

TRUE WISDOM FOR YOUR CHURCH

by

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Introduction

True Wisdom for Your Church.

A study from the book of I Corinthians.

Central truth for this book: A healthy church wisely focuses all attention upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Corinthian letter was sent to a church that was in need of spiritual wisdom. She was located in one of the richest, yet one of the most

wicked, cities of the world. Corinth was situated on a small neck of land about four miles wide which connected the southern part with the rest of Greece. As a consequence of that location, Corinth had become a trading center for most of the world. Land traffic passed from the north and the south on the way to other parts of the world; sea traffic from east to west used Corinth as a port. As a result, objects of luxury found their way to the Corinthian markets. Those objects included Arabian balsam, Phoenician dates, Libyan ivory, Babylonian carpets, Sicilian goat hair, Lycaonian wool, and Phrygian slaves.

With wealth came every conceivable form of wickedness. Corinth had such a reputation for wickedness that a concept of "Corinthianize" developed, meaning to live in drunken, immoral wickedness. Whenever a Corinthian appeared in a Greek play, he was always drunk. Being a Corinthian meant being a wicked person.

In addition to the normal wickedness found in Corinth, immorality was practiced as a part of their religion. Above Corinth stood the great temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. To that temple were attached a thousand priestesses who were immoral women. In the evening they would leave the temple and enter the city to practice their immorality on the streets. Every citizen of Corinth was subjected to great temptations by those women. The sad truth was that the majority of the citizens saw nothing wrong with immorality. Many saw it as a part of their worship. Paul wanted to encourage the church of Corinth and instruct her members concerning how to live righteously in the midst of that decadent society. He showed them how to find and develop their spiritual gifts, how to live a clean life, how to love one another, how to glorify God, and how to rejoice in the resurrection of Christ. He taught them how to give to the ministries of the church, how to serve the Lord, and how to exercise care so as not to offend others in Christ.

Paul was concerned that the church at Corinth knew that she had two addresses. While on earth, she was located in the wicked city of Corinth; but there also was a spiritual address her members were in Christ. (Every church has two addresses: a geographical address [at Corinth or wherever], and a spiritual address [in Christ]). The Corinthian church was surrounded by sinners but was composed of saints who had trusted

Christ as Savior and Lord. As saints, the members were people who had been set aside for God's special use and enjoyment.

All churches, just like the one at Corinth, have troublesome problems. The Corinthian letter shows that Jesus is the answer to those problems. In the first ten verses, Paul used the name of Jesus ten times. Paul's message was that Jesus is the only answer to the challenges of living in a wealthy, decadent society. The answer is still the same. If a church today is to serve Jesus successfully in this wicked and troubled world, she must do it by focusing attention on Jesus. Barclay wrote, "Sometimes in the church we try to deal with a difficult situation by means of a book of laws and in the spirit of human justice; sometimes in our own affairs we try to deal with a difficult situation in our mental and spiritual power. Paul did none of those things; his difficult situation he took Jesus Christ, and it was in the light of the cross of Christ and the love of Christ that he sought to deal with it."

The instruction found in I Corinthians is needed in churches today.

Churches need to discover continually the spiritual wisdom that comes only from God. Members of all churches need wisdom for finding and developing spiritual gifts. If a church is to prosper in God's economy, she must take seriously the use of spiritual gifts.

Members must learn how to keep their lives clean in a filthy world.

There must be perpetual growth in the ability to love and express that love both to one another in church fellowship and to those outside the church who need the message of Christ. In a dark and foreboding world, churches must be the light which glorifies God through their lives, their praise, and their service.

Lesson 1

THREE VIEWS OF YOUR CHURCH

The Way the Lord Sees the Church (I Corinthians 1:1-9).

Central Truth: Present a positive picture of your church by actively demonstrating the principles of Scripture!

There are many problems in almost every church. People are people, and they will inevitably fail at times in their Christian pilgrimage.

Sometimes the problems will loom so large within a church that one would even question whether a fellowship so corrupted should even be considered a church. But when the Lord looks upon the church, He sees the people whom He has saved, sanctified, and called to be saints (verse 2). He sees their problems and knows they are frail; He also sees their potential because they have been born from above and are His people.

The Lord sees the church as His own special creation. She was created to be a fellowship of people who give themselves to prayer. The prayer fellowship is even larger than the local community. It involves "*all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord*" (verse 2). One of the exciting things that I have experienced teaching at the seminary in Jacksonville, Texas, is the commonality of prayer that Christians from all over the world share. While there are many cultural differences among people, those who love the Lord always have prayer in common, regardless of the land from which they have come.

Christ sees the church as a fellowship of people who have received His grace. In Paul's letter to Corinth, he did not begin with their sins; but in his salutation, he began by reminding them of God's amazing grace.

"Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 3). Without the grace of God, the congregation would be just another gathering of lost humanity.

There is little doubt that some of the members of the church at Corinth were rich through trade, but Paul reminded them that earthly riches were not their greatest treasure. They had been made rich by the Lord. "In every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift" (verses 5-7). When the Lord looks upon His people, He does not see a group of poor downtrodden people, but a people who are joint heirs with Him. If we are His "children, then [we are] heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:17, 18).

The Lord sees His church as a community that is "*waiting for the*

coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 7). The exciting thing is that while she waits, the Lord has affirmed that she will stand faithfully until the end. [Christ] "shall also confirm you unto the end" (verse 8).

Standing firm is not something that the people do through their own strength; it is something that the Lord does through them. He saved them, He keeps them, and through His blood atonement and His imputed righteousness He has made them "*blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (verse 8).

What a privilege it is to be a part of the fellowship of Jesus Christ. "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (verse 9). The Lord's church is composed of people who have received the gift of God. Paul wrote, "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ" (verse 4).

The Way the World Sees the Church (I Corinthians 1:10-15).

Unfortunately, many churches do not live up to the standard that Christ has called them to achieve. He does not discard or disown them when they fail, but a failing church causes confusion for those who are in the world. That was the condition of the church in Corinth. The Corinthian church was divided. Paul wrote, "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (verse 10). When any church allows sin to enter her fellowship and cause factions within the membership, Satan has gained a victory. On a discouraging note, one of my brothers-in-law who had served many Baptist churches during his ministry said, "It is a terrible thing, but most of the large Baptist churches either have split or are on the verge of a split." What a sad picture that is for the world. The church is the one and only voice that can offer lost hope in this troubled world.

The Corinthian church was a group contentious people. Paul wrote of them, "It hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you" (verse 11). Not only was the church made up of contentious people, but

she had become a politicized body. The members had chosen different personalities around which to mobilize their selfish causes (verses 12-15).

How could any church with such problems glorify the Lord? It is only through the grace of God. But His grace is real; and even though churches are marred by human failure, the Lord continues to reign. He will continue to use His churches as witnesses to lost and dying humanity. He has decreed that He will receive glory in and through His church in the world. "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:21).

What Should Be Seen in Your Church (I Corinthians 1:26-31).

The Lord has chosen His people to do great works. Paul wrote, "*Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence*" (verses 26-29). Every church should be a center where God is at work in and through the people. If God is not working within a fellowship, then the fellowship is just that a fellowship devoid of the spiritual power that is needed to be a church of Jesus Christ.

The Lord has chosen to make His people rich in wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (verse 30). As people within a church serve the Lord, there should be a reflection of the riches of Christ that God has bestowed upon them. No church needs to be a beggar in the world, for all the resources he needs are available through the Lord. A church must be forever a fellowship of people who glory in the Lord (verse 31). With all that the Lord has bestowed upon the church, some may begin to think that by their own hands they have wrought the great works that have been accomplished. The temptation is to think, "We built the buildings, we won the people, or we did the work." Such thinking is a terrible mistake. Jesus said, "I am the vine, ye are the

branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Questions for Discussion

1. What could you do to help the world see a reflection of Christ when they look at your church?
2. What was the church of Corinth's greatest problem in projecting a positive image to the world?
3. Why was the Lord able to see good in the church of Corinth in spite of all the evil that was present

Lesson 2

HEAVENLY WISDOM

I Corinthians 2:1-8, 12-16

Central Truth: Resist the temptation to depend on worldly wisdom!

Many people believe that the answer to the problems in the world is better education. The argument is that if we will only spend more to educate all the children in our society, we can eliminate poverty and crime. On the basis of that argument, the United States has spent billions of dollars and regularly considers measures to increase the spending for education. In spite of all the efforts to provide universal education for the citizens, the United States continues to have a high crime rate, and millions continue to live below the poverty level. Logic should indicate that education within itself is not the answer to the needs of our society. Our society needs the wisdom that comes from the Lord. Unless we admit our need for the Lord, no amount of education will result in the desired improvement of our society.

Heavenly Wisdom Is Limitless

The wisdom of the world is not the wisdom of God. Regardless of the eloquence, the world's wisdom is human and limited (I Corinthians 1:17). The wisdom of God is that which is demonstrated through the Spirit's power and knows no limitation (I Corinthians 2:4, 5). The world's wisdom is framed in enticing words of man's wisdom; God's wisdom operates through the Word of the Spirit (I Corinthians 2:13). Man's wisdom brings spiritual ignorance (I Corinthians 1:21); God's wisdom brings knowledge of things eternal, the things of God (I

Corinthians 2:12).

In relationship to God, man has always presented a confusing picture. As a race, man has always had an insatiable desire to know God, but he wants to know Him through natural experience. God wants man to know Him, but because of man's limitations, the only way he can know God is through a special revelation from God himself. Mankind as a whole has rejected that revelation and continues the quest of attempting to discover God through his intellect. Man has tried to discover the creation and the reality of God, as well as His nature, scientifically. However, the more man has searched through his own wisdom, the further away his mind has moved from knowledge of the true God. "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Romans 1:21).

Even those who know God are in danger of losing much of their understanding if they begin trusting human wisdom. "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

The wonder of wonders is that heavenly wisdom is framed as a simple message (verse 1). While the message is deep and complex, God gave His message in such a way that people can by faith comprehend its basic truth. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul showed that because of the work of Christ in their lives, Christians can have great spiritual understanding. With Christ dwelling in their hearts, the people of God *"may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that [they] might be filled with all the fullness of God"* (Ephesians 3:18, 19).

As Paul delivered the message of Christ, he did so "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling" (verse 3). The fear and trembling was not because of people who were resistant to the message he preached; Paul was never terrified by his adversaries. His anxiety lay in the awesome responsibility of his task and the serious nature of the message he delivered. The message he preached had eternal implications for the hearers. What the hearers did with the message would determine the

direction of their future life and their eternal destiny. Paul gave a glimpse of the seriousness with which he viewed the responsibility of his task when he wrote, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (II Corinthians 5:11). He also showed the level of sacrifice he was willing to make in order to communicate the gospel: "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (I Corinthians 9:22). While Paul spoke in weakness, his preaching of Christ was accompanied with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power (verses 3, 4). As he spoke, the Spirit convicted people of their sins; as they turned from their sins and put their faith in Christ, their lives were changed and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Wisdom of God Is a Mystery

The most brilliant theologian cannot fathom the depths of the gospel; yet, it remains simple enough for even a child to comprehend its invitation and to receive it. In fact, Jesus said, "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein" (Mark 10:15). Every person must take great care that he not become so smart that he becomes a fool before God.

Paul said that the wisdom of God was spoken in a mystery. "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory" (verse 7). The idea in the word for "mystery" was a truth hidden from people on the outside but revealed to those on the inside. While people of the world cannot understand the simple truth of the gospel, Christians have the potential not only for understanding but for a continual growth in the things of the Lord as well. Paul wrote about "the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26, 27).

Another idea that Paul discussed was that Christian truth is something in which believers must grow. While the basic ideas of the faith are preached, there is a higher level of Christian truth. There seem to be at least three levels that a person can experience in spiritual maturity. The

first level is that of a hearer - one who hears the Word, believes in Jesus, and is saved. The second level is that of one who has become teachable. Such a person is open to the Word and willing to be taught, but has not reached the desired level of spiritual maturity. The third level is one that could be described as a mature student. He is still being taught, but has grown to the point where he is feeding on the "*meat*" of the word. (See Hebrews 5:12-14.) No Christian ever outgrows the need for growth. Paul taught that there was a level of wisdom that could be understood only by "them that are perfect" (verse 6). By the term "*perfect*," Paul meant those individuals who had grown past the rudiments of the faith and were ready for more advanced instruction. Out in the world, the message that was needed was the simple declaration of the basic gospel; but to those who had already believed, there was a need for an understanding, not only of the basic facts of the gospel, but also the meaning of those facts. Believers need to grow to the point that they can think about the things of God on their own initiative. The mystery of the wisdom of God is hidden from "*the princes of this world*" (verse 6). Had they recognized God's work among mankind, "*they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*" (verse 8). While God has hidden His work from those of the world, those who belong to Him have access to a vision of God that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man." God has chosen to reveal to His servants "the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (verse 9).

Heavenly Wisdom Is Taught by the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 2:10-16)

God reveals the truth about himself through His Spirit. Through the Spirit, God can reveal to man truth that human reasoning cannot fathom. Just as "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16), the Spirit also teaches and reveals all the truth that we as Christians need in order to serve God and find fulfillment in life. "*The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you*" (John

14:26). Not all people can receive the revelation of the Spirit. Paul spoke of "*the natural man*" (verse 14). He used that expression to describe a person who is governed by the flesh. Such a person is not sensitive to the Spirit of God and cannot receive "*the things of the Spirit of God*" (verse 14). To the "natural man" the things of God are foolishness. But those who have been born from above and have become sensitive and obedient to the Spirit of God can discern the truth that the Spirit brings to them. Believers should realize that it is possible for them to fall back under the control of the flesh and live and think like "*the natural man.*" He can be insensitive to the Spirit and in effect do what Paul commanded the Thessalonians not to do quench the Spirit (I Thessalonians 5:19).
Where do you stand in relationship to heaven's wisdom?

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the rudiments of the faith? How does one come to know those rudiments?
2. What is the "mystery" of revelation? How can one ever understand the "mystery?"
3. What must a person do before he can receive the "meat" of the Word? In what ways does the meat of the Word differ from the milk of the Word?
4. Is there anything that you or your church could do to be more open to the Spirit of God?
5. What special dangers do those who are trying to serve God in the flesh face?

Lesson 3

ELIMINATING DIVISION

I Corinthians 3:1-9, 11-13, 18

Cause of Trouble (I Corinthians 3:1-9)

Central Truth: Set your eyes upon Christ as the cure for division.
Carnality has always been a major cause of trouble that arises within a church. Paul recognized that as a problem among the Corinthians: "*I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal*" (verse 1). In defining what was meant by being carnal, Paul used a word which meant flesh. By that he meant that the Corinthians continued to

think only with their human capacity. They had allowed the lower side of their nature, or their flesh, to shape the way they thought and lived. Paul was not saying that they were not Christians, but they had not allowed their spiritual nature to grow to the point where their lives were shaped by their spirituality. They were, in effect, "*babes in Christ*" (verse 1). The new life they had found in Christ had failed to thrive.

A failure to thrive is a tragedy that sometimes occurs in the physical development of a newborn. In such a case, the infant does not take proper nourishment and his physical development is brought almost to a standstill. The child does not necessarily have a disease; there is just a failure to thrive. Several things can contribute to the development of such a condition in a newborn, but I understand that neglect is the most common cause of the problem. If an infant is to thrive, he needs the touch and care of those around him. The same is true of a newborn's spiritual life. A newborn Christian needs the touch and care of more mature Christians about him. If mature Christians neglect to express their care, or if the newborn Christian is in a fellowship marked by sub-Christian behavior, he could possibly do as the Corinthians and fail to thrive, allowing the fleshly nature to resume control.

A symptom of a failure to thrive is the inability to receive adequate nourishment. The growth of the Corinthians had been so stunted that they could not receive the meat of the Word. "*I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able*" (verse 2). Even though the Corinthians had prided themselves in their great understandings and spirituality, they had become so concerned with getting their own way that they could not get past their selfish concerns and receive the great truths of God. Without a greater understanding of God's truths, they had no way of growing beyond their carnal nature.

Evidence of a Troubled Church

Paul left no doubt that the carnal lives of the Corinthians would result in conflict in their fellowship as a church. He described them as being marked with "envying, and strife, and divisions" (verse 3). Paul was

deeply concerned that the Corinthians were quarreling and demonstrating jealousy toward each other. Such action was indicative of the worldliness that had taken over in their lives. Anytime a church is known more for her quarreling than for praying, she is in trouble. If a church has difficulty operating because the members are jealous of each other, she will not have an effective ministry. If the lives of church members are more like the world than of a God-fearing community of faith, the church will not be able to have a positive impact upon the world.

A serious problem that had invaded the church of Corinth was divided loyalties. "*One saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos*" (verse 4). Exactly why the Corinthians had allowed themselves to choose one leader over another is not known, but the damage of such action is obvious. Instead of serving the Lord, they were fighting about who was the best leader.

Unfortunately, the problem of the church at Corinth has been repeated in the fellowship of many modern-day churches. It does not matter whether it is the pastor, preachers within the membership, evangelists, or just a strong natural leader within the church membership, churches must never choose up sides and become pitted against each other. The world needs the testimony of God's people far too much for that testimony to be wasted in trying to lift a human being to an inordinate position. The Christian community is to worship the Lord, not man! It is extremely foolish to try to build a movement around men, even great men of faith. "*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed...?*" (verse 5). The ministers are simply the ones by whom the ministry of the Lord is delivered. Someone has said, "You can't build a movement around the busboy or a waiter." That is all a minister is - one who serves the milk and meat of God's Word. It is very foolish to seek to elevate the delivery person above the works of God. In the spiritual warfare of the church, only God can give the increase. "*I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase*" (verses 6, 7).

While men are called to do different works for God, they are all working to build the same cause. Those who are truly spiritual leaders are all united in their efforts to glorify the Lord through their labors, and they do not desire the praise of man. Paul said of Apollos - and of his own ministry - that one planted and one watered, but it was God who brought the increase. As workers, he and Apollos were united. "*He that planteth and he that watereth are one*" (verse 8).

Principles That Prevent Division

Paul gave several principles that can prevent divisions with a church.

Personal accountability - It is difficult to spend much time judging the effectiveness of others if one is aware that one day he will stand in the presence of Christ and give account of his own stewardship. Paul wrote, "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (verse 8). It does not matter the degree of effectiveness of those around a person, that person must account for his own work.

Self-knowledge - Each Christian is a worker among workers, seeking to serve the Lord. "*We are labourers together with God*" (verse 9). It is not the role of a worker to supervise or judge other workers; it is the responsibility of a worker to be faithful in his task and let the Lord of the harvest make the judgment as to the effectiveness of each worker.

Knowledge of the nature of the church - The church belongs to the Lord. The work of the church is His work. "*Ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building*" (verse 9). A prominent minister gave testimony of how he once became despondent because it seemed that the church he was leading was not progressing as it should. In his testimony, he told that during the night, it was as if God spoke to him and said, "*I will build my church*" (Matthew 16:18).

If one fully understands that the church belongs to the Lord and not him or her, a lot of nerve will be required to complain about how the Lord is directing the work of the church.

Recognition of mutual dependency - "*According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon*" (verse 10). From Paul's words, it is clear

that not every person in the church has the same work to do. Some are instrumental in laying the foundation; others are charged with the responsibility of building upon that foundation. Even in the building process, there are various works to be performed, and each worker needs the other workers in order to accomplish the total task. In building a house, the roofers cannot install the roof unless the framers complete the frame.

Realization of dependency upon Christ - "*Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ*" (verse 11). It is important for all Christian workers to remember that apart from Christ they can do nothing. Jesus said, "*Without me ye can do nothing*" (John 15:5).

Realization of coming judgment - "If any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (verses 12-15).

Damage Caused by Division

Division among God's people defiles the temple of God. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (verses 16, 17). This passage is often quoted to show the importance of a Christian avoiding unholy things in his life. That is a fair application of those verses, but Paul was showing how the carnality of the Corinthians was a defilement. A Christian does not have to engage in immoral behavior, smoke, drink, or do other things usually considered worldly to defile his body, the temple of God. All that a Christian has to do is to fail to grow spiritually. Paul seems to be saying that if there are divisions within the church or if there are people who are following leaders instead of Christ, they are defiling the temple of God; and the consequence of such action will be disastrous. "*If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.*"

It is indeed a fearful thing to continue living a carnal life within a fellowship that is supposed to be committed to growth in grace and knowledge of the truth. Another problem that Paul identified among carnal Christians is that their carnality deceives them into thinking that they are wiser than they are. *"Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain"* (verses 18-20). Those things which seem so clever by human standards are really very foolish before God. Only the person who grows in grace and knowledge can truly be wise in the sight of God.

Carnality robs Christians of blessings. A Christian is rich in the Lord. God's grace has enriched him in every way. God in His grace has called workers who are committed to ministering to all the saints. If one is carnal and begins to elevate people to higher positions than he should, he cuts himself off from the rich ministry by which God has intended to bless him. Paul said, "Let no man glory in men. For all things are your's; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are your's; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (verses 21-23).

Notice the statement, *"All things are your's."* How great is the treasure that Christians have in the ministries of one another. Christ has enriched His kingdom by giving various gifts and ministries to His people. The ministries of all belong to all; specialized workers are called for the edification of all members. No one should ever allow his fleshly nature to keep him from receiving blessings God has purposed to give through His workers. No one should ever say, *"I am of Paul,"* or *"I am of Apollos"* (verse 4). We are the product of all the people that God has brought into our lives. Prohibiting the ministry of any of God's workers robs us of great spiritual blessings.

Lesson 4

EVALUATING GOD'S SERVANTS

I Corinthians 4:1-14

Central Truth: Leave all judgment of people and ministries to God

Most people who attend church services have at one time or another been guilty of having "preacher stew." In that meal the people discuss the pros and cons of the preacher's leadership, his preaching, or some mannerism which he exhibits. Seldom do such sessions honor the Lord, but they do much to discredit the Lord's servants.

In the lesson text, Paul explained how God evaluates and measures Christian servants. He stressed that believers must exercise caution in judging one another concerning their service to the Lord. "*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*" (verse 6). It is very important that Christians learn to be careful about discussing, evaluating, or listening to unkind and unnecessary comments about Christian servants.

A Christian Servant Will Be Judged

There are two main areas for which a Christian servant will be judged. He will be judged concerning his faithfulness as a minister of Christ (verse 1) and his faithfulness concerning his responsibility to the truth of God's Word. The word minister carries the idea of a servant. Being a minister is not a rank to be achieved but a service to be rendered and a responsibility to be filled!

Ministers are "stewards of the mysteries of God" (verse 1). As such, they must handle the word of God faithfully; they must be true to the doctrines of God. In all that they do, they must be faithful to their responsibility. "*It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful*" (verse 2).

A Christian Servant Is Judged by the Lord

The Lord has not delegated the judgment of His servants to another. Paul states that "*it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you.. He that judgeth me is the Lord*" (verses 3, 4). While there will always be those who take it upon themselves to judge the Lord's servants, their judgment has no authority and no meaning; the Lord himself will judge His servants.

The fact that no man is capable of adequately passing judgment upon the

servants of the Lord does not mean that a church should sit back and allow an unworthy person to destroy the flock. The leaders of a church have a responsibility both to follow and to discipline the men who are set before them as leaders. Such discipline, however, should be administered with great care. Paul wrote, "*Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses*" (I Timothy 5:19). No minister should ever be judged on the basis of community gossip; no accusation should be received against a church leader unless there is clear proof of wrongdoing. Those elders who prove themselves unworthy, however, should be rebuked. "*Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear*" (I Timothy 5:20).

Judgment meted out to elders must not be done in a spirit of partiality but in fairness, holding all to the same level of accountability, regardless of their charisma or lack thereof. "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality" (I Timothy 5:21).

One way to avoid confusion concerning elders is to allow men opportunity to prove themselves before they are given the responsibility of the ministry. "*Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure*" (I Timothy 5:22). Too often men are thrust into ministerial responsibility long before they have the spiritual maturity or experiential background to faithfully fulfill the duties of a pastor. Because of inadequate preparation, some young men have been overcome by the responsibility of the office and have left the ministry altogether.

One of the difficulties in judging another person is the problem of truly understanding that person's actions. Only the Lord is capable of bringing "*to light the hidden things of darkness, . [making] manifest the counsels of the hearts*" (verse 5). A saying credited to native Americans, "Do not judge a man until you have walked a mile in his moccasins," should be remembered when a person begins to sit in judgment of those who are actively trying to serve the Lord. A thrilling truth is that those faithful servants whom men have judged harshly and set aside will be judged fairly by the Lord. The Lord will not ask His servants, "How large was

the church you led?" or "How many people thought you were great?"

Instead, He will simply state, "*Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord*" (Matthew 25:21). When the Lord judges, "*then shall every man have praise of God*" (verse 5).

No Mortal Should Undertake the Task of Judgment

All judgment by mankind is premature. "*Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come*" (verse 5). Man tends to judge upon the basis of appearances; God judges upon the basis of eternal outcomes. Which judgment seems to you to be more fair?

When the Lord judges, He will "*make manifest the counsels of the hearts*" (verse 5). When the heart behind a work is understood, the matter always looks different. Man cannot make a judgment of the heart, for only God can see into the deep secrets of a person's life.

No mortal is worthy of favorable judgment because everything a mortal is has been given him. "*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?*" (verse 7). In order to pass judgment upon another, one must see himself superior to the one being judged. How can anyone do that, since any gift or any accomplishment is given by the Lord? Since "*there is none that doeth good, no, not one*" (Romans 3:12), how can any of us sit in judgment of our brother?

It Is an Act of Folly to Judge God's Servants

Those who set themselves up as judges of the Lord's servants have viewed themselves as being full, rich, and judging as if they were kings (verse 8). Paul showed the folly of their judgmental attitude by using irony. When he said, "Ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us," he was showing them how in their own minds they had begun to see themselves superior to the very people who had nurtured them into the Christian faith.

The Corinthians had developed a false pride in what they thought were their spiritual wisdom and spiritual gifts. Their pride had led them to overrate their own powers and overlook the spiritual power of those who

had been their spiritual benefactors. In their own conceit, they reigned as kings. Paul said in effect, "I wish it were true." No doubt he was thinking, "It would be wonderful if you had as much of the true glory of the faith upon you as you believe yourself to possess." Matthew Henry wrote, "The Corinthians might have reigned, and the apostle with them, if they had not been blown up with an imaginary royalty. Pride is a great prejudice to our improvement. He is stopped from growing wiser or better who thinks himself at the height; not only full, but rich, nay, a king .. The Corinthians may think themselves, and be esteemed by others, as wiser and stronger men in Christ than the apostles themselves. But O! how gross is the mistake!" (Matthew Henry's Commentary). Those who think best of themselves and have the highest opinion of themselves usually do not really know themselves at all. Those who would judge the servants of the Lord have misjudged both themselves and those who are true servants. In their minds and hearts they have placed themselves in a superior position to those who are true servants. *"I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised"* (verses 9-11). While the Corinthians were rejoicing in what they considered their great spiritual understanding and very casually passed judgment as to which of the great leaders was actually the greatest, those very leaders were engaged in a life and death struggle to carry the claims of the gospel to the lost world. The attitude of the Corinthians was very similar to that of those Christians today who attend their Bible studies and then sit in judgment of those Christians who are engaging the world in an evangelistic outreach. A Christian, trying to justify the smallness of the church where he was a member, said of a larger group, *"They majored on the method of the Word while we majored on the meat of the Word."* Jesus said *"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work"* (John 4:34). A doctrine that is not expressed in action is probably a fantasy rather than a doctrine. Those who would sit in judgment upon the Lord's servants do not

consider the sacrifice of true servants. While the Corinthians sat in the midst of their comfortable religious discussions and judgments, the apostles and other faithful servants were undergoing suffering as they sought to obey Christ's Commission to carry the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. *"Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; and labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day"* (verses 11-13).

Reality should serve as a warning to those who set themselves up as judges of the Lord's servants. Paul said, *"I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you"* (verse 14). There is definite danger when a believer begins sitting *"in the seat of the scornful"* (Psalm 1:1). After just a short time in that seat, he will become a hindrance to the work rather than a productive servant of Christ.

Paul's warning concerning the building of a Christian life should be considered: *"Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire"* (I Corinthians 3:12-15). What work are you doing for Christ that is deserving of a reward?

Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever been at a place where "preacher stew" was the main course of the meal?
2. Of what will ministers be held accountable in the judgment?
3. How many witnesses are necessary before charges can be brought against an elder?
4. What could churches do to minimize having an unworthy man filling the office of the pastor?

5. What is the normal consequence of sitting "in the seat of the scornful"?

Lesson 5

DISGRACED BY IMMORALITY

I Corinthians 5:1-13

Central Truth: Exercise discipline toward persistently sinning church members.

Thank God for I Corinthians chapter 5. While it reports a horrible condition within the Corinthian church, it provides the revelation that churches need today as they deal with such problems. Without that divine revelation, church leadership would be at a loss when confronted with the great problems that inevitably arise within most fellowships.

The Problem Identified

The talk around the world was that within the church of Corinth there was a member who had committed fornication. Such talk was dishonoring to the church and to the entire body of Christians. The horrible thing about the Corinthian situation was that the accusations could not be denied. The nature of the sin was so terrible that Paul said even the Gentiles would not commit such a thing. The man had taken his father's wife and had been immoral with her (verse 1).

When professed Christians are guilty of heinous sins, news of such deeds travels quickly and travels far. Would it not be horrible for such talk to be in circulation about your church? As Christians, we must walk circumspectly because the eyes of the world are upon us. Any misdeed will cause many mouths to be against us and cause our witness to the community to be unheeded and unheard.

While the sin Paul identified was horrible almost beyond imagination, that was not the issue that was uppermost in his mind. Paul saw that the greatest problem within church was the attitudes of the members toward the sin and the guilty person. Paul said of the church at Corinth, "*Ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you*" (verse 2). Nothing other than the sin is known about the guilty party; but, for some reason, the people of the church held him in high esteem. Perhaps he was a person of great eloquence, knowledge, or riches. Whatever it was, they were proud that

he was in their fellowship. Instead of renouncing him and removing him from their number, they applauded him. There seemed to have been little or no concern about his behavior and the reproach that he had brought the name of Christ and the reputation of the church. What a horrible state existed in that church when the members admired an incestuous person!

There is a second possible interpretation of Paul's accusation concerning the Corinthians' being "*puffed up*." It could have been that since the church had divided into several factions, some were glad that the brother had fallen because it showed how holy their group was and how sinful the others were. Whatever was going on in Corinth concerning that sinful person, God was not being glorified by the church and His holy standard was not being lifted up before the world.

The sin of the Corinthians is sometimes repeated in churches today. Like the Corinthians, they glory over the shortcomings and sins of others. It would be far better if people would pray and mourn for those who fall rather than use them to build up their own feelings of holiness. "It is a sad consequence of divisions among Christians that it makes them apt to rejoice in iniquity. The sins of others should be our sorrow. Nay, churches should mourn for the scandalous behavior of particular members, and, if they be incorrigible, should remove them" (Matthew Henry).

Paul pointed out that the attitude of the people of the church at Corinth placed the spiritual well-being of the entire church in danger. He used an illustration of bread making to show them the danger in which they were placing themselves (verse 6). In making bread, one leavened lump of bread added to new dough will cause the entire loaf to be leavened. The same is true of sin. Sin tolerated in a fellowship infects the entire congregation. If a sinning brother is defended and held up before the body as an outstanding member, the entire church participates in his sin. Sin left undisciplined can cause newborn Christians to fail in their spiritual lives.

Corrective Action

The church at Corinth needed to take swift and decisive action

concerning the sinning brother. Paul said, "I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (verses 3-5). Even though Paul was not physically present at Corinth, he felt he had adequate information to advise the members in the action they should take. Paul prescribed three action steps for the church to take.

1. They were to take the needed action in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The action taken was not to be decided by the flesh; it was not an action that was to be taken in anger; there were to be no politics in the matter. The church was simply to do what Jesus Christ had taught them to do. Jesus taught that when a brother trespasses against another, it is the responsibility of the injured party to go to him and privately tell him his fault. If the offending brother is not repentant, then a group of two or three should meet with him to discuss the offense. If he continues to refuse to repent, then the matter becomes public and is to be taken to the church. If he still refuses to repent, he is to be considered as a heathen and a publican (Matthew 18:15-18).

2. They were to take their action publicly when they were gathered together (verse 4). Since the man's sin was already a public matter, it was to be handled publicly. Hopefully, someone had already warned him of the consequences of the sin in which he was involved. Paul stressed that the time had come for the church to fulfill her responsibility and take action.

3. They were to deliver the man's flesh unto Satan. This is normally understood as ordinary excommunication. Delivering the man to Satan was simply the act of disowning him and removing him from the church. That action was to have two goals: (1) In removing the sinning party, the church would be purged and could better carry out the mission Christ had given her to do. (2) In excluding the person, he was being delivered to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. Some think that this was more

than excommunication; that it involved a miraculous power whereby the sinning brother would be surrendered to Satan who would afflict his body with diseases and thereby bring about the destruction of the flesh. Whatever was meant by the phrase, it was clear that the purpose was to destroy the old life of sin and reclaim the man spiritually. Any church discipline that does not have the goals of purging and bringing about reclamation of the lost brother is unworthy of the name of Christ.

The Application of Principles for Dealing With Sin in the Church

Paul showed that the discipline of the sinning member was a necessity if the church was to be able to have true worship when celebrating the Lord's Supper. He urged them to "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (I Corinthians 5:7, 8). Failure to purge out the sin would be to keep the feast with malice and wickedness in the heart. Paul taught that if the Lord is to be worshiped, it must be done in "sincerity and truth."

Paul stressed that the church of Corinth was not to fellowship with a brother who was "*a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner*" (verse 11). Evidently that instruction had been given earlier and had been misunderstood by some at Corinth.

They had taken it to mean that they were to avoid all contact with the world. Paul stressed that such was not possible. To attempt such a thing would necessitate leaving the world. Perhaps Paul had in mind the words of Jesus as He prayed for the disciples: "*I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world*" (John 17:15-18). Instead of desiring that the disciples be isolated from the world, it was the Lord's intent that they be sent into the world to be witnesses of Him.

One of the greatest mistakes a Christian community can make is to withdraw from the world around them. They are not to fellowship with

an unworthy brother who professes faith in Christ, but they are to build as many bridges as possible to those who have never believed. It is only as the Christian community reaches out in love and friendship to those who are lost that they will be effective witnesses. Isolated Christianity is not Christianity at all.

Paul stressed that it is not the responsibility of Christians to sit in judgment of the lost world. God judges them. It is, however, the responsibility of the Christian community to judge their own; and when a brother walks unworthy, he is to be disciplined. What forms of discipline are practiced within your church fellowship? Discipline does not always mean excommunication. A person is being disciplined anytime a brother cares enough to help him correct some problem in his life. In all probability Aquila and Priscilla saved the ministry of Apollos when "*they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly*" (Acts 18:26). All members are responsible for helping one another live a life that pleases God. Being a part of that discipline is one of the wonderful benefits of church membership.

Questions for Discussion

1. What action did Paul want the church to take (verses 4, 5)?
2. What does it mean to deliver one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh?
3. How would that action save the spirit "*in the day of the Lord Jesus*"?
4. Can a church observe the Lord's Supper if there is malice and wickedness within her membership?
5. What application can be made of Paul's statement, "*I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world*"?
6. What did Paul mean by the phrase, "*not to keep company*"?
7. What did Paul say was the special area of judgment for which the church was responsible?
8. Why must the church practice discipline of those within her membership?
9. What different forms of discipline can be practiced within a church

fellowship?

10. What are the steps of discipline for which a church is responsible?

(See Matthew 18:15-17.)

Lesson 6

LEGAL MATTERS

I Corinthians 6:1-8

Central Truth: Strive to settle all differences according to Biblical instructions.

For as long as I can remember, Christians have debated the issue as to whether it is right for a believer to use the court system for settling a matter if the other party is also a Christian. In this passage Paul dealt with that problem as it was demonstrated in the Corinthian church.

While the issue is still one that Christian must face today, the matter Paul discussed was primarily a problem unique to Grecian Christians.

It was customary for Jewish people to settle disputes before the elders of the village or the elders of the synagogue, not in a Gentile court. The feeling against going before a Gentile court was so strong that they considered it blasphemy against the law of God. The Greeks, on the other hand, had no such tradition. They were by nature litigious people; frequenting the courts was a form of entertainment for them. The normal Grecian manner of settling a dispute was for the parties involved to submit to arbitration. Each party was allowed to select one arbitrator and then together they selected a third person who was to be an impartial judge.

If that arbitration failed to settle the dispute, the parties went before "The Forty," which was a court consisting of citizens sixty years of age who were to arbitrate the dispute. If that court failed, the matter was taken to a jury court which was made up of 201 citizens if the matter was less than \$50.00, or 401 citizens if the matter involved a greater sum. All jury members had to be more than thirty years of age.

With the system used by the Greeks, for all practical purposes, every citizen became a lawyer and spent a great deal of time in court arguing his case or hearing someone else's complaint. To the Greek, the courts were a way of life; but to the Jew the entire system was reprehensible.

As a Christian, Paul saw the process as a paradox. He could not see how anyone who knew Christ as Lord could bring himself to seek justice in the presence of unjust men.

Christians in Court Undermine the Witness of the Church

In Corinth, the problem was not that they would not get a fair hearing in a public court, but that they were ignoring the authority of the church and showing no respect for her ability to judge correctly. Paul pointed out that Christians would one day have responsibility for judging the world. "*Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?*" (verses 2, 3). To take a matter before a pagan court was like making an admission that no one in the congregation was capable of discerning the matter; so if they could not render judgment in small matters, how could they ever judge the world under Christ?

There will be times in our society when it is necessary for a Christian to go to court. When a divorce arises, the laws require a secular court to get involved. In cases of child or spouse abuse, a Christian would be forced to seek protection from the state. When crimes occur, the court is the proper place for prosecution; and in certain financial and estate matters, the legal system becomes a necessity.

However, the general rule for a Christian is that he does not go to court against a fellow Christian, but seeks to settle things within the Christian community.

Suffering a Wrong Is Better Than Justice in an Ungodly Court

"*Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren*" (verses 7, 8). Paul made it clear that it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong; it is better to suffer loss than to lose spiritually. To Paul, taking a brother to court was far below the standard Christ set for His people. In Paul's mind, if one has the love of Christ within him, he will choose to suffer insult or damage rather than hurt someone else.

Paul's statement seemed to imply that the Corinthian Christians were

going to court over trivial matters. Such behavior would certainly have been in harmony with Greek law practice. In trivial matters it would be much better to suffer the wrong rather than to cause injury to another and in the process do damage to one's Christian testimony. Protecting one's testimony is best done by demonstrating the spirit of Christ in all things. Paul prayed, *"This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God"* (Philippians 1:9-11). Rather than fighting and dying over mole hills, it is far better to save one's efforts for the mountains that will arise in the process of life's pilgrimage.

In matters that result in great damage to oneself or one's family, a Christian should use all lawful means to achieve what is right. Christians should not sit idle while rights of religious freedom are taken away; neither should the battle to curb abortion through legal means be neglected. Christians are not bound to suffer injury quietly, but in the name of Christ should stand for what is right in whatever forum God gives. Powerful sermons are often delivered in places other than the pulpits of churches. By standing for that which is right even in the court system of the land, a Christian will be delivering a powerful message to unbelievers.

Several years ago an acquaintance's wife left him because she was involved in an adulterous affair with a prominent leader in the state. The greatest complication in that tragedy, however, was a young daughter. Because the mother wanted the child, she used the power and influence of her adulterous partner to manipulate the situation to gain custody, even though she probably was not a fit mother. In praise of the father, he and his family went the distance in the court system to gain custody of the child and gave the young girl an opportunity to grow up in a Christian environment. Did they not do the right thing in going to court? While there are occasions when a Christian must fight evil in the courts of the land, there are matters in which it is less costly and more

expedient to put up with the wrong. A Christian should always be ready to forgive a wrong. Exercising the power of forgiveness almost always wins the ultimate victory. It is better to look to God for redress rather than seeking it for oneself in a court of law.

An Unsuitable Court

Any court in Corinth was composed of unrighteous men - people who were "*fornicators,*" "*idolaters,*" "*adulterers,*" "*nor effeminate,*" and "*abusers of themselves with mankind*" (I Corinthians 6:9). A study of those words which Paul used to describe Corinthian society should create horror at the thought of a Christian standing before them to plead a cause against another Christian. Such people were not fit to be judges between people who were sons of God and seeking to live a godly life. Even though the Corinthian Christians at one time were those same kinds of people, they had been changed through the work of Christ. Instead of hearing Christians complain one against another, the Corinthians needed to hear the glorious message of Christ from the lips of Christians and see evidence that Christ had changed their lives. Surely the work of grace that God had done in the lives and hearts of the Christians had better prepared them for dealing with problems than the people who did not know God.

Speaking to the Christians at Philippi, Paul showed clearly why all believers are better prepared for judging than the unbelieving world. "*Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.. Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain*" (Philippians 1:6, 9-11; 2:14-16).

The lifestyle of the world is different from that of believers. While the people of the world live to satisfy the lust of their bodies (verses 13, 16, 17), a Christian's body has been prepared to be the "*temple of the Holy Ghost*" (verse 19). No one has ever brought that wonderful change in his life by his own power, but he has been "*bought with a price*: [he should] therefore glorify God in [his] body, and in [his] spirit, which are God's" (verse 20).

Conclusion

Paul's concern seems to have been that going to court against a brother would weaken the testimony of the church in the world. Do you think that would be a legitimate concern today? Are there certain conditions under which going to court could strengthen the testimony of the church? Do you think it would ever be more correct to suffer loss than to defend yourself?

Lesson 7

PRINCIPLES FOR THE MARRIED AND THE UNMARRIED

I Corinthians 7:1-10, 17, 19.

Central Truth: Follow the Lord's principles in the relationships of life.

Marriage and Holiness

How would you like to be able to write the apostle Paul and ask him questions which you do not understand about the Christian life? Would it not have been thrilling to get clarification from him about those matters which the Bible does not specifically address? That is exactly the opportunity that the Christians in Corinth were given. In chapters 7-15, Paul addressed a series of questions and problems which the Corinthians had written to him about, asking for his advice. He began with a consideration of the appropriateness of marriage for a Christian. While there is no way to know for certain, probably the question which the Corinthians asked was, "Is it best for a Christian to remain celibate?" The reason the Corinthians would ask such a question grew out of the philosophies which surrounded them. There were those who held that

the body was unimportant. To those people, it did not matter what a person did with his body; one could be immoral or commit any other vice and it would have no effect on the soul. Such philosophy was not dissimilar to the modern philosophy that has emerged on the political scene which argues that a man can do a good job in his office regardless of his behavior outside of the office.

On the other hand, some people in Corinth argued that the body was totally evil and that one must do everything possible to bring it into subjection. One discipline for bringing the body into subjection, they believed, was to deny the body all its natural desires. To do that, they argued, necessitated living a celibate life.

Paul's answer to those who had raised the question was, "*It is good for a man not to touch a woman*" (verse 1). Paul's answer showed that celibacy is an acceptable lifestyle. There are some people who do not need to marry. In fact, Paul declared that he himself preferred the single life. He felt that a single person's life could be lived for God's glory if he or she was gifted for that lifestyle. On the other hand, Paul would say, if a person does not have the gift of celibacy, he should marry. Knowing human nature, Paul expected most Christians to marry.

Paul taught that there was nothing wrong if a person did not marry. He went on to say, however, that "*to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband*" (verse 2).

While Paul's answer sounded like a low view of marriage, He was facing the reality of human nature and responding with a practical answer. The streets of Corinth were filled with all manner of moral temptations, just as the world is today. Not every person (either then or now) could live with those temptations without falling into sin. No person should attempt an artificial way of life; neither should he or she choose a path that leads through temptations. Therefore, for most people marriage is the better and safer way of life. Every person should know himself and live accordingly. Paul said, "*Every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that*" (verse 7).

Prayer, Fasting, and Marriage

The second question which Paul seemed to address was, "Should a husband and wife refrain from all acts of marriage in order to live a

dedicated Christian life?" That question was just an extension of the first one. It was based on the mistaken belief that somehow the marriage relationship was inherently evil. Paul taught that marriage must be a partnership with both the husband and wife rendering "*due benevolence*" to each other. By that he meant that the husband should give his wife all that was due her by virtue of her being his wife; likewise the wife should do the same for her husband. In marriage both husband and wife have surrendered certain rights over their bodies to each other (verse 4).

Neither spouse should be viewed as a tool for self-gratification of the other, but the obligations of marriage should not be neglected and cause undue temptation. Marriage must be lifted to a high standard, where each partner contributes to the physical and spiritual well-being of the other. Paul allowed special circumstances in which normal acts of marriage may be set aside for an intensive period of worship and devotion. After the worship, however, it is best for the married partners to come back together lest they fall into temptation of Satan. If such a devotional period is to be entered, both partners should consent to forgo their rights of marriage for that period of time. If one of the partners objects, the other should not insist on having a celibate worship experience (verse 5).

The Unmarried and Widows

The third question Paul seemed to have addressed was, "Should those who are unmarried or widowed seek to be married?" Paul's first reaction to that question was that it would be good if they remained single. In the single state they would have greater freedom to render service to the Lord. But since Paul was intensely practical, he knew that advice would not be good for every person. For some, remaining single would have subjected them to the constant danger of falling into sin. With the danger of temptation in mind, Paul advised those possessing a passionate nature to marry. He felt that marriage was a better choice than allowing one's inner being to burn with unsatisfied desire (verses 8, 9) and risk moral sin. Paul was not teaching that marriage was simply an escape valve for the sex drive. He had a much higher concept of marriage than that, but he was stressing the reality of sexual temptation.

The Married

The third question Paul addressed related to marriage. Perhaps the question went, "Should Christians who are married divorce in order to live a more holy life?" That question was more than just a hypothetical proposition. Over the years, many by their practice have answered that question in the affirmative and have left their spouses in the name of religion. Paul strictly forbade divorce and based his prohibition upon the words of Jesus: "*Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder*" (Matthew 19:4-6). Those words show that not only did God establish marriage and the family, but He was also the one who joined husband and wife together.

It is inconceivable that anyone would ever believe that a person becomes better equipped for service by leaving a spouse. In fact, the opposite is true. If one is married, the best service that can be rendered to the Lord is to do whatever is necessary to build a solid marriage that will honor and glorify the Lord. As the marriage is built, so can a beautiful life be built in the service of the Lord.

The sad reality of human life, however, is that many marriages do end in divorce. The tragedy of divorce belongs not only to those in the world but also to many who are part of the Christian community. Paul taught that when divorce comes, the parties either should be reconciled or remain celibate. That was indeed a high standard, but should not the people who compose the Lord's church live by the highest of all standards?

Some will argue, "My divorce was necessary because I no longer loved my spouse." Love in a marriage is a choice and a commitment which were made at the time of the marriage. In the Old Testament, couples were not expected to marry because they loved each other, but they were expected to love each other because they were married. When Isaac was married to Rebekah, "*she became his wife; and he loved her*" (Genesis

24:67).

The Bible is clear as to how people can have a successful marriage. A woman can succeed as a wife by submitting to her husband, as unto the Lord (Ephesians 5:22). Paul lifted up the church's submission to Christ as the model for the wife's submission (Ephesians 5:24). A man can succeed as a husband by loving his wife *"even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it"* (Ephesians 5:25). How can a marriage fail if a wife is loved with such love that she knows that her husband would give even his life for her? How could any wife fail to honor her husband if she knows that he loves her as Christ loved the church?

Marriage With an Unbeliever

Paul taught that a Christian whose unbelieving mate abandoned the marriage would be free from that marriage. Some believe the phrase *"not under bondage"* means that the deserted spouse has the right to a remarriage. Others disagree and teach that Christians should remarry only if they are reconciled to their estranged spouse. Regardless of one's interpretation of the passage, it is clear that Paul taught that a believer should not seek a divorce from an unbelieving mate, but work to keep the marriage together in the hopes that the unbelieving partner would be led to salvation (verses 14-16).

While it is fitting that one married to an unbeliever seek to maintain the marriage, it is not wise for a believer intentionally to begin a marriage with an unbeliever in the hopes that the unbeliever will be saved.

Marriage should not be entered as missionary work. Paul wrote, *"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?"* (II Corinthians 6:14, 15).

Serve the Lord Where You Are

An important first understanding that a Christian should have concerning his new life in the Lord is that he has been called to be a Christian where he is. Almost all people wistfully desire to change responsibilities of the old life and move on to something more spiritual. But the fact remains that God saved a person in his present situation and wants him to begin

serving him in that situation. When Christ cast the demons out of the man of Gadara, he wanted to leave his old world behind and go with Jesus. Jesus, however, told him, "*Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel*" (Mark 5:19, 20).

In time the Lord may move one into different circumstances; the believer then will have responsibility for serving in that environment. The point Paul made was that one should serve the Lord in whatever situation he lives.

You should not wait for better circumstances to serve the Lord; you should serve Him now. You should serve the Lord where you are with the resources you presently have. Perhaps, in time, God will enlarge your ministry and move you to a more challenging place; but until He does, you are responsible for those around you now.

As a teenage preacher, I preached in a penal institution. A number of times when a prisoner would make a profession of faith he would say, "I want to be a Christian but it is impossible in this place." I understood what those men were saying, but they were missing the point of the Christian life. A person is not saved to associate only with Christians; he is saved to be a light to a dark and sinful world. The light shines the brightest in the darkest place. What better place to be a witness than in a place where almost everyone was lost? It would be a mistake to judge the thinking of those prisoners harshly because many studying this lesson have a similar problem. It is easy to be a Christian in your Sunday School class and in the safe fellowship with fellow believers, but your Christian life is needed out in the world. The Lord does not save anyone to be an isolated Christian.

Questions for Discussion

1. In your experience can you identify anything in the marriage relationship that would hinder in Christian service?
2. Do you think it is ever appropriate for a Christian to marry an unsaved person thinking that through marriage that person will be saved?
3. Do you think that the pressure of living a Christian life contributes to

the divorce rate increase among Christians?

4. What can be done to strengthen Christian marriages within your church?

Lesson 8

LIMITS OF LIBERTY

I Corinthians 8:1-13

Central Truth: Do not exercise liberty at the expense of a fellow believer's conscience.

In this lesson text, Paul was still answering questions which the Corinthians had sent to him. The question centered around what a Christian should do about food sacrificed to idols. The issue was whether a Christian should eat meat which had been offered to idols. It seems as if the answer would be simple, but it was not simple for the Christians in Corinth. Almost all, if not all, meat sold in Corinth was first sacrificed to the gods. When a private sacrifice was made, a token part of it was burned and a small part was taken as the priests' portion. The rest of the animal was returned to the worshiper, and he could use it anyway he liked. When a public sacrifice was made, such as the sacrifices offered by the state, a small part was used and the remaining part of the meat was sold in the markets. The practice of selling meat sacrificed to gods in the markets or using meat sacrificed to gods at festive occasions made it difficult for a Christian to avoid all contact with meats that had been so sacrificed. One would never know when he would be eating meat that had been part of a heathen worship.

The problem the Corinthians were facing seems to have little application for Christians today, but the principle Paul used to answer the question is applicable to Christian conduct in any generation. His position was that even though a Christian would be free to eat the meat sacrificed to an idol, a mature Christian should never do anything that would violate the conscience of a weaker brother. A more mature Christian might realize that an idol is nothing more than a symbol of nothing (verse 4). To a weaker brother, however, the practice of eating meat so sacrificed was an offensive return to idolatry (verse 7). Therefore, Paul concluded, *"Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend"* (verse 13).

Questionable Practices

The question Christians face today is, "How far does Christian freedom go in regard to questionable behavior not specifically forbidden in the Scriptures?" There are a great deal of questionable behaviors with which Christians have struggled. The issues through the years have included attending movies, playing cards, dancing, Sunday sports, eating in restaurants that sell intoxicating drinks, watching television, and others. One reason such activities have caused problems is that while there are some activities that the Bible declares to be right or wrong, those activities were not specifically dealt with in the Scriptures. To determine the rightness or wrongness of certain activities, a Christian must determine eternal principles which can govern behavior in any circumstance.

Over the years there have been two extreme attitudes which people have taken toward questionable activities. Some have chosen legalism. To such people everything is either right or wrong; rules are formulated to govern conduct in regard to all activities. A legalist might decide that it is wrong for a Christian to attend a movie. He would make a rule against movie attendance and, even if a Christian film was being shown, it would still be wrong to go to a movie theater. Another extreme is an overemphasis on freedom. To such people Christian freedom is absolute. They believe that as long as the conscience is clear, one can do anything that he pleases and still be free of sin. To such people Paul would say, "*All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not*" (I Corinthians 10:23).

The Corinthian Argument for Freedom

Some in the Corinthian church argued "*We all have knowledge*" (verse 1). They were basically saying, "We understand that an idol is nothing; therefore, it does not matter to us whether the meat we eat has been sacrificed to a god or not. Our conscience is clear; therefore, there is no sin in our participating in the festivities of our city and celebrating with our neighbors." The problem Paul saw with their argument was that they had allowed the little knowledge they had to "puff" them up. They were right in their assessment that food sacrificed to idols was not corrupted,

but acting on that knowledge was selfish because it could offend others.

They were thoughtless as to how it might apply to those who did not have the knowledge they possessed. They were strong on doctrine but weak in love.

The Corinthians needed to evaluate their knowledge, for "if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (verse 2). Someone has said that the difference between a fool and a wise man is that the fool knows not that he knows not, and the wise man knows that he knows not. That was basically the message Paul was giving the Corinthians concerning their knowledge. Whatever knowledge one has must be tempered with love. "*Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth*" (verse 1). Knowledge may tell one that there is no sin in a certain activity, but love will say it is not right because it wounds a brother's conscience and may cause him to sin. That which is safe for one person may be dangerous for another. Someone has said that the devil has his own secret stairway into every heart. No one who loves his brother will ever do anything that gives the devil opportunity to invade a weaker brother's life.

The Corinthian Problem

Most of the new converts in Corinth were coming to Christ from idolatry. For years they had been a part of pagan rituals which sacrificed meat to the gods and then celebrated the sacrifice. To them such celebration was a continuation of idolatrous worship. To participate in those occasions after coming to Christ was to return to their old life, and that would be a sin against Christ. If they had seen one of their more mature brothers participating in those festivities, it would have created a stumbling block for them. The new Christians could not tolerate idols or the food sacrificed to them. They felt they should have nothing to do with idols, their worship, or their festivities. While the more mature Christians would not be engaging in the activity as idol worship, participation by newer Christians would be a partial return to a worship ceremony of which they had recently repented. Paul said of them, "Some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled" (verse 7). Even though the act of eating the meat was not wrong, it was wrong for them because

it was against their consciences; it was a return to idolatry.

The Principle Applied

Do we have a similar problem within the fellowship of believers today?

It is my understanding that in some countries Christian brethren drink wine with their meals. Those same brethren believe so strongly that it is

wrong to smoke tobacco that they exclude smokers from their fellowship. While most Baptist Christians in the United States do not believe it is right to smoke, they have not made it a test of fellowship.

Most of those churches, however, have adopted a covenant that states:

"We will abstain from the sale and use of intoxicating drink as a beverage." When American Christians visit brethren in those countries where wine is consumed, they are shocked at the apparent license the members take regarding wine; but when Christians from those countries visit America, they are shocked to find that even a few of the ministers smoke tobacco and the church takes no action against them.

Years ago a family was in the process of moving into our community. As a family, we were trying to help them make the move as smoothly as possibly. They had several children, and we offered to care for them while the parents were in the moving process. While trying to entertain the children, we taught them how to play a game which our family had enjoyed playing for years. The children seemed to enjoy the game very much. We were playing when the father returned for his children. He immediately joined the game and it was obvious that he was a very skilled player.

After they had settled into the community, they began inviting members to their house to play various games. The intensity of playing increased until it became a problem. The members were so busy playing that no one was available to do any work for the church. I talked with the father about the problem, and he told me, "The game you played with my children is nothing but a gambling game played on most of the river boats." He said, "I used to play it as a gambler before I was converted."

I was shocked. Without realizing it, to some degree, I had caused a brother to return to a behavior pattern from which he had repented. Not wanting to harm him any further, I made a bargain with him that if he would stop spending so much time playing games, I would not play the

game any more as long as he was a part of the church. He agreed and the problem was solved. I believe that was what Paul was teaching the Corinthians when he wrote, *"Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; and through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ"* (verses 9-12). "No man has any right to claim a right, to indulge in a pleasure, to demand a liberty which may be the ruination of someone else. It may be that he has the strength of mind and will to keep that pleasure in its proper place; it may be that course of action is safe enough for him; but he has not only himself to think about; he must think of the weaker brother. A pleasure or an indulgence which may be the ruin of someone else is not a pleasure but a sin" (William Barclay). Paul gave a firm answer to the Corinthians concerning eating meat: *"If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof: conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved"* (I Corinthians 10:27-33). The principles upon which Paul based that argument should be the principles that all Christians follow concerning any questionable activity.

Questions for Discussion

1. Since there is always the danger that one might do something that

would offend another, are there some things so questionable that it would be better to change a weaker brother's opinion rather than avoid the activity?

2. Can you think of any activity in your life that might be a problem to some other believer?

3. Should you take steps to change that activity?

Lesson 9

MUTUAL DEPENDENCE

I Corinthians 11:3-16

Central Truth: Always demonstrate obedience to God's order.

In previous chapters Paul dealt with questions concerning the Christian life. Beginning in chapter 11, he dealt with problems the Corinthians were experiencing in their public worship. Upon reading the letter to the Corinthians, it is evident that there was disorder in their public meetings; some of the women were dressing and behaving in manners which endangered the church's reputation, and various members were abusing the concept of spiritual gifts. Paul wrote this part of the letter to help them know how to behave and to offer proper worship when they assembled for their public meetings.

Christianity brought freedom and hope to women, children, and slaves. Christian theology taught that, regardless of race or sex, people were equal before God. The lessons of equality did not come easy even to the Christians; but through various circumstances and revelation, the Lord taught them that they should not be respecters of persons. With newfound freedom, inevitably some within the ranks of the Christian faith began to carry the concept of freedom to excess and behave in inappropriate manners.

In Corinth, some of the women began to ignore customs and assume more freedom than was appropriate in their culture. Paul felt that such behavior was damaging to their reputation and could bring criticism upon the church. In eastern culture the veil was a necessary part of a woman's dress. It was worn any time a respectable woman went out into the public. If she went out without it, she was judged as a woman of questionable morals and placed herself in danger of insults and assault. It was necessary, therefore, that Christian women continue the practice

of wearing the veil when they came into a church service. To fail to do so was to make the church appear to be a questionable place. Paul's teaching showed that a Christian should, even in dress and habits, avoid anything that could possibly dishonor the Lord.

Today there is no custom for women wearing a veil in the Baptist churches of America, but the principles by which Paul reached his conclusion for the Corinthians continue to remain applicable. In dress as well as in behavior, it is better to be too strict than to be too lax. It is better to surrender one's rights if the exercise of those rights could cause someone to stumble or for the church to be disrespected. Not all traditions are sacred; and, perhaps, many of them should be abandoned; but they should not be abandoned in such a way as to cause shame and trouble within a church.

The Principle of Submission (I Corinthians 11:3)

Submission is a necessary part of any organized society. Christ was the great example of submission. If He had not submitted to the will of God, redemption for humankind would have been impossible, and we would not have a Savior. If individuals do not submit to Christ as Savior and Lord, they are lost because they have rejected God's gracious provision in Christ. If husbands do not take responsibility for their families and exercise spiritual leadership in submission to the Lord, their homes will be in jeopardy. When wives do not submit to their husbands and honor them as leaders, the integrity of the family is threatened with disorganization. Submission is an indispensable element in God's order. Submission is not required to make one's partner superior; it exists to make family relationships more fruitful and workable. The happiest homes always will be those where family members have submitted themselves to God's plan for their lives.

The history of Israel showed that there was no difference between men and women as far as personal worth, abilities, intellect, or spirituality are concerned. As human beings and as followers of the Lord, women have proved themselves of equal worth with men. In spite of the fact that the culture in Israel was male dominated, some of the finest leaders in Israel were women. There were great military victories won because of the courage of women (Judges 4, 5; 9:54; Esther 4:16). God revealed His

Word through prophetesses (Judges 4:4; Luke 2:36; Acts 21:9). God used Priscilla and her husband Aquila to explain "*the way of God more perfectly*" to Apollos the preacher (Acts 18:26). The heroes of faith included Sarah, Moses' mother, and Rahab the harlot, (Hebrews 11:11, 23, 31).

Some women have proved themselves superior in abilities, intellect, maturity, and spirituality; but that does not change the principle of leadership within a family. God established the principle of male leadership for the purpose of order. As Christ was submissive to the Father and Christians are to be submissive to Christ, wives are to be submissive to their husbands. Authority and submission in each instance in the Bible were based upon love. The Father sent Christ out of love, and the Son submitted to the Father out of love. Christ loved the church so much that He died for it. Likewise the church submits to Him in love. Similarly, husbands exercise their leadership in love, and Christian wives submit to their leadership in love. Men are not given responsibility for leadership because of greater worth or ability, but because of God's love for the family. He designed a plan whereby the family could function without falling into anarchy. Ignoring that design lays the foundation for serious problems in any marriage.

The role of women in society has changed greatly since Paul's instructions to the Corinthians. To some degree his discussion addressed customs that existed in the Grecian world. For a woman of Corinth to ignore the customs for women in that day was to some extent a declaration that she was unhappy with being a woman and desired to be a man. Such a desire is contrary to nature; it is important that sexes not try to change places. "The order in which divine wisdom has placed persons and things is best and fittest: to endeavor to amend it is to destroy all order, and introduce confusion. The woman should keep to the rank God has chosen for her, and not dishonor her head; for this results in dishonoring God. If she was made out of the man, and for the man, and made to be the glory of the man, she should do nothing, especially in public, that looks like a wish of having this order inverted" (Matthew Henry). God intended for a husband to be masculine and a responsible loving leader; He intended for a wife to be feminine and a

submissive loving wife to her husband.

The Partnership of Men and Women

Men and women are complementary to each other in every way in life. Invariably, they assume different roles in the home. The traditional role has been for the husband to be the breadwinner and the wife to be a homemaker. To a large extent that tradition has broken down in American society; but even as new traditions emerge, nature continues to impose different roles for husband and wife. They may both work outside the home; they may both do housework; but God's order still must stand. There still must be a structure within the family, and there is no way anyone can improve upon the structure that God has designed.

In the work of the church, women and men serve each other and they serve with each other. Through the years women have kept many churches alive and active with little support from the men. It is difficult for a church without godly women to be strong and effective. Likewise, a church without godly men who are willing to lead in the work will be limited in what it can accomplish. Men and women have different roles, but not different importance. Both are essential in the work of the Lord. Circumstances sometimes call upon a person to go beyond a traditional role. I have been told of an incident in a foreign country where there was no Christian male to carry on the Christian work in their community. A

dedicated and talented woman stepped forward and led a few discouraged Christians into becoming a Christian church. Later, the man she married surrendered his life to the ministry, and today they serve together as missionaries in their home country. God used her to plant a seed of a Christian community and then He raised up a man to lead that community to greater heights. Without her, there may never have been a Christian church in their community; without him, that church may not have flourished. Which one did the greater work? Neither; they were partners and co-laborers in the vineyard of the Lord.

Perhaps to show that one should not unduly emphasize the headship of man, Paul stressed that God had so created men and women that they cannot survive without each other. "*As the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman*" (verse 12). What Paul meant by that

statement was that the first woman was taken from out of man in creation, but ever since Adam, man has had his origin through birth from a woman. Without man, woman would not have an existence; without woman, man could not continue to exist.

The important issue in the matter of submission is submission of the heart to the Lord and obedience to His order. It has always been a delight to Satan for Christians to misunderstand the Word of God and carry its principles to extremes. Some have committed that mistake and equated headship with dictatorship. Such behavior is a gross misapplication of the teaching of this passage. When writing to the Ephesians, before Paul instructed wives to submit to their husbands, he commanded that both husband and wife submit themselves "*one to another in the fear of God*" (Ephesians 5:21). He also taught that the husband must love the wife even as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it (Ephesians 5:25). When such love is present, submission is not a challenge but a natural response.

Paul knew that some would reject this teaching. He knew that some would argue with God's plan (verse 16). He rebuked such thinking. There is no place in God's work for contentiousness.

Lesson 10

THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

I Corinthians 13:1-13

Central Truth: Express love as the basic and most profound trait of Christian character.

The simplest description of God in the Bible is the statement, "*God is love.*" The most complete description of a Christian is, "*he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.*" (See I John 4:16.) It is tragic that in many churches, as in the Corinthian church, love does not characterize the membership or the ministry. Corinth could boast of spiritual gifts, they could claim to have sound doctrine; but, to a large extent, love was lacking.

Everything a Christian does is to be done in love (I Corinthians 16:14). Sound doctrine is not a substitute for love; for without love, doctrine is hollow; it is "*as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal*" (verse 1). Good works and works of charity, as lovely as they can be, are not substitutes

for love. All the benevolent works that a person might possibly do, if done without love, do more damage than good. They hurt the recipient, and they are unprofitable for the doer.

Love is an intangible quality. It is both a choice and an emotion. Many perverted things have been done in the name of love. People have tried to buy love but have found that *"if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned"* (Song of Solomon 8:7). People have been treated as property in the name of love; children have been physically abused in the name of love; women have been raped in the name of love. It is easy to understand that such perversion is not love; but what is real love?

Paul wrote the most lovely description of the qualities of love that can be found anywhere. While I Corinthians 13 must always be cherished as Scripture, it is also a great literary work. Its beauty should be admired, but the important thing is the message. By understanding those beautiful words written by inspiration, one can begin to understand the real meaning of love.

Qualities of Love

Love "suffereth long" (verse 4). Paul was expressing the idea that love is patient with people. A person who is controlled by love is slow to anger and always ready for reconciliation. Such a person may despise the circumstances in which he finds another, but he will love the person regardless of the circumstances. If real love is present, he will seek to help his fellow man rise above circumstances that are self-defeating and find a better life in Christ. Matthew Henry wrote, "[love] can endure evil, injury, and provocation, without being filled with resentment, indignation, or revenge. It makes the mind firm, gives it power over the angry passions, and furnishes it with a persevering patience, that shall rather wait and wish for the reformation of a brother than fly out in resentment of his conduct. It will put up with many slights and neglects from the person it loves, and wait long to see the kindly effects of such patience on him."

Love "is kind" (verse 4). The kindness that is expressed in love is akin to the goodness in God which leads sinners to life. *"Despise thou the*

riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4).

God has shown that there is a power in kindness which can accomplish in others what the strongest of all rebukes could never do. It can lead hardened sinners into repentance.

Love "envieth not" (verse 4). Envy and love are opposite emotions. Love rejoices when others are blessed; envy not only covets the possessions of others, but it also begrudges the blessings others receive. A person under the control of envy is much happier when his friends are experiencing adversity rather than prosperity and blessings. Love will never give place to such an emotion. Love obeys the injunction of the Bible to "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Romans 12:15).

Love "vaunteth not itself" (verse 4). A lovely characteristic of love is that one who is controlled by love is "*not wise in [his] own conceits.*" Love causes one to "*mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate*" (Romans 12:16). Love determines to "*let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.*" It prompts believers to "*look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others*" (Philippians 2:3, 4). One who is controlled by love is always aware that he has received more than he will ever be able to give.

Love "is not puffed up" (verse 4). Love and self-conceit are incompatible. One controlled by love will not assume a position to which he has no right to claim. Love will not allow a person to despise others and treat them with contempt and scorn. The natural course for those under the power of love is to delight in showing honor to one another (Romans 12:10). Love causes one to esteem and value his brethren. Love not only causes one to place a higher value on others, but will limit one's obsession with self and cause him to walk humbly rather than going about with a spirit of arrogance.

Love "doth not behave itself unseemly" (verse 5). It usually comes as a surprise when one discovers that the meaning of this verse is that love has good manners. Practicing good manners is a way of saying to other people, "I recognize your presence and you are important to me."

Behaving in an ill manner says to others the opposite: "You are not important to me, and I do not care if you are here or not." The unloving person does not care enough for those around him to act politely. He cares nothing for their feelings or sensitivities. One who is controlled by love has a graciousness that says to others, "I care about you."

Love "seeketh not her own" (verse 5). Basically, there are two kinds of people in the world: (1) those who seek to make everyone their servants and (2) those who are servants to all. Jesus, the great example, said, "*The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many*" (Matthew 20:28). As the great example of love, Jesus came into the world to serve others; He never insisted upon His rights, but graciously deferred to others. "*Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded*" (John 13:3-5). He was Lord of all, yet He made himself a servant to His disciples!

Love "is not easily provoked" (verse 5). Provoke means "to arouse to anger." One who is controlled by love guards against being irritated, upset, or angered by others. When one loses his temper, he loses everything, because anger is always a sign of defeat. One who is ruled by love has the capacity not to begin hating even when he is hated. The ultimate example of love overcoming the hatred of others came at the cross when Jesus prayed, "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*" (Luke 23:34). A second great example came as Stephen was stoned, and he prayed, "*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*" (Acts 7:60).

Love "thinketh no evil" (verse 5). The basic idea that Paul expressed in the term "*thinketh no evil*" is that love does not keep a record of wrongs. One of the most damaging things people can do to their relationships is to make a permanent record of injuries experienced. It may be good business practice, but it is a terrible practice in personal matters. Keeping track of every injury experienced is a sure way to make oneself

and everyone around unhappy. One who is controlled by love knows that it is important to forget wrongs experienced and remember the positive things that come from a relationship.

Love "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth" (verse 6).

Love does not delight in anything that is wrong but is rather grieved by it. The basic idea is not so much enjoying doing what is wrong, but enjoying hearing terrible things about others. Oddly enough, most people would rather hear something bad about someone rather than something good. Love changes that nature and causes the heart to rejoice when the report is good news about a friend (or even an enemy).

Love "beareth all things" (verse 7). The word bear means "to cover, to support or to protect." Love bears all things by protecting others from exposure, ridicule, or harm. To bear carries the idea of endurance. One controlled by love can bear any insult or disappointment. Peter suggested *"not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing"* (I Peter 3:9).

Love "believeth all things" (verse 7). One of the beautiful qualities of love is that it is not suspicious or cynical of others. Without love it would probably not be possible to rise above doubt and believe what God has promised. Love coupled with faith enables one to place all hope of life both now and in the future in the hands of God. Love also enables one to believe the best about his neighbor and others with whom he associates.

Love "hopeth all things" (verse 7). Love sees possibilities in others when there seems to be nothing but failure present. When Jesus called the twelve disciples, He did not see what they were; instead, He saw what they could become if they would but follow Him. No one is where he ought to be, but love accepts a person where he is and then leads him into his potential.

Love "endureth all things" (verse 7). Endure is a military term which carries the idea of an army holding a vital position, enduring every hardship and suffering in order to hold fast. Love endures all things at all cost. One who is controlled by love does not sit passively by, but rises up in spite of the pain and presses forward to victory. Love endures until

it wins.

Love "never faileth" (verse 8). Every other quality of the Christian life will fade, but love is forever. "*Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it*" (Song of Solomon 8:7). Love will even survive the grave; for when all saints are assembled before the throne of God, one common quality will be shared: love. God is eternal, and God is love; we are God's children; we are the children of love. One day there will be no need for faith; one day there will be no need for hope for it shall be lost to sight; but there will never be a day when love is not needed.

Questions for Discussion

1. In evaluating your service to the Lord and to other people, is there anything other than love that is the basis for your motivation?
2. In what ways do your class's activities project love to the visitors who come your way from time to time?
3. What could your class do differently to help outsiders feel loved when they visit?

Lesson 11

TONGUES and LANGUAGES

I Corinthians 14:4, 9, 13-16, 22, 26-28

Central Truth: Exalt Christ in understandable languages.

The Preferable Gift

After presenting love as the "*more excellent way*," Paul instructed the Corinthians concerning the use and abuse of spiritual gifts. In his instruction, he made it clear that the purpose of spiritual gifts was to benefit the church body. To Paul, if a gift had no apparent benefit to the body, it should not be exercised within the assembly. Since anything spoken in an unknown tongue could not be understood, it had no benefit for the body, unless an interpreter was present; such speaking in public assembly was to be avoided. On the other hand, prophecy or spiritual teaching which could be understood by all who heard it was of great benefit to the body. Therefore, he stressed that prophesying was to be

valued over speaking in unknown tongues in the church assembly. Reference to tongues was commonly used in Paul's day to describe pagan ecstatic speech. In all probability the tongue speaking in Corinth was similar to that form of speech, and was not really some Christian phenomena. In tongue speaking a person would work himself into a frenzy and begin to express himself in sounds unrelated to an intelligible language. The carnality of many of the members in the church at Corinth caused them to be more interested in things of the flesh than they were in the spirit; so it made them susceptible to any activity that appealed to their carnal nature. Paul was concerned about the confusion such abuses were causing in the church.

For many of the Corinthians, possessing the ability to speak in an unknown tongue was the height of spirituality. Those who had such ability were admired by many in the church. Paul made a comparison of prophecy to tongue speaking. Prophecy in the sense it was used in the passage had more to do with declaring the message of God than it did to foretelling the future. Basically, the gift of prophecy was the gift of preaching or proclamation. Paul lifted that gift up as being more profitable to the church than speaking in tongues.

He stressed how speaking in an unknown tongue was unprofitable, emphasizing that all spiritual gifts should be used for the good of the church. There was no conceivable way the church could profit from listening to an unknown tongue, for no one could understand what was being spoken. Paul used a potential visit with the Corinthians to illustrate the folly of ministering through an unknown tongue. "*Brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine? And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air*" (I Corinthians 14:6-9).

Paul's concept of worship was that it should be celebrated in such a way that the most ignorant or immature person present could understand. Worship should be designed so that all could at least mentally participate in prayer and praise and study of the Word.

The Purpose of Tongues

Paul affirmed that tongues were a sign for unbelievers rather than those who had believed. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit gifted believers with the ability to speak in languages they had never learned to bring about the conversion of unbelievers who had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost. Those tongues were used of the Lord to bring three thousand people into the church in one day (Acts 2:41). After those people became converts, they needed to be strengthened in the faith. They had to be instructed in the truth, using their own language. The gift of tongues had been used to spread the gospel; but prophesying, or explaining the Scriptures, was the instrument God had chosen to bring about the edification of those who became believers. Speaking with tongues in the church was out of place. If the Corinthians were to use spiritual gifts correctly, they needed to consider God's purpose for the gifts. Paul was concerned about the disorder and confusion within the assembly of believers resulting from an incorrect use of spiritual gifts. When the believers came together, if each one acted independently in his worship, there would be total confusion. Paul felt that if one must speak in an unknown tongue, an interpreter was required to give an intelligible meaning to what was being spoken; otherwise, the tongue speaker must remain silent. Even if people were speaking as prophets, it was required that they speak in turns. If someone listening gained an insight and felt he had to speak, Paul commanded him to remain silent. All had to speak in turns so that what was spoken could be profitable to all and that there would be order within the services. *"God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints"* (I Corinthians 14:33). In the book of Acts there were three instances where men spoke with tongues. The first instance came on the Day of Pentecost. On that occasion the tongues were given to expedite the dissemination of the gospel to those who had gathered in Jerusalem. It also was a sign of the

coming of the Holy Spirit upon the church. "*There appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance*" (Acts 2:3, 4). On the Day of Pentecost the church was "endued with power from on high" and was prepared to begin the great mission enterprise about which Jesus had told them (Luke 24:49).

A second incident came when Peter preached to the household of Cornelius, the first Gentile who had been intentionally converted to the Christian faith. The Jews were reluctant to envision the church as being intended for Gentiles, and without supernatural action they possibly would have rejected the conversion of the Gentiles, not thinking them worthy of being included in the kingdom. As Peter witnessed to them, they began to believe; and as they believed, they began to "*speak with tongues, and magnify God.*" The Jewish Christians could not argue with the action of God; so they recognized that God had poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost upon Gentiles, just as He had the Jewish Christians (Acts 10:45, 46). It was also a sign that the Gentile Christians had been endued with the same power from on high and were likewise a part of the worldwide mission of which Jesus spoke.

The third incident came while Paul was visiting in Ephesus and encountered about twelve men who claimed to be Christians but had not received the Holy Spirit. Paul examined the basis of their claim of faith and discovered that, while they had accepted John's ministry, they had not really come to understand the meaning of Christ and had not experienced the spiritual birth. For that reason the baptism which they had experienced was invalid. They had been baptized with only head knowledge, but with no heart faith in the Messiah. They were still lost, but were open to the gospel. Paul explained to them that the purpose of John's ministry was to point sinners to Christ. They responded to that message and were baptized in the name of Jesus. Paul laid his hands upon them and prayed for them, and they received a visible sign of the reality of their new faith as "*they spake with tongues, and prophesied.*" Their speaking with tongues and prophesying seems to have been signs

of the difference between a dead faith and a living faith (Acts 19:2-7).

Matthew Henry pointed out that tongues, as were being used by the Corinthians, were a token of judgment from God rather than mercy to any people, "*In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord*" (I Corinthians 14:21). The passage to which Paul referred was delivered as a threat. "The meaning in this view is that it is an evidence that a people are abandoned of God when He gives them up to this sort of instruction, to the discipline of those who speak in another language. And surely the apostle's discourse implies, 'You should not be fond of the tokens of divine displeasure. God can have no gracious regards to those who are left merely to this sort of instruction, and taught in language which they cannot understand. They can never be benefited by such teaching as this; and, when they are left to it, it is a sad sign that God gives them over as past cure.' And should Christians covet to be in such a state, or to bring the churches into it? Yet thus did the Corinthian preachers in effect, who would always deliver their inspirations in an unknown tongue."

Another thing that showed Paul's concern for order in the worship of the church was his instruction concerning the behavior of women in public service. He issued a prohibition for women speaking in the church, "*Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord*"

(I Corinthians 14:34-37). While in this passage Paul seems to have forbidden all public performances of women, there is ample evidence that women did pray and prophecy in the assemblies of the churches (I Corinthians 11:5). To make the interpretation that women were to have no public role within the church service would be to deny what he had taught in other passages. The teaching of Paul seems to have been that

women were to minister as women and not try to assume the role of men in public worship. Perhaps in chapter 14 Paul had in mind the practice of women doing authoritative teaching and preaching. He also seemed to be dealing with a fellowship problem within the Corinthian assembly, where women were troubling the fellowship by raising questions and challenges to those who were responsible for leading the congregation.

Instructions of the nature that Paul was giving should always be interpreted in the light of the culture he was addressing. Whatever was the actual teaching of Paul in the passage concerning women, his great concern was that everything in public worship be done with order and decency (I Corinthians 14:40). To him it would have been tragic for an unbeliever to come into their assembly and observe their behavior and conclude that they were mad. He asked the Corinthians, "*If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?*" (I Corinthians 14:23). The church must have a positive message to the world. It cannot have that positive message if everyone in the assembly is struggling to have his own say or demonstrate his own spirituality with some display of language.

Paul stated, "*I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also*" (I Corinthians 14:15).

Questions for Discussion

1. One of Paul's great concerns about the worship services in Corinth was that they might make a bad impression upon unbelievers who might come into the services. When unbelievers visit in the services at your church, is there anything about the procedures that might cause them to receive a bad impression?
2. How was the first speaking in tongues a sign?
3. What was the result of the Christians speaking in tongues on the Day of Pentecost?

THE RESURRECTION

I Corinthians 15:1-11

Central Truth: Rejoice that Jesus Christ is alive.

The resurrection of Christ is the pivotal truth of Christianity. Without His resurrection, other truths would have no meaning. Without the truth of Christ's resurrection, Christianity would simply have been another religion built upon human reasoning and speculation. Some have said that without the Resurrection, the final chapters of the four Gospels could not have been written. Without the final chapters of the four Gospels, there would have been no gospel. In fact, had there been no resurrection, it is doubtful that anyone reading this lesson ever would have heard of Jesus. It is the Resurrection that makes the name of Jesus powerful. It is because of the Resurrection that one day "*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*" (Philippians 2:10, 11).

The Resurrection is the cornerstone of the gospel. If Christ is not risen, there is no basis for believing that He is divine; there is no provision for our salvation from sin; and eternal life is just a myth. Paul wrote, "*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable*" (I Corinthians 15:19). Without the resurrection of Christ, the gospel has no power for changing lives in this world nor power for giving hope for the world to come.

Proof of the Resurrection

A powerful argument for the Resurrection involves human experience in relationship to that resurrection. Shortly after Christ was crucified and buried, the disciples began proclaiming in the streets of Jerusalem, "*Jesus is alive.*" It would have been unthinkable that those men who were terrified by the crucifixion of Jesus and had fled in fear for their lives as their friend was crucified could have overcome that fear. They would have never had courage to have done that unless there had in fact been a resurrection. Those men could not have been persuaded to preach such a message and risk the execution they feared so greatly had they not truly been convinced that Jesus was alive. They could not have been

convinced through some rumor or tale that someone fabricated. There would have been no way that those men would have hazarded their lives for a corpse. Only a resurrected and living Lord could have commanded the courage to preach the gospel in such a hostile environment.

One must keep in mind that the disciples did not believe in the Resurrection prior to its occurrence. Mark indicated that even after the empty tomb some of the eleven were reluctant to believe what they were being told about Jesus. Those who had not seen the risen Christ just could not bring themselves to believe the reports of the Resurrection.

"Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen" (Mark 16:14). Thomas was not convinced when he first heard; he said, *"Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe"* (John 20:25). But, upon seeing the living Christ, he said, *"My Lord and my God"* (John 20:28). It was at the empty tomb that John believed that Jesus was risen. *"He saw, and believed"* (John 20:8). The Bible is not clear as to the exact moment Peter became convinced of the Resurrection, but it is obvious that his road to faith in that truth began when he entered the empty tomb and examined the grave clothes (John 20:6, 7).

Another powerful argument for the resurrection of Christ was the ease by which authorities could have disproved it, but did not. If there had been no resurrection, all that was necessary to disprove it was for authorities to retrieve the body of Jesus. There seems to have been some evidence that such a task was undertaken. Guards of the grave were paid to say that the body had been stolen by the disciples (Matthew 28:11-15). That story could not be upheld. The body of Jesus could not be produced. Jesus was alive! His body had been changed into a spiritual body and had come out of the grave victoriously. There was no corpse to be found. The salvation of believers in Corinth was proof of the Resurrection. Paul had preached the gospel of the Resurrection to them. The fact that they had believed that message and had experienced its

power in their lives was proof of the truth of the gospel. To have experienced salvation was personal proof to the Corinthians that Jesus had died and had risen from the dead.

Today, one of the greatest proofs of the resurrection of Christ continues to be new Christians. Every time a person is saved from a life of sin and changed by the power of the gospel of the Resurrection, the resurrection of Jesus is reaffirmed.

The Scriptures Proclaim the Resurrection of Christ

Paul wrote that Jesus "*rose again the third day according to the scriptures*" (verse 4). To us, the Scriptures that declare the resurrection of Jesus are primarily the New Testament, but when Paul made his statement, the New Testament had not been completed. The Scripture to which he referred was the Old Testament. There is no way of knowing what passages Paul had in mind when he affirmed that the Resurrection was according to the Scriptures, but there are several passages which teach that glorious truth.

David wrote, "*Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption*" (Psalm 16:10). Upon a casual reading, one might miss the great implication of those words, but the passage was clarified by both Peter and Paul. Peter applied the passage to the resurrection of Jesus. "*David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption*" (Acts 2:25-31).

Paul made a similar application of the psalm, showing clearly that he believed that David prophesied of the resurrection of Jesus, "*He saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: but he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption*" (Acts 13:35-37).

While Isaiah did not speak directly of the Resurrection, his prophecy showed Jesus both beaten down and then raised up in triumph. "*It pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors*" (Isaiah 53:10-12). Only through a resurrection could the Messiah have met all the conditions described by Isaiah!

The prophet Hosea used language which sounded similar to events associated with the Resurrection. "*Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight*" (Hosea 6:1, 2).

Jesus applied Jonah's experience in the belly of the whale to His coming resurrection. "*As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*" (Matthew 12:40). Perhaps there are other Old Testament passages which you might identify that applied to the Resurrection.

Certainly Paul was convinced that the Resurrection was not an afterthought with God, but was part of His eternal plan. Though they may not have understood what they described, the Resurrection was an event which God put in the hearts of His prophets hundreds of years

before its occurrence.

Account of Eyewitnesses

Throughout history, the testimony of eyewitnesses has been considered reliable evidence in a court of law. Paul affirmed, "*that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time*" (verses 5-8). Luke said that Jesus "*shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*" (Acts 1:3).

Today we have the written testimony of those eyewitnesses. We cannot cross examine them, but we have no reason to doubt their word and every reason to believe them. The faith they had in the Resurrection caused their lives, like the lives of the disciples, to be in jeopardy. The authorities hated the doctrine of the Resurrection and sought to squelch it by any means. Anyone professing faith in the living Christ was at risk. Many of the witnesses paid for their testimony with their lives. How can anyone doubt the testimony of those who were willing to stake their lives upon what they reported? Truly the testimony of those who claimed to be eyewitnesses of the greatest event in history cannot be discounted.

Paul was a unique eyewitness. He was one who had hated the story of the Resurrection. So great was his hatred of those who believed in the living Christ that he actively sought to destroy them. As he went about the horrible work of imprisoning believers, Jesus appeared to him. Jesus asked him why he was persecuting Him. Upon being so confronted, Paul fell before the Lord and accepted the message of the Resurrection. In fact, he became the greatest proponent of the resurrection of Christ and gave much of his energies to teaching people the significance of the Resurrection to Christian faith. Paul felt that the most needed thing of his day was the preaching of that message. "*Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed*" (verse 11).

Not only did Paul teach and preach the Resurrection, but the message

that Jesus was alive was the basic truth of the early preaching. When the Christians of Jerusalem were scattered because of persecution, they went everywhere telling of Jesus (Acts 8:4). Their message was, "Jesus is alive!" That message captured the hearts of thousands of people and throughout most of the known world men and women accepted the glorious truth of the gospel.

The heart of the gospel is still centered in the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. All who believe must proclaim to a lost and dying world that Jesus is alive. He lives and saves all who turn to Him in faith.

Question for Discussion

The reality of the Resurrection is usually best proven by the changes that come into a believer's life. What changes came into your life when you believed that prove that Jesus really is alive?

Lesson 13

GIVING, WORKING, LIVING, AND LOVING

I Corinthians 16:1-8,13-16,22-24

Central Truth: Render practical service to Christ.

This lesson is concerned with a practical application of Christianity

While Christianity is concerned with great theological matters, it is also concerned with how people spend their lives in the here and now. Those who are concerned with the great biblical truths and neglect matters of giving, working, living, and loving are not dealing with the whole counsel of God's Word. It is good for Christian thinkers to have great lofty thoughts of the hereafter, but they must never lose sight of how those truths relate to life while on earth. Christianity is not a "pie in the sky" religion, but a practical faith that teaches believers how to make their spiritual pilgrimage on the earth. All the truth of the Bible is designed to help believers live faithfully for the Lord.

Giving (I Corinthians 16:1-4)

One of the great practical issues of the Christian life is the use of money. Paul addressed that issue in connection with a benevolent collection for the poor saints of Judea. From his teachings related to that collection flow the great principles concerning Christian giving.

1. There is a need for cooperation among the people of God in supporting the work of God.

Paul pointed out that his instructions for giving were not just for the Corinthians, but involved the "*churches of Galatia*" as well (verse 1). Paul recognized that there was power in cooperation. When churches work together they can do what one church alone cannot do.

The principle is demonstrated in the giving by the churches of the Baptist Missionary Association of America. Most of the churches with that affiliation are small with limited finances, but when each church rallies her membership to support a cause, they can underwrite the support of missionaries around the world, engage in educational ministries, and do significant benevolent work. With each person who is a member of one of the churches giving a few dollars each week for outside causes, the total offering would be a very large sum. According to the Directory and Handbook of the Baptist Missionary Association of America, 234,334 members gave \$12,168,038 to all outside causes. While that is a relatively large sum of money, it is only about \$52.00 per member!

An ideal way for each church to support various phases of the associated work is for a specific portion of the budget to be designated for missions and other causes. If each church that is affiliated with the association would designate a minimum of 10 percent of its offerings for the support of various phases of the associated work, the support for each department would be greatly increased and there would be less need for special appeals. The secret to power in supporting a cause is total cooperation.

2. There is a plan for giving.

The first step of the plan that Paul wrote about was to include giving in regular public worship. It was to be done when the saints came together "*upon the first day of the week.*" Of course, giving can take place any time, but it should always be done as an act of worship.

A second part of the plan for giving was that it should be done systematically. Each member was told to "*lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.*" Giving should not be based upon emotional appeals, but should be done purposefully. "Every man according as he

purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Corinthians 9:7). Paul showed that no member, regardless of financial position, is excused from taking part in giving. Provision was made for the different economic status of various members; they were to give as God had prospered them. That simply means that each member was to give proportionally.

There have been many discussions as to what proportion should be used in giving. At least from the day of Abraham, great men of faith have given a minimum of 10 percent in their worship. While the concept of giving 10 percent was prior to the law, that percentage was incorporated into the Mosaic Law. There is no direct command that Christians must give at least 10 percent in support of the work, but Paul taught that giving should be in proportion to God's blessings. Since there is a biblical precedent for setting 10 percent as a minimum, should not Christians do at least that much? If people under the law gave 10 percent, how much more liberal should people under grace be in the support of the work of their Lord!

A third principle in the plan for giving was that Christians should give adequately. Paul taught that giving should be done so that there would be no need for "gatherings" when he came. How great it would be if the work of the Lord was adequately supported through regular giving! Tremendous creative energy is invested each year by leaders of mission enterprises promoting support for the cause they represent. Would it not be more profitable if those leaders could spend their energies planning for doing the work rather than planning how to get people to give?

Working (I Corinthians 16:5-14)

Paul opened his heart and shared with the Corinthians details about his work for Christ. In verse 6 he shared his plan for the immediate future. He showed that he recognized that his day-by-day plans were subject to change. It was his desire to winter with the Corinthians and that they would support him in whatever direction his ministry should go. But even the plan to winter with them was subject to the permissive will of God. James wrote, "*Ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that*" (James 4:15).

Paul recognized that wherever he went there would be opposition to the work. While he saw a great door of opportunity for ministry opened to him, he knew there would be many adversaries. Instead of cowering from the opposition, he viewed it as a challenge rather than a hindrance. He simply sought for the prayer support of the people as he continued his mission.

Paul showed concern for his fellow laborers. He wanted the Corinthians to support Timothy's ministry. He encouraged them to allow Timothy to work in among them without fear, recognizing that he was a part of the work, just as Paul had been. Paul recognized that the way a church treats its ministers has tremendous implications for the success of the work that they will do. If churches do not respect and support the ministers among them, they limit not only the effectiveness of the ministers, but also the ministry of the church.

Paul shared with the Corinthians that he desired to bring Apollos with him on his journey to Corinth; however, "*his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time*" (verse 12). That reference showed that while Paul felt that a visit to Corinth by Apollos would have been helpful, he trusted the thinking of Apollos. If Christians are to work together, there must be mutual trust.

Paul gave six imperatives to the Corinthians in regard to their work for the Lord.

1. They were to watch. Being watchful involved being alert against the attacks of Satan. Peter wrote, "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*" (I Peter 5:8). Christians must be alert to temptation, apathy, indifference, and false teachers. To fail to watch is an invitation to failure.

2. They were to "stand fast in the faith." Paul recognized that being a Christian in any environment required vigilance. If a Christian should become careless, he would allow opportunity for the devil to cause them to waver. If a Christian is to stand, adequate preparation must be made for the warfare in which he is engaged. "*Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand*" (Ephesians 6:13).

3. They were to "quit [themselves] like men." While a man must come to Christ as a little child, there is no excuse for a Christian acting childishly. Christians must develop a level of maturity which will enable them by the grace of God to be courageous in their work for God.

4. They were to "be strong." The strength for doing the work comes from God. Jesus said, "*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth*" (Matthew 28:18). On the basis of that power, Jesus commissioned believers to carry out His work. The work is great; but as Paul said, "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*" (Philippians 4:13).

5. They were to "let all [their] things be done with charity." Love gives meaning to everything a Christian does. If love is missing, even the good things one does become unprofitable (I Corinthians 13:1-3). The first four commands were like military orders, requiring strength and courage. But in the Christian life there must not only be the courage which will not retreat, but there must also be the love which will never fail.

Loving (I Corinthians 16:15-24)

In this passage Paul showed the fruits of love.

1. Love produces unselfish service. Stephanas was the firstfruits of Achaia, and he was proving his love by serving the Lord's people. Spontaneous service is the beginning of great service in the work of the Lord. Too many people think that working in the church requires a designated office; but no one should have an official duty in the church until he proves that he serves the Lord from the heart.

2. Love leads to submission. Paul taught that believers were to submit themselves to the leaders that God sent to them. They were not to be selective in their submission, but were to support and submit to all the workers that were helping in the work.

No army would ever attempt to fight a war without leadership, but many in the church rebel against the leaders God sends to them and then wonder why the work does not prosper.

3. Love results in unselfish giving. Apparently Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus did for Paul what the Corinthians had failed to do. Perhaps

they supplied some material need, or maybe they simply supplied the companionship that he needed. Whatever they did was motivated by the love and respect they had for Paul.

4. Love knows no boundaries. Paul told the Corinthians that "*The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. All the brethren greet you*" (verses 19, 20). It is important that the love that Christians have should not be limited to those within an immediate congregation. The work of the Lord is much greater than just a local field. Christian servants who labor abroad require the support and love of the greater Christian community. Many of our faithful workers around the world are suffering great persecution as they faithfully minister in the Word. They need to know that they are loved and appreciated by their fellow believers in America.

5. Love results in friendly greetings. Paul admonished the Corinthians, "*Greet ye one another with an holy kiss*" (verse 20). The holy kiss has largely been replaced by a handshake in Western culture, but in many areas of the world the kiss is still practiced. The important thing is not the vehicle of greeting but the fact that the greeting is given in love. The sad truth in many churches is that too little affection is shown for one another.

Paul identified two other great truths about love.

(1) Love is required of one who would be a part of the kingdom of God. "*If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha*" (verse 22). There actually is a break between the words Anathema and Maranatha. Anathema means "let him be accursed." *Maranatha* means "O come, Lord Jesus." It is a serious matter to fail to grow in love. After all, "God is love," and we are His children.

(2) Love is assured to those who believe in Jesus. "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus*" (verses 23, 24). Every believer can be assured that he is loved. He is loved by the Lord, and he is loved by the faithful workers whom the Lord has sent to minister in his life.

As you come to the close of this study, think about how your faith is being expressed in practical ways both in your church and in your life.

How could you put into practice additional ways that you can prove that your faith really does produce good works?

Write additional questions here for Discussion

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