

Chapter 1
"The First Church of Corinth"
(First Corinthians 1:1–9)

MINI BIBLE COLLEGE

INTERNATIONAL BOOKLET EIGHTEEN

Verse by verse Study of First Corinthians

(Part 1)

The church Paul planted in Corinth had many questions and problems that demanded the inspired counsel of the greatest missionary and church planter the church of Jesus Christ has ever known.

The church was hopelessly divided because they polarized around several leaders whom Paul had placed there to teach and disciple these believers. A man who was probably a leader in the church was having an affair with his stepmother. Everybody knew this but nobody was doing anything about the problem. They were suing each other in the civil courts of Corinth and they were getting drunk on the wine when they celebrated the Lord's Supper.

Paul learned about many of these problems from one of the many house churches there. The Corinthian believers had also written him a letter in which they asked him questions about marriage, a problem that involved idol worship, the role of women in the church, especially certain aspects of the worship in the church, the function of the Holy Spirit in a church, resurrection, and stewardship issues. Paul addresses the problem of their divisions in chapters one through four, immorality and their law suits in chapters five and six, then the issues raised by their letter in chapters seven through sixteen.

With that brief overview of First Corinthians, let's look at the opening verses. In verse one Paul described himself as "called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." When you get into the content of this letter and Second Corinthians, you discover that the Corinthian church questioned his right to call himself an apostle. So immediately he made the point that he was "Called to be an apostle through the will of God."

Paul addressed this letter to "Those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints." (2) The word sanctified means "to be set apart". When you are set apart to follow Christ, of necessity you turn away from things that are sinful. But the emphasis in Scripture regarding sanctification is not that you have been set apart from sin, but that you have been called to be set apart unto the One to Who has called you to have fellowship with Him (1:9). Paul's favorite way of referring to believers was to call them "saints". The fact that Paul would write to these believers, while knowing of their many problems, and address them as "saints" shows us that being sanctified does not mean to be without sin in your life. It does mean that a believer is called to live his or her life set apart to Christ and from sin.

In the second half of verse two Paul writes, "... together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ — their Lord and ours." This letter was not only addressed to the church of God at Corinth, but to everyone who was calling on the name of Jesus Christ when this letter was written and down through

the generations, all over this world. That means this letter is addressed to you and me. "The church of God" is the invisible, universal church, and "the church of God which is at Corinth" is the visible church in its local expression.

Verse 3 contains a greeting: "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." This was Paul's standard greeting, because he believed that if a believer has grace, then they have all kinds of wonderful blessings in their lives that God has given to them — not because they deserve or have achieved them by their own self-efforts, but because God has given them those blessings. Grace is not only the unmerited favor of God, but it's also the power, the charisma of God, that makes it possible for them to function as followers of Jesus Christ. The result of having God's grace is that the Corinthian believers were "enriched in every way and did not lack any spiritual gift." (5, 7)

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ was a very important teaching to Paul. So he told these first-century believers in Corinth that they were "waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed." (7) As they were waiting for His return, Paul wrote, Jesus could "Keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." (8)

How is it that Paul had the confidence (especially in this church with all of its problems) that these people would continue and not fall away, right up to the day of the coming of Jesus Christ? The

confidence of the apostle was: "God, Who has called you into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful." (9)

Chapter 2

"Is Christ Divided?"

(I Corinthians 1:10–17)

These verses in chapter one reveal the purpose of this letter. As mentioned, First Corinthians was written to a church that had many problems. In the first four chapters Paul addressed the problem of divisions in the church. He learned about the divisions in the church from "them, which are of the house of Chloe." (11) The church in Corinth met all over the city of Corinth in house churches. All the churches Paul founded met in this way. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that he had "taught them publicly and house to house." When he challenged them to shepherd that part of the flock over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseas, we can assume that these elders led house churches in Ephesus and were responsible for the spiritual oversight and growth of those who met with them in their house churches. (Acts 20:28) The New Testament churches met in homes for the first three hundred years of church history.

The Corinthian house churches were polarized around their leaders. Because Paul was the one who came to Corinth and

preached the Gospel when these people were saved, some of them said, "I follow Paul. Paul led me to Christ, and I'm going to follow him." Before Paul was converted, he was a great scholar, a Rabbi, and a Pharisee who had studied at the feet of the famous Rabbi Gamaliel. (Acts 22:3) To be able to say that you sat at the feet of a famous teacher like Gamaliel was the equivalent of saying today that you have a degree from a prestigious university. In other words, Paul had all the intellectual credentials. The Greek culture of Paul's day placed great value on learning. The Corinthian believers who had great respect for intellectual credentials would listen only to Paul and had little respect for Peter.

Not everyone in Corinth was an intellectual, however; many there loved the down-to-earth practical and unassuming preaching of Peter. Some people didn't grasp the teaching of Paul as well as they did the devotional preaching of Peter. Even though Peter was illiterate, as you discover when you read his letters, he emphasized the devotional and practical application of spiritual things.

Then there was a young man named Apollos, who probably was a very eloquent Greek before he was converted. Since the Corinthians highly valued eloquence, some of them said, "I follow Apollos. He's the one who speaks to me."

Finally, there was a group within the Corinthian church who were especially pious. These are the people Paul describes as those who were "of Christ". Paul means that they were saying, "I follow no man. I follow only Christ." (12)

After labeling these divisions in the church, Paul addressed this polarization around their leaders by asking a very profound question: "Is Christ divided?"

In one verse, Paul gives us a bird's-eye view of what salvation really is. He writes: "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." (9) Now, if salvation is essentially a call to have a relationship with Christ, if it's possible for us to have fellowship with the risen, living Christ, then Paul has asked us a very profound question: "Is Christ divided?"

In his letter to the Colossians he essentially writes that Christ in our hearts is our only hope. (Colossians 1:27) His question is actually, "How does the Christ Who lives in us and fellowships with us feel about race, social class, abortion, cloning human beings, worship forms, doctrine, or any other issue that divides us?"

Is Christ divided? Think about it. The obvious answer must be a resounding "No!" And the obvious deduction has to be that if Christ really does live in us, then we should not be divided. If we are divided because we are polarized around our leaders, there's something wrong with our relationship to Christ, and there's something wrong with the way we view our leaders.

In verse thirteen Paul uses himself as an example of how leaders should be perceived. "Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?" He's asking, "I didn't die on the cross for you, did I? So why would some of you say, 'I am of Paul?'" He

does not address those who were polarized around the other leaders. He diplomatically addresses those who follow him there in "The First Church of Corinth".

Paul points out that he baptized only a few of the believers in Corinth, and then he makes this profound statement that compares baptism and the Gospel: "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel — not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power." (17) To separate baptism from the Gospel means that we are not baptized to be saved. We are baptized because we are saved. Baptism is like a wedding ceremony where we make a public announcement of a decision that has already been made privately.

To make his point, Paul will spend the rest of chapter one and chapters two, three and four explaining what really happens when the Gospel is preached, believed, and people are converted. Obviously, he is addressing those who would only follow his leadership because he was the one who preached the Gospel in Corinth when they were converted.

Many make the mistake of trying to make the Gospel of Jesus Christ intellectually appealing. They like to make it so profound and logical they seem to believe "If I can just answer all your intellectual questions, then I'm sure you will be saved."

Paul tells us here that this isn't what happened when he preached the Gospel in Corinth. He did not preach the Gospel using enticing words of man's wisdom. He declares that he wasn't sent to

preach the Gospel there with enticing words of man's wisdom. If he had done that, it would have emptied the cross of Christ of its power and their faith would have been rooted in the wisdom of men. He writes that he was with them in great weakness and with much trembling. He had deliberately determined to know nothing among them but Christ and Him crucified. When he proclaimed the Gospel in their city, they had witnessed a demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 3
"The Preaching of the Cross"
(I Corinthians 1:18–2:5)

If the recipients of this letter understand and apply what Paul has written in these verses we have just considered (1:10-17), they will not polarize around their leaders and they will not be divided.

In verse eighteen Paul explains what the preaching of the cross is and how people respond to that message: "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." When Paul claims that he came to Corinth to preach the Gospel, the word he uses for "preach" means that he came simply announcing the Gospel the way a herald announced the decree of a king.

When Paul declares that he determined to know nothing among them but Christ and Him crucified, the historical perspective we learn from the Book of Acts helps us to appreciate these words Paul writes to the Corinthians. The seventeenth chapter of Acts describes an experience Paul had in Athens that profoundly impacted his ministry in Corinth.

When he was in Athens, he was invited to preach at the Areopagus, a very prestigious, cultured place overlooking Athens where scholars, politicians and great orators were invited to debate the important philosophical issues of their day and culture. It was a great honor to be invited to debate or teach there.

Some scholars believe Paul succumbed to the cultural pressures of that place with its emphasis on philosophy and intellectual debates. He preached a great sermon there on Mars Hill, taking his text for the sermon from an inscription written on one of their idols, and ending his sermon with quotes from Greek philosophers and poets. It was a magnificent sermon but the results were meager. There is no epistle of Paul to the Athenians and he does not plant a church there. Only a few respond favorably to that clever and magnificent message.

Paul went to Corinth directly from that experience in Athens. When he arrived in Corinth, the Lord told him in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in

this city." (Acts 18:9–10) Paul preached the Gospel in Corinth for a year and a half.

Read what Paul wrote to the Corinthians about his preaching the Gospel in Corinth while holding in perspective the historical context we learn about his ministry in Corinth from the Book of Acts (Acts 17-18). In Corinth he did not use an idol inscription for his text. He did not quote Greek philosophers and poets. He simply announced two facts about Jesus Christ. He preached the Gospel. He didn't debate the Gospel. He didn't defend it. He just announced it (I Corinthians 2:1-5).

He concludes this letter with a declaration of the Gospel and how he preached that Gospel in Corinth (15:1-4). Paul believed that when he preached (announced) the Gospel — that Jesus Christ died for our sins, and rose from the dead — the Scriptures — Holy Spirit would give the gift of faith to some who heard that Gospel. Those who believed were the ones God was referencing when He told Paul He had many people in the city of Corinth.

Why Do Some Believe?

Why is it some people believe the Gospel when it is preached, and some do not? It's not because those who believe it are stupid and those who do not believe it are smart. It is not because those who believe are smart and those who don't believe are stupid. Paul tells us that faith is a gift and the Holy Spirit gives it to the people who believe when they hear the Gospel announced. The Holy Spirit

moves them to know that what they are hearing is true. They believe because they have been given the gift of faith. (Ephesians 2:8; Philippians 1:29)

In verse nineteen Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah: "I shall destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing all the learning of the learned." (Isaiah 29:14) In verse nineteen of chapter three, Paul quotes the Book of Job: "God uses man's own brilliance to trap him; he stumbles over his own 'wisdom' and falls." (Job 5:13) God was predicting through Isaiah that man's intellect will be his undoing. As a proof of that prophecy being fulfilled, Paul asks, "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (20) God opens His dialog with man by asking the question, "Where are you?" He then asks Cain, "Where is your brother?" Later, God asks Abraham, "Where is your wife?" The question here is "Where is the wise man?" The thrust of the question is "Where is the wise man spiritually?"

Why is the wisdom of this world foolishness to God? Paul's answer is that "The world through its wisdom did not know God." (21) God knows that wisdom begins with a fear (or knowledge) of our Creator God. (Proverbs 9:10)

Paul sums up the way Jews approach God when he writes that, "The Jews look for a sign." He characterizes the way people who live in Corinth approach God - and everything else - when he writes that, "The Greeks seek after wisdom." That's why the simple

declaration of the Gospel of Christ crucified is a stumbling block to the Jews. It doesn't give them a sign beyond the sign that everybody else has when they hear the Gospel.

The Greeks think the Gospel is "foolishness," because you don't have to be an intellectual to understand the Gospel. But to people who are "called", - it doesn't matter whether they're Jews or Greeks - the preaching of the Gospel of Christ crucified is the wisdom and power of God that works the miracle of salvation in their lives when they hear and believe.

Chapter 4

"The Natural Man and the Spiritual Man"

(I Corinthians 2:6-16)

In verse six of chapter two Paul begins one of my favorite passages in the Word of God:

"We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as

it is written: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him' — but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

"The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit Who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: 'For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ."
(2:6–16)

Any great teacher like Paul understands how people learn. People learn through the "ear gate," or by what they hear. This covers everything we are told by our parents, pastors, teachers, and others. We also learn through the "eye gate." We learn from what we see. This includes everything we read and observe. That's why

audio-visual education, where we learn through the eye and the ear simultaneously, is an effective way to teach.

Paul mentions the eye, the ear, and the heart in this passage. The heart represents the will. It's difficult to teach those who do not want to learn. Our Lord told us that, "If any man wills to do, he will know." (John 7:17) Disciples are followers of Christ who are learning by doing, and then spending the rest of their lives doing what they have learned. That is the essential meaning of the word "disciple." No wonder Jesus was looking for people who had the will to do that they might know.

The primary message of this great chapter of Scripture is that to learn spiritual truth, we must have another gate – we must have the gate of the Holy Spirit. Paul uses a beautiful illustration to make his point. He challenges us to think about the fact that only the spirit of a man knows the thoughts of a man. The only way we could know what another person is thinking would be for us to have the spirit of that other person in us.

In the same way, the only One Who knows what God is thinking is the Holy Spirit of God. When we have the Holy Spirit, we have the capacity to know the thoughts of God. There is a real sense in which when we have the Holy Spirit in us we have the very mind of Christ!

Paul emphatically teaches that the only way to know spiritual truth is to have the Holy Spirit because spiritual truth is spiritually learned. If you don't have the Holy Spirit you cannot know spiritual

truth. In verse fifteen you find the term, "the spiritual man". Who is Paul talking about?

He is describing the person who has believed the Gospel and experienced the miracle of salvation through which they received the Holy Spirit. This person doesn't have to be an intellectual or be formally trained in theology although it is wonderful for a spiritual person to have such training.

I am intrigued by the fact that the first four apostles were illiterate. They reached their entire world for Jesus because they were spiritual men who had received the Holy Spirit. There are approximately two million pastors in this world today and less than one hundred thousand of them have seminary degrees. The risen, living Christ is still reaching this world through people who are like those first four apostles.

In these verses Paul is profiling two kinds of men. This is a pattern throughout the Bible. The Psalms refer to the blessed man and the ungodly man; Jesus profiles the wise man and the foolish man. (Psalm 1; Matthew 7:24-27) Paul profiles here the spiritual man and the natural man. The word he uses for "natural" is the word "unspiritual." What he is presenting to us is simply, the man who has the Holy Spirit residing in him, and the man who does not have the Holy Spirit living in him.

When pastors preach and teach the Scripture today, it's possible for them to look out over a congregation of people and distinguish the spiritual man from the natural man. When Paul

prayed for the Ephesians, he prayed, "That the eyes of your understanding might be enlightened." (Ephesians 1:18) Those who communicate God's Word to others can see eyes light up with understanding as they hear the Word of God.

Likewise, it's sometimes easy to spot the man Paul describes as the natural man, or the unspiritual man. That person just doesn't understand spiritual things. In fact, he considers them to be foolishness. Why? Because he doesn't have the Holy Spirit. His eyes do not light up with understanding. (Sometimes, his eyes are covered by his eyelids, because he goes to sleep when he hears the Word of God.)

We should not expect unspiritual people to understand spiritual truth or have spiritual values. As you try to share your faith and your experience of Christ with secular people, you must pray that the same Holy Spirit Who opened your eyes and ears will open their eyes and ears, that they might be born again and receive the Spirit of God.

This leaves us with some important questions. By the grace of God, have you believed the Gospel and been born again? Does the Holy Spirit live in you? Do you have that "Spirit gate" that can open your eye gate, your ear gate and your heart gate and teach you spiritual truth? Do you have access to the thoughts of God and the mind of Christ because you have the Holy Spirit living in you? Or are you the natural, unspiritual man who cannot understand spiritual truth and calls the Gospel foolishness?

Chapter 5

"Words which the Holy Spirit Teaches"

(I Corinthians 2:6-16)

The Holy Spirit has many ministries and functions. He's a Comforter and a Counselor. He regenerates us, makes us new creatures from the inside out. Jesus called Him a "Paraclete". This Greek Word means that, "He comes alongside us, and attaches Himself to us in order to assist us."

One of the important ministries of the Holy Spirit is to teach us. When Jesus introduced the concept of the Holy Spirit to the apostles, He told them that this would be one of His functions: "He will guide you into all truth ... and He will make known to you things to come." (John 16:13) On one occasion, after Jesus had taught publicly, He was alone with the apostles answering their questions and explaining His teaching to them privately. He told them that it was given to them to understand His teaching, but it was not given to others. What was it that was given to the apostles that they might understand His teaching?

Jesus often made that observation about His teaching. After giving His teaching about marriage, He said that only those to whom it is given can receive His teaching about marriage. (Matthew 19:11) When He was asked why He taught in parables, He answered that when He taught in parables only those to whom it was given would

understand Him. (Matthew 13:11) Obviously, that which was given that His teaching might be understood was the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle John writes that we have an anointing in us and that anointing is able to teach us. He even goes so far as to tell us that we need no man to teach us because this anointing in us is able to teach us (I John 2:20,27).

The Apostle Paul is in total agreement with his Lord and his fellow apostles when he tells us the Holy Spirit Who lives in us can teach us spiritual truth. Paul expresses this truth beautifully when he states his mission objectives as a teacher of the Word of God. He claims that he teaches spiritual truth to spiritual people in "Words which the Holy Spirit teaches". This is what he means when he writes that spiritual truth is spiritually discerned and that he teaches spiritual truth to spiritual people. (2:13)

When you read or hear the Word of God preached and taught, do you find yourself thinking, "That relates to what I read or heard last week or yesterday." May I challenge you to realize something? That is the Holy Spirit teaching you the Word of God - "In words, which the Holy Spirit (Himself) teaches." According to Jesus, Paul, and the Apostle John, the only way we can understand the Word of God is to have the Holy Spirit in us as our Teacher, revealing spiritual things to us. This is one of the reasons why He came to live in you - and one of the most important ways He ministers to you.

If the ability to understand spiritual truth were based on a person's intelligence, or education, that would be grossly unfair. We

do not all have the same intelligence or educational opportunities. Who chooses the genetic pool that formed their intellectual gifts or the circumstances of life that determined their educational opportunities?

Peter could not write his letters, yet, when you study the letters of Peter, did he know about spiritual things? Why, he was a spiritual giant! He writes that God has made available to us "all things that pertain to life and godliness." (II Peter 1:3) He didn't have to read and write to be spiritual. He had the Holy Spirit in him, and he did not need any man to teach him because the Holy Spirit taught him.

The same spiritual understanding is available for believers today. "Ask and it will be given to you," Jesus taught. "Seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7) If you come to the Word of God asking, seeking, and knocking, the Holy Spirit will open the Word of God to you. He will be your Teacher.

Chapter 6

"Who Is Paul?"

(I Corinthians 3:1–7)

Having divided the human family into the natural man and the spiritual man, Paul introduces a third category as he begins the third chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians. In so many words he writes, "What am I going to call you rascals and scoundrels there in Corinth? How can I address you as spiritual men when you're divided because you're polarizing around your human leaders?"

Paul concludes, "I cannot address you as spiritual but as carnal - as mere babies in Christ." (3:1) So, now we have the spiritual man (the one who has received the Spirit and understands spiritual things), the natural man (the one who has not received the Spirit of God and does not understand spiritual things), and the carnal man. (Paul uses the word "man" generically.) We should ask, "Who is this carnal person?"

The word "carnal" is a translation of the Greek word for "flesh". What is Paul suggesting here — three kinds of men? Maybe, but there's another way to look at this passage. The natural man cannot be spiritual because he doesn't have the Spirit. He has no choice. He walks in the flesh all the time because he doesn't have the capacity to walk in the Spirit.

The spiritual man, on the other hand, has the Holy Spirit, but is he spiritual all the time? Does he always walk in the Spirit? No,

he has a choice. He can walk in the Spirit, and live and move and have his being in the Spirit, and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. But he doesn't always do that. So, when the spiritual man does not walk in the Spirit, Paul calls him "carnal".

Now you might say, "Wait a minute. There's no such thing as a carnal, spiritual man." But, think about it. Is there really any other kind of spiritual man? Jesus Christ was one hundred percent spiritual all the time, but are we? We should be, we are called to be and we can be, but are we spiritual all the time? One Bible scholar defines the word "flesh" as, "human nature unaided by God". When the spiritual man relies on his human nature and seeks no help from God, he is carnal, according to the Apostle Paul.

Paul began this letter reminding the Corinthian believers that they are sanctified and called to be saints. Now he is telling them that they are not living up to their calling. The proof of that is their jealousy and quarreling. To paraphrase and summarize, Paul writes: "I've got to treat you like people who are still walking in the flesh, because that's exactly what you're doing. In fact, I've decided to treat you just like babies, because that's what you are. Spiritual babies have not yet learned that they are to do nothing unaided by God. They try to live like saints in their own strength without seeking any aid from God.

Paul writes that babies have not yet developed their digestive systems and so they must be fed predigested foods like milk. He

regrets that he must continue to feed them baby food and treat the Corinthian church as if the entire church were a nursery.

If the only spiritual food you ever receive is what someone like your pastor has already digested, then it's possible that you're a spiritual baby and you are feeding on the milk of the Word. When you're a baby, milk is a wonderful thing. Peter exhorts us as newborn babies to earnestly desire the sincere milk of the Word that we may grow. (I Peter 2:2) But the only time you feed a regular diet of milk to a grown person is when they are sick.

It's important to track with Paul and appreciate the argument of these first four chapters. Remember, Paul is addressing the problem of the divisions in the church when he asks, "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul?" Paul answers his own question several times when he writes that he and Apollos are only ministers (servants), through whom these Corinthians came to believe, "Even as the Lord has assigned to each his task." (5)

Paul begins most of his letters by describing himself as the bond slave of Jesus Christ. Paul and Apollos were just slaves God assigned to preach the Gospel and shepherd the church in the city of Corinth. Paul continues to answer his own question: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So he who plants and he who waters are nothing, but only God, Who makes things grow." (6, 7) Paul rebuked the Corinthians for polarizing around their leaders, which caused divisions in the church.

In Summary

Paul concludes that they were still walking in the flesh because their spiritual community was filled with strife and envy. Their behavior also showed that they were just spiritual babies. The strong point he is making is, that since God is the power behind the great miracle of salvation they experienced through his preaching the Gospel in Corinth, they should polarize around God, not the servants God sent to Corinth to plant and water. They should surrender to and follow the God Who sent His Son into the world for their salvation and sent him to Corinth to tell them that Good News.

Chapter 7

"Building on the Foundation"

(I Corinthians 3:8–17)

In the third chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, Paul uses a beautiful metaphor when he writes that the believers in Corinth are God's field. He and Apollos are like farmers. He has planted the seed of the Gospel and the Word of God in their field and Apollos has watered that seed, but God has given life to that seed and made it grow. In verse nine, Paul changes the metaphor and tells these same believers, "You are God's building."

Peter and Paul both taught that the temple in which God now lives is the body of a believer. Peter adds to that metaphor the concept that we are living stones in a temple God is building today. (I Peter 2:5) What a beautiful description of the church of the risen living Christ.

Using the illustration of the building, Paul continues, "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." (10–11) Paul is saying that the church in Corinth is like a building, and he laid the foundation of that building when he preached the Gospel in Corinth and the founding members of the church experienced salvation.

Paul was a missionary. He didn't want to preach the Gospel where Christ had already been preached. He wanted to preach where Christ had never been preached. He wanted to lay foundations. But Paul knew that Christianity is a team effort, and he believed that others like Apollos and Peter would follow up his ministry in places like Corinth. They would build on this foundation he laid when he preached the Gospel.

But now we read a warning he is issuing to those who were going to build on that foundation:

"If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light.

It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." (12–15)

Many scholars believe that Paul is referring to the Judgment Seat of Christ, when believers will be judged. Another judgment presented in Scripture is the Great White Throne Judgment, when the unbelieving will be judged and condemned to eternal death. (Revelation 20:11-15)

The issue at the Judgment Seat of Christ, however, is not condemnation. Nobody will be condemned at this judgment. The issue at this judgment is evaluation. What is the total of the value of your life after trusting Christ to be your Savior? "Only one life that soon will pass; only what's done for Christ will last." What are you building on the foundation of Christ? Things that will last, such as gold, silver, and precious stones, or things that won't, like wood, hay, and straw?

This metaphor of judgment is suggesting that we are accumulating wood, hay, and straw mixed with gold, silver and precious jewels. When we are evaluated as believers, Jesus Christ will apply fire to all that we have accumulated. When the fire is applied to wood, hay, and straw, they will be consumed. Fire will purify the gold, silver and jewels.

The truth being taught is that after we experience salvation, when we are carnal and try to live for and serve Christ without trusting Him to make that possible, we are accumulating wood, hay, and straw. When we are spiritual and we live, move, and depend completely on Christ, we are accumulating the precious metals and jewels. When the fire is out, the quality of our eternity will have been determined.

Paul is not teaching that we are saved by our good works. That which is consumed in this fire is not our salvation. Actually, he is warning those who were building on the foundation he had laid as a wise master builder in the lives of the believers in Corinth. That foundation was Christ, Who was the foundation of the salvation of those who believed in Corinth.

Continuing with the illustration of the Corinthian believers being a building, Paul agrees with Peter when he asked: "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple." (16–17)

Paul and Peter agree that God no longer lives in temples made with men's hands. He no longer lives in that wilderness tent of worship or the Temple of Solomon. If we are believers, our body is the temple of God.. He lives in us - and we should never defile that temple.

Chapter 8

"The Wise Man and the Foolish Man"

(I Corinthians 3:18–20)

Paul returns to the theme he began in verse 17 of the first chapter when he writes here in chapter three: "Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a 'fool so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: 'He catches the wise in their craftiness'; and again, 'The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.'" (3:18–20)

Paul is not teaching that when we become followers of Christ we stop using our brains. Paul told us in chapter two that "The Holy Spirit teaches us, explaining spiritual things to those who are spiritual (2:13). Many people like myself did not even know they had a mind before they came to Christ. I was nineteen when I experienced salvation. At that time I thought my head was a knot to keep my spine from unraveling! After coming to Christ, however, I became aware of the fact that God had given me a mind. Anointed by the Holy Spirit, I've used that mind a lot more since coming to Christ than I did before. That's true of many believers.

What does Paul mean by "the wisdom of this world"? Sometimes when the Scripture uses the word, "world" it's referring to a system of beliefs, a system of values, the way the world thinks, or what the world considers important. That's what Paul means by

"the standards of this age". (18) If we think about it, we should not expect people who are not spiritual to have the values of people who are spiritual.

The Scripture makes it clear, that when we become believers, we have spiritual values. We have experienced "the renewing of our minds." (Romans 12:2) We should not think the way the world thinks. We are in union with the living Christ. The Holy Spirit lives in us. God has become the source of our values and our thoughts.

So when Paul again brings up this contrast — the wisdom of this world and the wisdom of God — he writes, "Be willing to be thought of as a fool by this world so that in the sight of God you may be truly wise." Solomon said, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." (Proverbs 9:10) The fear of the Lord is the same thing as faith in the Lord. Fearing God doesn't mean you view Him as some kind of tyrant. It means a reverence for God because you believe in Him. Because you believe in God, you would be afraid to defile the temple in which He lives.

Are you afraid to disobey God? Do you believe in God so much that you would be afraid to sin and disobey Him, because you believe that He would chastise you? That's a healthy fear of the Lord. It's also an evidence of faith — and the beginning of wisdom. You are beginning to be wise when you believe in God. If you want to be wise in the sight of God, then be willing to be thought of as a fool by the world. Are you wise in the things of God? Are you wise

in the things of the Spirit? Are you wise in terms of your understanding of Scripture?

The world calls foolish the spiritually wise people of God. It should not surprise us to learn that the world's "wisdom" is considered foolishness by God, because, through their wisdom they do not know Him. It is the plan of God to save people through the preaching of the Gospel. The unspiritual man hears that Gospel and says, "Foolishness!" But, God looks at the wisdom of that worldly man and says, "Foolishness!"

In His great prayer for the apostles and His church, we hear Jesus pray, "This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom You have sent." (John 17:3) According to Jesus, knowing God and His Son is where life begins. Paul is agreeing with Jesus when he writes in these verses that those who make that great discovery are wise and those who miss that eternal quality of life are fools.

Chapter 9
"Managers of Mysteries"
(I Corinthians 3:21–4:5)

Paul now comes to his conclusion regarding the first problem in the Corinthian church he addresses in this letter – the problem of division among believers because they are polarized around the leaders of their church. His conclusion is found in verse twenty-one: "So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God." (21–23)

Paul is saying that God knows the things you need to bring you to salvation and grow you in your faith. And He sees to it that you have everything you need in order to accomplish these miracles in your life. So if He thinks you need Paul, He'll send you Paul. If He thinks you need Apollos, He'll send Apollos. If He thinks you need Cephas (Peter), He'll send Peter. God will use all the events of your life and make them work together for your good. He is the great Prime Mover in it all. That's why Paul concludes his argument by telling these Corinthians not to boast about these men God has sent them.

In chapter four Paul writes, "Men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries of God." (1) Another version reads, "stewards of the secret things of God." In

effect, Paul is saying here, "We're just servants (slaves) of Christ. We came to Corinth because Christ sent us to Corinth. Everything that happened in Corinth was because of Christ, not because of us."

In chapter two Paul wrote that he taught "God's secret wisdom." A mystery is a secret that is ultimately revealed. There are two senses in which the Gospel is a mystery. The Gospel is going to be revealed when Jesus Christ comes back again, and human history is consummated in Christ. The Bible has much to say about the future. When Paul tells us about life beyond the grave later in this letter, he writes, "Behold, I tell you a mystery." (15:51) Future events are mysteries to us now, but one day they will be revealed.

However, Paul is explaining to these Corinthian believers, that he and the other leaders, who brought salvation to them, should be considered stewards of the future and present mysteries of God. There is so very much about the Gospel and the Scripture that is hidden from us until the Holy Spirit reveals these truths to us. In that sense, all the spiritual truth God wants to share with us is a mystery. Paul considered himself and others who teach the Scripture to be stewards of those mysteries.

Paul continues, "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust (a stewardship) must prove faithful." (2) In Luke 16 Jesus gives us a parable that teaches the concept of stewardship. In that parable and others, He teaches that all of us are stewards. As God's children, we are managing things that belong to Somebody

else. "You are not our own; you were bought at a price," Paul writes later in this letter. (6:19–20)

Stewards are managers. Stewardship means our time is not our own, our energies are not our own. Stewardship doesn't just relate to our money and possessions. It relates to every dimension of our lives. In this profound passage, Paul relates stewardship to the present and future mysteries of God.

The important thing for stewards is that we be faithful, for one day we must give an account of our stewardship. Will we be able to rejoice in those words from the Master, "Well done, good and faithful (steward) servant?"

Having introduced that thought in verse two, Paul essentially writes, "You people have been judging me and my stewardship. Well frankly, I'm not impressed." (Keep in mind that he is still addressing his followers in Corinth, those people who think that he is the greatest.)

Paul is actually asking here, "What do you really know about me? In fact, what do I really know about myself? Why, I don't even judge myself and I'll tell you why. I don't know the motives of my heart. Only God knows my motives and that's why He is the only One Who is qualified to judge me. (Jeremiah 17:9,10; Psalm 139:23,24) Therefore, it is the Lord who judges me. So when it comes to judging other people (positively - not because of sin), judge nothing until the Lord comes." According to Paul, when the Lord comes, "He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will

expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God." (5)

Chapter 10

"Models of Martyrdom"

(I Corinthians 4:6–21)

In verse seven of chapter four Paul raises three profound questions. The first is, "Who makes you different from anyone else?" One of the great miracles of God is that human beings are all different by design and He has a different plan for each one of us. For example, at the end of the Gospel of John, Peter asked Jesus what His plan was for John. And the Lord replied, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow Me." (John 21:22)

More than six billion people live on Earth today, yet each one of us is unique. We all have different fingerprints. Our voices can be identified with sophisticated electronic equipment because no two of us has the same voice. Our dental structure is different. Our DNA affirms absolutely that when God made you and me and all the other billions of people, He threw the pattern away every time. He's been doing that since He created the first man and woman.

Paul's second question in verse seven is, "What do you have that you did not receive? You have nothing that you did not receive from God. Think of how passive you were in your creation. Did you choose to be born? Did you pick your parents? Did you decide which part of the world or which period of history into which you wanted to be born? Did you determine your own abilities, or your spiritual gifts? If you will think about it, there isn't anything you have that you did not receive from God.

His third question is: "And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not receive it?" What right do you have to be proud of any ability — natural or spiritual — as if God had not given these abilities to you?

Carefully read Paul's answers to those questions for himself and the other apostles. "We are fools for Christ... We are weak ... we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world." (10–13)

Clearly, this was the cost of being Christ's followers. Paul and the other apostles were "models of martyrdom." But Paul wasn't writing this to make the Corinthians feel bad. Instead, it was a reminder that they should have their hearts set on heavenly values, not earthly treasures. Just before He went to the cross, Jesus prayed,

"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you." (John 17:1)

Dr. A. W. Tozer, a godly pastor in America, often taught that every disciple of Jesus should pray something like this: "Father, glorify Yourself and send me the bill. Anything, Father - just glorify Yourself!" Any disciple of Jesus should be willing to "take up his cross". To that end, Paul and his fellow apostles are excellent models for us all. That's why he urged the Corinthians and others to follow his example (16).

Chapter 11

"Church Discipline"

(I Corinthians 5:1–5)

Having devoted four chapters of this letter to the problem of divisions in the church at Corinth, when Paul writes the fifth chapter of this letter, he addresses a different problem. It was common knowledge among the house churches in Corinth that there was sexual immorality among them. Specifically, a man was having a sexual relationship with his father's wife. (It might have been the man's stepmother.) Paul writes, "And you are proud of your spiritual gifts! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who is doing this?" (2) The way Paul

addresses this second problem among the Corinthians serves as a biblical model for what we call "church discipline" today.

The Motivation for Church Discipline

The motivation for church discipline is the same motivation parents have when they discipline their children — love, and the hope that the wayward person might ultimately be rehabilitated, restored, and saved in the fullest sense of the word. The inspired counsel of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians is: "You must not ignore sin in the church. You must confront sin and reclaim the erring believer."

In addition to our love for the fallen believer, the motivation for church discipline is rooted in the reality that there is a sense in which all of us ought to be able to say to a person who is seeking to know about Jesus Christ: "If you want to know what a born again disciple of Jesus Christ is, come and live at my house for a couple of months." By the grace of God, we ought to be able to give that challenging invitation to sincere seekers. It was that kind of dynamic life witness that spread the Gospel throughout the entire Roman world in the first centuries of church history.

Jesus invited the twelve apostles to live with Him for three years. That experience changed the lives of the apostles forever. In the same way, the church is meant to be an example to the world — "a candle on a candlestick", as Jesus described it. In the context of that metaphor, Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that

they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

The individual and corporate examples the church presents to this world are the very heart of the Gospel the church proclaims to this world. Since Satan knows that is true, his strategy is to attack those examples. That is why there is always been a problem with immorality in the Body of Christ, especially among leaders. The evil one wants to discredit the example of leaders because their moral and spiritual failure will negatively impact more people.

How do we deal with immorality among believers? This chapter of the letter of Paul to the Corinthians is one of the most important answers in the New Testament to that question. According to Paul, if a man is involved in sexual sin, those in the church must confront him. The objective of the confrontation is that the man might confess and forsake his sin. The good news is that God will forgive him. (I John 1:9) Restoration and spiritual rehabilitation must follow. (Galatians 6:1)

It is important to observe, that in the church at Corinth, the sin was not a thing of the past. It was still going on when Paul wrote this letter. Even worse, it was "commonly reported" by those who shared the problem with Paul. Apparently, everybody knew and nobody was doing anything about it.

Here is Paul's prescription for this problem:

"Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the

one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord."
(3-5)

The Strategy of Church Discipline

The last part of Paul's prescription reveals the strategy of the apostle, which is the present and ultimate salvation of the man who is living in sin. He must be rescued from his sin. The church must reclaim the brother who has lost his way. When Paul follows this letter with another letter to the Corinthians, the church is instructed to receive this man back into the fellowship of the church. (II Corinthians 2:4-8)

The Discipline of Leaders in the Church

The public nature of this church discipline leads some scholars to believe that the man involved in this sin was a leader in the Corinthian church. In his letters to pastors, Paul instructed Timothy: "Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may be warned. I solemnly command you in the presence of God and the Lord Jesus Christ and of the holy angels to do this whether the pastor is a special friend of yours or not." (I Timothy 5:19-20) When we compare this counsel written to Timothy with the

prescription for church discipline in the fifth chapter of this letter to the Corinthians, we conclude that the man involved must have been a leader in the Corinthian church.

Having rebuked these believers in chapter four for judging him and having instructed them that they judge nothing until the Lord comes, in this chapter he now rebukes them for not judging this brother. Neither Paul nor Jesus taught that we should never judge anything or anybody. Jesus taught that we should judge ourselves before we judge others (Matthew 7:1-5). Paul taught that we should not judge the motives of others because we don't even know the motives of our own hearts.

In this chapter, Paul is telling us that we must judge and discipline those who sin within the church, especially leaders. This doesn't mean that if a leader is sinning, they will somehow "lose" their salvation, or that they should be excommunicated from the church. The only sin for which there should be expulsion from the church is sin that continues after confrontation, without confession and repentance.

Chapter 12

"That You Might Gain Your Brother"

(I Corinthians 5:6–12)

The church is not the strong power and influence for God in the world that Christ wills it to be. There are many reasons for that. We have one right here in First Corinthians 5 — a lack of church discipline. If Paul felt strongly about the lack of church discipline in Corinth, how would the great church planter feel about our churches today? The church is designed to be the habitation of God in this world. Peter and Paul both tell us that believers in the church are to be like living stones in the church the risen Christ is building in this world today. (I Peter 2:5; I Corinthians 3:9,16)

Does Christ care about the purity and the power of His church today? The two go hand in hand. If the church isn't pure it won't be powerful. The purpose of church discipline is to keep the church pure and powerful.

The Purpose of Church Discipline

One purpose for church discipline is the restoration of the one who has fallen into sin. The purpose of church discipline is not just to punish the offender. In Matthew 18, the Lord gave this instruction: "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others

along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." (15–17)

That sounds so severe. But what is the purpose of church discipline? "That you might gain your brother." Out of love for him, you must confront and discipline him. If he truly is a spiritual person, then he will confess his sin. He will repent. He will turn away from his sin. He will be restored to the place from which he's fallen. And you will have gained your brother. But if he's not an authentic brother in Christ, if he's just a "wolf in sheep's clothing", then out of your love for Christ and His church, you are instructed to preserve the purity of the church by treating him as a heathen because, in fact, that's what he is.

Another purpose for church discipline is love for Christ and for His church. The glory of God, the glory of Christ, the purity, power, and witness of the church in the world are all purposes for church discipline. If we fail to apply church discipline, it's as if we're saying that we care for none of these things. We don't really care about what glorifies God and the risen, living Christ. We don't care about the witness of the church in the world. We don't even care for the one who is fallen.

In verse nine, Paul indicates that this was not his first letter to the Corinthians: "I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people — not at all meaning the people of this

world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world." (9–10) We know that the Lord never meant for us to withdraw from the world. "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." (John 17:15)

We are commissioned to associate with the people of this world who are immoral. That may come as a shock to you. You may not even like it. You may refuse to do it. But remember this. Jesus sent us into the world in exactly the same way that the Father sent Him into the world. Did He associate with immoral people? Read the four Gospels and you will see that He did. They were the people who responded when He preached the Gospel. How are you going to share the Gospel with sinners if you don't have any contact with them?

Paul was telling the Corinthians to separate themselves from immoral people who professed to be believers. "You must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler." (11) If a man professes to be a believer and his lifestyle is not what it ought to be, don't associate with him. Sooner or later people will discover the way a person lives. Jesus said that we are known by the fruit produced in our lives. If others see you associate with a professing brother who is not living the life he is professing to live, they will think you are just as phony as he is.

Chapter 13

"Disputes of Disciples"

(I Corinthians 6:1–8)

When Paul writes the sixth chapter of this letter he addresses yet another problem in the Corinthian church. The believers were having difficulties getting along with each other to the point that they were actually taking legal action against each other in the civil courts of the city of Corinth.

This behavior was a contradiction of everything Paul believed and had taught them. Why would believers go into a pagan court and appear before a judge who is a natural man, an unspiritual man, and say to him, "We are spiritual men, but we have a problem and we don't have the wisdom to solve it. Even though we have the Holy Spirit and you don't, we need the wisdom you have that we do not have?" Paul had this problem in mind when he wrote in chapter two, "He who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is judged by no man."

Furthermore, Paul wrote, one day believers will "judge the world." (2) If we will do that, why can't we make judgments about the trivial matters of life? "The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already," is the essence of what Paul wrote in verse seven.

Just as associating with hypocritical professing believers was tarnishing their witness (chapter 5), these lawsuits were a repudiation

of everything they professed to believe. So the apostle came up with this solution: "Why not rather be cheated?" (7) It would be far more honoring to the Lord to simply accept your losses and be cheated. Instead, you are the ones doing wrong and cheating your own brothers — and in the process you are making Christ and the church look foolish.

A General Spiritual Solution

As you study this corrective epistle, you'll find that Paul gives a specific solution to each problem he addresses in the Corinthian church. However, when we get to chapters twelve through fourteen, he offers spiritual solutions that are more general in nature. The general solution for all the problems he's addressing in the Corinthian church is found in chapters twelve through fourteen, especially chapter thirteen. The agape love Paul profiles in that chapter is selfless, not self-centered. By nature, self is at the center of everything we think and do. But Paul says that when Christ comes into our lives He gives us a new center.

For example, when Paul met Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, he found a new center for his life. His life now revolved around Christ. Instead of interpreting and evaluating everything in terms of what it meant to him, he now saw everything in terms of how it affected Christ. Paul approached every difficulty in his life asking, "What's in this for Christ? How can this glorify Christ?"

That is the perspective he is proposing to these believers who are suing each other. Don't think about how to resolve these conflicts in your best interest, but how you can resolve these problems in a way that glorifies Christ. A Christ-centered and an others-centered solution to these disputes is to honor your love for Christ and His church by suffering loss yourself.

A Specific Spiritual Solution

Paul offers disputing disciples an alternative solution in verse four: "If you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church!" He isn't literally suggesting that when we have a problem we should find the people who have the least amount of wisdom or experience in these matters. He is saying that believers, people with the Holy Spirit living in them, are far more qualified to understand the problems of spiritual people than people who don't have the Holy Spirit.

So, if there's a problem between two people in your local church, related to an inheritance or business matters, you should find some godly people in the church who have business experience and go to them with the dispute. Ask them to sit down with the parties involved and give discerning judgment about these matters. This inspired counsel of Paul has been taken seriously and is called "canon law" in the Roman Catholic Church today.

Chapter 14

"Specific Solutions for Sexual Sins"

(I Corinthians 6:9–20)

Because the apostle Paul championed spiritual liberty and was opposed to legalism, some of the more intellectual believers in Corinth were saying, "I have the liberty to do anything because of the Spirit residing in me. I'm free to do whatever I like." But that's not what Paul taught. While Paul hated legalism, he was not telling people that in the Spirit they had the freedom to do anything they wanted to do.

He begins this passage by reminding them that, "the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God." (9) He goes on to say that some of them used to be sexually immoral, adulterers, prostitutes, homosexual, and more. "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (11)

Paul says to these people who were delivered from that kind of life, "How can you take this great miracle so lightly?" Perhaps some of these Corinthian believers had difficulties giving up their old lifestyles. They still struggled with temptations to sin sexually. And that is understandable. Such a person may have a harder time gaining victory in this area than people who have never engaged in that lifestyle. Still, Paul makes it clear that new creatures in Christ do not have the liberty to sin.

In verse twelve he quotes the people who were probably misquoting him about their spiritual liberty. "Everything is permissible for me." Paul inserts his argument: "But not everything is beneficial." "‘Everything is permissible for me.’" Paul argues, "but I will not be mastered by anything."

When you come to Christ just as you are, He changes you, and you do not leave just as you came. From that point on there is only one power that should control your life, and that is the power of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit. If Jesus is Lord in your life, then nobody or nothing else can be Lord. It is wrong for a believer who is supposed to be controlled by the power of the Holy Spirit and under the lordship of Jesus Christ to be under the control of anyone or anything else.

In verse thirteen Paul uses a profound metaphor to make another great argument. "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food,' but God will destroy them both. Your body was not made for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." What Paul is saying is this: God has given us an appetite for food, and He has given us a stomach to digest food. That is good. But, the Bible is saying, "That does not mean that you should eat more than you should."

Our bodies were not made for sexual immorality. They were made for God, to be His dwelling place. When Jesus died for you on the cross, He bought you, He redeemed you, at a great price. And

having bought you, He owns you and you belong to Him. Therefore, Paul says, "Honor God with your body."(20)

There are many lines of argument in this passage, but it all comes down to this: "Flee from sexual immorality." (18) No other sin affects the body as this one does. Because your body is God's temple and you are one with Him and, perhaps, with a marriage partner, you have no right to engage in a physical, sexual oneness with other people. Paul reasons that our body, which is the temple of God, should never become one flesh with a prostitute. (16,19)

Scripture tells us in many places that we are not pillars of strength. That is why we must not to get into compromising situations where we're tempted and then expect the Lord to deliver us. Instead, we must flee sexual temptations. We must build fences of protection by setting standards and creating structure that we will not compromise because in our heart of hearts we really do not want to commit sexual sin.

Chapter 15

"The Marriage Manual"

(I Corinthians 7)

When Paul writes the seventh chapter of First Corinthians, he not only addresses a different problem but he begins a new section of the letter. He had learned of the divisions in the church, the immoral person, and their lawsuits from the house church of Chloe. Paul now begins to address problems that were presented to him in a letter he had received from this church.

While answering their questions about marriage, Paul has given us what many pastors consider to be a marriage manual. This chapter has become a manual pastors have used ever since it was written when parishioners have questions about marriage, divorce, remarriage, and many other marriage issues.

To understand the specific teachings of this chapter, I must begin with some general observations. The first one comes from the first two verses. Paul writes, "It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband." That seems like a terrible perspective on marriage, doesn't it? The key to understanding verses one and two is found in verse twenty-six, where Paul writes, "Because of this present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are." What did he mean by "this present crisis"?

During the first three hundred years of church history, the church experienced many periods of severe persecution. This is one reason why believers met in house churches before the Roman emperor Charlemagne made Christianity legal for Roman citizens in 313 A.D. The church was a secret organization for three centuries. This entire chapter should be read in light of that "present distress" which was the persecution of believers. This is one reason Paul writes that if you were single for any reason, it would be better for you to remain single. But, if you were single and you were struggling with temptation, then in order to avoid immorality, you should get married. It is better to marry than to burn with passion.

A second general observation relates to the divine inspiration of this chapter. There are places in this marriage manual where Paul writes, "I have no commandment of the Lord, but I'll tell you what I think." Or he writes, "Not I, but the Lord." These statements sound like Paul is writing, "I'm not telling you; the Lord is telling you" or, "The Lord is not telling you, I'm telling you." Some people have wrongly concluded that sections of this chapter where Paul says he has no word from the Lord are not divinely inspired. Be sure to make the observation that the last words of Paul in chapter Paul are, "I have the Spirit of God." What Paul means is that when he is telling us what he thinks, he is writing in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. (7:40)

If Paul is not telling us when he or the Lord is speaking, what is the meaning of all these statements? Paul is very carefully

building on the teaching of Jesus on the subject of marriage. If the question the Corinthians asked him related to what Jesus taught about marriage — for example, in Matthew 5 or Matthew 19 — then Paul is essentially writing, "I don't have to answer that question because the Lord answered that question."

But some of their questions touched on topics Jesus did not address. One such question was this: "Suppose a man and a woman got married when neither one of them was a believer. Then when you and the others came preaching, one was saved, but not the other. Now what are these people to do?" Jesus did not address that marriage problem.

When Paul addresses this question in verses twelve and following, he says, "I have no commandment of the Lord, but I'll tell you what I think." But remember, this is inspired instruction, for he is writing in the inspiration of the Spirit of God.

Chapter 16

"The Sex Life of Married Believers"

(I Corinthians 7:1–6)

Throughout church history, devout followers of Christ have pondered this question: What is the purpose of sexual intercourse in the life of a married couple? Is it simply procreation? Is that the only purpose? In verses three through five Paul gives inspired marriage counsel about physical intimacy to sanctified married couples in Corinth.

Paul writes: "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer and fasting. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." (3–5)

The only basis for refusing your partner his or her rights in this area of sexual intimacy is to devote yourselves separately to prayer and fasting. You are not to refuse one another unless you mutually agree to give yourselves separately to fasting and prayer. Then, you are to resume your relations again, so that you won't be tempted.

There are several important principles we can glean from these verses. The first one is this: The two are one flesh. The wife's body belongs to her husband, and the husband's body belongs to his wife. The husband doesn't have full rights to his body; his wife has rights to his body. And the opposite is true as well—the woman doesn't have full rights to her body. Her husband has rights to her body also.

A second principle is that the best defense against the temptation to commit adultery is a good offense — to have a good, satisfying physical relationship in your marriage. That way, when you go out into the world and interact with other people, you will not be as vulnerable to temptation because you are already satisfied. The Proverbs of the Old Testament give this same counsel to young men who are married. (Proverbs 5:15-20)

A third principle is that the operative word in the physical intimacies of the marriage relationship is the word "mutual". Questions are often raised about what is right or wrong, what is normal or abnormal. What is the average for the number of times a couple has sexual relations? The answer to all these questions is that the couple should ask this question: "What is mutual?"

Another important principle is that the relationship each one of them has with God continues to be individual and private even though this relationship is vital to their marriage and they enjoy together much of their relationship to God.

Jesus taught that the relationship between two married people is not only physical. When He designed marriage, God planned that the married couple should be one in spirit and one in mind, and then the physical intimacy should be the joyful expression of those deeper levels of relationship. Paul is building on this marriage principle of Jesus by adding the insight that the relationship a couple has with God continues to be individual and private as well as a shared relationship. The spiritual bond that makes a married couple one isn't simply the fact that they pray together or go to church together. A man and his wife must each have a spiritual union with Christ.

If you find your marriage relationship becoming weak, if it does not have the deep communion that it is supposed to have, what do you do? You both seek a deeper relationship with God. The spiritual bond that unites a married couple spiritually is only as strong or as weak as their individual relationships to Christ. So if you want to strengthen your marriage, get closer to Him.

Chapter 17

"The Inspired Marriage Counsel of Paul"

(I Corinthians 7:7–16)

In the midst of his message on marriage, Paul makes it clear in verses seven and eight that he is single: "I wish that all men were as I am... It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am." Some scholars believe that since Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin, he had to have been married at one time, so they conclude that he was a widower at the time he wrote First Corinthians. Whether he was single or single again, the principle he lays down here is the same: If you are single, stay single.

At the end of this chapter Paul teaches again that single people, virgins who have never been married, would do well to stay single. Even those who are single again, should remain single. All this teaching needs to be seen in the light of verse twenty-six, which refers to the "present distress", or the persecution of believers. Paul was obviously reasoning that the persecution would be a lot easier on a single person than a married person with children.

Paul also believed that the return of the Lord was imminent — another reason he told single people to remain unmarried. Furthermore, he wrote that unmarried people could focus their attention wholly on pleasing the Lord. In many places in this chapter Paul makes the argument for staying single, but he also says that if you cannot handle the single life, if your sexual drive is so strong you

are burning with passion, then go ahead and get married. Paul definitely makes a case for celibacy in this chapter. He calls celibacy a gift. Apparently, the gift of celibacy means that you can be fulfilled without marriage because you are "married" to the Lord.

In verses ten and eleven Paul is addressing the married, believing couple, the same couple he was speaking to in verses three through five. His instruction to them is not to divorce. This is consistent with what Jesus taught. He therefore writes, "yet not I but the Lord." Our Lord gave one exception to this, and that is in the exception of unfaithfulness. Jesus taught that marriage is a contract that this based on the condition of exclusiveness. When the exclusiveness is violated, the contract can be declared broken. God and Jesus do not command believers to live with a partner who will not live with them exclusively.

Verse twelve begins Paul's answer to another question the Corinthians raised in their letter to him regarding marriage. Apparently, they had asked him what a believing man or woman should do if they are married to an unbeliever. Paul writes: "If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him." (12-13)

Jesus didn't address the subject of "mixed marriages," in which one partner is a believer and the other is not. These marriages probably were a result of one spouse receiving salvation after the

marriage, something that happens a lot today, too. Of course, this could also be a result of a believer marrying an unbeliever, which is something the Bible forbids us to do. (II Corinthians 6:14)

Divorce in the Bible

In a mixed marriage, Paul does not give the option to divorce to the believer, but to the unbeliever. This is very fair in many ways. Let's suppose, for example, that an unbelieving man is married to a woman who has become a believer after they were married. When they were married as unbelievers, they were compatible; they shared the same value system. Then, the wife becomes a believer. Now what is she to do? Paul's instruction is that she is to stay committed to her husband. But if her husband looks at her and says, "You are not the woman I married. I want out of this marriage." Then, Paul says, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases." (15)

If, on the other hand, the unbelieving husband says, "Well, you are not the person I married, but I still love you. I want to stay in this marriage," Paul's inspired counsel to the believing spouse is to stay in the marriage. Why? "For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife." (14) The hope, of course, is that she might lead him to Christ. We must define what it means for him to want to stay in that marriage. He must live with her exclusively. When Paul writes that she is under no bondage when he leaves, does

that mean she is free to marry again? (I agree) I interpret no bondage to mean that she is free to marry again.

Chapter 18

"Mixed-up Marriage Backgrounds"

(I Corinthians 7:17–24)

I have divided this great marriage chapter into sections, because I believe each division represents Paul's answers to the questions these Corinthians asked him in their letter. As we study these answers of Paul to their questions, we can determine what their questions must have been.

Based on this principle, in this passage we can surmise that Paul was answering a question from (or about) people who had been married more than once. Think about the culture of Corinth and what the lives of the people who belonged to this church must have been like before they were converted. Remember, in chapter six Paul said that they had been involved in every sinful lifestyle imaginable. In this section, he addresses the crazy, mixed-up marriage backgrounds of some of the couples in the church of Corinth.

In this passage, notice how verses seventeen, twenty, and twenty-four present the same principle. "Each one should remain in

the place in life in which God called him." (17) "Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him." (20) "Each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation in which God called him." (24)

Let me illustrate this situation through the story of an elderly couple I knew. Over the course of two years I got to know the couple pretty well. One night they asked if I would stay after a Bible class they hosted in their home because they wanted to tell me their story.

She had been a circus performer before she was converted. She also had lived a very immoral life, including being married three or four times. And then she met her husband. He had been a criminal and also had been married three or four times. On a holiday in a big city, they heard a preacher who was leading a crusade in that city. They were saved, but as they began to study the Bible, they wondered, "What do we do about our marriage?" They found a pastor and his counsel to them was, "Go back to your first marriage partners, and if they are living and not married, then you can be married to them. But your relationship is adultery. Dissolve this union right now!"

They loved each other too much to divorce, especially since they had both trusted Christ for salvation and were following Him. But every time they had a physical union, they believed they were committing adultery. Their guilt was immense. In our Bible study we had just studied this marriage chapter, and they asked me, "What

does Paul have to say to us?" I pointed them to this passage and told them that three times Paul told them to remain in their marriage because that was their marital status when Christ found them.

Paul liked to use the word calling to describe the experience of salvation, as this passage and others indicate. I believe Paul was addressing couples just like the couple I have described and he essentially said to them: "When Jesus Christ found you, what was your marital status? Whatever it was, remain in that marriage." That's what I advised this elderly couple. We had a marriage ceremony for them, a spiritual ceremony in which we asked God's blessing and sanction upon the union they were in when they were called to follow Christ.

When sinners are saved, they are justified. All their sins are not only forgiven. It is as if he or she had never sinned. Now, let's apply the principle of justification to the mixed-up marriage backgrounds of people. Are they justified except for our previous marriages? No! The inspired counsel of Paul in these verses is consistent with the Gospel. Whoever you were with when God called you, stay in that marital status and ask God's blessing upon it. Your past is under the blood of Jesus Christ, and that includes your marriages.

Chapter 19

"The Sanctity of Celibacy"

(I Corinthians 7:25–40)

All of the counsel in the closing paragraph of First Corinthians chapter seven is directed at people who are single, whether never married or now single because of death or divorce. As we have said before, to understand Paul's teaching here, it is necessary to keep in mind what he says in verse twenty-six: "Because of the present crisis (persecution), I think that it is good for you to remain as you are." In addition to the above, Paul believed the Lord would soon return. "The time is short. This world in its present form is passing away." (29, 31)

Paul also wanted single people to remain single because they could devote themselves to the Lord's service in a way that married people could not. "I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs — how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world — how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided." (32–34) Paul said the same thing was true of women. He wanted single people to be free of worldly entanglements.

Throughout this chapter, Paul makes a strong case for remaining celibate. We should not think it strange if people in the Body of Christ are led to serve the Lord without distraction. You would think from what Paul says in this chapter - that a single person

can be more devoted to the Lord's service - that a church would be very wise to call a pastor who is single.

But at the same time, Paul made it clear that marriage was still an option. "Are you married? Well, don't try to be separated. Are you unattached? Then don't try to get married. But if you should marry, don't think that you have done anything sinful.

Regarding the widowed, Paul writes, "A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is — and I think that I too have the Spirit of God." (39–40) Obviously, this same counsel applies to men who lose their wives.

If you lose your marriage partner to death, even if you had the most wonderful marriage imaginable, you are free to marry. It is the normal, natural thing for you to do. In fact, just after creating man, God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone." (Genesis 2:18) God didn't mean for a man or woman to go through life incomplete, even if it's just the last ten or fifteen years of their lives.

As I conclude this study of the marriage chapter, I must emphasize that there has never been a time in history when this chapter has been as important to the church as it is right now. Marriage is under attack today all over the world. Satan knows that married couples are the bows from which children, who are like arrows, are to be thrust out into the world. (Solomon gave this illustration in Psalm 127.) If you were Satan and you knew how true

that is, what would you do? Would you not cut the string on that bow? Would you not try to break down marriages? That is exactly what he is doing; that is why divorce is epidemic all over the world.

For the glory of God and for our own spiritual well-being and happiness, we need to strengthen our marriages, which is the heart of the family, the basic, central, vital unit through which God wants to populate the earth with people who will be the salt of the earth and light of the world.

Chapter 20

"Love for the Weaker Brother"

(I Corinthians 8)

Chapter eight of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians begins his inspired answer to yet another question they must have asked him about a problem that existed in Corinth — eating meat that had been offered as a sacrifice to idols.

Before they became believers, many of the Corinthians to whom Paul wrote this letter were involved in idol worship. Idol worship was grossly immoral because they worshipped gods they believed were the essence of erotic love. Their worship of these gods involved temple prostitutes and same sex experience for those who had homosexual preferences. They were provided young boys for

that "worship experience". They offered sacrifices of meat to these idols. That meat was collected and sold at discount prices in the marketplaces of Corinth. Was it right for a follower of Christ to buy this meat and serve it at the dinner table, since it had been associated with idolatry and the worst kind of immorality? The church in Corinth was sharply divided over this issue.

Before they came to Christ, many Corinthian believers were idol worshipers. In fact, idol worship was an important aspect of the Greek culture. One scholar said that when Paul went to Athens, as described in Acts 17, it was easier to find a god in that city than it was to find a man.

In connection with this type of worship, good portions of meat were offered as a sacrifice to the idols. That meat was then gathered up by butchers, who sold it in the marketplaces at a discount. Given the persecution of believers in that day, we can assume that they suffered economically because of their faith and that they were poor. The believers had to be frugal, and many of them did not see anything wrong with buying and eating this meat that had been offered to idols.

But then there were those in Corinth who had very sensitive consciences — Paul refers to them as having a "weak conscience". (10) Perhaps they had been involved in idol worship, and as part of that worship they had engaged in all sorts of sexual immorality. For them, it wasn't right to eat meat that had been associated with this godless behavior. Who was right and who was wrong? When Paul

writes the eighth chapter of this letter he gives the Corinthians his answer to their question.

He begins with a few words about knowledge. The Greeks were big on knowledge. They worshiped the intellect and education. So Paul begins by focusing on knowledge. "We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God." (1–2) The issue is not what you know, but how much you love. The issue is not what is right or wrong, but how much you love the weaker brother who thinks this is wrong.

You might be thinking, "How in the world could this apply to me today? I don't worship idols, nor do I buy meat that has been offered to them." Just as we did with the marriage chapter, let us look for principles in chapter eight that apply to us.

Paul commended those who believed it was okay to eat this meat. However, Paul said that not everyone understands that there is only one true God and that idols are nothing but wood, stone, gold and silver. And when they eat food that has been sacrificed to idols, their weak consciences are defiled. "Be careful, therefore, that the exercise of your superior knowledge which gives you the freedom to eat this meat does not become a stumbling block to the weaker brother." (9)

Jesus Christ loves the person who is judged to be weak in conscience, or weak in mind. He loved that person enough to die for

him. Now Paul asks, "Do you love him enough to give up a plate of meat?" Again, the issue is not what is right or wrong, but how much do you love the people who think it is wrong?

Think of something in your culture, or life, or church, which in your opinion is not wrong, because you have good discernment. But perhaps you know believers who are not as discerning as you. They do not see the issue as clearly as you do. For their own reasons, they think the matter is wrong. And if they see you do this thing, they will be hurt spiritually.

You may ask, "Why should my liberty be limited by somebody's weak mind or conscience?" This is where love comes in. This is why Paul says it is not a matter of knowledge. Knowledge puffs you up and makes you feel proud, but love builds you and others up. Jesus Christ loved the weaker brother enough to die for him. How much do you love him? Out of love, not knowledge, are you willing to give up the things that might offend a weaker brother?

Chapter 21
"All Things to All Men"
(I Corinthians 9:1–23)

Suppose a pastor founded a church and was the one who led the members of the church to Christ. As the church grows, it requires a pastoral staff, so it hires several ministers. What if the church supported all those other ministers, but not the founding pastor? Would that be right?

That's what happened in Corinth. The ministers who built upon Paul's foundation were supported by the church, but Paul never took support from the Corinthian believers. In chapter nine, he uses this as an example of the fact that he was applying the "weaker brother principle" in his own life. He considered the Corinthians weaker brothers in the area of giving.

Apparently, some people in the Corinthian church questioned Paul's right to call himself an apostle. Remember, the apostles chosen in Acts 1 were selected because they had been with the Lord from the time of His baptism to His ascension. Based on that criteria, Paul was not qualified to an apostle. After dealing with this subject in chapter nine, he will return to the topic of love for the weaker brother in chapter ten.

Paul writes: "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?"

Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord." (1–2)

An apostle (sent one) was one who was sent, like a missionary. Paul argues that he was sent to Corinth, and the people then were as pagan as they could be. But as a result of his coming, they had experienced salvation; they were the result of his work for the Lord. These once pagan Corinthians, who are now in Christ, Paul argues, were convincing proof of his apostleship.

He continues, "This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. Do not we have the right to food and drink? Do not we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? ... If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with everything rather than hinder the Gospel of Christ." (3–6, 11–12)

Paul had the right to receive support from the Corinthian church, but he did not take any support from them, those in Ephesus, or from those in Thessalonica. The church that supported him while he ministered to these churches was the church in Philippi. Paul believed that the Philippians were mature enough, that they had the right motives for supporting his ministry, so he extended to them the great privilege of supporting him.

He did not want to make the Corinthian believers stumble over this issue. If he had insisted on receiving his rightful support, some of them might have said, "He's just trying to take money from us." So Paul made sure that he offered the Gospel free of charge in Corinth, so no one would be hindered from coming to faith in Christ. Do you see how he was implementing the weaker brother principle in his relationship to the Corinthian church?

This leads to one of the greatest passages in the Bible about what people call a philosophy of ministry. Paul says in verse 16, "I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" That's the way it was for Paul. He would have been miserable if he had not preached the Gospel. His commitment was to offer the Gospel "free of charge" (18) — and in doing so, he was applying the principle of love for the weaker brother.

It is in this context that Paul gives us his philosophy of ministry: "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible." (19) To the Jew, the one under the law, he became like one under the law. To the weak, he became weak, to win the weak to Christ. "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." (22)

Everything we do should be measured in terms of how it impacts others. We should be others-centered. We should be weaker brother-centered, not self-centered — all for the sake of the Gospel. Paul put the religious Jew, the weaker brother, the legalistic believer,

and the lawless, lost persons at the center of his life and ministry. He made himself the slave of those people and determined that he would do anything to win a hearing and then share the Gospel with them.

Chapter 22
"Run to Win"
(I Corinthians 9:24–27)

Paul concludes chapter nine by using illustrations from the world of athletics to encourage the young believers in Corinth to persevere in their faith. "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly." (24–26)

The first example from sports the apostle uses is that of a race. Let's suppose that runners are competing in a ten-kilometer race. They pace themselves with their eye on the goal at the end of the race — the tape they will break as they cross the finish line. If they pace themselves correctly, at the very instant that they break the tape, they will have given everything they could possibly give to win that race. Pacing is crucial to running the race well and winning it.

Runners do not want to give their all too soon, or they might collapse on the track before the end of the race. Neither do they want to finish the race with a lot of unexpended energy that could have been used to win.

Paul applies this concept to the philosophy of ministry that he outlined for us in this chapter (19–23). His goal as a missionary was to evangelize the world, and he would do whatever was necessary, within the law of Christ, to accomplish this goal. He knew that his reward — the people who accepted the Gospel because of his preaching — would be eternal.

In verse twenty-six he uses another illustration from the world of athletics: "I do not fight like a man beating the air." He continues, "No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize." (27) Perhaps as a young man Paul was an athlete, for he uses a number of these illustrations in his epistles. In Ephesians 6, for example, he talks about wrestling. In this passage, after comparing his outlook on life and ministry to the way a marathon runner plans a race, he compares his perspective on his life and ministry to the perspective with which a boxer prepares his fight plan.

When a boxer prepares for a fight, he spends months devising a strategy for his fight. He studies the films of his opponent, he may see weaknesses in that man — he spots his opportunities to win. Also, he knows what his own strengths and weaknesses are. All of this preparation is part of his strategy for winning the fight.

Like a long-distance runner, a boxer, and any other athlete preparing for an event, Paul was very focused on his objective. When Christ saved him on the road to Damascus, He called Paul to a ministry. And in order for that ministry to be accomplished, Paul devised a plan for the way he would live his life — he would be all things to all people, so that he might lead as many as possible to Christ. Just as an athlete subjects his body to a severe regimen of training and discipline, Paul did the same. He did not want to find at the end of the race — a race he invited others to run with him — that he had done anything to be disqualified.

I wish every follower of Christ would have this philosophy of life and ministry. This should be the attitude we have about the life for which we have been saved and to which we have been called. How God would be glorified, how Christ would be exalted, how the Great Commission would be implemented, if more believers had the philosophy of ministry and life that the apostle Paul expresses here in these magnificent verses!

Chapter 23

"Examples and Warnings"

(I Corinthians 10:1–22)

In First Corinthians 10, Paul returns to the subject of eating meat offered to idols. To those who believed it was right to eat this meat, he issues a warning. "Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?" (18) In other words, "Don't you realize what you are associating yourself with if you eat this meat offered to idols? Is it possible for you to have communion with Christ and the bread of Christ, which represents His body, and still be participating in this idolatry and all the things that are associated with it?"

Having cited some examples from the Old Testament, including the idol worship that the Israelites participated in when they were in the wilderness, Paul says in verse 11, "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come."

The word "examples" is from a Greek word, "tuos", which means "type". A type is like a printer's type, a symbol that leaves an impression on the printed page. So these examples Paul mentions are really little allegories, meant to make an impression upon the Corinthian believers and us today.

"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall!" (12) If you are thinking, "Oh, I would never fall", let Israel

be a warning to you. For you also may fall into sin. We must be careful that we do not repeat the mistakes that the people of God made in the Old Testament. Their history was recorded, in part, so that we would not make the same mistakes. And it wasn't just the Israelites wandering in the desert who sinned. Solomon, for example, also made mistakes. And at the end of his life he said, in essence, "Do not do what I did. Benefit from my experience and avoid the consequences I suffered. Let my life be a warning to you." (Psalm 127:1,2; Ecclesiastes)

Every temptation that David had, you could have. Every temptation that Solomon had, you could have. Every temptation that the Israelites had, you could have. Why? Because they were people and you are people. God is using the very same resources today that He used then - imperfect human beings. Imperfect people are always going to be tempted and capable of falling.

But Paul gives us hope in the next verse. "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." (13) Observe that the next verse shows us that way out, which is to flee.

The wrong desires that come into your life are not anything new and different. Other people have faced these same temptations. But you can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so

strong that you cannot stand up against it, for He has promised this and will do what He has promised.

Paul mentions specific sins the Israelites committed that he wanted the Corinthian believers to avoid: idolatry, sexual immorality, testing the Lord, and complaining. Then in verse fourteen he mentions idolatry again as he returns to the issue of eating meat offered to idols and how that may affect the weaker brother. "Therefore, my dear friends flee from idolatry." (14) Eating meat offered to idols brings up an association with immoral behavior.

It's impossible to over emphasize how sinful those practices were. In fact, idol worship even had a connection to the spirit world. "The sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons." (20) That's why he told the Corinthians to flee. Stay away from the temples and everything associated with them.

That is also good advice for us: immediately flee from these temptations. Don't think that you are a pillar of strength and can find a way to escape the temptations that come into your life. Remember, though your spirit may be willing, your flesh is weak. Don't give in to the flesh. The consistent teaching about temptation is that we should pray that we not be tempted. In His disciple's prayer, Jesus taught us to pray every day, "Keep us from temptation." (Matthew 6:13; 26:40,41)

Chapter 24
"Three Principles of Love"
(I Corinthians 10:23–33)

As Paul concludes this wonderful treatise on the issue of eating meat offered to idols, he repeats what he said in chapter eight about Christ-like liberty. Everything is permissible, he says, but not everything is beneficial or constructive. Again, he insists that we seek the good of others over our own good.

Then he gives specific instructions. "Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it.'" (25) Furthermore, he advises, if somebody invites you to dinner, and there is meat on the table, do not ask, "Has that meat been offered to an idol?" Just eat it without asking any questions. But if your host says, "I want you to know that this meat has been offered as a sacrifice to an idol," then do not eat it for conscience' sake." And Paul clarifies, "The other man's conscience, not yours." (29)

Paul anticipates the question of the Corinthians. "Why should my spiritual liberty be limited by another's conscience?" (29) Why, you may ask, must I be guided and limited by what someone else thinks? For the glory of God! Everything you do as a disciple of Jesus Christ should be done for the glory of God, even your eating and drinking. And you should make sure that you live in such a way

that you're not a stumbling block to anyone — whether they are Jews, pagans, or believers." (10:32,33)

Your host is a candidate for salvation. Since he or she made that observation, they probably believe followers of Christ do not eat meat that has been sacrificed to an idol. Another answer to this question in one word is "love". Observe how every problem Paul addresses in the Corinthian church is resolved in the love chapter, including this one.

Three principles are emerging here that guided the personal ethics Paul described and prescribed in chapter nine. He sought not his own good, but the good of others. He placed the Jew, the pagan, the legalistic believer and the weaker brother at the center of his life. He did not seek his own glory, but the glory of God — even in the smallest matters, like eating and drinking. What glorifies God? What results in the salvation and edification of others? Am I seeking my own profit or the profit of others? These are wonderful principles that should govern the ethical lives of believers.

These principles are for every believer, but sometimes disciples who are young in their faith cannot quite grasp these ethical absolutes. As they mature, however, they will accept the principles that guided the life and ministry philosophy of the greatest missionary, pastor, teacher, and author of the New Testament Church.

To be a leader in a church, a follower of Christ must believe and model this philosophy of life and ministry that Paul models and

profiles in chapters eight, nine, and ten of First Corinthians. Love is the fruit of the Spirit and the proof of spiritual maturity. Love must also be the credential of every believer. Love is at the center of this Christ-centered and others-centered ethical philosophy. If you believe and live this ethical philosophy, Christ and the evangelism and edification of others will be at the center of your life.

Everyone you know is either an opportunity for evangelism or for edification. Whether a person is a believer or an unbeliever, your passion should be to serve them as a slave for their edification or salvation. You must be determined that you will not do anything that would keep people from coming to Christ if they are not believers. And if they are believers, your magnificent obsession must be that you not do anything that would offend them, be a stumbling block to their faith, or hinder their growth.

These principles — the glory of God, the evangelism of unbelievers, and the edification of believers — are also the principles by which we should resolve the "gray issues" - those issues that the Bible does not expressly condone or condemn, in our relationships.. When you face one of these difficult issues - the equivalent of eating meat offered to idols - think about the people who are watching you. Then examine yourself. Are you self-centered or are you Christ-centered and others-centered for the glory of God, the salvation of lost people, and the edification of believers?

I solemnly challenge you to make the ministry priorities of Paul that he shares with us in chapter nine, and at the conclusion of

chapter ten, your own absolute priorities. Make the commitment to be the slave of every human being you meet. Put them at the center and vow that you will become all things to all of them that they might be saved. Also, make the commitment that you will do nothing that might offend religious, pagan, or believers whose lives intersect your life.