *justification* of man. Such is implied in the reception of the Holy Spirit upon one’s obedience in baptism for

the remission of sins as seen in the phrase “made to drink of one Spirit” (cf. Acts 2:38; 5:32; 1 Cor. 6:19-20).

A Message of Hope for You

Paul, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, would not set before his readers the horrors of sin without bringing the subject back to redemption. He reminded his readers that they had been cleansed and saved in Jesus’ name. The people at Corinth had repented of their sins that Paul named at the time of their baptism. The transforming power of the gospel can turn the most sinful men and women into holy and justified children of God. The apostle maintained a wonderful balance between the initiative God has taken to bring about salvation in the human family and the responsibility the saved must embrace in order to be glorified. The strength of the church is in each believer’s simple piety and trust in God. We are baptized into one body. Baptism marks the beginning of a new life in Christ separated from life in the world. The apostle admonished members of the church to live according to a new set of values.

A central concern of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians is the unity of God’s family. The church in Corinth was seriously deficient in the central way of love. The thrust of Paul’s thought is the unity that should exist within the body of Christ. Such is the unity that entails one New Testament church which is entered into only by one means of entrance: faith, repentance, confession, and baptism for the remission of sins. The church is governed only by one standard of authority, the word of God. Only through a proclamation, application, and maintenance of these divine principles will the “*unity of the Spirit*” (Eph. 4:3) be possible. May God be with all who strive toward this end!

Discussion Questions

1. What is the meaning of “sanctification”? How is the Holy Spirit involved in the sanctification process?
2. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, list those sinners who cannot go to heaven. Define fornication, adultery, and homosexuality.
3. What hope is there for people who have been involved in such sins? What would repentance demand?
4. What is the relationship between “For by one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body” and “made to drink of one Spirit” in 1 Corinthians 12:13?

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Lesson 18–The Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians

THE HOLY SPIRIT INDWELLING THE CHRISTIAN

Mark Hanstein

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

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

The Bible plainly teaches that the Holy Spirit dwells in the Christian. In Romans 8:9-11, for example, Paul writes, “However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you”. [All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted]. The Bible further says, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought for a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). According to the Scriptures, it is God “who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge” (2 Cor. 1:22; cf. Gal. 4:6; 1 Thess. 4:8). We know this by faith because the Scriptures tells us, not because we feel or physically sense this.

The Heart of the Message

Roy H. Lanier, Sr. mentioned that “when God gives us the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32) to dwell in our bodies as His temple (1 Cor. 6:19), He fulfills His promise to dwell in us and walk in us.”¹ To this end the Bible teaches, “Or what agreement does the temple of God have with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I WILL DWELL AMONG THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE’” (2 Cor. 6:16).

¹ Roy H. Lanier, Sr., *20 Years of the Problem Page*, Vol. 2 (Abilene: Quality, 1984), 22.

The manner of the Holy Spirit's indwelling is actual and personal. This means that, "deity in the Person of the Holy Spirit makes his residence in the body of the child of God."² This is indicated by the Scripture that says, "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have from God" (1 Cor. 6:19). The term "temple" is a word that refers to the dwelling place of deity. This Greek word *naos*, "is an allusion to that holy sanctuary of the Mosaic economy wherein God actually made his presence known (cf. Ex. 25:22)."³ There are two significant points to note from this verse. First, the body of the individual Christian is the temple, or dwelling place, of the Holy Spirit. Second, the Holy Spirit actually dwells in the individual Christian.

This indwelling of the Spirit is also called the "gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38) Whom God gives to all who obey His plan of salvation (Acts 5:32). This indwelling is not the same manifestation of the spiritual gifts that blessed the early church. The nine miraculous gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:1-11) were temporary in duration (1 Cor. 13:8-13; cf. Eph. 4:8ff) and limited to select Christians in the first century (Acts 8:9-19; 1 Cor. 12:29-30). In other words, not all Christians received miraculous abilities, but all Christians receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at conversion (John 7:38-39).

Messages for Today

- **The indwelling of the Holy Spirit serves as motivation for holy living.**
- **Christians should present their body as a living sacrifice.**

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit serves as motivation for holy living. Knowing that one's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who actually and personally dwells in us, should serve as motivation to holy living. Our actions can bring honor or dishonor to Christ. To that end the Bible reminds the child of God that his body is not his own (1 Cor. 6:19) and that he was bought with a price (v. 20). There is a spiritual presence in us that we must honor. It is no wonder then that the Christian is commanded to, "Glorify God in your body." In spite of living in a culture that encourages and indulges in immorality, the Bible

² Roy H. Lanier, Sr., *The Timeless Trinity for the Ceaseless Centuries* (Denver: Lanier Books, 1974, reprint 2008), 385.

³ Wayne Jackson, *What is the Gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38?* Christian Courier website.

teaches that one's body is not for immorality but is to be used by God (1 Cor. 6:12-20). Immorality defiles and is a sin against one's own body (v. 18). Since the Christian's body is a member of Christ, and a temple of the Holy Spirit, it is God's property and is not to be abused or misused.

Christians should present their body as a living sacrifice. Every Christian must endeavor to "present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:1-2). The Scriptures also command, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let's cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). The Bible says we must, "pursue... holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14; cf. Rom. 8:5-14; Gal. 5:16-25).

A Message of Hope for You

The Bible indicates that the Holy Spirit works in the lives of Christians today (Phil. 1:6; 2:12-13). This lesson explores some of these matters.

Christians are "sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of the promise" (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). This blessing serves to authenticate the relationship of the Christian with God. This demonstrates that we belong to God. The Bible says, "But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him" (Rom. 8:9).

God gave His children the Holy Spirit as "the earnest of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:13-14; cf. 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). "The Holy Spirit is an assurance, a deposit, a guarantee, a pledge from God to the Christian that He will ultimately give us eternal life as our inheritance."⁴ Since the Holy Spirit dwells in the body of the individual Christian, this affirms that God will grant us eternal life as an inheritance.

At times one struggles in his prayer life. He does not know how to adequately express himself to God. The good news is that "the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26). Because of the

⁴ Lanier, Sr., *The Timeless Trinity*, 397.

assistance of the Holy Spirit, no child of God will go unheard. Their concerns, fears, needs, and troubles will not be lost or overlooked. Because of the aid of the Holy Spirit, they are brought before our Heavenly Father.

The promise of God is that the Holy Spirit will resurrect the mortal body of the Christian. The Bible says, “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom 8:11). When Jesus returns on that last day, the Holy Spirit will resurrect the Christian from the dead (1 Cor. 15:42-49, 52).

All Christians should be grateful to God for the blessing of the Holy Spirit who dwells in our bodies and providentially works in our behalf for our spiritual benefit.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does the Holy Spirit indwell the faithful Christian?
2. How does the Christian know the Holy Spirit dwells in him?
3. In what ways does the Holy Spirit work in the lives of Christians today?
4. How does the knowledge that the Holy Spirit indwells a Christian motivate him to live more righteously?
5. What are some extremes to avoid in discussing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?
5. What purpose did Paul have in mind in his illustration of the “one body”?’ Relate the unity concept in 1 Corinthians 12:13 to denominationalism today and to division in the church.

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Lesson 19–Things That Divide Us

FOLLOWING MEN-SECTARIANISM

Roy Knight

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

1 Corinthians 1:10

As sheep follow a shepherd, it seems to be the nature of men, for good or for bad, to follow others. From the beginning there have been leaders and followers. The serpent led Eve into temptation. Eve turned and led Adam into temptation. Some people lead, but most people are followers to some extent. This places a heavy responsibility upon those who lead and on those who would follow them.

Heart of the Message

When one examines the entirety of the text assigned in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17, it is easy to see how good men often drift in their minds from the Hope of their salvation and begin to place their focus on others. The idea is set forth by Paul in verse 10 “... that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” [All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] Yet, when they began to exalt the messenger over the message, cracks began to form which undermine the effectiveness of the church.

Messages for Today

- **There are many causes for division today.**
- **There are problems that arise from division.**
- **There are cures for division.**

There are many causes for division today. First, showing favoritism towards others can cause division. The church in Corinth was dividing over their favorite preachers. Paul writes, “Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ’” (1 Cor. 1:12). Each had a different method of delivery. Each had a different style of speaking. They allowed themselves to gravitate to the one that best suited their style. Paul at one time was accused of having

“contemptable speech” (2 Cor. 10:10), while Apollo was described as “an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24). Who would you want to hear? We too can develop the same mindset in the Church if we are not careful. We can begin to worship the messenger instead of the Giver of the message. None of those mentioned in the list by Paul would have ever thought about causing a division in the church, yet, people allowed it to happen.

Second, the desire for prestige can cause divisions. John wrote of “Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them...” (3 John 1:9). Though Diotrephes is dead and gone, the spirit of Diotrephes persists today. There are those who love for people to follow them and to hang on their every word. They love being the center of attention. As Diotrephes divided the church in the first century, so Christians with that same mindset will divide the church today.

Third, cliques can cause divisions. When opposing personalities arise and humility is replaced with pride, cracks begin to emerge. Opinions begin to form. Ungodly attitudes begin to develop. In time, they can break apart, carrying the church with them.

Fourth, false teachers from within or outside the church can cause divisions. Peter warned of such, saying in 2 Peter 2:1-2:

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways.

This threat is ever more real since many have stayed home due to Covid and are turning on the TV to preachers who espouse denominational doctrines. Church leaders need to be aware of this, and church members need to be mature enough in the faith to distinguish true from false doctrine.

There are problems that arise from division. First, divisions shift our focus away from Jesus to people. Whether it is prideful people, cliques, people who are looking for a following, or false teachers, they all do one thing: they distract from seeing Jesus and the beauty of the Church. Members need to understand that the church was not created for their exploitation or amusement but for their salvation. When we lose our focus on the Savior, we have lost it all.

Second, divisions stifle the growth of the church. As a body that is cut in sunder loses its strength, so likewise does the church. The body consists of many members, but when those members get a mind of their own and cease to focus on the Head, they forget the true mission of the church. They may be busy doing their own things but not the things pertaining to Christ.

Third, divisions smother the enthusiasm of Christians. Genuine joy of being in the body of Christ should permeate every Christian soul seeing that we are saved and are beneficiaries of the blessings God has bestowed upon His children. That joy and enthusiasm for the work is diluted when members of the body take their eyes off the Head and begin to focus on their own desires.

There are cures for division. First, true appreciation for what Jesus has done for us ought to help us maintain the unity of the body. In speaking to the Ephesian elders, Paul spoke of the church that was purchased with Jesus' own blood (Acts 20:28). When we are truly thankful for the sacrifice of Jesus, we will never seek to undermine the church for which He died.

Second, unity is a command. Paul pleaded with his brethren to stay united (1 Cor. 1:10). As much as depends upon us, we are always to be "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). When we seek to go our own way and do our own thing, we have not developed the spirit of Christ.

Third, eliminating worldliness from our lives will help us to keep the unity of the body. Paul writes, "For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?" (1 Cor 3:3-4.) Carnality is worldliness and selfishness. When Christians behave like the world, they bring envy, strife, and divisions into the church. True self-examination is continually needed in our lives to study the motivations behind the thoughts and actions we take. If our actions are prompted by worldliness, then we are to pluck it out of our lives and remove it far from us.

Fourth, elders, church leaders, and preachers need to address issues that may divide the church. Preachers need to instruct in classes and from the pulpit the importance of Christian unity and the beauty of God's family. Elders and church leaders need to be proactive in addressing discord when it arises. Paul warned the Ephesian elders: "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from

among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:29-30).

Elders and church leaders must lead by both authority and example. They must address sources of division even if it means taking disciplinary actions. Elders are shepherds that are to guard the sheep from the wolves within and without. They are responsible to God for the souls entrusted to them. In the end, their goal is to nurture and defend the flock and lead people to the true Head, Jesus.

A Message of Hope for You

Divisions do not have to occur. It is very possible for Christians today to have the same unity as those in the Acts 2. The church shines forth its beauty when members stand together in Christian love. May it be our endeavor to put away worldliness and keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3). David said in Psalm 133:1, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

Discussion Questions

1. What are some other things that may cause division in the church?
2. As one studies the book of 1 Corinthians, what were some things that were dividing the church?
3. What role does 1 Corinthians 13 play in maintaining the unity of the church?
4. What spirit must the Christian possess if the body is to flourish?
5. What is my attitude towards others with whom it is difficult to get along? What is the value of their soul?

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Lesson 20—Things That Divide Us

TOLERATING SIN-CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Lovell C. Hayes

Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8

Proverbs 14:34 says, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” [All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] Righteousness and sin are on opposite poles from one another, and they result in opposite effects. Righteousness exalts; sin brings reproach. 1 John 2:29 says that the one who practices righteousness is born of God, while 1 John 3:8 says that the one who practices sin is of the devil.

Righteousness ought to be characteristic of God’s people. According to Romans 6, we were set free from the slavery to and dominion of sin so that we could become slaves to righteousness who now present our members as servants of righteousness to God. We are now to be about continuing in righteousness and not continuing in sin.

Realizing that even though we are growing toward that goal of righteousness, we still sometimes sin and fall short of the glory of God (cf. 1 John 1:8-10). Since we want to continue in the way of righteousness, we confess our sins (1 John 1:9) and repent of our sin (Acts 8:22) and pray with the promise that God “is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

The Heart of The Message

In our text we see a brother in Christ at Corinth who was practicing something that was far away from righteousness. Paul said that this brother had gone further than even the ungodly Gentiles would go. This brother was having a shameful sexual relationship with his father’s wife. And since Paul described her as “his father’s wife,” we assume that this woman was his stepmother.

Paul said that this brother had sunk to the lowest of lows when it comes to sin. This relationship was condemned under Jewish law (Lev. 18:8), under Roman law,¹ and under the law of Christ as adultery (cf. Gal. 5:19).

Then, to compound the issue, instead of being repulsed by the behavior, the church was not responding to the behavior. Instead of being shamed by the behavior, the church was by its silence sanctioning the behavior. Paul says, “You are puffed up, and have not rather mourned” (1 Cor. 5:2).

The church was tolerating sin and neglecting to apply church discipline. They were making no efforts to bring repentance to the reproach or purge the ungodly leaven of malice and wickedness. Therefore, the apostle Paul urges them to take steps to correct the situation. Paul says in verses 4-5 that they are to deliver this fornicator over to Satan. This delivering over to Satan is further explained in verses 9-13. We describe that process as disfellowshipping, withdrawing fellowship from, or practicing church discipline.

Messages For Today

- **Divisive Reasonings Regarding Church Discipline.**
- **Divisive Reckonings Regarding Church Discipline.**

The program heading of my assignment suggests that even though the Bible is clear about what the church’s approach should be to ongoing, willful, impenitent sin, i.e., it cannot be tolerated, we as the people of God are not on the same page when it comes to dealing with it. And even though the Bible does tell us that we ought to “not keep company with” (1 Cor. 5:9, 11) those who practice ongoing sin, with regard to these matters, we as the body of Christ do not “walk by the same rule” and are not “of the same mind” (Phil. 4:16).

Divisive Reasonings Regarding Church Discipline. There are a number of reasons congregations avoid the practice of church discipline. However, all can fall under the category of neglect. We neglect to see that discipline is “for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved” (1 Cor. 5:5). Nevertheless, consider some reasons we tolerate sin and neglect discipline.

¹ Dallas Seminary Faculty, *1 Corinthians*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, vol. 2, gen. ed. John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, (Wheaton: Victor, 2002), 513.

(1) Nothing Is the Easy Path. For some, it is easier and less problematic just to do nothing. It may be because, like the Corinthians, we are puffed up and glory in the satisfaction that we keep peace and avoid any ripples in the water by ignoring the wrong. But doing nothing when God calls for us to do something is sinful in itself (cf. Jas. 4:17).

(2) Negative Is the Feedback That Results. Some members will get offended at the practice of church discipline, especially if a family member is involved. The church is accused of being judgmental and unfair. However, we can't set aside the will of God because someone is offended. The Pharisees were offended when Jesus pointed out their fault in Matthew 15 (cf. v. 12), but that did not change the fact that they were at fault. Some of the Corinthians were "made sorry" by Paul's approach, and some responded in "godly sorrow" (2 Cor. 7:8, 10), but the resulting repentance was something to rejoice about.

(3) Nervous About a Litigious Society. Because of the fear of lawsuits and court actions against the church, some avoid church discipline. Nevertheless, we must follow the teachings of the Word of God. We must be wise and consult those in the legal field who can help us, but "we ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

Divisive Reckonings Regarding Church Discipline. Even among those who are willing to follow through with church discipline and recognize the detriments of tolerating sin, there are some issues which are disputed.

(1) The Issue of Defining Godly Love. Some take the approach that if you truly love a person, you must accept them as they are without repentance. Yes, God accepts us as we are. We come to Him "just as I am," but He does not leave us as we are. The woman caught in adultery in John 8 was accepted by Jesus as she was, but she was told by Him to "go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). The Bible clearly teaches that God in His love will discipline and chasten us (cf. Heb. 12:1-13). Therefore, godly love corrects, but allowing a person to live in a way that brings condemnation is an ungodly and unloving thing to do!

(2) The Issue of the Delinquent Member. What should we do regarding a member who has fallen away from the faith and no longer worships or fellowships with the local congregation? Clearly, that member who is forsaking the assembly and not faithful in serving the Lord is sinning against God (cf. Heb. 10:24-31). Their sin is compounded if they are living in a way

where they are fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. For this person, it is debated as to how effective church discipline would be. Some view that person as having already removed their fellowship from the congregation; therefore, withdrawing fellowship from them is useless.

(3) The Issue of the Defaulting Congregation. Another question that brings dispute is whether a whole congregation can discipline another congregation. For instance, some congregations have apostatized into doctrines and practices that are not in accord with the word of God, such as worshiping with instruments of music or allowing women to preach in the assembly or serve as elders. Are we, in such an instance, to follow the process of Matthew 18:15-17 in dealing with that congregation?

Note this observation about these areas. Such texts as Matthew 18:15-17 and Titus 3:10-11 deal with an individual in the context. It is questionable as to whether this process can be applied to a whole congregation. We may be better off practicing the principle of Romans 16:17 in marking and avoiding those who teach and practice false doctrine.

A Message of Hope for You

God is not willing that anyone should perish, but wants all sinners, even the erring sinner, to repent (2 Pet. 3:9; James 5:19-20). Because of His love, God caringly chastises us to bring us back to the pathway of righteousness. The church is sometimes His tool for discipline in love, and we must be receptive to the efforts of the body to build us up, remembering that God is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse (1 John 1:8-10).

Self-discipline can eliminate the need for church discipline. If each of us would be humble enough before God to consistently examine ourselves (2 Cor. 13:5) and correct our course as needed, then there would be no need for church discipline. "For if we judge ourselves, we would not be judged" (1 Cor. 11:31).

Discussion Questions

1. List disadvantages and detriments to a congregation that tolerates obvious, open, on-going sin.
2. What are the advantages socially and spiritually of instructive and corrective discipline in the church?
3. Name some examples of God practicing corrective discipline directly and how that relates to God's love.
4. What characteristics are indicative of being spiritually self-disciplined?

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Lesson 21—Things That Divide Us

WOUNDING MY BROTHER'S CONSCIENCE—CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

Ed Benesh

But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

1 Corinthians 8:9-12

Most of us have a friend who cannot sing, which, in and of itself, is of little consequence. Less benign is when that friend thinks that he is the greatest singer in the world and makes every attempt to “bless” everyone with the gift of his golden vocal cords. My wife’s boss is such a man. As they labor and toil in the fast-paced coffee shop environment, he will belt out the lyrics to just about any country song, sounding more like a bellowing Siberian husky than Luke Bryan.

In this chapter Paul deals with those in Corinth who have the mindset of men like my wife’s boss. They knew, or at least thought they knew, a few things about Christian theology and felt they were not only experts but were bent on flexing that intellectual muscle no matter who was hurt or what collateral damage it caused in the church.

The Heart of the Message

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul begins addressing yet another divisive situation at Corinth. The pressing issue was meat offered to idols and whether a Christian should partake of this meat. Paul addresses several topics fundamental to Christian faith, including love, knowledge, liberty, sin, conscience, and idolatry.

Knowledge is vital to the Christian faith and marks the beginning of the spiritual journey. “So, faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). [All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise stated.] Faith and knowledge are two of the eight virtues mentioned by Peter that keep us from being

unfruitful and move us to maturity (2 Pet. 1:5-8). In five short chapters of 1 John, John uses the word “know” thirty-four times in twenty-eight verses. Knowledge is vital to Christian faith.

Love is a foundational principle of faith. After all, “for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son...” (John 3:16). Paul dedicated an entire chapter in 1 Corinthians to it (13). John talks about it at length in 1 John 4, where he draws a sharp line in the sand, saying, “Anyone who does not love, does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8). Finally, Jesus says, “If you love me keep my commandments,” revealing a great deal about how our love must be expressed. Love, too, is vital to the Christian faith.

In 1 Corinthians 8-10 and in Romans 14, Paul addresses the conscience and Christian liberty, saying, “It is not good to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.” The conscience is that unseen part of who we are that convicts us of right or wrong. The more we educate it, the more efficiently it works, and thus the more liberty we may take. However, until maturity is reached, we may be convicted that some things are wrong when they are not. To go against our conscience is sin (Rom. 14:22, 23), and to cause a brother to do so by taking a liberty is sin (Rom. 14:10). Liberty, or rights, are not matters we should press on others as obligatory burdens.

Separately, we readily understand these concepts and their importance. Combining them in a balanced way, however, was a source of consternation for the Corinthians. Paul outlines three guiding principles for them. First, knowledge cannot stand alone, but must be tempered by love, lest it lapse into conceited insistence upon its liberty. Second, love will often demand restriction of a liberty to keep a brother from sin. Third, where there is no love, both the weak and strong brother perish.

Message for Today

- **We must ask hard questions about even the most entrenched social norms.**
- **Attempting answers from our own knowledge alone can cause conceit and pride.**
- **When we insist on our liberty because of our knowledge we can cause great injury to our brother and ourselves.**
- **Love that is irreproachable and which tempers knowledge is the only solution.**

We must often ask hard questions about even the most entrenched social norms (8:1). The problem of meat offered to idols was difficult because it was pervasive. It is hard for us to understand today just how much a part of the culture in Corinth this was. Alexander Maclaren observes, “It is difficult for us to realize the close connection which existed between idol worship and daily life...It was almost impossible for Christians to take any part in society and not seem to sanction idolatry.”¹ There were formal public worship services in various pagan temples, private functions in homes such as weddings, and celebrations of victory in battle or other social events, which would include meats offered to idols. Some of the meat used for worship would be taken and sold in the marketplace, where one may or may not know whether it was offered to an idol. The Corinthian culture was steeped in idolatry. What was the Christian to do? Do they partake? Do they not partake? What was the solution?²

Attempting answers from our own knowledge alone can cause conceit and pride (8:2-8). Building upon the absolute truth that there is only one God (Deut. 32:15-17) and that an idol is nothing (Isa. 44:9ff), some at Corinth argued that these truths and the liberty they gave them were all that mattered. This argument elevates human reasoning to the highest and most important spiritual activity and ethic. Paul is not downplaying the importance of reasoning. Paul himself went to synagogues on every Sabbath and “reasoned...to persuade Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4). He told the Thessalonians to “test everything; hold fast what is good,” implying the necessity of reasoning. What he addresses, however, is the love or adoration of knowledge among the Corinthian brethren (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-30). As one commentator said, “The trouble with intellectualism is that it inflates the human ego. Those who ‘know better’ than others are always in danger of feeling superior. Knowledge that does this is not true

¹ Alexander Maclaren, *Exposition of Holy Scripture: I Corinthians* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, n.d.), 129-130.

² Gareth Reese, in his *1 Corinthians: A Critical & Exegetical Commentary*, gives a great amount of in-depth material concerning the saturation of Corinth with idol worship and how most of the Corinthian’s life centered around idol worship (N.P.: Scripture Exposition Books LLC, 2020).

knowledge.”³ What they were demonstrating was an elitist mindset, built by pride and lack of spiritual balance.

When we insist on our liberty because of our knowledge we can cause great injury to our brother and ourselves (8:9-12). Intellectualism inflates the ego, settles our conceit, and thrusts our arrogance onto the stage of spirituality, claiming greatness and superiority to the detriment of everyone else around us. Because they rightly understood the truth about God and idols, they believed it gave them liberty to do as they pleased without consequences. The truth was that taking the liberty of eating in the idol’s temple may cause a weak brother to fall prey to temptation and perhaps fall back into idol worship (Gal. 4:8-9). Further, it causes the brother whose argument is correct to sin because he failed to love his brother for whom Christ died. Thus, his sin is against the “weak” brother and Christ.

Love that is irreproachable and tempers knowledge is the only solution (8:1, 13). Paul talks of a second, far better way to solve the question of eating meat in the idol’s temple. While intellectualism causes sin and division, love, Paul says, is the only true solution because true knowledge has its basis in love (Rom. 14:14-15). Love is the intention that compels the correct usage of knowledge. Love is the higher obligation (1 Cor. 13:1-13) that willingly sacrifices so a brother can live. Such love would never insist on its way when it knowingly could cause another to sin.⁴

A Message of Hope for You

There is a lot of liberty in Christ. Furthermore, this liberty grows as we mature in faith and settle in the truth of the Bible. Now, we are not all at the same place at the same time spiritually and will run into situations where we must choose the people rather than the principle, sacrificing our liberty so the growing

³ Paul T. Butler, “First Corinthians,” *Bible Study Textbook Series* (Joplin, College P, 1992), 151.

⁴ It is interesting that Paul appeals to love rather than the decree of the Jerusalem council, which stated that the Gentiles should abstain from things “polluted by idols” (Acts 15:20). This is exactly what the weaker brother was attempting to do but would perhaps be lead away from it by the “stronger” brother’s example, having not fully settled the question of what pollutes his or her mind. Not being able to rid themselves of the lingering idea that an idol was something, they would then sin in eating polluted meat.

brother may be encouraged and strengthened. Paul does not call the “weak” brother such to resign him to this position, but rather to encourage growth. Every Christian should grow and thrive.

Finally, since all Christians are bonded with Christ, then we are all part of each other (1 Cor. 12). Every blow, wound, or injury we afflict on a brother we afflict on Christ (Matt. 25:40). Let us love and seek unity in all things.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some things today which might be benign in themselves but could cause injury to the Christian’s conscience?
2. What should a congregation or leadership do with brethren who seem indifferent to others’ scruples?
3. Would you classify yourself as “weak” or “strong”?
4. Do you think that the practice of Christian liberty is a threat to unity? How so?
5. Is the “weak” brother a threat to Christian unity?

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Lesson 22–Spiritual Gifts

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE GIFTS

Drew Kizer

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:7

Because miracles transcend natural law, they fascinate and divide readers of the Bible. Questions abound concerning their definition, classification, existence, and duration.

The Bible employs several terms to denote miraculous activity. Peter in Acts 2:22 refers to “mighty works and wonders and signs.” [All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.] Hebrews 2:4 adds “various miracles” and “gifts of the Holy Spirit” (*merismos*, “distributions”)¹ to the list. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses the phrase “spiritual gifts” (vv. 4, 9, 28, 30-31). The word he uses (*charismaton*) is from the same root as the word translated “grace” (*charis*), thus stressing “the freeness, the bounty” of these gifts.²

As with other blessings God had bestowed on the church, such as baptism (1 Cor. 1:10-17) and the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34), the church at Corinth had managed to abuse these gifts and turn them into a cause for contention. Paul devotes three chapters to this problem (1 Cor. 12-14). This study will focus on 1 Corinthians 12, where he calls for unity and addresses the manifestation of spiritual gifts.

The Heart of the Message

The manifestation of the gifts was varied. Paul explains that “there are varieties of gifts” (v. 4). In verses 8-10 he lists nine different spiritual gifts God had bestowed on the early Christians. The phrases “utterance of wisdom” and “utterance of knowledge” (v. 8), not to be confused with mere human wisdom and

¹ Water Bauer et al., eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: U of C Press, 1979), 505.

² Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 168.

knowledge, probably refer to the inspired ability to know and apply God's word. Like the first two gifts, "faith" has a natural counterpart, but here Paul refers to a special "mountain-moving" faith possessed by a select few (v. 9; cf. 1 Cor. 13:2). Some of the first century Christians possessed "gifts of healing" that cured physical ailments (v. 9), and others worked "miracles" (v. 10), a term emphasizing general displays of power, perhaps similar to certain acts of Jesus, such as the stilling of the storm (Matt. 8:23-27) and the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:1-12). "Prophecy" (v. 10) involves inspired foretelling (prediction) and forthtelling (preaching). "The ability to distinguish between spirits" (v. 10) involves a supernatural awareness of a teacher's veracity, "spirits" being used in the sense of religious instructors (cf. 1 John 4:1). The final two examples, "various kinds of tongues" and "the interpretation of tongues" (v. 10), are frequently misapplied to incoherent babbling, either faked or sincerely provoked through an ecstatic state of mind. However, the Bible uses "tongues" in the sense of "languages" (1 Cor. 14:10-11; Acts 2:5-11). Therefore, those gifted with tongues spoke in languages they had never studied, and their counterparts, the interpreters, understood and translated languages they had never studied.

The manifestation of the gifts was purposed. True miracles were not performed out of personal interest. For example, even though Jesus was starving after forty days of fasting, he refused the devil's temptation to turn stones into bread (Matt. 4:3-4). John's favorite word for miracles is "signs" because Jesus' miracles symbolized spiritual truth.³ Two purposes for the spiritual gifts of the early church are mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12.

First, he indicates that the Spirit distributed gifts for the purpose of revealing and confirming the truth that "Jesus is Lord" (vv. 2-3). No one would have believed the bold claims made by Jesus and his apostles unless God gave clear testimony to back up these claims (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4). The proof that these miracles did indeed exist in the first century is in their effectiveness. It is a historical fact beyond dispute that the church exploded into a fellowship numbering in the thousands within weeks of the execution of its founder. How can this be explained without the testimony of spiritual gifts?

³ Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1987), 99.

Second, Paul says these gifts were meant to contribute to the “common good” (v. 7). That is why the Corinthians’ abuse of their abilities was so tragic. By making spiritual gifts a point of contention, they put an instrument of God in the devil’s hands. Later, Paul will instruct his readers to use their gifts only for building up (1 Cor. 14:3-5, 12, 26).

The manifestation of the gifts was divinely appointed. The Spirit, Paul says, “apportions to each one individually as he wills” (v. 11). Also, using the imagery of the church as a body, the apostle writes that “God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose” (v. 18). We don’t choose. God in his sovereignty distributes gifts, both natural and supernatural, as he sees fit.

Messages for Today

- **Diversity should never be a cause for division.**
- **Every gift is special and should be used for God’s glory.**
- **We have gifts that are more excellent than miracles.**

Diversity should never be a cause for division. The Corinthians did not rate all spiritual gifts the same. Paul’s emphasis upon tongues in chapter 14 suggests the ability to speak foreign languages and was the most highly respected gift. Furthermore, Paul’s rhetorical questions in verses 29-30 suggest that some of the brethren in Corinth had no spiritual gifts and were disregarded for their natural gifts which were considered dispensable and less honorable (cf. vv. 22-24). They had found another way to create disorder and divide the church.

Paul illustrates the unity God desires using the imagery of the church as a body. “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with [Christ’s body]” (v. 12). Our differences should complement one another to make us stronger and not be used to separate us (vv. 15-20). God has designed the church to be interdependent and self-sustaining. Just as a toothache upsets our whole body, one member who is suffering should affect the rest (v. 26).

Every gift is special and should be used for God’s glory. Our task is not to complain about limitations and weaknesses but to identify our strengths and opportunities and use them to contribute to the Lord’s work in our own special way. The Lord distributes gifts as he sees fit. Therefore, it follows that (1) no talent is unimportant; (2) what we accomplish is nothing to

boast about, except to the glory of God; (3) we are stewards, and it is required of stewards to be faithful (1 Cor. 4:2); (4) we will be held accountable for the way we managed our gifts. In the Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30), even though the first two servants made their master a profit of seven talents, he was still concerned about the one talent the fearful servant hid in the ground. Every part of the body is important to God no matter how “big” or “small” we may think it is and should be used for God’s glory (1 Cor. 10:31).

We have gifts that are more excellent than miracles. We tend to fixate on wonders, forgetting that throughout the biblical record, God kept miracles to a minimum, using them only when they were needed. It is not the purpose of this lesson to discuss the duration of spiritual gifts, but we should point out that Paul reveals that the age of miracles would come to an end upon the completion of the written word (1 Cor. 13:8-12). At the close of chapter 12, he urges his readers to “earnestly desire the higher gifts,” promising to show them a “more excellent way” (v. 31). He then goes on to talk about faith, hope, and love, natural gifts that “abide” in the Christian age (1 Cor. 13:13). Rather than looking for signs and wonders, we should glorify God with these abiding gifts, along with other natural abilities that bless us, now that we no longer need miracles (cf. Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).

A Message of Hope for You

When the seventy-two disciples returned to Jesus exclaiming that the demons were subject to them in his name, the Lord gave them a little perspective, saying, “Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). All gifts have been given by God to us to serve his purpose of bringing salvation through Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the two purposes Paul gives for spiritual gifts?
2. Why do we often allow diversity to divide us?
3. How can our differences be used to strengthen our unity?
4. How can we discover our own special talents and opportunities?
5. Why should we desire natural gifts more earnestly than spiritual gifts?

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Lesson 23–Spiritual Gifts

THE DURATION OF THE GIFTS

Dennis Doughty

Love Never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, love abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:8-13

The fact that miraculous gifts were present during the early days of the church is not in question. To understand their duration, we must first understand their function. In a previous discussion of Chapter 12, we see the presence of “varieties of gifts” (12:4). [All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Version unless otherwise noted.]

In our day if we had no inspired Scriptures, it would be difficult to imagine how we are to worship, what we are to teach concerning salvation, and how we are to relate to our fellow man. From the day of Pentecost to the middle of the first century, there were no New Testament writings. The first letter to the Corinthians was one of the earliest inspired writings, dated in or around AD 55.¹ All the New Testament Scriptures were written in the time frame between the early 50’s to the mid-90’s. If indeed Jesus was crucified around AD 33 and the church began on Pentecost some fifty days later, this would mean that the early Christians had no written instructions to go by for some twenty-five years after Christ’s death.

Yet the gospel of Christ, the message of his death, burial, and resurrection, spread around the known world during these early years. How was that possible? It was made possible by the dedication and inspiration of the apostles as they went by Jesus’ direction to be his “witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts

¹ Richard E. Oster, Jr., *1 Corinthians*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin: College Press), 15.

1:8b). The Apostle Paul went to the Gentiles on his three great missionary journeys, preaching “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

These “chosen” apostles carried with them some unique gifts: witness (Luke 24:48), inspiration (John 14:26), miracles, and the ability to bestow miraculous gifts on others. After Phillip had baptized “men and women alike” in Samaria, they had to send for Peter and John to come lay hands on them, “that they might receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:12-15). Paul had laid hands on several in Corinth to bestow these types of gifts upon them. These gifts allowed the church to function after the apostles had died. They could teach (prophecy), speak in languages as needed, and conduct their worship as God would have it. But how long did these gifts continue?

The Heart of the Message

The partial nature of the gifts. In our text, we see that these gifts are described as “in part” and “partial.”² The term *ek meros* means “partly, imperfectly.” The idiom has the force of “piece by piece, part by part ... in fragmentary ways”³ On one occasion the word is used to describe the lack of detail the writer had in describing the cherubim over the mercy seat: “but of these things we cannot now speak in detail” (Heb 9:5).

The details of God’s plan of salvation came “part by part:” Abraham to Moses to the prophets to Jesus himself to the apostles and here, via spiritual gifts such as prophecy and tongues. However, these gifts were unable to deliver the complete will of God. This led Paul to ask, “How do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (15:12). It required Paul’s greater knowledge to give one of the great discourses in Scripture on the subject. Those gifts in Corinth, and we can properly infer the similar status of all those who received these gifts across all churches, were “partial” in God’s overall plan.

² William D. Mounce, ed., *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 497.

³ Anthony C. Thiselton, ed., *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1064.

The duration of the gifts. It is clear from the text that this part of God's plan would, at some point, come to an end. "Prophecy? It will be done away." Tongues? "They will cease." Knowledge? "it will be done away" (13:8).

When will this happen? "When the perfect comes." (13:10) We understand what the "partial" is, but what is "the perfect"? It is translated as "when perfection comes" (NIV), "when the perfect comes" (ESV, NKJV), "when the complete comes" (NRSV), and "when the complete and perfect (total) comes" (Amplified Bible). In the two other uses in this letter, "the perfect" is translated "mature" (2:6, 14:20) in referring to persons. This "perfection" is illustrated by Paul's example of a child maturing into more "grown-up" thinking (13:11) and of the passing miraculous gifts as a "dimly" reflecting mirror (13:12).

There are two popular interpretations of this wording. First, the eschatological interpretation is that the completeness will come at the second coming when Jesus turns the kingdom over to God and brings us to our heavenly home. This is Pentecostal theology, teaching that the end of these gifts will only come at the end of time. However, they are very selective in only continuing to speak in tongues, which is easily counterfeited, while ignoring other gifts, i.e., inspired teachings (prophesies), interpretations, raising the dead, and the handling of serpents.

Second, it is referring to the "completeness" of the New Testament canon. The inspired writings, referred to as the "perfect law, the law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25), were still being written when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. These writings were all "inspired of God" and would "make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17, KJV). No special "miraculous gifts" are needed today.

Message for Today

- **Miraculous spiritual gifts eventually ceased.**
- **Although miraculous spiritual gifts have ceased, the abiding gift is love.**

Miraculous spiritual gifts eventually ceased. It is worth noting that those who had been given these miraculous gifts were unable to pass them on, and they would have been dying out about the same time the New Testament Canon was coming together. With the completion of the New Testament, the partial nature of the spiritual gifts would then be ending, having fulfilled

their purpose. We are then left with the inspired message of God, but not in the form of a person, but in inspired writings.

Although miraculous spiritual gifts have ceased, the abiding gift is love. This point is made clear by Paul when he say:

If I speak with the tongues of mankind and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have *the gift of prophecy* and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give away all my possessions *to charity*, and if I surrender my body so that I may glory, but do not have love, it does me no good.... Love never fails. (1 Cor. 13:1-4, 8a)

A Message of Hope for You

This study would be totally remiss if the main topic of 1 Corinthians 13, for which it is so famous, was not given its proper attention. There are some gifts that were greater than tongues or interpretation and that would never fade away. Paul strongly reinforced this as he began this topic with the statement, “Earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way” (12:31). These abiding gifts were “faith, hope, and love” To prevent today the kind of division that was plaguing the Corinthian church, we must exercise the greatest gift which is love (13:13). Why? Because “love never fails” (13:8)!

Discussion Questions

1. What was Jesus’ promise to the apostles concerning his departure? See John 14:16-26.
2. Could the ability to pass on these gifts be given to others (Acts 8:14-24)?
3. After faith and hope, how is love the greater gift?
4. Compare the “mirror” of this text in verse 12 with the similar statement in James 1:23-25.

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Lesson 24–Spiritual Gifts

THE REGULATION OF THE GIFTS

Travis Bookout

...the women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. Or was it from you that the word of God first went out? Or has it come to you only?

1 Corinthians 14:34-36

Humans have an impressive ability to ruin good things. We can turn peace into war without breaking a sweat. We shut the gates of Eden and turned God’s good world into thorns and thistles. We’ve transformed Christian sources of unity, like the Lord’s Supper and baptism, into some of our most divisive topics. No matter what good thing God gives us, we can find ways to misuse, abuse, or destroy it.

As we turn to 1 Corinthians 14, we find this pattern repeating again. The church at Corinth has been turning God’s wonderful gifts into sources of selfishness, arrogance, and division. A church filled with miraculous tongues and divine prophetic utterances has used those gifts as ammunition against one another and fodder for boasting.

In response, Paul refreshes their understanding of the purpose of spiritual gifts and then regulates their use to accomplish this purpose. These gifts are supposed to provide peace in the churches instead of confusion. They should aid the message, not bolster the pride of the messenger. They are meant to edify the church and not tear it down.

As we approach this text, let’s not make the mistake of thinking, “Well, we don’t have these gifts at my church, so this chapter isn’t relevant today.” Arrogance, division, and superficiality are just as alive today as they have ever been. The need for worship that produces understanding, unity, and edification is universal and applicable to every church.

The Heart of the Message:

Love and edification are the foundation and purpose of spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts devoid of love, as captivating as they may seem, are empty and meaningless. They can cause more

harm than good. The regulation of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 14 demonstrates how followers of Jesus can use their spiritual gifts to respect one another, edify the church, and promote love.

1 Corinthians 14, contextually, is the practical conclusion of a lengthy discussion started back at 1 Corinthians 12:1, “Now concerning spiritual gifts...” [All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.] Paul has already argued that these gifts are intended to promote unity. He has already designated “love” as the greatest gift, the ground for all other gifts, and the gift that lasts into the eschaton.

It seems the church in Corinth has elevated the gift of “tongue speaking” above all others and attached supreme value to the tongue speaker. Basically, tongue speakers are walking around Corinth like they own the place. Without disparaging the Spirit-given gift of tongues, Paul’s words humble the tongue speakers a little bit: “greater is the one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues...” (1 Cor. 14:5).

Paul begins with a challenge to pursue love (1 Cor. 14:1). He then articulates the necessity of “edification”—a keyword that means building up (1 Cor. 14:3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26), qualifies the value of tongue-speaking (1 Cor. 14:6-19), and regulates these diverse gifts so that one gift or person does not dominate others. All gifts should be used together to edify the church (1 Cor. 14:26-40). All things should be done for edification (1 Cor. 14:26).

Interestingly, Paul’s solution to division over spiritual gifts, love and edification, is essentially the same as his solution to eating food sacrificed to idols: “knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies” (1 Cor. 8:1). Paul believes acting out of love for edification is the simplest solution to church division. It makes me wonder how many divisions and problems we could solve by elevating love to the supreme position as the greatest gift.

Messages for Today

- **Engage the mind to edify the church.**
- **The message matters more than the messenger.**
- **Proper order has a peaceful purpose.**

Engage the mind to edify the church. Paul argues for the superiority of prophecy over tongue speaking, not because of partiality or preference, but because prophecy edifies the church and tongue speaking does not (1 Cor. 14:3-5). Tongue speaking edifies the speaker, but without an interpreter, the church gains

nothing from it (1 Cor. 14:6). It is like speaking “into the air” or speaking as a “barbarian” (1 Cor. 14:9-11).

Paul’s argument is rooted in the idea that for the church to be edified, it must understand the message being presented. The message must engage the mind of the listener. Paul would rather speak five words that instruct the church and engage the mind than ten thousand words in a tongue nobody understands (1 Cor. 14:19). Preachers should be careful not to speak in such esoteric and high-minded language that Christians struggle to understand. Simplicity is the lifeblood of effective communication (even if we can’t show off how smart we are).

Paul also includes unbelievers in this discussion. Sometimes unbelievers will enter our churches, and Paul wants us to be mindful of them. Without interpretation, tongue-speaking will do more harm than good. We don’t want the church to look crazy to outsiders. An understandable word of prophecy can convict, produce worship, and demonstrate the presence of God even to the unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:23-25).

The message matters more than the messenger. Paul places little to no value on the communicator but places tremendous value on the message being communicated. Paul is fine with a tongue-speaker speaking. You can even have two or three. Paul does not specify who the speaker is, where he is from, how long he has been a member, or if he is clergy or laity. Paul does, however, specify that they must have an interpreter because the message, regardless of who is speaking, needs to be heard and understood to edify the church.

The same principle is applied to prophets. Paul is not specific about which prophet gets up to speak; you can have several of them. What matters is the message being spoken. If one prophet is speaking and a message is revealed to a second prophet, the second prophet gets the floor, and the first must remain silent. It is not about the pride of the first prophet but about the message God wants to communicate.

This should remind us that it is okay to share the pulpit and that it’s okay to be silent. Sometimes the church can benefit from hearing other members of the family speak and learning from diverse voices. Do not be like the tongue speakers who believed so much in their special gift that they couldn’t sit down, be quiet, listen, and learn from others. None of us are that gifted, and even if we were, love requires us to take a back seat sometimes.

Proper order has a peaceful purpose. People love to say that “all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner” (1 Cor. 14:40). This phrase can become a catch-all to mean “All things should be done exactly how I deem proper, and in the order I like.” Paul is specifically trying to quell selfishness in the church. Tragically, we can borrow his phrase and subjectively apply it to support our selfish whims. Paul is not advocating order for order’s sake. Paul wants order for the sake of peace. Paul describes an ordered service because “God is not a God of confusion but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33).

Without Paul’s instructions, and this may well have been happening in Corinth, gifted Christians could fight and bicker over the podium. You could see tongue-speakers discrediting prophets, factions forming, and only one voice or perspective being allowed. Paul is ordering the service so that no one group or gift can dominate. Men must take turns and be silent while another is speaking, and all should be able to learn and understand. This order is not based on the whims of Paul or any man; Paul specifically says that “the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment” (1 Cor. 14:37). If your view of “decent and in order” is not producing peace and is not the Lord’s command, then it should probably be kept silent.

A Message of Hope for You

Love and edification are powerful cures to selfishness and division. When you consider doing anything in service to God’s people, remember love. Remember that God loved them enough to send His Son for their forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. And God calls us to share in that love. Seek to edify, build up, and encourage the church. Use your gifts not for self-aggrandizement, to take exclusive ownership of the pulpit, or to lord your abilities over others, but to strengthen and support the church God loves. Love still edifies, produces peace, and wins.

Discussion Questions

1. What role does “love” play in the use of spiritual gifts?
2. Why would prophecy be more desirable than tongues?
3. Why should one prophet “keep silent” because another prophet received a revelation?
4. What is the purpose of doing things “properly and in an orderly manner”?
5. Without the gift of tongues and prophetic revelation, how can we apply this text to our churches today?

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Lesson 25–Resurrection

ARE THE DEAD RAISED?

Charles Cochran

But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

1 Corinthians 15:13-19

There are Bible chapters remembered because of the subject matter found in them. What is the “love” chapter? First Corinthians 13 would be the answer. What chapter focuses on “faith?” The correct response would be Hebrews 11. Which great Bible chapter is riveted on the resurrection? The fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians establishes the certainty of the resurrection! Our study focuses on the question: “Are the dead raised?”

The Heart of the Message

The Preaching. When Paul went into the city of Corinth, he carried the gospel with him. He reminded these Christians in the words: “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel, which I preached to you” (1 Cor. 15:1). [All Scripture references are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.] This gospel had been “received” by Paul (1 Cor. 15:3). It came from heaven (Gal. 1:11-12). When the message was declared, Luke records that “many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). Paul reminded them they had “received the gospel” and in it they took their “stand” (1 Cor. 15:1). The gospel brought them “salvation” (1 Cor. 15:2). Paul delivered three golden truths which describe the gospel message. They were “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3), “He was buried” (1 Cor 15:4), and He “rose again the third day” (1 Cor. 15:4). No part of this good news can be deleted. The three-fold declaration is tied inseparably together! Paul understood the priority of preaching the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ when he wrote: “For I delivered

to you *first of all...*" (1 Cor. 15:3, emp. added, CFC). No other message can save those lost in sin. This is the fact of the resurrection Paul proclaimed.

The Proof. Paul reminded the Corinthians that their faith in the death, burial, and resurrection was connected to "the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). The Old Testament had predicted the reality of what would happen to the Messiah (Ps. 22:15; Ps. 16:9-11; 110:1; Isa. 53). Not only was the faith of the Corinthians founded upon the Scriptures, their faith was also based upon the eyewitnesses of the resurrected Savior. Four times Paul stated the risen Lord "was seen" (1 Cor. 15:5-8). The number ("over five hundred brethren at once," 1 Cor. 15:6), the names (Cephas, James), along with "all the apostles and Paul," provide a powerful testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. That the dead are raised is a proven fact.

The Problem. There were those who denied the reality of the resurrection. Some were saying, "There is no resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15:12). To deny the resurrection has several implications. If there be no resurrection, "then Christ is not risen" (1 Cor. 15:13). If Jesus is not raised, we "empty" the preaching of the apostles (1 Cor. 15:4) the faith of the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:14), the forgiveness of sins (1 Cor. 15:17), and the hope of seeing once again those who had "fallen asleep in Christ" (1 Cor. 15:18). To reject the resurrection of Christ would identify the apostles as "false witnesses," for they "testified of God that he raised up Christ" (1 Cor. 15:15). Life becomes a miserable existence if there be no hope beyond the grave (1 Cor. 15:19).

The Promise. Death came upon the human race through Adam. Christ brings life eternal through the resurrection. There is a glorious "when" and "then" seen in the promise of resurrection. Observe: "Then cometh the end, when he shall deliver up the Kingdom to God, even the Father, when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power" (1 Cor. 15:24). Again, notice: "And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). Jesus is the "firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. 15:20). The "firstfruits" are a guarantee that others will follow! The promise of life beyond the grave stands sure because Jesus was raised!

Messages for Today

- **The preaching is still needed.**
- **The proof is still noted.**
- **The promise is still new.**

The preaching is still needed. When Paul visited the corrupt Corinthian people, he was never ashamed to challenge them with the message of the gospel. He remembered its power to save (Rom. 1:16). He knew its potential to change people's lives (1 Cor. 6:9-11). We live in a culture that needs the kind of preaching Paul did when he came to Corinth. Sin still enslaves. Death continues to be the consequence of sin. Hope needs to assure the hearts of those knowing they face eternity. The blessed assurance of the resurrection must be proclaimed today.

The proof is still noted. Paul's approach to providing proof of the great doctrine of the resurrection should be followed today. We live in an age of "doubt" and "denial" concerning the reality of the resurrection. The support Paul gave the Corinthians is available to us now. We still possess Scripture. The inspired Word can be trusted and must be taught. While we have no living "witnesses" to the resurrection of Jesus here today, the record of what those "witnesses" affirmed about Jesus' resurrection assures our faith. Proof is provided for all who investigate the resurrection of the Lord.

The promise is still new. The exciting truth that a resurrection of the dead will occur is as new as when first given! Death still comes to all (Heb. 9:27). The dead still slumber in the silent tombs. The bodies of all the dead have not yet been raised to share in the glorious resurrection of Jesus. We wait for the final trumpet to awaken the dead to eternal life. When this happens, the *precious* promise that "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26) will become a reality.

A Message of Hope for You

The "Good News" which is reflected in the gospel is that the dead will be raised. Because Jesus was raised, we shall someday share in this wonderful day. All fear is gone as we face death. Victory will be experienced by the faithful (1 Cor. 15:57). Such motivates us to be assured of a true and living hope in Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. What was Paul's priority in preaching?
2. Give two sources of proof for the resurrection.
3. What was the promise Paul gave concerning the resurrection?
4. What are the consequences if there be no resurrection?
5. How is Jesus compared to Adam?

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Lesson 26–Resurrection

HOW ARE THE DEAD RAISED?

Rob Berghorst

But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

1 Corinthians 15:35-38

In reference to a future resurrection, Paul asked two questions still of interest to us today: “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” (1 Cor. 15:35). [All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.] This is one of the few times in the Bible where a writer asks the exact question we desire to know and then answers the question.

Unfortunately, even after reading his answer, we are still left without a clear picture. John’s words resonate well: “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). Nevertheless, the apostle provides helpful thoughts as we live with the knowledge of a future resurrection. Paul offers sufficient evidence for us to instill confidence and hope in a future resurrection, even if it lacks the perfect clarity that we may desire.

The Heart of the Message

Our death precedes our life. Yes, this may sound backwards. However, in relation to the question, this is the pattern that Paul teaches. Paul illustrates this emphatically: “You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies” (1 Cor. 15:36). Like Jesus often did, Paul used a natural example to illustrate a spiritual truth. He compares the future resurrection to a seed that is sown. Unless a seed is planted, the final essence of its life is not seen. An oak tree cannot come into existence until after the acorn is buried.

The new life is also substantially different than the previous life. Using the above example, there would be no way to tell what

an oak tree might look like if we only examined an acorn. Instead, “God gives it a body as he has chosen” (1 Cor. 15:39). Just as God has determined the design of our bodies here on earth, so he has also designed the new body which comes forth in the resurrection.

Our new bodies are imperishable. “So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable” (1 Cor. 15:42). Thankfully, the resurrection body will not suffer the same ailments of the physical body. Currently, tragedy surrounds us. The words *cancer* and *Covid* are still a regular part of our vocabulary. The perishable nature of our bodies is also not isolated to a certain age group. Many of us know someone who was *taken too early*.

The resurrected body is raised in glory and not susceptible to the physical dangers we face now. Is it any wonder we long for something better? So much of our heartache today is tied to the fact that our bodies are temporary. According to Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:1-4, we look forward to a building from God instead of a temporary tent. We look forward to being fully clothed in our eternal state, “so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (2 Cor. 5:4). Paul gives the Corinthians something to look forward to that is unattainable in our present life. We have the promise of an imperishable body. No more physical pain. No more anxiety over the physical aging process. No more needing to say goodbye due to a physical death. Paul defines this as a *spiritual body* that is raised in power (1 Cor. 15:43-44). Since the term *spiritual* may raise connotations not intended in the passage, it may be best to think of this comparison as a natural body versus a supernatural body. Although he provides details about this body, we still do not know exactly what this body will be like. Is it possible that our current form provides an indication of what we may be like? It is certainly a possibility, but the Scriptures are silent on this speculation.

We shall bear the image of Christ. Paul writes, “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” (1 Cor. 15:49). Continuing the discussion, Paul makes an analogy about Adam, the first human being created (Gen. 2). Adam provided a means for subsequent humans. Like Adam, we are natural and susceptible to the challenges inherent with the earth.

This *second Adam* also became a life-giving being. As the natural man allowed for natural life, so the spiritual man provides spiritual life. It is easy to read over this section of the text without fully grasping the significance. In Adam we are given all things related to Adam. Similarly, in Christ, we are given all things related to Christ. How amazing is that! As I am still a product of Adam at this point, the concept of eternal life is somewhat beyond my grasp. However, God has revealed to us the eternal nature of Jesus. It is his life into which we are invited. Eternal life is only possible because of a connection to the one who has life within him. Paul's promise to the Corinthians is that they will one day bear the image of Jesus just as surely as they have borne the image of Adam.

Messages for Today

- **We must live in view of a future resurrection.**
- **We must live according to God's design.**
- **We must live in harmony with the image of Jesus.**

We must live in view of a future resurrection. Life is challenging. Our struggles are not new. Many of God's people questioned why certain things were happening. Asaph doubted whether it was beneficial to follow God when he saw the endless blessings of the rich and powerful (Ps. 73). In Revelation 6:10, the souls of those slaughtered because of the word of God cried out, "How long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Christians will endure suffering right up until the moment of the resurrection. At that moment everything changes; we will be raised in glory. Paul sums it up well in Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

We must live according to God's design. As Paul illustrates a number of different bodies in this text, it is clear that each body was designed for a specific purpose. A kernel of wheat was given an intentional design just as the sun fulfills its purpose in God's creation (1 Cor. 15:37, 40). While the focus of this passage deals primarily with the spiritual body, his teaching offers us a powerful lesson on the design of the physical body as well. Our physical bodies are designed to accomplish specific tasks while on our physical earth. Consider the relationship between our brain, our emotions, and our flesh. We have the ability to learn to think like God. We have the ability to feel compassion for those

around us and love them as God loves us. We have the hands and feet designed to serve the downtrodden and seek the lost. Likewise, whatever our role will be in the eternal realm, the spiritual body will be designed for that purpose.

We must live in harmony with the image of Jesus. The future spiritual body appears to find its pattern in Christ (cf. Phil. 3:21). Amazingly, God's intent for Christians now is to look like Jesus as well (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). Do you want the same glory as Jesus later? It seems only logical that one strives for the same life right now.

A Message of Hope for You

Our world is filled with fear. One of those fears is the fear of the unknown. Paul reminded the Corinthians that we need not fear what lies beyond death's door. As Christ has life abiding in him, so do those who are connected to Jesus. As God was able to fashion a body suitable for our current life, he is also able to create a body designed for eternity. Although we may not fully understand what that will be like, his creation all around us furnishes us with confidence in his ability to deliver.

Death may escape no one, but eternity is real. In the never-ending distractions inherent in our world, Christians must live, serve, and love with an eternal perspective and truly look forward to the day when they are clothed with glory.

Discussion Questions

1. How does knowing that you will be raised affect your current life?
2. In what ways do you find confidence from God in his ability to create something you have yet to experience?
3. How can you better bear the image of the heavenly man (Jesus) right now?
4. In what ways does 1 Corinthians 15:35-49 cause us to reflect on the Genesis account of creation?

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Lesson 27–Resurrection

WHEN SHALL THE DEAD BE RAISED?

Jonah Stults

But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:23

Sadly, after the sin in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3), death became an inevitable fact of the world. Many of us have lost a loved one, and we wish that we can see them again. 1 Corinthians 15 gives a very clear hope that one day we can see our loved ones again. Not only that, but we can also have victory over death. What is this hope? Where do we see it? Let us dive in and find our hope.

The Heart of the Message

Paul begins to establish our hope by speaking of Jesus' resurrection first. Jesus was one of the biggest figures of His time. We can see this in multiple points of His ministry (Matt. 14:13-21; Lk. 17:12-19). [All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.] The two biggest points of his ministry appear towards the end of his earthly stay: His death and resurrection. Jesus' resurrection was a central point of the Gospels and, many over the years have questioned its validity (Matt. 28:11-15). Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15, set out to negate this doubt. Starting in verse 1, he begins to list those who had seen the risen Jesus. This list included: Cephas, the twelve apostles (v. 6), 500 brothers (v. 7), James, the apostles (v. 8), and finally Paul (Acts 9:1-19a). Paul uses this to begin to establish the fact of our resurrection. Going back to verse one, he says: "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received...." He finishes the first section of Scripture by saying, "Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed."

Paul then establishes the hope of our resurrection. Paul begins this section by saying: "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the

dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15:12-14). Paul then goes on to write, “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (vv. 20-22). We can know that we will be raised to a better life!

Paul then tells us when we shall be raised. In verses 50-58, Paul establishes the time of our resurrection. He says in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52: “Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.” So, when shall the dead be raised? At the sound of the trumpet. When will this trumpet sound? At the second coming of Christ (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

Messages for Today

- **We can know there will be a resurrection of the dead.**
- **We can have hope associated with the resurrection of the dead.**
- **Our resurrection can bring victory over death.**

We can know there will be a resurrection of the dead. Even before Paul penned the words of 1 Corinthians 15, the hope of a resurrection had been established. In John 5:28-29, Jesus said: “Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” In his defense in the book of Acts, Paul says: “[Have] a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and unjust” (Acts 24:15). Even all the way back in the book of Daniel, the prophet said: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). Finally, God confirmed it through Paul in Romans 6:5: “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

We can have hope associated with the resurrection of the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15:50-54, Paul talks about the hope we have in the resurrection: “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the

last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” (v. 53). We have a hope that at the sound of the trumpet those who have died will be raised, and then those who are still alive shall rise also to meet Christ in the sky (1 Thess. 4:16-18). On that day, we will all head to judgment, and the faithful will live with Christ forever (Rev. 21:1-7). There will be no more pain, no more sorrow, no more crying, and no more mourning (Rev. 21:4).

Our resurrection can bring victory over death. Death is often a very negative and sad subject, but for the Christian, death does not have to be sad. If we live our lives faithfully to God (Heb. 3:1-2), we can truly have joy in our resurrection. We can have victory over death. In 1 Corinthians 15:54-58, Paul tells us how we can achieve this: “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” We can achieve this victory by putting on Christ in baptism and living faithfully unto death (Acts 2). Then and only then will we achieve victory in our resurrection.

A Message of Hope for You

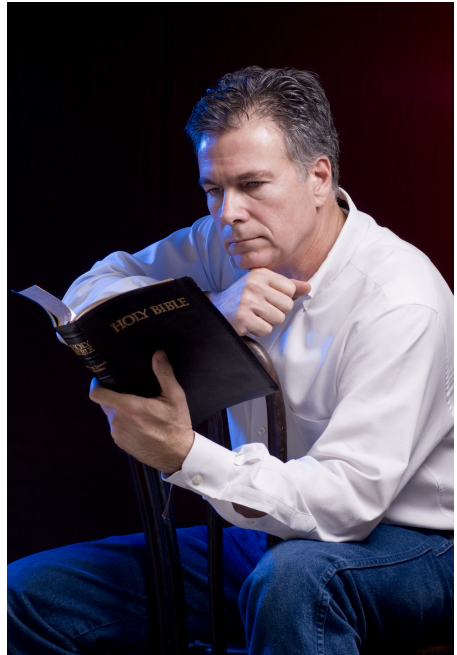
Our resurrection can be sure, and we can see the faithful again. In 2 Samuel 12, David loses his son after his sin with Bathsheba. In verse 23b, after being asked why he grieved while his son was living, he says, “Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.” Even here, David talks about the resurrection of the dead. David had hope he could see his son again. We have the same hope. Our resurrection can be sure and if we remain faithful, we can see those who died in Christ again.

Discussion Questions

1. How did Paul establish the fact of Jesus' resurrection?
2. Can we have the hope of our resurrection? Why?
3. When shall we be raised?
4. Can we truly have victory over death?
5. How did David prove the resurrection of the dead?

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UNITED: BECOMING ONE IN CHRIST

Studies in 1 Corinthians

“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.”

1 Corinthians 1:10

Due to a lack of wisdom, maturity, humility, morality, and love, the Christians at Corinth weren't united. By the time Paul wrote to them, they were accommodating different factions, depreciating Christ and the gospel, tolerating egregious sin, taking one another to court, participating in sexual immorality and idolatry, struggling with marriage issues, insisting on their respective rights, abusing the Lord's Supper, viewing certain spiritual gifts as more important than others, failing to edify one another when assembled for worship, and questioning the hope of being raised from the dead.

If left unchallenged and uncorrected, Paul knew these practices among the Corinthian Christians would only lead to further polarization in the church at Corinth and ultimately separation from God. For Paul, as well as Jesus (John 17:20-23), becoming one in Christ is essential.

This book, suitable for junior high through adult classes, will provide students with an overview of 1 Corinthians, challenging them to cultivate those attitudes and actions that are essential to creating and maintaining unity in Christ's church.

