

- Corinth was a mixture of New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas in the ancient world
 - It sat on the isthmus of Corinth, a narrow strip of land that connected northern Greece with the southern Peloponnesus
 - It was a crossroads of the ancient world
 - And it was a land bridge with two coastal ports
 - The city's ports connected the western Mediterranean with the Aegean Sea in the East
 - These ports were the basis for commerce in the city
 - Boats were off loaded, cargo transported over land
 - Smaller boats moved entirely
 - Later a canal was dug, started by Nero and finished in 1893
- As those boats arrived, they brought sailors
 - Sailors brought pagan traditions and vice of all kinds
 - Aristophanes in 400BC coined the phrase *korinthiazo*, which means to act like a Corinthian, as in to fornicate
 - Perhaps the most licentious city in the Roman Empire
 - The city was also incredibly wealthy due to the trade there
 - Another popular phrase was “not everyone can go to Corinth”
 - Which meant not everyone was wealthy enough to live in the city
 - Finally, the city was a center for worship of Apollo at the Temple of Aphrodite
 - The temple was manned by the prostitutes of Aphrodite
 - This is why the city was a favorite for men who wished to “worship”
 - You can't overestimate how pervasive sexual perversion was in this city
 - It was the original Sin City
- Paul has an extensive relationship with the city
 - Paul first traveled to Corinth in about AD 51 (less than 20 years after Christ's death)
 - This was the first major church Paul established in the Greek world
 - As was his practice, Paul initially went to the synagogue, but was soon rejected
 - So then he went to the house next door and reached his first Gentile convert, and from there began the Corinthian church
 - There he met Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18)
 - And lived among them for 18 months in his first visit
 - At that point, Paul left for Ephesus taking Priscilla and Aquila with him
- Later in about AD 54, Paul hears disturbing news about the church in Corinth
 - In particular, the church is engaging in many of the immoralities of the surrounding culture, and polluting church practice and doctrine

- Remember, none of the four gospels have been written and distributed by this time
- Virtually none of the letters of the New Testament have been authored
- The church has the Old Testament and the teaching of Paul and its other leaders
 - So in the absence of such grounding and discipleship, the church was highly susceptible to wrong teaching and unhealthy practices
 - What kind of bizarre practices would invade our church were it not for the word of God?
- In fact, we do see exactly the same tendency in the church today
 - Where the word of God and the doctrines of the church are not taught, the practices of the faithful quickly begin to deviate and become corrupted
- So in AD 54 Paul writes his first letter to the city warning about vice and immoral conduct
 - That letter no longer exists (1 Corinthians 5:9)
 - But it must have begun the discussion of how the church was to correct these practices
- Later Paul hears of factions developing within the church
 - And he receives a letter from the church asking him to settle some disagreements (7:1)
 - The disagreements revolve around how the church should practice marriage, divorce, idols, spiritual gifts, giving to the poor in the church and other issues
 - The delegation carrying the letter to Paul (headed by a man named Stephanus) elaborated on the problems in the church
- So about AD 56, Paul writes his second letter to Corinth to address the things he's heard and to answer the questions posed to him in their letter
 - That second letter from Paul is the one we hold in our hands, the letter we call First Corinthians
 - In this letter, Paul says he knows there are those in the church who have disputed Paul's teaching and are claiming equal authority with Paul
 - And it was because of these false teachers that many of the disputes and bad behavior had developed in the church
 - Since there is no written New Testament scripture at this point, this church had only Paul's word as an Apostle to guide them
 - Furthermore, this is a Gentile church, made up of former Greek Pagan worshippers with no prior experience in Jewish teaching or practice
 - So they had no background in the teachings of the Old Testament and no written guidance for New Testament practice
 - The conduct and future direction of this church depended on whose counsel and direction they held as authoritative

- This is why Paul's ability to perform miracles and prove his authority by the Holy Spirit was so important
- Paul could back up his teaching with real spiritual power, which he received from Jesus directly
- And in this letter we'll see Paul demand that his detractors do the same
- Finally, Paul later made a "painful visit" (as he called it) to Corinth in AD 58, probably because his letter hadn't succeeded in correcting their sin
 - It was during his second stay in the city that Paul sat down to write Romans
 - I wonder if seeing Corinth running wild gave Paul the inspiration to write such a powerful letter of theology
 - As he came to understand how essential good doctrine is to the conduct of godly church life
 - That is a truth that has been set aside in many churches again today
- That is the central theme of the letter: how to live out a godly (spiritual) life
 - If Romans can be considered the preeminent letter on Christian theology
 - Then 1 Corinthians is the New Testament's principle letter for the pastoral application of theology in everyday church life
 - This is a letter that demonstrates how important theology is to the proper conduct of Christian life, particularly the life of the gathering
 - The letter reads with two discrete sections:
 - First, Chapters 1-6 addresses all Paul has heard about the goings on in the church
 - The factions
 - The false human wisdom
 - The carnal conditions
 - The lack of order and discipline and respect for the Apostles' authority
 - The second section in Chapters 7-16 is where Paul answers the questions posed in the letter he received
 - This explains why the letter reads a little like a laundry list of issues
 - Less doctrine, more practice
 - Therefore, this letter is utterly contemporary and highly applicable to our day
 - The same issues Paul addressed in Corinth continue to weigh on the church today
 - The celebrity status of church leaders and the factions that develop around them?
 - The manner and source of our salvation?
 - Divorce and remarriage?
 - Confusion over the purpose and use of spiritual gifts?

- The integration of the pagan practices in the church?
- The role and place of women in the church?
- This letter written nearly 2,000 years ago, may as well have been written yesterday!

1Cor. 1:1 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,

1Cor. 1:2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

1Cor. 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Immediately in the opening of the letter, we see the issue of authority taking the center stage
 - Paul reminds the church of the source of his authority
 - As an apostle, Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles, a man whose word and teaching carried real authority for the church
 - “Apostle” was and still is a unique title in the church
 - Men cannot assign this title to themselves or one another
 - Only the Lord Jesus Christ may appoint an apostle, as demonstrated here by Paul’s statement
 - Paul was called to be an apostle by the will of God
 - This office is so special and unique in the church that only God may appoint this position directly
 - And He did so through His Son, Jesus Christ
 - The office of apostle was awarded only through a personal appearing of Jesus Christ
 - And the office carried special and unique signs and powers, which validated someone’s claim to being an apostle
 - In 2 Corinthians 12:12, Paul mentions that he performed the signs of a true apostle when he visited the church
 - We see accounts of apostles performing these signs elsewhere in scripture, particularly in Acts, including raising men from the dead, healing and even bringing men to death
 - But today in the church, we do not have true apostles
 - The office ended when the last of the 12 died, for the office had met its purpose in establishing the church
- Secondly, Paul says the believers in Corinth were likewise called by Christ into the faith they shared

- This concept, that we are in faith by an act of God and not an act of men, is Paul's first line of defense against the false teachers in Corinth
 - Paul wanted the church to understand that they did not owe their salvation to any teacher or even to an apostle
 - And they certainly couldn't credit their own wisdom and intellect as the source of their salvation
- Instead, they were called by Jesus Christ, and the rest of the first and second chapters will develop this point further

1Cor. 1:4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,

1Cor. 1:5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge,

1Cor. 1:6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you,

1Cor. 1:7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

1Cor. 1:8 who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1Cor. 1:9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

- As is typical for Paul, he moves out of his salutation and directly into a prayer of thanks for the Corinthian church
 - This church was the first Greek church Paul planted after working his way through Asia Minor
 - Before reaching Corinth, Paul had spent some time preaching in Athens
 - But as you may know from Acts, Paul failed to gain much of a following in Athens
 - He must have left that city in a bit of despair and discouragement
 - But when he arrived in Corinth, he was met with an almost immediate Gentile response
 - In the 18 months Paul lived in Corinth, he saw many come to the Lord
 - This must have been a tremendous encouragement to Paul
 - Especially in a city of so much immorality
- Paul's experience in moving from a fruitless Athens to a fruitful Corinth reminds us that our evangelism results lie entirely in God's hands
 - It's clear that Paul made equal effort in both cities
 - And in God's eternal purpose, it was necessary that Paul visit both places
 - Yet it's also clear that in God's eternal purpose, Paul was intended to see meager response in one city but great response in the other

- Had Paul stubbornly remained in Athens, assuming he could overcome their objections and eventually achieve results, he would have been working against the purposes of God
 - No man can turn meager response into great response in his own power
- If we persist in laboring outside God's will, we increase our own frustration and discouragement
- And we may miss the opportunity to reach people in the city down the road
 - Paul walked in the Spirit, moving from Athens to Corinth so that he could labor in the field God had prepared for him
 - Look at how Paul entered the city

Acts 18:8 **Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.**

Acts 18:9 **And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent;**

Acts 18:10 **for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.”**

- God told Paul that he had many friends in this city after only one household had been converted
- In other words, God already intended to bring Paul a great harvest, and the Lord described these future converts as if they were already believing
 - Because in light of God's sovereignty, they were
 - All that was left was for Paul to reach them, and that was the Lord's calling for Paul
- In Paul's statements of thanks, we can also see the beginnings of his first concern for this church
 - Paul says that this church already had everything they could hope to receive from their faith in Christ
 - First, and foremost, they had received God's unmerited favor in Jesus Christ
 - This is the basis for every good thing that would follow
 - Without having received grace through faith in Christ, no other benefit of the Body of Christ is available
 - Secondly, they were made rich in Jesus Christ
 - Not just in the sense of our eternal inheritance
 - But also in speech and knowledge
 - The believer has access to all the wisdom of God and the ability to carry that truth to the world in a powerful way
 - Just as the Gospel testimony Paul delivered to them worked powerfully to

convert Corinth

- Thirdly, the church in Corinth was not lacking in any spiritual gift
 - The Spirit was alive in the church and with Him comes access to every spiritual gift
- Finally, they have the assurance of their salvation and the glory to come
 - The church could be assured that they will be blameless in the end when they stand before Jesus Christ
 - Nothing else was required for the church to receive all these blessings... everything Paul listed was theirs already by virtue of grace alone
- Why has Paul started his letter in this way? Because the church was showing evidence they did not understand what they had obtained through faith alone
 - The believers in Corinth were products of their culture, just as every believer is a product of his or her own culture
 - Corinth was quintessentially Greek: priding itself on its wealth, wisdom, sophistication and oratory
 - And so the church in Corinth reflected those prideful qualities
 - When the faith first arrived in the city, the new converts were equals in Christ
 - But soon they began to compare themselves to one another seeking ways to re-establish rank and privilege
 - Because this was the way of the Greek culture
- But the shame was that their pride was actually causing them to stumble so that they were less than they should be
 - They valued wisdom and knowledge
 - They admired eloquence in speech
 - They respected wealth and prestige, as did all Greek culture
 - But Paul says they have already obtained everything in these areas by their faith in Christ
 - No one was superior to another
 - And they need not seek for something greater than they have already obtained in Christ
- In their searching for greater prestige and honor, the church had begun to find it by association
 - They had begun to argue for a greater honor on the basis of who converted them
 - Ironically, they had lost sight of who they truly were in Greek culture
 - While they argued for who had greater honor and chased after greater forms of wisdom, they neglected to notice how the rest of the Greek society viewed the church
 - So now Paul begins to address the first serious problem in the Corinthians church

life: their desire to create factions and credit themselves by association

1Cor. 1:10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

1Cor. 1:11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you.

1Cor. 1:12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."

1Cor. 1:13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

1Cor. 1:14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,

1Cor. 1:15 so that no one would say you were baptized in my name.

1Cor. 1:16 Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other.

- Paul begins with the first thing he's heard – there are dissensions and factions
 - And as Paul begins to correct them, he reminds them of his authority to correct them while describing the sin in the church
 - Paul says these things to bring them to shame
 - But then he will offer a correction
 - And he will end with an encouraging word to move them ahead in the right manner
 - This is the pattern Paul will follow throughout the letter
- Paul says that all in the church should agree and that there be no divisions
 - The word in Greek (autos) means to be one-minded
 - Paul is insisting the church operate as one, not as divisions
 - And he says they are to be complete, in the same mind and judgment
 - The word complete (*katartizo*) means to mend, as in to mend nets (Mark 1:19)
 - The church should be knitted together, not pulling apart
 - The split in the Corinthian church was the result of church members aligning themselves with certain leaders
 - The members of each group began to hold that their status in the body – and even their salvation itself – was determined on the basis of these affiliations
 - Specifically, they began to claim they were "of Paul" or "of Apollos" or "of Cephas"
 - Looking at these three men, we know each was important in his own way
 - Paul was the founder of the church

- Apollos was a gifted orator who also evangelized the Greek world
- Peter was the founder of the Jewish church
 - Peter never visited Corinth as far as we know
 - But some Jewish believers had probably migrated into the city
- In correcting the church, Paul asks can Christ be divided?
 - Obviously not – Christ's literal body could not be divided into parts
 - Neither can the spiritual Body of Christ be divided
 - For we are all one by the same Spirit Who indwells us all
 - But the Corinthian church was now placing an emphasis on their affiliation with a certain apostle more than with their identity in Christ
 - Paul demands that the church avoid these divisions, but when Paul says to agree, he doesn't mean that the church can't have disagreements
 - Paul didn't want division, but that doesn't mean he wished the church would compromise on the truth
 - In fact, disagreements are inevitable when the truth of God's word is at stake
 - There do come times when we must stand up for the truth
 - Notice in v.12 there were some saying they are "of Christ"
 - This was the correct viewpoint
 - These Christians were saying the correct thing, the same thing Paul himself is about to teach
 - But because others had established incorrect thinking, a division between right and wrong had developed in the church
 - Here we see how theological error creates division in the church
 - The division begins when some in the church leave the truth and begin teaching error
 - Then those who hold to the truth are forced to be divided
 - We cannot reconcile truth and error
- The solution to division in the church has always been the same: sound doctrine and sound teaching
 - When the church emphasizes correct Bible teaching, then the Body as a whole can grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ
 - But when teaching and sound doctrine are lost, division arises
 - For his part, Paul says he did nothing to encourage these divisions
 - Paul asks, was he the one who died on the cross?
 - Were they baptized in the name of Paul?
 - Paul didn't teach that he was central to faith and salvation
 - He taught that Christ was central

- Paul adds that he was thankful he didn't baptize many because he didn't want to encourage this nonsense
 - This is an important principle for the church then and today
 - Pastors, teachers, evangelists should never encourage their audiences to see themselves as attached or aligned with the individual
 - Our only identity is in Christ
- In the end, we must be careful not to repeat the mistake of the Corinthian church
 - And as members of the Body, we should take every opportunity, (short of compromising on the truth) to reconcile divisions in the church
 - We are not Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists
 - We are not conservative or charismatic
 - We are not reformed or dispensational
 - We are Christians or we are not

- Last week, we opened the letter to Corinth
 - Paul told the church he had heard troubling news
 - They were one Body, equally blessed and equally gifted
 - But they were dividing themselves in harmful ways
 - Paul tells them that by their faith in Jesus Christ, they would all be found blameless in the day of our Lord's coming
 - But they were acting as if a human affiliation was the key to God's favor
 - And in particular, they were trying to make something of who lead them to the Lord
 - Paul, Apollos, Peter...
 - Each evangelist had his respective following
 - Yet there were still some who said they were of Christ, not of a man
 - So Paul admonishes the church for such immaturity and pride
 - This is the earliest celebrity culture in the church
 - Taking our attention off Jesus and redirecting it to the men and women God calls to serve us
 - It's a type of idol – something of the creation turned into a focus of our worship
- Pastor Chuck Colson is no stranger to celebrity
 - He served time in prison as a result of the Watergate scandal
 - While in prison he became a Christian and a pastor who works in prison ministries
 - He is also a teacher and writer
 - And he wrote this about celebrity in the church

The cult of celebrity has seeped into our sanctuaries. Like the culture around us, churches too often reward the sizzle and not the steak. Too many people in the pews would rather have a celebrity in the pulpit instead of a good shepherd of souls, a good servant leader.

Not surprisingly, some pastors, certainly not the majority, become addicted to all the adulation and then try to live up to the idol we have made of them. Or worse, all the celebrity worship can make pastors feel they are above criticism and accountability. Their work for the Lord turns toxic. Like many pop celebrities, they can focus ultimately on self-aggrandizement, not on serving others.

- Chuck Colson

- Colson's words ring true in our ears and in our experience
 - Paul is worried about the very same thing as he writes to this young church

- In Chapter 1 Paul reflected that he hadn't baptized many of the church

1Cor. 1:14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,

1Cor. 1:15 so that no one would say you were baptized in my name.

- ○ Paul didn't want to do anything to feed the cult of celebrity in this church
 - Paul was so determined to keep the church's gaze squarely on Jesus Christ that he was thankful that he didn't baptize them
 - And he was grateful that this was the case
- Remember Paul's example anytime you happen to receive someone's thanks or praise for your service in the body of Christ
 - Receiving thanks and encouraging words from those we serve is fine
 - And we often need to hear how people have been blessed by our efforts, so we may have strength to continue on
 - But be like Paul, always vigilant to avoid drawing someone's attention and praise away from the Lord
- But Paul is just getting warmed up
 - He knows these bad behaviors are symptoms of a greater problem
 - One that's being fanned by false teachers who have selfish, ungodly motives
 - So we start again in v.17

1Cor. 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

- Paul explains his happiness at not baptizing many in the church
 - He declares that he wasn't sent by Jesus to baptize but to preach the gospel
 - Paul is speaking with a sense of sarcasm and exaggeration to make a point
 - Clearly baptizing new believers is an important and necessary function of any minister of the gospel
 - And no doubt Paul performed this sacrament many times throughout his ministry
 - So Paul wasn't denying the importance of baptizing
 - But in a comparison between baptism and preaching the gospel, there is no comparison
 - Baptizing believers is something that depends on the gospel
 - It's a step of obedience and recognition
 - But it means nothing in the absence of true faith

- And faith depends on a presentation of the gospel
- A wedding reception is a wonderful thing, but it means nothing without the wedding
- God has designed the process of baptism so that we must work with another in the faith to obey Christ's command (you cannot baptize yourself)
 - And this fact naturally leads us to feel a spiritual connection with the person who brings us under the water
 - But Paul says he wasn't commissioned by Christ to seek to develop these kinds of bonds...that wasn't the point
 - Paul was called to lay the foundation that makes baptism possible
 - Paul was called to preach the gospel of Christ
- But preaching the gospel can create another opportunity for a person like Paul to gain followers
 - Because in the same way that someone might follow a man because he baptized them, one might become attached to the man who brings the Gospel
 - Because beautiful are the feet that bring good news, as the Bible says
 - We often remember who preached the Gospel in the moment we first believed
 - And it's easy for us to develop a soft spot in our hearts for that person
 - Because they played an important role in our eternity, or so we assume
 - But while it is true that baptism is a moment when one person helps another spiritually, preaching the Gospel is properly understood as the moment when the Lord helped us spiritually
 - And Paul wanted the church to be utterly clear on the fact that no man deserved credit for their faith, not even Paul
 - In fact, Paul says the Lord has crafted the message of the Gospel in such a way that no human being will ever be able to claim that their salvation was due to the oratory power of another man
- In the second half of v.17 Paul says he did not arrive with clever words
 - In the original Greek Paul says didn't come in *sophia logos*
 - The Greek word *sophia* means human wisdom
 - We get sophistry from this word, which means clever speech intended to deceive
 - And of course the Greek word *logos* means the spoken word
 - So Paul says his preaching of the Gospel led to faith in the men and women of Corinth
 - But the message didn't succeed because Paul had convincing arguments
 - Paul wasn't crafty in his arguments
 - He didn't rely on perfect illustrations, poignant stories, cute jokes

- He didn't rationalize away their objections
- He simply presented the truth of Jesus Christ living, dying and resurrecting
- So those who came to faith under Paul's preaching couldn't make the argument that they are "of Paul" because Paul was such a good orator
 - If they did, they were giving Paul credit for something that Paul simply didn't do
 - No one in Corinth stood in the grace of Christ because Paul convinced them into that understanding, though it may have appeared to some to be the case
 - The reality was something else
- Paul says that were his success in preaching the Gospel dependent on his skill as a public speaker, then that would have made the cross of Christ void
 - This is a theologically important verse, and there are few more important verses in the New Testament
 - Paul teaches we are saved by the word of the cross of Christ
 - What is this word of the cross?
 - Simply put, it is the Gospel message
 - The message that one day in history, the Creator of all things put Himself on a cross to die in your place
 - His death was a payment for our sins
 - And nothing else but His payment can save you for the judgment that comes for all of us
 - Either we accept the cross of Christ or eternal judgment
 - If it were possible that something else could reconcile us to God, then the cross would be made void
 - To make something void is to declare it empty, without effect, untrue
 - As an evangelist, Paul would render the word of the cross void if he came seeking converts for Christ with a message other than the Gospel
 - If Paul substituted a more appealing presentation so as to be more persuasive
 - Perhaps employed court jesters to make the crowd laugh, or offered to make them rich or to heal them of every disease
 - Perhaps Paul relied on effective marketing methods to draw the most receptive crowds
 - If Paul did anything to create response rather than delivering the message that saves, he would have been rendering the cross empty, unnecessary, void
 - And as the recipients of grace, we can also render the cross void
 - We can attribute our conversion to someone or something other than the saving power of the Gospel message
 - We can claim we heard the right preacher, saw the right drama presentation or

movie

- We received the right Bible tract, belonged to the right denomination, were born to the right family
- That something in the Creation was the deciding factor in our salvation rather than the Creator alone
- If it were possible for anything else to bring these people to repentance and to faith in God, then why would the Father have needed to put His Son on the cross?
 - If *any*other way were possible, then He would have made use of it
 - So to suggest that someone was “of Paul” – that is, they were in the church because of Paul – was to make the cross of Christ void
 - And Paul says that they were guilty of rewriting history
- More importantly, notice Paul says Christ didn’t send him to preach in cleverness of speech
 - Paul was specifically told by the Lord NOT to dress up the presentation
 - Don’t come to Corinth with a three-ring circus, a 70-piece orchestra and a laser light show
 - This the Lord’s command to us as well
- The Lord has never asked anyone to find a better way to evangelize or share the Gospel
 - He doesn’t need our help...we need His
 - And when we get that backwards, we make the cross of Christ void
- To stop prideful men from claiming they were saved by the power of persuasion of the latest evangelistic fad, Paul says the Lord *designed* His Gospel to be a foolish message

1Cor. 1:18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1Cor. 1:19 For it is written,

**“I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE,
AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE.”**

- In v.18 Paul says that word of the cross (i.e., the Gospel) is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are saved, it is the power of God
 - To understand what Paul is saying, we need to take this statement in parts
 - First, Paul says the word of the cross is foolishness
 - How can the message of Christ’s death be considered foolishness?
 - As a believer you’ve probably never considered the Gospel to be foolish in any way
 - Like all believers, you have embraced it as the most beautiful awesome truth you’ve ever heard

- But I want you to try to think of it again in an objective way...here's what the Gospel literally claims
 - A poor, wandering Jewish man who lived 2,000 years ago was God
 - He promises that when you die you can be welcomed into Heaven with Him
 - But after only a few years of walking around Judea, He was convicted as a criminal by Romans, and was executed
- So our message to the world is that a man who seemed to be powerless to prevent his own death is our solution to death and hell
 - At its core, the message is foolishness
 - And God made it that way
- But then Paul qualifies his statement
 - The message of the Gospel is foolishness to some people, but not to everyone
 - The message is foolishness to those who are perishing
 - The phrase "are perishing" is written in the Greek present tense and middle voice, which is a conjugation we don't have in English
 - Present tense means a continuing action
 - While the middle voice means the subject and the object of the action are one and the same
 - So the one who sees the message of the Gospel as foolishness continues in a state of perishing for as long as they hold this view
 - They are both the subject and the object of the perishing
 - Their unbelief is the cause of their perishing
 - And they are in this state because the message that would save them is too foolish to accept
 - So how does anyone break this cycle so as to be saved?
 - Why did God present the message of salvation in such a nonsensical way?
 - Why didn't He design the message of salvation in a way that was compelling and convincing
 - Something that would appeal to the mind of every person?
- That brings us to the last part of v.18
 - Paul says for the one being saved, the foolish message becomes truth
 - The Greek verb for being saved is in the same voice as the verb for perishing
 - This group is also continuously saved because it has come to accept the truth of the word of the cross
 - When someone comes to accept a foolish message as spiritual truth, we are left with no choice but to credit God Himself with that outcome
 - Their acceptance is evidence of the power of God, Paul says

- Because self-evidently it didn't appeal to the wisdom of men
- And this was always God's plan from the start
 - Paul quotes from Isaiah 29:14
 - Isaiah declared that God's marvelous plan to save Israel will come in a way designed to negate the wisdom of men
 - And certainly, wrapping the message of salvation in a foolish message is guaranteed to nullify the wisdom of men
- And in fact, this has happened, according to Paul

[1Cor. 1:20](#) Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

[1Cor. 1:21](#) For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

[1Cor. 1:22](#) For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom;

[1Cor. 1:23](#) but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,

[1Cor. 1:24](#) but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

- Paul asks the church rhetorically, where are the wise men or the scribe or the debater of Paul's age?
 - What he means is, where are they in their pursuit to discover the truth of God?
 - Did the world's wise men reason their way to the message of salvation?
 - Did they deconstruct the cause of men's sin and misery?
 - Did the scribes come to understand the need for a perfect Messiah to die in their place?
 - Did they search the scriptures and realize Jesus was that Messiah?
 - And did the great orators of Greece discuss among themselves and arrive at the confession of faith necessary for salvation?
 - Did all their words bring their countrymen to the same understanding so that all Corinth could be reconciled to God?
- No, the people of Greece remained lost and perishing
 - But, oh, not for lacking of searching
 - Greece was famous for seeking truth through philosophy and literature and oration
 - And if it were possible for such pursuits to arrive at spiritual truth, then certainly Greece would have succeeded
- But Paul asks where did their efforts lead the people of Corinth? Nowhere

- The wisdom in the world has not arrived at a knowledge of God
 - And as a result, the world has substituted other gods to fill the void left by their inability to find the true God
 - For Paul says in v.21 that God was well-pleased to remain outside the reach of men who searched by their own power
- And in the meantime, the Lord chose to reveal Himself to men through a foolish message which they accepted by God's power
 - And this has always been God's plan: to craft a message of salvation that could not be believed apart from God's power to make it believable
 - So that when we believe, all the glory belongs to the Lord
- No man may share the limelight with the Lord
 - For if we're honest with ourselves, we will admit that the Gospel sounded a bit silly and unimpressive to our flesh, at least at first
 - We hesitated to accept it; we might have even been a little embarrassed when we did accept it
 - We may have even wondered if we were just going along with what everyone expected
 - Our parents, our spouse, our friends
 - But still the message rung true, and over time the truth of it grew stronger
 - And when we were baptized, we knew we had made a statement with our life
 - But did we ever stop to ask how we arrived in that place?
 - Paul's answer is simple: the power of God
- Paul says the world can't find God in their own power, because they will always doubt, always second guess, always reject
 - Jews seek for signs
 - If any people could have been expected to come to an understanding of the Gospel apart from God's power, it would have been the Jewish people
 - The Jews were educated in the truth of the Gospel
 - They knew that a Messiah would come
 - They were given an incredible head start compared to the rest of the world
 - Paul says in Romans 3 that it was a tremendous advantage to be born a Jew in God's plan
 - Nonetheless, it wasn't enough, because even when the Messiah came, they still insisted on signs before believing Jesus' claims
 - And the Greeks (meaning the Gentiles) knew nothing of the coming Messiah
 - So they had no reason to be looking for anything
 - Instead, they confronted every new spiritual theory with skepticism seeking a convincing argument

- And when Paul came with a foolish message those seeking for wisdom weren't impressed
- And so to a world seeking proof and words of wisdom, God determined to send men out with a message of a convict killed on a Roman cross
 - For the Jew, this became a stumbling block
 - Though they were looking for a Messiah
 - And they followed Jesus for a time in the hope He might be that Messiah
 - But when he landed on a Roman cross, they couldn't reconcile their hopes and expectations with that outcome
 - They couldn't look past Jesus' shameful death on a cross to see God's purpose in this outcome
 - And so they rejected His claims and continued in their perishing
 - The cross became something that stumbled them on the way into the Kingdom
 - And for the Gentile, including the Gentiles of today, the claims of Christianity sound ridiculous
 - They find nothing appealing in a message that demands repentance and submission to the Lord hung on a cross
 - So the world mocks the faith of Christians
 - But the Lord has designed the Gospel message to result in these responses
 - The message is foolish so that when it makes sense, we credit God
- In v.24 Paul says both Jews and Greek can find what they are seeking in this Gospel
 - To the one seeking miraculous signs of God's power, you will find it in the Gospel
 - You will see the life coming from death
 - You will experience a cold, godless heart coming to know and follow the Lord
 - You'll see sin removed from your life, spiritual and emotional wounds healed, spiritual gifts emerging, prayers answered and more
 - And to the one seeking wisdom and truth, you will find it in the Word made flesh
 - You will come to know the mysteries of God's plan for the creation
 - You'll come to understand the power of sin and the enemy and the greater power of grace, forgiveness and Christ's righteousness
 - You'll see the wisdom that is above all wisdom in the word of God and the marvels of His plan
 - So ironically, the world wants to find God by looking for power and wisdom
 - But God is offering them power and wisdom in the form of a foolish message that appears powerless
 - And only those who are called, Paul says, will receive it
- To the called, the message is power and wisdom, because the Lord brought them to an understanding in it

- This is the only explanation
 - We cannot say that some were smarter, for it does not depend on wisdom
 - We cannot say that some were more receptive because the message repels all equally
 - And we cannot say that some were presented with the message in a more compelling way, because Paul says cleverness of speech would render the message void
- Therefore the only explanation for why some believe a foolish message is that God calls them to that faith
 - It is the definition of grace – unmerited favor – that we came to faith in the foolish message of the Gospel

- We love to compare ourselves to others
 - We're trained to compete in school and in our workplace
 - We take tests, we achieve class rank
 - We are graded at work
 - We keep score in contests and sports
 - We're programmed to think in terms of comparisons
 - Unfortunately, we always find someone who is better than we are
 - Someone smarter, richer, better looking
 - Someone bigger, faster, stronger
 - Someone more capable in whatever measure we choose to make
 - But fortunately for our egos, there is usually also someone in the crowd who is less than we are in some measure
 - Someone less wise, someone less capable, less attractive
 - It's these people that make us feel better about ourselves
 - Of course, we know in our heart that such comparisons are vain and meaningless, especially from an eternal perspective
 - So it is with man
- But the vanity and pride of mankind isn't content in making comparisons to other men...we also make comparisons with God
 - Fallen man tries to compete with God, both in power and wisdom
 - We create rules for ourselves for Who God is, what He can do and how He thinks
 - We define what He wants and how we may please Him
 - And such wisdom is utterly bankrupt in the face of a living God Who will not be defined by His creation
 - And this tendency is not limited to fallen, unbelieving men and women
 - Immature believers have a tendency to do the same thing
 - And this is what Paul is facing with the immature church in Corinth
 - They were too busy slapping each other on the back for having followed the "right" evangelist to notice God really did the work of salvation
- But Greek society loved to measure wisdom and make comparisons between people
 - And because they didn't understand how they came to faith, they began making distinctions and comparisons among themselves on the basis of who delivered them the Gospel
 - Talk about the most inappropriate of comparisons!
 - Those who were "of Paul" thought they were better than those who were "of Apollos" – and vice versa
 - So not only had they misunderstood how they came to faith, they had also

- made it a point of prideful comparison
- They wanted to find that person they could compare themselves with to boost their ego
- And as I said, if we're looking for someone less capable with which to compare ourselves, we will always find them

When my wife and I arrived at an automobile dealership to pick up our car, we were told the keys had been locked in it. We went to the service department and found a mechanic working feverishly to unlock the driver's side door. As I watched from the passenger side, I instinctively tried the door handle and discovered that it was unlocked. "Hey," I announced to the technician, "it's open!" To which he replied, "I know – I already got that side."

- We start again in v.25, as we transition to the next point in Paul's letter

1Cor. 1:25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

- This verse opens with the Greek word *hoti*, which is translated “because”
 - In the earlier verses Paul said he was called to preach a foolish-sounding message
 - He preached the word of the cross, which God designed to be a message rejected by men seeking truth in their own power
 - Their so-called wisdom would lead them away from the truth
 - Still, Paul didn't try to enhance that foolish message with clever human words of wisdom
 - And now Paul explains why he followed that method
 - Because God's foolishness is more effective, more powerful
 - Relying on the “foolishness” of God was far better than taking his chances with the wisdom of men
 - Obviously, Paul is speaking sarcastically, since nothing of God is foolish in reality
 - But from a man's perspective, Paul says even when God's ideas seem foolish, they are still infinitely more wise and powerful than anything man comes up with on his best day
 - So Paul wasn't going to trade God's ways for man's ways
 - And neither should we
- But God's plan to mock the wisdom of men goes even deeper
 - Not only was the *message* of the Gospel judged foolish according to man's standards, so was the *audience* who received that truth
 - Ironically, the people of Corinth were judging themselves favorably for having

come to faith under Paul or Apollos

- They were making the prideful comparisons common in Greek society
- But they had conveniently overlooked an important detail in God's working
- So Paul points it out to them

1Cor. 1:26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;

1Cor. 1:27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

1Cor. 1:28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,

- Paul asks the believers in Corinth to "consider your calling..."
 - The Greek word for consider means to reflect, to take a closer look at something
 - Paul says, take a second look at your calling
 - More specifically, take note of who God has called in His Church
 - Paul describes them in three ways
 - Not many were wise
 - Not many were mighty
 - Not many were noble
 - We don't know much about the demographic make up of the members of the Corinthian church, except Paul's own testimony
 - But as a major Greek city, we can be sure Corinth had its share of philosophers and wise men
 - And the city was a relatively prosperous commercial center in its day, so wealthy men must have been plentiful
 - And as a center for Greek worship, Corinth no doubt had a privileged class of rulers, priests, etc.
- But Paul says that the church in Corinth was not populated by many of these classes
 - These groups were underrepresented in the church in Corinth
 - It's important to note that Paul says there weren't "many" of these in the church
 - He didn't say there were none
 - Paul didn't say certain types are *excluded* from God's plan
 - All people are included to some degree, because God is not a respecter of persons, as Paul writes in Romans 2:11
 - But Paul says few elite members of Greek society have been called by the Spirit to become part of the church in Corinth

- Consider the irony...the church has been arguing among itself working to establish some measure of status and privilege
 - Some seek to gain some advantage over others by claiming to be “of Paul”
 - Then another would argue they deserved the greater status because he was “of Apollos”
 - Then Paul points out they were nothing special according to the world’s standards
- It’s like two 90 year-old men living in the retirement home arguing about who was a more eligible bachelor
 - The two men might find some basis on which to settle the argument
 - Meanwhile the world would rank these guys at the very bottom of any list of eligible bachelors
 - So it was in Corinth...men and women contending for status within the church, yet forgetting that they were fighting over the scraps of Corinthian society
- In v.27 Paul says that the Lord specifically chose certain people to be included in the Church
 - The Lord chose those who were not wise, not strong and not noble
 - And He did so to mock human thinking and pride
 - The wise, strong and privileged congratulate themselves on their accomplishments
 - They invent their own gods, make their own rules and live oblivious to their coming judgment
 - So the Lord mocks their self-importance by extending His grace to the weak and worthless (according to the world’s standards)
 - Just as the Lord authored the Gospel in a way that mocks the wisdom of men, so He also works to build His church in such a way as to mock the pride of men
 - The Lord has always worked this way
 - We remember from our Genesis study the many times we watched God working to choose one man over another
 - As when He chose Isaac over Ishmael
 - Jacob over Esau
 - Joseph over his brothers
 - Elsewhere in the Old Testament, He selects David over his brothers
 - He selects the fishermen and tax collectors as apostles
 - Even Jesus Himself was a lowly carpenter from Nazareth, a town so lowly that people wondered if anything good could come from there
 - God has always been in the business of selecting the one no one expected
 - And as He works to build His Church, He’s doing exactly the same thing

- Earlier Paul taught how we make the Gospel void when we substitute the wisdom or power of men
 - And when we claim that our place in the church is a matter of individual merit, we make the grace of God void
 - We are undermining God's purpose in bringing the Church into existence in the first place
 - One of the reasons the Gentile church has been given a place in God's plan is to mock the so-called wisdom of Israel
 - Moses told the people that God would do this in response to Israel's unbelief

Deut. 32:20 “Then He said, ‘I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end shall be; For they are a perverse generation, Sons in whom is no faithfulness.

Deut. 32:21 ‘They have made Me jealous with what is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation,

- The Lord speaking through Moses told Israel that a day would come when the Lord would hide His face from Israel
 - He would make the nation jealous in a sense by forming a relationship with another people, the Gentiles
 - And notice the Lord calls these Gentile people a foolish nation
- The Lord's point is that He will teach Israel a lesson by bringing those least likely to know the God of Israel – the Gentile nations – to faith
 - While passing over God's own people, the Jewish nation, for a time
 - Now consider how we are working against the Lord's purposes when we try to make ourselves look worthy or deserving of his grace
 - When we claim status or worth in the face of salvation, we deny the obvious, like the old men in the retirement home
 - There is nothing special or deserving in any of us
 - We deserve to be counted among that “foolish nation”
- Instead of allowing our pride to carry us away into comparisons and status seeking of one kind or another, we're supposed to carry ourselves in humility
 - And when we feel the need to boast, we are to consider carefully what we will boast about
 - We don't boast of what we did to contribute to our success or status in the church
 - We boast of our limitations and weaknesses, as Paul did

2Cor. 12:9 And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

2Cor. 12:10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

- Since we know the Lord has chosen a foolish people to shame Israel and a weak people to shame the power of the world, then let’s boast about God’s plan
 - Boast how incapable you are and unprepared and unqualified
 - If you have to brag, brag about how much God had to do in compensating for your weaknesses
 - Talk about how little you could achieve apart from Christ working in you
 - Then at least your bragging is working in the right direction, furthering the work of God in the Church
 - Rather than working against the Lord
- Paul tells the Corinthian church the same thing at the end of Chapter 1

1Cor. 1:29 so that no man may boast before God.

- The Lord is working His plan to silence the boasting of men, especially concerning His plan of redemption
 - No man will stand before the Lord on the day of his judgment and claim any part in his own salvation
 - We didn’t examine the cosmos, uncover the truth of God, deduce the Gospel message and embrace it in our own power
 - The message was too foolish, too unattractive
 - Because God designed it to be compelling only by His power
 - And even after the message has come to rest in our hearts, we can’t engage in a little re-writing of history by claiming we are “of Paul” or “of Steve” or anyone
 - We didn’t deserve our spot much less earn it
 - We were not a choice prospect for God...we were anything but
 - According to Paul, the Lord went out of His way to stack His team with the last string
 - If salvation was a kickball game, God picked last, and He chose us
 - If the church was a prom, we’re the date with a “good personality”
- So if the message of the Gospel is designed to be rejected apart from the power of God...
 - And those who received that power were specifically selected by God to make a

point to the world...

- Then what does that say about how we became believers in the first place?
 - Paul gives us the unavoidable conclusion

1Cor. 1:30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,
1Cor. 1:31 so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”

- By His doing, we are in Christ Jesus
 - We should take a closer look at that statement, starting with the end first
 - We are “in Christ Jesus” Paul says
 - To be “in” Christ is a uniquely Pauline phrase
 - He uses it no fewer than 83 times in his letters
 - It simply means those who are in the grace of Christ, believers in Christ by faith in the Gospel
 - Paul preferred the term “in” as opposed to “of” because it reflects our position of righteousness
 - And it suggests our security
 - Just as the family of Noah entered into the ark, which pictures Christ
 - So are we “in” the Lord by faith, sealed until the day of our redemption
 - So Paul says we are in Christ and find ourselves there by His doing
 - This is the unavoidable conclusion we come to as a result of everything else Paul presents in Chapter 1
 - Nothing explains why we are “in” Christ
 - We didn’t reason our way into the relationship
 - We didn’t apply for membership
 - We didn’t deserve it on the basis of personal merit
 - And the purposes God set forth in creating the Church were established long before we were born
 - God was at work to bring us into the body of Christ long before we had anything to say in the matter
- Paul’s statement is an expression of the doctrine of election
 - Election is the truth of how the Lord elects (or chooses) to extend His grace to some according to His sovereign will and eternal purposes
 - Those He elects to receive His grace come to Him, drawn by the Spirit, and are saved through faith

- Scripture uses the word “elect” because even though the message of the Gospel goes out into the world, God does not draw everyone
 - As Jesus said, many are called but few are chosen
- Paul doesn’t teach the doctrine in this passage – he leaves that to others places, particularly Romans 9
 - But the reality of election is clearly evident in Paul’s teaching in this chapter
 - In fact, without appreciation for the truth of election, this chapter makes no sense whatsoever
 - Paul’s entire argument to the church in Corinth was that they had no basis for boasting how they came into the faith
 - Paul supports his argument by explaining that they didn’t choose God, He chose them
 - In fact, the Gospel was designed to prevent them from accepting it apart from God’s electing power
 - And when they stood back and considered that calling, they could see the hand of God working to select only the wise, weak and lowly
 - These arguments only make sense in light of the doctrine of election
 - We are “in Christ” because of the Lord Himself
 - And by God’s hand, Christ and the message of the Gospel became wisdom to us
 - By the renewing of our minds through the Spirit, we gained the capacity to see the truth of the Gospel
 - And in like manner, Paul says Christ is the source of our righteousness
 - We can eagerly look forward to our judgment day because we know we will not be judged according to our righteousness
 - We will be judged according to Christ’s righteousness, which has been given to us by faith
 - Moreover, Christ is the source of our sanctification
 - In this context, Paul is speaking of our future sanctification when we receive our new bodies and are glorified
 - Our opportunity to live in glory one day comes from Christ, who will give to us a new, holy body
 - Finally, Christ is our redemption
 - Our assurance that we have conquered the enemy and death is made possible by the payment of Christ
 - Having made the payment, we can be assured that the Lord will share His inheritance with us
 - So if we’re going to boast about our position in Christ, the only thing we can boast about is the work of the Lord...nothing less, nothing more.

- Last week I put to rest any concern that ours is a church of “feel good” preaching, as if there were any doubt
 - I was reminded after my last sermon on the foolish audience that believes the Gospel, that no one comes here expecting to be puffed up
 - I admit I like to feel good about myself too...who doesn't?
 - The world loves it so much that many churches now preach messages of improving self-esteem and self-worth
 - We're told that it's healthy and important to maintain a positive view of ourself, and perhaps it's true to a degree
 - But pandering to the flesh has eternal consequences
 - This new approach to preaching in the church has twisted the Gospel itself into a message of happiness and materialism
 - Today men and women are invited to join Christianity as a source for earthly happiness and fulfillment rather than for the opportunity to reconcile with a God Who judges sin
 - So with so much feel-good preaching ringing in our ears these days, I'm sure it's a bit of a shock anytime we encounter a message that runs contrary to that stream of happiness
- At the end of the day, Christians are supposed to ask what does the Bible teach us about ourselves and about God?
 - Does the word of God command God's children to develop greater self-esteem?
 - Does it teach us we were called into faith and blessed with the Holy Spirit so that we might think better of ourselves?
 - Does it identify lack of self-esteem as the source of our problems?
 - What does the Bible say?
 - Simply put, the Bible says that we do not need more self-esteem
 - Mankind already has way too much self-esteem
 - Self-esteem is the psychologist's term for an old Biblical word, “pride”
 - Pride is a bad word in scripture
 - Satan's pride was the source of evil in the world
 - And man's pride is the source of our sin and all its misery
 - Instead of more self-esteem, the Bible says we need more Christ-esteem
 - We need a greater appreciation of Who Christ is, what He's done for us and who we become in Him
 - And at the same time, we need less self-esteem to make room in our hearts for more of Christ
 - As John the Baptist said, He must increase but I must decrease
 - For Christ to be properly magnified in our understanding and in our life, we must diminish our view of self

- So don't be surprised if you don't feel affirmed as we study scripture together
- In fact, if our study of scripture leaves you feeling better about yourself, then you're not listening carefully
- One of Paul's key purposes for writing was to effect this change among the believers in Corinth
 - Paul wants to address their pride over how they entered the faith by instilling in them a new perspective on how they entered into the faith
 - In Chapter 1 and the beginning part of Chapter 2 Paul taught good communication theory
 - Communication theory says that communication always involves a sender, a receiver and a message
 - In Chapter 1, Paul explained that the Lord designed a foolish message
 - It proposed a foolish-sounding solution to the question of how man may find God and be reconciled
 - And then the Lord chose a foolish audience to receive the message
 - A group of people the world wouldn't consider wise or strong or noble
 - But what about the messenger?
 - Paul now teaches in Chapter 2 that God also chose foolish messengers to deliver the message of the Gospel
 - Men the world also viewed as weak and unimpressive

1Cor. 2:1 **And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.**

1Cor. 2:2 **For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.**

1Cor. 2:3 **I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,**

1Cor. 2:4 **and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,**

1Cor. 2:5 **so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.**

- Paul says he did not come to Corinth with any superiority of speech
 - In Greek, Paul literally said he didn't come with prominent words
 - Apparently, to hear Paul wouldn't have impressed you or me
 - When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he quoted his detractors as they described Paul's speech

2Cor. 10:10 **For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible."**

- Paul's speech was called contemptible or despised
- Remember, Greece was ground zero for professional debaters and orators in the ancient world
 - And so here comes Paul, a man who lacked a stage presence
 - He was unimpressive, probably because his impressive letters cause you to expect better
 - I can almost hear the whispers in the crowd now: "He seemed so much taller in his letters."
- But it wasn't just Paul's speech that was unimpressive
 - Paul says he came without superior wisdom
 - There's that word *sophia* again
 - Paul walked into a city filled with Greek wisdom and philosophy, yet by Corinthian standards he had little wisdom to offer
 - His arguments for the Gospel didn't rest on powerful and intricate defenses or explanations
- Instead, Paul says he simply proclaimed the testimony of God
 - The Greek word for proclaim is the word for announce or declare publicly
 - Paul went about the city proclaiming the truth of Jesus and then waited to see what kind of response he received
 - And the testimony was simple: Jesus and Him crucified
 - Jesus refers to the God-man, the incarnation of God in the form of Jesus Christ
 - A man who was God in the flesh, who lived a sinless life
 - And to Him crucified refers to Jesus' atoning work on the cross, His death in our place and His resurrection to glory
 - That was the message Paul proclaimed
- At the end of v.4 Paul notes that his presentation came with a demonstration of the Spirit and power
 - Paul's referring to something unique in the ministry of the apostles
 - These special men of the early church played a unique role in establishing the church
 - They were commissioned to preach the Gospel and deliver Jesus' teaching to early believers
 - In fact, their teaching became our scripture
 - In order to authenticate their message, God gave these men spiritual gifts of a different kind, gifts that were wholly unique to their station
 - We read in the New Testament of apostles raising men from the dead
 - Healing the sick merely by the casting of their shadow
 - The ability to cause men to fall dead merely at a word

- The ability to handle dangerous snakes, to be bitten even, and not to die
 - Self-evidently, these are not gifts common to the believer today
- These men combined the Gospel message the Lord gave them with the spiritual powers they received by the Spirit to establish faith where none before existed
 - Their powers were essential to validating their message and mission
 - Since the powers they demonstrated were clearly God-given powers, their audience realized that their message was approved by God
 - And when false apostles tried to deceive the church, their deception would become evident since they lacked these powers to validate their message
 - That's how the early church knew to ignore false apostles
- So Paul says the message of the Gospel was not without power
 - It came with power from God, in the form of Paul's apostolic powers
 - The truth of this message was authenticated by the power of God
 - Therefore, it didn't need to rely on human wisdom and human power
- Knowing this, Paul said he did three things:
 - First, he showed up
 - He said he came to them
 - This is probably 95% of any ministry work
 - Having the courage and conviction to follow God's call and go to people who most likely wouldn't want to hear the message
 - Secondly, Paul proclaimed the message
 - Paul was active and purposeful
 - He didn't just wander through Corinth looking for someone he could quietly approach and get to know over coffee
 - He didn't just hope a spiritual conversation might come up on its own
 - Then maybe ease into a conversation about Jesus
 - He wasn't content to simply sit in a public place
 - Wearing his WWJD t-shirt
 - Reading the Bible on his iPad
 - Listening to TobyMac
 - Hoping someone would look over his shoulder and ask him what he was reading
 - He proclaimed the Gospel boldly, publicly and frequently
 - He went into synagogues, homes, businesses
 - He declared the truth
 - And Paul expected – he depended upon – God's power to show up on cue and cause

a proper response, at least in some

- Did you know that evangelism could be this easy?
 - Did you know it doesn't require superiority of speech?
 - It doesn't rest on superior wisdom?
 - It rests entirely on showing up, proclaiming the truth of the Gospel publicly, and then waiting for God's power
 - We go, we proclaim, God changes hearts...it's that simple
 - Could it be that our hesitation to evangelize is partly out of an ignorance of what's truly required?
 - Perhaps we've imagined the process in exactly the wrong way
 - We've been so worried about having the right words, about making the arguments, answering the challenges
 - That we forgot that the point is simply to proclaim a foolish message
 - The joy of serving Christ in the Great Commission is in the simplicity of what we're called to do
 - We proclaim Christ, and Him crucified
 - We tell the story of the Gospel to the world, and it doesn't matter how many times they've already heard it or how likely they are to reject it
 - It only takes a second for the Spirit to bring faith to the heart and it comes by the power of God
- Paul says in v.5 that God designed the process of salvation in this beautiful way so that our faith wouldn't rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God
 - The Greek word for rest is *eimi*, which means belongs
 - The message of the Gospel and the results it achieves belong to God alone
 - In other words, we can never declare that we are "of Paul" or "of Apollos" or even of ourselves
 - My salvation didn't depend on human wisdom, nor does it depend on my own wisdom
 - It rests entirely on the grace and power of God
- Now since the beginning of his letter, Paul has repeatedly emphasized the foolishness of the message
 - But when Paul uses the word foolish, he means in comparison to the world's definition of wisdom
 - That doesn't mean that the Gospel message is actually foolish
 - It is a truth the world in its ignorance rejects
 - And yet, Paul says for the one who has received the Gospel and come to faith, God will make available real spiritual wisdom
 - That wisdom doesn't come all at once

- And it doesn't show up automatically

1Cor. 2:6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; **1Cor. 2:7** but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; **1Cor. 2:8** the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; **1Cor. 2:9** but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND which HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."

- Paul says yet we do speak wisdom
 - When he says "we", he's referring to the apostles
 - Paul, Apollos, Peter, etc.
 - Through these men, God was at work bringing wisdom to the believer
 - It's a wisdom very different from the kind the world seeks
 - This news must have piqued the interest of the Corinthian church
 - Finally, the wisdom loving Greek believers were hearing what they longed to hear
 - There was a heavenly wisdom they could come to know
 - But Paul says this wisdom is accessible only to the mature
 - Paul's going to come back to this issue of individual maturity and its relationship to our experience in the body later in Chapter 3
 - But for now, it's enough to know that the arrival of faith does include an opportunity to know mysteries and wonders of God
- Paul says this wisdom is not something found either in this age or among the powerful members of society, both of which are passing away
 - Wisdom is a fancy word for truth
 - There is a truth of this world, of this age, and then there is the truth of God
 - There is a truth that worldly rulers understand and there is a truth that God makes known
 - Of course, the truth of this age is no truth at all
 - And the rulers of this age are proponents of myths and various self-deceptions
 - The myths our world hold to be true are as temporary as the world itself, Paul says
 - One day all men die and pass away

- And when that happens, whatever lies they helped create or sustain will pass away with them
- Eventually the world itself will pass away, burning up as Peter tells us
- And when that happens, all the lies of Satan and men alike will be gone forever
- The wisdom that comes from God outlasts creation itself because it predates Creation
- Knowing that should encourage us to take little note of them or lose little sleep when the world scorns our contrary views
- Even more surprising, Paul says God determined to obscure His wisdom in a mystery that was outside the reach of the world
 - A mystery is a truth hidden until an appointed time when it is revealed by God
 - What is this mystery, this truth that God prepared and then revealed?
 - It is none other than the Gospel message itself
 - The message that God would come as man and die for our sin
 - That a Church of believers would be established on earth
 - That Christ will return to earth to establish His Kingdom
 - And everything else the New Testament reveals to us by the Spirit
- As Paul already taught, the Gospel message is a wisdom hidden from the world
 - When it was revealed, the world missed it
 - Jesus came and declared the kingdom, yet the world overlooked His message and His sinless life
 - It was as if Jesus talked a foreign language...they couldn't understand the importance of what He taught
 - And Paul says the Lord wanted it this way, as Jesus Himself said

Matt. 11:25 At that time Jesus said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.

- The rulers of this age missed God's mystery of Jesus as Messiah
 - Paul says if they hadn't missed it, they certainly wouldn't have crucified the Lord
 - And then Paul quotes from Isaiah 64 & 65 to prove this was always to be God's plan
- Isaiah says the human eye, ear and intellect has not perceived the things God has prepared for His children
 - The common way this passage is interpreted goes something like this:
 - The heaven God has prepared for each of us is so marvelous that we can't imagine what we will find there

- It's so wonderful, it's unimaginable
- Those statements are true statements
- Heaven is an unimaginably wonderful place
- But that's not what Isaiah and Paul are telling us in this passage
 - Paul explains the full meaning of Isaiah's statement in vs.10-11

[1Cor. 2:10](#) For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

[1Cor. 2:11](#) For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

[1Cor. 2:12](#) Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

- Paul says the things that our eye and ear and intellect couldn't imagine in advance are the very things we are now having revealed to us by the Spirit
 - We have come to understand God's plan from the beginning of time
 - The plan of redemption in Jesus
 - And now we know our place in the plan, as men and women appointed to believe and be saved
 - And now we're learning the next things God has prepared for us
 - Paul and Isaiah aren't teaching that we have no hope to understand the things God has prepared
 - They were teaching that apart from the power of God, men could not appreciate all that God had prepared in Christ
 - Paul says these mysteries are the wisdom of God
 - And it is even now being revealed to us, beginning with the truth of the Gospel itself
- God did not expect His children to stumble through this world in ignorance, waiting for a future day in Heaven when we finally understand God and His work and plan
 - Obviously, not everything can be known now; many things await until we reach the Throne room
 - But far more is available to us now by the Spirit, Paul says
 - Paul says the Spirit searches all things
 - This phrase means there is nothing of God that is too profound for the Spirit to reach and reveal to us if it be God's will
 - So everything that is in God is available to us in the Spirit
 - Just as a man's own spirit is intimately aware of everything that the man is and everything he knows, so it is with the Lord's Spirit

- No one knows the thoughts of God but the Spirit of God
- Until the Spirit makes Himself known to us, we cannot know God
- But once the Spirit indwells us by faith, circumstances flip and now we have access to all that God is and all He knows
- That what Isaiah meant when he said no man could imagine what God has prepared for those who love Him
 - Without the Spirit of God, a man is locked out of what God has prepared for us
 - Notice the wisdom is prepared, which means it is necessary for us to take advantage of it
 - Coming to faith instantly grants us all of God's wisdom at once
 - But as we work with the Spirit, He may reveal these things to us
 - It's like having a library card
 - Obtaining that card doesn't result in all the knowledge of the books on the library shelves automatically transferring into your brain
 - It grants you the opportunity to learn what has been prepared for you in all those books
 - If you devote yourself to learning what they hold
- Similarly, we have the Spirit indwelling us expressly for that purpose, Paul says
 - The Lord's intent was to grant us access to the mind of God
 - When Jesus told the disciples that a Helper was coming, He was referring to this teaching ministry of the Spirit

John 14:26 “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

- The Spirit is still working today in the same way, bringing to mind Christ's teaching and explaining its meaning
- We have all received a Spirit whose mission is to teach us what has already been freely given to us by God
 - Like the books in that library, everything is freely available
 - God is not asking for us to earn or deserve the wisdom that comes with a life lived in Christ
 - He has prepared great wonders and knowledge and power for His children
 - He gives us opportunity to seek that wisdom, and in His timing and will we receive the blessing of that wisdom
- But if we live like the Corinthian church, we stand the chance of missing out on that blessing

- The Corinthians were so busy resting in the world's wisdom and their own understanding, that they never bothered to use their Heavenly library card
- To seek the Spirit for understanding
- To search the scriptures for truth
- To check out a book
- Let's not trade the foolishness of God for the wisdom of men
 - Pray, read your Bible, listen to the Spirit
 - Go out, proclaim the message, rely on God's power
 - Membership has its privileges...let's use our library card

- Every decision we make in our life, every priority we set, every action we take carries a consequence
 - Sometimes those consequences are good for us
 - When we make a decision to accept Christ, good things follow obviously
 - When we prioritize expenses in our budget or activities in our schedule, we may be rewarded with greater security or increased contentment
 - When we take the proper course of action at work or in school, we are likely to be recognized for our diligence and judgment
 - But sometimes the consequences of our decisions will be negative

A little guy is sitting at the bar just staring at his drink for half an hour when this big trouble-making biker steps next to him, grabs his drink and gulps it down in one swig. The poor little guy starts crying.

"Come on man. I was just giving you a hard time," the biker says. "I can't stand to see a man crying."

"This is the worst day of my life," says the little guy between sobs. "I can't do anything right. I overslept and was late to an important meeting, so my boss fired me. When I went to the parking lot, I found my car was stolen and I don't have any insurance. I grabbed a cab home but, after the cab left, I discovered my wallet was still in the cab. At home I found my wife cheating with the gardener and my dog bit me. So I came to this bar trying to work up the courage to put an end to my life, and then you show up and drink the poison!"

- But sometimes the consequences of our decisions will be negative
 - When we set the wrong priorities, when we make bad judgments, when we ignore the wise counsel of others, we may suffer in some way
 - We know the Lord is patient with His children
 - We know He frequently rescues us from the consequences of our mistakes
 - And He always forgives by our faith in Christ
- But just because the Lord is merciful and forgiving doesn't mean we won't see consequences – eternal consequences for our earthly decisions
 - On the contrary, the Bible teaches there are eternal consequences for choices and actions that displease our Lord
 - For going against His commandments
 - Our salvation based on faith alone is never in jeopardy
 - But there is a whole lot more to a relationship with the Lord than merely the question of our eternal destiny
 - The question every Christian must consider is when we appear before the Lord,

what will He say about how we served Him in the time He gave us?

- It's clear enough from this letter that the Corinthian church was not focused on this question
 - They were preoccupied with earthly achievement, earthly appearances, earthly approval – and as we will see in coming chapters – earthly pleasure
 - We already know they fought over who had greater honor in the church on the basis of who baptized or converted them
 - They took pride in their following Christ, though Paul says it had nothing to do with human wisdom
 - Meanwhile, Paul says they had overlooked the fact that their mentors were themselves weak and unimpressive men
 - These kinds of behaviors are indications of spiritual immaturity, of living in the flesh rather than in resting on the counsel of the Spirit
 - Last week Paul told the church they had access to everything they needed for a godly life
 - They had access to the mind of God, to marvelous mysteries of the faith
 - But they had to make use of that wisdom
 - They had to make use of what God has provided
- Now Paul moves into a discussion of the consequences of their immaturity, both now and in the future moment of their eternal judgment
 - We pick up again in Paul's letter near the end of the second chapter

1Cor. 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

1Cor. 2:13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

- In the first part of Chapter 2, Paul explained his success in spreading the Gospel was a result of God's power, not his own power
 - The source of that power was the Spirit of God, Who indwells every believer
 - The Spirit gave Paul the words to use and the Spirit gave the Corinthian church the wisdom to respond
 - In fact, we all have the Spirit so that we may know the wisdom God is freely willing to share with us
 - Now Paul wants the church to understand the difference between living by the Lord's Spirit and living in the flesh
 - In v.12 Paul says the Spirit we received when we came to faith is fundamentally different than the nature or spirit of the unbelieving world
 - There is a Spirit of God, and there is a spirit of the world

- Everyone begins life as an unbeliever, so we who are believers once relied on the world's spirit
- What is this spirit of the world Paul is describing?
 - First, it's a reference to the nature or spirit we inherited at birth
 - Human beings are both flesh and spirit
 - The flesh is a container for the spirit
 - While the container is temporary and one day passes away
 - The spirit of a man is eternal and exists forever
 - Among other things the Bible teaches us, the dead spirit we received at birth is incapable of pleasing God or following God's commands

Rom. 8:7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so,

- It is a spirit that lives for itself and cannot please God
- Paul will explain this in far greater detail near the very end of this letter
- Secondly, the spirit of the world is a spirit under the control of the enemy, Satan, who is temporarily the power of this world
 - The unbelieving world is a world of fleshly people with spirits that can be manipulated and directed by Satan
 - Paul says in Ephesians

Eph. 2:1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,

Eph. 2:2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Eph. 2:3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

- Before we were saved by God's grace, we lived as men and women dead to the truth of God and the Gospel
 - We lived according to the course of the world
 - We lived according to Satan's authority, the spirit working in the world
- The spirit of unbelievers is subject to Satan through a fear of death, the Bible says

Heb. 2:14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render

powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, [Heb. 2:15](#) and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

- Believers are motivated by their knowledge and fear of God
- But unbelievers are motivated by a fear death, which the Bible calls a slavery to the devil
- The Corinthian church were believers, of course, so they had the Spirit
 - So Paul says the church's understanding didn't rest on Paul's wisdom
 - It was the Spirit's wisdom that Paul delivered
 - And it was the Spirit that taught them to understand what Paul said
 - That's why Paul says he spoke spiritual words combined with spiritual thoughts
 - He means that while the Spirit was working in him to deliver spiritual words, the Spirit was working in them to grant understanding
 - The effect is like transmitting a radio signal on a frequency that only a believer can receive
 - So the church can't credit Paul with having wise words, and it can't credit itself with having wisdom to understand the message
 - Paul was a vessel and they were vessels
 - The Lord was the sender of the message, the Father was the Author of the message, and the Spirit was the receiver of the message
 - So no man may boast
 - But the unbelieving world can't tune into this frequency apart from the Spirit's power

[1Cor. 2:14](#) But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

[1Cor. 2:15](#) But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.

[1Cor. 2:16](#) For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

- Paul uses the term "natural" to describe an unbeliever, because every person is born an unbeliever, and in that sense the natural state of man is to be an unbeliever
 - A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit
 - What does it mean that an unbeliever cannot accept the things of the Spirit?
 - The things of the Spirit is the wisdom of God
 - Chief among them is the Gospel itself

- The Gospel is a spiritual truth, spiritual wisdom
- The natural man cannot accept the truth of the Gospel, as Paul explained in Chapter 1
- He cannot understand them because they can only be appraised or investigated spiritually
 - Let's use a simple analogy to illustrate what Paul is saying
 - A person raised in an English-speaking home learns English naturally; it is their natural state
 - It's the only language they know, so in order to communicate with such a person, you must speak in English
 - Now imagine that one day this English-speaking person walks into an elevator with two other people
 - As the three ride up in the elevator, the two strangers begin speaking to one another in Swedish
 - Our English-speaking person hears the words being spoken, but they make no sense to him whatsoever
 - In fact, the language is so different and so foreign to his ears, it makes him smile a little just to hear the strange sounds
 - Their speech is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand it because it is not his natural language
 - But now let's imagine the English-speaking person entered the elevator with a friend who understood Swedish
 - When the other two people began speaking Swedish, the English-speaking guy can turn to his buddy and ask him to translate what was being said in the elevator
 - Now the foolish sounding words suddenly become understandable and sensible
 - The interpreter turned foolishness into wisdom
- Now let's change the situation...instead of three people speaking different human languages, now we have an unbeliever entering an elevator with two believers
 - This time the two believers begin to talk about their shared faith
 - They talk of their appreciation for God's grace and their desire to please Him prior to their judgment day
 - They discuss their joy at using their spiritual gifts in the Body of Christ
 - They note the hope they share in knowing that their body will one day be replaced and yet they want to glorify the Lord in the days that remain
 - What would our unbeliever in that elevator think?
 - Paul says it would be as if the two believers were speaking Swedish
 - The unbeliever understands the words, but the meaning and significance is lost upon him

- The whole conversation sounds foolish
- That's Paul's point
- Only when the Lord is ready to bring the natural man to an understanding of spiritual things will he understand such a conversation
 - The Lord must first send His Spirit to that person as an "interpreter" of spiritual truth
 - Like the buddy in the elevator, the Spirit explains the meaning of spiritual things to the unbeliever, leading him to faith
- In the moment the Gospel is presented, the Spirit must be present to impress upon the unbeliever the truth of the message
 - And by that work of the Spirit, the person believes and then continues to grow in spiritual wisdom
 - That's why Paul says at the end of v.14 that the truths of God can only be spiritually appraised
 - The word appraised in Greek means examined, investigated
 - We need the Spirit in us to explain to us the things of God
 - Otherwise, we cannot understand them
- Furthermore, in vs. 15-16 Paul says our transition from natural to spiritual is so complete, that afterward we have no need for another to reveal spiritual truth
 - Paul says the believer is not appraised by anyone
 - He means that no one can come to a believer indwelled by the Spirit and offer him additional spiritual truth
 - We're not saying that we don't benefit from teaching and teachers
 - Paul himself says elsewhere in Ephesians that the church has been given teachers so that we might be matured for the work of ministry
 - No man is an island and we all need teachers to move us forward in our walk of faith
 - But there is no source of spiritual knowledge in the world that can compete with what the Spirit offers
 - As Paul quotes from Isaiah 40:13 who can teach God anything He doesn't already know?
 - Therefore, if we have the mind of God in the Spirit living in us, why do we need to go to the world for spiritual answers?
 - We only need to rely on the Spirit of God to teach us according to the word of God
- Paul has now delivered a defense of the truth and corrected the Corinthians on their improper thinking and prideful associations
 - But even so, there is still a need for rebuke
 - These believers are making wrong choices and setting wrong priorities in their

walk

- So Paul is now going to instruct them on the consequences they face if they continue in their worldly ways

1Cor. 3:1 **And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.**

1Cor. 3:2 **I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,**

1Cor. 3:3 **for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?**

1Cor. 3:4 **For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not mere men?**

- Paul could not speak to this church as to spiritual men
 - Paul says this church was not ready to receive the spiritual wisdom God has freely prepared for believers indwelled by the Spirit
 - Because they were still living in an infantile state of spiritual maturity
 - Paul begins to explain that though we have access to the mind of God, that wisdom doesn't flow into our brain all at once
 - It is made available over time in a process of maturing
 - Though the Corinthians church had the Spirit, nevertheless they weren't making the most of His help
 - So Paul calls them spiritual infants
 - Infants by necessity must live on milk, not solid food
 - Milk is the only kind of food an infant can digest
 - Any attempt to feed them solid food would do more harm than good
 - They would choke on it
 - But at some point a diet of only milk is equally dangerous and unhealthy
 - A child or adult still living on milk alone eventually becomes anemic and weak
 - They have no strength without solid food to sustain them
- And so it was with the Corinthians' spiritual growth
 - They weren't moving forward in spiritual maturity
 - They were living in their flesh; they were fleshly, Paul says
 - The word flesh used in this context refers to someone living in the way they would without the Spirit in their life
 - Living the way a natural man or woman would live
 - Like an unbeliever, though they weren't unbelieving

- It's as if our friend in the elevator put a gag over his friend's mouth so that he couldn't interpret the conversation taking place
 - The church had the opportunity to benefit from the Spirit's wisdom
 - Nevertheless they purposely chose to live as if He wasn't there
 - So they were fleshy men, Paul calls them
- We often use a different term today: carnal Christians
 - This term describes a Christian, who has chosen to please their flesh rather than to please God
 - To some extent, we can all be carnal at points in time
 - But a carnal Christian is anyone whose life is defined by flesh-pleasing behavior
- Carnality doesn't always mean living in outright rebellion to God
 - It's not all drugs, sex and rock and roll
 - Carnal Christians come in all stripes and colors
 - Some are hardworking men and women so focused on school or career or hobbies that they neglect their spiritual development
 - Some are so devoted to keeping up with the Joneses that their goals and priorities leave no room for the Lord's desires
 - Some are so taken by materialism and comfort, that they insulate themselves far away from the toil and danger of advancing the Kingdom
 - The one thing all carnal Christians have in common is pleasing the flesh, seeking for the pleasures and approval of the world, ignoring the Spirit
 - And when we come across a carnal Christian, how do we approach them?
 - Paul says we approach them as spiritual infants
 - We bring them milk for that is all they were able to receive
 - They weren't capable of receiving solid food
- What is milk in this context? And what is solid food? Obviously, we're not talking about literal food
 - Milk and solid food are metaphors for something spiritual
 - Milk is a metaphor for simple spiritual truth
 - Simple truth includes the truth of salvation by faith, not works
 - It includes the commandments of Christ, the story of Jesus, the practices of the church, the essential doctrines of the faith
 - Solid food, on the other hand, represents the more complex truths of scripture
 - The pictures and types of the Old Testament
 - The covenants and the way Jesus fulfilled them
 - Eschatology and God's future plan for the Church, etc.
 - We're not talking about a different truth, but a deeper truth

- This is no different than any other area of instruction
 - In mathematics, we don't start with differential equations, but rather arithmetic
 - In science, we don't start in quantum physics but in simple nature
 - Except in spiritual instruction, the stakes are much higher
- Paul says this church was not able to receive the solid food he could offer them
 - If a child is fed only milk for too long they become anemic and weak
 - They lack the strength to fight disease
 - Their body is subjected to any number of ailments
 - What was once perfect and healthy becomes unhelpful and dangerous
 - Milk serves a purpose for a time, but eventually everyone must move to solid food
 - Otherwise, their growth is stunted
 - Likewise, we can identify an immature Christian by their behavior
 - For example, the church in Corinth was fleshly
 - They were jealous of each other
 - They were creating strife among one another
 - These are signs of immaturity
 - So Paul says he has no choice but to speak to them in simple ways
 - There is so much irony in Paul's words for this church
 - Remember, the central problem in Corinth was taking pride in their supposed wisdom for having come to faith in the Gospel under an apostle's influence
 - And yet here's Paul saying they have nothing to be prideful about
 - In fact, they were so immature spiritually that he couldn't even share with them the deeper things of God
 - Paul had little choice but to give this church the bare necessities of Christian doctrine and teaching
- Paul's words to the church of Corinth remind us that our behavior is a fair indicator of our spiritual maturity
 - And if our behavior is generally reflective of the life we lived prior to faith, then we must be honest enough to see that we are spiritually immature
 - We are infants in Christ
 - And if we only recently became believers in Jesus, then there is no shame in this realization
 - We understand that maturity takes time
 - Nevertheless, we can't be satisfied with this answer
 - We must make our goal to move ahead

- We must devote ourselves to understanding and living out the essential truths of our faith
- To pursuing spiritual maturity
- On the other hand, if we have been a Christian for years and years, regardless of our chronological age, and we still live a fleshly life
 - Then we must also come to grips with the shame of spiritual immaturity
 - We can't excuse the fact that we are infants
 - We are like the seven year old still using a pacifier
 - Or the twenty-five year old still letting mother dress him
 - Our immaturity is shameful
 - But perhaps we've decided we don't care what our parents think or what our friends think or what the church thinks
 - Perhaps we have decided that spiritual maturity is too much of a bother, too hard, too demanding
 - Perhaps we like our immaturity and the sinful pleasures it offers
 - What will come of that choice?
 - Next time, we study where Paul goes next in Chapter 3
 - Paul explains why God chooses to work through men
 - Why Christ encourages service to God
 - Why Christ asks us to become spiritually mature
 - Why our behavior and choices matter



1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 3B

Chapter 3:5-15

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- You've probably seen the bumper sticker, "As long as there are tests, there will be prayer in school."
 - Tests are moments of truth, as they say
 - Students can make all the claims they like about what they know or how hard they've studied
 - But in the end, the truth comes out when the test is taken
 - Tests are designed to reveal the truth about someone's accomplishments

Except for the time the Texas Aggie tried taking a true/false final exam by flipping a coin to get his answers: heads for true and tails for false. He finished the exam quickly and everything was going great...until he decided to flip the coin again to check his answers.

- And tests don't stop when we graduate from school
 - Many professions have competency or certification exams
 - And we take tests to get a driver's license, to be promoted, to apply for citizenship
- And each of these tests serves a similar purpose: to reveal the truth about our accomplishments
 - When we do well on these tests, we have good reason to feel good about our accomplishments
 - But when we score poorly, then we suffer the consequences
 - Men like to boast about themselves before the test, like a sports team before the big game
 - But the truth is revealed in the testing of that boast, and then only those who have performed well will have reason to boast
- The Corinthian church has been boasting lately, according to Paul's letter
 - They were boasting about things that they had no reason to boast about
 - They boasted over how they came to faith
 - They boasted over which apostle brought them the good news
 - Paul explained that such things are not eligible for boasting, because they are the work of God alone
 - They came to faith as a result of the power of God, and so boasting about such things was completely inappropriate
 - In the same way that fans of a sports team have little reason to boast over their team winning a game
 - The fans had nothing to do with the win
 - They are simply the recipients of a good outcome as a result of someone else's work
 - So it is for us in faith...we receive the good outcome of God's power and work
 - Last time we studied in this book, we heard Paul tell the church that their boasting was evidence of their spiritual immaturity

- They were thinking like fleshly men, not as spiritual men
- They were still thinking the way the world thinks, rather than thinking with the wisdom God grants by the Spirit
- Ironically, while Corinthians were busy boasting, they were oblivious to a coming test
 - There is a test coming for these believers – and for all believers
 - And this test will reveal the truth about how we served the Lord
 - The test puts to rest all boasting
 - And we must prepare if we are to do well
 - So while Paul wants the church to cease boasting about useless, earthly achievements, he wants to redirect that energy toward healthy, spiritually wise achievements
 - Beginning in v.5

1Cor. 3:5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one.

1Cor. 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.

1Cor. 3:7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.

- Paul now asks the church, what is Apollos? What is Paul?
 - The church had assigned value to these men, and then by association they claimed some of that value for themselves
 - If Apollos was a great man, then those he converted or baptized were great men as well
 - If Paul was a hero to the faith, then those Paul recruited were greatly blessed by association
 - This was the fleshly, worldly thinking that Paul said was evidence of immaturity, because that's the way the world thinks
 - So Paul asks what is Apollos' worth? How should a person evaluate Paul's importance? How does God see these men?
 - And then Paul answers the question with great humility
 - He says they were merely servants through whom God brought faith to the church
 - The Lord gave opportunity for belief, Paul says
 - It wasn't Paul or Apollos that brought the faith to the church
 - It was God
 - But He did it through the service of Paul and Apollos
 - If we imagine a different circumstance, we see Paul's point clearly
 - Imagine you were awarded a great sum of money from a wealthy businessman

- And when the day came for the money to be awarded to you, the rich businessman sent a courier to your home with an envelope containing a check
- How much significance do you assign to that courier?
 - Do you make a point of telling people that the courier made you rich? Do you even notice his name?
 - Or do you credit the rich businessman?
- Paul says he and Apollos are like that courier in the sense that they were merely carrying out the orders of their Master, the Lord
 - Paul uses the analogy of farming to explain his role
 - He planted the Gospel
 - Paul brought the word of God (the seed) and placed it in the ground of the Corinthians' hearts
 - And new faith blossomed
 - Later, God sent Apollos to water that new growth
 - Apollos taught the church more about their relationship with the Lord
 - And in that teaching, the church grew stronger in their faith
 - In both cases, Paul says God brought the growth
 - If we could be transported back in time to Corinth to watch Paul and Apollos working, we would see them putting forth great effort
 - We would hear Paul tirelessly arguing from scripture for why Jesus was Messiah
 - We could see Apollos patiently explaining the meaning of scripture for hours, emphasizing the importance of obedience
 - By all appearances, they seem to be working hard to gain a desired result
 - And that's what the Corinthian church saw too
 - But they misunderstood what they saw
 - And therefore they misunderstood the importance of these men
 - Paul says that spiritual wisdom is understanding that the results were entirely God's work
 - Paul's tireless preaching wasn't the cause for the church's emergence out of nothing
 - And Apollo's patient exposition of scripture didn't produce the growth they observed
 - The growth was a supernatural result accomplished by God, through the work of these servants
- So it stands to reason that had these men not come to Corinth, others would have been sent
 - Paul says that neither Paul nor Apollos were anything
 - Paul doesn't mean they are worthless or unimportant

- He means with respect to the ultimate result, that result doesn't rest on Paul or Apollos...they are nothing in relationship to the result
- God was responsible for the result
- And that's how Paul ends v.7
 - God deserves all the credit
 - And we know this because Paul taught in Chapter 2 that the message of the Gospel is foolishness to natural men
 - In other words, it would be impossible for Paul or Apollos or any man to gain a positive result when preaching the Gospel were it not for God to produce a positive outcome
 - Like that courier bringing you your check...were it not for the wealth of the master, the courier would have no power to make you wealthy on his own
- This truth is powerful spiritual wisdom
 - It has the potential to completely change our understanding of the work of evangelism and of God Himself
 - Where before we may have assumed we were the ones with the power to change hearts
 - Now we understand that only God has that power
 - Where before we might have condemned ourself or others for not working hard enough to save an unbelieving friend or relative
 - Now we understand that it was never dependent on us
 - On the other hand, where we might have pointed to our inability to preach or speak well as an excuse not to participate in evangelizing
 - Now we know that our ability is not the key ingredient to success
 - If in the past we ever hesitated to share our faith with a friend or family member because the odds of success seemed too small to warrant the effort
 - Now we know that at any moment we might find a positive response because that response lies completely in God's power
 - This truth cuts both ways
 - It takes away our opportunity to boast in any success we experience in our work of Gospel ministry
 - But it also removes any excuse for not trying
 - The bad news is we have zero power to save anyone
 - The good news is God has all the power in the universe, and He's prepared to work through us according to His will
- Some have come to this truth and left with only half an understanding
 - Men have heard that God owns the outcome anytime the Gospel is presented, and so they conclude that they have no reason to get involved
 - Personal ministry loses its attraction to some when they understand that faith arrives only by God's power, not by their personal efforts
 - Like a pouting child, they refuse to serve God at all, since God doesn't need

them

- This is just another form of spiritual immaturity
 - If boasting in God's work is one form of spiritual immaturity, then discounting the importance of joining God in His work is just another
 - Both views are evidence that we haven't understood the spiritual importance of advancing the Gospel
 - So Paul now takes a moment to explain why we need to work hard in serving God: because there will be a test

1Cor. 3:8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

1Cor. 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

1Cor. 3:10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.

- Paul says that the ones who plant or water are one
 - What he means is they are equal in their opportunity and importance
 - Since God drives the outcome, no man is more or less important than any other member of the body
 - We all have an equal opportunity to participate with the Lord, and therefore we all have an equal opportunity to be rewarded
 - Notice Paul raises the prospect of God rewarding us for our service at the end of v.8
 - Each worker will receive a reward according to his or her labor
 - Laboring in this context refers to serving God in His work of planting and growing the church
 - The issue isn't whether we are hard workers in general
 - In our job or at school or in our homes
 - The issue is whether we labor well in the ministry the Lord gives each of us to serve Him in the days we live on earth
- Some Christians are surprised to learn that we may earn rewards
 - To some the concept that the Father in Heaven is prepared to give us a reward seems incompatible with love or grace
 - I've heard some question whether it's proper to serve God expecting something in return
 - Shouldn't we just serve Him because He's God or because He saved us?
 - Well, yes, that is reason enough
 - But God is so good He's prepared to reward us for faithful service
 - The New Testament teaches about rewards repeatedly
 - For example:

Matt. 5:11 “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

Matt. 5:12 “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Luke 6:35 “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.

2John 8 Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.

- And then we have the many parables Jesus taught about slaves left to work in the master's absence
 - And then the master returns one day and evaluates the work of his slaves
 - The ones that have served faithfully will receive a reward while the unfaithful slave receives nothing

Matt. 24:44 “For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.

Matt. 24:45 “Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time?

Matt. 24:46 “Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.

Matt. 24:47 “Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

- Jesus says that He expects that we serve Him faithfully with what we've been given to accomplish
 - It's not our achievement He judges, it's our faithfulness to the task
 - Jesus isn't asking us necessarily to build great things, achieve great things, travel great distances, influence many people
 - The goal He sets before us is faithfulness to what we've been assigned
 - And Jesus makes the assignment, since He is our Master
- Paul explains the judgment criteria the Lord will use when He tests our work
 - To help us understand the process, Paul uses the analogy of construction workers endeavoring together to construct a new building
 - In v.9 Paul says we are all the construction workers
 - And the building we are constructing is the body of Christ, the Church
 - Paul calls it God's building
 - So the first thing to understand about our coming test is that we're being tested

on how well we participated in the construction project of building the Church

- Paul means in the sense of recruiting new believers and serving them as they participate in the body
- We can't expect reward for any kind of work we choose...it's work for the benefit of the kingdom
- It's easy to overlook this detail, but if we miss it, we miss the whole point
 - We aren't going to be rewarded simply for hard work at our job or in our studies or in our sports or hobbies or other endeavors
 - Only if those things eventually become opportunities to advance the Kingdom will they hold the possibility for reward
 - If we prosper at work and use that income to finance Kingdom work, then we might be rewarded
 - If our studies make us a more effective teacher of God's word or prepare us to serve Christ as a doctor, etc.
 - Then reward could result
 - Ultimately, the question is whether we were faithful to the Kingdom building opportunities the Lord gave us
- Notice Paul says in v.10 that our working is according to the grace God has given to us
 - What we do in service to God is a work appointed to us by God as a matter of grace
 - It's grace to us that we even have opportunity to serve the Lord
 - So we cannot make up our own ideas of service
 - Instead, we must approach carefully the opportunities we've been handed
 - To some Christians, Jesus gives greater grace: greater opportunities to have a greater impact upon the Kingdom and the Church
 - We might think of men like the Apostle Paul, Augustine, Luther, Tyndall, Bonhoeffer, Billy Graham, and many others
 - These men were gifted with remarkable insight and skill
 - And the Lord placed them in the midst of monumental circumstances
 - So they could make tremendous impact for the Kingdom
 - Therefore, they were expected to rise to the occasion and serve the Lord accordingly...they could do no less!
 - Were they to shrink back from their appointed tasks, then they would have been considered faithless in their service
 - And they would have received a lessor reward
 - But we also know the Lord has assigned most Christians lessor gifts and opportunities (lessor in the way men judge such things)
 - For every Paul, Luther or Graham, there are ten million Christians who work in obscurity to serve their Lord
 - But as Paul said, we are all one before the Lord, equally able to please Him and earn reward

- So the poor farmer faithfully serving the Lord working in the fields while raising his family to fear the Lord can be rewarded equally with the Apostle Paul
- The young missionary struggling to teach the Bible to a handful of believers in a remote village can earn the same praise as Luther
- And a single Christian mother working nights to feed her children while praising Jesus for her hope of resurrection may please her Master no less than Graham
- Just as that thief crucified next to Jesus used his last hours of life to praise the Lord and to testify to another sinner concerning the truth of the Gospel
 - We each receive some measure of gift and opportunity
 - The question is, what do we make of it?
- If we can be rewarded for faithful service, then it stands to reason that we might suffer loss for faithless choices, right?
 - Paul makes this point in 2 Corinthians

2Cor. 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

- When the time comes for our service to be assessed, Paul says Christ considers all that we do in the body, whether good or bad
- “In the body” refers to the works we accomplish in this life prior to our resurrection
- In other words, He doesn’t just ask what did we do, He also asks what *could* we have done?
- In the time we’ve been given to serve God, Jesus will recompense (or repay) according to what we’ve done, good or bad
 - If we do good things, serving Him faithfully, then we have reason to expect a reward
 - But if we do bad things – that is we do not serve Him faithfully – then we can expect a loss of that reward
- Paul explains further in the next passage

1Cor. 3:11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1Cor. 3:12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

1Cor. 3:13 each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work.

1Cor. 3:14 If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.

1Cor. 3:15 If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will

be saved, yet so as through fire.

- In v.11 Paul says every good work we set out to accomplish must begin with the Gospel itself
 - The Gospel message is the foundation of every good work in the Church
 - In fact it is the foundation of the Church itself
 - If our work doesn't begin with the advancement of the Gospel, it's useless from the start
 - Social works, charity, various other good works are not the mission and purpose of the church
 - They are tools we use to support the mission
 - But the mission is the Gospel of Jesus Christ
 - So we cannot begin our work for Christ on any foundation other than on the mission to spread the testimony of Jesus and Him crucified
 - And then from there, we are in a position to earn reward
 - Then Paul says we may build in one of two ways
 - We could build on the foundation of Christ using valuable materials
 - Gold, silver, valuable jewels
 - Obviously, these materials are not your ordinary construction materials
 - They are precious and they are also durable
 - Paul compares these materials to the good works that please the Lord
 - They are pleasing in that they are valuable to the Lord's purposes in building His church
 - And remember the church we are building is the people, not a literal structure
 - On the other hand we could build our metaphorical structure with ordinary materials like wood, hay and straw
 - These materials are of essentially no value
 - Moreover, they will not last very long
- Then in v.13, Paul describes our coming test
 - In a day to come, our work will become evident
 - The day Paul mentions is the judgment day, the day Christ assesses our life in service to Him
 - That day is the day we die and face the Lord
 - Hebrews says:

Heb. 9:27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,

- And in that day, Paul says our work will become evident
 - The word evident in Greek is *phaneros*, which means obvious
 - The quality of our work will be obvious to everyone, including us
 - Somehow the Lord will make it plain what we did, whether good or bad
 - All the games we play and lies we tell ourselves will end
 - And in their place will be truth
 - Because that's the purpose of every test: to reveal truth
- Paul compares this test to a fire that burns away the worthless things and leaves behind only the sturdy, valuable things
 - Fire is commonly used to test the quality of metals
 - Impurities are burned away and all that remains are the pure elements
 - That's the way our work will be evaluated
- Paul says in v.14 that if our work stands up to Christ's scrutiny, we will receive a reward
 - The Lord is a righteous judge
 - And He is also a good Father Who knows how to give good gifts
 - We can expect that our reward will exceed anything we might have gained for ourselves here on earth
- But for some, that judgment will not go well
 - Paul says in v.15 that if a man comes into that moment without a proper legacy of service to Christ, then all that he brings will be burned up
 - He may have been a Christian all his life
 - Attended church a Sunday here or there
 - Prayed when he thought about it
 - Threw a few bucks in the collection plate from time to time
 - But not much else
 - Whatever he did, the test of his life reveals a wasted opportunity
 - And so the fire of Christ's judgment consumes everything the man accomplished
 - He may have built a Fortune 500 company
 - He may have a fortune in the bank
 - He may be beloved by millions
 - He may have done many great things...but they weren't things that mattered to Christ and the Kingdom
 - Paul says that man fails his test...so what happens to him?
 - Praise the Lord, the man's entrance into the Kingdom isn't at risk
 - Paul says he comes through
 - He isn't left behind, he isn't shut out, sent away or rejected

- He is saved, but he comes through like someone walking through a fire
- They may have entered the fire clothed and holding many possessions
- But they emerge naked and empty-handed
- We should be working today for a better outcome on that future day
 - That day is a moment we all face eventually
 - And when we face that moment, we want to receive a good result
 - This test comes but once, and we have only one lifetime to prepare
 - But the results last 1,000 years
 - Our rewards (or lack thereof) will be ours to enjoy for the thousand year Kingdom
 - Let's stimulate each other to be prepared for that day



1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 4A

Chapters 3:16-23; 4:1- 13

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- Last week Paul was guiding us through a construction project of sorts
 - Paul's point, as you remember, was to draw a comparison between the work of constructing a building and our work in serving the Lord
 - And the analogy had several parts
 - We read in 3:9 Paul said he and Apollos were God's workers
 - And the field or place of work was us, the Church
 - Paul then calls the body of Christ "God's building"
 - Then as we moved forward in the analogy, Paul says that men who work for the Lord have opportunity to construct God's building, that is the Church, using two different types of materials
 - On the one hand, we can work on the building using precious materials
 - We can construct something lasting, durable, precious to the Lord
 - These are works in the body of Christ that promote holiness, spiritual maturity, love, forgiveness, generosity, sacrifice, glory and honor to the Lord
 - On the other hand, we can work in such a way that produces nothing durable, nothing valuable in God's building
 - We can choose to spend our time, energy and resources on priorities that aren't the Lord's priorities
 - Essentially, we're like that one construction worker who stands around and watches the others at work
 - We've got the hard hat, we're wearing the tool belt, but we're not putting them to work in a useful, helpful way
 - And then Paul said the Lord will test our work on the day of judgment
 - In that moment, truth will become evident or obvious
 - The work we did which mattered to Christ will be cause for reward
 - And the wasted time that produced no value will be lost opportunity
- Now we move forward in Chapter 3 and into Chapter 4 with Paul continuing to use this analogy of God's building
 - Let's see where he goes next

1Cor. 3:16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

1Cor. 3:17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

- Paul asks the church a rhetorical question: don't you know (or understand) that the church is the temple of God?
 - In Greek, the pronoun "you" is a plural word
 - Paul is working with his analogy of a building representing the church body
 - Paul isn't talking about the individual body per se

- He's talking about the body of Christ, the collective body of the church
- Paul asks don't you understand that the church is the temple of God?
 - This building that we are supposed to construct is a special, holy building to God
 - It's not just some common construction project
 - Building up God's people is the most important construction project on earth, at least in this day
- The reason it's so important is because the Spirit of God resides in this temple
 - In ancient Israel, the glory of God dwelled among men in a different kind of building, a stone temple
 - God tabernacled within this building, so He placed great importance on how it was built and maintained
- So Paul draws out his analogy in making application for us today
 - We are that temple of God today
 - Today, the Lord's Spirit indwells a group of people rather than a single stone temple
 - Therefore, He concerns Himself with the construction and maintenance of this building every bit as much as the earlier structure
 - In fact, He is far more concerned with the construction of the church because we are living stones, His adopted sons and daughters
 - Consequently, how stringent do you suppose the Lord's test will be for how we worked on God's building?
 - When the day of judgment comes, God will take a sober view of how we treated the construction work we were given
 - Paul says in v.17 that if someone makes a point of tearing down, destroying the temple of God, God will destroy him
 - Paul is using an extreme example of a false teacher, an unbeliever, who enters the church with the intent to do harm
 - This person will be destroyed in the same way that the Lord destroyed those who violated His temple in Israel

1Cor. 3:18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise.

1Cor. 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, “He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS”; 1Cor. 3:20 and again, “THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS.”

1Cor. 3:21 So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you,

1Cor. 3:22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you,

1Cor. 3:23 and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.

- Paul says we shouldn't deceive ourselves concerning the seriousness of our coming test and the standard the Lord will apply when judging
 - God cares deeply about the construction project we've been given
 - Building up the church is a holy project, one intended to reflect glory on the Lord
 - We can't expect the Lord to overlook shoddy work
 - And Paul wants us to know what's coming so we may be motivated to do the right things now
 - And in the case of the Corinthian church, Paul wants them to boast in the right things
 - When Paul says that if the Corinthians want to value wisdom, they need to understand what spiritual wisdom looks like
 - In a nutshell, it looks exactly the opposite of earthly wisdom
 - In most cases, you can arrive at the wisdom of God by taking the world's wisdom and reversing it
 - When the world says Evolution, God says Creation
 - When the world says self-esteem is good, God says pride is bad
 - When the world says the earth is permanent, God says it's temporary
 - When the world says man is temporary, God says we're eternal
 - When the world says there are many ways to Heaven, God says there is one way
 - When the world says there is no truth, God says Truth is a Person
 - That's what Paul means when he says to become spiritually wise we must be willing to be seen as foolish in the eyes of the world
 - We must be willing to be humbled by the truth of God's word
 - We must be willing to reject the world's standards, the world's criteria for power and wisdom
 - And once we have set aside the world's wisdom, the Lord begins to build us up again in His wisdom
- That's what working to build God's building looks like when it's done properly
 - Precious stones and gold are symbolic measures of introducing godly wisdom and promoting spiritual growth in the body of Christ
 - We deceive ourselves when we try to build God's building with the wisdom or intelligence of the world
 - It's laboring with straw and hay
 - Any time men devise new ways to accomplish the purposes God has already established in His word, then they are working in foolishness
 - In v.20 Paul says such efforts are useless
 - He means they do not work and they do not profit the builder
 - The building of God's building is a spiritual work, not a physical work

- The size and appearance of the church is not the measure the Lord will use in the day of judgment
 - Those are things that men boast in and men like to build
 - But they are not durable or precious works God wants for us
- Such things are boasting in men, and we can't do that if we expect a reward
 - There is no such thing as a breakthrough in church planting
 - There is no such thing as a new technique for building up believers
 - Churches grow only upon God's decision to affect that growth
 - Believers are discipled the old fashioned way
 - By teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded from God's word
 - The best any man can hope to do in serving the Lord is to lay the right foundation, plant the seed, water it, and trust God to grow it
 - We can't improve the foundation, we can't make a better seed, we can't control the growth
 - Therefore, we can't boast in men
- Then in vs.21-23, Paul ends with a beautiful and powerful reminder of our relationship to each other in the body of Christ
 - Paul says all things belong to us
 - He means there is no one within the body of Christ who is privileged above anyone else in such a way that we have reason to create special affiliations
 - We share the same origins in faith
 - We share the same power in the Spirit
 - We share the same destiny in Christ
 - All these things belong to the entire body of Christ
 - Whatever Paul or Apollos or Peter accomplished in working on God's building traced back to the power and grace of Christ
 - And from Christ, it itself traced back to the Father
 - Since we all share that same affiliation to Christ and the Father, we all have the same status and merit with regard to the building process
 - Further distinctions or associations are pointless
 - This is spiritual wisdom
- So with the issue of boasting having been settled, Paul will now explain the proper perspective this church should have for the apostles' roles

1Cor. 4:1 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

1Cor. 4:2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

1Cor. 4:3 But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself.

1Cor. 4:4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.

1Cor. 4:5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

- When the church in Corinth encountered a great man like Paul or Peter, he asked they be regarded as servants of Christ and stewards of mysteries
 - The word for servant in Greek is *huperetes* is literally the word “under rower”
 - It's a word most often translated officer
 - It describes a position of authority that serves under a superior
 - Like a sergeant under an officer
 - So we should regard men who serve in significant positions within the church as men and women commissioned by Christ to serve us
 - Secondly, Paul says they are stewards of mysteries
 - The Greek word for steward means a manager
 - A manager is given something which they must care for
 - They steward something entrusted into their care
 - So it was with the apostles
 - They were entrusted with certain mysteries God intended to reveal through their ministry
 - They weren't the authors of those mysteries, so they didn't deserve to be objects of the boasting in Corinth
 - Finally, Paul says he doesn't concern himself (i.e., it's no big deal) with how he is perceived among the church, whether they boast in him or criticize him
 - A steward is expected to be found trustworthy, and Paul has a clear conscience before the Lord
 - Paul raises the point of credibility to emphasize that he serves the Lord and not men
 - Therefore, he is not seeking to receive the praise of men
 - Nor does he respond to the critique of men so as to win them over
 - In the end the Lord will be his judge
- Therefore, Paul makes the application in v.5
 - The church needs to stop making comparisons, passing judgment on each other's degree of service and assigning status to each other
 - That's a natural thing for men to do
 - But it's a product of sinful, prideful thinking
 - It's the root cause for the behavior in Corinth
 - And it's still prevalent in the church today

- We may not have Paul or Apollos in our midst today, but we haven't defeated this enemy yet
 - As long as believers occupy sinful flesh, we'll remain prone to comparing ourselves to others in the body so we may feel better about where we are
 - I go to two Bible studies a week, but Bobby only attends one
 - I give more than Jeff, I take more mission trips than Pam
 - I attend a Bible church, I serve in the soup kitchen, I homeschool my kids
- Paul says we all need to stop judging one another because we're terrible judges of hay, straw, precious stones and gold, so to speak
 - In Paul's day, men were criticizing him for doing the wrong things in teaching and leading the church
 - Why did they level their criticisms? For the same reason any of us criticize someone: to influence them to do what we want
 - So Paul said he paid little attention to such commentary, because they couldn't understand what the Lord had revealed to Paul
 - Paul was serving the Master and all that mattered was that Master's approval...not the approval of men who didn't understand spiritual truth
- You see, all this time we thought Paul was talking about a problem in the Corinthian church, but now Paul says it's a common issue among men

1Cor. 4:6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.

- Paul says all these things he's been teaching about (planting, watering, building) focused on Paul and Apollos in their roles as apostles
 - But now Paul says from the beginning he was using Apollos and himself figuratively for their sakes
 - What Paul means is that he wasn't talking about himself and Apollos so much as he was talking about how the church viewed each other
- Paul began this letter pointing out divisions in the body, and now he ends the opening section by diagnosing the cause of the division
 - The Corinthians were making judgments about each other, and drawing sides and assigning superiority in the church
 - Drawing Paul and Apollos into the discussion was just a convenient way to make distinctions
 - But they would have found another
 - They were determined to maintain the status culture common to Greek society
 - And Paul says this needs to stop
- Notice Paul says they are in danger of exceeding what is written so as to become arrogant

- Exceeding what is written means living outside the boundaries set by scripture
- In this case, it meant assigning value to things the scripture did not value
- Boasting arrogantly in fleshly things to the detriment of unity in the body
- Anytime we untether ourselves from scripture, we will drift into sinful thinking and practices...like dividing the body by boasting and making comparisons
- There is a pathetic quality to their boasting, because in reality they have so little to boast about
 - Consider Paul's next comment to the church

1Cor. 4:7 **For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?**

1Cor. 4:8 **You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you.**

1Cor. 4:9 **For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.**

1Cor. 4:10 **We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor.**

1Cor. 4:11 **To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless;**

1Cor. 4:12 **and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;**

1Cor. 4:13 **when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.**

- There was a phrase I remember kids used to throw at anyone on the playground who tried to assume more authority than they should
 - We would ask, "Who died and made you king?"
 - The message of the sarcastic statement was that the person thought they were more important than they truly were
 - That's what Paul is saying here
 - Who regards you as superior? Who says you are important in the first place?
 - It's a strong statement, but it's one the church needed to hear
 - And sometimes we need to hear it too
 - There is nothing more pathetic than to watch someone with a thimbleful of responsibility lording over others
 - Generally making a pain of themselves
 - Making clear that the church exists to serve them rather than vice versa
 - Acting as if they are God's personally chosen representative

- God already chose His Representative, and you're not Him
- To that person, someone needs to say what Paul says here: who said you are superior in any way?
- Paul asks the church, what do you have in faith that you did not receive?
 - Whatever they knew of Christ, it required that someone introduce them to the Savior
 - Whatever they understand about scripture, someone taught them that truth
 - Whatever spiritual gifts they possessed, the Lord assigned them by His Spirit
 - Whatever spiritual things they boasted about were gifts of grace, God's unmerited favor
 - It didn't reflect on them
 - It was a reflection of the love of God
- The problem was they were boasting about possessing such things as if they deserved credit for obtaining them
 - They acted as if receiving great things made them great
 - That possessing great things proved great things
 - If this were true, then every lottery winner would be hailed as a brilliant business person
- Finally, Paul mocks them for thinking themselves so great, while ignoring the plight of those men God was using to bring them the very things they boasted about
 - In v.8 Paul uses sarcasm to illustrate their selfishness and ignorance
 - He says you have already been filled, that is you have become fully filled spiritually
 - You have already become rich, referring to the rewards of the kingdom
 - You have already become kings, referring to having authority in the Kingdom
 - In other words, Paul says you have already obtained all the things that we apostles are still working to receive from the Lord
 - You think you've already arrived, you no longer need to be sanctified, to receive instruction
 - The Corinthians behaved as though they had already faced the judgment seat
 - They acted as if they had received their rewards and could boast of all that they had done
 - They are like the disciples of Christ who argued about which would be the greatest in the kingdom
 - They are looking past the moment and arrogantly assuming things about where they will stand in the kingdom
 - Yet they were actually far from understanding where they stood
 - The fact that they had many riches and a relatively easy life didn't mean they were pleasing God
 - And it certainly didn't say anything about Paul and Apollos that they lived hard lives with significant challenges

- Paul continues on to mock them for the way they triumph in their self-importance
 - If the Corinthian logic was accurate, what would it say about Paul and the other apostles?
 - If they were men of great worth to God as evidenced by their life of ease and achievement...
 - Then what would that say about the apostles who were suffering great hardship in the work of the ministry?
 - Paul mocks them by drawing the obvious conclusion
 - While the Corinthians were prudent, the apostles must have been fools
 - While the Corinthians were strong, that must mean the apostles were weak
 - If the Corinthians were distinguished, then clearly the apostles lacked honor
 - If we're going to make assessments of each other and form judgments based on what we see with fleshly eyes, then we need to be consistent, don't we?
 - If the measure of value to God is what men value, then it stands to reason that the things men detest must be the things God detests
 - And when we compare the lives of God's appointed messengers to the lives of the newest members of the church, we see the folly of that thinking
 - Few in Corinth would have the gall to think themselves greater than Paul
 - Yet by their boasting they were creating an impossible standard, one that left them looking superior to Paul himself
 - We have the same problem today
 - We're often told today that if we're poor and lacking the things of life, it's proof that God isn't pleased with us
 - Then how do we explain the apostles?
 - We're told that if we are suffering persecution, it means we haven't found the right way to approach people in a culturally sensitive way
 - Then how do we explain the apostles?
 - We're told God wants us to be happy
 - How do we explain the apostles?
 - We're told God wants to heal our bodies
 - Then how do we explain the martyrdom of the apostles?
 - Paul says that if apostles were judged according to the standards of the world, then we must conclude the apostles were least valued of all men
 - God turned them into a spectacle, before angels and men
 - But we know the opposite was true, so we know human values and boasting is exactly backwards
- We need to be watchful of where we seek affirmation and what gives us satisfaction
 - If we want to climb the social ladders of the world, we can
 - But we can't climb that ladder *and* the one that leads to heavenly reward
 - We must become fools in the world so we can become wise in God's

estimation

- Because these value systems are always the opposite
- Remember the first shall be last and the last shall be first

- What is our responsibility to our leaders in ministry?
 - How are we to respond to their authority?
 - Did they arrive at those positions as a result of the consent of the governed?
 - Or did they acquire their authority through the agency of a higher authority?
 - Paul has been speaking sternly with the church in Corinth regarding their immaturity in faith
 - As we've moved in Chapter 4, his critiques have begun to sting
 - He's called them arrogant, prideful, foolish
 - He's mocked them for thinking themselves superior even to the apostles
 - And he's just getting started
 - When we move into Chapter 5, Paul will begin to address the specific situations he heard from Chloe's delegation
 - And many of Paul's comments will come with demands and corrections
 - Paul will place obligations on the church and demand changes in behavior
 - He will challenge their thinking and call them out publicly for their sin
 - Paul's words were no less offensive in his day than they might be today
 - Imagine having your sinful behavior called out publicly among your brothers and sisters
 - Or imagine being embroiled with other members of the church in a fierce dispute about church practice, and Paul writes a letter that sides with the others against you
 - How would you respond to such a moment? Would you fight back, pout, run away...or submit to Paul's authority?
 - The answer would depend on how you viewed Paul's authority
 - Do you see him as a man sent by the Lord speaking with the authority of the Lord?
 - Or is he nothing more than your peer, a man with an opinion like everyone else
 - And therefore, you can dismiss his opinion
- This was the situation Paul faced in Corinth
 - Only his situation was even more challenging, because he was physically separated from them
 - He had to impose his authority on the church from a distance
 - So he chooses his words carefully
 - And yet he doesn't tiptoe around the point
 - And so as we study Paul's response to rebellion and accountability, let's consider our own responsibility to leadership in the body of Christ
 - I'll start a few verses back from last time, in v.11

- Paul is concluding his reminder that godly servants will often experience lives of sacrifice and need according to God's grace
- And therefore, such things cannot become our measure of power or success or merit in the church
- So speaking of himself and the fellow apostles, Paul reminds the church:

1Cor. 4:11 To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless;

1Cor. 4:12 and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;

1Cor. 4:13 when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.

- Paul tells Corinth that even as he writes them this letter, he is hungry and thirsty
 - As they sat in comfort in Corinth, Paul was sitting in Ephesus poorly clothed, roughly treated and homeless
 - Paul lived a life that was the epitome of want, weakness, and shame
 - Was this the consequence of laziness? Was Paul simply not willing to work hard enough to achieve a better standard of living?
 - Was Paul suffering in this way despite working hard with his hands?
 - He says he toiled, which is a Greek word meaning to work so hard and diligently that the worker grows weak and weary
 - Paul was tirelessly working to support himself even as he worked for the sake of Christ and the gospel
 - Paul's situation was not a reflection of laziness
- Paul's situation was the direct result of serving Christ and the Gospel
 - Paul was called by God to sacrifice to serve the Lord according to a basic spiritual principle
 - The more we seek to serve the Lord, the more we come to reflect Christ by our words and actions
 - And the more we become like Christ in our words and deeds, the more we should expect to experience the same things Christ experienced
 - Our Lord explained this principle Himself when He taught His disciples

John 15:18 "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.

John 15:19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.

John 15:20 “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

John 15:21 “But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.

- The more diligently we seek to serve Christ, the more we become like Him
 - The more we become like Him, the more the world will treat us like they treated Him
 - And therefore, Paul’s poor circumstances was a testimony to his Christ-like life
 - And to the negative consequences that naturally follow
- Paul’s hard work didn’t arrive at wealth, because he probably found it very difficult to find work for his tent making business
 - In Paul’s day, artisans worked under the protection and authority of guilds
 - Like unions, these guilds regulated business to the extent that if someone was rejected by the guild, they would find it very difficult to do business in any Roman community
 - Paul’s willingness to upset Jewish and Roman leaders with his ministry undoubtedly left him unable to prosper financially regardless of how hard he worked
 - So Paul’s economic persecution was the natural consequence of living a Christ-like life in a world that hates Christ
 - If Paul suffered such things, then we should not be surprised to see negative consequences to living our faith and proclaiming the Gospel
 - And that’s ok
 - We can’t let that penalty cause us to question our commitment to serving the Lord
 - We simply understand that this is the natural consequence of a spiritual law the Lord Himself gave us
 - And we remember that our reward in Heaven will be great

Matt. 5:10 “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 5:11 “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

Matt. 5:12 “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

- Secondly, Paul’s poverty was a reflection of him placing a higher priority on heavenly goals rather than earthly goals
 - Naturally, preaching of the Gospel competed with his time and effort to make a

living

- The more time Paul spent on serving Christ, the less time he could spend earning a living
- And clearly, this was the right balance
- Paul understood that earning a living was a means to an end, rather than the end in itself
- He needed money to feed and clothe his body, but only so that he could then continue forward in ministry
- As the saying goes, he worked to live; he didn't live to work
- And notice, Paul doesn't say he has nothing
 - He may have needs, especially in comparison to the affluence of Corinth
 - But we can have enough while still having needs unmet
 - We can have enough food, enough clothing, enough shelter while experiencing needs
 - Paul experienced needs, but the Lord gave him enough to ensure he could accomplish his mission
- There is a word for having enough even while we experience need: contentment
 - Paul knew contentment
 - He understood living in need but accepted that situation as a necessary condition of serving Christ
 - He also trusted the Lord to provide what was required to enable him to remain focused on his Master's business
- This is the joy of serving the Lord
 - As we set our mind on things above, the Lord gives us contentment for our circumstances
 - Our needs remain, but they concern us less
- Then Paul said he was reviled and persecuted and slandered by his enemies
 - Was he mistreated because he invited the negative attention?
 - Did Paul insult people, did he treat people poorly?
 - Was he deserving of such mistreatment?
 - No. Paul says he returned those insults with love in the same way the Lord turned the other cheek
 - In other words, there was no earthly explanation for Paul's situation
 - He worked hard, but he was in need
 - He was diligent, but he suffered
 - He brought a blessing and tried to reconcile with people, but he was rejected nonetheless

- Paul said he was considered scum, which means refuse
 - He has been rejected by the world, and the only explanation for why is his love for, and service to, Christ
 - Nevertheless, Paul's critics in Corinth had been using Paul's situation against him
 - Suggesting that his poverty and persecution was somehow evidence that his teaching was wrong or that he lacked authority
- Authority is a funny thing
 - It's something we can have easily but it's not something we can take easily

A Department of Water Resources representative stops at a Texas ranch and talks with an old rancher. He tells the rancher, "I need to inspect your ranch for your water allocation. The old rancher says, "Okay, but don't go in that field over there."

The Water representative says, "Mister, I have the authority of the Federal Government with me. See this card? This card means I am allowed to go WHEREVER I WISH on any agricultural land. No questions asked or answered. Have I made myself clear? Do you understand?" The old rancher nods politely and goes about his chores.

Later, the old rancher hears loud screams and sees the Water Rep running for his life. And close behind is the rancher's bull. The bull is gaining with every step. The Rep is clearly terrified and yells to the rancher for help. So the old rancher immediately throws down his tools, runs to the fence and yells at the top of his lungs...

"Show him your card! Show him your card!"

- That water representative reminds us that we can't take authority that hasn't been granted to us
 - If we try, we're just setting ourselves up for a fall
 - Sooner or later, we'll find ourselves challenged by someone – or something – that doesn't respect our claims
- But when we have been given authority and that authority is challenged, then it's necessary to demonstrate our authority through the exercise of power
 - In the church, God grants a measure of authority to individuals
 - He grants authority to parents over their children
 - He grants authority to husbands over their wives

- He grants authority to teachers over their students
- He grants authority to elders over the flock
- And in Paul's day, the Lord granted apostles authority to found the church
- In each case, those in authority have the power to demonstrate their authority
 - That power is the word of God itself, which declares that these relationships exist
 - If we go against these sources of authority, we will experience the displeasure of God Himself, Who established these relationships
 - If we choose to rebel against these sources of authority, we may see consequences in this life
 - And we will most definitely experience loss of reward in eternity
- In the case of the apostles, the Lord granted unique authority and backed it with unique powers
 - Apostles were appointed to bring a new message to a people who weren't receptive
 - So God granted them power to persuade
 - They spoke with power and they performed miracles to validate their claims
 - These powers also gave the ability to quiet dissenters and oppose those who challenged their authority
 - The most memorable example of this power comes in Acts 5

Acts 5:1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,

Acts 5:2 and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet.

Acts 5:3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?"

Acts 5:4 "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

Acts 5:5 And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it.

Acts 5:6 The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.

Acts 5:7 Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

Acts 5:8 And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price."

Acts 5:9 Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well."

Acts 5:10 And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

- Merely by his words of judgment, Peter was able to bring these two to death
 - And we can see the effect it had on the church: fear of God and fear of the apostle's authority
 - This was healthy fear, in that it promoted obedience to God
- So now keeping in mind the power of the apostles, consider Paul's next words in Chapter 4

1Cor. 4:14 I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children.

1Cor. 4:15 For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

1Cor. 4:16 Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me.

1Cor. 4:17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.

- Paul starts by explaining that he didn't intend to embarrass the church with his hard words
 - Instead, Paul wants to admonish his beloved children
 - The word admonish means to correct with instruction
 - Paul is both chastising and teaching the church
 - And sometimes we need to combine both to get folks' attention
 - There is a time for discipline, and a time for instruction, and a time when we need to combine both
 - In this case, the church was suffering intense pride and arrogance
 - So simply educating the church wasn't enough to address their problems
 - They needed to be corrected, to be humbled, to have the pride set aside just long enough that they might be willing to hear Paul's instruction
 - So Paul admonishes them
 - Notice also that Paul calls them his beloved children
 - Paul isn't acting in anger or spite or with intent to hurt them
 - Like when a parent tells a child that a spanking is a sign of love, such is the case here
 - Paul is correcting in love

- In a nutshell, this is the reason we've been given both teachers and leaders in the church
 - There is a time to be taught, and teachers fill that role nicely
 - But there is a time for discipline and correction, even in the midst of teaching
 - And leaders with authority over the flock serve that role
 - If we are willing to accept teaching, then we must also be willing to accept the correction of leaders even if it wounds our pride or challenges our ego
 - Especially if it wounds our pride and ego!
 - This is a primary way the Lord disciplines His children
 - He admonishes them through leaders who are called to teach us even as they correct our behavior
 - Notice in v.15 Paul says that we might have countless teachers who educate us in our Christian walk, but we have a limited number of authority figures
 - Paul calls himself a father in the faith over Corinth
 - He's referring to his role as the founder of the church and the one who originally delivered the gospel in that region
 - This is no small matter, since it reveals the will of God to work through Paul
 - This church could see clearly that Paul was sent by God, and therefore it stands to reason that Paul carried God's stamp of approval
 - Like that water inspector, Paul had a card from God
 - Expect that Paul's card came with real power
 - Like we saw with Peter, Paul could back his words with authority
 - He could easily demonstrate by the Spirit that he was speaking with authority granted him by Christ
 - Surely, Paul had demonstrated his power in the past
- In v.16, Paul appeals to the church to imitate him since they knew he was a man following the Lord
 - To ensure they had an example to imitate, Paul took the extra step of sending his young protege, Timothy, from Ephesus to Corinth to serve as his representative on the ground
 - Paul knew it was important for the church to have a leader they could observe and emulate
 - Teaching is far more effective when it is modeled
 - So with Paul in Ephesus, he sends Timothy to Corinth to play the role of both teacher and example
 - Our leaders in the church exist to serve similar purposes as Paul and Timothy
 - Pastors, elders, and teachers are not apostles
 - So we're not equating these roles to the power and authority of an apostle
 - But they do play a comparable role in the church today in that they are called to do

the same three things for the sake of the body

- First, they are called to teach the church to follow Christ according to the word of God
- Secondly, they are called to model obedience through their own lives so that we might imitate them as they follow Christ
- Finally, they hold positions of authority over us to watch over our souls by admonishing us as needed to obey Christ
- We shouldn't neglect or minimize that third role
 - We will seek instructions from many teachers
 - But only have a few appointed leaders in the church
 - Just like we may have many adults in our extended family, yet we only have two parents
 - Christ has raised up church leaders so His sheep may be admonished or disciplined when necessary
- So we must recognize and accept the leadership of those God has placed over us so that we may gain the full benefit of that authority
 - When we receive correction, rebuke, admonishment and the like, we should consider those words carefully
 - Don't become defensive, don't reject difficult words out of hand
 - Consider the correction in light of scripture and in prayerful consideration of how to respond
 - As Hebrews says

Heb. 13:7 Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

- Leaders aren't perfect, so they won't always have the right perspective
 - But we ought to be very careful in challenging that authority
 - Because men rarely recognize their own errors until someone points it out
- If we do not submit to our leaders, we are in danger of becoming arrogant, just as the Corinthian church, as Paul says:

1Cor. 4:18 Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.
1Cor. 4:19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not

the words of those who are arrogant but their power.

1Cor. 4:20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power.

1Cor. 4:21 What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?

- Paul says the Corinthian church was showing evidence of arrogance in terms of rejecting authority
 - The key issue was lack of fear
 - Notice Paul says it is as if they assumed Paul would never return
 - This tells us that their arrogant behavior was inversely proportionate to their expectation of facing consequences
 - The less likely they were of facing consequences, the more arrogant they became
 - Just like every 4 year old child
 - The less likely of getting caught, the more likely they will misbehave
- So Paul corrects this bad assumption
 - Paul would return one day, and when that happens these people will be called to account for their arrogance and disobedience
 - Because the kingdom of God exists in power, not merely words
- This is a great statement, filled with meaning
 - First, today the kingdom of God is a kingdom of people, the believers on earth
 - And that kingdom doesn't exist merely in words, meaning it isn't merely some human institution created by creeds and doctrines
 - It is an entity built with real spiritual power, the power of Christ's Spirit working in the hearts of men
- Moreover, it includes spiritual gifts given to leaders like Paul, which can bring punishment to the rebel
 - Paul asks when he returns, would they prefer he come in love and gentleness or with a rod (meaning a rod of correction)
 - Paul is offering an implicit threat of doing to this church what Peter did in Jerusalem in Acts 5
- Today, our leaders don't possess the powers of apostles, but that doesn't mean they are deserving of any less respect or submission
 - Leaders serve over us to educate us and direct us into a closer walk with Christ
 - A good leader asks questions, examines our life, encourages us to persevere and to do better, and corrects us when he finds fault
 - To object to these things is arrogance and Hebrews says it will be unprofitable for us when we reach the day of our judgment
 - Paul reminds Corinth he has authority, he has power and he has words of wisdom they need to hear

- And if they were offended by what he wrote in Chapters 1-4, then they're really going to be bothered by what follows
- In Chapter 5, we'll hear of great immoralities in the church
- And a failing to fulfill the basic mission of the church
- Such are the consequences of failing to hear and obey the word of God and the leaders appointed to help lead us into righteousness

- Today we move into the second major section of Paul's letter
 - In the first four chapters of his letter, Paul spoke to the Corinthian church about their pride, arrogance and spiritual immaturity
 - He was addressing the underlying cause for so much of their troubles and missteps
 - Arrogance and pride are so dangerous in the lives of Christians because they become excuses for doing whatever we want and thinking ourselves OK in the process
 - Paul has disabused this notion in Chapters 1-4
 - They are not wise; they are acting foolishly
 - They are not powerful and successful; they are living in their flesh like the spiritual infants they are
 - Paul made this observation based on feedback he received from Chloe's delegation
 - But we've yet to learn what Paul heard that prompted this stern correction
 - What did Chloe report to Paul?
 - The answer to that question dominates the rest of the letter
 - In this next section, we'll learn what Paul heard
 - He will take each allegation and address it in turn
 - In each case, Paul issues an admonition
 - He will provide teaching in combination with discipline or correction
 - Generally, each issue is allocated one or more chapters, so the breaks in topics will follow chapter breaks
- This morning, Paul addresses perhaps the most serious sin of all he heard about: tolerating serious sexual immorality within the church body
 - Paul explains what he's heard in Chapter 5 vs.1-2

1Cor. 5:1 **It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.**

1Cor. 5:2 **You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.**

- Paul says it is “actually” reported that there is immorality among you
 - This report is Chloe's report, as we said
 - Paul says it was actually reported...
 - Paul uses the Greek word *holos* which means “completely”
 - The sense of that word in this context is one of incredulity
 - Paul can hardly believe his ears

- So Paul says I find this hard to believe, but I'm told you are engaging in immorality, which is the Greek word *porneia*
 - That word can have wide meaning, but it generally describes sexual activity prior to and outside the institution of marriage
 - Among Hellenistic Jews, the word *porneia* referred to any kind of extramarital affair, including homosexuality
 - The New Testament letters routinely warn against *porneia* precisely because it was such a common behavior among newly-converted Greek believers
- Paul names the specific sin involved: a man who has his father's wife
 - Paul doesn't say a man has his mother, but his father's wife
 - And Paul uses a Greek verb meaning "to have" in the present tense
 - When used in a sexual context, it refers to an ongoing relationship, not a single encounter
- So, putting all this together, it seems that a man was now living with a woman who used to be (or perhaps still was) his stepmother
 - While divorce was common in Greek society, both Greeks and Romans took a dim view of incest and Roman law prohibited it
- So Paul says this kind of adulterous, immoral behavior is not even tolerated by the Greeks
 - What kind of thinking must be present in the church of God for men to think they have freedom to engage in behavior that even the unbelieving world rejects as too sinful?
 - Paul names it in v.2
 - He says the church is showing evidence of arrogance
 - The word arrogance is *hubris*, thinking we are above accountability
 - Which leads to outlandish behavior unrestrained by a fear of consequences
 - This church was arrogant, without fear of consequences for immoral behavior
 - The proof of their arrogance was their willingness to tolerate this behavior within the church
 - Presumably, this couple were welcomed to church meetings, participating in the gathering without concern
 - No one said anything to them, no one made any demands that they repent and turn to godliness
 - Paul says no one mourned what they saw
 - The proper thing for this church to do would be to set this couple outside the fellowship of the church until they repented and corrected their behavior
 - Paul is speaking of church discipline, the process of using the influence of the body to motivate its members to put away sin and live holy and pleasing lives to the Lord

- Frankly, the church has limited weapons in the battle against sin and corruption in the body
- We admonish, we counsel, we pray and when necessary, we set people outside fellowship
- While the sin of this couple is very significant, don't overlook that Paul reserved the focus of his critique for the church body itself
 - The church's failure to "put this couple out" of the church is Paul's principle concern in this chapter
 - Every church body will encounter bad behavior from time to time among its members
 - And sometimes that behavior will be especially egregious, as it was in this case
 - But in all cases, the test of maturity and sobriety in a church is how the church body responds to such things
 - Do we acknowledge it?
 - Do we confront it?
 - Do we address it?
 - How did Paul expect this church to respond to the circumstances at hand?
 - He gives his admonition beginning in v.3

1Cor. 5:3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.

1Cor. 5:4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus,

1Cor. 5:5 I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

- This is a rare expression of Paul's apostolic authority
 - Paul says he has executed a judgment upon this man from a distance
 - Paul was physically absent from Corinth at the time he wrote this letter (i.e., "absent in body")
 - But his apostolic powers didn't depart from Corinth when his body did
- So Paul says he has already made a determination or judgment of how this couple is to be disciplined and that judgment will now take place
 - Remember the apostles had powers to execute earthly judgment on Christ's behalf for the good of the church
 - As we saw with Peter putting Ananias & Sapphira to death over their sin of lying
 - This is Paul's Ananias & Sapphira moment
- So what exactly was Paul commanding to take place?

- First, notice in v.3, Paul is disciplining only the man in the situation
 - This was in keeping with the culture
 - The woman was also guilty of sin, but women were presumed to be victims of male authority in these circumstances
 - Much the way a student assaulted by a teacher is not held to account in the same way that the teacher will be
 - So while the woman has engaged in sin, her sin is not the focus of the discipline
 - Furthermore, her sin will end when the man is put out of fellowship
- Secondly, Paul commands the church to assemble
 - Paul is requiring that the process of putting the member outside fellowship take place when the entire church was gathered
 - Presumably, the leaders of the church would explain the man's sin to the congregation
 - Then the leaders would announce that Paul had determined this man must be put outside fellowship
- Third, Paul says the man's personal consequence for this sin will be to see his flesh destroyed at the hands of Satan yet his spirit saved
 - Paul is describing excommunication, that is the cutting off of fellowship in the church
 - In this vulnerable position, the man is left without the support structure of the church
 - And Paul says that the Lord will permit Satan to attack this man in such a way that his earthly life will come to a premature end
 - We can imagine what that might look like
 - Disease, Roman persecution, violence
 - But remember the story of Ananias & Sapphira
 - The man's ultimate end was likely something supernatural
 - His earthly life was cut short because Paul had judged him
 - And in v.4 Paul says he does so by the power given to him by the Lord as an apostle
 - Yet Paul says there was a good outcome in this judgment, that the man's spirit is saved
 - What does "saved" mean in this context?
 - The key to interpreting this statement is found in the phrase "in the day of the Lord"
 - That day refers to the judgment day when the Lord judges believers and assigns rewards
 - That day is NOT the day we receive salvation...so Paul isn't talking about the man becoming a believer

- The man IS a believer, so Paul is trying to preserve (i.e., save) his eternal reward, what little there remains of it
- The point is that it would be better for this man to see his earthly life cut short than to go on sinning in this way
 - Every day this man lives and continues in this terrible sin, his heavenly account balance is dropping
 - Like a man spending his retirement savings, this Christian was in danger of losing everything the Lord had stored up for him in the Kingdom
 - So if this man wasn't going to repent, then the next best possible outcome was to die early to minimize the damage he might inflict upon himself and others
- This is a sobering truth, isn't it?
 - The Lord is loving and generous, but He is also demanding and perfectly just in His judgments
 - If we use the time He has given us to serve Him well, as Paul said in Chapter 2

1Cor. 2:9 but just as it is written,

**“THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,
AND which HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN,
ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.”**

- He has the power to reward us beyond anything we could want or even imagine in this world
- A wonderful and glorious life awaits God's children in the Kingdom
- But the Lord is also a true and righteous judge
 - So He must also take into account our rebellion, unholiness, and faithlessness
 - He isn't holding these sins against us for the sake of righteousness
 - We are declared righteous because we have been given Christ's righteousness
- But there is still an accounting for our service, as how we serve determines how we will be rewarded
 - And if our service is not pleasing, then our reward will be less
 - It can get to zero, as Paul says in Chapter 3, like coming through fire with nothing
- Peter warns us to remain mindful of this coming judgment, knowing the Lord will deal with us in strict fairness

1Pet. 1:17 If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth;

- Knowing that the Lord is impartial and fair should motivate us to live sober and upright

lives, aware the times are short

- And having concern for how that judgment will go for each of us
- Consider some of the warnings the apostles give us concerning how that day will go if we persist in disobedience

Heb. 10:26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

Heb. 10:27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.

Heb. 10:30 For we know Him who said, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.” And again, “THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.”

Heb. 10:31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Heb. 10:35 Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

Heb. 10:36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

Heb. 10:37 FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE,

HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY.

Heb. 10:38 BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH;

AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.

Heb. 10:39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

- Paul delivered this man to Satan to end his life as a last-ditch effort to rescue his soul from the judgment he awaits
 - Had that man been allowed to live another decade or two engaged in this sin, who knows how bad that judgment would have been for him?
 - He still had eternal life
 - And salvation was never in question because he was saved by faith alone
 - But don't minimize the Lord's judgment because you have received grace
 - The writer of Hebrews says if those who disobeyed the Law of Moses suffered death of the body, how much worse will God's judgment be for those who have disgraced the blood of Christ?
 - It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of a living God
- So Paul directs three things: the man is to be set outside fellowship, the moment of discipline is to be public, and this earthly punishment is taken in the hope of obtaining a better spiritual judgment
 - These three principles must guide all forms of church discipline

- First, we must address willful sinning within the body of Christ when we are confronted by it
- Paul never suggests we are to form squads of inspectors to seek out sin or investigate church members
 - We should never want to pry or become busybodies
 - Our intent should also be loving and healthy
- But when immorality comes to our attention, we must have enough love and courage to act on the news
 - The New Testament gives us parameters for how to respond in love through our leaders
 - The first steps are always done in private with a hope of encouraging repentance and self-correction
- So the second principle is that when our private efforts to correct sin in the body fail, the church must be willing to take the matter public (meaning to the church body)
 - Not to the unbelieving world, but within the church
 - Our hope is that a public exposure of the matter might place additional pressure on the individual to do the right thing
 - At the very least, if the person continues to resist the will of the Lord and the church, then the rest of the church will have motivation to avoid making the same mistake
 - Since they will have witnessed this person's public shame and condemnation for their sin
 - And they will be admonished not to walk in their footsteps
- Finally, we take these hard steps in love in view of eternal consequences
 - We practice this process with an understanding that though the short term effect may be negative in terms of relationships and peace in the body...
 - ...we are working toward eternal outcomes
 - The person being disciplined may react very negatively to our efforts to correct their sin
 - But these risks are well-worth the possibility of improving their eternal judgment
 - Furthermore, we are working in the best interests of the body as a whole and the mission of representing Christ to the world
- I know of a case when a church exercised this discipline process with great positive outcome
 - Two teenagers active in the church engaged in immorality; premarital sex
 - The result was a pregnancy, which meant the sin was brought to light both to teenagers' parents and to church leadership
 - The leadership called the couple to account before the body

- They were instructed to speak publicly before the entire church, confessing and repenting of their sin
- The teens were truly repentant, and so they agreed to submit to the church leadership and make the public confession
 - The result was profound
 - The church body was stunned but immediately after the news, they embraced the teens, wept with them, committed to helping them get through the experience
 - The church loved on those teens and they chose to put the baby up for adoption
 - More importantly, the Lord was glorified
 - The teens were transparently restored in fellowship
 - The body was reminded of the need to remain chaste and pure until marriage
 - And the entire church witnessed the wisdom of God's word lived out
- If we ignore sin among our members or excuse it or approve it, then the church body is guilty of an offense worse than the sin we have approved
 - Paul explains the danger of tolerating sin in the body in vs. 6-8

1Cor. 5:6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?

1Cor. 5:7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.

1Cor. 5:8 Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

- Notice again that Paul says this church is boasting
 - I doubt that Paul means this church is walking around bragging about a man sleeping with his stepmother
 - The church was celebrating this immoral relationship in the sense that they accepted it, perhaps thinking that grace makes such things possible
 - But when we approve someone else's sin – even if simply by not acting to correct it – then we are condemned by our approval

Rom. 14:22 The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

- There is a sin of approving sin, that is, to seem to give our approval to bad behavior
- But it's important to note this sin only applies to the fellowship of believers

- We are not called to criticize or attempt to discipline unbelievers
- Sinners sin, that's what sinners do
- We don't solve the problem of a sinner through disciplining the behavior
- We address that problem by preaching the Gospel so that they might become a new person in Christ
- But we must be careful about turning a blind to sin in the body
- Paul says such behavior is a form of arrogance and it leads to bigger problems in the body
 - He uses a familiar biblical metaphor to explain the danger: a little sin leavens the whole lump of dough
 - The metaphor draws a comparison to yeast causing dough to rise
 - We put only a comparably small amount of yeast in a large lump of dough
 - And that small ingredient causes the entire lump of dough to change
 - Likewise, if we allow a single person to live within the body of Christ with obvious, unrepentant sin, the entire body of Christ is polluted by their influence
 - The rest of the body is likely to look upon that person and their sin and draw wrong conclusions
 - We might assume that the behavior is permissible
 - We might assume that Christ or at least the church leaders don't care about our behavior
 - We might assume that sin doesn't necessarily carry consequences
 - We might assume that our personal behavior and choices don't matter to our faith
 - We might assume that salvation by grace through faith means we have nothing to worry about when we sin
 - All of these assumptions are terribly wrong, and a church that thinks this way is a church headed for disaster
 - If not now, certainly in their judgment day
 - So when we allow sin to persist in our midst, we are potentially doing injury to our own day of judgment
 - You might have overlooked others' sin in the past thinking that it was their problem
 - Perhaps you assumed that only they stood to suffer for their mistakes
 - But what if I told you that if you allow that sin to persist unchecked, it has the potential to rob you of eternal reward?
 - The power of sin is in its ability to reproduce itself, to spread to all men, Paul says in Romans
 - Is that a chance you are willing to take? Are you willing to suffer eternal loss of your reward so that a brother or sister may continue in sin?

- So the solution is to cut out the cancer before it kills the entire body
 - Paul extends his metaphor by ordering the church to cut out the leaven so the lump becomes new
 - Paul's referring to the Jewish feast of unleavened bread
 - Interestingly, Paul is speaking to a Greek church that lacked a background in Jewish feasts
 - So he must have explained the spiritual meaning of the Exodus and the feast commemorating the Israelites flight from Egypt
 - A flight from slavery is exactly the picture Paul has for this church now
 - They are in bondage to arrogance and the sin it produces in the body
 - They need to cut those chains
 - Just as Israel was set free from their chains in Egypt and ran from Pharaoh
 - So the church should cut themselves free of the sin of this individual (and all like him) so that they might walk without sin as a people
 - Paul says we must not celebrate and approve sin, we must celebrate sincerity and truth
 - Let's hold up values of honesty and transparency
 - Not busybodiness but healthy concern for others
 - Let's reward sincerity and confession and repentance
 - Don't condone selfishness, immorality, rebellion, arrogance and unholiness
 - Let's all seek for a good reward on the day of the Lord

- Last week we began the second major section of Paul's letter to Corinth
 - This section is Paul's response to a laundry list of issues brought to Paul's attention
 - Each issue reflects spiritual immaturity and ignorance
 - When you combine immaturity and ignorance, you end up in arrogance
 - Hubris we called it last week
 - A church self-satisfied and unconcerned with the consequences of their choices and decisions
 - But there are consequences for sin
 - And those consequences reach beyond ourselves, especially if the sin takes place in a public manner within the church
 - Simply put, as Christians we have been bought with a price, the blood of Christ
 - So we no longer own our own decisions and choices...Christ owns us and directs us and judges us
 - He makes His will known by His word, and He calls us to account within the structure of the church body
 - Ultimately, we will still be called to account when we die
 - So if we're determined to rebel against God's word, against parents, against church leaders or other institutions
 - We may escape the consequences of that rebellion for a time
 - But one day those decisions will come to rest upon us
 - Unless we repent and turn from those ways
- That's what Paul is doing now in his letter: calling the church to repentance so it may receive a better result in the day of the Lord
 - The first issue Paul addressed in Chapter 5 last week was the tolerance of sexual immorality in the church
 - Men and women in the church will make immoral choices from time to time
 - And these things should concern us
 - But Paul's biggest concern was the church's tolerance of this behavior
 - The church tolerated, even celebrated, an openly immoral sexual relationship in the church body
 - Paul said the right response was to put the man out of fellowship so that the behavior might be corrected
 - The man and woman would be preserving whatever they had left of eternal inheritance
 - While the rest of the church body learned the lesson that sin within the body is not acceptable and must be addressed
- As we pick up again in Chapter 5 and into 6, Paul connects this first issue of tolerating sin to a second problem of judging others appropriately

1Cor. 5:9 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people;

1Cor. 5:10 I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.

1Cor. 5:11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler — not even to eat with such a one.

1Cor. 5:12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?

1Cor. 5:13 But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.

- In v.9 Paul refers to an earlier letter written to the church
 - This is how we know that 1 Corinthians is not actually the first letter Paul wrote to the church
 - In that earlier letter, Paul evidently told the church not to associate with immoral people
 - The word immoral again finds its root in *porneia* (pornos in this case)
 - So it's a reference to sexually immoral people
 - Fornicators, adulterers, & homosexuals
 - When the church read Paul's words, they assumed Paul was speaking about unbelievers in the city of Corinth
 - They must have withdrawn themselves from most of Corinthian society, since sexual immorality was rampant in the city
 - Perhaps they shunned neighbors, family and friends
 - Perhaps they were patrons of only certain businesses
 - In short, they exercised judgment toward the unbelieving world
 - This is the type of judgment Jesus was speaking of when He said we are not to judge others

Luke 6:35 “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.

Luke 6:36 “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Luke 6:37 “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned.

- Jesus teaches us not to judge others in the context of unbelievers
 - Notice He begins in v.35 with the statement love your enemies

- And then says be merciful to those who oppose you
- Then He ends with don't judge those people, the unbeliever who opposes you
 - In fact, if we treat them with kindness it will be repaid to us in like manner
- So Jesus taught do not judge in reference to unbelievers
- He gave this instruction to guard us against assuming an attitude of superiority or pride or arrogance against sinners
 - To judge them means to consider ourselves better than them
 - We're holding their sin against them, forgetting that we are no different than they are
 - We are every bit the sinner the rest of the world is
 - Except that we have been forgiven by faith
 - And we received that forgiveness so that we could become an ambassador to the unbeliever
 - Ambassadors can't fulfill their mission if they treat their target audience with contempt
 - If we distance ourselves from the sinning world through a judgmental heart, we fail in our role
 - Withholding fellowship and kindness from the unbeliever won't make us more holy
 - We're already washed clean by the blood of Christ
 - And judging them isn't going to lead them into repentance
 - It's the kindness of God that leads men to repentance
 - We've been called to bring the world the Gospel message, which is the solution to their sin
 - But when we judge them, we declare they are unfit for our company and our message
 - The truth is exactly the opposite: Jesus delivered the Gospel for the sake of the sinner, not the righteous
 - He came to heal the sick, not the healthy
 - If our judgment drives the believer away, we've withheld the very thing that can address their sin
 - That's why judging unbelievers is a sin, Jesus says
- This was the conclusion the Corinthian church made, and so now Paul corrects that thinking
 - In v.10 he says he never meant for the church to disassociate from immoral people in the world
 - Paul lists some examples of immorality he must have listed in his first letter when he originally wrote these commands

- Paul says we aren't to avoid the covetous of the world
 - We don't avoid swindlers
 - We don't stay away from idolaters
- Paul chooses three types of sin typical of the world to make his obvious point
- The only way you and I could avoid contact with people who covet, people who cheat others, people who have idols would be to leave the planet Earth
 - Literally every human being is probably guilty of those things at one time or another
 - And among unbelievers, these behaviors will be common
- So for the church to conclude that Paul wanted them to stay away from unbelievers who exhibit these traits was patently ridiculous
 - And as we explained earlier, it was completely against the mission of the Church
 - We are supposed to spend time with these people to persuade them to the truth of the Gospel
- Paul says in the end, the Lord will be their judge, so we aren't to take that role in the meantime
 - We spend time in the world so that we may influence it
 - And we cannot influence it if we are not engaged in relationships with the world
 - It's literally impossible to limit our relationships to godly people
- The modern practice of boycotting companies because of their policies is a good example of the Church judging the unbelieving world
 - Why should it surprise or bother us when Company X has a policy to support immoral living or to fund immoral practices?
 - Every company is made up of immoral people who practice immorality
 - They are lost and dying in their sin, so naturally they act according to that sinful heart
 - More importantly, it is literally impossible to do business with only moral companies
 - Did you eat this morning? You ate food grown by immoral farmers
 - Some of those farmers beat their wives
 - Some don't pay their taxes
 - Some commit adultery
 - And that food was transported to your store by truck drivers, among whom some were immoral in various ways
 - And that food was stocked by sinful grocery store employees
 - And the car you drove it home in was built by immoral people and the roads you drove on were built by immoral people
 - And even the fork that carried that food into your mouth was being held by a sinful hand attached to your sinful body

- This is the problem Paul was talking about when he wrote this letter
 - We are not instructed by scripture to avoid immoral people in the world
 - We are not called to boycott this company or that company so we can show them our disfavor at their policies and practices
 - We are not called to judge unbelievers, for there is nothing to be gained in doing so
 - We are called to go to them in a spirit of love with the Gospel so they might receive the same mercy we received
 - And then we are to judge ourselves so that we might please God
- So we are to freely associate with the unbelieving world, however nothing in Paul's statement suggests we are to partake in their sin with them
 - While we must and should spend time with and around unbelievers, we should always be careful to remain unstained by that sin
 - We can spend time with someone, even as they might engage in sin, without becoming a party to that sin
 - So long as our association with that person is focused on bringing them to a knowledge of the truth
 - These moments are not social events; it's about conducting the business of our Father
 - Like an ambassador sent to a foreign country is there on business
 - But to conduct his business, he must participate in dinners with the local rulers and citizens
 - He is socializing but for a purpose
 - It's important to remember this balance as we conduct ourselves in our stay on earth, as Peter said
 - If we are not careful, we can fail in our mission in one of two ways
 - Either we can isolate ourselves so much that we have no chance to influence anyone
 - Or we become too close to the sin of the unbelieving world that they corrupt us and undermine our message
 - As Paul says in 2 Corinthians

1Cor. 15:33 Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.”

- So Paul directs a change in focus in the church
 - He says the church must associate with the sinners of the world, but we are NOT to associate with immoral, unrepentant believers
 - If someone in the church consistently, unrepentantly engages in immoral behavior, then they are to be judged and set outside fellowship

- Unlike unbelievers, the church is commanded to judge believers
- Interestingly, Paul calls those sinning inside the church “so-called” brothers
 - The Greek word is *onomazo*, which means “named”
 - By using this word, Paul is calling into question the heart of anyone who claims the name Christian but makes no effort to confirm their life to Christ’s commandments
 - They are “so-called” Christians because they are making claims to the name, but the evidence is lacking
 - Paul isn’t declaring that such people are always unbelievers
 - Sometimes they are believers bent on rebellion
 - Other times they are unbelievers pretending to be Christian
 - We can’t know their heart truly, so we are left with uncertainty
- In the end, it makes little difference, since Paul says such a person is to be judged according to the standards of the church
 - The church is to pass judgment on any in the church who continue in immorality
 - And that judgment results in taking action against the offender in the church
- Clearly, learning and applying Paul’s teaching correctly is so important, otherwise we run the risk of doing more harm than good
 - First, notice that we are judging immorality
 - We are not judging bad behavior in a lesser form
 - This isn’t a question of how someone dresses or whether they act rudely at times, etc.
 - Paul is speaking about judgments made against individuals who are morally corrupt, unrepentant and doing damage to the body
 - Going back to something I said last week...we don’t want to become busybodies in the church nor do we seek conflict or wish to bring shame
 - Only in the worst situations would this response be required
 - Secondly, notice this is a corporate judgment based on corporate concerns
 - Believers are not commanded, nor are we even allowed, to make a judgment about another believer much less assess a penalty
 - Paul is speaking about how the body corporately should respond to the sin of one of its members
 - On an individual basis, our personal response to another person’s sin is always the same: forgiveness
 - We forgive each other and show grace to each other because this is the basis for Christian love
 - It may sound strange but it’s possible for a congregation to forgive a fellow believer individually even as it acts corporately to put them out of fellowship

- In the same way that the victim of a crime may forgive her attacker yet still testify against him ensuring he goes to prison
- There is a difference between our individual responsibilities and our corporate response to sin
- Thirdly, the response of the church must be complete separation
 - Paul emphasizes that the church may not even eat with this person
 - As with the example of leaven
 - We can't let even a little of this person's influence in the church
 - The practical implications of this action are significant
 - The person's family might need to separate from them as well
 - Remember the church family is a strong bond according to Jesus, stronger than even our earthly family bonds
 - Also remember, the point of these steps is to trigger repentance and ultimately restoration to the body
 - Only without the sin
- Next week we continue on the general topic of judgment as Paul moves into the third topic of concern in this church
 - He has heard that individual members of the church who had disputes with one another were taking those disputes to local Greek courts
 - Paul will explain why this is wrong and give them a new way
 - The central problem remains an arrogant, hypocritical and ignorant church body
 - They stand in judgment of the unbelieving world rather than reaching out to them
 - Yet they gladly take disputes between themselves to those same pagan unbelievers asking for relief
 - While ignoring their responsibility to execute judgment of one another inside the church
 - This then leads Paul into a discussion of eternal judgment and our role in executing that judgment

- Onward we go in the list of concerns Paul is addressing in Corinth
 - Last week, Paul demanded the church cease in judging unbelievers
 - Stop isolating themselves from the very people they were supposed to win over for Christ
 - Be in the world so they can represent Christ
 - But at the same time, they should be of the world
 - The church must judge itself and hold itself accountable so we won't share in the sin of the world
 - Tolerating sin is self-destructive to the body of Christ
 - So while we can't judge others, we must acknowledge and respond to unrepentant sin in the body of Christ
- The discussion of judging within the church leads Paul into the third major issue in the church

1Cor. 6:1 Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?

- Chloe reported to Paul that men within the church were settling personal disputes by taking one another to Greek courts
 - Essentially, one man would sue another over some concern
 - The word translated law is *krino*, in the middle voice in Greek
 - *Krino* is judge in Greek, and the middle voice would be translated “going before judgment”
 - So the Corinthian Christians were turning to Greek courts and Greek judges seeking relief
 - Paul opens this section with a series of rhetorical questions to get the church’s attention to the seriousness of this matter
 - In fact, Paul is going to use this technique throughout this chapter, often beginning his questions with the phrase “do you not know”
 - Here again, Paul’s style reveals his personal frustration at their immature behavior
 - By asking questions in this way, Paul is scolding them even as he teaches, which is admonishment
 - He had taught these things in one form or another, but apparently they went in one ear and out the other in this church
- Clearly Paul is not happy that this church is seeking judgment from the pagan, unbelieving world in Corinth, but we need to read further to understand why this bothers Paul

1Cor. 6:2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?

1Cor. 6:3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?

- Paul's first "do you not know" question raises the topic of the next age
 - Paul says in a time to come, the Lord will allow the saints to judge the world
 - What time is Paul describing?
 - He's referring to the coming Messianic or Millennial Kingdom, which will last for 1,000 years following Jesus' Second Coming
 - That Kingdom will exist on the Earth as a very real, very complex world like the one we have today
 - Believers in Jesus Christ will join Christ in that world in resurrected, sinless, eternal bodies
 - We will live with Christ, Who will reign over this earthly world
 - And scripture says we will share in His reign, judging the world in which we live

Rev. 20:4 Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

- We see this truth reflected in numerous other places in the New Testament
 - Jesus says in the seven letters to the church that the family of believers are designated by our faith as a kingdom of priests and rulers over the Kingdom to come

Rev. 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying,
“Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

Rev. 5:10 “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”

- Jesus will grant us authority to rule even as the Father has granted Him all authority over the Earth

Rev. 2:26 'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS;

Rev. 2:27 AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father;

- Notice Jesus says our authority doesn't arrive until He has assumed His role as ruler over the nations
- This moment arrives at His Second Coming when the Kingdom on earth is established, as Daniel teaches

Dan. 7:26 'But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever.

Dan. 7:27 'Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.'

- Finally, Jesus says our authority in that Kingdom will be determined by our faithfulness in this time we serve Him
 - Our life on earth now is a "try-out" to demonstrate to Jesus that we are worthy of greater opportunity to serve Him in the Kingdom
 - Jesus taught this truth in a well-known parable

Luke 19:15 "When he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him so that he might know what business they had done.

Luke 19:16 "The first appeared, saying, 'Master, your mina has made ten minas more.'

Luke 19:17 "And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.'

Luke 19:18 "The second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.'

Luke 19:19 "And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.'

- Furthermore, in v.3 Paul says we will one day judge even the fallen angels
 - Jude tells us that the angels (i.e., demons) who sinned in the days of Noah are held in chains until the day of judgment

Jude 6 And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of

the great day,

- Now we learn from Paul that the saints who have returned to earth with Jesus on that day will participate in that judgment of the world, including of angels
- We don't know much more about that moment, and I wonder why we would have anything to say in the judgment of demons
 - Perhaps we are made aware of the ways in which these demons conspired against us in our days on earth
 - If so, then perhaps we are given opportunity to pronounce judgment against those demons that brought harm to us
 - If my speculation is correct, then it would mean that though the Lord allows demons to impact our lives today, He is also planning for our opportunity to obtain justice in the future
- Then in the second half of vs.2 & 3, Paul makes his application with two more rhetorical questions
 - In v2. he asks, if the Lord considers us capable of reigning over the world with Him then certainly we should be able to judge trifling matters among ourselves
 - Paul doesn't mean that our concerns today aren't serious or complicated at times
 - But by comparison, the kind of judgments we make today are insignificant compared to the level of authority and judgment we will possess in the Kingdom
 - And in the second half of v.3, Paul repeats the conclusion
 - If we are deemed by the Lord to be worthy of judging angelic beings, can't we handle human matters?
 - Would an accomplished surgeon seek medical advice from a first-year medical student?
 - Would a professional basketball athlete get tips from high school players?
 - Now Paul is not suggesting that Christians are automatically more wise in legal matters than unbelievers, for we know there are unbelievers with much greater legal expertise
 - Paul is speaking about outcomes, not expertise
 - The body of Christ possesses God's wisdom and has the benefit of the Spirit's guidance
 - These qualities are superior to the world's wisdom for the purpose of arriving at just and righteous outcomes
 - Christians may – and often will – judge matters very differently than the unbelieving world would
 - Not because we have greater legal expertise than they
 - But because we have different values and see matters with an eternal outlook

- So these opening questions beg a central question: why would Christians hand over judgment of their disputes to people who do not share our values or outlook?
 - That's the question Paul raises in the next set of verses

1Cor. 6:4 So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church?

1Cor. 6:5 I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren,

1Cor. 6:6 but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?

- Paul's question in v.4 is a little difficult to follow in our English translation
 - A better translation would be "Then when you have need for judgment in matters of this life, you select judges who have no standing in the church."
 - Though the church will one day judge all matters of the eternal kingdom, for now it has reversed roles with the unbelieving world
 - The church selected Greek courts to be their judges, men who have no knowledge of, or relationship to, the church and to Christ
 - Under what circumstances would the church expect an unbeliever's point of view to be preferable to the judgment of fellow believers?
 - The obvious answer is that the church body didn't see anyone in the church who could exercise judgment with wisdom and fairness
 - Self-evidently, if the church was willing to seek outside judgment from men who didn't know the Lord, didn't know His word and didn't have His Spirit, then they must have had a pretty low opinion of leaders and judges within the body
 - That's the conclusion Paul comes to in v.5
 - He says he points out that this situation is to the shame of the church
 - Specifically, it's shameful that there is not one among the church wise enough to handle these matters
 - The collective immaturity of this church was evidenced, once again, by their choices and actions
 - In this case, it was evidenced by brother willing to take brother before an unbeliever to settle a matter
- So how far do we take Paul's teaching? What obligations does the church have today when it comes to settling disputes?
 - Well, let's be careful to separate the biblical principle Paul is teaching from the specific application he makes for Corinth
 - I see at least two principles at the center of Paul's teaching
 - First, the church must seek to settle disputes within the family of God
 - We should not air our dirty laundry in front of the unbelieving world

- Paul's concern is not strictly one of maintaining an image, though our witness could be at risk
 - The real concern is whether the church is settling disputes according to the right standards
 - Our standards will be different than the unbelieving world
 - Therefore, our judgments must look different
 - If we seek counsel from unbelievers, we're likely to be pulled farther from the Lord and His word by that counsel
- The second principle is one of preparing for the kingdom responsibilities we will bear
 - Paul says it is to the shame of the church that they found no one in their ranks capable of exercising judgment over small matters
 - The church must take seriously our responsibility to make the most of the "minas" the Lord has assigned to us
 - So that in the judgment day we will be counted worthy of "ten cities" as Jesus assigns awards
- These principle doesn't automatically preclude using law courts when absolutely necessary
 - For example, if our dispute lies with an unbeliever, then clearly we must use regular law courts to settle the matter
 - We cannot expect an unbeliever to subject himself to the judgment of church leaders
 - And unfortunately there may also be times when we use a law court to settle disputes with a brother or sister
 - Probably the most common example would be a Christian couple going through a legal divorce
 - Ignoring the fact that divorce is wrong by itself, to conduct the divorce before an unbelieving judge adds sin on top of sin
 - Remember, Paul says when we take a believer to court rather than settling the matter in the church, such a situation is to our shame
 - We may win our case in court
 - But we may also be risking something far greater in the loss of heavenly reward because we took this course of action
 - It would be better to lose the earthly dispute to preserve our heavenly reward
 - Which is what Paul concludes

1Cor. 6:7 *Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?*

- For these Corinthians, Paul says it was “already” a defeat to go to the unbelieving court
 - The word in Greek for defeat is *hettema*, which literally means loss
 - I think that is the better translation in this situation
 - Paul is saying you have already lost something when you take a believer into the world’s courtroom
 - That’s the difference between living with a worldly perspective and an eternal perspective
 - As Christians, we are told to consider the eternal implications for every decision we make
 - As we conduct ourselves in this age, think about the next
 - As we live with our wife or husband
 - As we raise our kids
 - As we spend our money, as we schedule our time
 - How are these decisions impacting the glory of the Lord, and therefore our judgment and inheritance?
 - When we make a decision to take a brother or sister to an unbelieving judge, we have made a decision with eternal implications
 - Paul says even if we win that case in the courtroom, there will be loss
 - Perhaps the dispute is over money, property, custody, or some other right we feel we are owed
 - Regardless of what we win for ourselves in this life, how will it compare to the eternal reward that could have been ours?
 - It’s hard to believe that whatever we could obtain in a human court would be worth the loss of what Jesus might award us
- That’s why Paul says in v.7, why would we rather be wronged or defrauded?
 - If your brother or sister is determined to act sinfully against you, why would you fight them and join in that sin?
 - When Jesus was struck, he didn’t fight back
 - He was being wronged, but Jesus withheld His right to defend Himself because under the circumstances it would have resulted in the loss of His reward
 - The Father had commanded Him to submit to that abuse for the good of all creation
 - So Jesus preserved His eternal reward
 - Isaiah prophetically described Jesus’ situation

**Is. 53:7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,**

And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.

Is. 53:8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away;
And as for His generation, who considered
That He was cut off out of the land of the living
For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?
Is. 53:9 His grave was assigned with wicked men,
Yet He was with a rich man in His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

Is. 53:10 But the LORD was pleased
To crush Him, putting Him to grief;
If He would render Himself as a guilt offering,
He will see His offspring,
He will prolong His days,
And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.

Is. 53:11 As a result of the anguish of His soul,
He will see it and be satisfied;
By His knowledge the Righteous One,
My Servant, will justify the many,
As He will bear their iniquities.

Is. 53:12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,
And He will divide the booty with the strong;
Because He poured out Himself to death,
And was numbered with the transgressors;
Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,
And interceded for the transgressors.

- Is it too great a thing for Jesus to ask us to follow in His footsteps, to forgo some earthly gains if means pleasing the Father?
 - We're conditioned by the unbelieving world to think we have a "right" to justice and to recompense, even with our brothers and sisters
 - We let our earthly needs and our pride and ego get in the way of godliness and charity and forgiveness and grace
 - According to scripture it's better to lose your court case, even if it means suffering financial loss, than that we would lose the Lord's approval
- So let's summarize the practical implications of Paul's teaching
 - First, the church should be the place we bring our disputes between believers
 - We live according to the decisions of the elders or other church leaders we entrust with these situations
 - Those decisions should be made with the wisdom of scripture and the guidance of the Holy Spirit

- And we ought to abide by them
- Secondly, if we find ourselves in a dispute with a believer who will not submit to the church, then we should prayerfully consider how to proceed
 - If we are taken to court by that believer, we have a choice to make
 - Do we believe participating in the proceedings comes at the risk of sinning according to Paul's teaching here?
 - Sometimes, our participation is unavoidable, if we are subpoenaed to testify
 - In such cases, the decision has been taken out of our hands, and according to Romans 13 we must comply with the law
- But so far as it depends upon us, we are to be at peace with all men
 - And according to Paul's teaching in this chapter, we ought to refuse to defend our own interests in front of unbelievers
 - Let the believer acting against us take from us and live without
 - Your Father in Heaven will see your obedience and will reward you in the day
 - Like the Father did for His Son, Who bore far greater abuse on your behalf
- You've heard me say at times in the past that we must live with eyes for eternity
 - Here's an excellent example of what I mean by that phrase
 - Making everyday choices and decisions conscience of how our decisions impact our eternal future
 - Living aware of these relationships, aware of the Lord's expectations, aware of our coming judgment
 - Placing higher value on the future we cannot see than on the present we do
 - Knowing that this world is passing away
 - And the Kingdom is right around the corner

- Speaking as a father, I can say there are times when you have to pick your battles with your children
 - When your kids are acting up, sometimes we'll let a few things go by without chastising because we don't have time or energy for every issue
 - Sometimes, our kids can't bear to hear all the things they were doing wrong
 - We have to space those critiques out a little bit
 - But there are other times when our concerns are serious enough that we can't overlook them
 - As hard as it may be, our obligations as parents require we walk our children through their errors
 - Of course, we do this to encourage them into better behavior and away from the consequences of poor judgment
- Paul was the father of faith to the Corinthians
 - He brought the Gospel and founded the church
 - So it falls to him to admonish the church in the face of their repeated errors
 - It's really remarkable how many things were amiss in this one church body
 - It's a reminder of how far off a church can go when it's not guided by the word of God and good leadership
 - So far, Paul has corrected the church for its prideful associations, for tolerating immorality in the church body while failing to hold believers accountable within the church
 - We can also see how one error contributes to another
 - A prideful, arrogance church led to tolerating sin among the members
 - A willingness to tolerate sin leads to a failure to hold church members accountable in the church
 - A failure to hold members of the church accountable leads to taking those disputes outside the church body, etc.
- So last week we learned that the proper course for a Christian is to resolve disputes with brothers or sisters in the church
 - We ended in v.7 where Paul said the believer should rather be defrauded by a brother than take that one to a public court
 - Our witness and our eternal reward is worth more than anything we could gain in this world
 - To complete that thought, we read vs.7-8 this morning

1Cor. 6:7 Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?

1Cor. 6:8 On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren.

- The Corinthians were losing at their own game
 - They were asking pagan judges to grant them victory over their brother in the Lord
 - Meanwhile, they were losing ground with the Judge of Creation
 - Paul says they should have rather lost the earthly contest so that they might be received with greater honor in the Kingdom
- Peter explains this point in 1 Peter 2 with simplicity

1Pet. 2:19 For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

1Pet. 2:20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

1Pet. 2:21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

1Pet. 2:22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;

1Pet. 2:23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;

- We find favor with the Lord when we bear up under the sorrow of suffering unjustly
 - And when we do this we follow in the footsteps of the Lord
 - We are called for this very purpose, Peter says
 - To reflect Christ in our life, and we do that best when we suffer as required, whether from the world or regrettably at times from our brothers and sisters
- Peter sums up later in Chapter 3

1Pet. 3:8 To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit;

1Pet. 3:9 not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

- We must not respond to a sinful act with another sinful act
- When we do this, we forfeit the blessing we might have received for what we suffered
- It's like we taught our kids...if you are wronged by your sibling and strike back, then the one who strikes last is wrong
- Paul is concerned by the notion that the church is harming itself in these disputes, but his primary concern remains the absurdity of believers going before sinners for judgment
 - It reflects a failure on the Christians in Corinth to appreciate how their faith had

separated them from the world

- The church apparently didn't grasp the degree of that distinction
- So Paul puts it in perspective in the next passage

1Cor. 6:9 **Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,**

1Cor. 6:10 **nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.**

1Cor. 6:1 **Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.**

- Paul asks the rhetorical question, do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?
 - Paul is asking the church, do you not recognize that the unbelieving world is excluded from the future we will know?
 - They are on a different course
 - The only reason we are still among them is because the rest of God's timeline has yet to play out, but it's only a matter of time
 - Yet these are the people you seek out for approval and judgment
- Sometimes, we tend to sweep these differences under the rug, so to speak
 - We have friends, acquaintances, coworkers, classmates, neighbors, family members who haven't placed their trust in Jesus Christ
 - Since we enjoy their company or have strong attachments, naturally we tend to see the good in them
 - We prefer to think that perhaps they will be with us in the Heaven God has planned for His children
 - And perhaps they will...but only if they come to faith in Christ
 - Meanwhile, Paul says to the Corinthian church – and to us – in v.9 "do not be deceived"
 - He means don't be deceived into minimizing the profound differences between believers and unbelievers
 - Don't overlook the reality that we share nothing in common with them, spiritually speaking
 - They can't see what we see
 - They can't know what we know
 - They can't understand what we understand
 - They can't share in what we have without faith in Jesus Christ

- It goes without saying that we hope, pray and work to see those we know and care about come to faith so they may share in these things
- But until that happens, we cannot be deceived about who they are and who we are
 - If we become deceived, then we may be tempted to do the things the Corinthian church was doing
 - We come to see unbelieving courts as our superiors in judging disputes
 - We come to see the unbelieving world's values and achievements as our achievements and values
 - We may even begin to think that the unbeliever's behaviors can be ours as well
- That's why Paul lists so many sinful behaviors in describing the unrighteous
 - Paul says they are those who practice such things
 - The list includes fornicators – sex prior to marriage
 - Idolators – those who worship false gods
 - Adulterers – those who engage in sex outside marriage
 - Effeminate & homosexuals – both refer to homosexual behavior
 - The Greeks used different words to describe each person in a homosexual relationship
 - Both words are used here
 - Thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and swindlers complete the list
 - Paul is not teaching that anyone who commits any of these acts is automatically an unbeliever
 - Clearly, believers can be guilty of these same sins
 - Paul is speaking in broad terms of how unbelievers routinely live
 - They engage in these things as a matter of practice, while believers may slip into these behaviors from time to time
 - Perhaps John teaches this point most clearly in 1 John

1John 3:7 Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous;

1John 3:8 the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

1John 3:9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

1John 3:10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

- Notice John repeats Paul's warning not to be deceived
 - John says the children of the devil and the children of God are obvious
 - Each will live according to his or her nature
 - Take note of these patterns, and appreciate that they often testify to spiritual realities
 - Understand that saving faith sets the believer on a new course where these behaviors should fade into the past while new ones arrive in their place
- Paul says those who live according to such behaviors, enjoying them and practicing them, are of a different sort than the Church
 - And we have been called out from them
 - We have been justified and sanctified, that is set apart, by the Spirit
 - Paul reminds the church in v.11 that their church (and every church) is made up of former fornicators, adulterers, idolators and all the rest
 - But the important word is "former"
 - By our faith in Jesus Christ, we are washed clean of those sins, whether past, present or future
 - We no longer live in the flesh; we listen to the Spirit instead
 - We are to be in the world, but not of the world as we know
 - So let's not rush back to that world when we find ourselves needing example, or expertise or guidance or judgment
- As I mentioned earlier, one bad behavior or poor judgment frequently leads to more problems, and this is true in this case as well
 - The first mistake of the Corinthian church was forgetting their faith made them fundamentally different than the world around them
 - As a result, they were susceptible to far worse sin than seeking the judgment of a pagan court
 - They were in danger of following the sinful behaviors of that fallen world
 - This leads us to the next issue on Paul's list
 - That is the problem of engaging in sexually immoral behaviors

1Cor. 6:12 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.

1Cor. 6:13 Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.

- Paul introduces his response to the fourth item of concern by quoting and then changing a Greek proverb

- The Greek philosophers always minimized the importance of the body
 - They claimed it was separate from the soul to such a degree that it mattered not what was done with the body
 - A Greek proverb said that “the body is a tomb”
 - Epictetus said “I am a poor soul shackled to a corpse”
 - So they thought anything a person wanted to do with the body was acceptable
- Then Paul came to Corinth, and he taught that grace in Christ meant works of law did not lead to righteousness
 - Paul taught that liberty in Christ permitted, among other things, that men could eat anything they desired
 - So the Corinthian church remembered Paul’s teaching as all things were lawful in Christ
- You can see where this would lead to a problem in a Greek church
 - These Corinthian Christians took the Greek philosophical view and combined it with Paul’s teaching on liberty
 - They arrived at a perverse understanding of grace
 - They assumed that if the appetite of the stomach knew no restriction, then every other appetite of the body must also be permitted
- The Greek view of the body transferred into their Christian theology
 - They knew Paul taught all things were lawful, and that God would destroy this body, which Paul had also taught them
 - Therefore, they concluded in keeping with Greek thinking that whatever we do with our bodies in the meantime is irrelevant to God
 - Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die
 - Now we can understand Paul’s comments in vs. 12-13 better
 - Paul reaffirms that “all things” are lawful
 - But then he qualifies it
 - We must consider the effect of our actions, not merely whether an action is lawful by itself
 - Christianity does not rely on the Mosaic Law or any other religious dogma of rules or regulations to impart righteousness – we are righteous by faith alone
 - So all choices are equally lawful in that regard, because we find our righteousness in faith, not works
 - But determining what is sin is another matter
 - We have liberty to do many things, but in the way we practice anything, it may still become sin
 - In other words, nothing a Christian may choose to do contributes or detracts his or her righteousness

- Nevertheless, not everything we choose to do is pleasing to God
- Then Paul uses food as his example to demonstrate his point
 - At an earlier point, Paul must have taught this church that there is no spiritual significance to what they choose to eat
 - Food is food, without spiritual significance
 - Nevertheless, food has a designed purpose
 - Food's purpose is to nourish the body (which is what Paul meant by stomach)
 - It fulfills its purpose in making our body stronger and healthier
 - On the other hand, I can take food and make it my enemy
 - We can abuse it
 - We can mistreat the body in the way we choose to eat
 - So the point is that while all food is lawful, it can still become unprofitable if we use it in a sinful way
 - Paul then draws a comparison between our appetite for food and our desire for anything else
 - Just as food is intended to promote a stronger and healthier body, likewise our spiritual liberty must be used to promote a spiritually healthier life
 - Which leads Paul to say in verse 13 that the body is not for immorality but for the Lord's glory
 - The Lord indwells us for His pleasure and purpose
 - So our body is for the Lord's use and glory
- So apparently, the Corinthian church was engaging in sexual immorality under the guise of all things are lawful
 - And this was the fourth issue Chloe reported to Paul – members of the church engaging with Greek temple prostitutes

1Cor. 6:14 Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power.

1Cor. 6:15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!

- Paul begins his admonishment by challenging the Greek notion that the body matters not to God
 - Paul says in v.14 that the Father raised the dead body of Christ
 - Moreover, because of our faith in Jesus Christ, the Father will raise us into new bodies as well

- So if the body mattered not to the Lord, why does He provide us with a new body in the day?
- The Greek philosophers taught that once this body died, the soul existed without a body
- But the word of God teaches that God's design is for the soul to inhabit a body and enjoy the Creation God has made for us
- So clearly if the Lord cares enough for the body to raise it anew, then we can't assume He doesn't care what we do with it in the meantime
- More importantly, Paul says in v.15 that our bodies became part of something larger called the body of Christ
 - By the indwelling of Christ's Spirit, our physical bodies have become the home on Earth for the Lord
 - So as we live in this time, we are each a part of Christ's body
 - So consider that as you may choose to engage in sin with your body in one way or another, you are dragging the Spirit along with you in that sin
- In a very real sense, you are taking Christ with you into sin
 - Obviously, Christ isn't becoming a part of our sin
 - Our sin is a choice we make alone
 - But Paul's point is still clear
 - The choices we make with our body are clearly not unimportant to the Lord
 - On the contrary, they are very important to the Lord, since He is indwelling the very bodies we are using to sin!
- Paul asks should we allow a body occupied by the Lord to be engaged with a prostitute?
 - In Greek culture, prostitution was common in religious ceremonies
 - Before the Corinthians came to faith in Jesus Christ, they would have likely worshipped in Greek temples
 - And in those temples, prostitutes worked to serve the worshippers
 - Engaging with prostitutes in these temple "services" was a normal part of worshipping Greek idols
 - So even after the Corinthians had come to faith in Jesus Christ, the temptation to return to the prostitutes must have been very strong
 - Apparently, some have continued to frequent these temples
 - This is the natural result of failing to see the church as set apart and distinct from the world's views and behaviors
 - And the solution to this problem is to understand how the Lord sees such behavior, as Paul explains

1Cor. 6:16 Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH."

1Cor. 6:17 But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

1Cor. 6:18 Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.

1Cor. 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

1Cor. 6:20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

- Paul launches into the teaching portion of his admonishment to the church, beginning with a reminder of Genesis Chapter 2
 - When a man and a women engage in sexual relations, they are becoming one flesh, Paul says
 - Paul is referring to the words of the Lord in Genesis 2:24, where the Lord declares that men and women are intended to marry
 - And in that marriage, they bring about a relationship modeled on the relationship of the original man and woman
 - Woman was literally created out of the body of the first man, so that they were always one flesh
 - Likewise, husband and wife reunite today to become one flesh in the sexual act
 - So when a Christian unites with a prostitute, that person has taken a body already joined with the Lord and joined it again with a prostitute
 - Therefore, we are engaging in a grave sin when we sin with our body in immoral acts of one kind or another
 - In a sense, we are dragging the Lord along with us as we sin
 - The church couldn't see engaging with a prostitute as simply another appetite like the stomach's desire for food
 - It carried far more serious ramifications
- In fact, in v.18 Paul says there is a distinction between immoral sins and other sins
 - Immorality means specifically sexual immorality
 - These sins stand apart from other sins, in the sense that we are using the Lord's temple in a degrading way
 - Other sins can be corrected by moderations or abstinence
 - If I drink too much or eat too much or use foul language or gossip too much, then those things can be corrected in time
 - I can repent, I can change my behavior
 - My sin may have lasting consequences, but my sin hasn't altered my spiritual relationship with others
 - But once I commit a sexually immoral act, I have joined myself to someone else in a way that can't be undone

- I have become one flesh with someone I may never see again, and this is a serious sin Paul says
- To be clear, Paul is not saying we are less forgiven for this sin or that our righteousness in Christ is lessened
- The blood of Christ covers all sin
- But any act of immorality is an offense against the temple of the Lord
 - The temple of God is a holy place, and those who sin against the temple of God are committing a serious sin
 - We are repeating the sins of the priests in Israel who employed prostitutes in the Jewish temple
- So contrary to the philosophy of the Greek church, the Bible teaches that it matters very much what I do with my body
 - It matters to God and it matters to my eternal reward
 - We have been bought with a price, the price of Jesus' blood spilled on a Roman cross
 - Consider that fact should you ever be tempted to sin against the temple of God with your body
 - Let us glorify the Lord with our bodies
 - Never think that these choices don't matter

- To this point in Paul's letter, we've followed him as he admonished the church for various mistakes they've been making in arrogance and immaturity
 - That was part 1 of Paul's letter comprising Chapters 1–6 of the book
 - The rest of the letter is reserved for another set of issues
 - These are issues the church itself posed to Paul through Chloe
 - The church asked Paul six questions on a variety of church life issues
 - Paul will use the rest of his letter to address these questions
 - He'll also venture off into a few tangents along the way, because answering their questions often requires covering background issues
 - Since the issues in this section are issues the church itself raised, Paul's tone will soften considerably from the first part of the letter
 - He isn't admonishing as much as he is teaching
 - Remember, admonishing is teaching while correcting
 - But now Paul backs off the admonishing and moves to just teaching on the questions they pose to him
 - It's difficult to teach while at the same time demonstrating dissatisfaction with someone
 - You may insult them to the point they won't listen to the teaching
 - We can all appreciate the danger of writing words that impede our ability to get our point across to someone

A man and his wife were having some problems at home and were giving each other the silent treatment for day after day.

After a week, the man realized that he would need his wife to wake him at 5.00 am for an early morning business flight to Chicago, since his alarm clock had stopped working.

Not wanting to be the first to break the silence, he wrote on a piece of paper, "Please wake me at 5.00 am" and left it taped to the bedroom door and went to bed early.

The next morning the man woke up at 9.00am, and realized he had missed his flight.

Furious, he was about to go and see why his wife hadn't woken him when he noticed a piece of paper by the bed...it said..."It is 5.00am; wake up."

- So we'll notice Paul making an effort to speak with compassion throughout this section, softening the blow of his earlier critique
- My joke also serves to introduce the topic of this chapter which is marital relationships
 - We don't know the exact questions Paul received, but because Paul will introduce each new topic or answer with the phrase "Now concerning...", we can infer what the question may have been

- In this case, we know Paul was asked to elaborate in various ways on the nature of Christian marriage

1Cor. 7:1 Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.

1Cor. 7:2 But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.

1Cor. 7:3 The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.

1Cor. 7:4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

1Cor. 7:5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

1Cor. 7:6 But this I say by way of concession, not of command.

1Cor. 7:7 Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.

1Cor. 7:8 But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I.

1Cor. 7:9 But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

- From Paul's opening statement, we can tell the original question revolved around the proper boundaries of marital relationships
 - As you would expect given the sensitive nature of this topic, Paul's approach is uncharacteristically soft and deferential
 - He uses phrases like "by concession, not command" and "I say, not the Lord", to suggest a soft approach to his counsel
 - Secondly, Paul moves back and forth between man and woman a total of 12 times, creating a perfect balance or harmony in his teaching
 - So there is no hint of inequality on this issue
 - That in itself was very revolutionary in a culture where male dominance was never more evident than in marriage
 - Finally, Paul leaves plenty of room for personal preferences and different styles within marriage
 - Paul begins with the statement it is good for a man not to touch a woman
 - To the young ladies in the room, this is a good verse to pull out when dealing with annoying brothers or unwanted advances
 - The Greek word for good is *kalos*, which means beautiful or commendable

- And the Greek word for touch literally means to cling to, which is a reference back to Genesis 2:24

Gen. 2:24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

- In reality, Paul is saying it is commendable for a man to forgo marriage
 - Singleness can be a preferred Christian lifestyle, but it won't be the right thing for everyone
 - Throughout this discussion, Paul is going to speak in terms of tradeoffs and concessions
 - There are few absolutes in this chapter
 - So different Christian couples and individuals will land in different places on these questions
 - While in a few cases, the rules are the same for everyone
 - Nevertheless, for all Christians, the goal in marriage is always godliness and serving Christ with our lives
 - So we should seek whatever relationship advances those goals best
 - And as Paul will explain later in this chapter, singleness can have significant advantages
 - But meanwhile, in v.2 Paul says if living a life of singleness leaves us tempted to immoralities like fornication, then by all means it's better to seek for marriage instead
 - Marriage is the one and only way we may enjoy sexual relationships
 - And every marriage must itself confirm to the Biblical pattern for marriage
 - A man may have one wife
 - A wife may have one husband
 - We cannot use our lack of self-control as an excuse to justify entering into illegitimate marriage relationships of one kind or another
 - One sin does not excuse another
 - But in general, we should marry if we cannot demonstrate self-control outside marriage
 - Furthermore, our behavior in our marriages must be consistent with the purpose of marriage
 - And as Genesis 2:24 says, the core purpose in marriage is for two to become one flesh
 - Therefore, Paul says in v.3 that both the husband and wife incur an obligation or duty to their spouse of showing sexual intimacy
 - That duty to our spouse is not optional but neither is it absolute

- In v.4, Paul begins by explaining that neither the wife nor husband have sole authority over their own bodies
 - The right to sole authority over our own body is something we voluntarily give up when we enter into marriage
 - We agree to share our body with our spouse, in keeping with the one-flesh principle of marriage
 - In a spiritual sense, our flesh becomes their flesh too, and vice versa
 - So we must consider their interests and desires when making decisions about our body
 - We are expected to make ourselves available to our spouse regularly, so that the benefits of marriage might be enjoyed as expected
 - That's why in v.5, Paul commands that married partners not deprive one another of intimacy
 - The Greek word for deprive is the same word for defraud or cheat
 - That's a good way to understand the effect of one person denying sexual intimacy to the other
 - It's cheating or defrauding a spouse of something they have right to expect in a marriage as God intended
 - Furthermore, when we deprive our spouse, we are creating the conditions where they may be tempted to act on immoral desires
 - Paul isn't suggesting that we would share blame if our spouse makes a decision to sin outside the marriage
 - But our sin of depriving our spouse can become opportunity for Satan to tempt our spouse into unfaithfulness
 - So naturally, why would we want to do anything to make that outcome more likely?
- Sexual temptations are the chief concern behind Paul's comments in vs.7-9
 - He repeats his wishes that all men could be like him in serving God in singleness
 - He addresses these comments to those who are eligible for marriage
 - To the unmarried and those who were married but their spouse has died
 - He says for these groups, it is beneficial or commendable to seek for a single life
 - Once again, we'll learn the benefits of singleness later in the chapter
 - But then Paul acknowledges that singleness isn't for everyone
 - In fact, it's a gift Paul says
 - We must be gifted by the Spirit before we will be content in singleness
 - Without that gift, we should expect to experience a natural desire for intimacy
 - But if we deny ourselves marriage, we need to judge our own hearts honestly before taking that route

- If we know we have desire for sexual intimacy in marriage, then by all means marry
- Otherwise, Paul says our passions will remain a distraction and possibly a source of sin
 - And in that case, our singleness will be of no value in serving God
 - There is nothing noble or pious in remaining single
 - The value of singleness is a simple a matter of greater time and opportunity to serve
- But if our passions get in the way, we won't be any good to God even in our singleness
- If we do marry, we share our body with our spouse, though we don't forfeit all authority over our own bodies
 - Even as we grant our spouse authority over our body, we still retain a degree of authority ourselves
 - Each member of the marriage has a right to express desires, preferences and limitations for intimacy
 - And spouses should respect these things
 - Furthermore, physical limitations, illnesses, emotional stress and the like will come along from time to time to preclude intimacy
 - We also know that sexual desires naturally diminish with age
 - Even just the occasional marital conflict will impact fellowship in the marriage
 - Whatever the reason for the interruption in intimacy, Paul says the interruption should be by mutual agreement and temporary
 - In v.6 Paul says ceasing intimacy is a matter of concession, not command
 - The right of couples to put sexual activity on hold for whatever reason is a concession to the needs of the situation, but it's not a command
 - Meaning, it's not a requirement that one partner can unilaterally impose on the other
 - One partner should never require the other partner to go without intimacy beyond what's absolutely necessary or desired
 - To put it simply, Christian couples are expected to participate in normal, periodic sexual intimacy by mutual consent
 - The goal isn't to achieve some idealistic pattern of intimacy, for everyone will be different to a degree
 - Rather our concern should be to accommodate our spouse's desires in the interest of maintaining a healthy, loving marriage
 - Because our body is not our own
- This principle of our spouse having authority over our body extends into other areas of married life, not just to one context

- How a husband or wife cares for his or her body is a matter of common interest in the marriage
 - The decisions of what we eat, how we maintain our health, how much sleep we get, how we respond to illness, even the risks we are willing to take are decisions our spouse has a vested interest in
 - When we dismiss our marriage partner's concerns for our body's wellbeing, we're not only dismissing potentially good advice, we're acting selfishly
- In fact, abusing our body or neglecting our health to the detriment of our spouse's interests is a sin
 - We sin in the same way we would if we were denying anyone the rightful use and enjoyment of their property
 - In fact, this is one exception to a husband's authority in the home
 - A wife has an equal interest in the husband's body
 - And male headship doesn't trump a wife's rights to her husband's body
- Next, Paul turns to general guidelines for the sanctity of marriage:

1Cor. 7:10 But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband

1Cor. 7:11 (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

- Paul prefaces his teaching in this chapter on marriage by reminding us of the biblical standard for every marriage
 - The Lord teaches the church that a wife is not to leave her husband, and a husband is not to divorce his wife
 - Notice Paul uses the word "leave" for a wife and "divorce" for a husband
 - In Greek society, the wife had no legal standing and therefore could not legally initiate divorce proceedings
 - But if she was determined to leave the marriage, she might leave her husband by running away
 - She might hope to start her life again somewhere else
 - A man, on the other hand, could divorce his wife according to Roman law if he found some dissatisfaction with her
 - But in either case, the Lord has said that it is wrong for us to end a marriage
 - Paul adds that these instructions are from the Lord
 - He isn't suggesting that this particular teaching is more authoritative than other things he has taught
 - Paul is pointing out that we have no latitude in applying these instructions
 - In contrast to his teaching from a moment earlier when he was giving

options and concessions

- These expectations are unbendable and apply equally to all Christians
 - We are not permitted to bend the rules to suit our desires
- Even Paul's comment in v.11 is noteworthy because it says something about the strength of a marriage bond from God's point of view
 - Even if a woman should leave her husband, perhaps because he abuses her or the children, still she must remain unmarried
 - This tells us that though we may encounter extreme circumstances where separation is preferable to remaining together
 - Nevertheless no matter the reason for the separation, a marriage cannot be dissolved
 - Marriage is until death do you part
- Paul referred to Jesus' teaching on the matter, so let's consult the teaching Paul was referencing

Matt. 5:32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Matt. 19:9 “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery .”

- Jesus taught that divorce and remarriage inevitably involves an act of adultery
 - He isn't saying a second marriage is illegitimate; it is a true marriage
 - But that marriage is established through an act of adultery, because it is a betrayal of the one-flesh relationship formed in the original marriage
 - Therefore we should not seek to remarry so long as our first spouse is alive
- But what about Jesus' inclusion of the exception for immorality?
 - To understand the passage properly, we must take special note of the Greek word used for the word "immorality" or unchastity
 - Matthew recorded Jesus' words using the Greek word *porneia*, which is the Greek word for fornication, sex before marriage
 - Matthew did not use the Greek word for adultery (*moichao*), which is infidelity after a marriage has been formed
- In Jesus' day a marriage officially began when a couple was betrothed or engaged
 - During the engagement period, a couple was considered legally married even though they had not yet conducted a wedding ceremony nor had they consummated the marriage
 - The engagement period often lasted a year or longer

- The only way to end the engagement was through a legal divorce
- If during this time one of the engaged partners committed fornication, it was considered an act of unfaithfulness and the engagement would end in divorce
- This was the exception Jesus was speaking about
- We have an example of this situation given to us in the Gospels
 - Joseph was prepared to "send away" Mary when she was found to be with Child

Matt. 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.

Matt. 1:19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.

Matt. 1:20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

- The Greek word for "send" is *apolo* which is the word for divorce
 - Because Joseph believed Mary had been unfaithful during their engagement period, he was prepared to divorce her
 - Her unfaithfulness was one of *porneia*, fornication, not *moichao*, which is adultery
 - This is the one and only time that a divorce is permitted by Jesus
- This interpretation is consistent with the Bible's teaching concerning a married couple becoming "one flesh"
 - During the engagement period, "one flesh" has not yet been established through sexual relations
 - Therefore, divorce is permissible because the one-flesh relationship isn't being broken
 - But after a marriage has consummated, this exception no longer applies
 - The one-flesh relationship of the marriage is to remain intact forever
- Today you may hear a common interpretation of Jesus' words that proposes adultery in any form justifies divorce and remarriage
 - This interpretation fails to appreciate the special Jewish marriage ritual
 - It sees Jesus teaching that the marriage covenant is dissolved by infidelity after consummation
 - By this interpretation, an act of infidelity by one partner nullifies the marriage vows and frees the other partner to remarry without committing adultery as well
 - Not only does this interpretation misuses Jesus' words concerning unfaithfulness, it is contrary to the entire counsel of Scripture concerning

marriage and to the one-flesh principle of Genesis 2:24

- Even worse, it leads to a slippery slope of contradictory interpretation and application concerning marriage
- For example, every other scriptural reference to marriage – whether by Jesus or by the Epistle writers – consistently teaches that the marriage bond is unbreakable
 - For as long as both partners are living, a one-flesh relationship exists
 - Jesus' own words are this:

[Matt. 19:6](#) “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

- If Jesus says that no man can separate a marriage once the one-flesh relationship has been established, then not even a philandering husband or cheating wife can dissolve that bond
- Thirdly, such an interpretation introduces new problems
 - For example, if adultery by one partner dissolves the marriage bond, then it must (by logical necessity) permit both partners to remarry
 - I find this conclusion troubling, since it seems to give biblical license to an unfaithful spouse to remarry as a result of their own sinful behavior
 - According to this interpretive logic, Jesus would permit a husband who cheats to divorce and remarry yet He requires a faithful spouse abandoned by their partner to remain single
 - How can one sin of adultery make the sin of divorce and remarriage permissible?
 - It's not even a logical conclusion
- So if we believe that unfaithfulness in marriage invalidates a marriage covenant and permits remarriage, then what should we conclude about spiritual unfaithfulness to Christ?
 - We are implying that our salvation in Christ is only secure so long as we remain faithful to our "Husband"
 - Fortunately, Scripture teaches the opposite:

[2Tim. 2:13](#) If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

- The marriage bond is just as secure as our bond with Christ, and therefore we must approach our entrance into marriage with the same understanding
 - If you have yet to marry, consider whether you have the gift to remain single without temptation to sin
 - If marriage is for you, then remain chaste while waiting for your husband or wife to come along

- When you think you have found the right man or woman, be sure you enter the covenant of marriage understanding Christ's expectations
 - Marriage is for life, so choose wisely
 - We only get one marriage relationship at a time, so if your marriage doesn't last for any reason, you are to remain single thereafter until death do you part
- If a member of the marriage is unfaithful, that act of unfaithfulness is a sin
 - Nevertheless, that sin doesn't end the first marriage
 - The Bible asks for us to forgive, reconcile if possible
- Lastly, if a Christian divorces and remarries, that new marriage is formed through an act of adultery
 - Of course, the sin of adultery is forgiven by the blood of Christ, as is every sin
 - We do not hold some sins in special categories or above others
 - No one is perfect, and therefore no one can stand in judgment over any other Christian
 - That second marriage may have been formed in adultery, but it is no less legitimate and must be honored like any marriage
- Throughout the rest of the chapter, Paul teaches on other difficult situations related to marriage, including explaining why singleness has such advantages to the believer
 - We'll cover this when we get to it



1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 7B

Chapter 7:12-24

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- Chapter 7 continues our examination of the first question the church posed to Paul
 - Their question must have revolved around the nature of marriage in a Christian context
 - On divorce and remarriage, on marriage with unbelievers and on the value of singleness
 - Paul is patiently teaching through these questions, helping the church understand God's expectations for marriage in the church
 - Last time we studied through v.11, which established three basic truths about Christian marriage
 - First, Paul taught that singleness is an acceptable, perhaps even preferred lifestyle, for Christians
 - But it is reserved for those who have been gifted in that way
 - For without the gift of singleness, we will be tempted to distraction by our passions
 - Secondly, Paul taught each may have one husband or wife
 - Marriage has a one per customer limit
 - Thirdly, marriage requires we relinquish sole authority over our bodies
 - We share our bodies with our spouse
 - But we have only covered about 25% of the chapter, so Paul still has plenty left to say on this question of marriage
 - In the next section, beginning in v.12 Paul addresses the difficult situation of a believer married to an unbeliever
 - What should happen when one member of a marriage comes to faith while the other remains in their sins?
 - Paul now gives counsel to such a couple

1Cor. 7:12 But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.

1Cor. 7:13 And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.

1Cor. 7:14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

1Cor. 7:15 Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.

1Cor. 7:16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

- Paul begins this section saying “to the rest...”
 - The rest refers to those who are not the unmarried (v.8) or a believing married couple (v.10)
 - By process of elimination, the rest would have to be a married believer with

- an unbelieving spouse
 - What obligations does a person have to their spouse should that spouse be an unbeliever?
- Paul also prefacing these instructions by saying *he* gives these instructions, not the Lord
 - Paul doesn't mean these instructions are optional
 - After all, Paul's writings are inspired instruction, so by definition they are from the Holy Spirit
 - Instead, this comment is intended as a bookend to his earlier comment in v.10
 - In v.10, he said what I am about to say came directly from the Lord's teaching when He taught the apostles in person
 - So now Paul makes clear that he has moved on to new teaching that Jesus never stated personally
 - Think of these two statements as the equivalent of saying "quote" and "end quote"
 - Nevertheless, this instruction is still inspired
- Looking at his instruction, it's fairly straightforward
 - If a believer has an unbelieving spouse who is willing to continue in marriage, then the believer must continue in it as well
 - Paul is speaking about a situation when one person in an existing marriage comes to faith
 - Leaving the spouse on the outside of salvation
 - Obviously, the arrival of faith in any marriage is going to create friction
 - Faith in Christ fundamentally changes our view of the world and of our eternal future
 - The changes created by faith are incredibly profound, leading to countless opportunities for disagreement with an unbelieving spouse
 - From how we handle finances, to raising the children, to our entertainment choices
 - To the kind of friends we keep and the places we will visit
 - And especially to our life's priorities as we begin to live for Christ
 - All of these things can place a serious strain on the marriage, leading to a possibility that the unbelieving spouse may choose to leave
 - Paul says if the unbelieving spouse is content to remain married even as we endeavor to live as a Christian, then we have no grounds to divorce
 - This counsel is completely consistent with the one-flesh principle we learned last time
 - The bonds of marriage transcend faith
 - God established the sanctity of marriage for all humanity, not just believers
 - So we must honor that commitment
 - Paul says there are clear benefits from remaining in the marriage despite the

difference in faith

- When one member of the marriage is a believer, the other is “sanctified” through the relationship
- The word sanctified means to be set apart for a blessing
- Paul is simply pointing out that the unbeliever can be blessed through their association with a believing spouse
- Likewise, the children of this marriage will be blessed by having both parents in the home
 - And especially by the presence of a believing parent
- Most importantly, if the Lord has moved to bring faith to one member of a family, then it gives hope that He intends to extend that testimony to more members of the family
 - And if that is going to happen, then it stands to reason that the believing spouse will be catalyst for that purpose
 - If we give up and walk away from that family, we may be running away from a miracle God intends to work through us
 - So we stay married, first because of our commitment to our spouse, and secondly because we sanctify the family through our influence
- But as we pursue an unequal marriage, we must also have a sober understanding of what we’re likely to face
 - Things are going to be difficult at times
 - The believer is going to find himself or herself forced to choose between pleasing God and pleasing the unbelieving spouse
 - And really, that’s no choice at all, for we should always seek to please the Lord
 - Unfortunately, times will come when we choose to appease our spouse rather than follow the Lord, simply to maintain peace
 - This is why an unequal marriage is always a difficult situation
 - I came across a story of a woman who experienced this very situation in her own marriage
 - Her name is Nancy Kennedy, and she wrote:

When I first came to faith in Christ and Barry hadn't, I thought God had made a huge mistake. After all, two following God together made more sense than one. But I now know God never makes mistakes. Since I'd been an unbeliever when we married, I hadn't willfully disobeyed God by marrying Barry. My situation is by God's sovereign design. Reminding myself of that enables me to relax my spiritual chokehold on Barry.

The way I see it, God has a plan for each life. And no matter how hard I try, I cannot transform someone else's heart. I can't coerce, sweet-talk, or plead my husband into being a Christian. In fact, when I do try, it only drives him away—sometimes literally. If I start nagging him, he'll get in his truck and

drive for hours.

I decided long ago to accept that it's God's job to change hearts. That decision frees me to pursue my relationship with God without the added burden of having to bring my husband to faith. All I have to do is love and enjoy him. That's God's plan for me, and he gives me all the grace I need to accomplish it.

That doesn't mean I'm not lonely at times or that I do everything right. The other day I grabbed Barry by the shirt and yelled, "Don't you see Christ in me?" Struck by the irony of the question, he laughed—and to my surprise, said yes. It helps to remember that Barry's not my enemy; he's my husband. I'm just as much a sinner as he is—maybe more so because I have the power to say no to sin and often don't.

- Her advice to a woman caught in such a marriage is powerful
 - Live in the now, don't pine for a "happy-ever-after someday"
 - Live out your faith – let your spouse see you stumble and struggle as you live by grace alone, rather than living by a set of rigid rules
 - Honor your marriage; don't talk negatively about your spouse; Enjoy your spouse as God's gift
 - Pray, pray, pray and talk often and openly and freely about God
 - Find a support system and study the Bible with a friend or small group; Attend church as often as you are able
 - Never give up hope; God knows what he's doing
- As you can see, an unequal marriage is a trial, which is why Paul warns a believer elsewhere never to enter into a marriage with an unbeliever in the first place

2Cor. 6:14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

- Up to this point, we've been talking about a situation where a member of an existing marriage comes to faith while their spouse remains an unbeliever
 - It's one thing to be faced with the challenges of an unequal marriage involuntarily, but it's another to knowingly enter into such a situation
 - If we choose a spouse knowing they do not share our faith in Christ, we are acting very foolishly
 - We are signing up for a life of unnecessary spiritual struggle
 - We are shackling ourselves to someone who can never understand what we understand
 - They will have different values and goals

- So they will act as a spiritual weight, dragging us down and holding us back in our effort to mature and please the Lord
- Why would we ever want to do such a thing?
 - Whatever earthly joy or benefit we might find attractive in a relationship with an unbeliever will be greatly overshadowed by the eternal loss we may suffer as a result of their influence
 - And there is simply no turning back from such a choice
 - Paul says it is not cause for divorce
- However, in vs.15-16 Paul gives one option to end the marriage
 - He says that if the unbeliever leaves the marriage, then the believer is to let that one leave
 - We are not under obligation to chase after that person in a futile attempt to hold the marriage together
 - And we can immediately understand why it's better to avoid the chase
 - If we pursue the unbeliever, we're inevitably going to feel forced to make concessions in order to hold the marriage together
 - Whatever made the unbeliever upset in the first place will have to be rectified if we are to rescue the relationship
 - And those concessions will likely to lead to even greater harm to our spiritual maturity
 - What if the believer objected to our time spent at church or in prayer or in Bible study?
 - What if he or she demanded we stop speaking about Jesus to the children?
 - What if he or she objects to our desire to support a ministry financially?
- If they make these demands a condition for the continuation of the marriage, Paul says we are to let them walk
 - We are not in bondage to their demands
 - When Paul says we are not in bondage in such cases, he isn't talking about the marriage vows themselves
 - The word bondage means slavery, and the marriage covenant is never called slavery in scripture
 - Paul is referring to a bondage to the demands of our unbelieving spouse
 - We have been called to follow Christ in freedom
 - So we are not expected to submit to the demands and decrees of an unbeliever, even if such a person is our spouse
 - In v.17 Paul raises the obvious question: how do we know if our spouse will ever become a believer?
 - Since we can't be sure of such an outcome, we can't use that hope as an excuse to submit to conditions or demands that conflict with the Lord's instructions

- We must follow the Lord, and if that obedience causes our spouse to leave, then so be it
 - We are enslaved to Christ, not to them
- Now some in the church have taught that this statement opens the door for the believer to divorce and remarry
 - But take note Paul never says the believer can do either
 - He never says the believer is to divorce and he certainly never gives permission for the abandoned believer to remarry
 - He only says we are to allow the unbeliever to leave
 - In other words, the believer remains married to the unbeliever
 - But it's better to live a life of singleness than to fight for a marriage that brings us spiritual harm
 - Remember, we live with eyes for eternity
 - So the question we ask ourselves in all situations is what course of action is best for my judgment day?
- From this point, Paul now moves to teach on a general principle of Christian living
 - The church had asked him about marriage, concerning whether there was a requirement to stay married when one person becomes a believer
 - Paul has answered the question, but he wants to reinforce the point with a broader application
 - Not only should we continue in marriage having come to faith, but we should not seek to turn our lives upside down

1Cor. 7:17 Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches.

1Cor. 7:18 Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised.

1Cor. 7:19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.

1Cor. 7:20 Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called.

1Cor. 7:21 Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that.

1Cor. 7:22 For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave.

1Cor. 7:23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.

1Cor. 7:24 Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called.

- The greater principle Paul wants us to understand is to remain as God has called you
 - God called us into faith while we were living in a particular context, and self-evidently He chose that context when calling us to be His ambassador

- Paul uses several carefully chosen examples to prove his point
- First, he mentions circumcision, but this is just a way of describing Jewishness vs. Gentile
 - So if you were a Gentile or a Jew, then remain in that state
 - Gentiles are not expected to become a Jew and neither are Jews required to renounce their Jewishness
- And if you were called into faith while in slavery, don't worry about it
 - If you can win your freedom, then it's good to do so
 - And if you are free, do not return to slavery
 - Paul reminds us that whether you are free or enslaved to men, you remain enslaved to God in either case
 - These distinctions make no difference to our ability to serve Him faithfully
 - We are to serve and please God in either situation
- The greater principle Paul is teaching is that there is no one universal condition for all Christians
 - The Christian faith doesn't prescribe a certain lifestyle or walk of life, except that we seek to please the Lord in holy living
 - In fact, if we entertain some romantic notion about how a Christian's life is supposed to look, we're likely to go chasing after the wrong things
 - Not everyone is supposed to sell everything and become a missionary to the other side of the world
 - Not everyone is supposed to go to seminary
 - Not everyone changes careers, lifestyles and the like as a result of coming to faith
 - The far more common outcome of coming to know the Lord is to remain exactly where God found us, doing what we were doing, though doing it without sin
 - He saved us while we were attending school, working in the factory or office building
 - He saved us while we were living in a certain place, with a certain circle of friends, in a particular state of life
 - So it stands to reason, He called us to Himself while in that context so we might serve Him from that context
 - That's why Paul says in v.24 we are to remain in the condition the Lord found us
 - Literally in Greek, Paul says "as he was called, in this let him remain with God"
 - There is a purpose for where and how you were called into the faith
 - And it would be a shame if we allowed romantic notions of what it means to be a Christ follower to lead us away from our appointed mission field in pursuit of some idealized mission field
- We must give careful consideration to the realities in which we come to know the Lord while at the same time being willing to follow God anywhere He calls
 - Obviously, few of us will remain in the same place forever

- So Paul isn't saying we can never change our circumstances
 - In fact, God will usually call us to something different eventually
- But neither should we ignore the manner and timing and the context in which He chose to call us into faith
 - Reflect on it carefully as you consider how to serve Him
- Consider that many a man has gone to prison for a crime without knowing the Lord
 - But then while in prison, the Lord brings them to faith so that they can be His representative in that prison
 - Later, some may receive their freedom, and so then they move on to something new
 - But their first assignment was to be a witness where they were
- On the other hand, we are called to change who we are
 - How we think, how we behave, and what we value, will change continually as we grow more mature in our faith
 - And some of that growth may prompt us to make other changes in our walk, including how we serve the Lord
 - That kind of change is good, because it's prompted by the Spirit
 - But don't try to force that change by mimicking the progress of others
 - We each will have our own calling in service to the Lord
- Finally, I think this principle also extends to a church body
 - When you feel called to join a particular church body, like here at Oak Hill Bible Church, then you are receiving a mission as part of that relationship
 - Every church body has a mission to reach its local community
 - We may have a heart to reach beyond that community as well, and this is appropriate
 - But our primary mission reflects God's purposes in planting our church in its present location
 - So don't aspire to fit the mold of another church body, whether in size or style or location or audience
 - We should seek to care for what God has given us in our present circumstances
 - We should seek to reach the neighborhoods around us, and to reach the circle of friends and family we know
 - Even as we seek to expand that audience everyday
 - Let's seek to remain in the place God has placed us, while also seeking to become more like Christ

- Let's conclude Paul's discussion on Christian marriage
 - The final section of Chapter 7 continues to build on the theme Paul has repeated three times in this chapter
 - A Christian is not to seek some different station in life simply as a result of receiving salvation
 - God saved us for reasons of His own, so we don't need to construct some new, idealized Christian lifestyle
 - We only need to live to please the Lord Who bought us
 - Last week Paul stated the principle for the third time in the final verse from last week's lesson

1Cor. 7:24 Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called.

- We remain "with God" when we remain in the condition in which we were as He called us
 - Paul doesn't mean we can't ever change the place we live or the occupation we have, etc.
 - He means our salvation doesn't – by itself – demand that we upend our entire life to serve God
 - We can serve Him right where we are
- We have this confidence because we know that all the important issues of our sin and our salvation have been already settled on the cross

A wealthy man moved into a small community and decided to go to the local barber shop for a shave.

He walked into the barber shop to find that the local barber was a woman, named Grace. Grace gave the man a shave, and he asked her, "How much do I owe you?" She said "\$25."

The man thought that was somewhat expensive and that he may have to get a shave every other day. Nonetheless, he paid Grace and went on his way.

The next day, he woke up and found his face to be just as smooth as the day before. No need for a shave today, he thought, well, it was a \$25 shave.

The next day he awoke to find his face as smooth as the day before. Wow! he thought. That's amazing, as he normally would need to shave daily to keep his clean-shaven business look.

Day 3, he woke up and his face was still as smooth as the minute after Grace had finished. Now, somewhat perplexed, the man went down to the barber shop to ask some questions.

On this particular day he found the town pastor sitting in the barber shop waiting for a haircut, so the wealthy man struck up a conversation with the

pastor asking if the pastor knew how it was that his face could remain so smooth for so long after he was shaved.
The kind old pastor gently explained, "Friend, you were shaved by Grace... and once shaved, always shaved."

- The permanence of our faith and salvation underlies everything Paul is teaching in this chapter
- We can have confidence to remain in our present condition for as long as God requires because our condition has no impact on our salvation
- From this point, Paul now addresses his final teaching point on marriage

1Cor. 7:25 Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy.

1Cor. 7:26 I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is.

1Cor. 7:27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife.

1Cor. 7:28 But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.

- As he did earlier in the letter, Paul qualifies his instructions, but unlike the earlier qualification, this time he makes clear there is no mandate here
 - He says this instruction is not something Jesus Himself gave
 - But even more, Paul says he is giving an opinion
 - Paul is saying that the Christian is not bound by this counsel as if it were a command
 - Nevertheless, it is scripture, so it is wise and trustworthy counsel
 - That counsel is that Christians should not seek to change their marital status in view of the present distress
 - If you are unmarried, then it may be best to remain that way
 - If you are married already, then certainly do not violate your marriage vows by ending the marriage
 - In other words, remain as you are
 - Do not become distracted by such things as marriage when more important, eternal concerns present themselves
 - For the one who chooses to ignore Paul's counsel, Paul makes clear that person will not be sinning by taking a wife or husband
 - The opportunity to marry is never an act of sin in itself
 - But Paul says his counsel comes out of a personal concern for the believer in

light of the world's situation

- He knew that the burdens and responsibilities of marriage would add to the stress of the present time
- So he says he was trying to spare the believer the sorrow that would come
- As we hear Paul's words, we're left asking how applicable are these instructions to us today?
 - First, take note that Paul says his counsel is based on a sober assessment of the "present distress"
 - The present distress refers to the persecution that Paul and other Christians knew in his day
 - Believers were beginning to suffer at the hands of Jews for their faith
 - And Paul also knew that the days would grow even worse when the Romans joined in that persecution
 - Once persecution took hold throughout the empire, Christian families were subjected to the worst imaginable tortures and martyrdom
 - Families were crucified
 - Fed to wild animals in spectator games
 - Burned alive at the stake in a practice known as Roman candles
 - Facing such suffering alone is bad enough
 - But to be a father or mother and to watch helplessly as these things come upon your spouse or children is beyond our comprehension
 - Paul understood this dilemma, so he counsels that the church consider avoiding such a dilemma altogether
 - On the other hand, we have two clear reasons why we know Paul wouldn't expect all Christians to follow this advice
 - First, the present distress Paul cited is not universally true for all Christians
 - Not all Christians experience persecution of the level Paul experienced
 - Not all Christians are faced with persecution in their age or location
 - The churches in Paul's day were under such a threat
 - And many churches in our day face similar levels of persecution in places like China, North Korea, and in many Arab states
 - And in a future day, world-wide persecution will return as the end nears
 - But many churches today and throughout the centuries have existed in relatively peaceful circumstances
 - So Paul's counsel is not a mandate for all Christians...it depends on our circumstances
 - Secondly, we know Paul would not have expected every Christian to follow this advice, for if Christians never married, then the Christian life would be skewed toward singleness to an unhelpful degree

- We see clearly that the Lord works through Christian parents often to raise godly children
- While God must bring faith to every heart regardless of the family setting, nevertheless it's evident He delights to bring faith to children raised in a godly home
- So we can safely assume that it would go against God's purposes for every Christian to refrain from marriage
- So if we choose to marry, that's fine
 - But if we find ourselves in a difficult place and time, where our faith puts us at risk, we should consider Paul's counsel carefully
 - There is added burden that comes upon a man or woman trying to follow Christ within the context of a marriage
 - We are burdened by the responsibility to our spouse
 - We are constrained by our concern for their wellbeing
 - And we are distracted by worries over how our faith will lead to persecution
 - These burdens may outweigh the benefits of companionship, especially if we have a calling to evangelism or mission work where we will be in harm's way
 - Keep eyes for eternity
 - As Paul says to Timothy:

2Tim. 2:3 Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

2Tim. 2:4 No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

- Still, we expect that many if not most of us will choose to marry, as is our option
 - Should we take this course and should the times and circumstances change for the worse, then we'll have some difficult choices to make
 - So now Paul explains how we are to respond to those situations, as difficult as it may be

1Cor. 7:29 But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none;

1Cor. 7:30 and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess;

1Cor. 7:31 and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away.

1Cor. 7:32 But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord;

1Cor. 7:33 but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how

he may please his wife,

1Cor. 7:34 and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

1Cor. 7:35 This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.

- Paul's advice to married Christian couples begins with a curious reference to the days in which we live
 - Paul says the times have been shortened
 - The Greek word translated "shortened" is a complex idea
 - The word can mean wrapped up or covered over, like strings drawn together to close the mouth of a money sack
 - So in that sense it can be translated shortened, but that doesn't really give a full understanding of Paul's meaning
 - Think instead of the mouth of that bag tightening, constricting as well as the strings becoming shorter
 - Paul is emphasizing the nature of these last days before Christ's return
 - The time until His return is growing shorter by the day, like a fuse burning to the end
 - And at the same time, the opening is closing
 - The word represents both the fleeting and ever diminishing opportunity to serve Christ
 - As well as the increasing pressure and persecution of a noose being tightened around the Church
- These are the days all Christians know to some degree
 - We can't escape this reality, and though it will strike each of us differently, nevertheless we must give thought to what these days mean for our service to Christ
 - Paul says we who marry must be willing to live as if we are not married
 - Paul isn't asking us to abandon our wives or husbands for the sake of the Gospel
 - But in terms of our affections and priorities, we must be willing to follow Christ's commands without allowing our marital commitment to stand in the way of obedience
 - If the Lord asks us to devote our life to serving Him in a dangerous overseas location, would we say yes to the Lord if we were single?
 - Then we must be willing to say yes to Him if we are married and have children
 - We can't use our married life as excuse to say no to the Lord's call

- That's the price we pay for choosing to marry in view of these difficult times
- That's how Paul explains the logic of his advice in vs.32-34
 - He says he wants us to be free of concern, meaning the concern we naturally have for a spouse
 - If we are married, whether husband or wife, then naturally we have our attention and allegiances divided
 - This is true even when our spouse is a believer who also wants to follow the Lord
 - The reality of marriage is that we care for the other person to a degree that causes us to second guess the Lord's call
 - And Paul is trying to help us follow the Lord with the least distraction possible
- This principle of serving Christ free from divided attention extends far beyond the restrictions of marriage
 - In v.30, Paul says we cannot allow the sorrows and disappointments of this life to become excuse for not serving God
 - In Paul's day, Christians often experienced the sorrow of losing a loved one to persecution or suffering economic distress for their faith
 - Paul says if we have such sorrows, we must continue serving Christ as if we have only joys
 - Conversely, if we are living in luxury and comfort, we cannot allow the pursuit or maintenance of such things stand in the way of serving Christ
 - Remember the words of Christ

Matt. 19:21 Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

Matt. 19:22 But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.

- We cannot allow any affections in this life, whether family comforts or lifestyle, become an excuse to ignore the call of the Lord
- Every lifestyle decision we make will impact our obedience to the Lord
 - If our spouse demands we provide a certain degree of comfort or lifestyle, it will constrain our ability to serve the Lord
 - If we are determined to provide an expensive education for our kids or to live in only the best neighborhood, we'll be forced to pursue certain jobs
 - If we value our lifestyle over sacrificially serving the Lord, we'll spend our energy and free time on the wrong things
- Every decision we make for where we spend our time, money and energy means

something else is losing out

- And when we're married, some of our time, money and energy must be spent on our spouse and children, as it should be
- We remember that Paul emphasized that this choice is not sin
 - We have every right to take a spouse and have a family
 - And if we do, then we must give them the required time and attention
- But neither should we be naive about how this choice impacts our service to Christ
- And Paul, speaking from experience, counsels that we give some consideration to the possibility that our life will best serve the Lord if we remain free of such distractions
- Finally, in the principle of remaining as we are, Paul addresses one final issue of marriage in the church

1Cor. 7:36 But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry.

1Cor. 7:37 But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well.

1Cor. 7:38 So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better.

1Cor. 7:39 A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

1Cor. 7:40 But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.

- This passage is unnecessarily confusing because of a poor choice on the part of some English translators
 - The word "daughter" is not found in the original text
 - The KJV, NIV, NKJV, and many others get this correct, while my version (the NASB) misses the mark for some reason
 - The virgin in this passage is not the man's daughter
 - She is his fiancé
 - Remember, in Paul's day a marriage began with a betrothal, which we might call an engagement
 - But unlike today, the engagement was a much more solemn relationship that could not be easily broken
 - So Paul is addressing the situation where a man is currently betrothed to a virgin but he has heard Paul's teaching and is contemplating remaining unmarried

- What should such a man do? Go through with the marriage or remain single?
- Once again for this delicate situation, Paul gives very sensitive advice
- First, he says if you believe you are acting in an dishonoring way to the woman, and assuming she is already of marrying age, then he should go through with the marriage
 - On the other hand, if a man can pass three tests, he is in a position to forgo marriage and remain single in serving the Lord
 - First, the man must be able to stand firm in his own heart
 - He must be sure that this is a conviction brought by the Lord
 - He's not trying to impress anyone or appear pious
 - He is convinced in a manner that reflects a faith-led decision
 - He is prepared for a life of singleness and he is convicted of that call
 - Secondly, if the man understands he is under no constraint
 - The word of God does not require the man forgo marriage
 - And neither does any man dictate this choice for us, not even Paul himself
 - This is a choice we make in freedom, not as a result of Law
 - Thirdly, the man has authority over his own will concerning the matter
 - The question here is whether the man has made promises or entered into binding agreements concerning the marriage
 - If he has, then he no longer has authority over his own will in this situation
 - He is bound by his previous commitments
 - If he can pass these tests, then Paul says at the end of v.37 he does well to leave the fiancé a virgin and to serve the Lord in singleness
 - Likewise, if the man cannot pass these tests and decides to give the women in marriage (to himself), then he is not sinning either
 - Once again Paul says we do not sin when we choose to marry
 - This isn't an issue of right vs. wrong
 - It's a choice between good and better, depending on our circumstances
 - So in v.38 Paul says it is well to do one and better to do the other
- In like fashion, Paul flips the coin over and addresses a woman's options with a similar outcome
 - In Paul's day, a woman had few choices concerning marriage
 - Her father chose her husband
 - And she had no legal right to pursue a divorce, not that divorce was an option in any case
 - But it's in light of these social constraints that Paul says a woman must remain bound to her husband for as long as he lives (back to the one flesh principle of scripture)

- But if she becomes a widow, then she has a choice to make
- She is now free to be married to anyone she wishes
- She is no longer under her father's authority and without a husband, she makes her own decisions
- To that woman, Paul says she may marry anyone she wishes except only in the Lord
 - Paul is saying that a widow's decision to remarry must be in keeping with the Lord's will
 - And that includes not only whether to marry but who to marry
 - And as we learned last week that means marrying only believers
- But as Paul told the men, if the widow chooses to remain unmarried at that point, she will be happier
 - Paul isn't suggesting marriage makes us unhappy
 - He's speaking again of the benefits of serving Christ unencumbered by serving a husband
 - And since women historically have been disproportionately burdened in marriage, we can understand the sense of Paul's words
- And Paul ends by saying he believes he has the Spirit of God directing him to state these things
 - I find that statement a wonderfully ironic reflection of how the Spirit works with prophets and teachers
 - Paul sensed he was on the right track
 - He qualified his advice and made sure to say these things weren't direct commands of Christ
 - Nevertheless, he sensed he was teaching as God preferred
 - And of course, it is in scripture, which confirms for us that Paul was, in fact, teaching according to the Lord's wishes
 - That's a fitting postscript for this entire discussion of marriage
 - We may not always know exactly what we are to do in a certain situation
 - We may not know who we are to marry or even if we are to marry
 - We may wonder about trying to hold a difficult marriage together
 - But in the end, we can trust that the Spirit of God, Who lives in each of us, will lead us into all righteousness
 - We need to turn to the Spirit and search our hearts and listen to His counsel
 - When we do this we can be sure we will find what the Lord wants for us
 - And we'll receive the strength to follow
 - To say no to the wrong potential spouse or to marriage at all
 - To say no to Christ because of temptations of comfort, wealth or family demands

- To follow Him fully in these shortened days

- When we teach children math or science, the best teachers will emphasize key principles over memorization of questions and answers
 - If I teach someone to memorize specific answers to questions, then they really haven't learned much
 - As long as the questions don't change, they can parrot back the correct answer
 - But if the variables change even slightly, then the student is lost
 - It's as if they have to start over again in solving the puzzle
 - But if I teach a student the underlying principles, the basics timeless truths, then they are equipped to solve any problem that comes along
 - This method of teaching is especially important when learning spiritual truths
 - And Paul has followed this method in Chapter 7 as he answered the church's questions on marriage
 - On that first topic, Paul taught three basic principles that hold true in any circumstance
 - First, marriage is a one-flesh relationship that cannot be broken by the efforts of men, so we honor marriage for life
 - Secondly, each man or woman should remain in the condition in which they were called
 - A Christian conversion does not compel us to seek a new social status on Earth
 - Rather, it demands we seek after a kingdom that is not of this world
 - Finally, Paul counsels that singleness be given serious consideration in light of its advantages for serving Christ
 - These are principles that guide us in making decisions about marriage under any circumstances
 - Under this umbrella, we have much liberty and few restrictions
 - And this will be the pattern Paul will use throughout the rest of this letter
 - Answer specific questions with a few specific imperatives but many more general guidelines and principles
- The second of the questions Paul was posed by the church is answered in Chapters 8-10
 - This question concerns eating meat sacrificed to idols
 - Obviously, with three chapters to cover this topic, we'll take some time to examine all that Paul says
 - But in case you are thinking that this topic can't hold much value for the modern Christian, let me assure you it does
 - Because Paul responds by teaching on a principle that transcends a specific situation, like meat sacrificed to idols
 - And Paul uses Chapter 8 to set forth the principle he wants to teach

1Cor. 8:1 Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.

1Cor. 8:2 If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know;

1Cor. 8:3 but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.

1Cor. 8:4 Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.

1Cor. 8:5 For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords,

1Cor. 8:6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.

1Cor. 8:7 However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

1Cor. 8:8 But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.

1Cor. 8:9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

1Cor. 8:10 For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?

1Cor. 8:11 For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.

1Cor. 8:12 And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

1Cor. 8:13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.

- As we get into this topic and Paul's answer, we need some background on Greek culture
 - All ancient Greek culture was replete with idol worship, which largely took place in temples, much like churches of today
 - Pagan cultic practice regularly included an elaborate meal as part of their worship service
 - These pagan celebrations were common as part of state festivals (like government holidays of today) as well as private celebrations
 - The pagan worship ritual surrounding the meal typically had three parts
 - The first part of the ritual was preparation for the sacrifice
 - Following the preparation ritual, an animal was sacrificed
 - Finally, the meat of that animal was the centerpiece of a feast

- Obviously, this process took a few hours, so the entire event was a major social experience
- The meat of these sacrifices were commonly divided into three parts
 - First, a small part of the meat would be burned to the pagan god or gods as an offering
 - A second small part of the roasted meat was set before an empty table to honor the supposed god who was believed to be in attendance at the ceremony
 - Finally, the majority of the meat was served to the attendants and worshippers in the temple
 - The entire event honored the god who was presumed to be present
- These meals were an intense and important social occasion for the participants
 - It was a highlight event in Greek society, like a Super Bowl party or Christmas party today, only held regularly
 - Most if not all of the Christians in Corinth has likely attended these gatherings regularly before coming to faith
 - It was likely their primary social experience
 - One commentator called these temple meal services the ubiquitous restaurant of antiquity
- At these celebrations, worshippers supplied the animals used in the sacrifices, as their personal gift to the gods (think of it as BYO meat)
 - Consequently, the amount of available meat usually exceeded the appetite of the worshippers at the temple service
 - So after the service was concluded, the temple attendants would take the extra meat and sell it in the marketplace, called the Greek agora
 - The sale of the meat provided income for the temple and the temple attendants
 - The general Greek population shopped for daily necessities in the agora, including browsing meat shops stocked with temple sacrificed meat alongside regular meat
 - Under these circumstances, it could be difficult for a shopper to tell the difference between meat that had been sacrificed in a temple service from the regular meat
 - Nevertheless, the best meat was often the temple meat, because worshippers generally offered only their best animals in sacrifice to the gods
 - So a picky shopper would naturally gravitate to the better cuts of meat, increasing their chance of selecting temple meat
- Because of these Greek practices, a Christian living in Corinth faced a couple of challenges associated with meat sacrificed to idols
 - First, a Christian would undoubtedly be tempted to continue participating in the temple services
 - These services were a primary source of joy and social connection in Greek society

- These were the country clubs of today, so to cut off attendance altogether meant isolating oneself from friends and family
- But these events clearly posed a threat to the Christian's witness and maturity, hence the dilemma
- Secondly, just shopping in the local agora posed a challenge for a Christian
 - How does a Christian avoid the temple meat?
 - Or should a Christian even be concerned with the source of the meat they eat?
- These issues were at the heart of the church's question to Paul, and in this chapter Paul is answering both issues
 - As we consider Paul's response, it quickly becomes apparent that one situation concerned Paul far more than the other
 - As I mentioned at the beginning, Paul wants to teach principles of Christian living rather than merely answer questions about specific circumstances
 - So he begins his answer by quoting a well known Greek saying:
 - We all have knowledge
 - The meaning of the slogan was, there are some things everyone should understand so we need not suffer the ignorance of fools
 - The slogan meant we don't need to accommodate someone's ignorance if that ignorance is self-imposed
 - But Paul challenges that slogan by saying knowledge makes someone arrogant, where love for another is edifying
 - If we're not careful, we can become arrogant and unloving to others in the body of Christ because of something we think we know and they don't
 - It can puff up our pride, it can give us license in our own minds to treat them with contempt
 - And it makes others feel left out, judged and mocked
 - Furthermore, in v.2 Paul says the one who believes they have mastered some topic of spirituality, they are showing themselves to be a fool
 - When it comes to understanding God and our call to please Him, there will always be far more we don't understand than what we have learned
 - Imagine an undergraduate student claiming to have mastered mathematics, physics or medicine?
 - So what should be harder to understand? Science or the Author of all Creation?
 - Obviously, understanding God and His wisdom is infinitely more challenging than any other subject
 - So if other subjects take a lifetime to master, we shouldn't ever think we have all the knowledge when it comes to things of God
 - In fact, the pursuit of knowledge cannot lead us to God unless it makes us more like God

- In v.3 Paul says a true pursuit of God and of godliness is found only through a sincere love for God
- And if we love God truly, then we will also demonstrate love for His people
- Therefore, the Christian is called to make love for our brothers and sisters a higher goal than seeking empowerment through greater knowledge
 - For example, Paul acknowledges in vs.4-6 that an informed Christian knows full well that there is no such thing as an idol
 - Obviously, idols exist in the sense that pagans invented and worship idols
 - Paul says in v.5 that these so-called gods exist in many forms throughout the unbelieving world
 - But the informed Christian now understands that there is only one true God Who made all things and Who called us to Himself
 - The rest are figments of the unbeliever's deceived mind
 - Therefore, the meat sacrificed to these false gods is no different from any other meat
 - Our knowledge of the truth removes a sense of guilt concerning eating this meat, since we know the meat is not changing our relationship with Christ
 - The fact that an unbeliever previously chanted some mumbo jumbo when preparing the meat is irrelevant
 - We know the whole thing is a farce, a sham
 - So we can freely enjoy the meat without worry
- But then Paul steps back from the specific issue and returns to the principle at the heart of this question
 - In v.7 Paul reminds the Corinthian church that not all of their Christian brethren have broken free from their pagan roots
 - Not all men have this knowledge that pagan gods are powerless and without power
 - Paul explains that they were accustomed to idols until now
 - He means they were devoted pagan followers all their lives
 - And it takes time for someone to move beyond the influence of such things
 - They are babes in Christ, and in this fragile state they are still trying to understand the truth while reconciling it with their past
 - Consider the shock it must be to suddenly understand that everything you thought was true is a lie
 - Everything you've been taught was patently false
 - All the ritual and verse and songs you were taught were meaningless and pointless
 - All the power you thought these so-called gods possessed was never there at all
 - All your hopes and expectations for what your gods could accomplish has been

exposed as false hope and unmet expectations

- Perhaps there is no greater shock possible than for someone to lose their religion
- Of course, it's all for the best since they have now come to know the truth
- Nevertheless, Paul acknowledges it takes time to come through this process
- I think something happens when someone comes to understand that Evolution is false and the world has been taught a lie
 - It takes time to wrap your brain around the fact
- Paul says those Christians who live in this vulnerable infantile state are of special concern for the rest of the body
 - We must consider how to behave in light of their weak conscience
 - It's not enough to say they have the same knowledge we have
 - It's not a kind of loving to expect them to push all that history aside in an instant and dismiss their feelings and instincts
 - We took time to grow in our faith, so must every Christian be allowed the same time
 - Secondly, we must not make the highest priority in the body the exercise of our liberty or the exhibition of our confidence in knowledge
 - We may know that idols are nothing and that eating meat sacrificed to idols is nothing, but that doesn't mean we have no other concerns to consider
 - Paul says in v.8 that we don't commend ourselves to God when we exercise our freedom to eat anything
 - In other words, we don't prove our maturity by what we allow for ourselves
 - We prove our maturity by what we are willing to deny ourselves
 - Who is the more mature in the faith?
 - The one who enjoys alcoholic drinks because he knows it's permissible?
 - Or the Christian who denies himself the privilege out of concern for the weaker brother?
 - It's not the exercise of our freedoms that please God, but rather our self-restraint exercised in love for one another
- So the measure of our spiritual maturity isn't how much we know, but how we put what we know to practice by showing love for others
 - In the case of eating meat sacrificed to idols, the Corinthians' new-found understanding of idols had freed them to enjoy meat without guilt
 - But the decisions they made impacted others in the church
 - Paul reminds them in v.9 they must take care not to exercise their liberty in such a way that they become a stumbling block for the weak
 - Paul calls the conscience of immature Christians weak, in the sense that they

couldn't experience liberty in this area without defiling their conscience

- Our conscience is our internal compass, the conviction the Spirit gives us to help steer us into righteousness
 - As we grow in our maturity, that compass becomes stronger and more accurate
 - But in the early days of our walk, the compass is less discerning
 - We can make a comparison to learning how to swim in a pool
 - When we first put a child in the pool, they need a lot of help to keep them from danger
 - As they grow more confident, they graduate to water wings, and when they're ready they swim in the shallow without assistance
 - Finally, one day they swim even in the deep end without concern
- Likewise, when a new Christian is exploring the limits of liberty, they need a lot of help to protect them from danger
 - If they are thrown into difficult situations too early, it's like throwing a toddler into the deep end of a pool
 - Bad things are going to happen
 - That's Paul's concern here
- Those in the church who understood liberty were still frequenting the temples to dine, and buying the sacrificial meat in the agora, but this practice offended and concerned other Christians
 - So the question posed to Paul was whether it was acceptable to eat this meat and to attend these temple services
 - And as we can see, Paul elevated the conversation to a bigger, more important issue
 - We may not inflict harm on a fellow Christian through our pursuit of liberty
 - Paul explains in v.10 that if one of our weaker brothers observe us dining in the temple, won't they become confused about what is right?
 - They may be strengthened to eat meat sacrificed to idols
 - Paul means they will be encouraged by our behavior to act against their own conscience
 - Their conscience is still telling them that this is wrong
 - In their hearts, they made a decision to forsake pagan idols
 - They turned from such things to follow the true and living God
 - And so any thought of returning to that world sets off alarm bells in their heart, warning them to stay away
 - But then they see you, a respected member of the church, eating in the temple, appearing to enjoy the spectacle, oblivious to any concerns
 - Immediately, the weaker Christian experiences an inner conflict

- On the one hand they feel their God-given conscience telling them to stay away from these things
- On the other hand, they watch you modeling a different behavior and wonder if their conscience is wrong
 - Paul says the outcome will be that they will be strengthened to follow your examples
 - What he means is this weaker brother or sister has been taught by the stronger Christians that it's OK to ignore their conscience
- The problem isn't whether this specific action is permissible or not...the problem is how it impacts the weaker Christian's future sanctification
 - When we give a brother or sister license to go against their conscience, even in matters where they have liberty, we are setting them up for future ruin
 - In v.11 Paul says we have "ruined" our brother or sister
 - We have assisted them in ignoring their own convictions and to go against their own conscience
 - And in doing so, Paul says we have sinned against them and we sin against Christ
 - The sin we commit is in failing to uphold the commandment to love one another
 - The highest goals of the Christian life is to demonstrate love toward God and toward His people
 - But if the pursuit of our liberties leaves another Christian ruined, then we certainly have not loved them more than ourselves
 - And because we have turned our back on the Lord's commandment, we have failed to love the Lord as well
 - Finally, we have become a stumbling block to our brother or sister, leading them into sin
 - Ironically, though the specific behavior may be permissible in liberty (like eating meat sacrificed to idols), if we go against our conscience, we still sin
 - James says:

James 4:17 Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

- The right thing is according to the leading of the Spirit, and if we teach a brother to go against their own convictions, we are teaching them to ignore the Spirit
- And as they obey such an example, they will be sinning against the Spirit
- We have become their stumbling block
- So our chapter ends with Paul's application of this principle
 - He says that if enjoying a food is the cause for a brother to stumble, then he will

gladly never enjoy that food again

- The enjoyment of meat or of any passing thing in this life is secondary to the building up of the body of Christ
- This is another example of living with eyes for eternity
- Whatever passing pleasures we may enjoy in this world – and there are many we have liberty to enjoy – all of them combined are less important than even one Christian soul
 - Leading others into sin is a serious offense, according to Paul
 - So serious that it should lead us to change our behaviors whenever necessary to avoid such an outcome
 - This is a voluntary change, not one required by scripture but one made necessary by our love for one another
- Naturally, Paul's statement raises questions for us on what are the limits of such self-sacrifice?
 - For the mature Christian it may seem unfair to give up liberties for the sake of those too weak to share in them
 - The answers to these concerns come in the next chapters
 - But for now, let's dwell on the fundamental principle Paul taught us today
 - Enjoying liberty is not the highest goal in Christian life
 - Loving God and loving our brothers and sisters in the body is a much higher goal
 - And so we must exercise our liberty in love, sensitive to the convictions of others

- Last week we began a three chapter section on the proper exercise of Christian liberty
 - Paul is on this topic because the church in Corinth asked Paul to render his judgment on a certain question
 - The question seems to have been whether Christians may eat meat sacrificed to an idol
 - More specifically, the church wondered about two specific issues
 - Could a Christian continue to attend pagan temple meals, which were like restaurants or country clubs today
 - And secondly, could a Christian buy meat in the local market, called an agora
 - Paul will eventually answer those specific questions, but in the course of answering, he is teaching on a much larger principle, which is Christian liberty
 - In Chapter 8, Paul explained that Christians cannot exercise their freedoms with disregard for how our behavior effects others
 - If our freedoms injure others, then we are sinning
 - Likewise, if our lifestyle choices lead immature Christians to violate their conscience, then we sin as well
 - And even worse, we lead those other Christians to stumble, that is to sin against their own conscience
 - Understanding this principle is the most important goal of Paul's teaching in these chapters
 - Because even if he set them straight on the question of meat and idols, what would do when they encounter the next situation?
 - They would be lost
 - So the main goal of Paul's teaching in these chapters is to equip the church with an understanding of basic principles and biblical truths
 - And through this equipping, they will have what they need to exercise their liberty properly in every situation
- As we left Chapter 8, Paul summed up the principle with a simple but powerful personal statement

1Cor. 8:13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.

- Paul is using the question of eating meat sacrificed to idols as an example to make his larger point
 - We can generalize Paul's statement this way:
 - If enjoying my Christian liberty leads my brother or sister into sin, then I will gladly forgo that liberty out of love for that brother or sister

- We should be willing to set aside our liberties because our highest goal as a Christian is to demonstrate love
 - Love for God and love for our neighbor
- Liberty is a privilege of our faith, not an absolute right
- So we cannot make the pursuit of our liberties our priority when there are more important values (like love) at stake
- As we move into Chapter 9, Paul must continue challenging the Corinthian church to think differently about their liberties
 - Greek society respected strength and status, but these values can come into conflict with Christian values of humility and self-sacrifice
 - So in this situation, Greek culture was working against the goals of Christian maturity
 - So Paul is working hard to explain why this Greek church must be willing to set aside Greek goals
 - And in their place, the church needed to adopt a Christ-like perspective
- Lastly, Chapter 9 will also find Paul once again defending his apostolic authority in the face of his enemies' attacks in his absence

1Cor. 9:1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?

1Cor. 9:2 If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

- Did you notice Paul's defensive posture? He begins with four rhetorical questions
 - First, Paul asks am I not free? Am I not an apostle?
 - Paul is asking the church to consider his own rights and privileges as an apostle
 - Was Paul not free to enjoy Christian liberty like the rest of the church? Yes, he was
 - And more than that was Paul not an apostle, which was a unique and esteemed position in the church? And the answer is yes again
 - These questions set up the two purposes of this chapter
 - Paul will use himself as an example to demonstrate how a Christian must set aside liberty on occasion to show love to others
 - But secondly, Paul is at work again to defend his authority as an apostle to those who would try to use Paul's self-restraint against him
 - Paul's next two questions continue on the question of his authority
 - He asks did he not see the Lord Jesus Christ?
 - He's referring to his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus
 - It also reminds us that the fundamental requirement to be considered an

apostle was to see the Lord in person

- And if that weren't enough to demonstrate Paul's authority, he points to the founding of the Corinthian church as proof of his position and authority
 - As we learned back in Chapter 1, the founding of the Corinthian church was a self-evident miracle
 - Had the Lord not been at work through Paul, he could never have established such a large church out of nothing in a place as corrupt as Corinth
 - So Paul says in v.2 that even if some doubted his apostleship, certainly the Corinthians should know the truth
 - The very existence of this church was a seal or stamp of authenticity to prove Paul's claims
- Why does Paul open this chapter sounding so defensive, with this series of questions? He is setting up his argument for the rest of the chapter
 - Paul is referring to the time he and Barnabas lived and worked among the Corinthians
 - They made decisions at times to forgo the rights and privileges of apostles
 - They set aside their own comfort, ease and even their status as apostles in order to become a blessing to the Corinthians
 - For example, they enjoyed marketplace meat when living among the Gentiles, but avoided it when living among Jews in the city
 - They refused material support though they had rights to expect it
 - So Paul is using himself as an example of how one sets aside liberty out of love for another believer
 - Paul refused certain privileges out of concern for the needs of the church in Corinth
 - And yet his right to have these things was never in doubt, proving it was a self-sacrifice on Paul's part
 - And if an apostle can forgo personal liberty at times, then certainly every believer should be willing to do the same
 - Paul is also addressing his critics who have charged that his self-restraint was evidence that he and Barnabas weren't actually apostles at all
 - Because the Greek culture associated authority with strength and power, they interpreted any sign of weakness as evidence that authority was lacking
 - So Paul must defend his authority before he can explain his choice to set aside his Christian liberty

1Cor. 9:3 My defense to those who examine me is this:

1Cor. 9:4 Do we not have a right to eat and drink?

1Cor. 9:5 Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?

- Paul offers his defense to those who examine him, which means to those who put me on trial
 - Paul asks, do the the apostles not have a right to eat and drink or get married?
 - This is such a clever way to defend himself
 - Paul's critics were pointing to Paul's refusal to accept monetary support as proof he wasn't an apostle
 - After all, they would say, other apostles relied exclusively on support
 - They walked away from their fishing nets and tax collector booths
 - They depended entirely on the church for income
 - But Paul chose at times to continue working in his profession as a tent maker
 - So his critics argued that if Paul were truly an apostle, he would live on support like other apostles
 - His refusal to accept support was evidence they claimed that Paul wasn't truly an apostle
 - But instead of beginning his defense by explaining his decision to work for his income, Paul begins with questions of food and drink and marriage
 - Paul asks if he has a right to these things, which we know are things that he most certainly had a right to expect
 - Food and drink and even marriage are basic rights of every Christian
 - These things don't come and go based on our authority
 - Therefore, when Paul chose not to eat or drink certain things, he didn't forfeit his authority did he?
 - And when Paul chose to forgo marriage in order to serve Christ, he wasn't less an apostle was he?
 - Notice in v.5 that Paul mentions other apostles took wives
 - In particular, Peter was married we learn here
 - As a passing note, this tells us what we already know – that no man is required to forgo marriage as a condition of serving the Lord
 - Notice however that Paul qualifies that right...it must be a believing wife
- Paul cleverly leads his reader into an obvious conclusion: Paul had the right to such things and his decision to set aside that right didn't diminish his authority as an apostle
 - So then, Paul now moves in v.6 to the heart of his critics' accusations, concerning the issue of Paul working and refusing the church's support

1Cor. 9:6 Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?

1Cor. 9:7 Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?

- Paul asks if his critics think that only he and Barnabas are without the right to stop working?
 - Paul is demonstrating the nonsense of his critics' argument
 - Paul has made clear that he qualifies as an apostle according to the standard, and yet his critics say he must still be working because he is not entitled to their support
 - So Paul asks if only he and Barnabas are the only apostles required to keep working in this way
- Paul is refuting those who claimed Paul and Barnabas were forced to work because they weren't qualified to be supported by the church
 - Regardless of whether Paul or Barnabas chose to accept such support, they always retained a right to receive it
- So beginning in v.7 Paul teaches that financial support was something he and Barnabas had just as much right to accept as any other minister of the Gospel
 - Paul uses three examples of life to demonstrate the concept, followed by a support from scripture
 - His first example is of a soldier who enlists in military service
 - The soldier expects their income and other needs be met by that service
 - A soldier isn't expected to find work on the side to support his family while trying to fight for his country in the meantime
 - Rather, the soldier's time is focused on serving, because he knows that he need not divert any of his time and energy on making a wage
 - Secondly, a farmer with a vineyard would never think to buy grapes from the local agora
 - Instead, that farmer would be expected to obtain his grapes from the harvest of his own hands
 - His work has given him the right to expect a return from that effort
 - Finally, a shepherd would never purchase milk at the agora
 - He would obtain the milk from his own flock, which he maintains
 - He looks to his own for his support
 - By these three examples, Paul gives us three principles that should guide our understanding of why we support those who minister to the church
 - First, we should want their undivided attention focused on their ministry service
 - Just as we want our soldiers focused 100% on defending our nation
 - Imagine if our soldiers must spend half their time working at Walmart rather than being paid for their military service?
 - It might save us a few bucks in taxes, but what would we lose?
 - How prepared would our military be and how safe would our nation be?
 - Likewise, Paul is asking if someone devoted to the Gospel is expected by his critics to spend their time working to make ends meet instead of teaching the

Bible?

- Secondly, the example of the farmer illustrates that the work of ministry should be the source of a minister's supply
 - He is investing time and energy in growing up a field of fruit
 - And that fruit in turn should be a blessing for that one who worked so hard to produce it
 - If a vineyard owner never reaps a harvest for his work, he will eventually seek for better ground
- Thirdly, the example of the shepherd illustrates that the supply comes from within a shepherd's own flock
 - On any given hill, we might find many flocks and many shepherds
 - But each shepherd received the milk he needed from within his own flock
 - We should no more expect one shepherd to provide milk to another than we should expect our ministers to receive support from other flocks
- Not wanting to rest on these examples alone, Paul then turns to scripture prove his point

1Cor. 9:8 I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things?

1Cor. 9:9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, “YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING.” God is not concerned about oxen, is He?

1Cor. 9:10 Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops.

1Cor. 9:11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

- In v.8 Paul says he isn't speaking merely on the basis of human judgment, because the word of God teaches these principles as well
 - In Deuteronomy 25:4, we find it written that a farmer in Israel may not muzzle his ox while the ox is threshing
 - Threshing was a process of separating the grain seed from the husk that surrounded it
 - The best way to accomplish this was to lay stalks of grain on a flat hard floor
 - Then a large, heavy animal like an ox would be led to trample over the stalks of grain
 - The grain seeds were strong enough to remain intact under the pressure of the ox hooves
 - But the hooves would separate the chaff away from the grain seeds
 - So the ox would be tied to a pole and made to walk in a circle around the pole

- The grain stalks would be thrown in the path of the ox
- While the crushed grain would be swept out of the circle after the ox passed over it
- This process would go on for hours at a time, with the ox moving in a circle around this pole for the whole time
- Obviously, the ox would get hungry after working for so long
 - So occasionally the ox might stop and bend down to eat some of the grain under its feet
 - If a farmer wanted to prevent the ox from eating the grain, he could place a muzzle on the mouth of the ox
 - But in the Law, the Lord commanded that the sons of Israel not muzzle the ox while it was threshing
- And now in v.10 Paul explains why that Law found its way into the commandments given to Israel
 - Paul says the Lord's chief concern wasn't the welfare of oxen
 - It was for the sake of His people
 - First, it was beneficial to the farmer that his ox was well-fed and strong while it performed the work
 - The little bit of grain the animal might eat provided the energy needed for that animal to thresh the grain for the farmer
 - If the animal was weak, the grain wouldn't be harvested
 - So to starve the animal in the hope of saving a little grain was penny wise and pound foolish, as the saying goes
 - More importantly, Paul says this law was always intended to be a useful illustration of the very principle Paul was teaching now concerning supporting ministers
 - Like the ox, a workman should expect to give his work in the hope of receiving something of benefit in return
 - Workmen share in what they work to produce, just as the ox shared in the grain it helped to glean
 - It's not a burden; it's their right
 - Then in v.11 Paul makes the application to his own ministry
 - If he worked to produce spiritual benefits in the church, then certainly he should have right to material blessing in return
 - The spiritual gains are always more valuable than material gains
 - Paul gave them the Gospel and the knowledge of God, something of eternal, immeasurable value
 - And all he should expect in return was modest monetary support, which is something of passing, unimportant value by comparison
- So Paul certainly had a right and liberty to receive his full-time support from the church,

and his refusal to accept that support was not reason to doubt his authority as an apostle

- So why did Paul forgo this privilege of ministry?
- Now Paul is ready to return to the main issue of exercising personal liberty, using himself as an example

1Cor. 9:12 If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.

1Cor. 9:13 Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar?

1Cor. 9:14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

1Cor. 9:15 But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one.

- Paul asks the church if other, lessor ministers have received support from the church, then didn't apostles like Paul and Barnabas also have the right to expect such things?
 - The answer is obviously yes, nevertheless Paul and Barnabas did not use their right
 - Paul is referring to the way Paul and Barnabas made a decision to work to support themselves while they were in Corinth
 - As they worked to support themselves, they avoided burdening the church with the need to support them
 - Paul says in v.12 that they chose this path because they felt to do otherwise would be a "hindrance to the mission of the Gospel"
 - Perhaps Paul felt that if Paul had asked for support in the beginning of his ministry, the Greek church would misunderstand Paul's motives
 - Perhaps other false teachers were using the proclamation of the Gospel as a means of gain, so Paul wanted to distance himself from such men
 - Whatever his reason, Paul made a decision to set aside one of his rights out of love for God and the believers in Corinth
 - In vs.13-14 Paul reiterates once again that service to God is an honorable profession that carries the natural expectation that those who benefit from that service should support those workmen
 - In fact, Paul goes a step further and places a command on the congregation
 - Notice in v.14 Paul says the Lord commands that those who proclaim the Gospel receive their living or income from that work
 - Paul isn't saying this is a command on the minister, but rather it is a command to the congregation

- The congregation is required by the Lord to provide gifts of support to meet the needs of their ministers
- And that requirement on the congregation exists regardless of whether in the end the minister chooses to accept those gifts
- Even in cases like Paul's where the minister chooses to forgo support to set an example, the congregation is still commanded by the Lord to make it possible for the minister to earn his living by that work
- In v. 15 Paul reminds the church he never made use of these things
 - He purposely left money on the table, so to speak
 - The choice to cease working should be a privilege every minister has a right to enjoy
 - But that privilege is not a requirement
 - And if a minister, like Paul, continues to work out of concern for others, then it doesn't delegitimize his authority
 - No more than a refusal to eat or drink or marry would become an indictment
 - But neither does it remove the congregation's responsibility to support that minister
 - At the end of this section, we come to the power of Paul's example
 - If an apostle like Paul, the position of highest honor in the church, was willing to forgo his own livelihood for the sake of his love for the church
 - Then certainly the exercise of our liberties and rights and privileges must always be conditioned on the same standard of love
 - Furthermore, when someone exercises self-restraint of liberty, it isn't a sign of weakness or a reason to question their liberty in the first place
 - On the contrary, it's a sign of their spiritual maturity and a demonstration of self-sacrificial love
- In v.15 Paul makes clear he isn't mentioning these things now as a subtle way of gaining the church's financial support
 - He says he isn't writing to have this done so for him now
 - His motive isn't to obtain the money in the end
 - If he had wanted support, he could have had it at any time
 - Instead, he wanted the heavenly honor of receiving the Lord's praise for having given up something he could have so that he could demonstrate love for the church
 - Not wanting to be a burden on the church, Paul chose to work
 - That choice was a demonstration of love, not of weakness
 - And this standard of conduct is the standard the entire church is called to emulate
 - We can get the sense of how important this principle is when you consider Paul's

last words in v.15

- Paul says he would rather die than to have someone begin supporting him when he didn't want it
- That statement suggests that Paul knew he would be rewarded in the kingdom for this sacrifice, and he didn't want to lose that reward
- He would rather be rewarded in the kingdom than to take his reward here and now
- That's the standard we want to mirror, because that's the standard the Lord demonstrated for us

- Today we study part three of Paul's teaching on liberty and its limits
 - As you know, this topic runs from Chapters 8-10 and began with the question of whether it was proper to eat meat sacrificed to idols
 - In the course of answering the question, Paul has embarked upon a discussion of the nature of Christian liberty
 - First, Paul taught in Chapter 8 that liberty must be exercised with love for others
 - Secondly, Paul pointed to himself as an example of one who forgoes liberty out of concern for others
 - Finally, Paul defended his decision to forgo receiving financial support against those who claimed it was proof he wasn't an apostle
 - He argued that he still had a right to their support even as he refused it
 - Let's pick up in Chapter 9 where Paul was explaining his refusal to accept support

1Cor. 9:14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

1Cor. 9:15 But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one.

- As we saw last week, Paul made abundantly clear that those who proclaim the Gospel have an expectation to receive their living from the gospel
 - The minister who is devoted to proclaiming the Good News has every right to receive the support of those he serves
 - As Jesus Himself said when instructing the disciples:

Luke 10:7 “Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house.

- Such were Paul and Barnabas, laborers serving God's people and worthy of their wages
- Nevertheless these men chose not to take advantage of this right in Corinth
 - Paul says he used none of these things
 - Notice the word things is plural, meaning he refused donations of support given on his behalf
- Instead, Paul and Barnabas chose to work for their living instead
 - This is a meaningful and commendable choice on Paul's part
 - He took upon himself added burden he didn't have to take
- It's a great reminder to ministers today that forgoing financial support is an option we may take when circumstances warrant

- But we do so only when it's the better course for the sake of the Gospel
- But as we learned last week, a minister's choice in this matter has no bearing on our collective responsibility to offer support
- We are not to muzzle the ox we depend upon for our spiritual nourishment
- In Paul's case, he made his decision for two reasons
 - First, by forgoing his personal liberty he was showing love for the church by avoiding placing a financial burden upon them
 - Paul alludes to this purpose in this chapter
 - But he explains it most clearly in another letter, 2 Corinthians
 - In that letter, Paul once again reminds the church of his choice to forgo support and says it was intended as a benefit for their sakes

2Cor. 12:11 I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody.

2Cor. 12:12 The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.

2Cor. 12:13 For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!

2Cor. 12:14 Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.

- Sarcastically, Paul asks the church to "forgive him" for not placing a financial burden upon them
 - Apparently his refusal to accept their support was interpreted by the church as an insult, as if Paul was treating them as inferior or poor by refusing support
 - Paul says they should have perceived it as a blessing
 - Because he was trying not to be a burden upon the church
- There was a second reason Paul chose not to restrict his personal liberty in Corinth
 - In v.15 Paul says it would be better for him to die than to start receiving their support
 - Why was Paul so adamantly opposed to being paid for his ministry work in Corinth?
 - Paul answers saying that he didn't want his boast to be made empty
 - The boast he's speaking about is the claim that Paul served the church without receiving reward for his service
 - Had the church turned around now, as a result of Paul's letter, to begin

providing financial support, it would have made Paul's boast empty

- Paul didn't want his reward on earth...he was looking for a heavenly reward

1Cor. 9:16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

1Cor. 9:17 For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.

1Cor. 9:18 What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

- Paul explains that merely preaching the Gospel in Corinth was not a cause by itself for the Lord to reward him
 - Paul says he couldn't expect the Lord to reward Him merely for spreading the Gospel because Paul was under compulsion to do so
 - When the Lord appeared to Paul on the road, the Lord commanded Paul to preach
 - Here's how the Lord explained His plan for Paul

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

Acts 9:16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

- Paul was under compulsion to serve God
 - He might have refused, in the manner of Jonah
 - But woe to such a man, as Paul himself acknowledges
 - So how could Paul boast in what was already expected?
 - It would be like an employee bragging about showing up for work everyday
 - Or Ken bragging about showing up for church every Sunday
 - That's already expected, so we can't boast about it
- In v.17 Paul says if he were preaching voluntarily, then he might have reason to brag and receive reward
 - But Paul was arrested on the road against his will, and he was assigned this mission of suffering and sacrifice against his will
 - Paul didn't ask for these things, and he certainly didn't want for them when he was still Saul persecuting Christians
 - Paul says the Lord entrusted Paul with a stewardship, a caretaker responsibility, to deliver the Gospel to the Gentiles
 - The Lord stepped into this life, changed him and gave him a new mission in life

- So when Paul preached the message of the Gospel and suffered persecution, he was just doing what he was told
 - Nevertheless, Paul still wanted to have something to boast about when he stood before Christ to receive his judgment
 - And so that brings us to the second reason Paul determined not to receive financial support
- In v.18 Paul says his reward will come from his decision to preach the Gospel at no charge
 - He set aside his liberty, choosing not to make full use of his right to receive support
 - And he did this to show love to the brethren and in the hope of being more effective in the ministry of the Gospel

1Cor. 9:19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.

1Cor. 9:20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law;

1Cor. 9:21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.

1Cor. 9:22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.

1Cor. 9:23 I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

- Paul declares though he was free from all men
 - When he says he was free, he means he had the same liberty all men receive in knowing and following Christ
 - He was free from the restrictions of the Mosaic Law
 - He was free from the judgment of men concerning righteousness
 - He could make decisions about how to live without worry for how those decisions impacted his position before the Lord
 - Nevertheless, Paul voluntarily assumed additional certain burdens and restrictions to be as effective as possible in ministry
 - For example, Paul says when he was ministering among Jewish people, he assumed a lifestyle that was pleasing to the Jew
 - In assuming these restrictions, Paul voluntarily set aside some of his liberty
 - He made this choice to appease the Jews and create a cultural connection with them to improve his opportunity to present the Gospel

- And around Gentiles, Paul adopted a different lifestyle, one that probably made Paul a little uncomfortable and may have even offended him a little
 - Here again, Paul was making lifestyle choices that restricted his liberty
 - But he made these decisions to win men to the Gospel, whether Jew or Gentile, whether strong men or weak men
- Notice Paul makes clear that these choices weren't a requirement...they were choices he made to earn reward
 - He says he wasn't under the Law of Moses even when he lived like the Jews...it was his choice
 - And when he lived like a Gentile, he knew better than to think he was living without any law
 - He knew was always under the law of Christ
 - But he did these things for the sake of the Gospel and so that he may become a partaker in it
 - Obviously, Paul was already saved by his faith alone
 - So when he says he was working to become a partaker of the Gospel, he means he wished to share in the reward given to those who preach the Gospel
- If we study Paul's example carefully, we arrive at some basic principles for how we may set aside our own liberty with an eye toward our eternal reward
 - First, our attitude in life should be how can I accommodate another through self-restraint
 - So many Christians seem only interested in showing off their liberties
 - But we see Paul always looking for ways to restrain his freedom
 - So should we focus our attention on how we can restrain our freedoms rather than allowing them to rule us
 - Secondly, Paul restrained himself for specific purposes related to the Gospel
 - He was seeking to advance the purposes of the Gospel in love
 - Whether Paul moved left or right, front or back, he made every lifestyle decision with an eye toward how it impacted his effectiveness in ministry
 - Thirdly, Paul never placed undue emphasis on certain rules
 - Paul knew he wasn't bound by the Mosaic Law, but he always remembered he was accountable to the Law of Christ
 - Likewise, we must be willing to adopt or cast off any rule of life if it helps us win souls for Christ while always obeying Christ's commands
 - Any self-restriction not directly related to advancing the purpose of the Gospel is nothing more than self-righteousness
 - We can't allow any restriction to become an end in itself
 - Do whatever you do for eternal purposes

- Finally, we see how Paul used his self-sacrifice as opportunity for the Lord to bless him
 - Paul wasn't the only man living under compulsion
 - We all have certain obligations, and we fulfill those expectations as a matter of duty
 - If we merely do what we are already commanded to do, then a reward isn't in the cards
 - But when we decide voluntarily to use our life to serve the Lord, then we are working to gain reward
 - We can't think that assembling at church regularly, saying our prayers at night, and staying out of trouble will gain us reward
 - Those things are expected, because we've been commanded in scripture to do those things
 - Reward comes from voluntary service to God, Paul says
- And Paul ends this chapter on the topic of personal reward

1Cor. 9:24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.

1Cor. 9:25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

1Cor. 9:26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;

1Cor. 9:27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

- This is the second time in this letter that Paul has turned the church's questions to the issue of a Christian's eternal reward
 - Paul uses an analogy of a sports competition to explain to the church in Corinth why every Christian has good reason to exercise self-control
 - Paul says every Christian is running in a great foot race
 - Our Christian walk of life is the race, to mix my metaphors
 - Every Christian is running, but Paul says only one receives the prize
 - Paul is make a comparison to the ancient Olympic games of Greece where runners competed for honor
 - There was no second or third place awarded in the Greek games
 - You had one winner and the rest were losers
 - So Paul commands the church to run your Christian race in such a way that you may win your race
 - As we continue to examine this analogy, we need to understand both the similarities

and differences of the comparison

- For example, in the Greek games, an athlete competes against other runners for a singular prize
 - But in the Christian race, we are not competing against other Christians but against ourselves
 - Our performance will be compared to what we might have done with the opportunities the Lord gives us
 - And Paul explained that our opportunities have been prepared by the Lord so that we might please Him

Eph. 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

- And Jesus Himself taught in Luke 12:48 that to whom much is given, much is expected
- So we compete against our own opportunities
- Secondly, in the Greek games, there was but one prize for each race, but in the Christian race, the prizes are endless
 - Remember earlier in Chapter 2 Paul said that no eye has seen nor ear heard nor could men even imagine all that the Lord has prepared for those who love Him
 - So don't be jealous of another Christian who lives a life of excellence
 - Rather, we should celebrate their faithfulness and seek to emulate it
 - They have won their prize, and we may yet still win ours
- And that's Paul's advice to this church and to us as well
 - In v.24 Paul says run your Christian race to win
 - Just like an athlete that disciplines his body during training so he will compete well, we must exercise self-discipline to please the Lord and earn our reward
 - If an athlete is willing to endure great physical pain to arrive at a perishable wreath, then certainly we can endure a loss of freedom to earn an imperishable reward
 - So Paul exercised sound judgment, careful strategy and enormous self-discipline to ensure he could win the contest
 - Using more sports analogies, Paul says he ran with specific goals, not aimlessly
 - He boxed so that he hit his target, he didn't just beat at the air
 - Paul lived his life concerned with being disqualified from sharing in the rewards that he might otherwise receive for preaching the Gospel
 - Likewise, we must make strategic decisions about how to exercise our liberties
 - We must learn the lessons Paul has given us in these examples
 - We recognize that all of us have liberty to live in many ways, but we must

consider each decision with an understanding that we are planning a race

- That race has the opportunity to bring us reward or bring us loss
- We must think strategically
- We must be willing to exercise self-control
- And all these things we do so that the purposes of the Gospel will be accomplished in our choices

- At the end of Chapter 9, Paul was discussing his two reasons for choosing to restrain his liberty at times
 - One reason was to demonstrate love for other Christians by not becoming a burden for them
 - Specifically, Paul refrained from taking financial support, though he had a right to expect it
 - He did so to avoid burdening the church
 - But Paul placed greater emphasis on his second reason for this decision
 - He argued that restricting his personal liberty was a strategy for increasing his effectiveness in ministry
 - And greater effectiveness would garner him even greater rewards from the Lord
 - So for Paul, restricting personal liberty was a means to an end
 - He could please his Lord all the more by making these personal sacrifices
 - And by pleasing the Lord, Paul knew he was earning something far more valuable than anything he set aside
- Then toward the end of Chapter 9, Paul came to his central point on Christian liberty

1Cor. 9:27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

- Paul uses an arresting term
 - Paul says he does not wish to be disqualified
 - As we learned last week, he means disqualified from enjoying the benefits of serving Christ
 - Paul preaches to others that they should please the Lord and prepare for their judgment day
 - And he doesn't want to risk a chance he would lose any potential for his own reward
- He says we must discipline our bodies to ensure that positive outcome
 - The discipline Paul is talking about is that of denying our flesh, restricting our liberties, when necessary
 - And doing so purposefully to accommodate the needs of the Gospel
 - Like an athlete that must deny his body certain things while pushing it to perform so that he might take home the prize he desires
- Simply put, it's not enough that we have been given salvation
 - We must work out that salvation to the end that we please the Lord by our choices and decisions
 - We exercise self-control out of love for others, yes
 - But we also do so for our own eternal interests

- And that was Paul's focus
- Furthermore, if we do not make a point of exercising self-discipline in restraining our liberty, then there's a good chance our lack of self-restraint will eventually become sin
 - One day we're enjoying our liberty by eating meat sacrificed to an idol
 - The next moment, we've become comfortable participating in the idol worship ceremony that precedes the meal
 - One moment we are enjoying watching PG-13 movies
 - The next moment...what will we be willing to accept?
 - Again, the problem isn't that enjoying liberty is wrong
 - The issue is, are we spiritually mature enough to control these desires and even put them aside altogether when spiritual demands warrant?
- Now as we enter Chapter 10, Paul moves to illustrating his concern using an example from the history of Israel

1Cor. 10:1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea;

1Cor. 10:2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

1Cor. 10:3 and all ate the same spiritual food;

1Cor. 10:4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.

1Cor. 10:5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

- Paul often uses this phrase "For I do not want you to be unaware..." (*theo agnoeo*) to introduce a new thought as proof of an argument
 - And here's Paul's proof by way of example: the nation of Israel in the desert
 - The Israelites serve as a powerful example of how a failure to restrain sinful, fleshly desires can do destruction in one form or another
 - From their experiences, Paul will then make an application to the Corinthian church
 - Paul starts by drawing our attention to the fact that all these people shared a common set of experiences or knowledge
 - He says the Jewish fathers (or ancestors) were all under the cloud
 - A reference to seeing the physical manifestation of the angel of the Lord in the desert
 - They were under the cloud, because God used the cloud to shield the people from the desert sun during the day
 - It was evidence of God's love, and mercy and kindness

- Secondly, the people all passed through the sea
 - Going through the Red Sea proved God's power to deliver us from enemies
 - As well as His power to destroy those who oppose Him
- Thirdly, this group was baptized into Moses
 - Paul is using the word baptized in the sense of being baptized into one body
 - The entire nation experienced a type of baptism as it passed through the sea and entered into the covenant of Moses
- Finally, the entire nation received powerful examples of Christ in the form of manna, the bread of life from Heaven and they drank from the rock that pictured Christ
 - So the nation of Israel in the desert can be seen as a picture or example of the believer individually
 - Just as that group experienced God's mercy, deliverance, baptism, a covenant relationship, and communion with Christ, so does the individual believer today
 - While they received those things as shadows, we receive them in their full form
- So then what more might we learn from their experience? Paul goes on

1Cor. 10:6 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.

1Cor. 10:7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, “THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY.”

1Cor. 10:8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.

1Cor. 10:9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents.

1Cor. 10:10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

- In a remarkable statement of providence, Paul says the Lord orchestrated the events of the 40 years in the desert so that His children could learn important lessons
 - We could probably consider this statement all by itself for an entire lesson
 - The people of Israel were brought out of Egypt in such a dramatic way and were ushered through 40 years of experiences for our sake
 - And for the sake of all believers who could benefit from learning of the experience
 - So what do we learn from studying Israel's period of wandering in the desert?
 - Paul says the central lesson for believers should be that we not crave evil things
 - Paul is not suggesting that this generation of Israel were all believers
 - On the contrary, scripture makes clear elsewhere that this generation of

Israel was an unbelieving generation lacking faith

- Nevertheless, the collective experience of the nation holds important lessons for the individual believer when it comes to self-restraint
- In comparing their national experience in the desert to our personal experience in faith, Paul briefly mentions four moments in those forty years
 - First, he says don't be idolaters as some in Israel had become
 - Paul is referencing Exodus 32:6
 - In that chapter the Israelites sit down to observe the Lord's sacrifices in a congregational meal

Ex. 32:1 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”

Ex. 32:2 Aaron said to them, “Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.”

Ex. 32:3 Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron.

Ex. 32:4 He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.”

Ex. 32:5 Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD.”

Ex. 32:6 So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

- We can easily see Paul's reason for raising this example
 - The people wished to engage in a religious meal service
 - In the pagan traditions of Egypt, religious services involved elaborate meals and were often followed by sexual acts with prostitutes who served the worshippers
 - Sound familiar?
 - The pagan temples in Corinth operated in the same fashion
- So Israel longed to eat and play, which is a euphemism for sexual immorality, but they lacked a spiritual leader to lead them in the ceremony
 - Moses was unaccounted for, so the nation enlisted Aaron and asked that he create an idol so they could party
 - It's as if we were dying to have turkey and stuffing, so we demanded that someone invent a reason to celebrate Thanksgiving
 - Notice in v.5 Aaron declares tomorrow will be a feast

- And then the people proceeded to party
- Can you see Paul's point in this example?
 - When we let our fleshly desires control us, they will eventually lead us into serious sin
 - What starts as a desire for food becomes a desire for sexual pleasure
 - And sexual sin became a cause for idolatry
 - It's a slippery slope, so any time we give in to our flesh, we can't be sure where it's going to lead ultimately
 - The enemy is crafty
 - He knows our weaknesses
 - He will tempt our flesh in one capacity to get us comfortable with living in our flesh
 - Once we are practiced in allowing our flesh to rule our hearts, then he walks us further away from godliness
 - Before we know it, we're giving in to serious sin
- Paul uses three more examples to reinforce the same point, but each adds a new element to the pattern
 - In v. 8 Paul warns us of another time the Israelites were drawn into immorality
 - In Numbers 25 the Israelites followed after their sexual lusts to take daughters of Moab as wives
 - This was a sin in direct disobedience to the Lord's commands
 - Notice how their disobedience began

Num. 25:1 While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab.

Num. 25:2 For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.

Num. 25:3 So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the LORD was angry against Israel.

- Once again, the sin began with an invitation to sit and eat
- Followed by an invitation to bow down and worship false gods
 - The Israelites were so desirous of the food and the women that there were willing to worship false gods to get what they wanted
- In v.9 Paul reminds us of the episode of the serpents in Numbers 21

Num. 21:4 Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the

journey.

Num. 21:5 The people spoke against God and Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food.”

Num. 21:6 The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.

- Once again, a fleshly desire ruled their hearts and led them to sin against the Lord
- Prompting the judgment of the Lord
- Finally, in v.10 Paul describes a moment from Numbers 11

Num. 11:4 The rabble who were among them had greedy desires; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, “Who will give us meat to eat?”

Num. 11:5 “We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic,

Num. 11:6 but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna.”

Num. 11:33 While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very severe plague.

Num. 11:34 So the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had been greedy.

- If the pattern isn't clear by now, then we're not paying attention
- Greedy, fleshly desires set a trap for the soul, and the fall inevitably came
- Our liberties offer us limitless opportunities to enjoy the life God has granted us in Christ, but with great power comes great responsibility (to quote Marvel comics)
 - We must live in control of our fleshly desires
 - We must exercise sound and sober judgment concerning when and where to enjoy our liberties
 - And our enjoyment must be self-disciplined to ensure we don't harm others or lead ourselves into spiritual ruin
 - The Spirit gives us everything we need to exercise that control, if only we're willing to rest in Him instead of our flesh
 - But Paul makes clear our success depends on our willingness to endure the challenges that every athlete knows
 - No pain, no gain

1Cor. 10:11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

1Cor. 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

1Cor. 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

- These events came upon the unbelieving generation of Israel to teach all men an example, especially for those who have received the fullness of Messiah
 - If we think we're so strong in our faith that we have nothing to fear in exercising our liberty, then take heed
 - The Israelites fell into temptation and sin time and time again
 - Despite seeing wondrous miracles of God in the desert, nevertheless they couldn't stand against their own flesh
 - So only a fool believes he or she can stand easily in the face of temptation
 - The Corinthians were self-assured and confident
 - They believed they could enter the temples, eat the meat, enjoy the party and not get burned
 - But their confidence was a sign of immaturity not maturity
 - The mature Christian is the one who recognizes the danger of serving the flesh
 - The mature Christian stays far away from temptation
 - They recognize that every man is susceptible to a fall, just as Paul says in v.13
 - No man is immune to the power of the flesh
 - No one is strong enough to avoid a slip if they entertain their flesh's desires
 - Sooner or later we'll all end up regretting our lack of self-discipline
- Paul says our defense is not cockiness but humility and reliance on the Spirit
 - Even as our flesh brings a temptation, the Lord is ever present giving us an escape, if only we will take it
 - That escape will come in a variety of ways
 - But whatever way it comes will require we take advantage of it
 - Peter echoes this truth with the example of Lot

2Pet. 2:7 and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men

2Pet. 2:8 (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds),

2Pet. 2:9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,

- Remember when God provided Lot an escape from the coming judgment, He sent angels to drag Lot and his family out of the city
 - But they deposited him outside the city yet still within danger of the destruction
 - Lot still had a choice to make...return to the city or run to the mountains
- By taking him out of the city, the Lord moved him away from the point of temptation, providing him an escape
 - But Lot had to take advantage of the opportunity
- So then Paul gives us the bottom line to all these examples

1Cor. 10:14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

- When we boil all this down, we end up with a simple rule of thumb
 - Flee from idolatry
 - Yes, we have liberty
 - And yes, we can enjoy in peace things that entrap and deceive the unbelieving world
- But we can't live foolishly thinking that such things have no power to deceive or entrap us too
 - Our flesh still lives for a time, and it has power to draw us away to idolatry
 - If we live in ignorance and without a healthy concern for our flesh, we will grow spiritually lazy
 - More and more, we'll say yes to our flesh
 - And one thing will lead to another
- The church in Corinth wanted Paul's blessing to enjoy the pagan meat in the temples, because they assumed Christian liberty did away with the concerns of such things
 - But Paul reminds the church that liberty is not a defense to the power of the flesh to lead us astray
 - We must remember that the test of obedience and love is not how much we exercise our freedoms, but how well we keep those freedoms under control of the Spirit
- Our best defense is a good offense
 - Flee immorality
 - When you see your flesh drawn by a weakness, then respond like an athlete who is training to win a race
 - Discipline that weakness
 - Train yourself in righteousness so that you might strengthen yourself against that temptation

- Take whatever steps are necessary to steer clear of the fall you know is coming if you give in to your flesh
- We often tell ourselves that our sin patterns are unavoidable or beyond our ability to control, but scripture tells us the truth
 - When we find ourselves corrupted by our flesh, our mistake was entertaining the early temptations
 - We said yes to our first desires of the flesh, which then led us to a place where we couldn't say no any longer

- We're ready to wrap up our examination of Paul's teaching on the issue of Christian liberty
 - Today Paul circles back around to the first point, that is to the question of whether a Christian has liberty to eat meat sacrificed to idols
 - Paul began his answer in Chapter 8 with a straightforward answer: yes
 - Christians have freedom to eat anything
 - And we know that idols don't actually exist (except in the minds of the pagan worshippers)
 - So we are not sinning to eat a steak regardless of what may have been done with that meat prior to the moment it appeared on our plate
 - But of course, that's not the end of story, because the situation is more complicated
 - Paul used the next two chapters to explain the questions we must consider when making decisions about liberty
 - These questions are much broader than simply whether a specific action is sinful or not
 - We must consider what impact our actions will have on others, on our witness and on our effectiveness as an ambassador for Christ
 - In the end, we will find self-restraint will be the wiser choice more often than not
 - Because the choice to restrain personal liberty carries the possibility of far greater reward than an unfettered exercising of our freedoms
 - We will grow spiritually and please the Lord

Like the pastor who was looking for a inexpensive lawn mower for the church grounds and responded to ad for a used lawn mower. "How much do you want for the mower?" he asked the young boy selling the mower?

"I just want enough money to go out and buy me a bicycle", said the little boy. After a moment of consideration, the preacher decided to generously offer more than it was worth as a testimony of God's goodness.

The boy was overjoyed at the prospect of finally getting the bike he always wanted. Meanwhile, the pastor realized he had never bothered to check to see if the mower ran. So the preacher bent down began to pull the starter line. He pulled on the cord a few times but with no response from the mower.

The preacher called the little boy over and said, "I can't get this mower to start." The little boy said, "That's because you have to cuss at it to get it started."

The preacher said, "I am a minister, and I cannot cuss. It has been so long since I have given up cussing that I do not even remember how to cuss." The little boy looked at him happily and said, "Just keep pulling on that cord. It'll come back to ya!"

- Eating meat sacrificed to idols wasn't a sin, Paul said, yet the church was to consider the impact of this choice on themselves and others
 - So where does that leave the church in Corinth on this issue?
 - Should they or should they not eat this meat?
 - Were they permitted to visit the temple meals?
 - And what about shopping in the agora where the temple meat was sold alongside regular meat?
 - So to conclude this conversation, Paul demonstrates how to apply all the principles he taught to the specific situation in Corinth

1Cor. 10:14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

1Cor. 10:15 I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say.

1Cor. 10:16 Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?

1Cor. 10:17 Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.

1Cor. 10:18 Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar?

1Cor. 10:19 What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?

1Cor. 10:20 No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons.

1Cor. 10:21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

1Cor. 10:22 Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?

- As we ended last week, Paul summarizes his chief concern over eating this meat: the church is flirting with idolatry
 - Their desire to enjoy that top quality meat is so strong, they're willing to risk slipping into idolatry
 - They are following in the footsteps of the Israelites in the desert
 - They are so immature they think they can resist the temptations common to all men, as Paul said
 - So Paul tells the church to flee idolatry
 - Steer a wide path around these things
 - Discipline the flesh's desires
 - And then to this immature group that thinks themselves wise and strong, Paul says he is prepared to speak to wise men

- If they are truly wise and discerning, then they will recognize the sense of Paul's advice and heed it
- And then Paul begins to apply all that he has taught in coming to a specific recommendation for action in Corinth
- In v.16 Paul looks past the question of eating or not eating to consider how does eating impact a Christian's testimony and influence in the city?
 - Insightfully, Paul draws a comparison to another meal in the Christian context – the communion meal
 - Paul asks, don't we share a common cup of wine and a common loaf of bread when we share the communion meal?
 - More importantly, what do the sharing of these things mean symbolically?
 - As every Christian knows (or should know), these elements represent the blood and body of the Lord
 - They remind us of His death in our place
 - And so they become symbols of our joining with Him through faith in the New Covenant
 - Are the elements of this meal the actual body and blood of Christ?
 - No, they are merely symbols
 - And do we become Christians through the taking of these elements?
 - Again, no
- But by taking part in that meal, we testify that we consider ourselves joined to Christ
 - Notice in v.17 Paul says that when the Body of Christ shares in this meal, we communicate we are one with one another and with Christ
 - A small piece of the bread enters each of our bodies, so for that brief moment everyone's body is connected by that bread occupying everyone's body
 - In that symbolic manner, we testify that we are made one Body by the indwelling of Christ's Spirit in each of us by faith
 - And the Israelites who bring their lambs to sacrifice at the Jewish temple during Passover all shared in the meat of those sacrifices
 - Their common participation in that sacrifice communicated they were one people under one God
 - And their unity was further emphasized by eating the Passover together in a ritual manner according to a common covenant
- So though a meal may be symbolic, nevertheless choosing to participate becomes a statement of who we are and what we believe
 - The meat sacrificed in Corinth meant nothing to a Christian, spiritually speaking
 - Neither did the so-called idols, since their gods don't truly exist as Paul says again in v.19
 - But that wasn't the point...the point was what message were they sending by

their participation?

- If they participated in these ceremonies – even just to gain access to the meat – they were declaring their solidarity with the pagans and their gods
- Even more importantly, the pagans may have been sacrificing to nonexistent idols, but that didn't mean there wasn't spiritual power present
 - In fact, the demonic world orchestrates these ceremonies and guides the worship
 - The enemy and his army of demons have blinded the unbelieving world, leading them into false worship of one kind or another

2Cor. 4:3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,

2Cor. 4:4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

- The enemy has placed false gods before the eyes of the unbelieving world to distract them from the true Light of Christ
- Therefore the Corinthian Christians – of all people – must be sensitive to the message they send by participating in a pagan meal with religious connotations
 - As they choose to return to the temple services and eat the meat sacrificed there, they become sharers with these people in the symbolism of this meal
 - Even though they may not agree with their beliefs, still their actions speak louder than their words
 - They are declaring an allegiance they don't actually have
 - They are proclaiming the existence of a god they don't actually believe in
 - They are inadvertently extending honor to demons, who are the declared enemies of God and Truth
 - The problem wasn't the meat...the problem was the message
 - And if they proclaim a message of pagan belief, they diminish the Christian testimony
 - At the very least, they confuse the Greek culture concerning what a Christian believes
 - Even more serious, they risk provoking the Lord to jealousy
 - The Lord certainly knows that His children are not truly worshipping pagan gods much less demons
 - But that doesn't mean He approves of going through the motions
 - Would a husband kissing another woman provoke his wife to jealousy? Would that change if he said it didn't mean anything?
 - Would a child be jealous if a father spent all his free time with buddies instead of with them? Would that change if the father told the child he loved them more?

- The point is that all relationships come with expectations of certain guidelines and commitments
 - If we violate those guidelines, we provoke the other party
 - And it makes no difference what we think of that relationship...it only matters what the injured party feels
 - And when we join in celebrations designed by demons to replace a relationship with God, then we provoke the God Who died to save us from such lies
 - It makes no difference what we truly believe
 - Because eventually, our unrestrained flesh will pull us deeper and deeper into idolatry
- Our world presents many situations where this same principle must apply
 - Situations where an activity itself is not sinful and Christians have liberty to participate
 - And yet in the way the activity is commonly practiced, we have good reason to reconsider our involvement
 - Our involvement presents concerns because of the message we send or the company we keep
 - For example, our culture is enamored with Eastern mysticism and pseudo-religious practices
 - Yoga, meditation, chanting, Eastern medicine, and the like
 - Once again, are these things wrong for Christians?
 - No, but in each case we should consider their source, their messages and the associations we establish through our participation
 - The enemy is just as active today as he was in Paul's day
 - And he is still the father of lies, working behind the scenes to create alternatives to the Lord for the unbelieving world
 - Many of his inventions are dressed as lambs, appearing innocent and helpful
 - We cannot live without concern for what we approve

Phil. 1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment,

Phil. 1:10 so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;

- In the end, the question isn't what's lawful, for virtually everything is lawful apart from obvious immorality
 - The question is what's the best way to serve Christ and His people?

1Cor. 10:23 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are

lawful, but not all things edify.

1Cor. 10:24 Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.

- Among all the myriad of choices I have, which ones are most profitable for the sake of the Gospel and my eternal reward?
- And which path results in building up my brothers and sisters in the Lord rather than merely building up my flesh or ego?
- As we live out the liberty granted us through faith in Christ, we must seek the good of others rather than the good of ourselves
 - This is the true fulfillment of the commandment to love others as we love ourselves
 - When the question of eating the temple meat came to their minds, the believers in Corinth should have asked, how would my choice impact other believers in the city?
 - What will the unbelievers in the temple or market think when they see a Christian appearing to support a pagan god?
 - Will my choice make it easier or harder to persuade others of the Gospel?
 - These are the questions a mature Christian asks before running blindly ahead under the banner of liberty
- Since the church wasn't accustomed to thinking about these things in a mature manner, Paul finishes his answer with simple instructions on when and how to eat the temple meat in keeping with all he's said

1Cor. 10:25 Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake;

1Cor. 10:26 FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS.

1Cor. 10:27 If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake.

1Cor. 10:28 But if anyone says to you, "This is meat sacrificed to idols," do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience' sake;

1Cor. 10:29 I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience?

1Cor. 10:30 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks?

- The church was free to eat this meat, just as Paul has said from the beginning
 - But he asks them to observe certain guidelines to ensure they act in love towards God and others
 - If they are shopping in the market, don't ask questions about the source of the meat
 - Just shop in blissful ignorance
 - Or if you are served meat in someone's home, ask no questions about its origins

- Because as Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 10:14, everything God created is made for our enjoyment
- So as long as we had no reason to fear the temple meat
- But Paul makes clear that his point isn't to keep us ignorant, for our ignorance isn't making us holy in these situations
 - Paul says in v.25 that we aren't to ask the origins of the meat "for conscience' sake"
 - But then Paul clarifies in v.29 that he isn't worried about the believer's conscience
 - The believer already knows the meat is just meat and that there is nothing to be concerned about
 - The point of not asking is to avoid initiating a conversation that then obligates us to protect another person's conscience
- When a Christian shopper asks a pagan shop owner if his meat came from a temple service, he immediately opens a conversation of spiritual dimensions
 - Where before, the shop owner knew nothing about this shopper, now he knows he is a Christian
 - The shop owner realizes this is a person who has rejected pagan idols and declared his faith in the one true God
 - He has been put on notice that this shopper sees his meat purchase as an issue of spiritual concern
 - Secondly, the shop owner has communicated to the Christian about the meat's source
 - So now the shop owner has interest in how the Christian responds to that news
 - He may expect the Christian to disapprove of the meat's source and distance himself from pagan practices and beliefs
 - Or maybe he doesn't know what to expect
 - Regardless, whatever the Christian does next will impact the shop owner's conscience
 - The impression this Christian leaves on this pagan's conscience hangs in the balance
- Paul says that for the sake of the shop owner's conscience, the Christian is now obligated not to buy the meat
 - Where before the Christian might have eaten it without worry, now he can't because to do so would mean damaging his witness of Christ
 - This is a powerful example of living with concern for the needs of others above our own
 - Though we are free to eat the meat, we can only do so when it doesn't damage another
 - We must be sensitive to others and to our own testimony

- Interestingly, Paul says our freedom doesn't depend on another man's approval in v.29
 - He's speaking of how others might disapprove of our liberties
 - No one can or should rob me of my liberties simply because they are not personally approving of them
 - However, I am called to restrain my liberties whenever necessary to avoid harming the conscience of others
- I can illustrate Paul's point with a simple example from our own experience today
 - Christians have liberty to drink alcoholic beverages, according to scripture
 - Nevertheless, there are pockets of Christians who disapprove of drinking alcohol and will cast judgment upon a Christian who drinks
 - We need not doubt our liberty to drink merely because another person is disapproving of the practice
 - However, when I am around that person, I refrain from drinking to avoid injuring their conscience
 - So I have not given up drinking, since I know I have liberty to do so and I am thankful to God for the joy it offers
 - But nevertheless, I gladly abstain from drinking in the company of those who object out of respect for their conscience
- Paul concludes with a succinct summary of everything he's taught on the question of Christian liberty

1Cor. 10:31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

1Cor. 10:32 Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God;

1Cor. 10:33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.

- The golden rule of sorts for the godly use of our liberty is to do whatever you do for the glory of God
 - God's glory is magnified when we act in love toward God and toward our neighbor
 - God is glorified when we preach the Gospel by our actions as well as our words
 - God is glorified when we discipline our flesh for the needs of the Gospel
 - God is glorified when we flee immorality out of respect for our body, which is the temple of God
 - We are to live without giving offense to any man or woman, whether believer or unbeliever
 - Because as we live this way, we are seeking the maximum spiritual profit in our day

- We are maximizing our potential spiritual and eternal rewards as we please the Lord
- And we are maximizing the potential to be a positive influence upon others for the sake of the Gospel
- These are the very reasons we've been saved and left here on the Earth
 - When Jesus prayed his remarkable prayer to the Father in John 17, He prayed for us, that we might live by these standards and thereby fulfill our mission on earth
 - Consider Jesus' words again...

John 17:15 “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.

John 17:16 “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

John 17:17 “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

John 17:18 “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

John 17:19 “For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

John 17:20 “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;

John 17:21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

John 17:22 “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;

John 17:23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

- Last week we concluded our study of Paul's explanation of Christian liberty
 - In three chapters, Paul addressed the Corinthians' rights to consume meat sacrificed to idols
 - Paul addressed this topic in his letter because the Corinthians themselves had apparently asked about the practice
 - He began the section in Chapter 8 with the introduction, "Now concerning..." which is the indication that Paul has moved to a new topic
 - And then for the next three chapters, Paul worked his way through a series of points on the matter of eating meat
 - Paul has received other questions from Chloe and the delegation, and he will address each in turn in his letter
 - But Paul also introduces topics of his own along the way
 - For example, in answering the question on meat, Paul introduced his own topic of Christian liberty
 - We can see Paul wanted to make sure the church understood a larger context even as he addressed their particular concern
- As we enter Chapter 11 today, we find Paul moving even farther away from the question he was asked, yet remaining on the general topic of liberty

1Cor. 11:1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

1Cor. 11:2 Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.

- We notice Paul doesn't use the phrase "Now concerning...""
 - This tells us Paul hasn't yet moved on to a new question
 - Nevertheless, what follows is new subject matter
 - Instead, Paul is about to raise a couple of new topics because he's heard of abuses of liberty taking place in the church
 - He introduces his concerns with a couple of statements
- Paul starts with an exhortation that the church should follow Paul's lead, imitating Paul's self-restraint from Chapter 10
 - Remember at the end of Chapter 10 Paul says he became all things to all men, seeking to win them over to Christ
 - Paul was willing to set aside any personal privilege or freedom if necessary to be more effective in serving Christ
 - He did these things gladly, and he asks other Christians to see ministry and liberty in a similar way
- Secondly, Paul offers the church a praise concerning their willingness to hold firmly to

certain traditions Paul delivered to them during his visit

- For us, the word “tradition” can carry a negative sense
 - Some religions rely on tradition to an unhealthy extent
 - Relying on tradition instead of following the Lord
- But at other times, traditions can be good and useful if they are consistent with the word of God
- They can teach godliness or guide our conduct in helpful ways
- In this case, the word for traditions in Greek refers to something handed down as an honored practice
 - These are things worthy of respect and practice
 - And Paul says the Corinthians showed the appropriate respect for traditions Paul handed down to them
 - They observed them as taught and they stuck with them even after Paul left
 - Remember, the Corinthian church was the first Greek church in history
 - They had little prior exposure to Jewish thought and practice
 - They knew little or nothing of the promised Messiah
 - Meanwhile, they had a culture replete with pagan traditions and practices they needed to unlearn
 - We can’t underestimate how difficult this transition can be for any culture unfamiliar with the God of Israel or Christianity
 - Christians have traditions that God’s word calls us to observe and hand down
 - Practices like baptism, the Lord’s supper and gathering together
 - These things are called traditions in the sense that they are cherished rituals handed down from generation to generation
 - But they are not manmade traditions, so they are not optional or unimportant
 - They have been handed down because they teach important spiritual lessons or witness to our faith
 - We call these things tradition because they come with some degree of flexibility in the way the ritual is observed
 - For example, baptism requires immersion in water, but it makes no difference if it’s a pool, river, lake or bathtub
 - The Lord’s Supper requires the elements of bread and the pressing of grapes, but it makes no difference the form either takes
 - In all cases, our only priority should be whether the proper message is being delivered through the observance of the tradition
 - If the form of our observance distorts or changes the message, then we have ventured too far away and violated the tradition
- Paul says the Corinthians have been good to adopt and hold to the Christian traditions

he delivered

- But in a couple of cases, the Corinthians were allowing their pursuit of liberty to interfere with their practice of these traditions and thereby distort the messages
 - Paul will address two such examples in this chapter
 - We'll look at one example today and the other next week
- In v. 3 Paul moves directly into a discussion of the first tradition

1Cor. 11:3 But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

- Paul says God is the Head of Christ, Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman
 - Paul is speaking concerning the administration of the family
 - Let's look at each item on the list
 - I've reordered Paul's list a little so it moves from top to bottom
 - First, the Father is the Head of the Son, Christ
 - This is an important principle of the Trinity
 - We know God to be Three Persons and yet One God, which is a mystery in our limited understanding
 - No One Person of the Godhead created any other member
 - All Three coexisted from before the beginning, we're told in scripture
 - We can see all three present in the very opening verse of Genesis
 - Nevertheless, we also find a distinction of roles within the Godhead
 - For example, the Son obeys the Father, while the Father instructs the Son
 - The Father gives a Bride to His Son, while the Son presents the Bride to the Father spotless
 - The Son gives His Spirit to us, while the Spirit leads us to the Son
 - The Son prays to the Father, while the Father glorifies His Son
 - And so on...
 - These roles imply a certain hierarchy
 - So Paul reminds the church that even Christ respects and honors the authority of the Father as His Head
- Moving down the chain of authority, Paul says Christ is the Head of every man
 - The word for man is *aner*, which is the word for husband
 - So we see Paul is talking about leadership in a family
 - He isn't talking about society in general

- This is a discussion about the leadership structure in a single household
- So a husband answers to Christ for his decisions and his leadership in his home
 - Christ's headship will be most clearly evident at the man's judgment when the Lord will pass judgment on how he cared spiritually for his family
 - But Christ's authority over a husband doesn't wait for that moment
 - Everyday the Lord is working through His Spirit to guide Christian husbands to love and lead their wives and children
 - To be the teacher in the home
 - To model obedience to Christ and His word
 - To patiently guide and even discipline his family to ensure godliness reigns
 - Husbands bear this responsibility and they can't avoid or delegate it
- Finally, Paul says the man is the head of a woman
 - Once again, Paul uses the word for husband here
 - Also notice Paul doesn't say a husband is the head of every woman
 - In other words, a husband has leadership authority over his wife (and children obviously)
 - But men in general are not automatically over all women
 - Outside a family, men and women operate in equal terms
 - Within a single family, however, there is a hierarchy that God Himself has directed for good purposes
 - A husband has the responsibility, the privilege and burden for the spiritual welfare of his family
 - And the family, both wife and children, are commanded by scripture to honor and respect the man's role as leader
 - We find plenty of other places where this truth is echoed

Col. 3:18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Eph. 5:22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

Eph. 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

Eph. 5:24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.

- The command for a wife to respect her husband's leadership role is not contingent upon the husband's good performance
 - Regardless of how well a husband leads, a wife is commanded to do her best to

respect his authority in the home

- In fact, the Bible teaches that a wife can best encourage her husband to live up to his leadership responsibilities by remaining submitted to his authority despite his failings

1Pet. 3:1 **In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,**

1Pet. 3:2 **as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.**

- The principle is similar to the one we apply to children and parents
 - No matter how fallible parents may be, a child is forever commanded to honor the parent and submit to their authority at least as long as they live in the home
 - Only in circumstances when the parent is abusive or dangerously neglectful do they forfeit their authority
 - Likewise, only in extreme circumstances when a husband crosses the line to become abusive or reckless should a wife consider challenging his authority
- Interestingly, Paul doesn't take a lot of time at this point to reinforce this truth
 - His statement in v.3 is given more as a reminder to the church of past teaching
 - Instead, Paul moves forward in the next verse to connect this spiritual truth to a tradition he wants to reinforce

1Cor. 11:4 **Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head.**

1Cor. 11:5 **But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved.**

- In vs.4-5 Paul reminds the church of the tradition for wearing various head coverings, whether men or women
 - In Paul's day, the Jewish and Christian cultural tradition was that men never wear head coverings in worship while women always wore a covering
 - Paul says for a man to go against this tradition disgraces his head
 - The Greek word for head is the same in every place we've seen it used in this chapter
 - It's the same Greek word in v.3 as it is in v.4
 - The word head has two meanings in Greek
 - It can mean your skull of course
 - But it can also mean a person of authority, as in Christ is the head of every man

- Paul uses the word in both senses in v.4
- Paul says that any many who wears a covering on his physical head is disgracing Christ, Who is his authority
 - Likewise, a wife who arrives in church without a head covering is disgracing her head, that is her husband
 - In fact, Paul says a wife who would dare to appear in church without a head covering is as disgraceful to her husband as a wife who shaved her head entirely!
 - Why are these behaviors so problematic?
 - And is Paul expecting all Christians everywhere to observe these rules, including us today?
- Before we can answer these questions, we must recognize the relationship between the tradition and the message they are communicating
 - Remember, we said that traditions, even those mandated by scripture, exist to edify, educate and witness concerning a central truth
 - They are not magic or hocus pocus, and they don't exist for their own sake
 - We aren't called to observe them in a mindless, ritualistic manner
 - We are supposed to follow a tradition with an appreciation of the underlying message it's trying to communicate
 - And in some cases, we may need to modify the ritual observance to better reflect the message in a changing culture
 - In short, the message takes precedence over form in any tradition
 - So before we can determine what aspects of the tradition of head coverings would apply today, we first need to ask what message did a head covering send in Paul's day
 - And in the next passage Paul explains the importance of these things in his day and culture

1Cor. 11:6 For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.

1Cor. 11:7 For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.

1Cor. 11:8 For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man;

1Cor. 11:9 for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.

1Cor. 11:10 Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.

- In Paul's day, a woman's choice of whether she wore a head covering or how she wore

her hair carried a certain message

- Specifically, failing to wear a head covering in the worship communicated she felt she was an equal in authority with her husband
 - The head covering was a symbol that declared, “I am submitted to someone else”
 - So if a married woman dispensed with her head covering, she was declaring loud and clear she was no longer submitted to her husband
 - She was saying that she lacked respect for her husband’s authority
 - That’s why Paul says in v.5 that such a woman disgraces her husband (her head)
- Any woman who did such a thing knew full well what she was doing and how her choice would be interpreted
 - What would be communicated if you were on trial for a serious crime and you chose to show up in court wearing shorts and flip flops, while chewing gum loudly throughout the proceedings
 - Do you think the judge would understand you were showing the court contempt?
 - That’s what it meant for a woman to intentionally reject a head covering
- Paul says if a woman was willing to defy the head covering tradition, she might as well shave her head
 - Paul is referring to another, similar tradition that expected a woman to grow her hair long
 - If a woman chose to shave her head, she was sending a not-so- subtle message that she wanted to be viewed as an equal to a man
 - Prostitutes usually cut their hair very short, as a way of advertising what kind of woman they were to their customers
 - Also, the Law required that a woman caught in the act of adultery was required to have her hair cut off
 - So Paul challenges any woman who wants to protest against submission by saying don’t make your protest in a subtle way...go all the way
 - Paul says just shave your head and make sure everyone knows your true heart
 - He says this to shame them for setting aside these traditions without giving a thought to the greater good of the body
 - Perhaps some women began to defy the tradition out of a misguided view of liberty
 - Whatever their purpose in it, their behavior ignored an important tradition engrained in the culture
 - So it sent an unavoidable message of defiance
- And then Paul moves to explain the full message behind the tradition
 - The tradition of wearing head coverings was a testimony in Paul’s day to the order

of Creation

- In v.7 Paul says God created man from nothing and in His own image
 - This is a testimony to God's power bringing Him glory
- So a tradition arose for men to leave their head uncovered as they worship to symbolize there is nothing between them and the Lord
- This tradition reflects the man as the chief authority in the home as God designed the family
- But when God created Woman as a companion for Adam, He created her from Adam's flesh
 - God says a wife finds her chief purpose in the family in desiring, supporting and helping her husband
 - Her creation from Adam's body is a testimony of this intimate relationship with, spiritual dependence upon her husband
 - So Paul says in v.9 that a wife is to the glory of her husband in the sense that she brings honor to her husband by submitting to his authority
 - Therefore a tradition arose for a woman to wear a head covering in worship as a testimony that she is covered or protected by her husband
- Therefore, Paul says a woman ought to have this symbol of the man's authority on her head when worshipping
 - She was expected to keep this tradition because if she didn't, she would communicate a defiant attitude
 - Think of it like table manners
 - We eat with forks and knives because it's a tradition
 - And if we purposely defied the tradition, it would offend others unnecessarily
 - So we keep the tradition because we agree with the principle of showing concern and kindness for others
- Of course this tradition says nothing about a woman's access to the Lord or her relationship with the Lord
 - No woman is required to work through a man in reaching the Lord
 - And women are not lesser members of the body of Christ
 - Paul makes that clear that men and women are equals in spiritual terms

1Cor. 11:11 However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.

1Cor. 11:12 For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God.

1Cor. 11:13 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

1Cor. 11:14 Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a

dishonor to him,

1Cor. 11:15 but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering.

1Cor. 11:16 But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.

- God has designed reproduction so that both man and woman are equally important to the process
 - Ensuring that no man can say he isn't dependent on a woman and vice versa
 - Every man had a mother and every woman had a father
 - And in that way, Paul says we all trace our origins to God
- But in the way God designed men and women, Paul says we can see clear, physical signs that God knowingly made men and women differently
 - Men have traditionally kept short hair and women have traditionally valued long hair
 - These traditions have existed from Adam and Eve until today
- Paul says these differences were designed by God to reflect the differences in the family roles
 - A woman is glorified by having a covering of hair
 - While men are dishonored by having a covering of hair
 - These things are tradition based on the physical differences
 - And these things send a message about God's design for spiritual authority in the family
- So the big question for us...do we still share an obligation to observe this tradition?
 - The answer is it depends
 - If we find ourselves in a culture where head coverings still carry this meaning, then we should observe the tradition
 - There are some places in the world and some Christian communities even in this country where these traditions persist
 - If we are in these settings, then Paul's instructions are fully appropriate for us
 - In many other places, though, the traditional meaning of head coverings has been forgotten
 - So that today if a woman were to wear a head covering, few would understand its meaning
 - More importantly, if a woman fails to wear a head covering, no one assumes she is defying her husband's authority
 - Our customs have changed to the point that the tradition is no longer meaningful
 - Is it wrong for a church to maintain this custom?

- No. A church body certainly has freedom to resurrect this tradition and asks women to observe head coverings out of respect for its meaning
- On the other hand, other churches are equally free to pay no attention to head coverings
- Because the Biblical message of submission isn't being undermined in the process
- Not every tradition can be set aside entirely, but I believe this is one that can be
 - The message of wives living in submission to husbands will never change
 - But how we choose to demonstrate that truth has and will change over time
 - If we are chained to the ritual rather than to the message, we are at risk of becoming slaves to legalistic rules divorced from any meaning
 - Instead, we want to remain focused on the teaching behind anything we practice

- Paul's discourse on liberty has lead him into offering correction to the Corinthians on how to conduct certain traditions and rituals within the bounds of Christian liberty
 - Specifically, there are two areas of beneficial Christian ritual that Paul expected the church to observe in keeping with the word of God
 - Last week we looked at the first of these rituals, that of rules for the wearing of head coverings
 - In the society of Paul's day, the choice to wear or not wear a head covering conveyed a certain meaning
 - For a man to wear a head covering in church meant he rejected the idea he was under the authority of Christ
 - The head covering was a symbolic barrier between the man and Christ
 - So if a man chose to wear a hat knowing the cultural stigma, then he was choosing to bring shame to Christ, Paul said
 - Likewise, for a woman NOT to wear a head covering, she was communicating she was not submitted to her husband's authority, for that's how the culture interpreted such behavior
 - Her head covering was a symbol that she recognized she DID have an authority between her and Christ, that is her husband
 - So if she gave up her head covering, she was claiming to have equal authority with her husband, which brought shame to him
 - You may have noticed last week in v.10, Paul says the woman must remember her place of submission because of the angels
 - He's reminding his readers of times in the past when a failure of a woman to be covered by the authority of her husband led her to be deceived by the angelic realm
 - Woman in the Garden, and the women on earth before the flood of Noah were victims of sinful angels who took advantage of women absent spiritual cover
 - Paul warns the church not to return to a state where women are without spiritual cover and vulnerable to the schemes of angels
 - The messages associated with head coverings were culturally determined, and therefore there was no way for the Corinthian church to avoid them or dispute them
 - Paul explained that since these rituals had their source in the Creation story itself, so their actions would either affirm or deny certain spiritual truths
 - The rituals declared that God created man as a reflection of His glory
 - That God created woman as a reflection of man's glory
 - And the cultural practice of head coverings and of certain hair length were testimonies to these truths
 - Therefore, Paul urged the church to respect these traditions so that they may be seen as standing with the truth rather than contradicting them
- As we ended last week, I wrapped up by stating that when a manmade ritual loses its intended message, then the ritual itself ceases to be important or necessary

- Today, our society – including the church society itself – no longer associated the Creation account with the wearing of hats and scarfs
 - Generally, men and women don't wear head coverings much anymore (apart from a sports caps or cowboy hats)
 - So when we see a man remove his hat walking into church, we interpret that as polite etiquette, rather than as a testimony to the order of Creation
 - If we see a woman without a head covering in church, we don't gasp at her rude display
- Therefore, we do not need to re-institute the head covering practices Paul outlines in order to be in compliance with Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 11
 - Instead, we must respect and honor the spiritual message of these bygone rituals as the Bible expects
 - We don't resurrect the ritual; we look for the modern ways we can continue communicating the Biblical truth of headship
 - A wife can show respect for her husband's authority in many other ways today
 - While a husband can likewise demonstrate leadership in the home and submission to Christ
- When we do these things, we are obeying the intent of 1 Corinthians 11
 - Ironically, it's possible to reinstitute the behaviors of head coverings today without actually meeting the spirit of Paul's instructions
 - He is asking us to maintain the tradition of living under headship and testifying to all that it represents in God's plan for the family
 - God is not concerned with what we wear on our head if that tradition has lost its meaning
 - To do otherwise is to elevate ritual above message, which is always unhelpful and often dangerous

A priest, a pastor and a rabbi decide to see who's best at his job. The test is to go into the woods, find a bear and try to convert it.

After they return from the woods, the priest says, "I read to the bear from the Catechism, sprinkled him with holy water and next week is his First Communion."

The minister said, "I found a bear by the stream, preached God's holy word and he let me baptize him in the river." The rabbi was bandaged from head to foot and said. "Looking back, maybe I shouldn't have started with the circumcision."

- Moving on in the chapter, today we want to examine the second tradition Paul raises
 - Once again, the church is in danger of treating a certain tradition with too much liberty, which had the effect of damaging the spiritual message of the ritual

- So Paul begins to introduce the problem in their practice in v.17

1Cor. 11:17 **But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse.**

1Cor. 11:18 **For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it.**

1Cor. 11:19 **For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you.**

1Cor. 11:20 **Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper,**

1Cor. 11:21 **for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk.**

1Cor. 11:22 **What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.**

- As Paul moves into v.17, he switches gears from the first half of the chapter
 - You remember in v.1 Paul began with a praise for this church
 - In the case of head coverings, it appears they had largely held to the traditions
 - Perhaps some men or women were questioning the tradition, which lead Paul to reinforce it
 - Nevertheless, Paul's praise tells us that the church had largely held the line on the tradition of head coverings, which pleased the apostle
 - But now in v.17, Paul abruptly changes his tone to one of admonishing the church
 - He says in giving you this instruction, I do not praise you
 - He means in giving you the following instruction, I am not pleased with your behavior
 - So what follows to the end of the chapter is an admonishment for how they have approached perhaps the most significant Christian tradition: the Lord's Supper
 - In fact, Paul says in their practice of this ritual, the church is coming together for the worse, not the better
 - The way the church was engaging in the Lord's Supper was so contrary to the intentions of the Lord that they were actually making matters worse than if they never practiced it at all
 - Once again, Paul is referring to the meaning or message behind the ritual
 - Their behavior was sending a bad message rather than communicating the good message the Lord intended when He instituted the practice before His death
- In v.18 Paul begins to outline what they're doing wrong as they observe this meal
 - First some background...in ancient times, religious worship services usually

included a lavish meal

- The pagans and Jews incorporated a meal service into the worship meetings
- So the practice of enjoying a meal together was already common in Jesus' day
- The Lord's Supper was not unique in that respect
- But of course, it communicates something very unique and important, so it must be observed in a way that fits that purpose
- The religious meals could be quite elaborate and even excessive, especially in a pagan setting
 - The meal was the main event, and most worshippers attended the service primarily for the meal
 - Just as many of you come to church primarily for the donuts 😊
 - If it were not for the meal, the service would probably not even happen
- Furthermore, the worshippers were expected to contribute to the food of the meal, through the bringing of a sacrifice animal
 - Though the food was shared to a degree, it wasn't a perfectly fair system
 - If a rich family brought a choice animal, they might set themselves apart from the rest of the crowd to ensure they ate the better meat
 - While a poor family who contributed something less would have a lessor meal
 - So this resulted in divisions within the worshippers that reflected a class system in the society
- Paul's comments suggest that the Corinthian church had begun to follow these societal traditions when they practiced the Lord's Supper in the church
 - So in v.18 Paul says there are divisions reported among the people
 - This division is different than the one Paul mentioned in Chapters 1 & 2 of this letter
 - In the earlier case, the divisions were the result of a desire to gain status by association with various apostles
 - In this case, the division relates to the wealth and selfishness of the worshippers
 - The church had refashioned the Lord's Supper into a meal like the kind practiced in the pagan temples
 - First, Paul says in v.19 that the church was maintaining divisions during the meal in order to make clear who was "approved" among them
 - Paul means that divisions were instituted by the wealthy so that their superior socioeconomic status would be evident to everyone in the body
 - They were setting themselves apart so they could eat the superior food they brought for themselves
 - And they were refusing to share that food with the poorer members of the congregation
 - Notice in v.22 Paul says they despise and shame those who have nothing

- Apparently, some of the poorest believers would come to the gathering without any food
- And so they had nothing to eat when the Lord's Supper was practiced during the service
- It was BYO bread and wine or have nothing
- Therefore, Paul says they are coming together for reasons other than to observe the true meaning of the Lord's Supper
 - They are coming together to show off, to enjoy a big meal, to get drunk, to have a party
 - These purposes have nothing in common with the purposes of observing the Lord's Supper
 - The ritual Jesus gave the Church had a specific purpose and message, but when the ritual is distorted, then the message is distorted too
 - That's why Paul said that the way they were practicing the ritual was doing more harm than good
 - It was sending a worldly message, not the message Jesus brought
 - It was testifying to ungodly, fleshly, sinful things
 - Imagine what an unbeliever living in Corinth might have taken away from watching the Christians practice the Lord's Supper in exactly the same way that pagans practiced their meals?
 - They couldn't have helped but think there was nothing new in the Christian message
- In v.22 Paul asks rhetorically don't they have homes where they can have their meals?
 - In other words, the church service is not intended as a restaurant experience
 - We are not supposed to take the ritual of the Lord's Supper and equate it with a normal everyday meal opportunity
 - A church is not free to take the tradition of the Lord's Supper and play with the form beyond what's given
 - Unlike the tradition of wearing hats, this tradition was prescribed by Jesus in a certain form with a certain message
 - In the earlier example, the form of hat wearing to testify to headship arose out of human culture, but the message was timeless
 - But in this case, both the form and the message were prescribed by the Lord, so we do not have the latitude to change it beyond a few details
 - So Paul says he can't praise the church in this case unlike in the example
 - No, in this case, he says he will not praise them
 - Which is to say, he is chastising them for their poor behavior
- You may remember from an earlier lesson that we learned the meaning of the word admonish

- It means the combination of a rebuke with correction
 - So as Paul has now offered the rebuke for their bad behavior, it's time for him to offer a correction
 - Paul is now going to remind them of the proper observance of the Lord's Supper tradition

1Cor. 11:23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread;

1Cor. 11:24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

1Cor. 11:25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

1Cor. 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

- First, Paul re-establishes that the model for this meal is prescribed both in form and in message
 - The Lord Himself gave Paul the form He expected His Church to observe as they obeyed His instructions
 - And Paul says he delivered that form to the church faithfully
 - It's this statement that tells us we cannot change the form of this tradition
 - It makes no difference what happens in our culture over time
 - It makes no difference whether the culture understands what we're doing
 - Since Jesus told us to do it this way, we must not change the form
 - So the Corinthians' behavior amounted to sinning against the Lord Himself
 - And then Paul begins to relate what the Lord passed along to him
 - Remember this letter was written before any of the Gospel had been written to the Church
 - So this account preceded the writing of the Gospels' accounts of the Last Supper moment
 - That makes this record so important to the early church, and it explains why Paul put these instructions in writing here
 - His account begins with the original setting where the ritual was established
 - It began on the night Jesus was betrayed, which means the night before He died
 - On that night, the Lord engaged in the Passover meal, and he did so for the benefit of those Who opposed Him, His enemies
 - We know this was a Passover meal
 - But Paul's Greek audience probably didn't give much attention to the Passover

or even its significance

- So Paul makes no attempt to explain that connection here
 - He's more interested in outlining the reason the church is commanded to repeat this practice
- The setting of the meal is central to how and why we practice it today
 - Jesus was preparing to die on the cross
 - He knew He would die, He knew how He would die, and He knew why He had to die
 - The apostles were largely oblivious to all these things
 - So Jesus used the occasion of the Passover meal, on the night before He became a sacrifice, to institute a ritual that would forever after explain His death
 - Therefore, the meaning and purpose in the Lord's Supper is intimately connected to this moment, which means we can't approach the ritual in a casual or disrespectful manner
 - We can't honor the purpose and meaning of this ritual if we see it merely as an opportunity to eat dinner
 - The Corinthians' practice had stripped the seriousness and importance out of the ritual, rendering it meaningless
- Next, Paul relates the steps of the ritual, in keeping with the steps Jesus took on that first night
 - First, Jesus took the bread, blessed it and gave thanks
 - He took the bread from the Passover table
 - This step was not a step of the normal Passover
 - It marked a departure from the Jewish tradition
 - That tells us this was purposely an interruption of past things and the instituting of new things
 - Secondly, He announces the meaning of these symbols as they are used in this new ritual
 - The bread will forever after be a symbol of the body of the Messiah sacrificed on our behalf
 - And when we repeat this moment, we are doing it as a memorial of Christ's death and sacrifice on our behalf
 - Like any memorial, we practice the ritual to ensure we never lose sight of the meaning of past events
 - Thirdly, Jesus interrupted the meal again to take a cup of wine from the table
 - And he creates another symbol by equating the wine to the blood Jesus will spill to forge the New Covenant
 - Like the writer of Hebrews teaches us, every covenant of God is formed through

blood

- And this most important of all covenants will be formed through the spilling of God's own blood
- We are commanded to drink of the fruit of the vine as a symbol of Jesus' blood poured out on our behalf
- Fourthly, Paul explains Jesus' expectations for the frequency of this ritual
 - Unlike other rituals that are practiced only once, like water baptism, or practiced annually like the Passover, this ritual happens frequently and without a prescribed period
 - In vs.25-26 we are to conduct this ritual as often as we do
 - In other words, not by any set schedule
 - The church is free to establish for itself how often to observe this ritual
 - But it's understood to be done routinely
- Finally, Paul sets forth the message that Jesus wanted communicated by the practice
 - The message we proclaim is two-fold
 - We proclaim that Jesus died to free us from sin
 - The elements of the meal stand as reminders of His sacrificial death
 - Every time we conduct the meal, we declare bread to be representative of body and wine to be representative of the blood to remind us that a death was required for sin
 - Secondly, we proclaim that death did not conquer Jesus; Jesus conquers death
 - We are conducting this ritual as a temporary ordinance
 - It will not carry forth into the Kingdom after Jesus returns
 - Jesus says in v.26 that we are to observe this tradition until He returns
 - And so the message we are to convey as part of our observance is that Jesus is returning and we're eagerly looking forward to that moment
 - In light of that message, we need to observe the meal with a balance of sober reflection and joy and anticipation
 - We should conduct the meal with a sour face and in a joyless mechanical fashion
 - That may be communicating death, but it certainly doesn't reflect the hope and joy of a Christian's anticipation for the Lord's return
 - The point is to reflect on the need for a sacrifice coupled with a joy that the one and only sacrifice has been made
 - Now we have a hope that God's grace makes possible
 - Let's not slip into the mindset that assumes we must remove all joy from the Lord's Supper
 - We just need to guard against letting our joy become indulgence as the

Corinthians did

- To end his correction, Paul now addresses how he wants the Corinthians to correct their behavior in the observance of the meal

1Cor. 11:27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

1Cor. 11:28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

1Cor. 11:29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.

1Cor. 11:30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.

1Cor. 11:31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.

1Cor. 11:32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

1Cor. 11:33 So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

1Cor. 11:34 If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment. The remaining matters I will arrange when I come.

- Paul says if someone persists in dishonoring the ritual by an improper observance, they are guilty of a sin
 - The sin in this case is of dishonoring the memory of Christ's death
 - Paul says we are guilty of the body and blood, which is a way of saying we are guilty of the very sin that Jesus died to save us from
 - He is not saying we bear some special guilt for putting Jesus to death
 - He's emphasizing the sad irony of the person who would choose to sin in the course of remembering the sacrifice made for their sins
 - Nevertheless, this is a serious matter, as that person is testing the Lord's patience as he or she sins against the specific instructions of the Lord
 - To prevent such a sin, Paul advises the church to consider their behavior, every person is to examine himself
 - The instruction to examine ourselves in conjunction with observing the Lord's Supper is often taken out of this context
 - Paul means that we should ask ourselves if we're keeping the right attitude regarding the meal itself
 - Do we hold the symbols in the proper perspective?
 - Do we maintain a respectful attitude throughout the meal?
 - Do we communicate a balanced message of remembering Christ's death for sin and our hope in a future resurrection?

- Paul did not mean we were supposed to take a moment and reflect on our sins in general
 - Or that if we participated in the Lord's Supper with any unrepentant sin we were guilty of yet more sin
 - Jesus never instituted a step of confession of sin or even the step of us reflecting upon our sin
 - What sense would it make for us to reflect on our sins while observing a ritual that reminds us that the price has already been paid for our sins?
 - We have to guard against slipping into a mindset that says we must pay penance or show a contrite heart to be worthy of Christ's sacrifice
 - That borders on a works' mentality
 - The gift of salvation came freely
 - We are memorializing the death that made that possible
- Finally, Paul leaves the church with a warning for how the Lord may respond in discipline to any church body that does not observe this tradition properly
 - In v.29 Paul says that the one who fails to identify failings within the church body is risking judgment from the Lord
 - When Paul speaks of judging a body, he means the church body, not our physical bodies
 - In other words, if a church goes on practicing the Lord's supper in the wrong way, that church body is in harm's way
 - And in fact, Paul says that there was evidence in Corinth to indicate that the Lord had already begun to take disciplinary action against the church for their sins
 - There were members of the Corinthian church who were suffering weaknesses, sickness and even death
 - The Lord revealed to Paul through the Spirit that these cases of sickness and death were punishment brought by the Lord against the body for their sin against Him
 - In a sense, the church was harming the symbols of Jesus' body, and so He brought a judgment of a similar kind against them
- What a powerful lesson for any church!
 - We learn that the Lord is capable and willing to bring our physical bodies harm to discipline us for sin
 - If we test the Lord in any way, we may see Him take action in a physical realm to bring us into obedience
 - Or at the very least, the Lord is removing us from the earth to minimize the damage we might do against Him
 - Sobering stuff, isn't it?
 - Paul says we can avoid receiving the Lord's judgment if we rightly judge our own behaviors and keep them in line with the Lord's commands

- Otherwise, the Lord will judge us to ensure we stand out from the world's condemnation
- If the Lord let us continue in sin without a challenge, then the message of the church would be distorted in the world
- To prevent that, the Lord will step in to stop the church's bad behavior if necessary
- To summarize his instructions, Paul says let's come together in unity, not division, and for a message, not merely for a meal
 - Wait for each other so as to act in unity
 - Don't come to eat the food out of hunger
 - Eat as a ritual of respect to Jesus' death
 - Practice it in a way that avoids the Lord's judgment
 - And if there were other details that needed addressing, Paul says he would correct them when he is present and can observe them firsthand

- We now launch into the next major section of Paul's letter and a new topic
 - Paul is ready to tackle the next question he received from the Corinthian church as delivered by Chloe's delegation
 - The new topic is spiritual gifts in the body
 - Paul is going to use the next three chapters to cover this issue in depth, so we'll be discussing gifts for a few weeks
 - This topic is probably the most controversial of any of the issues Paul raises in this letter
 - It was controversial in Paul's day
 - And it's still controversial today
 - But it hasn't always been controversial
 - In fact, Paul's letter largely settled all questions on the purpose and operation of spiritual gifts in the body
 - And those issues remained settled for nearly 1,900 years
 - Until the controversy returned at the beginning of the twentieth century
 - We'll look at that history in the course of studying the next three chapters
 - But for now, let's see how Paul introduces this next topic, beginning in the opening verses of Chapter 12

1Cor. 12:1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.

1Cor. 12:2 You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led.

1Cor. 12:3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is accursed”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

- The chapter begins with “Now concerning,” which is the tell-tale sign that Paul has entered into a new topic
 - We've left behind the subject of Christian liberty and moved into a new area of discussion
 - But Paul doesn't announce the new topic until he reaches v.4
 - Instead, in vs.1-3 he first establishes a fundamentally important principle of Christian experience that we must understand to appreciate spiritual gifts properly
 - It's no exaggeration to say that if a student doesn't understand Paul's point in these first three verses, that student is doomed to misunderstand the rest of Paul's teaching

- Paul ends v.1 saying he doesn't want the church to be unaware of something...
 - The better translation would be "I don't want you to be ignorant"
 - That phrase was Paul's polite way of telling the church they were ignorant
 - There was a fundamental fact of Christian theology that had escaped their understanding
 - And if they had any hope to appreciate spiritual gifts in the body properly, they needed to know this one missing fact
- So in v.2, Paul moves to explaining what they were missing
 - Prior to coming to faith, unbelievers are led astray in a variety of ways
 - Notice Paul ends v.2 saying "however you were led"
 - Unbelievers are prompted to say and do many things through the influence of a wide variety of forces and desires and temptations
 - But these forces universally lead them away from the truth
 - In particular, in the area of religious worship, all unbelievers are astray
 - Unbelievers chase after so-called gods and mute idols, giving them their allegiance and worship, and doing so in full conviction and sincerity
 - Unbelievers are convinced of the reality of false gods and false beliefs
 - Despite their sincerity and conviction, in the end they are devoted followers of lies
 - Even atheists are devoted to a false idea, to the idea that the creation lacks a Creator, which is a faith in itself
 - This is the condition of every single unbeliever on earth
- Paul's point is that religious fervor and zeal cannot be – by itself – a proof of God working or of spiritual truth
 - Even unbelievers can put on a convincing display of spiritual commitment and devotion
 - We know these displays lack any real spiritual power, because they are worshipping things that don't exist
 - They may worship demons indirectly, as Paul said earlier, but it's not as though unbelievers are constantly under the control of demons
 - For the most part, they are led astray by self-deception, propelled by fleshly desires with hearts set against God
 - Therefore, when we see someone displaying religious zeal, we can't automatically assume we are witnessing a work of the Lord
 - Paul points out the Corinthians once worshipped mute idols that they now understand were never really there
 - That was evidence to this church that spiritual truth is not a matter of personal experience or feelings
 - Our feelings lie to us

- Personal experiences are not proof of anything
- We can be led astray by emotion and experiences and false displays
- But there is a truth to be found, and there is a specific way in which it is found
 - As we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we move out of the spiritual wilderness and come into a true knowledge of God by the Spirit
 - Paul makes that point in v.3
 - He says “therefore I make known to you...”
 - This opening phrase is a mild form of correction
 - Paul is saying essentially, “I want you to correct your thinking on this point so you will know the truth”
 - Paul says no one who is speaking under the influence of the Spirit of God can say Jesus is accursed
 - And no one can profess Jesus is Lord except by the power of the Holy Spirit
- Paul is making two important points related to the topic of spiritual gifts
 - First, looking at the second half of the statement, Paul says every believer is indwelled and under the control or influence of the Holy Spirit
 - At the time of our salvation, we receive the Holy Spirit as a permanent indwelling of God
 - We receive the Holy Spirit in the moment of our belief in Christ
 - In fact, in Romans Paul teaches that it is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which is the defining characteristic of a Christian

Rom. 8:14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

- In other words, the indwelling of God’s Spirit is both the cause and consequence of saving faith
 - God’s Spirit living in a person defines who is truly saved
 - And the Spirit’s presence in us forever separates us from the world and from the person we used to be
 - Furthermore, in 2 Corinthians Paul calls the indwelling of the Spirit a pledge or down payment on God’s promise to resurrect us and grant us an inheritance with Christ

2Cor. 1:21 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God,

2Cor. 1:22 who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

- It’s critically important to note that Paul says in v.3 that the very words of our confession of faith must be prompted by the Spirit of God
 - We believe and confess Christ because of the Spirit

- So until the Spirit is in us, working to prompt faith, we are incapable of making a true confession of Christ
- This fact refutes any teaching that suggests the Spirit doesn't come upon a believer until some time after coming to faith
- The Spirit is with us from the moment of our confession, Paul says
- At this point, you think back to examples in Acts where believers received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at a point after coming to faith
 - Specifically, there are three very important and very limited exceptions in the time of Acts when the Spirit acted in this unusual way to fulfill His prophecy
 - We covered the reason behind those three exceptions in our Acts study
 - I encourage you to listen to that study to find out why these three exceptions happened in the early church and why they have never happened since
- Moving back to our text, Paul says only by the Spirit can someone confess Christ, but Paul doesn't mean it's literally impossible for an unbeliever to speak the words "Jesus is Lord"
 - Of course, any human mouth can form those words and make that statement, physically speaking
 - But that's not the issue
 - The issue is whether a person can make that confession truly agreeing with the statement in their heart
 - Paul says apart from the work of the Spirit in their heart, it's impossible
 - Jesus said the same thing to the disciples in John 6:

John 6:63 “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.

John 6:64 “But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.

John 6:65 And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.”

- The Spirit is the One Who gives a person eternal life through a faith in Jesus
 - The flesh profits us nothing, Jesus says, because apart from the Spirit, no man can know the truth
 - So Jesus says that unless the Father grants us grace to know Christ, we can't and won't come to know Him
- Secondly, looking back at the first half of that statement, Paul says that no one who has come to know the Lord truly can ever cease being a Christ follower
 - We can never return to a point where we say that Jesus is accursed or damned with true conviction

- Once we have been made a child of God, we've become a new creature, and the old us is gone forever
- We are like the butterfly that's emerged from the cocoon
- There's no way to return to the caterpillar we once were, Hallelujah!
- As with the earlier statement, Paul doesn't mean it's impossible for a Christian to say the phrase "Jesus is accursed" – I just did!
 - Speaking the words are not the issue again
 - In fact, some believers rebel against Christ's authority to the point that they live lives indistinguishable from an unbeliever's
 - And some of them even declare that they no longer believe in Jesus
- But Paul says that no born again believer is ever capable of truly rejecting their belief that Christ is God and Savior
 - They can never return to a belief that Jesus was just a man who died accursed on a cross
 - Despite their protests and bad behavior, the Holy Spirit is still with them as a pledge and seal for their salvation
 - And because the Holy Spirit is indwelling the believer, the Lord cannot turn His back on us despite our disobedience

2Tim. 2:11 It is a trustworthy statement:

For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him;

2Tim. 2:12 If we endure, we will also reign with Him;

If we deny Him, He also will deny us;

2Tim. 2:13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

- Paul says it's a trustworthy statement: if we died with Christ by faith, then we will live with Him
 - Once we have become born again through faith, we are forever linked with Christ
 - Just as He rose from the dead and lived a life to the Father, so will we
 - Salvation is based on faith alone, not by good works
- Furthermore, if we endure hardship on His behalf, then we will be rewarded in the Kingdom
 - We will reign with Him, which means we will receive reward in Heaven in the form of authority and privilege
 - But if we deny Him our endurance and service, then the Lord will deny us eternal reward
- Finally, Paul says even if our disobedience should rise to the point of faithlessness, nevertheless we know the Lord will remain faithful to us
 - We may lose eternal reward, but we can never be separated from God

- Because He cannot deny Himself, that is He can't turn His back on His own Spirit living in us
- So the presence of the Holy Spirit living in each of us is our proof that God will complete the good work He began in each of us
- So the two fundamental truths Paul teaches in vs.2-3 is that coming to Christ is a work of the Spirit alone, and once we have been saved by the Spirit, we remain Christ's forever
 - Now Paul is going to draw an important and inevitable conclusion from these truths on the matter of spiritual gifts in the body
 - That conclusion is that there are not "levels" of the Spirit or degrees of the Spirit separating believers

1Cor. 12:4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.

1Cor. 12:5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.

1Cor. 12:6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.

1Cor. 12:7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

- Paul begins his teaching on gifts with a series of contrasts
 - There are a variety of gifts in the body of Christ
 - But all these gifts are the product of the same Spirit
 - When Paul says the same Spirit, he doesn't mean that believers in Corinth were going around claiming there were different spirits of God
 - Instead, Paul means everyone has the same degree or measure of the Spirit
 - Just because you and I exhibit different spiritual gifts doesn't mean we each share in different portions or aspects of the Spirit of God
 - Paul has already established we all have the same Spirit
 - Moreover, we all have all of the Spirit
 - You can't have 50% of the Spirit
 - It's all or none, as Paul established in vs.2-3
 - One Christian might be more submitted to the Spirit than another Christian, but both Christians have the same Spirit
 - Both in nature and degree
- Furthermore, the body of Christ will display a variety of ministries – or works of service
 - But every work of service in the Body is directed for and by the Lord through His Spirit
 - Just because I serve the body in one kind of ministry while other Christians work in different ways doesn't mean we serve different gods
 - It's simply a reflection that the Lord has a lot of work to get done in the world,

and he equips and calls individual believers to play different roles in that work

- We can't expect that all Christians will serve in the same way
 - And therefore, we can't expect the Lord to gift all believers with the same set of gifts
 - Just as we wouldn't expect construction workers to arrive at a complex construction site all carrying exactly the same tool
 - Likewise, we shouldn't expect that the Lord will give every believer the same spiritual gifts to perform the variety of ministries the Lord desires
- To sum up this point, Paul says in v.6 that there are a variety of effects (or operations) in the body of Christ, but they all originate from the same God
 - I may have one kind of spiritual gift, and I put it to use in a particular ministry
 - You may have a completely different kind of gift, and you will put it to use in a very different ministry
 - But these differences are not to be considered a "problem" to be fixed
 - They are the natural consequence of one God working to accomplish many things
- On the other hand, these gifts and ministries do share one important thing in common: they exist for the good of the Body of Christ
 - Paul says in v.7 that the purpose of God equipping all believers in the body with gifts is to effect good things within the body
 - Every believer receives one or more spiritual talents or abilities at the point they become a believer
 - These new abilities are the consequence of the indwelling of the Spirit
 - They are not natural abilities amplified or simply put to new use
 - They are literally new abilities we didn't have prior to the indwelling of the Spirit
 - That is why we call them spiritual gifts
 - They are the work of God through us
 - These are behaviors enabled by the Holy Spirit, so that as we accomplish a work of ministry in our spiritual gift, the Lord receives the credit for the fruit it produces
 - You will know a spiritual gift when you see it, because you'll say to yourself, I could never expect to get the results that person is getting
 - For example, I don't have the gift of evangelism
 - So when I see someone operating with that gift, I'm always amazed at their ability to convert
 - I might present the Gospel to a person, and get no response at all
 - But then a person with the gift of evangelism could speak exactly the same words to the same person, and that person falls to their knee in repentance

- What was the difference between me and them? The Spirit
 - The only way we can explain the difference is to recognize that God was working differently in one of us, hence the spiritual gift
 - On the other hand, the absence of a particular spiritual gift doesn't relieve me from participating in that ministry to the best of my abilities
 - I may not have the spiritual gift of prayer, but I'm still expected to pray
 - I may not have the spiritual gift of evangelism, but I still share my faith
 - I may not have a spiritual gift of teaching, but I still endeavor to teach others God's word – if only my children
- In the end, the Lord has equipped every gathering of believers with a variety of spiritual gifts and a variety of ministries to accommodate the array of spiritual needs in that body
 - These gifts are for our benefit and serve to build us up spiritually
 - They are not magic tricks
 - They don't exist to make us feel proud or special
 - Furthermore, the differences between various spiritual gifts are not measures of spiritual maturity
 - They are not distinctions that reflect God's pleasure or suggest importance or authority
 - They are not cause for assigning special recognition to one group over another
 - They are intended to unite the body, not divide it
- So whatever else we may learn about spiritual gifts in the weeks to come, we must return over and over again to these fundamental principles
 - All believers possess an equal degree of the one and only Spirit
 - The Spirit made us a part of the body and holds us to the body eternally
 - The Spirit equips us all in one way or another, leading to a variety of gifts and ministries within the body
 - Furthermore, the differences between spiritual gifts are a necessity given the variety of works the Lord intends to accomplish in His body
 - We need not worry that we aren't all doing exactly the same things with exactly the same spiritual gifts
 - Rather, we should be thankful for the wisdom of God to ensure a unique and necessary role for each of us in serving the body and the Kingdom
 - In the end, the union of our individual spiritual gifts creates the symphony of ministry that ensures a common good
 - No more than we would wish for a symphony made up of a single instrument should we want a body expressing the same gift



1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 12B

Chapter 12:4-11

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- Our foundation for the study of spiritual gifts has been set
 - Paul laid that foundation last week in the first seven verses of Chapter 12
 - Our life of faith in the truth begins with, and is guided by, the Spirit of God
 - And that same Spirit is at work in us to grant us spiritual gifts
 - Furthermore, the body will be equipped with a variety of gifts for a variety of intended ministries
 - This variety is intended for the common good of the body
 - Each gift plays a role in the symphony of spiritual work the Lord intends to accomplish in a body of believers
 - But no matter how different one gift may be from another, we can be assured they all originate from the same Spirit
 - No one in the body of Christ receives more or less of God's Spirit
 - He is indivisible and ever-present in us
 - So the question isn't, do we have the fullness of the Spirit?
 - The question is, what are we doing with what we've already been given?
- Now moving forward, Paul jumps into an explanation of how these gifts are to be experienced and shared within the body
 - Let's back up a few verses from last time...

1Cor. 12:4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.

1Cor. 12:5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.

1Cor. 12:6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.

1Cor. 12:7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1Cor. 12:8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit;

1Cor. 12:9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,

1Cor. 12:10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.

1Cor. 12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

- As Paul explained, we should expect to find a variety of gifts within the body of Christ, all originating in the same Spirit
 - This is a key point running through the entire discussion of spiritual gifts
 - The fact that you possess a different spiritual gift from me is never proof that you have a different measure of the Spirit
 - Our different experiences in the Spirit are planned and purposeful on God's

part

- I need not feel less a Christian or that God is less pleased with me simply because I don't have your spiritual gift
- Neither should you feel cheated because the Lord didn't give you the gift I received
- In v.7 Paul explains that whatever we have been given is necessary to assure the common good
 - God knows what He's doing
 - He knew who would gather in this church body on a certain day, and He knew what gifts we would need
 - So He equips every body as needed to ensure the common good
 - Sometimes that equipping comes from within and sometimes it comes from outside the body (i.e., a visiting teacher or internet ministry)
- Then in vs.8-10 Paul lists nine gifts in the body, so let's consider each one in turn
 - First, there is the gift of wisdom
 - Wisdom is the ability to come to a spiritually mature perspective on current circumstances
 - That perspective can then be offered to a leader or group in the church
 - Secondly, there is the gift of knowledge
 - This refers to a true understanding of God-revealed mysteries
 - Knowledge is different than wisdom in terms of time and scope
 - Wisdom is God-given maturity and insight about how we approach the world and our circumstances
 - While knowledge is God-given insight about how we understand God and His mysteries and purposes
 - Joseph and Solomon demonstrated wisdom; Moses and David demonstrated knowledge
 - In both cases, these gifts find their purposes in enlightening and educating God's people
 - Third, faith is a spiritual gift
 - We know faith is a gift for every Christian in the sense of salvation
 - But the spiritual gift of faith refers to a supernatural trust in God coupled with a courage to act on that trust
 - We could say that Daniel's three friends displayed the gift of faith in their willingness to enter the fire
 - Or that Abraham demonstrated a gift of faith in his willingness to sacrifice his only son
- Fourth is healing, meaning a supernatural power to end illness in the body instantly
 - Progressive healing over time is not a manifestation of this gift
 - If I lay hands on someone and they get better over a period of weeks, how can we say that was a manifestation of God's power?

- It could just as easily be explained as the natural work of the body's immune system
- I'm not suggesting that God isn't working in natural ways to heal us
 - I simply want to make clear that the gift of healing – like all spiritual gifts – stands apart from similar, natural forms
 - A spiritual gift is, by definition, a manifestation of God's power in a supernatural way
 - So the gift of healing will always be immediately recognizable as a work of the Spirit
- Interestingly, Paul describes this particular gift in the plural in Greek (e.g., gifts of healings)
 - This tells us that Paul means there are many types of healing gifts, not just a single healing gift
 - So not everyone with a gift of healing can heal every ailment
- Some Christians debate whether this gift still exists in the church today
 - Certainly we see many examples of supernatural healing in the early church in Acts, but what about today?
 - There is nothing in scripture to suggest that this gift ended at any point in the church's history
- And it's hard to say how common it truly is today, compared to in the time of the early church
 - The Bible records notable moments in church history, but we have no way of knowing how prevalent these examples were in those days
 - Were people healed supernaturally on a regular basis or was it as rare as it seems to be today? We can't know
 - It is impossible to determine how common genuine healing may be in the church today
 - God may be healing many people supernaturally around the world, even if we never hear about it
 - Even though we know many frauds and liars are working to deceive believers with false displays of healing
- Next, miracles are mighty works of God that alter the normal course of natural events
 - The term miracle is often used to describe any supernatural work of God
 - And it's even used at times to describe natural occurrences, like childbirth or when I volunteer to do the dishes at home
 - But once again, the spiritual gift of miracles is something specific and recognizable as a unique work of God
 - Elijah had the ability to work miracles
 - Moses had the ability to work miracles
 - Paul had the ability to work miracles
 - And once again, the ability to alter natural events is something given for the

- benefit of the body of Christ
- Can believers possess this gift today?
 - Once more, there is nothing in the Bible to suggest the gift has expired
 - But it's also clear that it was never common and is always associated with important moments in God's plan
 - Miracles are not common by definition, so it should not surprise us if the Spirit rarely hands out the gift of miracles in the body
 - But there is a difference between rarely and never, and we can't say it never happens today
- Prophecy is a gift of supernatural utterances
 - The word "prophecy" has a variety of meanings in scripture
 - First, a prophet is someone who is called to reveal details of God's future plan for the world and His people
 - Like Isaiah or Daniel
 - But a prophet can also refer to someone who explains the spiritual meaning of past or present-day events
 - Like the address spoken by the first martyr, Stephen, in Acts 7
 - Thirdly, in the Old Testament, a prophet can be a person who sings prophetic praises as a spontaneous expression of thanks to God
 - As Mary sang her song after the appearance of the angel
 - Or when Moses and Miriam both sang songs after crossing the Red Sea
 - Finally, a prophetic word can be an instruction from God delivered to edify or instruct the church
 - Just as Agabus came from Jerusalem to Antioch in Acts 11 to inform the church of a coming famine so they could prepare
 - Seeing the diversity of the prophecy gifts, we might naturally ask which of these four kinds of prophecy still continue in the Church today?
 - The answer is found in scripture itself
 - Both the writer of Hebrews in Chapter 1 and the Apostle John at the end of Revelation make clear that the canon of scripture is now forever closed
 - God Himself has declared that He has finished revealing the details of coming events
 - We have all the prophecy we're going to get
 - First, because God's revelation culminated in the revealing of His Son Jesus Christ
 - Secondly, because the canon was closed with the death of the last apostle, who were Christ's appointed representatives to write the canon
 - Finally, there is no need for new prophecy to explain the spiritual meaning of past events since Christ is the fulfillment of all past prophecy
 - Therefore, the first, second and third types of prophecy ended with the death of John

- But here we find Paul was still talking about these forms of prophecy working in the church in his day
- Obviously the apostles were still alive and working in Paul's day, so he had reason to mention it then
- Today, however, new prophecy of the first three kinds is no longer possible, since the Spirit will not act to contradict the word of God
 - So should someone offer you a new revelation concerning future events in God's plan, they are a false prophet
 - L. Ron Hubbard was a fraud when he offered new prophecy of coming events in forming Scientology
 - Or if someone should suggest a new interpretation of past events, we can know they are a fraud according to scripture
 - Joseph Smith was a fraud when he offered a new interpretation of past events in forming the Mormon church
- That leaves the prophetic word of instruction to the church
 - There is nothing in scripture to suggest that the prophetic word of prophecy has ended
 - We might expect that God will gift someone with these abilities from time to time
 - But as with all other gifts, the manifestation of this gift must be self-evidently a work of the Spirit
 - If someone claims to have a prophetic word as an instruction for us from the Lord, we should test this utterance carefully before placing any trust in the person's assertions
 - As Paul has said, the same Spirit is working in all gifts
 - So if the Spirit is truly giving us a word through another member of the church, then we should expect that same Spirit in us to confirm that word some other way
 - Without that confirmation, we should reject the word supposedly coming from the Lord
 - This is why the Jews were commanded to stone any person who claimed to be a prophet but made mistaken prophecies
 - If a person is truly speaking with the power of the Spirit, as they claim to do, then they won't make mistakes
 - Anyone can guess about a future event or offer advice to a person and get lucky once in a while
 - But God's predictions and God's instructions will never be wrong
- Distinguishing spirits, or discernment, is the counterweight to the gift of prophecy
 - It is the ability to know whether a prophetic word is coming from the Spirit of God or the Spirit of the antichrist, that is Satan
 - This gift acts with prophecy much like the gift of interpreting tongues works with speaking in tongues

- If someone claims to speak with prophecy, it may be difficult to know if a specific prophetic word is accurate
- If a false prophet is speaking, they can skillfully word their prophecy to sound spiritual and weighty yet have no substance or accuracy
- Much like the way horoscopes sound meaningful, but in reality they are vague and offer no real insight about the future
- So this gift resides in the body to help the church filter out the enemy's work from that of the Spirit
 - Keep in mind, we all have a degree of spiritual discernment simply by the presence of the Spirit in each of us
 - So this gift goes beyond a normal level of discernment
 - A person with this gift can call out a false prophet before anyone else may have detected the fraud
- Finally, we have the gifts of tongues and interpreting tongues
 - Paul spends an extended period of time teaching on this one gift in Chapter 14, so we're going to hold off discussing it in detail until then
 - For now we can simply define it and its complement
 - In the Greek, the word "tongues" is *glossa*, which is the word for a foreign language
 - If you know how to speak a foreign language, then you know how to speak a tongue, to use the Greek word
 - Likewise, interpreting a tongue means understanding a foreign language when someone is speaking it to you
 - You may have grown up as a native English speaker, but because you took Spanish classes in school, you can understand Spanish when you hear it spoken
 - In the sense of the Greek word, you can be said to interpret the tongue of Spanish
 - We will wait until Chapter 14 to understand how and why this gift is given in the body of Christ
 - For now we should note that in all the references to gifts made in 1 Corinthians 12-14, the one spiritual gift Paul always includes in every list is the gift of tongues
 - When we get to Chapter 14, we'll find out why Paul places this gift at the center of his discourse on spiritual gifts
- Speaking of lists of gifts, this list in vs.8-10 is but one of three several such lists found in the New Testament
 - Paul gives similar lists elsewhere in 1 Corinthians, again in Romans 12 and also in Ephesians 4
 - In each place Paul lists spiritual gifts, he includes a slightly different group
 - In fact, on at least three different occasions in 1 Corinthians alone, Paul lists spiritual gifts differently

- In this list in vs.8-10, Paul mentions nine different spiritual gifts
 - Word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing spirits (discernment), tongues, interpretation of tongues
 - If we compare this to the list in Romans, we see a few similarities but also differences
 - In Romans, it's prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, mercy
 - And if we look at Ephesians, we find still another list
 - There it is apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers
- How do we reconcile the differences among these lists?
 - Are they merely additive?
 - Do we just lump them all together and call it a day?
- If we do that, we are at risk of committing an exegetical error
 - Because to lump these together ignores the context in which each list was given
 - In other words, we need to ask did Paul himself intend for these three lists written in different decades to three different audiences to be joined into a single list of spiritual gifts?
 - And if so, why did he repeat a few gifts across all three lists?
 - Perhaps he had other purposes in these lists?
- Let's step back and look at these lists in their context
 - First, looking at the list in Ephesians
 - This list is clearly different than the other two
 - The Ephesians list is not a list of gifts at all; it's a list of positions or roles in the church
 - Apostle, teacher, pastor, evangelist, prophet
 - These roles are closely associated with gifts, but they are not gifts in and of themselves
 - Someone can be an evangelist without having the gift of evangelism
 - Then if we look at the context of Ephesians 4, we see Paul is talking about the role-players God raises up to equip the body for service
 - So in Ephesians 4, Paul isn't talking about spiritual gifts at all
 - So we can't add this list to any other
 - Then moving to Romans, Paul's topic in Romans 12 is how the church should regard one another in the body of Christ
 - Paul is teaching that we should not think too highly of ourselves, since we all have a part to play in the body of Christ
 - In that context, Paul mentions some spiritual gifts as examples of the ways a member of the body can be of service to others in the body
 - In each example, Paul prefaces the mention of a spiritual gift with the preposition

“if”

- If you have a gift of teaching, then teach...Paul says
- If you have a gift of service, then get busy serving, etc.
- It's obvious in Romans 12 that Paul's purpose in listing spiritual gifts wasn't to provide an exhaustive list of gifts
 - He was just offering a few examples to make his point
- His point being that everyone should be serving in some kind of gift in humility and without haughtiness
- So now back to 1 Corinthians, we can recognize Paul's pattern
 - He often lists spiritual gifts as examples to make a larger point in specific context
 - What is Paul's context for giving this list in 1 Corinthians 12?
 - His point is that a diverse number of gifts are a blessing to the body, yet all gifts originate from the same Spirit
 - And once again to illustrate his point, Paul lists a few representative gifts
 - The things Paul chooses to include in this list reinforce the diversity of gifts available from the Spirit for the common good
 - For example, a church might have one believer who is martyred in a courageous act of faith
 - While at the same time another believer is being rescued from martyrdom by the working of a miracle
 - One believer is edifying physical bodies through a gift of healing
 - While another believer is edifying minds with a gift of wisdom or knowledge
 - One may be speaking in a foreign language while another interprets that language, etc.
 - So as we look across all the lists of spiritual gifts given in scripture, it's clear Paul never intended to present us with an authoritative inventory of all possible spiritual gifts
 - Paul's various lists are always a little different because each list was merely a representative sample of spiritual gifts
 - Even if we were to add them all together, we still have no reason to think we arrive at an exhaustive list of spiritual gifts
 - In fact, it makes sense to conclude that Paul didn't give us a complete list because he *couldn't* list all the gifts
- Therefore, to the question of how many spiritual gifts are there in the body, the answer from scripture is we don't know
 - While we know of some gifts, because they are listed in one place or another, we can't be sure we know all of them
 - Can someone possess a gift of worship, or a gift of hospitality, or a gift of prayer?
 - None of these are called out in scripture, but that doesn't mean they don't

exist

- The real question is whether an ability in the body glorifies God in the way it sets itself apart from the common giftings of individuals, and provides for the good of the body
- If it meets this test, we might be looking at a spiritual gift
- Each person is to be certain in their own heart what God has called and gifted you to do, and then you should work in that gift
- Let's not waste more time debating what is or isn't a gift or trying to equate one gift to another
 - None of these lists of spiritual gifts are intended to be comprehensive
 - So neither should we get too dogmatic in arguing what is or isn't a spiritual gift
 - In the end it's not the form a gift takes that matters, but the way it glorifies the Lord and edifies the body that counts
 - When God moves in a person's life to gift them supernaturally, we see that work as coming from God and we give God glory for it
- Next time we'll pick up again in v.11 as we continue in our study of gifts



1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 12C

Chapter 12:11-27

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- Through the first ten verses of Chapter 12, Paul has begun patiently teaching the church about the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts
 - We've learned that spiritual gifts are a consequence of the salvation work accomplished by the Spirit
 - As we believe, we are equipped by the Spirit
 - He is present in us from the very moment of salvation
 - And He unites the body of Christ
 - Though there is one and the same Spirit working in all believers, nevertheless He manifests Himself in a variety of ways
 - There are a variety of ministries
 - Therefore, there are a variety of gifts in the body
 - The Spirit is working to assign gifts according to the Lord's purposes
 - So we cannot assign greater worth to one member of the body over another based on spiritual gifting
 - Finally, all these gifts are given for the common good
 - No one receives a spiritual gift to "show off" or gain attention
 - We use our gifts so that the entire Body benefits
 - Gifts always draw attention to Christ and His work in the Body, never to us and our work
- At the end of our last lesson, Paul listed nine gifts as examples of how the Lord can assign very different gifts and yet all come from the same Lord with an intended purpose
 - At the very end of the list we read v.11, which is where we pick up again this week
 - The same Spirit works all these things according to the will of God

1Cor. 12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

- Paul summarizes his list of examples by repeating his main point
 - The diversity of spiritual gifts are all the work of the same Spirit
 - In v.11, Paul says the gifts of the Spirit are always a "work" of the Spirit
 - We can't create our own gifts, either through hard work or by asking God for it
 - God assigns to each believer the gift or gifts He wills, and we don't get a choice in the matter
 - Our gifts are assigned by the Spirit, according to His will, and they are ours at the moment we become a believer
 - Neither can we create a gift through persistence or effort
 - By definition, the word gift means something given to us, not something we obtain in our own power
 - So I can't earn a gift

- Nor can I learn a gift
- Such things are works of flesh
- So even if we honed some talent or ability to perfection, it doesn't become a gift
- You'll know a spiritual gift when you see it...because you'll recognize you couldn't mimic it no matter how hard you tried
- On the other hand, we can develop or nurture our spiritual gifts
 - The Spirit who equips us also calls us to work with Him to develop our gift to its greatest effectiveness
 - As Paul counseled Timothy:

2Tim. 1:6 For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

- - If gifted to teach, I must still apply myself to learning the word of God and delivering the teaching with polish
 - If gifted to pray, I must develop the discipline to solicit prayer requests and devote the time to prayer
 - If gifted to service, I must seek opportunities to become useful to others in the body
 - When we develop our gifts in these ways, we aren't producing a gift out of nothing
 - Without the Spirit working in us, we might be able to mimic the behavior, but we'll never produce the same results
 - For the good our gifts produce is always a product of the Spirit working in us
 - The gifted teacher sees things in scripture no one else sees
 - The gifted prayer warrior sees prayers answered more powerfully
 - The gifted servant continues serving long after the rest have lost energy or interest
 - And so on
- From v.11, Paul now focuses his teaching to his main concern for what he's heard has been happening in the church in Corinth, in the practice of spiritual gifts

1Cor. 12:12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.

1Cor. 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

1Cor. 12:14 For the body is not one member, but many.

1Cor. 12:15 If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.

1Cor. 12:16 And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.

1Cor. 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

- Paul introduces what is perhaps his most famous analogy in all his letters: the analogy of a human body to the church, the body of Christ
 - In v.12 he begins with his premise: the human body is a single organism
 - Yet that one whole is constructed of many “members”
 - The word “members” is *melos*, which literally means parts
 - So the human body is made up of parts
 - But we don’t perceive our body as a collection of parts
 - We think of ourselves as a single person, a single body
 - And more to the point, we instinctively appreciate that all parts of our body are equally important to us and work in unison
 - There is no part of our body that we would choose to live without voluntarily
 - We might use some parts more often than others, but when a certain part is required, it becomes all important at that moment
- Then in the second half of v.12, Paul draws the comparison to the body of Christ
 - Within the church, we find many individuals, each bearing a different spiritual gift as given by the Spirit
 - But this collection of individuals (or we could say parts) operates as a single body
 - The church is not one person, but everyone
 - That’s why Jesus said:

Matt. 18:20 “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

- Jesus wasn’t saying that He isn’t present with a single believer
 - For more certainly Christ’s Spirit lives in each of us and will never leave us or forsake us
 - Rather, His point was that Christ’s body is represented by the assembling of the saints
 - So the collected presence of the church is a physical manifestation of Christ’s body on earth in these days while we await His personal return
 - This union of many into one is accomplished through our sharing of the one Spirit of God
 - As the Spirit indwells all of us, He becomes our connective tissue uniting the various members into a single organism
 - In v.13 Paul calls the collective indwelling of the Spirit “one baptism”
 - As Paul taught earlier, we have all received the same Spirit upon coming to faith

- That indwelling is called the baptism of the Spirit
- It's called a baptism in the sense that by faith, we are immersed in the Spirit of God and cleansed by the blood of Christ
- Notice again Paul emphasizes that all believers, no matter their origins or human circumstances, are unified by this common experience
 - Every believer receives the same Spirit, to the same degree and for a common purpose: to become part of the body of Christ
 - Also notice the tense of the verb Paul uses: he says we were "made" to drink of the one Spirit
 - We play no part in the coming of the Spirit and His power to equip us with gifts
 - We were made to receive the Spirit, and by His arrival came our entrance into a common body
- Then in vs. 14-21, Paul moves to the second half of his analogy to illustrate the importance of every member of the body
 - He says the human body is many parts working together for the benefit of the body
 - The fact that a foot differs from a hand doesn't mean it's less a part of the body or less important
 - It's not as though the hand is standard for who can be considered part of the human body or who can be considered useful
 - Furthermore, the foot doesn't look at the hand and pout because it assumes that only hands are worthy to be counted part of the body
 - And Paul makes this point again with the example of the ear and the eye
 - Next Paul points out the absurdity of such attitudes
 - If a body could be designed with only one kind of part, it would be a hideous, unworkable, useless thing
 - If the ear got its way and it could become an eye, then where would the body be when it needed to hear something?
 - We need our hearing just as much as we need our eyesight, of course
 - And in some situations, we need hearing even more than eyesight

A concerned husband went to a doctor to talk about his wife. He says to the doctor, "Doctor, I think my wife is deaf because she never hears me the first time and I always have to repeat things."

"Well," the doctor replied, "go home and tonight stand about 15 feet behind your wife and say something to her. If she doesn't respond, move about 5 feet closer and say it again. Keep doing this so that we'll get an idea about the severity of her deafness."

Sure enough, the husband goes home and does exactly as instructed.

Secretly, the husband stands about 15 feet behind his wife in the kitchen as she is chopping some vegetables and says, "Honey, what's for dinner?" He hears no response, so he moves about 5 feet closer and asks again. No reply. He moves 5 feet closer. Still no reply. He gets fed up and moves right behind her, about an inch away, and asks loudly, "Honey, what's for dinner?"

She replies, "For the fourth time, vegetable stew!"

- Then Paul moves to making the point from this analogy

1Cor. 12:18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

1Cor. 12:19 If they were all one member, where would the body be?

1Cor. 12:20 But now there are many members, but one body.

1Cor. 12:21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

1Cor. 12:22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary;

1Cor. 12:23 and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable,

1Cor. 12:24 whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked,

1Cor. 12:25 so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

1Cor. 12:26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

1Cor. 12:27 Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.

- In the body of Christ, the Lord has placed a diversity of members, each gifted just as He desired
 - It's God's wisdom that determines who gets what gift
 - And that wisdom ensures a distribution of gifting that suits His purposes
 - So we must not make it a goal to force everyone to exhibit the same spiritual gift, if that were even possible
 - In v.19 Paul makes the application of his analogy to the church
 - If everyone in the church were to have exactly the same spiritual gift, then what kind of body would result?
 - Imagine the conflict of everyone stepping over one another trying to serve the body in exactly the same way
 - Imagine all the needs that would go unmet as a result
 - Imagine the confusion

- Imagine the uselessness
- Just as the body needs a diversity of parts, so does the body of Christ
- Every member of the body has a place and purpose, so no one member can turn to another and say they are more important or that the other is unnecessary
 - Just as our eye needs our hand and our head needs our feet to be a complete, functioning, useful body...
 - So it is in the body of Christ...we are all equally important and necessary if we are to be a body useful to Christ and to each other
- In fact, Paul goes a step further and says that those members of our body who seem weaker are actually the most important to the body of Christ
 - Notice in v.22 Paul describes those who “seem” weaker
 - They seem weaker in the sense that they are in need of our particular spiritual gifting
 - From the perspective of the gifted teacher, a student in need of teaching seems to be the weaker one
 - To the gifted prayer warrior, the one in need of prayer can appear weaker
 - To the one gifted in service, the brother or sister in need of their care is the weaker
 - Obviously, this relationship cuts both ways
 - When someone in the church needs our particular form of spiritual gifting, we can say they are the weaker member of the body
 - But when we need another’s spiritual gifting, we become the weaker member
 - So in this context, weakness simply refers to a spiritual need within the body, a need others in the body have been gifted to satisfy
- Paul says the weaker members of the body are necessary to the health of the body of Christ
 - This sounds contrary to our expectations
 - We naturally assume that the strongest churches would be those in which we find no weaker members with spiritual needs
 - Where everyone is self-sustaining and in no need of teaching, no need of prayer, no need of service, etc.
 - But this isn’t the truth; the strongest churches are those where many so-called weaker members reside
 - Notice again in v.23 Paul says these weaker members are those we deem as less honorable
 - They are not actually less honorable, but until we appreciate the true purpose of the church, we are likely to perceive them as less valuable
 - The weaker members of our body are the most valuable members in the church because the church exists to bestows honor upon them
 - How so? Because everything we do as a body gathered together is for the our weaker members

- We honor the weaker when we serve them
- We bestow honor upon them when we use our spiritual gifts to meet their spiritual needs
- Paul says in v.23 that the body's purpose is to make the less presentable members of the body into more presentable members
 - In other words, when I come to the gathering, I find my purpose in teaching those who need to be taught
 - If I'm to make good use of my teaching gift, I must have someone who needs my teaching
 - But if no one were the weaker in respect to teaching, then I would have no one to serve, and I would lose the chance to develop my gift
 - If I could not develop my gifting, I cannot receive the blessings the Lord holds out for those who serve
 - Nor can I myself grow spiritually, since my own spiritual growth is made possible through serving in my gifting
 - So the Lord is in the business of bestowing honor upon the "weaker" members by sending them stronger members to serve them in their need
 - Truly, the weaker members of any church body are the most important to the health of the body, for they give purpose to the body
 - We gather to pray for those who need prayer
 - We gather to serve those who need our service
 - We gather to encourage those who need encouragement
 - We gather so that our collective strengths may serve our collective weaknesses
 - Sometimes we're the one who is less presentable and in need of strengthening
 - And at other times we are the one strengthening others
- Collectively, we are all growing and being strengthened spiritually, which is the very purpose of the church

Eph. 4:11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

Eph. 4:12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

Eph. 4:13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

Eph. 4:14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

Eph. 4:15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,

Eph. 4:16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what

every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

- Paul says the various roles of service with their respective giftings exist in the church to serve and build up the body
 - And as the body is strengthened, we all attain to the unity of faith, to the knowledge of Christ, and to His full stature
 - We are all growing into all aspects of Christ as His living body on earth, fitted together according to the proper working of each individual part
 - In v.26 Paul says that as one suffers or rejoices, so do the rest, because our very existence on earth is so closely connected to one another
 - As Christians, we have been left to live on earth for a time so we may use our spiritual gifts to serve other Christians even as we are served by others
 - This is our very purpose of our earthly lives, while we await the Lord's return
- We now have our third principle for understanding spiritual gifts properly
 - First, we learned that spiritual gifts come by way of the Holy Spirit at the point of our salvation
 - Everyone received the same Spirit, in the same measure
 - No one gets more of the Spirit, and no gift in the body is more honorable or desirable
 - Secondly, Paul taught that the gifts in the body are assigned as God wills
 - We cannot decide for ourselves what spiritual gift we want
 - We should expect a diversity of gifts in the body, according to God's purpose
 - And now we learn that the purpose of gifts is found in serving others who are in need of our particular spiritual strength
 - If no one needed our gift, then we cease having purpose in the body of Christ
 - So we can be assured there will always be someone in the body who needs what we can offer
 - Likewise, it would be absurd for everyone in the body to be gifted in the same way
 - It would be like a body made up of only hands or eyes or feet
 - A healthy body needs a diversity of parts working together
 - All three of these principles come to bear in the next part of this letter, as Paul begins to chastise the church for their abuses of spiritual gifts



1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 13

Chapter 12:27-31; 13:1- 10

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lesson-13](http://versebyversemistry.org/lessons/1corinthians-2013-lesson-13)

- As we end Chapter 12 and enter Chapter 13 in our study of spiritual gifts in the church, Paul is about to transition out of teaching and into correction
 - He's laid down the ground rules for how and why the church is gifted by the Holy Spirit
 - He's explained the nature of our gifting, the manner of its arrival
 - He's emphasized the purpose God has in assigning gifts to the body
 - So now it's time to compare those principles against what the Corinthians were actually practicing in the church in the use of their spiritual gifts
 - And the result isn't going to be pretty
 - We stopped our study in Chapter 12 at v.27, where Paul summarized the main point of teaching
 - The members of the church collectively represent Christ's physical body on earth while we await His physical return
 - Every member is important and has a purpose in God's plan
 - Every member must be actively engaged if the body is to be its most effective
 - Moreover, we don't need nor do we want everyone to minister in the same ways much less to possess the same gift
 - And in fact, it's not even possible, for the Lord has gifted us as He wished from the moment we were saved
- As we prepare to leave Chapter 12, Paul now turns to applying these truths to the situation in Corinth
 - And as we'll see, the church was operating quite differently from the standards of scripture

1Cor. 12:27 Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.

1Cor. 12:28 And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.

- I began by repeating v.27 to set the context, and then we see Paul moving into another list of gifts
 - Like the list from earlier in this chapter, this list of gifts reads as a set of examples, not a comprehensive or exhaustive catalog of gifts
 - In fact, notice that this list differs from the earlier list Paul gave
 - There is some repetition but some prior gifts have dropped off and new ones have been added
 - This inconsistency among various lists of gifts is a clear indication to us that Paul likes to use these lists as examples to illustrate a larger point
 - So let's not miss the forest for the trees
 - Rather than focusing on lists of gifts, let's stay focused on the point Paul is trying to make
 - So what is Paul's point now?

- To answer that question, we need to notice something important about the way Paul wrote the particular list in v.28
 - Paul orders these gifts from most important to least important
 - In the Greek language, the list communicates hierarchy
 - Our English translation reflects this hierarchy when it says God has appointed in the church “first” apostles, “second” prophets, “third” teachers...
 - The words first, second and third imply a hierarchy as does the word “then” before the later items
 - These same words are present in the original Greek as well, which means Paul was listing these gifts in diminishing order of importance
 - The most important gifts are listed at the front of the list, while the least important gifts are at the end of the list
 - Now earlier, Paul taught that every member of the body is important and no member is more important than another
 - So we might wonder if Paul has changed his mind concerning the relative value of each member of the body
 - The answer is no
 - Where before Paul argued that the value of each member in the body is the same regardless of the type of gift they possess, now he’s discussing the relative value of the gifts themselves
 - To borrow from Paul’s earlier analogy, while a nose is no less a part of our body than is our eye, nevertheless it’s fair to say we rely on our eyes more than we rely on our nose
 - On the other, when I need the services of my nose, no other body part will substitute
 - The nose becomes all important in circumstances when its needed
 - Similarly, each person in the church is equally a part of the body and equally able to contribute in his or her own way through their gifting
 - Nevertheless, spiritual gifts vary in their relative impact and importance in the body of Christ
 - Some spiritual gifts are more powerful and more universally beneficial in edifying the body
 - While other spiritual gifts minister on a smaller scale or in more select circumstances
 - But when a particular gift is required to edify the body of Christ, there is no substitute
 - In short, all people in the body are equally important and necessary, but spiritual gifts vary in their capacity to edify the body
- Looking at this list, Paul says the gift of apostleship is the most important gift
 - The gift of apostleship is the most important gift because it was the gift God used to found the church
 - Without this gift, there would be no church and nothing else would matter

- Second in importance are prophets
 - Prophets are those who deliver God’s word to the church
 - Without the word of God, the church would remain in the dark concerning God and His purposes in Christ
 - Nothing comes before the word of God in edifying the church
- Today, these two gifts have ceased operating in the church, because as we explained earlier in this chapter the canon of scripture is closed
 - In Paul’s day apostles and prophets were still active, so these gifts were the most important gifts in the body
 - On the other hand, today the highest priority gifting is teaching
- Teaching is the highest gift today for the same reason that apostles and prophets were important in Paul’s day
 - Growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ is the essence of edification
 - And the word of God is the sword of the Spirit to accomplish that work in our hearts
 - The gift of teaching illuminates scripture and brings it to bear on the lives of God’s people so that growth can happen
 - Through teachers, the Holy Spirit makes the Bride of Christ spotless and presentable for the Groom
- From this point, Paul’s list continues listing other gifts in diminishing order of importance
 - Remember, this list is not an exhaustive inventory of all gifts
 - Therefore, we know Paul didn’t set out to arm us with a definitive rank ordering of spiritual gifts
 - Why bother rank ordering just a sample of gifts then? What’s Paul’s point?
 - To understand the contrast fully, we need to read to the end of Chapter 12

1Cor. 12:29 All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they?

1Cor. 12:30 All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?

1Cor. 12:31 But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

- Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions concerning the gifts in his list
 - Not all believers are apostles, right?
 - Some believers were certainly gifted and called to be apostles in the church, but not all Christians possessed the gift of apostle
 - Nor could a believer join the ranks of apostles merely because they liked the idea of being an apostle

- The truth of this statement is self-evident
- But if this statement is true, then logically the rest of Paul's questions follow as well
 - We have prophets in the church, but not everyone is or can be a prophet
 - We have teachers gifted around us, but not all of us are gifted to teach
 - And by that same token, not everyone in the body will have a gift for miracles or healings, or tongues or interpretation of tongues
 - Spiritual gifts are appointed by God, designed for diversity and are nontransferable, nonrefundable and nonreturnable
- Then in v.31 Paul gets to his point in providing a ranked list...he's making a contrast between things that are great and things that are greater
 - And so Paul says, earnestly desire the greater gifts
 - The word for earnestly desire is *zeloo*, which means to zealously seek for something
 - Some might come to this command and assume Paul meant that an individual Christian should seek to acquire one of the spiritual gifts at the top of Paul's list
 - But that can't be Paul's intended meaning, since Paul has already said we can't all have the same gift
 - And the gift we will have is determined by the will of God, not by our earnest seeking
 - The proper interpretation of v.31 hinges on knowing that the phrase in Greek is written in the second person plural
 - In Texas, we would say "you all"
 - In other words, Paul is speaking about the desires of a congregation, not the personal desire of an individual Christian
 - Every congregation should earnestly seek for the higher priority gifts over lesser gifts
 - Paul means that as a congregation, we should make it our goal to support and encourage those with the higher priority gifts to serve us all the more, while holding the lesser gifts in the proper perspective
 - In any gathering there is only so much time available and that time is precious
 - We should want that time to be used to the greatest possible benefit of the body
 - And while all gifts are important and every believer will have opportunity to serve at one time or another, we need to prioritize
 - Now we understand the point of Paul's list...the contrast illustrates that some gifts should have priority over others
 - And Paul says the priority should favor the apostolic, prophetic and teaching gifts over lesser gifts
 - If the choice is between hearing teaching and seeing miracles, we should seek more to be taught than for someone to do a miracle for us

- Our flesh will always prefer miracles – just as Israel did in the desert
- But our spirit needs the teaching of God's word
- If we have a choice to receive Bible teaching or be healed, we should seek for the teaching over the healing
 - Healing addresses the needs of our flesh in a temporary way
 - Teaching addresses the needs of our spirit in an eternal way
- And if we have a choice for teaching or to hear someone teach in tongues, then we should seek for the teaching
 - While tongues may fascinate us...
 - Teaching matures us
- And Paul reminds the church not everyone is a prophet, not everyone is a teacher, etc.
 - Therefore, by necessity we must give some among us more opportunities to serve if we are to gain the most edification possible
- The tension between giving time to greater gifts instead of lesser gifts is still present in the church today
 - It's no coincidence that churches that place an emphasis on seeking for signs and miracles and dramatic displays of the Spirit often give little attention to in-depth Bible teaching
 - God knows that the thing that will draw us closest to Him in a genuine, lasting and meaningful relationship are not the empty emotional displays
 - But an abiding knowledge of Him through His word is the true path to spiritual maturity
 - Paul says seek earnestly for the greater gifts, for the good part, as Jesus called His word:

Luke 10:41 But the Lord answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things;

Luke 10:42 but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

- Now if you had been a member of the Corinthian church and you were reading Paul's letter, you probably began to squirm at about this point in his teaching
 - Because you would have recognized that the Corinthian church was practicing spiritual gifts in exactly the wrong way
 - While Paul taught that gifts were assigned by God at the moment of salvation
 - The church thought that gifts could be obtained, either by learning them or asking God for them
 - While Paul taught that God planned for a diversity of gifts
 - The Corinthians made it a goal for everyone in the church to obtain the same gift and then use it in unison
 - Like a secret handshake or initiation rite

- And while Paul taught that the use of gifts was for the common good
 - The Corinthians were using gifts to show off and draw attention to themselves – and to create divisions between the “haves and the have nots”
- And lastly, and most ironic of all, Paul has now taught that the gift of tongues was the least important gift in the body of Christ
 - But the Corinthians had chosen tongues as the gift they valued the most in the body
 - They made it their goal to see the gift of tongues expressed every time the body gathered – to the exclusion of other gifts
 - They had turned everything on its head, completely defeating the purpose God intended when He gave them gifts
- How did the Corinthians go so wrong in their understanding of gifts?
 - We can safely assume Paul taught this church the proper perspective on gifts and on tongues when he lived with them
 - Yet somehow, the church had left Paul’s counsel behind and landed in a very bad place
 - They were living in pride and ignorance
 - They took a gift from God intended for the edification of the body and turned it into an opportunity to glorify themselves
 - They used gifts to make distinctions that served to divide the body rather than drawing it closer together
 - How did the church go so wrong? They were missing a key ingredient, an essential piece to the puzzle, something that makes a spiritual gift serve its purpose
 - If they tried to use their spiritual gifts without this key ingredient, then the whole recipe falls apart
 - The gifts cease having power to benefit
 - And that ingredient is love
- Paul says he wants to show the church a far better way to work as a body

1Cor. 13:1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

1Cor. 13:2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

1Cor. 13:3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

- Paul begins his famous chapter on love by making a series of exaggerated comparisons
 - Paul uses four examples of gifts
 - The first example is of tongues

- Paul began his examples with tongues because the core problem in this church was their abuse of this particular gift
- In fact, as I said in an earlier lesson, the one spiritual gift that Paul includes in every list in this letter is tongues, since that was his central concern in Corinth
- And in Chapter 14 it will become abundantly clear that Paul's central concern in Corinth was their over emphasis on tongues
- Paul's second example is the gift of prophecy
- The third example is the gift of giving
- And the fourth seems to be a gift of martyrdom or perhaps faith
- Then for each gift, Paul gives an extreme example of how a gift could be used in the body
 - For example, Paul says even if I had the ability to speak in the language of angels
 - Men do not have such an ability, even those gifted with tongues cannot speak as the angels speak
 - Paul is exaggerating to make his point
 - Similarly, Paul exaggerates by saying even if a prophet could know all things, all mysteries, all knowledge
 - Certainly, there is no prophet who possesses all knowledge – apart from Christ Himself
 - Again, Paul's exaggerating
 - And even if someone with the gift of giving gave away everything he possessed
 - Or if someone with the gift of faith submitted to death
 - Another extreme example
 - Nevertheless, these extreme example of spiritual service still fail in the end if they aren't united in love
- Then Paul lists three different ways in which our gifts fail to accomplish their intended purpose when they aren't practiced in love
 - First, Paul says tongues becomes nothing but a senseless noise
 - The gift of tongues is a speaking gift, but without love the speech is useless for its intended purpose of edification
 - It fails to benefit others when used without love
 - The person is just given a useless, offensive noise
 - Secondly, if a prophet doesn't use his gift in love, then that person is nothing
 - Paul emphasizes that we gain no status, no recognition for our gifting, if we use it without love for others
 - The Corinthians desired status and recognition
 - But they lacked a loving motive, so they gained no status, neither within the church nor with God

- Finally, Paul says we will not profit if we try to use our gifts without love for others
 - God assigns us eternal rewards in Heaven for our service in our gifting
 - But that reward is contingent on us using our gift in love
 - Not in pride, not in spite, not selfishly, but in love
 - So love is the missing ingredient that allows our gift to be useful, valuable and profitable
- Love means self-sacrificially using what God has given us to meet the needs of others
 - It means placing their needs before our own
 - And sometimes it means not using our gift if another gift is more appropriate or better suited to a person's needs
 - Sometimes it's more loving to not offer our service to the body if that service would displace a more important gift
 - We'll know when and where to serve by asking what's the best thing for the church, not what's the best thing for me
- But the word love can mean different things to different people, especially in a culture like Corinth where pride, status and illegitimate sex were so ingrained in their thinking
 - What does love look like from God's point of view?
 - Paul's eloquent and timeless description of love follows:

1Cor. 13:4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant,

1Cor. 13:5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,

1Cor. 13:6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;

1Cor. 13:7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1Cor. 13:8 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.

1Cor. 13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part;

1Cor. 13:10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

- Paul defines agape love as a list of behaviors, some positive and some negative
 - This list is not exhaustive, just as the list of spiritual gifts is not exhaustive
 - There are other aspects to loving our neighbor
 - In fact, that list is probably infinite
 - But still, this is a pretty good start to understanding what love looks like
 - Love is evident when I'm patient with someone else
 - When they are hurtful or rude to me, I wait for their rudeness to pass without making a point of it

- When they delay me on the road or cause me inconvenience, I do not hold it against them
- In terms of using our gifts, patience means waiting for the right time and opportunity to serve
- Love is kind
 - Whenever possible, I give a kind word, a thoughtful gesture
 - I smile, I enhance the lives of others and welcome them into my life
 - In my gift, I ensure my service is always beneficial and pleasing to others
- Love is not jealous
 - I don't resent others' success or possessions
 - I don't let my lack of contentment become excuse to hurt someone else
 - And I don't compare my gifting with others so as to become jealous of another's gift in place of my own
- Love does not brag
 - Bragging is elevating oneself at the expense of another
 - Bragging only works if it raises my profile while diminishing another's, but it's not loving to do that
 - Instead diminish yourself to elevate another
 - Or at least see to it that everyone rises together
 - And I don't use my gift to show off for others or to make others feel inadequate
- Love isn't arrogant
 - Love never wants another person to be offended by our pride
 - We want others to be refreshed by our presence
 - I don't intimidate or bully others through the use of my gift
 - I don't assume I have a right to use my gift at any time and place of my choosing
- In v.5 Paul says love will not act in an unseemly way, never acting inappropriately
 - When we act in inappropriate ways before others, we embarrass them as we bring shame to ourselves
 - Caring for others means protecting them from the embarrassment that our poor actions create
 - So in love I don't misuse my gift to bring shame to Christ
 - And love does not seek for its own needs first
 - When one piece of pie remains, we offer it to someone else
 - I don't use my gifting for personal gain
 - And when someone else takes that last piece before we could claim it, we're not provoked
 - We can overlook such things
 - We can control our emotions and responses

- We want the other person to feel as though that piece of pie was our gift to them
- We don't want to diminish their joy by becoming provoked by them
- In love, I will always respond to another's use of their gifts with grace and understanding, taking pleasure in their service
- We don't take any wrong into account
 - Which means we have the worst memory in the world when it comes to others' offenses
 - No matter how often or how severely they harm us, we're quick to forgive and forget
 - So that we are loving in the way the Father is loving to us
 - Therefore, when someone misuses their gift, I will let the offense go
- In vs. 6-7 we are taught that love will never be on the wrong side of the facts
 - We don't celebrate unrighteous actions, unrighteous causes, unrighteous people
 - Instead, love rejoices with the truth
 - We want justice and truth to reign
 - But we can't allow our want for these things to put other aspects of love at risk (like forgiveness and not being provoked)
 - In love, we look for ways to advocate for truth and righteousness without causing offense to those with whom we disagree
 - For the sake of love, we must operate our gifts in accordance with scripture
 - Paul summarizes love as bearing all things, believing all things, hoping for all things and enduring all things
 - What's implied in that verse is "all things for Christ's sake"
 - Christian love bears all that the world brings us for the sake of Christ
 - We believe all that is written in scripture for the sake of Christ
 - We hope for all things promised in God's word for the sake of Christ
 - And we endure all the trials and suffering that may come for the sake of Christ
 - We live as Christ lived so that we can show the world what God's love looks like
 - For Christ's sake, I persevere in the proper use of my gifts
- These qualities of love are the secret ingredient to serving God and His people
 - We simply can't perform works useful to God and ourselves without love
 - That love must be sacrificial and unconditional
 - Love must be both our motivation and our goal as we serve in our gifting
 - Our love for God motivates us into action
 - And our goal is to show God's love to others through our service
 - But the Corinthians were working from an opposite perspective
 - Love wasn't the motive; pride was the motive

- And love wasn't the goal; personal achievement and attention was the goal
- So the church accomplished nothing in the end
- As we leave 13 and enter into 14, Paul's correction steps into high gear



1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 14A

Chapter 13:8-13; 14:1-4

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- Last week we ended in Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians, the well-known chapter of scripture describing what love looks like
 - Paul's description is so well-known because he captures perfectly the way love is a verb, not a noun
 - It isn't a feeling, it's an action – a set of actions, actually
 - Love is how we treat others, not merely how we feel about others
 - In fact, we might feel an emotion for someone and call it love, but they won't know what we feel unless we demonstrate it by our actions
 - Nevertheless, for those of us who struggle to put love into words, Paul's thirteenth chapter is a wonderful study in eloquence
 - Many men wish they could be as eloquent when expressing love to the object of their affection

A wife once submitted a Reader's Digest anecdote about one such attempt. The middle- aged couple was attending a wedding for a young couple. The wife was noticing the beautiful, young bride and her bridesmaids, wistfully remembering her own lost youth.

The husband noticed his wife's melancholy at the sight of so many younger women on display, and so he leaned over to encourage her with a few sweet words.

He said, "Darling, you're more beautiful than half the women here."

- ◦ Clearly, men don't always have the right words to describe their love
 - But Paul certainly had the right words in Chapter 13
- But in our study last week, we were also careful to note that Paul was talking about love in the context of spiritual gifts
 - He was explaining to the church that our use of spiritual gifts must spring from a desire to show God's love to others
 - They must be guided by a self-sacrificial motivation that keeps God's glory and the spiritual needs of others as the motivation for our service
 - They cannot become an excuse to show off, to draw attention to ourselves, to provoke jealousy in others or divide the body
 - As we ended, we reached vs.8-10, which I read but did not explain
 - So we will pick up again at that point in Chapter 13

1Cor. 13:8 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.

1Cor. 13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part;

1Cor. 13:10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

- Paul summarized the list of characteristics that define love with the statement that love never fails

- When Paul says love never fails, he is speaking in terms of its longevity in the human experience
 - Love is a single word that describes all the characteristics of a perfect, sinless existence
 - God is love, in the sense that His existence is the embodiment of all the characteristics of love
 - He is kind, merciful, just, wise, etc.
 - Everything Paul wrote in his list (and even more) describes the character of God
- And so in that sense, love never fails, speaking in eternal terms
 - Love will always be a part of our experience
 - In fact, once we reside in our glorified bodies, we will fully know love in our everyday experience
 - Our every action will be in keeping with love
 - The list in 1 Corinthians 13 won't be an ideal; it will be a reality for all of us
 - Which is why Paul calls us even now to walk in love by the power of the Spirit and to set our minds on love in all we do
- But in contrast to love, Paul says the gifts we possess now will fail one day
 - Unlike love, spiritual gifts are temporary features of our existence
 - One day they will no longer be present in us
 - Because one day they will no longer have a purpose
 - Once more, Paul presents a list of gifts, and once more we can tell it's merely a set of examples to illustrate his point
 - Paul says that the gift of prophecy will come to an end one day
 - As we defined prophecy in an earlier lesson, we can already see a partial fulfillment of Paul's statement
 - Some kinds of prophecy have ceased already, while others continue for a time
 - But eventually, all forms of prophecy will end
 - Likewise, Paul says the gifts of tongues and knowledge will cease as well
 - Notice once more that Paul included tongues in this list
 - As I said last week, there is only one gift that Paul is careful to include in every list of gifts he provides in 1 Corinthians – tongues
 - One day, like prophecy, men will no longer have need of these spiritual abilities
 - But long after the gifts have departed, love will remain our preeminent concern within the family of God
- Some interpreters have concluded that Paul was speaking about a near-term cessation of gifts when he wrote this list
 - They anticipate the end of prophecy and tongues at the end of the apostolic age
 - Therefore, they teach that these gifts are entirely unavailable to the body of

Christ today

- While it may be true that some of these gifts have ceased, at least in part (like prophecy for the purpose of revealing scripture), the text doesn't support a cessation view overall
- We know some forms of prophecy are still in service
 - And the gift of knowledge (discernment) is never said to cease during the church age
 - And even tongues has a certain place in the church, which we'll learn more about in the next chapter
 - So contextually, we must interpret Paul's examples as looking forward to the kingdom age, when all gifts are gone and love reigns
- So why does Paul say the gifts will end in the Kingdom while love continues into eternity?
 - The gifts will cease when they have fulfilled their purpose in the body of Christ
 - And their purpose, as Paul just described, is to reflect the love of God into the Church
 - So once we reach our glorified state, we will no longer have need for spiritual gifts, since at that time we will know and reflect the love of God perfectly
- In v.10, Paul says when the perfect comes (that is, our perfect, sinless, glorified life with Christ) we will put away the partial form of love
 - Today, we show love within the body through the effective use of our spiritual gifts
 - When we use them for the purpose of loving our brothers and sisters, we are manifesting a portion of God's love
 - Think of it as a "coming attractions" preview of the way our life will be in the Kingdom
- But obviously, when the fullness of the Kingdom arrives, we will no longer have need for these crutches

1Cor. 13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part;

1Cor. 13:10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

1Cor. 13:11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

1Cor. 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

1Cor. 13:13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

- Today, when someone serves in the spiritual gift of knowledge or prophecy, we experience a small taste of the Kingdom
 - We could use the example of a gift of prayer, which exposes us to a little of what it will be like to communicate with God perfectly
 - In the Kingdom, Isaiah says that our communication will be effortless

Is. 65:24 “It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.

- - In v.9 Paul uses the examples of the gifts of knowledge and prophecy
 - No matter how many people in the Church have these gifts, nevertheless Christians will have experienced only a partial, a sample of what life will be like in the Kingdom
 - Likewise, in each area of spiritual gifting, we experience a small taste of the perfection of the coming Kingdom
 - That's why it's so important that we exercise our gifts in love now
 - Because the purpose of a spiritual gift is to give a preview of what perfect love looks like
 - Paul says we should understand the purpose and benefits of spiritual gifts as a temporary measure resulting from our spiritual immaturity
 - God has assigned them to us to compensate for the spiritual weaknesses brought about by the sin living in us
 - Sin has blinded us and deceived us, creating fear and doubt, leading to many other false and destructive tendencies
 - But in His grace, the Lord has given the body spiritual gifts to compensate for these deficits, as a foretaste of the perfect love to come
 - Knowing this, Paul says we should long for that time when we will be so perfect in love that we no longer depend on others' spiritual gifts to compensate for our own spiritual weakness
 - Once again, Paul uses an analogy to illustrate his point
 - He says children exhibit certain behaviors before they become adults
 - They speak like a child, saying things that are silly or perhaps inappropriate at times
 - But one day, they will outgrow these limitations and speak with the maturity of an adult
 - Children think in childish ways, often very self-centered, only thinking about the near future; never planning beyond tomorrow
 - But adults think deeply and soberly, with a full appreciation of the past and the future
 - Children reason in simple and incomplete ways, making decisions without all the facts
 - Adults possess a far greater understanding of the world, and that understanding informs their views and actions
 - But then Paul says there comes a time to set aside the partial to embrace the fullness
 - Once a child has grown up, he or she gladly puts away childish ways and embraces the benefits of adulthood
 - No adult prefers the immaturity of childhood over the benefits of adulthood

- Likewise, we shouldn't make the acquisition of spiritual gifts as our eternal goal
 - We should understand that we possess them only for a time to promote love
 - And we will gladly relinquish them for the perfection of love found in the Kingdom
- In v.12 Paul says we have only a faint, cloudy reflection of what Kingdom life will be like
 - My Bible describes it as looking into a mirror but the word in Greek more literally refers to a crystal ball
 - Paul says that we are looking into a cloudy crystal ball as we consider what a life of perfection will be
 - Our spiritual gifts offer us a partial understanding of what that future state will be like
 - But in the Kingdom I will fully understand God and the life He has prepared for me in perfection and love
 - Even as God fully knows me now
 - But for the time being, Paul says we should abide or patiently rely upon our faith, hope and love
 - But the most important of these heart attitudes is love
- Let's consider this statement a little more carefully
 - Paul says until we reach our perfect state in the Kingdom, we are to patiently rely on faith, hope and love – but love is the greatest
 - Once again, the issue is one of temporary versus eternal purpose
 - Faith and hope are temporary devices that bridge our time until we reach the kingdom
 - Once we see Christ face to face, we will no longer need or even experience faith
 - Remember faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen, according to Hebrews 11:1
 - But Paul says that faith and hope are not required when I see

Rom. 8:24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?

- So faith and hope are temporary accommodations for the time we spend awaiting the fullness of the promise to come
 - But love is different
 - Love doesn't fade as we enter the Kingdom, it becomes all the more real and full
 - All those characteristics of love Paul listed earlier become ours forever
- So Paul ends this chapter calling the church to see spiritual gifts with an eternal appreciation for their purpose

- To summarize what Paul taught, spiritual gifts are given to manifest the love of God to the saints
 - He uses spiritual gifts to compensate for our sinful weaknesses
 - So we may experience a small measure of the love we'll possess in the Kingdom
 - Therefore, they have a limited purpose and a limited lifespan
- Furthermore, they must be used in love if they are going to fulfill that purpose
 - Which means that we should make our goal loving each other, not merely expressing our gifts for their own sake
 - For while gifts and faith and hope have a purpose for a time, only love lives on eternally
 - Therefore, we must make our goal increasing love rather than showcasing our gifts
- As we began this chapter, I said that this was a chapter of correction, and so it is
 - Paul has been gently chastising this church for forgetting the real purpose in spiritual gifts
 - They have pushed love aside to become selfish, prideful and even hurtful in their use of their gifts
 - For the Corinthians, a spiritual gift was a badge of honor for the person who possessed it, rather than a means of showing love to others
 - But Paul isn't done chastising the church for their mistakes
 - In fact, Chapter 14 is a full frontal assault on the church's misuse of gifts
 - In this chapter, Paul leaves nothing to chance, spelling out exactly what the church should and shouldn't be doing in the practice of gifts
 - And there is more than a little irony to be found in this chapter, because much of what Paul writes in Chapter 14 has been twisted by some to justify the very practices Paul condemned

1Cor. 14:1 Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.

1Cor. 14:2 For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.

1Cor. 14:3 But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.

1Cor. 14:4 One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.

- Paul begins the chapter repeating his command that the church pursue love, desiring earnestly for spiritual gifts
 - Remember, this command is stated in the second person plural
 - Paul is asking the church as a whole to see the greater gifts expressed or used where they are present in the body

- Notice that Paul skips the highest gift, the apostolic gift
- This makes sense because in Paul's absence there was no apostolic gift in the body
- So the next highest gift would be prophesy
- So in pursuing love, the church should desire to see the highest priority gift expressed in the body above all other spiritual gifts
 - But then notice that the next comment Paul makes is regarding speaking in tongues, which is the lowest gift on his list of importance
 - Why did Paul jump from prophesy to tongues?
 - He is making a contrast between the highest and lowest gifts in the body
 - And as I mentioned last week, the Corinthian church had developed an unhealthy fascination with speaking in tongues
 - To the exclusion of other, more valuable gifts in the body
- Paul wants the church to move their attention away from the bottom of the list and toward the top of the list
 - Remember, the purpose of gifts is to manifest love in the body, so then we should assume these gifts are rank ordered in keeping with their ability to promote love
 - The revelation of God is far more powerful in its ability to promote love within the body than is the gift of speaking in a foreign tongue
 - I've mentioned the gift of speaking in tongues on numerous occasions over the past two chapters
 - But as you remember, I set aside discussing it in detail, preferring to wait until we reached this chapter where Paul himself begins to focus on this particular gift
 - So let's define speaking in tongues
 - First, the word "tongue" in scripture is *glossa*, which has two meanings in Greek
 - It means the body part found inside your mouth
 - And it also means human language
 - Obviously, by the context we know Paul was using the word in the sense of human language
 - So the gift of tongues is a gift of a human language
 - It's important to emphasize that a tongue means a real, human language
 - A language has syntax, vocabulary, structure
 - It is not merely repetitive babbling of a few sounds over and over again
 - When you hear someone speaking in a language you don't understand, you can still recognize it as human speech
 - Human speech sounds far different than the sounds of a baby babbling or a toddler speaking in nonsense sounds
 - So a tongue is always a real, human language
- Then how is it considered a "spiritual gift" to be able to speak in a human language?

- Don't all humans naturally speak in a language from a very early age?
 - Yes, but the gift of tongues is a supernatural ability to speak in a foreign tongue that the speaker doesn't understand themselves
 - For example, I speak English, and I know a little Spanish, but I know absolutely no Japanese
 - So if I were to suddenly begin speaking to you in perfectly fluent Japanese, it would truly be a miracle
 - You wouldn't understand what I was saying
 - But if a Japanese speaking person were present in the moment, they could understand what I was saying with no trouble whatsoever
- But the miracle of the gift is in speaking something I don't understand
 - My own words would be a complete mystery to me
 - I hear them coming out of my mouth, I recognize it as speech, but I have no idea what I said...in fact, I probably wouldn't know what language I was speaking
 - And that's the miracle, that by the power of the Spirit, someone can speak a language they don't understand
- We can see an example of this gift working in exactly this way when we look at what was happening in the day of Pentecost

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

Acts 2:2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Acts 2:3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.

Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

Acts 2:5 Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven.

Acts 2:6 And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language.

Acts 2:7 They were amazed and astonished, saying, “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?

Acts 2:8 “And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?

- Luke describes the moment when the Holy Spirit first indwelled the church saints on the day of Pentecost
 - On that day, many believers received the gift of tongues simultaneously, which is a very unique event in the church
 - In the book of Acts, there are only two other occasions when a large group of

believers are given the gift of tongues in a mass gathering

- Paul will explain why this was necessary later in Chapter 14
- Then notice what Luke reports as this crowd begin speaking in foreign languages
 - In v.4 Luke says that there were Jews living in Jerusalem at this time, having come from every nation under heaven
 - This means that within the crowd were expatriate Jews who had come from other nations and who understood virtually every language on earth
- Then in v.6 Luke writes that these men were amazed and astonished by the display of speaking in tongues
 - And they say, are not these the men who speak in the language of the Galileans (which was Aramaic)?
 - Then they go on to say in v.8, “then why do we hear them speaking in our own languages, the languages we’ve had since birth?”
- By their statement, we see proof that speaking in tongues is not babbling in an unintelligible manner or speaking in mysterious sounds no one understands
 - On the contrary, speaking in tongues is speaking in a normal, understandable human language
 - The miracle is that the speaker himself doesn’t understand the language
 - The Spirit is prompting the speech supernaturally
 - This leads us to the final thought for today...what is the edifying purpose of such a gift?
 - How does anyone benefit spiritually from someone speaking in a language that the speaker himself can’t understand?
 - Paul answers that question in v.2
 - He says that the one who is gifted to speak in tongues is speaking to God alone, not to men
 - This makes sense, since the speech is likely to be foreign not only to the individual speaking but also to his audience
 - Had God not assembled the group of foreign Jews on Pentecost, no one in the crowd of Galileans would have understood the speech that day
 - And so in most cases where tongues takes place, we might expect few of any observers to understand what’s said
 - Therefore, the gift serves the purpose of edifying only the one who speaks
 - No one else benefits from the speaking in tongues gift except the speaker alone
 - And even then, the benefit to the speaker is minimal
 - Notice Paul says the speaker is communicating in mysteries
 - He means the speaker is actually cut out of his own conversation with God
 - So the edifying impact of speaking in tongues is limited to the degree of encouragement that comes in knowing God is working in you
 - This is why the gift ranks last in importance in the body

- It serves to edify only one person, and even then only to a limited degree
- But in contrast to that gift, the gift of prophecy has tremendous potential to edify the body
 - In v.3 Paul says that prophecy can impact many people in the body for the purpose of edification, exhortation and consolation
 - I can strengthen others with revelation from God
 - Prophecy can move the body of Christ into taking action for the sake of righteousness
 - And I can console those who are under trials or persecution with a word from God
 - These are great benefits that far outweigh the limited benefits of speaking in tongues
 - So Paul concludes his introduction to Chapter 14 by saying the one who uses the gift of prophecy edifies the church, while the one who speaks in tongues only edifies himself
 - Clearly, if the goal of spiritual gifts is to show love to the body and strengthen the body, then prophecy is a much more important gift than tongues
 - Which is why Paul says the church should seek after prophecy when it's available in the church far more than it should seek to see the gift of tongues utilized in the church
- With that, Paul is ready to expose the problems with the manner and practice of tongues in this church, beginning with our study next week

1Corinthians 14B

- Our study of spiritual gifts in this letter has been building to this moment
 - Paul's taught us about how they arrive, when they arrive, why they arrive and why they must one day cease
 - As well, Paul has cautioned the church against misusing gifts or misunderstanding their purpose
 - He's also encouraged the church to seek for the greater gifts so that the body might enjoy the most of God's love
 - But now in chapter 14, Paul will address the specific errors this church has been making in their understanding and use of spiritual gifts
 - In particular, this church has developed an unhealthy fascination with the gift of speaking of tongues
 - They probably saw the gift at work in Paul or in new believers in the church, and it caught their attention
 - Later, after Paul left town, some began teaching that this gift was the most important spiritual gift, causing others to wish for it themselves
 - Eventually, the entire church was involved in an inappropriate and counterfeit version of the gift, hoping to create in their flesh what God had not chosen to do for them in the Spirit
 - Paul has heard of these problems, of course, so he is writing to correct them
 - So now Paul is ready to expose the mistakes and right the wrongs
 - Last week he introduced this final section with a comparison between the most important gift available to the church with the least important gift
 - The most important gift available within the church was the gift of prophecy
 - Only the apostolic gift is higher, and there were no apostles in Corinth in the moment Paul wrote this letter
 - The least important gift was the gift of tongues

1Cor. 14:4 One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.

1Cor. 14:5 Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

- Paul supports his contention that prophecy was a greater gift than tongues on the basis of their ability to edify in the church
 - The gift of tongues works to yield edification in only the person who speaks, because not even the one speaking knows what he's saying
 - So when someone uses the gift in tongues, the edification opportunity is limited to only one person, and then only in a very limited way
 - The speaker is encouraged to see the Spirit working in them
 - And there is a strengthening of the spirit whenever the Spirit of God is shown working in us
 - Gordon Fee commented on this feature of gifts

"Contrary to the opinion of many, spiritual edification can take place in ways other than through the cortex of the brain. Paul believed in an immediate communing with God by means of the S/spirit that sometimes bypassed the mind; [but] in church he will have only what can also communicate to other believers through their minds."

- The gift of tongues can bring edification to the speaker at a spiritual level, but by itself it lacks the ability to transfer that edification to others
- But the gift of prophecy reaches many ears with powerful spiritual knowledge and spiritual insight
 - Not only is the speaker edified by what he has been given to reveal, but he can edify many more by sharing it
 - So the church is to seek after those who can bless them with prophecy far more often than seeking after someone who can speak in tongues
- In fact, the church should never trade the opportunity to be edified by God's word for the limited edification of speaking in tongues
 - In v.5 Paul makes a statement that sets up the rest of the chapter

- He says he wished that that could all speak in tongues
- Notice Paul chose the word "wish"
- He said he wished that everyone in the church could speak in tongues, which means that not everyone did speak in tongues
- If all did speak in tongues, then Paul would simply have said, "I'm glad that you can all speak in tongues..."
- So, self-evidently, not everyone in the church possessed this gift, which is consistently with what Paul has said earlier
 - We only possess the gift that God assigns us
 - And He assigns a diversity of gifts in the body
- So why does Paul say he wishes they could all have the thing they desired?
 - Paul is speaking to the church like a father speaking to a child who has an unrealistic Christmas wish list
 - "Son, I wish you could have a dinosaur for Christmas."
 - "Daughter, I wish you could have a pony."
 - Paul's sympathetic for their desire, but they have unreasonable and immature desires
- Consider how Paul finishes the thought by saying that his greater desire for them would be they all could prophesy
 - It's no more possible for the church to all prophesy than it is that they all speak in tongues, but if he could give them something, it would be prophesy
 - In other words, if Paul had a magic wand and could use it to assign every believer in Corinth a specific spiritual gift, Paul says he wouldn't choose to award every believer the gift of tongues...
 - Instead, he would choose to award the gift of prophecy, because it's the greatest gift available in the body of Christ
 - He wants what's best for them, and like a child with an unrealistic Christmas wish, the church was seeking for the wrong priority

- Paul's point isn't that such a magic wand exists, that believers can actually obtain the spiritual gift they want
 - Like the child who wishes for a dinosaur or a pony, it was unrealistic for the Corinthians to want for a common gift
 - But even it were possible, their choice of the gift of tongues was misplaced
 - Instead, if a common gifting were possible, they should have desired for prophecy
 - It's a far more powerful edifying force in the body of Christ
 - In fact, Paul adds that unless an interpreter is present in the body, the gift of speaking in tongues holds no prospect for edifying anyone beyond the speaker alone
 - As we covered last week, the gift of speaking in tongues is the ability for a person to speak in a foreign language they do not understand
 - The gift of interpretation of tongues is the ability to understand a foreign language that the person cannot naturally speak
 - When the gift of tongues operates with the gift of interpretation, the message of the speech can be relayed to the congregation
 - But without the gift of interpretation present, the gift of tongues loses any chance of edifying anyone beyond the speaker
- Finally, notice at the end of v.5 Paul says that the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues
 - He's reiterating the priority of prophecy over other gifts, especially tongues
 - And again the basis for that priority is measured in the degree of edification that takes place in each case
 - So moving forward in the chapter, Paul gives specific instructions for the use of gifts in the body according to this test
 - Gifts are to be used in a logical, disciplined way to ensure edification by placing gifts in their proper priority
 - While still making opportunity for every gift to operate within reasonable limits

- And the first set of rules regard how the gift of tongues may be practiced in the church gathering

1Cor. 14:6 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?

1Cor. 14:7 Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp?

1Cor. 14:8 For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle?

1Cor. 14:9 So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.

1Cor. 14:10 There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning.

1Cor. 14:11 If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me.

1Cor. 14:12 So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.

- To begin, Paul describes a hypothetical situation in a church gathering in which the gift of tongues is put to use
 - Paul says if he should come into a church gathering in Corinth with a gift of tongues, he asks how could his presence in the gathering profit anyone?
 - By profit, Paul means spiritual benefit
 - Paul says his spiritual benefit to the body was dependent on sharing something meaningful with the rest of the body
 - He would need to share a revelation of God, a piece of spiritual knowledge, a prophecy, a teaching...
 - He must share something understandable, something that can be received and used by the hearers
 - Otherwise, his presence and his gifting is useless to the body
 - Paul's drawing upon the very purpose of a gathering
 - The church is gathered for the same reason a basketball team gathers on a court for practice

- Basketball players can practice by themselves to a degree, dribbling, shooting, rebounding
- But unless the team gathers, there are many aspect of the game that simply can't be perfected without teamwork
- Likewise, Christians can work alone in developing disciplines of prayer, study, and the like
- But there are many aspect of our Christian walk that simply can develop properly without teamwork
- We need the gifts others possess to round out our spiritual development
- But imagine if a basketball player showed up at practice and then proceeded to stand in the corner of the gym dribbling by himself
 - Of if he stood at the opposite end of the court shooting free throws alone
 - What if he never participated in the practice in such a way that he made the other players better or they helped him?
 - That's the problem with a church that placed emphasis on the gift of tongues at the expense of other gifts like prophecy
 - It's like a gym full of basket players all dribbling alone and by themselves
- So in v.7 Paul uses his own analogies...instead of basketball, he uses musical instruments
 - He says even lifeless musical instruments like flutes or harps can only benefit us if they play in harmony
 - If they were to play their own thing in the midst of an orchestra, they would disrupt the gathering
 - But if they play something sensible, they communicate something beneficial in concert with the other instruments
 - And a bugle only serves a purpose in battle if it plays a recognizable tune
 - Soldiers were told when to attack and when to retreat, when to flank or when to hold position by specific bugle calls

- The bugle had the potential to aid the soldiers but only so long as it communicates something useful
- Then Paul makes his application to the use of tongues in the gathering
 - He says in v.9 that unless the speech we utter in the gathering is clear, then who will understand it? The answer is no one
 - Paul says to speak without being understandable is to speak into the air
 - He is referring to sound waves
 - He means that that sound may leave our mouth, but it stays in the air
 - It never lands on anyone's ears in a useful way
 - It never enters the brain
 - It's simply lost in the air
- Paul's speaking about two situations, both problematic, but one is worse than the other
 - First, Paul's alluding to a false form of this spiritual gift, a counterfeit
 - With so much interest in speaking in tongues in the Corinthian church, there was a peer pressure for believers to "acquire" this gift
 - Since we know that a spiritual gift is not available except to those God chooses to give it, any desire to obtain a gift is going to be a fruitless desire
 - Nevertheless, if the pressure is great enough, a Christian may resort to counterfeiting the gift to feel accepted or approved by their peers
 - Counterfeiting a speaking gift is impossible and easy at the same time
 - On the one hand, it's impossible to fake any spiritual gift in a meaningful way
 - If a spiritual gift from God could be obtained through the works of our flesh, then what it say about spiritual gifts?

- The value of a spiritual gift would lose its significance if it was within man's ability to create it in his own power
 - It would lose its ability to glorify God
 - So it's literally impossible for someone to fake speaking in another language
 - If you don't know another language, you aren't going to fool anyone by trying to imitate it
 - If I don't know Spanish, I can't fake it by taking English words and putting the letter "o" at the end (i.e., dog-o, cat-o, etc.)
 - It's silly
- On the other hand, if I didn't realize that speaking in tongues means speaking in a real human language, then I might be fooled into thinking that any form of unintelligible babbling was speaking on tongues
 - In that case, faking it would be very easy
 - I see one person babbling in repetitive nonsense syllables, and I just mimic the behavior with my own mantra of babbling
 - Just like that, I'm told I have spoken in tongues, and in ignorance I accept what I'm told
- And that's what had begun happening inside the church in Corinth
 - Paul alludes to this behavior in v.10 when he reminds the church that there are many kinds of human language in the world
 - God produced an unknown number of languages at the Tower of Babel and most continue to this day
 - But every human language possesses meaning, Paul says
 - Every language has as its purpose the communication of thought, and so they all possess structure, syntax, and vocabulary
 - In other words, there is no tongue that consists entirely of nonsense babbling
- The second situation Paul's addressing is the inherent limitation of the gift of speaking of tongues

- Even when it's used in a genuine way, the gift of tongues is still limited by its nature to edifying only the speaker
 - Since no one can understand what's being said, the gift of tongues has no edifying purpose in the gathering of believers
- Notice in v.11 Paul says that when someone speaks to me in a language I can't understand, they are like a Barbarian to me and vice versa
 - A Barbarian was a Greek term for any non-Greek speaking person
 - Paul's point if there is no fellowship taking place between people who can't understand one another
- It's like an instrument playing off tune in an orchestra
 - Or the basketball player practicing by himself in the gym
 - The gift of tongues has individual benefit, but it's not a team sport
 - It has no edifying purpose in the gathering
- To conclude, Paul says in v.12 that since the church was zealous to possess and use their spiritual gifts, Paul says make your goal to see the greatest possible edification in the church
 - He says make sure the gifts abound for the edification of the church
 - Consider how to put them to use in a way that ensure the greatest possible edification takes place
 - This should be the aim of every church, every gathering, every time
 - Why do we spend roughly half of our main gathering in study of God's word?
 - Because there is simply no better way to edify the church
 - But neither is it the only way, so we also make time for other gifts to work in the gathering
 - Paul isn't asking for one gift to be used to the exclusion of all others, but he expects the church to give preference to greater gifts

- Therefore, since the gift of tongues has a very limited power to edify, Paul places severe restrictions on its use in any Christian gathering

1Cor. 14:13 Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.

1Cor. 14:14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.

1Cor. 14:15 What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.

1Cor. 14:16 Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?

1Cor. 14:17 For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.

1Cor. 14:18 I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all;

1Cor. 14:19 however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than

- First, if a Christian possesses the gift of tongues and desires to contribute to the gathering with their gift, they are commanded to pray for the opportunity to interpret their own speech
 - The fact that interpretation may be obtained through prayer in this manner demonstrates that interpretation is not a distinct spiritual gift
 - Instead, the gifts of tongues is a general category of gifts that include the ability to speak and/or interpret foreign languages
 - So a person with the gift of tongues may have the ability to speak in a foreign tongue and at other times they may possess the ability to interpret
 - They might be moved by the Spirit to interpret someone else's foreign speech
 - Or as Paul says here, they can be moved by the Spirit to understand their own foreign tongue
 - Therefore, Paul tells all who possess these gifts of tongues to pray for interpretation before they use their gift in the gathering
 - The reason they should pray in this way is so they might ensure their gift edifies others
 - Paul uses himself as an example saying that if he should speak in tongues without the ability to interpret his own speech, his spirit is edified but his mind is left out of the loop

- As Gordon Fee said earlier, there is an edifying effect in the spirit that doesn't transfer to the brain
- So in v.15 Paul says what should be the outcome then? In other words, what would be the better alternative?
 - The better alternative is to have both our spirit and mind engaged in the spiritual service, allowing both to be edified
 - So Paul preferred to pray in a way that both his spirit and mind were engaged
 - He preferred to sing in a language that both his spirit and mind could understand and agree with
- In other words, Paul says even if he might pray or sing in a foreign tongue, he would prefer to pray and sing in a recognizable language so that others would be edified through his service
 - Notice in v.16 Paul says that the effect of praying or singing in a common language is to trigger an "Amen" from the others in the gathering
 - Ministry is happening in that moment, as evidenced by another person's agreement in the expression Amen
 - It means someone is feeling blessed at my display of faith and worship
 - It means someone is learning something through my teaching
 - It means someone else is moved to bless the name of the Lord because of what He did through me
 - That's edification
 - But edification depends on communication, so unless we are blessed to be able to interpret our own speech, we should refrain from sharing it
 - We might still exercise our gift of tongues in private, because it still brings us personal benefit
 - In v.17 Paul says it's well enough for us to give God thanks through our gift
 - But it goes no where else

- As an apostle, Paul possessed the gift of tongues, so he uses himself as an example of the proper use of the gift
 - In fact, Paul says he was glad to have the gift more than anyone else in the church
 - Paul makes this claim to establish his credibility on this issue
 - His motive for placing restrictions on the use of the gift was not spite or jealousy
 - On the contrary, Paul was the greatest practitioner of tongues in the church, he says
 - Nevertheless, Paul restrained his use of the gift
 - In fact, he says he would rather speak five words in an understandable tongue rather than speak 10,000 words in a foreign tongue
 - He's exaggerating to make a point, of course, but it's still a very strong statement
 - Paul's emphasizing that there is virtually no value to be found in allowing someone to speak in a foreign tongue in the body during the gathering
 - If someone else has even five intelligent words to offer the congregation, that person should be given priority over a person with the gift of tongues
 - Because the opportunity to edify is entirely in favor of the understandable speech
- When we return, we'll finish the chapter looking at how Paul instructs the church to restore order to a service that's deteriorated into a free-for-all
 - We'll learn that order and purpose must reign
 - But in the meantime, if you should have an experience today in a church where the gift of tongues is supposedly in use, remember Paul's counsel in the first half of chapter 14
 - Is the speech a true foreign language or repetitive babbling sounds?
 - If it's babbling, it's not a result of the Spirit; it's just the flesh deceived into a mimicking behavior

- And if you're ever in a church where you've been pressured to join in to such behavior, then consider Paul's words
 - Consider whether this is a place you should congregate
 - For if the church has ignored such clear instruction in scripture on this topic, where else have they been deceived?
 - We must use the discernment we've been given by the Spirit



1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 14C

Chapter 14:18:25

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- Today, we near the conclusion of Paul's teaching concerning spiritual gifts
 - I hope you'll agree we've learned a lot so far on this important topic
 - Among other things, we've learned that all gifts are important
 - But they are not all created equal in their potential to edify the body
 - Therefore, there are going to be times when it may not be appropriate to put a certain gift to use in the body

During the French Revolution, there were three Christians who were sentenced to die by the guillotine. One Christian had the gift of faith, the other had the gift of prophecy, the other had the gift of helps.

The Christian with the gift of faith was to be executed first. He was asked if he wanted to wear a hood over his head. He declined and said he was not afraid to die. "I have faith that God will deliver me!" he shouted bravely. His head was positioned under the guillotine, with his neck on the chopping block. He looked up at the sharp blade, said a short prayer and waited confidently. The rope was pulled, but nothing happened. His executioners were amazed and, believing that this must have been an act of God, they freed the man.

The Christian with the gift of prophecy was next. His head was positioned under the guillotine blade and he too was asked if he wanted the hood.

"No," he said, "I am not afraid to die. However, I predict that God will deliver me from this guillotine!" At that, the rope was pulled and again, nothing happened. Once, again the puzzled executioners assumed this must be a miracle of God, and they freed the man.

The third Christian, with the gift of helps, was next. He was brought to the guillotine and likewise asked if he wanted to wear a hood.

"No," he said, "I'm just as brave as those other two guys." The executioners then positioned him face up under the guillotine and were about to pull the rope when the man stopped them. "Hey wait a minute," he said. "I think I just found the problem with your guillotine."

- - - As this example demonstrates, there are times when it's best to remain silent rather than to use our gift
 - In our last lesson, Paul was teaching about one such situation involving the gift of speaking in tongues
 - Speaking and interpreting tongues is a very unique gift in the body
 - Paul ranks it as the least important gift in terms of its ability to edify other believers

- Its low rank is a consequence of its inability to communicate knowledge from one believer to another
- Paul said that when communication is absent, the gift lacks a purpose in the context of the gathering
 - In other words, we gather to extend edification from one to the other
 - And since tongues lacks that ability, it should remain a private experience, not a corporate experience
- Though we can understand and accept this truth, it still begs additional questions
 - Why did God place the gift in the body of Christ if it has so little potential to benefit the body?
 - What was its intended purpose in the body?
 - And given its low potential to edify, how common was it in the early church?
 - And how common should we expect this gift to be today?
 - Finally, if it does appear today, how do we know if it's real or proper to see it at work in the gathering?
 - Last week we ended as Paul was redirecting the church's interest in gifts away from the spectacular and toward the meaningful

**1Cor. 14:18 I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all;
1Cor. 14:19 however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.**

- In vs.18-19 Paul couples two statements that effectively sum up his teaching on the proper place of tongues in the body
 - On the one hand, Paul is thankful for the gift
 - Every gift from God is something to be received gladly and with thanks
 - The gift of tongues is certainly not something to be rejected or despised, neither by the individual who possesses it nor by the congregation that receives it
 - So all gifts are to be appreciated
 - On the other hand, Paul keeps this gift in its proper place and perspective
 - Tongues is at the bottom of our priority list in the church
 - Meanwhile, Paul possessed far greater gifts, like prophecy, which is where he focused his time and interest
 - Consider the fact that there is not a single mention in all scripture of Paul using his gift of tongues
 - Yet at the same time, the New Testament is dominated by Paul's gift of prophecy, since he wrote most New Testament scripture
- So if tongues is of so little value relative to other gifts, why did the Lord see fit to place them in the body of Christ?

- Paul answers that question now...

1Cor. 14:20 Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.

1Cor. 14:21 In the Law it is written, “BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME,” says the Lord.

1Cor. 14:22 So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.

- When Paul begins with the phrase “don’t be children in your thinking...” we see clearly he is still admonishing the church
 - The church has been thinking about spiritual gifts – and tongues, in particular – in a spiritually immature way
 - They have missed the big picture
 - If they only understood the Lord’s purpose in giving the gift in the first place, then they never would have gone so astray in their use of the gift
 - Paul says it’s ok to be like a child when it comes to knowing evil
 - In other words, if you’re going to be ignorant about something, be ignorant about evil
 - But when it comes to spiritual thinking, strive to be mature
 - As usual, the church’s immaturity is a result of a failure to understand the scriptures
 - Because the answer to why gifts exist in the church was given in the Old Testament
 - So often we act in wrong ways simply because we fail to open our Bible and understand what God has written for our benefit
 - In the case of speaking in tongues, God spoke beforehand about how and why things would come into the world
 - So Paul explains this lesson from Deuteronomy and Isaiah, which takes a little explanation...it requires spiritual maturity
 - First, Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 28:49 where Moses wrote to Israel:

Deut. 28:47 “Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things;

Deut. 28:48 therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in the lack of all things; and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you.

Deut. 28:49 “The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand,

Deut. 28:50 a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the

old, nor show favor to the young.

- In this passage, Moses warned Israel that in the future, they would not obey the covenant of Law
 - As a result the Lord would punish Israel by sending an enemy against them
 - This enemy would come by way of a powerful army that would enslave the people and destroy their nation
 - Israel will know this day has come because the nation that attacks will speak in a language the people of Israel do not understand
 - In other words, the nation will know when their judgment had begun when they encounter an enemy speaking a tongue they do not understand
 - The prophecy was fulfilled when Babylon invaded speaking Akkadian, a language Israel had never heard
- More importantly, the Lord is establishing an important spiritual pattern: The appearance of an unknown tongue in Jerusalem was forever be a sign to Israel of God's judgment against their sin
 - The sign was established in Deuteronomy and it was confirmed for the first time in the days of Babylon
 - But that wasn't the end of the sign
 - God continues to use this sign to warn Israel
 - The Lord promised to use it again after Israel rejected their Messiah, as Isaiah foretold

Is. 28:11 Indeed, He will speak to this people

Through stammering lips and a foreign tongue,

Is. 28:12 He who said to them, "Here is rest, give rest to the weary,"

And, "Here is repose," but they would not listen.

Is. 28:13 So the word of the LORD to them will be,

"Order on order, order on order,

Line on line, line on line,

A little here, a little there,"

That they may go and stumble backward, be broken, snared and taken

captive.

- The Lord had been warning the northern kingdom through Isaiah that a judgment was coming
 - But the people mocked Isaiah's warnings
 - So once again, in v.11 Isaiah warns the people that they should expect to hear from the Lord
 - But they will hear from God through the voice of strange people speaking in a language they don't understand
 - And that people will take Israel away into captivity

- That invader was Assyria
- The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy of speaking in tongues comes in connection with the arrival of the Messiah in Israel
 - Peter gives us that connection, when he quoted from Joel at the moment of Pentecost

Acts 2:8 “And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?

Acts 2:9 “Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

Acts 2:10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,

Acts 2:11 Cretans and Arabs — we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.”

Acts 2:12 And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

Acts 2:13 But others were mocking and saying, “They are full of sweet wine.”

Acts 2:14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.

Acts 2:15 “For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day;

Acts 2:16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:

Acts 2:17 ‘AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,’ God says,

‘THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND;

AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHESY,

AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS,

AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS;

Acts 2:18 EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN,

I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT

And they shall prophesy.

Acts 2:19 ‘AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE

AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW,

BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE.

Acts 2:20 ‘THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS

AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD,

BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME.

Acts 2:21 ‘AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.’

- When the believing Jews began speaking in foreign languages at the first Pentecost, the people watching were asking what does this miracle mean?
 - Some recognized this was a supernatural act of God, but they couldn’t make sense of what the sign meant

- Yet others in the crowd dismissed it as merely a crowd of drunk people
 - So Peter stepped forward to explain its meaning and defend the word of God
- He begins by saying these men aren't drunk, it's only 9:00 AM in the morning
 - Instead, this was an act of God in keeping with His word
 - Peter points to the prophet Joel for an explanation
- In Joel, we read about a time to come in Israel when God would accomplish miraculous works on behalf of the nation
 - God would pour out His Spirit on Israel
 - And as a result of that outpouring, the people of Israel would experience supernatural manifestations of the Spirit
 - Prophecies, dreams, and visions
- Moreover, the moon and sun would undergo miraculous changes
 - And the earth would also experience great turmoil
 - But in the midst of this calamity, all in Israel who call upon the name of the Lord would be saved
 - And it would culminate with the Lord's glorious reign on earth
- Interestingly, Peter offered Joel 2 as an explanation of men speaking in foreign languages in the day of Pentecost, but Joel doesn't mention tongues at all
 - Furthermore, the scene in Pentecost doesn't match the scene Joel describes
 - The sun and moon didn't change on the day of Pentecost
 - The earth didn't experience great turmoil
 - All Israel wasn't saved and Jesus didn't set up the kingdom and reign on Earth
 - Joel was describing the time of Tribulation, which is yet to come on the earth
 - When Tribulation arrives, it will be accompanied by all the great signs and wonders that Joel described
 - And it will culminate with Israel receiving the outpouring of the Spirit
 - As a result of that outpouring, miraculous things will happen in that nation
 - The nation will come to faith
 - And their Messiah will return to save them, as Paul says in Romans 11

Rom. 11:25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery — so that you will not be wise in your own estimation — that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;

Rom. 11:26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,

**“THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION,
HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.”**

**Rom. 11:27 “THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM,
WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.”**

- ○ ■ So the prophecy of Joel is speaking about a time in the future when Israel will experience salvation as a result of the Spirit
 - And it will lead to salvation for Israel and the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom on earth
- So if Joel 2 isn't speaking of Pentecost, why does Peter quote Joel 2 to explain the moment of Pentecost?
 - Peter's using Joel 2 to prove that when God pours out His Spirit on men, miraculous things should be expected
 - ■ These men aren't drunk as some accused; they were simply responding to an outpouring of the Spirit
 - Speaking in tongues, prophesying and the like are evidence that the Spirit of God is moving among His people
 - So Peter is using Joel 2 to defend the work of the Spirit
 - But in Israel's case, the appearance of foreign tongues in the city of Jerusalem is always a very bad sign for Israel
 - ■ Notice again Joel never mentioned foreign tongues spoken in Israel at the time of his events
 - That's because the sign of foreign tongues in Jerusalem is always a bad thing for Israel
 - It means God's judgment is coming upon them for their disobedience
 - In this case, the Lord Himself declared that this judgment was coming

Luke 13:34 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!

Luke 13:35 “Behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, ‘BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!’”

- When the people of Israel rejected their Messiah, He declared that they would see their nation left desolate as a result
 - Moments earlier, the Lord had declared that this generation was guilty of lacking faith and demanding signs

Matt. 12:39 But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;

Matt. 12:40 for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

- ○ ■ So Jesus declared that the only sign they would see is their own Lord killed, buried and later resurrected

- Jesus was prophesying that this generation of Israel would be guilty of putting their Messiah to death
- And so this evil generation will be left desolate
- And so it was, 40 years later when the Romans arrived and destroyed the temple and the city of Jerusalem
- Therefore, the Lord gave the church in Jerusalem the ability to speak in foreign tongues as a sign to Israel that it was about to be destroyed for its unbelief
 - Just as Moses said to past generations
 - Whenever the people of Israel hear foreign tongues spoken in the city of Jerusalem, they should know that the Lord is predicting judgment
 - It is a sign to the unbelieving Jew that their Lord is about to act against them
 - And yet, the sign will always go unheeded
 - For the Lord is determined to carry through with His judgment once the sign is given
 - So looking back at 1 Corinthians 14:22 Paul says the gift of tongues was given to the church as a sign to Israel of coming destruction upon the city
 - Its purpose was to warn unbelieving Israel in the days prior to the destruction of the temple and the city
 - When the early church gathered prior to AD 70, it did so largely in Jerusalem and it did so publicly
 - In that context, the sign of tongues was at work to warn of coming judgment
 - But Paul says tongues serves no purpose as a sign for the believer
 - We have no need of the sign, for we are not going to be caught in God's judgment
 - Therefore, the practice of signs is to be limited by its purpose
 - If the church wanted to be spiritually mature in their understanding of this gift, then they needed to understand this background
 - They needed to know what tongues meant and who it was for
 - That it meant judgment, and it was for unbelieving Israel
- Obviously, the sign has lost its purpose today, at least for the time being
 - The destruction of AD 70 has already come and unbelieving Jews are not present in our gatherings, generally speaking
 - Consequently, any display of tongues today in a corporate gathering runs counter to its purpose
 - In fact, any manifestation of tongues in the gathering without unbelieving Jews present cannot be a true manifestation
 - Otherwise, we would be saying that the Spirit was working contrary to the word of God
 - Unfortunately, that's what's happening in some churches today

- Large gatherings are all taught to mimic tongues through babbling, which is not tongues at all
 - And in doing so, they are directly disobeying Paul's instructions in this text
 - And even worse, they are bringing shame to Christ and His word by causing the unbelieving world to think that Christians are bizarre and gullible
- This is exactly Paul's concern as well...

1Cor. 14:23 Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?

1Cor. 14:24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all;

1Cor. 14:25 the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

- Paul says if the whole church acts together to speak in tongues, those who visit will think the church is insane
 - In Paul's example, he's not distinguishing between a mimicking or the real thing
 - ■ He's saying that either situation is equally wrong
 - Of course, mimicking tongues is always wrong, because it's not a spiritual work
 - It's a work of the flesh which profits no one
 - But even if it were possible for an entire church to speak in tongues, it would be wrong for the entire congregation to do so
 - ■ It does nothing to advance the mission of the church
 - We are called to be ambassadors for Christ, to witness to the truth and to invite others to know the salvation we have
 - We can't fulfill that mission by speaking in words no one can understand
 - Furthermore, misusing the gift in tongues just makes us into a spectacle that the unbelieving world mocks
 - Nothing good comes from acting in disobedience to the word of God
- Instead, Paul says if we give priority to the proper gifts, like prophecy or teaching, we have a hope to influence the unbeliever
 - We can edify the ungifted (i.e., the one who needs our gift) and we convict the unbeliever
 - ■ They hear what's taught and they understand the truth of the word
 - And then their heart is changed and they respond to the word
 - And in conviction, they fall on their face and seek for salvation

Rom. 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

- The question is what do we want out of church?
 - Do we come here to show off our gift?
 - Do we seek a chance to stand up and dance and make a scene and cause everyone's eyes to turn our way?
 - Do we want for that attention?
 - Or do we want to see people convicted and changed?
 - Do we want believers to learn about Jesus? To become more like Him?
 - Do we want unbelievers to be pierced in their hearts by the word of God, as we were?
 - Do we want to see Christ glorified and the church growing
 - If we want for the latter, then we should follow the words of John the Baptist

John 3:27 John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.

John 3:28 “You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent ahead of Him.’

John 3:29 “He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. So this joy of mine has been made full.

John 3:30 “He must increase, but I must decrease.

- ◦ □ John understood how spiritual gifts truly worked
 - A man can have nothing spiritual except what has been given him from Heaven
 - And by that gifting we become useful to Christ
 - But only if we understand that we must diminish, so that Christ may increase
- Next week we'll conclude Paul's examination of how gifts are to operate in the church
 - Paul will finish his correction on gifts by giving us a model for how the entire worship service should proceed
 - A model that fits very well with our desire to include a wider variety of individuals in the conduct of our church service



1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 14D

Chapter 14:26-40

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- There are probably as many ways to conduct a church service as there are churches
 - Styles vary from denomination to denomination
 - And even within a certain tradition, individual congregations will each have their own style
 - Musical styles, the order of events, the approach to teaching, the schedule for the Lord's Supper
 - But despite all our differences, the Christian gathering has maintained a remarkable consistency over the centuries
 - We have songs of praise, whether with instruments or not
 - We have prayers, whether aloud or privately
 - We have the Lord's supper, whether every week or occasionally
 - We have teaching, hopefully from the text of scripture
 - We have recitation of creeds, testimonies, personal confessions, announcements, collections for the saints, hails and farewells, and occasionally something out of the ordinary
 - This pattern is more than habit...it's a fulfillment of the purpose of the gathering
 - We gather for the same reason a sports team practices together
 - We each have a role to play, but our role is meaningless apart from the rest of the team
 - We depend on the gathering for our chance to serve Christ by serving His people in our spiritual gift
- As Chapter 14 ends, Paul is ready to leave this church with a prescription for how everyone gets their chance to serve properly
 - Paul wants everyone to play their part, but he also wants every contribution to edify
 - Like a sports team, everyone has to participate in a coordinated, selfless manner ensuring the team is successful
 - Church is no place for prima donnas
 - The only One in the spotlight is Christ
 - We're all supporting cast members, role players
 - So to end his discussion on spiritual gifts, Paul leaves correction and returns to teaching to explain how the church gathering should proceed

1Cor. 14:26 What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

- What is the outcome then, Paul asks?
 - Today, we would probably say something like, "So what?"
 - In other words, after all Paul's said about spiritual gifts, the need to edify and respect the priority of gifts, so what do we do now?

- How does the body of Christ work together with a diversity of spiritual gifts to edify each other?
- How do we juggle these priorities?
- Paul answers his own question by instructing the church on how to conduct a church service properly
 - His solution is deceptively simple
 - It's general enough to allow a wide variety of styles and traditions
 - But it ensures the service will serve its intended purpose of edifying believers and glorifying the Lord
- First, Paul says when you assemble...
 - Paul starts with a simple statement, but take note Paul never prescribes the frequency of assembly
 - Earlier when teaching on the Lord's supper, Paul had said "as often as you gather"
 - In fact, no New Testament writer ever prescribes the frequency of the gathering of the body
 - Nevertheless, the expectation is that we gather regularly
 - The writer of Hebrews says:

Heb. 10:24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,

Heb. 10:25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

- While no specific frequency for our gathering is prescribed in the Bible, we are called to never forsake the assembling together
 - To forsake means to desert or give up on something
 - It doesn't mean to miss church occasionally
 - It means to stop going to church services altogether
 - This is not an option for any Christian
- And when we assemble, Paul says each one is to arrive at the gathering with the expectation that they have something to offer for the benefit of other believers
 - Paul says each one has something
 - We shouldn't pass by those simple words too quickly...each one
 - Not some, not a few, but each one
 - Everyone should come ready to offer something to the body of Christ
 - If you routinely come to church and leave having given nothing to the assembly, then you haven't met the purpose in gathering
 - Can we go to our workplace and contribute nothing everyday? Can we attend school and accomplish nothing day after day?

- Even if we assemble for an entertainment event like a concert or a sports game, we still contribute something
 - We contribute our money to fund the event
- If we gather for a service project, we contribute our labor
- If we gather at a wedding we bring gifts
- If we gather at a funeral we bring words of encouragement
- Virtually every gathering of people functions only because of the contributions of the individuals assembled
- Church is no different
 - In fact it's all the more the case
 - Since our gathering has no purpose apart from giving opportunity for us to use our spiritual gifts
 - Therefore, Paul says everyone is to bring something
- Is that your mindset when you leave your home on Sunday mornings?
 - Do you get in your car for the drive to church with the mindset that you're bringing something for someone else?
 - Are you thinking about who you want to pray for or pray with?
 - Do you consider who might need some encouraging words?
 - Do you have a testimony to share? A teaching to offer, whether to a child or adult?
 - Are you bringing an instrument to play, a card to give someone?
 - Are you bringing your checkbook or wallet?
 - All of these things and many more are the means by which we edify fellow believers
- But we have to discipline ourselves to think this way about church
 - Otherwise we'll miss the chance to play our part
 - And the gathering is diminished as a result
 - We have a diversity of gifts for a reason
 - So everyone is important
 - Don't ever think your participation or attendance isn't important to this gathering
 - It's eternally important
- As Paul lists examples of different contributions, he includes a wide variety of gifts from across the spectrum of priorities
 - He says one comes with a psalm, another with a teaching, another with a revelation, one with a tongue and another with an interpretation
 - A psalm refers to a moment of praising the Lord in worship
 - Today, we'd say a song of praise
 - A teaching refers to any form of instruction, whether at the pulpit, in a class or

- one-on-one during a conversation in Fellowship Hall
- A revelation refers to a statement of prophecy or offering someone a word of counsel under the guidance of the Spirit
- A tongue and interpretation refers to the gift we studied earlier, speaking in a foreign language while another person interprets
- Even though some of these gifts have a greater potential to edify than others, nothing is excluded from the gathering
 - Everything has a place and a reason to exist
 - So long as everything is done for the purpose of edifying the body, Paul says
 - That's our ultimate test as we make decisions about what to include or exclude from the assembly
 - Can we allow drama skits? Solo musical performances? Movie excerpts? Original songs?
 - In every case the question is, did it give someone a chance to use their talent and express love for the Lord and His church?
 - Does it edify the believer and testify to the glory of Christ?
 - These are the tests we should apply
- But they are not the only tests we must apply
 - There is another equally important test for what to include in the gathering and how to orchestrate everyone's contribution

1Cor. 14:27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret;

1Cor. 14:28 but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.

1Cor. 14:29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.

1Cor. 14:30 But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent.

1Cor. 14:31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted;

1Cor. 14:32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets;

1Cor. 14:33 for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

- The additional test is respectfulness
 - Are we contributing our gifts in a respectful manner
 - Respectful to the purpose and value of our gifting
 - Respectful to the needs of others
 - Respectful to the purpose of the gathering
 - Respectful to Christ
 - Paul uses some example gifts to illustrate his point, and once again, Paul includes

the gift of tongues in his list to correct the church's use of this particular gift

- If someone in the body has the gift of tongues and intends to contribute with their gift, then it must be done in a respectful way
- Speaking in a foreign tongue no one understands should only be done in the gathering if someone is available to interpret
 - An interpretation could come from someone with a gift of tongues
 - Or it can come from someone who speaks the language naturally
- But without an interpretation, the speaker should remain silent keeping the gift to himself out of respect for the gathering

- Then notice Paul says that even if interpretation is available, the use of speaking in tongues should be limited to no more than 2 or 3
 - We limit tongues in the gathering out of respect for the limited edification afforded by this gift
 - As well because we need to leave room for others' opportunity to contribute
 - Furthermore, tongues are to be used only one at a time
 - If two or more people are trying to speak over one another, then we are being disrespectful to one another
- If you've ever been exposed to the modern version of "so-called" tongues practiced in some churches, then you will notice they typically operate in direct violation of this biblical mandate
 - As I've witnessed it, the room is filled with multiple people attempting to speak in something they think is tongues
 - There are far more than two or three allowed to speak
 - Everyone is speaking at the same time, so it's a confused cacophony of useless noise
 - And of course, no one makes any effort to interpret
 - We need go no further than v.28 to see that such behavior is unbiblical
 - And if it is contrary to the word of God, than it cannot be the product of the Spirit

- But in case we think Paul is singling out tongues, he gives similar counsel for one of the most important spiritual gifts: prophecy
 - He says prophecy is also limited to 2 or 4 utterances in the gathering
 - And after each person speaks a prophecy, the rest of the gathering is to immediately pass judgment on what is said
 - Passing judgment means to discern whether the word was truly prompted by the Spirit
 - Paul holds prophecy to the same standard as any other gift
 - Is it done with respect to the gathering?
 - And in respect to its purpose?
 - In particular, Paul is concerned about any gift of utterance leading to chaos when used without the necessary respect

- In the case of prophecy, Paul asks that if a revelation is given concerning someone who is seated, then a special test must follow
- He's talking about a situation where someone is standing and speaking to the congregation in some manner
- And while this person is standing, one who is seated, that is someone who did not have the floor to speak, receives a revelation from the Lord
- Paul says that the one who is standing should stop speaking long enough for the one seated to add his voice to the gathering
- Paul's point is that the movement of the Spirit must be respected by all
 - The Spirit may move in a way contrary to our order of service
 - When that happens, we make room for it, but only to the extent that we can discern it is from the Lord
 - The gathering isn't a free-for-all, but it does need to remain flexible
- Paul gives the rule for how speaking gifts operate in the gathering in vs.31-33
 - Paul says that everyone can contribute to the edification of the body by speaking in turn
 - But the spirits of the prophets are always subject to the prophets
 - Paul means that we aren't acting out of control
 - Prophets of the Old Testament weren't robots who acted possessed and spoke without control over their bodies
 - On the contrary, these men were always in full control of their faculties
 - When they spoke, they spoke inspired words, but they never lost control over their mouths or bodies
 - Similarly, Paul reminds the church that just because you have a speaking gift doesn't mean you've lost all self control
 - If you cry out in the middle of a church service, speaking over the top of someone else, you can't claim that the Spirit made you do it
 - The Spirit has never worked that way in past, and He's not working that way now
 - We are to remain in control at all times, carefully selecting the opportunity to contribute and always with respect and according to the rules established in scripture
 - If we can't control ourselves in this way, then we are not operating by the Spirit
 - We are indulging our flesh
 - Or worse, we're under the influence of a false spirit
- When it comes to gifts of utterance, Paul says let's be careful to keep everything we do in the gathering sensible, understandable and respectful to the Lord
 - Because God is not a God of confusion
 - In other words, our God doesn't produce confusing, nonsense displays
 - That's not how He operates, for it does not glorify Him to do so
 - The implication of Paul's words is that when we see a gathering operating in a

fashion contrary to these instructions, we simply can't be watching something produced by the Lord

- For the Lord is not a God of confusion, so if confusion reigns in the gathering, then the Lord's Spirit is absent
- He's been pushed to the side, and in His place the flesh has taken over
- To conclude the chapter, Paul gives one additional command to ensure a respectful gathering

1Cor. 14:34 The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says.
1Cor. 14:35 If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.

- In the context of individuals contributing teaching and revelation to the gathering, Paul commands that women may not speak
 - In modern culture, these commands raise concerns
 - Is Paul saying that a woman with a speaking gift can never use it?
 - Was he a misogynist? No
 - First, let's not divorce Paul's words from the context of this chapter
 - Paul didn't insert these words out of thin air
 - He's in the middle of a line of thought, teaching on how to ensure a respectful, edifying gathering
 - Secondly, Paul has just been addressing the use of speaking gifts
 - All speaking gifts work to edify in a similar manner
 - They teach spiritual truths, whether by revelation, or correction or teaching
 - So it's in that context that Paul asks that women refrain from contributing to the teaching, because women teaching men is contrary to respect
 - Elsewhere Paul writes:

1Tim. 2:11 A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness.

1Tim. 2:12 But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.

- ◦ Paul equates a woman teaching a man with a woman having authority over a man
 - Anyone who teaches someone else becomes an authority over that person
 - And in the proper order of the family and church body, the Lord has appointed men to lead
- Therefore, Paul instructs women not to take a teaching role in a gathering that includes men, because they assume a position of authority over the men when they teach

- Notice in 1 Corinthians 14:34 Paul says that they should remember that they are to submit to male authority
 - We discussed headship earlier in this book, so I won't repeat the lesson here
 - Except to reiterate that this order is God's design and not one we're free to rethink or change in response to culture
- On the other hand, Paul is not prohibiting a woman from using her speaking gift
 - He only asked that it not be used in the context of the main gathering because it challenges male authority
 - Instead, women with teaching or other speaking gifts can exercise their gift through their husbands or fathers in the gathering
 - And they can use them when teaching children or other women
 - If that sounds unfair or limiting, remember that in most churches the women and children constitute the majority of the church body
- We all have plenty of opportunity to edify with our speaking gifts, whether men or women
 - In fact, we can have women speaking during the gathering in a non-teaching role
 - Women could perform scripture readings without commentary, sing worship songs, give mission updates, announcements, and offer prayers
 - These speaking roles don't suggest authority over others
 - But teaching is reserved for times and places where women aren't taking positions of authority over men
- Just in case any husbands are feeling smug at this point, you should notice that Paul called us out also in v.35
 - Paul said that since the wives are called to respect our authority, we in turn need to be ready to answer their questions
 - In other words, men are expected to be the teachers in their homes
 - Husbands, if you desire a godly wife who respects your authority, then you had better give her something to respect
 - We need to know our Bible, for that's our obligation
 - Certainly, wives are called to know their Bibles just as much as the husbands
 - But if your wife knows more than you, then you have a problem
 - You need to race ahead, so that as she has questions about scripture during the gathering, she can seek your counsel confident that you'll have something helpful to say
 - Ladies, if you know the Bible better than your husband, don't slow down... keep the pedal to the metal
 - And challenge your husband to catch up and pass you as you both pursue Christ through His word
- When everyone is doing their part in the assembly with respect and according to the word of God, then the gathering functions in a beautiful, balanced way

- We have latitude but don't have a right to work outside the guidelines of scripture
 - We have an obligation to serve others in Christ, in love and with a desire to edify
 - This is Paul's summary

1Cor. 14:36 Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?

1Cor. 14:37 If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment.

1Cor. 14:38 But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

1Cor. 14:39 Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues.

1Cor. 14:40 But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.

- Paul asks sarcastically if the Corinthian church was the author of God's word?
 - Or perhaps this church is the only place on earth that knows what God has said?
 - Paul's pointing out that they don't have a corner on the truth
 - That God's instructions came to them no different than any other place
 - So Corinth didn't have the right to make up their own rules for the gathering and claim they were operating under instructions from God
 - God didn't tell Corinth something different than He told everyone else in His word
 - Our brothers and sisters who repeat the Corinthian mistakes in tongues or women teaching men or other guidelines are working against the word of God
 - They can't claim to be enlightened or to have new revelation
 - They can't claim to have a greater portion of the Holy Spirit
 - Or to be more sensitive to His leading
 - Just as Paul says, if anyone thinks he is more spiritual than others, then let him show that spiritual maturity by greater obedience to God's word – not less
 - And God's word has spoken on the proper use of the gifts in the body
 - If a brother or sister fails to acknowledge that Paul's teaching is a command from the Lord, then we aren't to recognize them
 - We are to separate from them for our own good and as discipline to them
- Meanwhile Paul finishes saying, desire the greatest gift of prophecy over the rest but don't despise lesser gifts like tongues
 - Each has its place in the body when used respectfully and in love
 - All things we do should be done properly
 - Everything must be orderly, in control
 - And with a potential to edify believers
 - As we operate under these constraints, we please the Lord
 - And we serve Him as He called us

- To the glory of His name before the nations



1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 15A

Chapter 15:1-4

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lesson-15a](http://versebyversemistry.org/lessons/1corinthians-2013-lesson-15a)

- There are probably as many ways to conduct a church service as there are churches

An employee of a company was working at his desk one morning when the boss stopped by to ask him a question. Out of the blue the boss asked, “Do you believe in resurrection?”

The question stunned the young man. His boss had never shown any interest in his Christian faith in the past, so it was quite unexpected to hear him asking about religious matters, especially in the workplace. Finally, he hoped he would have an opportunity to witness to his faith. The young man answered enthusiastically, “Why yes, I do believe in resurrection.”

The boss got a smile on his face and said, “Oh wonderful, then that explains everything.”

Now the young man was puzzled. He asks his boss, “What do you mean it explains everything?”

His boss answered, “Well, when you were away from the office last Friday to attend your grandmother’s funeral, she stopped by the office to see you.”

- It's not an exaggeration to say that the entire Christian faith – and all the Bible teaches concerning Christ – depends on the resurrection
 - If the resurrection of Jesus is not true...if it never really happened, then the entire Christian faith is meaningless and a fraud
 - It would mean Jesus is still in the grave like every man
 - It would mean that His claims to being God and to having the power to overcome death were lies
 - It would mean that we have no reason to trust in Him for our own salvation from death
 - But if the resurrection is true...if it happened as the New Testament authors testify, then it changes everything
 - It means that Jesus' claims to being the Truth and the Life are trustworthy
 - It means that He and He alone has the power to conquer death
 - It means we can place our trust in Him to raise us from the dead, and we will not be disappointed
- We've reached the final topic Paul addresses in this letter to Corinth
 - Each topic Paul's raised so far has been the result of something he heard was going wrong in the church
 - We've heard him preaching on idols, marriage, spiritual gifts and the Lord's Supper
 - With each topic, Paul begins with teaching and eventually ends in correction
 - Once again, this will be Paul's approach to his final topic of resurrection
 - So Paul begins with a teaching on the resurrection of Jesus Christ

1Cor. 15:1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand,

1Cor. 15:2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

- Paul begins his teaching in a curious manner
 - He says I make known to you the gospel which I preached to you, which you received
 - Paul calls his audience brethren, which is a term reserved for fellow believers
 - So Paul is implying they have heard and believed the gospel of Jesus Christ, the message that brings salvation and makes one a Christian
 - So we might ask why does Paul feel the need to preach the gospel once again to believers in Corinth?
 - The answer is because Christians need to be reminded of the gospel daily
 - It's one reason why we honor the day of Jesus' resurrection every year at Easter
 - It's why pastors repeat the Gospel from the pulpit on many Sundays
 - It's not merely because we hope to persuade a new heart to believe
 - It's also because even those who have believed need a constant reminder of what the gospel is and what it teaches
- If you pay attention to religious news articles on website or in blogs, then very quickly you'll realize many people have no idea what the gospel is
 - In fact, many Christians don't know what the words means
 - If you want to entertain yourself sometime, conduct a random "man on the street" experiment
 - Ask people, what is the gospel?
 - You'll be surprised by the answers
 - I've encountered Christians who think the word "gospel" simply means the New Testament
 - Others think it's a synonym for Jesus Himself
 - Some think the gospel means treating other people nicely
 - Some say it's a call to equality and opportunity
 - Some teach the gospel is about achieving happiness or wealth
 - Some think it's about social equality
 - I've read religious articles written by so-called Christians who treat the term "gospel" as if the word has no definition at all
 - They view the gospel as a mysterious, ambiguous concept without specific form
 - Something we acknowledge yet can't relate to
- All this confusion is exactly why we return to the Bible repeatedly to find and preach the gospel on a regular basis, both to others and to ourselves
 - Otherwise, even a believer may become confused about how they are saved

- We may lose all understanding of what it means to be a Christian
- Then we'll have no hope to understand the theology or our faith, much less to avoid the deceptions and schemes of the enemy
- So in effect, Paul is saying to the church I need to reteach you the gospel that you received from me before, the one you received in faith, the one in which you stand
 - When Paul says stand he means to withstand the judgment of God
 - All men are going to stand for judgment by a holy and righteous judge
 - Either we enter that moment prepared and ready to stand
 - Or we enter with no prospect to survive the wrath of God
 - That's why in v.2 Paul says the message he delivered is the one that saves them... saves them from the penalty of sin
 - The world is filled with men preaching false gospels, false messages of salvation
 - Religions that claim you can earn your way out of hell or that there is no eternal punishment in the first place
 - There are even distorted versions of Christianity that have changed the gospel to suit their deceived hearts
 - But only one gospel has the power to save men on the day of their judgment
 - Notice at the end of v.2 Paul adds a provocative statement
 - He says you are saved if you are holding fast to the message I have preached to you, unless you believed in vain
 - Now we see clearly why Paul feels the need to repeat the Gospel to this church
 - Chloe's report to Paul must have included a disturbing case of some in the church professing belief in a different gospel
 - Rather than holding to the truth Paul delivered, these people were now claiming to be saved by a different message
 - A message the enemy had introduced into the church through false teachers
 - So naturally, Paul is concerned that these people were never believers in the first place
 - They heard Paul deliver the true gospel and they professed an acceptance
 - But when a more appealing alternative showed up, these people ran after the new message with equal gusto
 - By not holding fast to the truth, they gave evidence that they had never accepted it in the first place
 - They had “believed in vain” which means to have never believed at all
 - The word “vain” in Greek means to fail or to be empty
 - There had been a false or empty acceptance
- This is precisely the danger with any group of Christians setting the gospel aside assuming that once is enough
 - The gospel is never a message that gets old

- It never loses its importance or relevance
- Repeating the true gospel is just as important for the person who has been saved as it is for the one who has believed in vain
- We all need to be rock solid on the message that brings God's forgiveness
- Salvation isn't like a game of horseshoes
 - You don't get points for getting close to the gospel
 - You don't get into heaven because you went to church
 - Or because you were married to a Christian or because your parents were Christians
 - You don't get a pass because you were mostly a good person
 - There is too much at stake for anyone, whether Christian or not, to misunderstand the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- So do you want to know what the true Gospel is? Do you want to be sure you've believed in the right thing? I hope so, and so does Paul
 - Because now he presents the church the one and only message that saves men from Hell and assures us entrance into Heaven

1Cor. 15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

1Cor. 15:4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

- There it is...the true gospel
 - This isn't the only place you can find it in the Bible
 - In fact, it's written in one form or another on virtually every page of the Bible
 - But in these two verses, Paul succinctly captures the one and only message that saves our souls
 - In v.3 Paul says this is the message he delivered in the past as well
 - And this is the message of first importance
 - There is no other topic or discussion that matters unless and until the gospel is settled in a person's heart
 - If someone wants to entertain themselves with religious conversation, there are an infinite number of things we can talk about
 - We can talk about myths, controversies, denominational differences, traditions and mysteries all day long
 - But the gospel is the topic of first importance Paul says
 - He doesn't say highest importance
 - He says first importance
 - What he means is that we have nothing else to talk about until we agree on the Gospel

- Unbelievers with an interest in religion love to engage a Christian on many useless topics...except on the gospel itself
- I can't tell you how many conversations I've had with unbelievers unwilling to discuss the Gospel
 - They want to talk about Evolution
 - Or the accuracy of the Bible
 - Or the errors of Catholic popes or whatever church scandal is in the news
 - But ask them to consider the truth of Jesus' claims, and the conversation ends
- We need to take note of Paul's example here
 - As soon as he becomes aware that some may not have understood the Gospel, he returns to the message of first importance
 - And so should we
 - Preach the Gospel and nothing more until it's received
 - As Paul said earlier in this letter, when he first entered Corinth he was determined to know nothing except Christ and Him crucified
 - So should we
- And then Paul proceeds to explain the fundamental elements of the gospel message
 - Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures
 - The gospel story begins with our sin
 - Men have sin, lots of it
 - Years ago when I was a new believer, I had a friend who was an unbeliever
 - In those early days of walking with Christ, I wanted to share my faith with this friend
 - One day I began to testify to him that belief in Jesus Christ was the only way to avoid the penalty for our sin
 - And then he said something I didn't expect
 - He said he didn't believe in sin
 - His comment stopped me in my tracks
 - If he didn't understand his own sin before God, then there was nowhere for our conversation to go forward
 - The gospel message is fundamentally a message of how God forgives us for our sin
 - But if we don't appreciate our sin, then we have no reason to consider a message that promises to save us from the penalty of sin
- The gospel begins with the sobering reminder that sin brings judgment

Rom. 3:9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

Rom. 3:10 as it is written,

“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

Rom. 3:11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,

THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

Rom. 3:12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;

THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,

THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”

Rom. 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

- Why do we have so many false gospels, so many ways to define the word, so many alternatives being preached in pulpits?
 - I think it's because the last thing a hard, unbelieving heart wants to hear about is sin
 - The true gospel begins with an accusation
 - We are in trouble with God
 - The choices we've made, the lifestyle we've lived, the words we've spoken, even the thoughts that run through our head
 - They offend a holy God
 - They are wrong, they are sin, and they put us in God's debt
 - A debt that only death can pay
 - That's not a message the unbelieving heart wants to hear, but even the believer's heart rebels at the thought if we aren't reminded of it continually
 - Many a Christian has become self-righteous or even self-indulgent and licentious because we forget why Christ died
 - Our sin is the problem Christ came to solve
 - He didn't die to teach us a lesson or show us a way
 - He came to solve the problem of our sin
 - And what He did is the only thing that could be done
 - There was no alternative
 - Don't let someone fool you that there are many ways to heaven
 - There aren't "ways" to heaven
 - There is only Christ's death
- Then Paul says, this death was the one scripture said would happen
 - Many men have died, but only one death was capable of solving the problem of our sin
 - It was the death that came in accordance with God's promises found in His word
 - It's the only death the Father will accept as payment for our sin, as He foretold through the prophets
 - Like Isaiah who said

Is. 53:1 Who has believed our message?

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

Is. 53:2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,

And like a root out of parched ground;

He has no stately form or majesty

That we should look upon Him,

Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

Is. 53:3 He was despised and forsaken of men,

A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;

And like one from whom men hide their face

He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Is. 53:4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore,

And our sorrows He carried;

Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,

Smitten of God, and afflicted.

Is. 53:5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions,

He was crushed for our iniquities;

The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,

And by His scourging we are healed.

Is. 53:6 All of us like sheep have gone astray,

Each of us has turned to his own way;

But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all

To fall on Him.

- There was a death of a certain Man that the scriptures said would come for our sake
 - This Man would have a common, unremarkable appearance
 - And He would be despised by men and forsaken
 - Isaiah says this Man would be One chosen by God to bear our griefs and sorrows
 - He was assigned by God to be afflicted in our place
 - Pierced through for our transgressions, referring to the crucifixion, and crushed for our sins
 - By His affliction we are healed, forgiven of our sins and reconciled with God
 - You see not just anyone can address our sin before God
 - No self-appointed savior can save us from the wrath of God
 - Not Buddha, not Muhammed, not Confucius, not the Dalai Lama, not David Koresh, not Joseph Smith, not Charles Russell
 - Nor any other crackpot, conman, false prophet or cult leader with a messiah complex
 - Whether by their life or by their death, none of these can solve the problem of our sin, because God has not appointed them to serve that purpose
 - God alone determines the propitiation, the remedy for our sin
 - And Paul says the Father determined that His Only Son Jesus would be the One to address the problem of our sin

- He would be assigned to bear the penalty for our sin
- He died for our sins, so that we might escape that penalty
- Our sin is the beginning of the Gospel message, but it doesn't end there
 - If the Gospel message begins with our sin, it moves to the penalty of sin
 - Paul says that Jesus was buried and then raised three days later
 - There's certainly nothing remarkable about a dead man being buried
 - That's what happens to every person who dies
 - The body returns to dust, one way or another
 - But Paul repeats this part of the story because it's essential to our understanding of what sin requires
 - Paul says in Romans 6:23 that the wages of sin is death
 - Paul means that because we sin, we have earned the penalty that sin requires, which is a spiritual death
 - Yet Christ took that wage on our behalf, standing in our place, lying in our grave
 - So the true Gospel recognizes that Jesus died a true death
 - In the early church, false teachers began to report that Jesus had not actually died
 - He had swooned on the cross, experiencing punishment for our sake but not actually dying
 - For some held that it wasn't right that God could die like a man
 - So they concocted a story that Jesus faked death and then escaped from the tomb
 - But this is not the Gospel
 - The Gospel says that Jesus truly died, for that is what's required because of our sin
 - If Jesus never died then the payment for our sin has not been paid
 - What's more, if Jesus never died, then the next part of the Gospel message is rendered false as well
- This brings us to the final element of the true gospel: Paul says Jesus rose from the dead
 - In a word, He resurrected
 - Jesus' dead body became living again, stood up and walked out of the grave
 - Just as surely as He was dead, He also came to life again
 - The true gospel is the good news that our death doesn't have to be the end of us
 - We can live again just as Jesus did
 - The promise of the gospel is that everyone who places their trust for salvation in Christ can be assured they will not be disappointed
 - For when it comes to choosing a savior who promises to rescue you from death, shouldn't we choose the One Who rescued Himself from death?

- If a person cannot even raise himself from his own death, then certainly there is no reason to place your own life in his hands?
 - Buddha never returned to life
 - Muhammed is still in his tomb
 - Not Confucius, nor the Dalai Lama, nor David Koresh, nor Joseph Smith, nor Charles Russell nor any other man has ever returned from the grave
- Except Jesus Christ
 - When He rose from the dead, He proved beyond any doubt that He has the power of life over death
 - He validated all that He claimed concerning Himself
 - Talk is cheap...anyone can make claims about their power and authority while they walk the earth
 - But before you accept their claims, first let them die and come back to life
 - The One Who can bring himself back to life has proven Himself to be God, the one with power over life
- The true Gospel, the true good news is the story of the Son of God dying and resurrecting for our sake
 - The gospel Christ delivered to Paul is the same gospel Paul taught in his letters
 - It's the same message Paul delivered in Corinth
 - And it's the message of first importance that I preach to you this Easter morning
 - Our sin made necessary a death
 - But the Father, in His mercy and love for us, appointed His only Son to stand in our place to satisfy the wrath of God
 - And on a cross, Jesus died in our place
 - His dead body was buried in a tomb for three days
 - But after three days and three nights in the grave, Jesus' dead body returned to life, resurrected never to die again
 - This is the one and only gospel, the good news that saves
 - Paul says in Romans 10

Rom. 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;
Rom. 10:10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

- ◦ Accept the truth of this testimony, believe it and rely upon it for your salvation from the judgment that is to come, and you will be saved
 - Jesus' resurrection means He has the power to give life to your dead body
 - And His word says if you trust in Him, you will not be disappointed

- This is the gospel



1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 15B

Chapter 15:3-19

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lesson-15b](http://versebyversemistry.org/lessons/1corinthians-2013-lesson-15b)

- Our entry into Chapter 15 of this letter gave us a clear-eyed view of the gospel
 - Paul told the church this was the message he received from the Lord and delivered to them
 - The story has never changed:
 - Jesus died for our sins according to God's word
 - He remained dead for three days
 - Then resurrected to prove His power of death
 - This message was the one they heard and believed, if they didn't believe in vain
 - And having believed, this was the message that saved them
 - There is no other message that offers salvation
 - Having seen Paul begin his teaching on resurrection in this way, we might ask why was Paul concerned about the church's understanding of the Gospel?
 - The answer as we learned last week is that the resurrection of Jesus' body is central to the gospel itself
 - If resurrection isn't true, both for Jesus as well as for us, then the hope of our faith evaporates
 - Who cares about Jesus if He isn't a solution to death?
 - If death is the end of me, then why care about Jesus' claims or teaching?
 - If I don't believe in Jesus' resurrection, then I haven't believed in the gospel
 - This is Paul's concern
 - As the church rejects the notion of resurrection, they are revealing they have never truly accepted the gospel itself
 - That's why Paul asked if they had believed in vain, which means to have never believed at all
 - So as Paul moves forward in Chapter 15, he will re-establish for the church the truth of resurrection
 - Beginning with the fact that Jesus' own resurrection was affirmed by many eye witnesses, not merely by Paul's testimony alone

1Cor. 15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

1Cor. 15:4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

1Cor. 15:5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

1Cor. 15:6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;

1Cor. 15:7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles;

- I re-read the verses we covered last week to set the context of Paul's testimony
 - Because the resurrection is a key element in the Gospel

- Jesus lives again, we're told
- This was the message Paul delivered to the church, that their Savior was alive again
 - Jesus' death on the cross was not the end of Christianity
 - It was the beginning
 - Because Jesus lives again
- Then, Paul reminds the Corinthian church that this reality didn't depend solely on Paul's word
 - In fact, Jesus appeared to Peter first on the day of His resurrection
 - Luke tells us this in Luke 24:34
 - Then Jesus appeared to the rest of the 12 on the first night after He resurrected
 - The twelve refers to the eleven Jesus selected plus Matthias, who was selected to replace Judas by throwing lots
 - This confirms that Paul did not consider himself one of the twelve
 - Also, Paul was not called to be an apostle until long after this appearance
 - All these men can join Paul in testifying that Jesus truly was resurrected in the flesh
- Why does Paul mention Cephas specifically?
 - You should remember at the beginning of this letter how Paul addressed the problem of factions developing in this church
 - Some were saying they were "of Paul" or "of Apollos"
 - And some were saying they were "of Cephas" or Peter
 - So for those in the church who aligned themselves with Peter while rejecting the idea of resurrection, Paul reminds them that their man Peter also testified that Jesus resurrected
- Then in v.6, Paul tells the church that at one gathering Jesus appeared to over 500 believers, showing Himself to be risen and alive
 - We have no other mention of this event in scripture
 - But Paul mentions this appearance as if the Corinthian church would already know of this event
 - Since Paul is writing this letter only about 23 years after Jesus' resurrection, it's likely that the church was still familiar with the stories of Jesus' appearances
 - And it's also credible that many of those 500 witnesses were still around at this time as Paul says
 - So that if anyone in the Corinthian church doubted Paul's testimony, they had many other eye witnesses who could verify the claim of Jesus' resurrection
 - Beyond the 500, Jesus appeared to His half brother, James, and to the rest of the apostles
 - Notice that Paul separates the twelve apostles in v.5 from "all" the apostles in

v.7

- This reminds us that there were more than 12 men gifted as apostles in the early church, including men like James and Paul
- And it reminds us that no one can be considered an apostle unless he has seen the risen Lord in the flesh
 - Which is why apostles are no longer present in the church
- The Lord used these men to establish His church in the earliest days through their testimonies
- In fact, the early church was established entirely on the basis of eye witness testimony backed by spiritual power through the apostolic gifting
 - The apostles and other disciples of Jesus and others who could testify from a firsthand perspective of Who Jesus was and what He did
 - They preached His teaching
 - They demonstrated His fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy
 - And they reported what they experienced when the resurrected Lord appeared before them
 - We might wonder why did anyone believe their word in the first place?
 - We might expect that many people would dismiss their testimony as simply the rantings of a crazy sect of religious fanatics
 - And many, many people did come to that conclusion
 - But some believed by the power of the Spirit, as Jesus promised

John 15:20 “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

- But as you wonder at how the church was founded on merely the testimony of a few men, don't forget that this is still how the church grows today
 - Nothing has changed, really
 - Jesus' followers take the message of Who Jesus is and what He has done, and we preach it to the world
 - We too show how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy
 - And like the early church, we also have eye witnesses who testify that Jesus truly died and resurrected
 - Where do we this eye witness testimony? In the New Testament
 - The New Testament writers are all apostles, for that was the test required before a writing could join the canon of scripture
 - All New Testament scripture was authored by an apostle who saw the resurrected Lord
 - And we have their eye witness testimonies still today in the form of the Gospels and the letters

- Truly, we're in the same situation that the early church found itself in, bringing a message to the world that many will reject but some will receive
 - It's a message that must be accepted on faith in God's word
 - Just as the early church grew on those who had faith in the eye witness testimony of men Christ chose to carry that message
 - Today the church grows on the basis of faith in the word of God, where these same testimonies have been recorded for our sake
 - This is why Paul says elsewhere in Romans 10:17

Rom. 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

- Finally, Paul reminds the church that he also saw the risen Lord

1Cor. 15:8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

1Cor. 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

1Cor. 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

1Cor. 15:11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

- In great humility, Paul describes himself as the the least of the apostles
 - He says he was the last one to see the risen Lord, which is true
 - Paul's experience happened while he was traveling on a road from Jerusalem to Damascus, Syria
 - This event occurred many years after the earlier appearances
 - But this was no less an appearance of the resurrected Lord
 - In fact, it's fair to say it was an even more dramatic appearance than the others
 - Even though Paul is confident he was every bit as much an apostle as any of the others, he also acknowledges his apostleship came in a different way
 - Paul says in v.8 that he was "untimely born"
 - The phrase in Greek literally means abnormally born
 - In fact, the phrase was used in Greek to describe a premature birth or even an abortion
 - By the context, Paul meant his commissioning of an apostle came in a very different way than the first twelve
 - Paul wasn't appointed by the Lord in the early days of Christ's ministry as were the other apostles
 - Paul didn't spend three years walking with Christ before His death
 - And in fact, before he was an apostle, Paul was the chief persecutor of the church

- So in these ways, Paul certainly did not have the typical entry into his apostleship
- Nevertheless, Paul says by the grace of God, he is what he is as an apostle
 - By God's unmerited favor – and nothing else – Paul became the apostle who then founded the Corinthian church
 - His history of disobedience, ignorance and hatred toward God's people were overlooked by God
 - And in mercy the Lord called Paul into faith and commissioned him to accomplish great things
 - God's mercy to Paul was also mercy to the rest of us
 - Because when God converted a man like Paul, the Lord gave the rest of us hope indeed
 - And the more you reflect on what God could accomplish through a man like Paul, the more reason you have to serve Christ despite your weaknesses
 - You and I may not be the most talented or well-trained servants of Christ
 - We may have come to faith late in our lives or simply waited a long time to live up to our faith
 - We may be saddled with physical limitations, financial limitations, emotional baggage, and self-doubt
 - We may have a past that includes great sin and shameful behaviors
 - But I believe Paul's example exists just so God can remind us that such things are not barriers to God's grace
 - Our life before Christ does not dictate our usefulness to God
 - Our talents or strength are not limitations to God's power working through us
 - Our reputations as unbelievers went to the grave with Jesus
 - So that we can serve Him in a new life

Rom. 6:4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

- And this is what Paul did, for he says God's grace given to him wasn't in vain
 - Because Paul made the most of the opportunity the Lord gave him
 - Paul labored more than any other apostle, Paul says
 - He started late but ran faster
 - Which is clearly evidenced both by Paul's journeys and his writings, which form the bulk of the New Testament canon
 - Remember, there were many apostles, some of whom you have never heard mentioned
 - We don't even know their names

- And others we may know by name, like Matthias, yet we see no record of their work recorded in scripture
- Perhaps some of them are missing from scripture because they didn't work very hard in their appointed office
- Perhaps they were not as diligent or dedicated to the task the Lord appointed
- I can't say what's true in the case of the apostles, but I can say that we face a similar choice in our walk with the Lord
 - We can take the grace given to us and make the most of it
 - Or we can be the one who causes God's grace to be given in vain
 - The one who squanders the opportunity the Lord gave us to serve Him
 - Clearly, we should seek to imitate Paul's example
- So Paul's opening argument in favor of resurrection is that many eye witnesses testified to the reality of Christ's raising from the dead
 - This brings us to Paul's second argument in support of resurrection, an argument from logic

1Cor. 15:12 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

1Cor. 15:13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised;

1Cor. 15:14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.

1Cor. 15:15 Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.

- Paul now begins to demonstrate that the Corinthians' view on resurrection was self-contradictory with their Christian message
 - First, Paul asks the question if the heart of the Gospel message itself claims that Jesus resurrected, then how can the Church also preach that there is no such thing as resurrection
 - If we hold that there is no such thing as a dead body coming back to life, then by necessity we would be saying that Christ's dead body was never resurrected either
 - And if Christ was never resurrected as our Gospel message claims, then our preaching is in vain
 - Once again, the word vain means empty or amounting to nothing
 - In other words, if Christ didn't actually rise from the dead, then we are preaching a worthless message to the world
 - More importantly, if the message the church is preaching to others is worthless, then the church's faith is also empty and worthless
 - Our faith in something is only as sound and valuable as the object of our faith
 - If we place our faith in something that is worthless, then our faith is itself

worthless

- I think many unbelievers go through life assuming that generic faith will save them
 - That even if they happen to place their faith in the wrong thing or wrong person, God will nevertheless give them credit for the sincerity of their faith
 - It's very fashionable these days for people to describe themselves as "spiritual"
 - And for people to talk about "faith" in abstract terms, as in "I'm a person of strong faith," without ever defining the object of their faith
 - But blind faith is not saving faith, according to scripture
 - And neither is sincerity
 - You can be sincerely wrong and die in your sins
 - That is the point Paul is making here – he points out that they cannot simultaneously claim faith in Christ while at the same time denying the very object of that faith
 - Christians have faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
 - Because we find our hope in believing that just as the Son was raised from the dead, so shall we be
 - To reject the resurrection is to reject Christ
- Moreover, Paul says in v.15 that if the testimonies of resurrection are not true, then all the apostles are false witnesses
 - These men were universally lying about the resurrection, because all say that Jesus died and was resurrected
 - They all testified that Jesus rose from the dead
 - But if the entire concept of resurrection is false, then we have no choice but to conclude that all the apostles were frauds and liars
 - If so, then why do the Corinthians care about anything Paul or another apostle says concerning Christ and Christianity?
 - Why bother with any of it if you believe that the cornerstone claim is nothing but a lie?
 - Imagine you were on a jury hearing testimony from a witness in a trial when you learned that a key detail in a witness' testimony turns out to be a lie
 - Would you trust anything else this witness said?
 - No
 - Likewise, Paul says the church is taking a self-contradictory stance concerning Paul's testimony
 - The church is willing to accept Paul's word that Jesus was Lord
 - That the Gospel saves them from sin and that they have become children of God by faith
 - And yet they believe resurrection is impossible, which means Paul was lying when he testifies that Jesus resurrected
 - C.S. Lewis made a similar observation about those who say Jesus the man was a

good teacher or even a prophet of God, yet they don't believe His claims to being God in the flesh

- That is a mutually self-contradictory stance, which C.S. Lewis summed up in his book *Mere Christianity* with the phrase "liar, lunatic or Lord"
- Jesus was either a liar, a lunatic or He was truly Lord
 - He can't be merely a good teacher, because He claimed to be one with God
 - He can't be a good role model or prophet because He told people that unless they follow Him, they will not see the Father
 - The only sensible stance we can take is that Jesus was a liar or a lunatic... or He was truly Who He said He was: Lord
- This is the dilemma facing the church in Corinth
 - They cannot reject resurrection as a concept while still embracing the Gospel
 - They cannot follow Paul and Apollos as leaders in the church while simultaneously thinking they are lying about key facts
 - They cannot say they believe in the Gospel while rejecting its source of hope
 - So Paul brings this chain of logic to its inevitable conclusion

1Cor. 15:18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

1Cor. 15:19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

- - If resurrection isn't possible, then those believers who have already died in Christ have perished
 - Paul uses a euphemism for death: sleep
 - To sleep in the context of a discussion of resurrection is a reference to dying
 - Paul asks what would it mean for those believers who have already died if resurrection never happens
 - It would mean that these people will never again live
 - They were allowed to live once, but then they have perished
 - The Greek word for perish is *apollumi*, which means to be utterly destroyed
 - To cease to exist at all
- In other words, without the promise of resurrection, we would have to conclude that our present life on earth is the only life we have
 - And if that were true, then the hope we have been given in Christ is an earthly hope only
 - The benefits of placing our trust in Jesus cannot extend past the grave, and so what good are they at all?
 - Adopting the Christian viewpoint means placing yourself in a position of suffering
 - It means self-denial in an attempt to obey the Lord

- It means hardship
- And if it goes no further than that, then of what value was it?
 - Paul says if it were true that we perish when we died, then we are the most pitiful of all men on earth
 - While the rest of the world at least gets to enjoy their brief life on earth, we would be suffering for the sake of Christ but to no reward
 - For scripture tells us that the rewards of our service to God come in a future time on earth
 - But we can only enjoy those future moments if we're alive again to experience them
- Jesus made this same observation during an encounter with the Sadducees, which was a religious sect within Israel that also rejected the notion of resurrection
 - As Jesus was addressing their challenge to Him concerning resurrection, He answered them this way

Luke 20:37 “But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB.

Luke 20:38 “Now He is not the God of the dead but of the living; for all live to Him.”

- ○ Jesus reminded the crowd that God made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
 - That covenant promised these men they would inherit the land of Canaan one day
 - But all these men died without having received those promises in their lifetimes
- Therefore, the only way God can remain true to His promises is if these men live again one day
 - And in that future day, the Lord will finally fulfill His promises to them to give them the land
 - And then they will enjoy the inheritance God promised
- So Paul has concluded his correction of the church for their foolish thinking on the matter of resurrection
 - Next, he begins his teaching on the true understanding of resurrection
 - Including on the way it happens and why it must happen
 - And also, the timing for when it will happen to every believer in Jesus Christ



1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 15C

Chapter 15:19:28

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- Returning to Chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians, we find Paul in the middle of a teaching on resurrection
 - The church in Corinth was debating whether resurrection was true
 - Under the influence of bad teaching, some in the church had come to think that the death of the physical body was the end
 - While we might continue to exist in spirit form only, we would never again receive a body
 - No more enjoying the physical world
 - No more walking on earth, enjoying food and drink, working the land, enjoying the Creation God made to be enjoyed
 - Moreover, all God's promises for a kingdom and a glorious new life were false promises, according to the Corinthian's view
 - Even worse, their viewpoint on resurrection directly contradicted the Gospel itself
 - By denying resurrection, the church was essentially denying Christ's own resurrection
 - They were challenging the very idea of a risen Lord
 - So Paul began his response by pointing out their contradictory position, claiming to be followers of a resurrected Lord while denying the possibility of resurrection for His followers
- Paul ends his opening argument with a self-evident conclusion

1Cor. 15:19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

- If the power of the Gospel dies with our bodies, then of what value was it to us?
 - How did faith in Christ produce the hope of eternal life if our body can never be replaced?
 - Rather than being rewarded for our faith, Paul says we should be pitied by the world
 - While the rest of the world enjoyed their bodies, eating, drinking and engaging in all kinds of merriment, we restrained our flesh
 - But for what benefit? Without resurrection, then when our flesh is gone, we lose all opportunity to enjoy life in those ways
 - If resurrection isn't true, then Christians are the most pitiful, duped, confused and miserable group of people on earth
 - No, our faith in Christ is not about producing happy outcomes in this life, because its promises are focused on the resurrected life
 - We deny our flesh today in obedience to Christ's promises, so we may enjoy a new life in a new body in a future day
 - We hope in resurrection, because that is the reward
 - So we hope in Christ not for this life but for the next

- So having illustrated the illogical nature of the Corinthian position, Paul now moves to instructing them on the reality of resurrection, including ultimately how the resurrection of the church will take place

1Cor. 15:20 **But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.**

1Cor. 15:21 **For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead.**

1Cor. 15:22 **For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.**

- Paul begins where everything begins: with Christ's work on our behalf
 - When Christ was raised from the dead, He was the first fruits of those who have died
 - In other words, Christ was the very first human being to receive a resurrected body
 - We know others in scripture who have bypassed death on earth like Enoch or Elijah
 - And we know of other men who died temporarily and were raised to life like Lazarus
 - But none of these have yet received a new body, one that will never die again
 - Elijah and Enoch present a mystery yet we know from scripture they have not yet received new bodies
 - And Lazarus and others came back to life, yet in their old bodies...they eventually died again!
 - These people haven't been resurrected yet, because Jesus must be resurrected first, according to scripture
 - He leads the way of salvation
 - His death and resurrection become the way to the Father, and none can go before Him
 - In vs.21-22 Paul explains that Jesus' death and resurrection was necessary to reverse Adam's mistake in the garden
 - When Adam sinned, he placed himself in a sinful state, with a fallen nature incapable of reconciling itself with God
 - His nature lacked the perfection required for fellowship with God
 - And Adam had no ability to correct the problem, since once perfection is lost, it can never be regained
 - His nature was marred forever, and because God decreed that Adam and Woman would procreate after their own kind, then they were doomed to reproduce sinfulness in their offspring as well
 - So the death we experience today is the direct result of Adam's sin
 - We share in Adam's penalty because we share his nature by birth
 - One man's mistake brought a consequence for all of us

- Therefore, Paul says in vs.21-22 that if we can accept that by one man's mistake, we all suffer death...
- Then we can also understand that by One Man's resurrection, we can all share in His resurrection
- The principle is that one man set the human race on a course of death, and One Man made a way of escape for the same
- Christ came as a man for the express purpose of reversing the predicament created by Adam's sin in the Garden
 - Christ became a new Adam, a man created by God to establish a new beginning for mankind
 - Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin so that He didn't begin His earthly life inheriting the sin of Adam
 - Then, Jesus lived in perfection and without sin though He was tempted
 - His perfect life preserved His claim to being a new Adam
 - Had Jesus sinned at any point, then His life would be no more helpful to us than Adam's had been
 - But because Jesus lived a sinless life, He was eligible to become a new Adam Who gives birth to the children of God
 - That's why we say we are "born again" by faith, for our likeness of Adam is put to death and in its place comes the likeness of Christ
 - That transition takes place in two steps
 - First, we received Christ's Spirit at the point of faith
 - And then later, we receive a new sinless body on the day of resurrection
 - And these things are made possible because Christ's death and resurrection forged this new path for all of us
- Christ's resurrection is the turning point for humanity
 - It is the antidote to death
 - When you and I are resurrected, we will never fear death again, because we will have been created anew in the likeness of Christ
 - We no longer fear death, for we no longer deserve the penalty of death
 - We have been born again into the family of Christ
 - This is why the Bible declares that Jesus conquered the grave and death
 - Death is no longer a part of our future
 - Yes, our physical body must die
 - But that death is not the death that we are to be concerned with
 - The death of the body is a necessary step toward a new perfect existence
 - Made possible by resurrection
- So we might ask when do Christ's children get to follow Him into a resurrected body?
 - Certainly, today we don't see walking around us the new bodies of those saints who have died already

- So clearly, they haven't yet been resurrected
- When do we join Christ in a new body?
- Paul begins to explain the timeline of events in the next passage

1Cor. 15:23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,

- Paul says these is an orderliness to God's plan for resurrection
 - Each stage of the resurrection happens according to a certain timing
 - First, of course, Christ is resurrected
 - Before Christ's own resurrection, no resurrection was even possible
 - This resurrection has already happened, of course, so that moves us to step two
 - Paul says in v.23 that the next step of resurrection is reserved for those who "are Christ's"
 - To be Christ's means to be believing in Christ
 - Christians
 - All those who have come to believe in Christ since the day of His resurrection
 - Paul says this group will receive their new bodies at Christ's "coming"
 - This phrase can be a source of confusion to many
 - When the New Testament references the "coming of the Lord" or "Christ's coming" it's a reference to the resurrection of the church, as you see here in v.23
 - The resurrection moment for the believers of the church is the moment the Lord comes for His Bride, the Church
 - This is not the second coming of Christ, when He returns to reign on Earth
 - This is a different moment: the resurrection of the Church
 - Paul will come back to explaining this moment in greater detail later in this chapter
- Meanwhile, Paul moves forward in the timeline

1Cor. 15:24 then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

- In v.24 Paul says "then the end"
 - In my English translation, we also see the word "comes" inserted in the text, but in the original Greek that word is not there
 - The actual phrase in Greek is "then the end"
 - Paul is brushing over some details in this discussion for the sake of brevity, but

elsewhere in scripture we learn what specifically happens “at the end”

- According to Revelation 20, there are two periods of resurrection in God’s plan for humanity: the First and Second Resurrections
 - The first resurrection begins with Christ Himself
 - Then it moves to the Church, as Paul says here
 - Then it follows with the Old Testament saints and those saints who live during the Great Tribulation and those who are born in the Millennial Kingdom
 - You can learn more about the stages of the first resurrection in the Revelation study
- All these saints receive their new bodies at different points in time, but collectively they are called the “First Resurrection” in scripture

Rev. 20:4 Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

Rev. 20:5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.

- ○ John tells us that there is a first resurrection, but the rest of humanity won’t be resurrected until after the thousand years of the kingdom
 - This first resurrection is the resurrection unto eternal life
 - It is the resurrection for saints only
 - It begins with Christ and comes to conclusion with those who are resurrected during the 1,000-year kingdom
- But as Revelation 20:5 told us, the “rest” of humanity didn’t receive new bodies until after the 1,000 years are complete
 - Then is the Second Resurrection
 - The end of the kingdom is the end Paul is talking about at the beginning of v.24
 - The Kingdom of Christ will last on Earth for 1,000 years, but it must come to an end
 - And then follows the second resurrection
 - Revelation says the Second Resurrection is reserved for all unbelieving souls who have been confined in Hades waiting for this day

Rev. 20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.

Rev. 20:12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

- - This is the Great White Throne Judgment, when unbelievers are finally judged
 - And then they are thrown into the Lake of Fire to live eternally because they did not receive the Messiah to atone for their sinful deeds
 - We need to understand that all mankind is resurrected eventually
 - Resurrection isn't just reserved for the believer
 - Resurrection is a fact for every human being
 - The believer's reward is to be resurrected into a new, sinless body that will enjoy eternal life with God in peace
 - But unbelievers are resurrected into eternal judgment, because their new bodies still exist in the sinful nature inherited from Adam
 - They have not been born again, so they have no escape from the judgment of sin
- Then in v.24 Paul says the end of the Kingdom means Christ handing all authority back to the Father, as the Father abolishes all power and authority in His Creation apart from His own
 - This is a fascinating insight into the distant prophetic plan for Creation
 - After Christ's Second Coming to earth, He sets us a kingdom to rule over humanity on earth
 - Christ presides over a world that still exists in sin
 - The resurrected saints will not have sin
 - But others in the kingdom will still have sin
 - Necessitating Christ's perfect judgment and our ruling with Him
 - As we read in Revelation 20:4, we are ruling with Jesus over this world during that kingdom
 - But this rule has a purpose, and that purpose according to scripture is to allow Christ to put all Christ's enemies under His authority

1Cor. 15:25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

1Cor. 15:26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

1Cor. 15:27 For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him.

1Cor. 15:28 When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

- The final and greatest enemy of God is death itself, and the source of death, that is

Satan

- So Christ will rule until that final enemy is conquered
- The moment Satan and death are conquered is at the very end of the Kingdom
- But once that victory is won, then the purpose of the Kingdom has been fulfilled, and Jesus hands back authority to the Father
- In v.27 Paul quotes from Psalm 8
 - The pronouns cause some confusion at first, but if we replace them with proper nouns, it makes easier reading

1Cor. 15:27 For the Father HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER Christ's FEET. But when the Spirit says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that the Father is excepted who put all things in subjection to Christ.

- ◦ Paul says that the goal of the Kingdom is to put everything under Christ's rule
 - But of course, the Father Himself is not to be subjected to Christ's rule
 - Therefore, once the final enemy is gone, the Son obediently returns all authority to the Father
- At that point, the Son obediently subjects Himself to the Father once again, and Paul says God returns to being "all in all"
 - It's not clear what this moment means for the Godhead, but the simplest explanation is that the expression of the Godhead returns to a singular expression
 - The Three Persons of the Godhead still exist, of course, as they always have existed
 - But they no longer express themselves into Creation in Three Persons separated one from another
 - Instead, the Godhead expresses itself as One, in a manner similar to the way God existed at the beginning of Creation
 - When the Godhead said Let Us make man in Our image
 - In other words, Christ came to earth as a man to die and resurrect and rule so that as a man, He could conquer all the enemies of God in Creation
 - And once He completes this mission, His purpose to exist in the form of man is met
 - And then He will return to the Oneness with the Father that He has enjoyed since before the beginning
- Resurrection is a key step along that path of redemption
 - It proved His claims to deity, and it opened the door for our own rebirth into new sinless living
 - That new spiritual birth and physical resurrection sets us on a course of eternal fellowship and reigning with Christ
 - And once Christ has ruled to the extinction of all God's enemies, then the next phase of eternity will begin

- A glorious endless age of living with and enjoying the fullness of God in the new heavens and earth
- And it all began with a resurrection
 - The risen Lord Who promises we will share in His future by faith in His promises
 - Our own promise of resurrection begins with our confession of faith in Christ as Lord
- How can we call ourselves Christian and live in the hope of new life without a belief in the literal, physical resurrection of the dead body?
 - As Paul says in Romans 8

Rom. 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

1Corinthians 15D

- The reality of Resurrection is so important to the church, that Paul reserved his longest and most detailed defense in the letter to this topic
 - Up to v.28 Paul has argued three points:
 - The hope of resurrection lies at the heart of the Gospel, which the church believed by Paul's testimony
 - Christ Himself was raised, proving the reality of resurrection
 - Finally, Christ's very purpose in leaving Heaven to be born as a man was to conquer death by making a way for men to receive new, eternal bodies through resurrection
 - Certainly, these arguments are powerful evidence of the reality of resurrection, but Paul isn't done arguing his case
 - Next, Paul points out two examples where the actions of the Corinthian church were in contradiction with their beliefs against resurrection
 - The first example is found in v.29

1Cor. 15:29 Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?

- Paul begins with the word otherwise, meaning "If resurrection isn't true, then..."
 - If it isn't true, why are you baptizing for the dead?
- This phrase is potentially confusing
 - In fact, the Mormon religion has misunderstood this phrase to the point of creating a bizarre, false doctrine
 - Joseph Smith and his followers invented the practice of researching family genealogies to discover the names of family members who died without believing in the Mormon religion
 - Then in secret rituals, the Mormons perform a "baptism" on behalf of these dead relatives, thinking they have given them eligibility to enter the Mormon version of heaven

- They came to this ridiculous practice from this one verse, thinking that Paul was advocating for baptisms for the dead
- We don't have to be Bible scholars to recognize the errors in the Mormon heresy
 - First, we know the Bibles teaches that following death comes judgment without the possibility of second chances
 - Hebrews says:

Heb. 9:27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,

- God has appointed that men die and He has appointed that our physical death is followed by eternal judgment
- Therefore, there are no backup plans or escape clauses
- Secondly, we know every man or woman will be judged according to their own faith and decisions

Ezek. 18:20 “The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.

Ezek. 18:21 “But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

Ezek. 18:22 “All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live.

- We each stand or fall on the basis of our own righteousness
 - A righteousness we receive by faith in Christ
 - No one can be saved by the decisions of another person
 - I can save you and you can't save me, whether before or after I die
 - A parent can't save an infant by baptizing them
 - Nor can a child save a dead parent by some silly Mormon ritual

- So if v.29 isn't talking about baptizing dead people, what is Paul talking about and how does it reinforce the truth of resurrection?
 - Let's take a second look at the text again
 - Paul asks what will those do who are baptized for the dead?
 - Paul is speaking of water baptism that every believer undergoes following their profession of faith
 - Water baptism was given to the Church by Christ to communicate a picture concerning death and resurrection
 - When we enter the water and someone submerges our body, we are testifying to our belief that our sinful nature was put to death with Christ through our faith
 - And when that person lifts us out of the water, we are testifying to our hope that one day Christ will raise our dead bodies to eternal life
 - Baptism always requires a second person to conduct the ritual to illustrate that we cannot save ourselves
 - We depended on the Lord to lay in our grave in our place
 - And we rely on the Spirit to raise us into a new body
 - So Paul asks why is this church practicing baptism for the dead if they don't believe in resurrection?
 - Paul's question makes more sense when we add a missing phrase that's implied but unstated in Paul's wording

1Cor. 15:29 Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the resurrection of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?

- Paul is asking why this church continues to practice water baptism if they don't believe in the resurrection from the dead?
- If they don't believe in resurrection, then why do they perform a water baptism that illustrates a belief in resurrection?
- Paul's second example of their behavior contradicting their beliefs is vs.30-32

1Cor. 15:30 Why are we also in danger every hour?

1Cor. 15:31 I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

1Cor. 15:32 If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE.

- Paul asks why are he and the other apostles - indeed all Christians - placing themselves in harms way for the sake of the Gospel if resurrection isn't true?
 - The apostles remained in danger every hour of the lives
 - They were hunted down, imprisoned, beaten, starved
 - They were never at ease and always at risk
 - In fact, Paul says in v.31 that because of his work in founding the church in Corinth, he received even more persecution
 - So then Paul asks why would he choose to live this way if his body in this life were all any man was to receive?
 - It must mean that he was working for human motives, for certainly there would be no spiritual reason to persevere so much
 - Paul says in v.32 that if working for the Gospel only produced rewards in this lifetime, then why would he have risked his neck?
 - The phrase "wild beasts" doesn't mean animals
 - It's a euphemistic reference to the enemies of the Gospel in Ephesus, where Paul was as he wrote this letter
 - So why take these risks if resurrection is a lie?
 - Instead, it would have been far more sensible to adopt Solomon's perspective that we wring every last ounce of physical enjoyment out of earthly lives for as long as we can
 - For when we die it all comes to an end
 - But that's not what Paul and the other apostles did
 - Instead, they fought hard against the Gospel's enemies in Ephesus and elsewhere to ensure they pleased the Lord and served Him well

- And they took their risks with the earthly lives because they understood that the abundant life Christ promises is the life that follows resurrection, not the one that precedes it
- It's the only explanation for why Paul would place himself in harm's way time and time again for the Gospel
- The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is a beautiful testimony of saint after saint who sacrificed their earthly life in faith to God's promises of resurrection
 - As the writer summarizes

Heb. 11:35 Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; Heb. 11:36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.

Heb. 11:37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated

Heb. 11:38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

Heb. 11:39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised,

Heb. 11:40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

- The writer says these OT saints accepted even greater persecution for the sake of a "better" resurrection
 - How can a resurrection be made better?
 - The writer is referring to a better reward in the resurrected life
 - We may receive greater rewards in the Kingdom because of greater obedience, sacrifice and faithfulness now
- But if the Corinthian church truly believed that resurrection was a lie, then they should have been living according to that belief
 - They shouldn't sacrifice for the Gospel
 - They should have been using their one life to live it up, since there was no future life, no future body, no future reward to earn

- But they weren't doing that
- They were preaching no resurrection, but they were attempting to live in obedience in the hope of a reward
- Once again, their behavior and beliefs were in opposition
- Paul asks these questions to highlight the contradictions in Corinth, but in the process Paul has exposed an even bigger problem in the church
 - He's exposed the spiritual immaturity of the church
 - The church didn't understand the meaning of the rituals they performed or the rewards they sought
 - And by their ignorance, they contradicted their own beliefs
 - They proved the adage that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing
 - While it's easy for us to chuckle at the ignorance of the Corinthian church, we need to be careful about pointing fingers too quickly
 - The Lord ensured Paul's letter found its way into the canon of scripture for good reason
 - Because today's church is not that much different from the one Paul founded in Corinth
 - We can still find plenty of examples of belief and behavior contradicting in Christian practice today
 - Some churches practice baptism by sprinkling, proving they don't understand how baptism pictures of death and resurrection of the body
 - Some churches feature altars in the sanctuary, even though altars imply sacrifices which Christians maintain are no longer needed
 - Some churches tell believers to seek for a filling of the Holy Spirit after coming to faith, yet the Bible teaches that faith itself comes as a result the indwelling of the Spirit
 - The list goes on, but the root cause is always the same in every case

- Any time our church practices are disconnected from the authority and instruction of scripture, we're going in the wrong direction
- Sooner or later, our behaviors will come into conflict with the beliefs we claim to hold
- Before we know it, we're wise in our own estimation
- Instead following the Lord by His word, we're in danger of becoming followers of denominations, signs and wonders, styles of worship or worse - cults, heresies and the like
- Paul calls the church to seek for better influences and better theology

1Cor. 15:33 Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."

1Cor. 15:34 Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

- Paul warns don't be led astray by this kind of false teaching
 - And Paul quotes a popular phrase of his day
 - Bad company corrupts good morals
 - The quote comes from a stage comedy by the Greek playwright Euripides, and it was so popular in Paul's day that it had become a proverb
 - It's still well known today because of Paul's quotation
- When we associate with the wrong people, we'll find ourselves adopting their bad thinking and practices
 - If we associate with bad teachers, we're going to fill our heads with false teaching
 - If we associate with immature and misled congregations, we're going to become spiritually immature and misled ourselves
 - If we associate with corrupt and fleshly Christians, we're likely to be pulled into sinful choices
 - No one remains immune from these influences once we place ourselves under their influence

- Paul admonishes the church in the severest terms yet in v.34 telling them to start thinking in spiritually mature ways and stop sinning
 - What was their sin in this case?
 - Well, among other things, clinging to unbiblical theology in the light of better teaching is a sin
 - When the Lord brings us the truth by His word and we stubborn choose to hold onto to contrary views we're sinning
 - We're demonstrating self-importance, pride and disobedience to the word of God
 - We can get away with protecting our pride for only so long
 - For one day, the Lord will expose us at the judgment
 - But we don't have to choose spiritual ruin
 - Instead, we can humble ourselves, concede to the truth and become sober-minded
 - Paul says there were those in the church who had no knowledge of God and it was to their shame
 - He's not saying they didn't know the Lord, as in were unbelieving
 - He's saying they were utterly ignorant of the Lord's teaching...of scripture
 - They were professing to teach the truth, but their were fools
 - They were proving James' teaching true, that not many should desire to be teachers
 - Educating others concerning the Lord and His word is an unforgiving, demanding task in the church, and nothing is more important
 - This poor church was being led by fools without a clue, and they were bringing many others down with them

1Corinthians 15E

- It's time for Paul to wrap up his teaching on resurrection
 - He's rebuked those in Corinth who would suggest resurrection isn't possible
 - He's explained its importance to the Gospel
 - He's reminded them of Christ's own resurrection
 - He's explained the centrality of resurrection to Jesus' mission of reversing Adam's mistake
 - And he's shown the church that their cherished Christian rituals point to the reality of resurrection
 - So all that's left is for Paul to explain to the church the manner of their coming resurrection
 - Because at the heart of the church's doubts was a lack of appreciation for how the Lord can accomplish something so incredible
 - How can it be possible for a dead body that's been decomposing in the grave for centuries to return to a living vessel?
 - The seeming impossibility of it all was probably the main reason the church succumbed to this false teaching
- Let's see how Paul answers these objections

1Cor. 15:35 But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?"

1Cor. 15:36 You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies;

1Cor. 15:37 and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else.

1Cor. 15:38 But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.

- In v.35 Paul refers to a person asking how the dead will be raised and what kind of body they will have?
 - It's important to understand the tone of the question as Paul repeats it

- This was a question begin asked by those in Corinth who didn't believe in resurrection
- The question itself was intended to mock the very idea of resurrection
- Put another way, the questioner was asking, "How could it even be possible for God to raise a dead body? Imagine the condition of such a body!"
- The question pointed to the decaying process of dead bodies and to the destructive nature of death itself to discredit the idea of resurrection
 - How can a body that's decomposed be brought to life?
 - Or what if that body is totally burned up?
 - Or what if the body is crushed by a rock or eaten by an animal?
 - Can you imagine the condition of such a resurrected body? Therefore, resurrection must be a ridiculous idea
 - Paul repeats the question here so he can answer this objection
- Notice his response begins with a strong statement: he calls those who harbor such thinking "fools"
 - At first glance we might wonder if it was proper for Paul to issue such a strong rebuke
 - Elsewhere Jesus said that the one who calls another a fool has sinned

Matt. 5:22 "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ' You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You **fool**,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

- But the context in this case makes clear Paul was not sinning in his use of this strong rebuke
- The meaning of the word fool in scripture is a person who discounts or excludes the power of God
- As Psalms says:

Psa. 53:1 The **fool** has said in his heart, “There is no God,”

They are corrupt, and have committed abominable injustice;
There is no one who does good.

- In Matthew 5:22 Jesus gave an example of someone who uses the term fool in hateful manner to slander a brother
 - But here Paul is using the term in it's technical sense, as a description of this person's sinful mindset
 - Truly, the Corinthian church was discounting and ignoring the power of God when they claimed resurrection was impossible
 - They argued a believer wouldn't receive a new body, and in the process they were dismissing God's ability to do things beyond what we can imagine
 - So Paul wasn't uttering a hateful insult, as Jesus described
 - He was correctly labeling the mistaken thinking of the Corinthians
- Then in the second half of v.36, Paul moves to answering this foolish objection by reminding them of God's power to do the very thing they have been denying
 - Paul draws a comparison to another kind of resurrection involving seeds and plants
 - It's tempting to call this example metaphoric, but it's far more than metaphor
 - Paul's example of seeds yielding new life is a type of resurrection that transcends mere illustration
 - Paul is pointing out the miraculous power of God to turn one physical form into another, something that's evident in the everyday cycle of life on earth
 - Looking at Paul's example, God designed the reproduction of plants to depend on the implanting of seeds into the earth
 - Paul picks up on that pattern to teach that nothing new comes to life until it is first buried in the ground
 - But Paul says take note that the thing that we bury bears no resemblance physically to the plant that appears later

- In fact, you can't predict the appearance of a plant by looking at its seed
- God has chosen to assign a certain "body" or physical appearance to each plant as He wished
 - And that body originates from an earlier body - a seed - that is completely unlike itself
 - God makes this transformation happen around us everyday, and we take it for granted without giving it a second thought
 - Yet the critics of resurrection overlooked this daily miraculous transformation even as they claimed God can't grant us knew bodies after our present body is buried
- Furthermore, once the new plant arrives, the seed that produced it is gone
 - It's not as though the old seed remains in the ground
 - The seed is literally transformed into the new body of the plant
 - And that new plant body is not only different from the seed in appearance, but it's much larger
 - Which means the material for the plant comes from somewhere beyond the materials present in the original seed
 - All these elements in Paul's example demonstrate God can use one thing to create something wholly new and different without being dependent on the structure, appearance or condition of the original material
- Next Paul broadens his examples beyond seeds and plants to address the vastness of God's creative powers

1Cor. 15:39 All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish.

1Cor. 15:40 There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another.

1Cor. 15:41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

- Paul reminds us that God's palette for creating physical bodies is vast and limitless

- Consider the universe of “bodies” we can observe to exist
- The bodies of men are different than that of animals, birds, fish, etc.
- The celestial bodies of the universe vary tremendously in physical construction from the sun to the moon and rest of the stars in the sky
- They differ in size, brightness, etc.
- If God can make a universe so diverse in appearance, why would we have reason to doubt His ability to construct a new body for us?
- Therefore, when the time comes for the Lord to assign each of us our resurrected body, He won’t be constrained by the condition or appearance of our first body
 - He isn’t required to reassemble our new body from the same molecules in our original body
 - Instead, Paul says God will construct a body suitable for eternal life in a heavenly realm, which requires He use all new material
 - Just as our first body was suited for physical birth and a physical life on earth, so our eternal bodies must be designed to share an eternal life with Christ
 - Since our earth has been cursed because of sin, our new bodies cannot share any material in common with the present world
 - We must be created all new, in the likeness of Christ, if we are to live eternally
- Therefore, we will enter into our new bodies by the power of God rather than by a physical birth
 - While our first body was made from the material of our parent’s bodies, our new body must be made in the likeness of Christ’s body
 - Just as our new spirit was born again in the likeness of Christ’s Spirit
 - The material for our new body will have a new, eternal source
 - Something beyond the present cursed creation

- Because our new body has a new purpose, it will have a new construction

1Cor. 15:42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body;

1Cor. 15:43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;

1Cor. 15:44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

1Cor. 15:45 So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

1Cor. 15:46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual.

1Cor. 15:47 The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven.

1Cor. 15:48 As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly.

1Cor. 15:49 Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

- In our new existence, Paul says we will be imperishable
 - The Greek word for perishable means corrupt or killed
 - Our first body was constructed from materials that were already corrupted
 - Adam's sin placed all mankind in a state of corruption, of sin
 - His body and spirit became damaged goods, and therefore our first body was damaged goods too
 - But the new body we will receive at the resurrection will find its source in Christ, so that He will construct for us a new, perfect body
 - And it will be an imperishable body
 - The word imperishable means incorruptible
 - It cannot be corrupted
 - We will be held in a state of sinlessness by the power of Christ
- Paul reiterates the example of the seed to emphasize the contrast between old and new
 - The first body is sown (buried) in dishonor

- The dishonor of our present body is our weakness in sin
- Our present bodies are corrupt and our physical death is proof of that corruption
- But after that death and planting in the ground, we come to our state of glory
- We can see the death process as a process of bringing new life, a life of glory
- Likewise, a seed is small and weak compared to the strength of the plant that emerges
 - So will our new body be strong in the face of temptation to sin
 - We will never again experience the weakness of sin'
 - We will enjoy Christ's power in us to obey in perfection
- While our original body was natural, living according to the desires of the flesh
 - Our new body will be spiritual, driven to serve and please the living God
 - Our thoughts and desires will be according to His nature, rather than according to a sinful nature
- And if we have experienced an earthly, sinful existence, then we can be sure we will also experience the heavenly, eternal life that follows
 - Just as the seed experienced an existence of one kind, so will that seed know a new existence as a plant living a new life
 - Seeing Paul's example fit so perfectly in describing resurrection should give us pause to wonder if God prepared the seed in Creation just to support this illustration
 - Did the Lord give us seeds leading to plants so that we might better grasp His power to resurrect our dead bodies?
 - It seems so
 - Which reminds us how much care God has given to ensuring His children are well-prepared for our coming resurrection
 - Today we bear the image of the earth

- We are made of dirt, as was Adam
- We are sinful as the Adam
- And our bodies are cursed to die, as is the entire earth
- But by our faith in Jesus Christ, we have reason to look forward to a new resurrected and heavenly life
 - We will be made of an eternal material
 - We will be perfect as Christ is perfect
 - And we will have escape the curse of death as Christ Himself conquered death
- And now Paul reveals one of the most powerful mysteries of the New Testament age: the manner of our resurrection

1Cor. 15:50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

1Cor. 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,

1Cor. 15:52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

1Cor. 15:53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

- First, Paul repeats that the bodies of this world are simple unable to enter into a heavenly realm
 - Our sinful natures bar us from entry into heaven
 - So that even though we have been saved by grace, our salvation cannot undue the sinful nature of our present bodies
 - Our bodies must be replaced so that we are prepared for the eternal life
 - And then in v.51 Paul begins to explain the manner of that replacement, unveiling a mystery to the church
 - The word mystery in the New Testament has a very specific meaning
 - The word doesn't mean something mysterious or confounding

- It means a truth concerning God's plan which was hidden from our understanding until an appointed time it is to be revealed
 - Paul was given the honor of revealing a total of 8 mysteries to the church
 - Here we see him revealing one of those 8 hidden truths: the manner of the resurrection
- To begin, Paul says we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed (often a phrase posted on church nursery walls)
 - Sleep is Paul's euphemism for physical death
 - The physical death of the body has long been described in polite, kind terms
 - Today, we speak of passing away, expiring, going home, etc.
 - In Paul's day, the popular euphemism was "to sleep" because the death of a body resembles someone sleeping
 - Paul says we will not all die
 - The we is a reference to the church saints (the believers in the church)
 - Not all church saints will experience a physical death
 - Most will obviously, and so far everyone has
 - But Paul tells us that God plans to allow some Christians to escape the death experience
 - Nevertheless, we all must be changed, Paul says
 - The Greek word for changed can also carry the meaning of being exchanged
 - We must all give up our current body for the eternal body, as Paul has explained already
 - For most Christians, that change involves first the death of the body followed by a receiving of a new body at some later point
- But for some Christians, the new body will come by way of an exchange without the death of the first body
 - This exchange happens incredibly fast, virtually instantaneously

- In v.52 Paul says this exchange will come in a moment
- The Greek word for moment is atomos
 - It means an indivisible moment of time
 - We took our English word atom from this Greek word to describe an indivisible particle
- Paul adds that it will be in the twinkling of an eye, which is that brief flash of light reflected by a person's eye
- So the moment we exchange our old body for our new body involves practically no time passing...it's instantaneous
 - Next, Paul says it happens at the last trumpet
 - The reference to a last trumpet is a statement that any practicing Jew in Israel would immediately recognize
 - It's a reference to the Jewish feast of Trumpets or Rosh Hashanah
 - It is the first of the Fall feast on the Jewish calendar
 - The feast begins with a series of trumpet blasts and ends with one long, great blast called the *tekiah gedolah*
 - Paul's reference to this trumpet indicates that the Feast of Trumpets is fulfilled by the resurrection of the Church
 - Some have concluded that the trumpet mentioned here is a reference to the trumpet judgments in the first half of tribulation, but this possibility is precluded by the timing of the books of the canon
 - When Paul wrote this letter, the book of Revelation had yet to be written
 - So the Corinthian church (and likely Paul himself) had no knowledge of the coming trumpet judgments of tribulation
 - Yet Paul says "the trumpet" as if he expected his audience in Corinth to know about this specific trumpet
 - The only trumpet known to Paul and the church in his day would have been the last trumpet blown at Rosh Hashanah
- As the trumpet associated with Rosh Hashanah blows, the resurrection will begin

- First, Paul says those Christians who have already died by the time this moment arrives will be the first to receive their new eternal bodies
 - Until this moment, these Christians have been without a physical body since the day their bodies died
 - They have existed as spirits only, present in the heavenly realm with the Lord waiting for this day
 - At the commencement of the resurrection, the Lord rewards their waiting by assigning them new bodies before anyone else
 - They are raised, that is resurrected, into imperishable bodies, just as Paul has described earlier
- Next, those who are alive will undergo the exchange of old bodies for new bodies
 - This process is explained in a little more detail in another of Paul's letters written years later to a church in Asia Minor

1Th. 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.

1Th. 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

1Th. 4:15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

1Th. 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

1Th. 4:17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

1Th. 4:18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

- Once again, Paul reassures the church that those who have already died in faith will not be left out of the resurrection
- In fact, they will be the first to be raised, meeting the Lord in the air
- And then we who remain (alive) are then caught up to meet Christ in the air to join the others in our new incorruptible bodies
- Why does the Lord orchestrate the manner of our resurrection in such a unique process, one that permits some believers to bypass physical death?

- There are two reasons as I see it...first, it's about numbers
 - Paul says that the church is a temporary fixture intended to bring Israel to jealousy
 - We get what Israel could have had, and we exist for a time to illustrate the Lord's kindness to a stubborn and disobedient Israel
 - But then Paul says once the Gentile church reaches its appointed number, the church has met its purpose and must end

Rom. 11:25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery – so that you will not be wise in your own estimation – that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;

- When the fullness (or complete number) of Gentiles has been reached, the church will be removed from the scene
 - The sudden resurrection of the church is designed to bring that conclusion precisely at an appointed number
 - The Lord doesn't wait for the last Christian to die naturally
 - He simply brings the end in a moment according to His timing
- Which is the second reason for a sudden departure of the church
 - It creates a sense of urgency and unpredictability to the event
 - If God waited until all Christians had died, then we would have no reason to be watching for the Lord's return much less to be ready for that moment
 - We would all simply just be waiting for our deaths, which drives far less urgency than it should
- Instead, the Lord warned us that His return for the Church is a ever-present possibility, one we must be ready for at any time

Matt. 24:42 "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.

Matt. 24:43 "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into.

Matt. 24:44 "For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.

- Our removal will be a surprise so that we have good reason to be attentive to the Lord's commands while we wait
- Take nothing for granted; use everyday to please Him
- Finally, Paul wraps up his lesson on resurrection with a praise to the Lord for His plan to put an end to our mortality

1Cor. 15:54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory.

1Cor. 15:55 " O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?"

1Cor. 15:56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law;

1Cor. 15:57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

- God's plan of redemption in Christ promises that His death and resurrection has won the victory over our enemy Death
 - But that victory won't be evident to us personally until our own death has been conquered
 - And the resurrection is the moment when death is swallowed up forever
 - Imagine death forever removed from your thinking
 - Imagine a day when your mortality and the mortality of others around you is completely removed from your mind and your experience, never to trouble you again
- Paul says the sting of death is sin
 - The Greek for sting means a stinger, the sharp point of attack
 - So the instrument of death's attack is our sin
 - Our sin is the "stinger" that set death into our flesh
 - And the power of that stinger comes because of God's Law
 - The power of the Law is in its ability to condemn men for their sin
- But the Lord granted us victory by meeting the requirement of the Law and also paying the penalty it required for sin...he won our victory over death
 - Thanks be to God for winning this victory for us!



1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 16

Chapter 16

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lesson-16](http://versebyversemistry.org/lessons/1corinthians-2013-lesson-16)

- Today we study the 16th and final chapter of Paul's letter
 - With it comes Paul's answers to the final two questions he was asked through Chloe's delegation
 - The first question concerns the proper manner for giving for the needs of the saints
 - The second question concerns the possible return of Apollos to Corinth
 - Lastly, Paul wraps up the letter with some words of encouragement to the church and instructions on obeying leaders
 - The correction of the letter is behind us at this point
 - All that remains is instruction on these points as Paul brings his letter to a close
- Paul opens the chapter with the familiar “now concerning” phrase, which indicates we are moving away from the prior topic of resurrection and into a new topic

1Cor. 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.

1Cor. 16:2 On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.

1Cor. 16:3 When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem;

1Cor. 16:4 and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.

- The next question the church asked Paul to address was the proper manner for the collection of the saints
 - Paul's answer gives us the opportunity to examine the biblical expectation for how we are to support the body of Christ financially
 - One of the reasons I am dedicated to preaching and teaching in a verse-by-verse style rather than in a topical style is the freedom it gives me to address sensitive topics
 - As we move through books of the Bible teaching the whole counsel of God, inevitably we will come across a topic that we don't want to hear
 - Topics that cause us to become defensive or even angry
 - When a topical teacher raises one of these issues on some Sunday, we're tempted by our flesh to accuse the preacher of having an agenda
 - Rather than crediting the Holy Spirit with drawing our attention to a problem in our thinking or behavior, we tell ourselves that the pastor was just picking a fight for selfish reasons
 - And on the basis of that thinking, we find our excuse to dismiss whatever instructions the teacher offers from scripture
- The opening topic of Chapter 16 is a good example of one of these sensitive topics
 - Some of us may have been conditioned through past experiences to react negatively to any discussion of giving

- We may assume the pastor wants more money for himself
- Or for his ambitious grandiose building plans
- So we brace ourselves for the guilt trip that we know must be coming
- And as a result we close our ears and hearts to the conviction of the Holy Spirit
- On the other hand, when you and I have been studying a book of the Bible verse-by-verse, everything changes
 - Both the audience and the teacher are constrained by the text of scripture
 - We must address whatever topics we find on each page
 - Verse-by-verse teaching ensures that ears and hearts remain open, since at least they can't impugn the motives of the teacher
 - Whatever else you might say, you can't say I chose this topic for personal reasons
 - The Holy Spirit chose it, and so we should all be listening closely
- The church in Corinth was unclear on the expectations for Christian giving, so they ask Paul to clarify the practice
 - Paul's answer will surprise many Christians, both for what he says and for what he doesn't say
 - Paul says in v.1 that he is giving the church in Corinth the same instructions he gave to the church in Galatia
 - This comment is important because it shows us that Paul was teaching a consistent approach to giving throughout the New Testament church
 - These are not unique instructions for just one church or situation
 - This is Paul's prescribed manner for giving for all churches, including ours today
 - Then in v.2 Paul gives us the manner for giving
 - Before we look at his instructions, let's take a moment to reflect on how little Paul says on this topic
 - To my knowledge, this is the only verse in all of the New Testament letters that specifically addresses the manner of giving in the church
 - One verse only
 - To be sure, Jesus speaks extensively about money in the Gospels
 - He talks about the need to be generous, selfless and unattached to our money
 - He speaks of storing up treasure in Heaven and not merely on earth
 - He speaks of being a good steward and caring for the needs of others
 - But when we ask what are the rules for how to fulfill these expectations with our giving, we find only this one verse
 - Now consider how much preaching takes place on this topic
 - Something's wrong when preachers are far more fixated on Christian giving than the Bible is
- Also, take note that a certain word is missing from Paul's directions

- That word is tithe or tithing
 - Tithe is a word that means one tenth
 - The common teaching in the church today is that Israel was required to give one tenth of their income to God
 - Therefore, today Christians are required to give one tenth of their income to the church
 - In reality, neither idea is biblically correct
- The word tithe first appears in the Bible in Genesis 14
 - It describes Abraham's contribution to Melchizedek from the war spoils he obtained defending Lot
 - Abraham gave one tenth as a thanks to God
- Later in the covenant given to Israel, the Lord incorporated the concept of tithing into the Law
 - But Israel was required to give far more than one tenth to the Lord
 - In reality, the Law contains three separate tithing requirements for Israel
 - In Numbers 18, Israel was required to give a tithe to support the priests
 - In Deuteronomy 12 the nation was required to give an additional tithe to support the three feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles
 - And in Deuteronomy 14 the nation was required to give a third tithe for the poor
 - Taken together, these tithing requirements amounted to upwards of 30% of a Jew's income
- So if someone is to argue that Christians should repeat the pattern of Israel, then be careful what you wish for
 - Because we're signing up to a commitment well beyond just ten percent
 - We're signing up for 30%
- Of course, the Christian is not bound by the Law of Moses
 - That law was given to Israel as part of their Old Covenant
 - Paul tells us in numerous places that if we are under the grace of the New Covenant, then we are not under the Law of Moses
 - Therefore, the tithing requirements of the Old Covenant are not the standard for our giving today
 - In fact, we can't tithe as required under the Law, because the institutions designated by the Lord to receive Israel's tithes don't exist any longer
 - The Jewish priesthood does not exist today
 - And the temple is not operating
 - So without these institutions in existence, it is literally impossible to tithe according to the Law
 - This is why Paul never uses the word tithe in any of his letters
 - In fact, the concept of tithing is completely missing from the New Testament

- The Bible never commands a Christian to tithe
- So if you have ever heard a Bible teacher or preacher tell you that we have an obligation to “tithe” that is to give 10% to the church, then you have not heard the truth according to scripture
 - Because tithing in Israel meant 30%, not 10%
 - Secondly, tithing was a prescription for Israel only, and it’s never repeated to the New Testament Christian
- So with that background, we’re now in a position to consider Paul’s instructions with an open mind for what the Christian should do to demonstrate a generous heart
 - First, Paul asks the church to put aside money in savings on the first of every week
 - The mention of the first of the week is a measure of regularity and consistency
 - I don’t believe Paul is intending to prescribe the exact interval or day of the week for our setting aside
 - I believe his point is that we are to be diligent and committed to setting aside some of our income on a regular basis in order to give it away
 - Notice again that Paul never designates an amount
 - He doesn’t say how much we set aside because the New Testament believer has liberty in this area of life
 - We set aside whatever amount the Lord places on our heart
 - If you feel led to set aside 10%, then so be it
 - If you feel led to give more or less, than do so
 - Whatever you do, you must be convinced in your own heart that it is what the Lord is asking from you
 - But notice in the next part of v.2 Paul says we should set aside as we prosper
 - In other words, as our income rises and falls, so should our setting aside
 - In good months and good years, we are expected to become more generous
 - And in lean times, we are expected to adjust our saving accordingly
 - This only makes sense of course, but while it’s often easy to adjust downward, don’t forget to adjust back upward when business picks up
- Next, Paul says that no collection was to be made when Paul arrived in Corinth
 - When Paul arrived in any city, like Corinth, he always asked the church to make a contribution for the needs of the next church on Paul’s itinerary
 - Notice in vs.3-4 Paul mentioned his intention to take a contribution from Corinth to the believers in Jerusalem when he departs
 - When Paul left the church in Macedonia to travel to Corinth for the first time, the believers in Macedonia gave a contribution to Paul to fund his work in Corinth
 - Paul reminded this church of their generosity in his next letter

2Cor. 8:1 Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,

2Cor. 8:2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.

2Cor. 8:3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord,

2Cor. 8:4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,

2Cor. 8:5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

- The church in Macedonia was poor while the people in Corinth were wealthy
 - Nevertheless the believers in Macedonia wanted to support Paul's work in the Gospel
 - Later in 2 Corinthians, Paul turns the tables on the church in Corinth asking them to support the poor believers in Macedonia
 - But Paul didn't want these collections taken merely on the occasion of his visits
 - He didn't want his arrival to be the cause for the church's giving behavior
 - He wanted the Church's giving behavior to be consistent, not based on circumstances
 - More importantly, Paul's ministry was funded by those who had benefited from God's work in a previous day
 - Paul never burdened those he was serving at the time
 - Verse By Verse Ministry International follows this same pattern
 - We never ask for funds from those we serve as we serve them
 - Instead, we depend on the generosity of those who have been blessed by our work in the past and want to ensure others may be blessed in the future
 - That was Paul's pattern
- Lastly, notice where our giving is to go: into our own savings
 - The believer is called to save up privately for the needs of the saints
 - We set aside a portion of our income into a fund designated for the needs of the saints
 - Then as needs are brought to our attention, we have a ready resource from which to fund our giving
 - There is no requirement in scripture that our giving go automatically to a single institution or body
 - There is no expectation in scripture that churches have bank accounts with large balances that we sustain
 - We don't depend on the church to hand out funds on our behalf
 - We should take an active part in that distribution
 - On the other hand, remember the three reasons the Lord told Israel to tithe
 - They were called to support the needs of the priests and temple

- To care for those who dedicated themselves to ministering to the nation in corporate worship
- They were called to support the feast celebrations in Israel
 - To support the corporate activities of the body
- And they were called to support the poor in Israel
 - To care for the needs of those who lacked what we have received from the Lord in abundance
- These three reasons have parallels in the Christian experience
 - Like Israel, we set aside funds to support the needs of those who minister to us
 - We fund the operation of the church and the programs that provide us spiritual benefit
 - And we come to the aid of those in the church who have needs
- Of course, this system depends on our self-discipline and willingness to obey the Spirit
 - We must have the self discipline to store up regularly
 - We must be willing to obey the Spirit's prompting for how much to store
 - We must have the integrity not to rob from the fund recognizing it has become God's money
 - And we must have the generosity to distribute the funds as the Lord leads without hesitation
 - Like every experience in our Christian life, liberty gives us an opportunity to walk in the Spirit and in freedom
 - But the benefits of liberty depend on spiritual maturity
 - Liberty in the hands of an undisciplined, immature Christian leads to license to sin
 - And in the end, the one who suffers the most will be that Christian himself who abuses his liberty
 - When we walk in obedience, we will be blessed
- Next, Paul describes his travel plans with the church

1Cor. 16:5 **But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia;**

1Cor. 16:6 **and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go.**

1Cor. 16:7 **For I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits.**

1Cor. 16:8 **But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost;**

1Cor. 16:9 **for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.**

1Cor. 16:10 **Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am.**

1Cor. 16:11 **So let no one despise him. But send him on his way in peace, so that**

he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren.

1Cor. 16:12 **But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity.**

- Paul wrote this letter while he was working with Timothy in Ephesus, and as he wrote he planned to travel north to Macedonia before returning to Corinth
 - He mentions these plans probably because his supporters in the city were looking forward to his return and wondered when it would happen
 - We know from 2 Corinthians, Paul changed his plans and went directly to Corinth from Ephesus
 - He did spend a winter with them as he promised, but it was a year later than he expected
 - He says he wanted to spend time with them, probably because he has seen the need to deal with so many apparent problems
 - His reference to Pentecost means he wrote this in Spring, but it also suggests that Paul's religious year was still driven primarily by the Jewish feasts
 - In v.9, Paul speaks of a great opportunity in Ephesus which requires he spend more time in that city
 - He describes the opportunity as an open door, which is a favorite metaphor meaning opportunity for people to know the Gospel
 - And yet that occasion is accompanied by many adversaries
 - This is a very different attitude than we may encounter in the logic of the church today
 - Today, when we encounter many adversaries or opposition, we often declare the door of opportunity is closed
 - Strong resistance is interpreted as a reason to pause or re-evaluate our plans
 - But the true measure of opportunity in ministry is the amount of fruit available, not the ease with which we harvest it
 - Paul was determined to stay in Ephesus because he saw great opportunity with Timothy
 - And the great resistance he faced was all the more reason for Paul to remain and fight for the Gospel
- Speaking of Timothy, Paul tells the church he will send Timothy in his place, and they must receive him as they received Paul
 - He asks them not to despise Timothy
 - That's quite the endorsement of Timothy
 - Paul is simply speaking honestly knowing the Greek culture placed an emphasis on strength and age, neither of which Timothy possessed
 - Timothy was young and prone to stomach problems
 - He wasn't going to strike a powerful image in Corinth, but Paul sent him anyway because he knew the Lord was working in Timothy in a great way

- Perhaps this was Paul's strategy
- Perhaps Paul intentionally sent someone in his place, who the Corinthians would not be tempted to idolize as they had Paul and Apollos
- This is another perspective Verse By Verse Ministry International tries to emulate
- To the extent possible, we want to diminish my profile and the profile of other teachers to guard against encouraging a celebrity mindset among those who hear our teaching
- You can see that celebrity mindset in the Corinthian church, to a degree, when they ask Paul the final question of the letter in v.12
 - While some wanted to know when Paul was returning, others wanted to know when Apollos was returning
 - Remembering that the letter began with the Paul vs. Apollos argument, here we see those factions still seeking for their respective hero
- Paul answers their question, saying that he encouraged Apollos to come back, but Apollos had no interest in returning at this time
 - Paul's strong statement seems designed to reassure Apollos' followers that Paul was not to blame for Apollos' reluctance to return
 - We don't know Apollos' reasons nor do we know if he ever did return
 - But I suspect that Apollos was staying away to avoid feeding the unhealthy desires of his "followers" in that city
 - Apollos didn't want followers any more than Paul did
 - Both men wanted the church to follow Christ alone
- Then to finish the letter, Paul gives a few instructions and greetings to the church

1Cor. 16:13 Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

1Cor. 16:14 Let all that you do be done in love.

1Cor. 16:15 Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints),

1Cor. 16:16 that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.

1Cor. 16:17 I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part.

1Cor. 16:18 For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.

1Cor. 16:19 The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

1Cor. 16:20 All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

1Cor. 16:21 The greeting is in my own hand — Paul.

1Cor. 16:22 If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha.

1Cor. 16:23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

1Cor. 16:24 My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

- I really like Paul's direct commands in vs.13-14
 - Given all that's been said in this letter
 - All the critique, admonishment, correction...
 - Still Paul wants to make sure the church is stirred to walk with the Spirit in confidence, not defeated or discouraged
 - He tells them to be alert
 - To maintain eyes for eternity
 - To recognize the urgency of the times, the needs to remain soberly mindful of their coming judgment
 - To stand firm in the faith
 - To have courage and assurance in what they believe and in WHO they believe
 - To act like men, which is to say to be mature in their thinking concerning spiritual things
 - Paul does not mean think like men, not like women
 - He means think like men, not like children
 - The Greeks admired wisdom, so Paul says let's aim for spiritual wisdom
 - To be strong
 - The Greeks admired physical strength
 - But Paul says let's aim for spiritual strength
 - A strength built upon spiritual wisdom
 - Most of all, act in love
 - The love God showed to us in the face of Christ must become the source for our love to others
 - Self-sacrificial, selfless, intended to unite not divide
- Paul's last instruction involves how the church would receive other leaders in the church who might visit them from time to time
 - Specifically, Paul mentions Stephanas and two other men who come to Corinth
 - This delegation may have accompanied Paul's letter of reply to Corinth
 - Paul sent along these instructions so that as the letter was read, these men have been seen to receive Paul's endorsement
 - These men had proven themselves to Paul, so Paul tells the church to acknowledge these men
 - He wants them to acknowledge their authority
 - Moreover, he wants them to subject themselves to their authority as they minister to the church
 - Paul's instruction reaffirms that men may be assigned authority in the church and that authority follows them into other congregations
 - That's why we say once an elder, always an elder
 - But that authority extends from their character and their work ethic, to be

committed to devotion to ministry

- Then Paul ends the letter with greetings, intended to unify the church and encourage them to think as a single body geographically distributed across the globe
 - Paul mentioned Aquila and Priscilla, the couple that came from Rome to join Paul in ministering in Corinth before leaving with Paul for Ephesus
 - Their home in Corinth had become a house church
 - Now it's clear they were using their house in Ephesus as another church
 - Their model is the ideal model for the church in any day
 - A couple ministering together, devoting their lives to ministry
 - Using their resources for the glory of God
 - Setting up shop wherever the Lord sends them
 - Then Paul extends a general greeting and kiss from all the brethren in Ephesus
 - Paul ends his letter taking the pen from the scribe who wrote on his behalf
 - This one line written in his own hand validated his authorship
 - In the next line, Paul gives a final strong warning to the church
 - That should anyone fail to show love for Christ, then this person is revealing themselves to be accursed
 - They are not a believer, and therefore we must see them as infiltrators in the church
 - Paul finishes the thought with *maranatha*, which is Aramaic for Oh Lord come
 - Paul writes it here in Aramaic, a language largely unknown in Greek society
 - This tells us that the word had become a Christian expression like Hallelujah is today
- Paul ends the letter in a manner similar to the way he started
 - He extends grace to the church, just as he began by saying grace to you
 - No single word better expresses all that Paul taught or all that Christ has done for the church
 - Grace is favor shown without cause or merit
 - The church was called to live according to the grace the Lord extended to them
 - Showing each other favor without cause or merit
 - In doing so, they are showing the love of Christ, as Paul ends
 - The love of Christ be with us all