



STUDY NOTES

First Corinthians

“Solving Church Problems”

CHAPTERS 1-16

With

Questions on Each Chapter

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Foreword

Local churches have always had their problems of one kind or another. The Galatian churches were bothered by teachers who attempted to forge a compromise between the Law of Moses and the Gospel of Christ. The church at Colossae had difficulties with pagan philosophy and human traditions. Christians at Thessalonica were upset about several misconceptions concerning the second coming of Jesus. And the Hebrew converts were strongly tempted to abandon the better things they had received under the New Covenant and return to the Old Law from which they had been freed by the grace of God.

Corinth was no exception. The difference between it and most of the other congregations whose problems were addressed in the epistles was that it was beset by not one or two issues, but by no less than *seventeen* knotty questions about doctrine and practice. Human leaders had diluted the confidence that the members formerly had placed in Paul and other inspired evangelists and were actively opposing the apostle's authority to oversee their behavior in the church. Numerous personal differences existed among the congregation, sin was not being treated with the disdain it deserved, and some of the members were having far too much contact with their pagan friends and their pagan practices at the expense of the tender consciences of weak brethren. On top of everything else, some were losing faith in the realities of the bodily resurrection, and their spiritual anchor was in jeopardy. All in all, what Paul learned about the conditions at Corinth, soon after his first work there was concluded, painted a dismal picture, indeed. A lesser man would have become immediately discouraged and given up any hope for improvement. But Paul was no ordinary man. In addition to his mantle of apostleship, he possessed an uncommon courage and a determination to accomplish whatever task was laid upon him. He met the issues at Corinth headlong and dealt with each situation in a clear and unwavering manner.

The solutions Paul offered to the church problems at Corinth should give invaluable help to modern churches in the solutions of their problems, too. Problems remain pretty much the same in all ages where humans are involved. Only the details and the applications change. "Solving Church Problems" will continue to be done in much the same way as in the past. Just as in the first century, church problems will only be solved when Christians are willing to listen *only* to the voices of inspiration and follow their legislation unerringly.

It is my desire that the brief treatment given to the text of this practical New Testament book will be of assistance to those who are dedicated to serving God and "solving church problems."

--Reg Ginn, 2009

FIRST CORINTHIANS-- “Solving Church Problems”

INTRODUCTION

- I. The establishment of the church at Corinth is recorded in Acts 18:1-18.
 - A. Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, had come to Corinth from Rome under a decree by the emperor Claudius [A.D. 49-51] that banished all Jews from that city (verses 1,2).
 1. The common trade of tentmaking drew Paul to them; they lived and worked together.
 - B. Paul “persuaded” Jews and Greeks every Sabbath day (verse 4).
 1. Many Gentiles were persuaded and were obedient, but the Jews were not (verses 6-8).
 2. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, and his family were exceptions.
 - a. Crispus was one of a few whom Paul baptized personally (1Corinthians 1:14).
 - C. God encouraged Paul to be bold in his preaching (verse 9).
 1. There were “many people” who would be receptive to the gospel message (verse 10).
 2. Paul continued his efforts at Corinth for a year and six months.
 - D. Inadvertent support came to Paul from the Jews’ efforts to stop his work (verses 11-17).
 1. God had promised him protection from harm (verse 10).
 2. He kept that promise through Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia.
 - a. History credits Gallio with fair-mindedness and gentleness of spirit.
 3. Evil designs backfired on the designers; a synagogue ruler, Sosthenes, was beaten as the leader of the conspiracy, and Paul was freed.
 - E. Paul remained in Corinth “a good while” before departing for Syria (verse 18).
- II. Paul’s task of converting the Corinthians was extremely difficult (1Corinthians 2:3).
 - A. Corinth was a large city (400,000-600,000) bustling with many activities.
 1. It was very prosperous, utilizing two seaports for trade, and it had experienced a large influx of wealthy foreigners.
 2. It was conspicuous as the site of the Isthmian games which attracted large numbers of participants and spectators. See 1Corinthians 9:24-27.
 3. It was worldly-wise, with much attention given to philosophy, science, and art.
 - B. Corinth was the seat of an unusually sensual pagan religion.
 1. The temple of Venus had more than one thousand prostitutes serving “worshippers.”
 2. “To Corinthianize” was an expression signifying extremely disgraceful behavior.
 - C. Misplaced values posed a serious obstacle to the gospel’s influence in Corinth.
 1. People of rank and influence were unaffected by spiritual teaching (1:23,20).
 2. Common people were overly-affected by signs (1:22; 2:4) and tongue-speaking (13:1; 14:5) and unaffected by morals (5:1,2) and by the basic principles of the gospel (10:14, 20-21).
 - D. Paul harvested the fruits of eighteen months of “teaching them to observe all things...”
- III. Three or four years later, Paul was constrained to write a letter to the church at Corinth.
 - A. Many of the Christians were weak and vulnerable to moral sin and false teaching despite the time he had spent teaching them a “better way” (3:1,2; 12:31).

- B. False teachers had undermined Paul's influence as an apostle (2Corinthians 11).
- C. His teaching (e.g., chapter 15) and personal example (9:3-6) had been challenged.
- D. The work of false teachers had caused strife and doubt among church members.
- E. Paul had *heard* (1:11) of some problems, and certain members had *written* (7:1; 8:1; 9:3, etc.) to him about other issues.
- F. His reply evidently was carried to Corinth by Titus and a "brother" (2Cor.12:17,18) from Ephesus (16:8).

IV. First Corinthians is an epistle about "Solving Church Problems."

- A. Numerous problems were addressed by Paul, and *heavenly* solutions were offered.
- B. It would be interesting to know how many problems might have existed in the church at Corinth had Paul not worked and taught so diligently among the Christians there for a year and a half.

V. Paul's approach to "solving church problems" seems to have been:

- A. Be *open* and *admit* their existence;
- B. Deal with them *quickly* (5:4);
- C. Use *inspired* guidance for solutions;
- D. Everyone must try to have the *same mind* so as to enjoy *unity in truth* (1:10).

FIRST CORINTHIANS

“Solving Church Problems”

SECTION ONE-- 1:1-9

“A Greeting and a Challenge”

Verse 1-- “Paul, called to be an apostle...”

- a. Paul never forgot what his “calling” was. He had been sent to the Gentiles for their forgiveness from sin and their *inheritance* among the *sanctified* (Acts 26:15-18). This church was far from its goal of *sanctification* [to be “set apart” from the world around them], so Paul’s mission among them was not yet finished. This letter was intended to help them toward that goal.
- b. “...and Sosthenes our brother...” Was this the same “Sosthenes” who, as a ruler of a synagogue (Acts 18:17), had opposed Paul’s original work in Corinth? It would not be the last time that an active *opponent* of the gospel ultimately became one of its most active *proponents*!

Verse 2-- “To the church of God...”

- a. God’s “calling” for these Christians was as impelling as was Paul’s “calling.” They were called: (1) to be saints [sanctified]; (2) to “call on” the name [entrust themselves to the authority and power] of Jesus; (3) to acknowledge the Lordship of the Christ as being common to *all* believers, whether Jews or Gentiles.
- b. “called to be saints...” Sanctification is an essential goal for every Christian. However, it is more difficult for some to attain than for others, and it comes to all by degrees. It is acquired only through the hard work of “putting off” the sinful man and “putting on” the better man (Eph.2:3; 4:22-32).

Verses 4-9-- “I thank my God always concerning you...”

- a. Although this church demonstrated by its problems that sanctification was yet “a work in progress,” Paul could have good feelings about these people, because God had shown confidence in them by: (1) extending His grace to them; (2) “enriching” them with His spiritual gifts of knowledge and utterance [and likely *all nine* gifts--verse 7]; (3) giving them the opportunity to confirm the testimony of Christ through the utilization of those gifts.
- b. Blessings were theirs, despite their obvious weaknesses: (1) the Lord’s return was anticipated “eagerly;” (2) God would provide whatever was needed for their ongoing confirmation and blamelessness to the end; (3) God’s fellowship was assured [being dependent only on their own faithfulness].
- c. “Fellowship” is “joint participation” with Christ in all spiritual matters. Fellowship with Jesus involves sharing: (1) His feelings and views; (2) His trials and sufferings; (3) His resurrection to new life; (4) His reward of eternal glory.
- d. It has been noted that the name “Christ” appears more often in this book than in any other [nine times in these first nine verses]. Perhaps it was Paul’s intent to stress that name often in an effort to lessen their emphasis on other names.
- e. Men are “called” into fellowship with Christ through the gospel (2Thess. 2:24), which both affords spiritual blessings and imposes spiritual obligations on the called.

FIRST CORINTHIANS

“Solving Church Problems”

SECTION TWO-- 1:10-17

“Unity of Mind”

Verse 10-- “Now I plead with you, brethren...”

- a. Christ’s authority demands that: (1) Christians must all speak the *same* thing, which happens when everyone respects and mirrors what the Holy Spirit has spoken about any matter; (2) Christians must allow *no divisions* as might occur when churches prefer to follow human wisdom in preference to the divine wisdom conveyed through the gospel. Denominational religion is everywhere condemned in the Scriptures as divisive, but denominations did not exist until centuries after these words were written. It was *internal* division that was forbidden to these saints. The problem was not yet *open* division with *no* fellowship, but *limited* fellowship with the strained feelings that had come between these brethren.
- b. The unity demanded by Jesus of His followers requires that all have: (1) the *same mind* [“purpose”--W.E.Vine]; (2) the *same judgment*. [“opinion”]. In any congregation, the first state is achieved when all members abide in those matters plainly taught in the Scriptures. The second will prevail when all members willingly submit to the decisions made by their elders in the course of their work as “rulers” of the local church. [See Eph. 5:21; 1Cor. 10:24; 1Tim. 5:17.]

Verse 11-- “For it has been declared to me...”

- a. Members of Chloe’s household had come to Ephesus from Corinth bearing a distressing report of church trouble at Corinth. Obviously, they had confidence that Paul, who planted the church, would share their concern about its spiritual condition and would be anxious to deal with its problems so as to restore it to a healthful condition.
- b. We know nothing more about Chloe or about these messengers.
- c. Their report was serious-- not that the church building (?) had burned, or that some of the most active members had died suddenly-- but that there were “contentions” [“quarreling”--RSV] among the membership. This crisis would be far more difficult to overcome than the others would have been.

Verse 12-- “Now I say this, that each of you says...”

- a. Far too much importance was being attached to certain leaders in the Corinthian church. We cannot know who these leaders really were, for Paul says that he has replaced their names with those of other leaders whose places in the church would *much more* qualify them for the misplaced adulation than the leaders to whom it had been directed (1Cor. 4:6). Perhaps this would help some to understand that if *more* deserving men refused to be exalted among the brethren, *less* deserving leaders certainly should disallow any such treatment. Furthermore, Paul’s choice of names may have been intended to illustrate the fallacy in giving undue attention to particular “strengths” that were thought to reside in the recipients of the inappropriate honor.
- b. “**I am of Paul...Apollos...Cephas...Christ...**” Each of these persons possessed special qualities that would be desirable in a religious leader. They were aware of

Paul's *devotion* to the gospel; they had been impressed by Apollos' eloquence in *proclaiming* the gospel; they appreciated the aggressiveness of Peter ["Cephus"] in *defending* the gospel [Acts 15]; they knew that Jesus Christ was the sole *focus* of the gospel. Yet, none of these strengths was an acceptable basis for loyalty to any man. Even giving loyalty to Jesus because he was judged the *best* leader, as determined by the human eye, would be wrong. Religious loyalty must be given to Christ because He is the only choice, not because He is the best among the rest!

Verse 13-- Is Christ divided?...

- a. A series of rhetorical questions follows to demonstrate the folly of lining up behind any sectarian leadership in the church:
 - (1) "Is Christ divided?" Can He tolerate our devotion to human leaders, whoever they might be? Will He allow *any* dilution of our *total* commitment to His leadership? He has declared, "I am the way..." (John 14:6).
 - (2) "Was Paul crucified for you?" Only Christ's death could offer freedom from sin and death (Hebrews 9:12; 10). If an *apostle's* death would not suffice, how much *less* would the "sacrifices" of human leaders benefit anyone?
 - (3) "Were you baptized into the name of Paul?" Their baptism had been in *Christ's* name because only *He* has the authority to forgive sins in response to the act of baptism (Matt. 28:18; Acts 2:28). Even an apostle could not forgive sins, much less uninspired leaders!
- b. While Paul could not qualify in these two vital requirements to serve as the religious leader of these saints, Jesus Christ completely satisfies those requisites. Paul makes it clear that the two things that would allow the Corinthians to be his followers also were necessary to following Jesus Christ: (1) Jesus must have been crucified for them; (2) They must have been baptized in His name. The absence of *either* condition would prevent their being Christ's true disciples.

Verses 14-16-- "I thank God that I baptized none of you..."

- a. Paul did *not* thank God that these people had *not* been baptized, but that, because of circumstances created by the Corinthians themselves, it was fortunate that he had *personally* baptized only a few converts.
- b. He had actually baptized some at Corinth. He could remember a few and had possibly forgotten a few others.
- c. The importance of baptism to salvation was fully recognized by Paul. He himself had been baptized to wash away his own sins (Acts 22:16), and he everywhere taught its necessity for everyone else (Gal. 3:27; Romans 6:4, etc.). Even at Corinth he had insisted that baptism was essential to membership in the "one body" [church] (1Cor. 12:13).
- d. The tendency at Corinth was to make too much of human involvement in the process of salvation. He wanted no one to think that he was more important to God's plan than being just a messenger of that plan. He certainly wanted no man to single him out for loyalty because Paul had baptized him [as often is the case with baptizers and the baptized].

- e. No implication should be made that Paul approved of infant baptism when he baptized the “household” of Stephanas. Many households do not include infants, and those households in the Bible who were baptized consisted of those who were old enough to become “believers” (Acts 10:2; 16:34).

Verse 17-- “For Christ did not send me to baptize...”

- a. Jesus *did* send Paul and the other apostles to *preach* the gospel and to *baptize* those who were taught (Matt. 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16).
- b. While almost anyone could physically baptize converts, only inspired teachers initially could preach the gospel message (2Cor. 4:6,7).
- c. As a matter of priority, Paul had done at Corinth what only he could do [reveal the gospel message], and others who could not preach the word had tended to baptizing those whom Paul had taught.
- d. In much the same way, Paul is *still* preaching the gospel through the written word, and others are *still* baptizing those whom he has taught the importance of baptism.
- e. Paul’s physical involvement or lack of involvement in no way diminishes the place that God gave to the act of baptism in His redemption plan. Paul *always* baptized converts [See conversion accounts in Acts 10, 16, 18.], whether by his own hand or that of someone else. He included the “one baptism” along with other elements essential to salvation (Eph. 4:4-6), making it no less vital than the other things listed. What he taught in other places, he also taught at Corinth (1Cor. 4:17; Eph. 4:5; Romans 2:11).
- f. Paul’s statement about baptizing is obviously intended to be understood as elliptical, i.e., “having a part omitted.” The sense is: “Christ did not send me to baptize [only] but [also] to preach the gospel.” Compare John 12:44: “He who believes in Me, believes not in Me [only] but [also] in Him who sent me.”

(Questions on this Section are included with questions on Section three)

FIRST CORINTHIANS

“Solving Church Problems”

SECTION THREE-- 1:18-31

First Problem-- “Intimidation by the World”

Verses 18, 19-- “For the message of the cross is foolishness...”

- a. The same message of the cross was preached to everyone in the same way. God did not show respect of persons, and neither did Paul (Romans 2:11). Everyone enjoyed the same opportunity to accept the truth about Jesus and to reap the benefits of faith in the gospel story. Unfortunately, although many “gladly received his word” (Acts 2:41), many did not. The attitude of those who heard the gospel preached determined whether the message of the cross would be “foolishness” or “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16).
- b. The “message of the cross” was to most people a message of shame and disgrace attached to a criminal who was executed for his crimes. To believers, it was a message of “amazing grace” and of a love that would culminate in the sacrifice of God’s own innocent Son, because no other price could be paid to atone for man’s sin.
- c. The reaction to the truth by worldly-wise and prudent men fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah [29:14] about their unbelief many years before the truth was ever proclaimed.

Verses 20, 21-- “Where is the wise?...”

- a. The “wise [who derive their wisdom from worldly sources], the “scribe” [who is learned in some religious law other than the gospel], and the “disputer of this age” [who feels capable of logically debating about the validity of any faith] all have arrayed themselves against a gospel that strikes them as foolish, contrary to the “acceptable” extant religious systems, and indefensible before the “logic” of human reason. Surely, they suppose, there is no cause for giving any serious consideration to this “new thing” (Acts 17:21).
- b. It was through no accident or unforeseen reaction to God’s plan that the “wise”men had aligned themselves against the message of the cross. Rather, it was the product of *God’s* wisdom that just such a “foolish” [humanly unreasonable] method of saving men from sin would serve to test man’s faith in God to the utmost.

Verses 22-24-- “For the Jews request a sign...”

- a. The Jews who listened to Jesus teach were never satisfied with His message alone. They insisted on witnessing signs and wonders at His hand (Matt.16:1; John 4:48). When He performed miracles before their eyes, they also rejected their sufficiency as proof of His Sonship (Matt.12:22-24). They rejected His *miracles* because His *message* was so unacceptable to them.
- b. The Greeks [Gentiles] were enamoured with the “wisdom” of human philosophy. They demanded a gospel that would be in keeping with their mindset of rationalism. Their demands reflected the deep pride that they had in their human history and heritage.

- c. The cross of Christ raised a problem for both Jews and Greeks. Jews hesitated to accept a Messiah who had been crucified like a common criminal instead of coming to an earthly throne as a triumphant king. Greeks thought it ridiculous to place faith in any man who had been killed and who would, in their judgment, be forever dead. They were accustomed to men dying for their gods, but no god had ever died for men!
- d. Insufficient faith can never overcome such human impulses as plagued Jewish and Gentile unbelievers. Even today, man are impressed by “miracles” performed by modern-day healers. Rationalists still reject any teaching that clashes with their own perceived rationality.

Verses 24, 25-- “But to those that are called...”

- a. Jesus promised that, “if anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (John 7:17).
- b. Good-hearted men of every race and nation will rise above their prejudices and personal commitments to a faith that will overcome every doubt and question about the truth of God’s revelation. To them, the message of Christ crucified is a message of heavenly wisdom that only faith can comprehend, and it is a message that reveals a heavenly power that could raise a dead Jesus to become a living Savior.
- c. Thus, what *seems* foolish to many becomes perfectly acceptable to men of faith. The divine plan of a God-sacrifice is recognized by them as the only was possible for man’s salvation, when all the facts are examined. The *weakness* of Jesus’ crucified flesh is seen as God’s evidence to demonstrate unquestionably His divine strength when He raised that flesh to a new and better life.

Verses 26-31-- “For you see your calling, brethren...”

- a. Relatively few of those who are grounded in worldly wisdom and pride are able to overcome these obstacles to saving faith. Those who consider themselves to be mentally and intellectually superior to other men seldom can humble themselves enough to “become as little children” and be “great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:1-4).
- b. The things chosen by God to have a part in man’s salvation are things regarded by worldly-minded people as “foolish,” “weak,” “base,” “despised,” and “not” [of any importance]. Yet, in the divine scheme of things, these elements truly “are” [of importance], and they “put to shame” things highly valued by the world but that can play no part at all in God’s plan of salvation.
- c. Churches today frequently make the mistake of exchanging the simple ways of God for the complex ways of men in executing the work of the local congregations. The appealing but unauthorized organizations and arrangements devised by human wisdom cannot with impunity be substituted for the unadorned but inspired will of the Lord in carrying out the work and worship of the local church.
- d. Man cannot claim personal glory for any part of God’s salvation plan, for there is no part of the plan that man in his own wisdom would have chosen. Only God

could see the true wisdom that resides in each element of the plan, and only those who willingly adopt God's wisdom as their own can expect to reap any benefit from what heaven has so richly provided.

- e. Faith, perfected in obedience *because* we believe, puts men into Jesus Christ (Acts 2:36-38; Gal 3:27). When we totally embrace Christ as our Savior and our Leader, we are assured that He will provide for us: (1) righteousness, (2) sanctification, and (3) redemption. What more do we need? What more could we want? Can't we see that God's wisdom is demonstrated through Jesus, and that this is ***wisdom indeed?***
- f. Jeremiah (9:23,24) was certainly right when he declared that all the glory associated with salvation goes to God, and none to man.
- g. Paul's lesson to the Corinthians-- Don't be intimidated by those making claims contrary to the gospel and those who base their claims on human wisdom and human tradition. When all the evidence has been examined and assessed, God's way will always be vindicated as the only way possible from earth to heaven.

FIRST CORINTHIANS-- QUESTIONS

SECTIONS ONE-THREE 1:1-31

1. How does Paul describe the church at Corinth? (verse 2)
2. What particular blessings did the Corinthians possess? (verses 4-7)
3. What was their prospect for the judgment [if they were faithful to the Lord]? (verse 8)
4. What things were necessary if members were to have “no divisions” among them? (verse 10)
5. What serious shortcoming of the church was reported to Paul? By whom? (verse 11)
6. How do you reconcile verses 11 and 12 with verses 2 and 8?
7. What act of obedience was inappropriately tied to the divisions in the Corinthian church? (verses 12-15)
8. Explain verse 17 in the light of Paul’s teaching in Rom. 6:3-7 and Gal. 3:26,27.
9. What three attitudes were held toward the preaching of the crucifixion? (verses 18,23,24)
10. How does God’s plan of salvation compare to the plans of men? (verse 25)
11. To whom does the gospel [generally] appeal and to whom does it not [generally] appeal? (verses 26-29)
12. Any boasting in the church should be centered on whom? (verse 31)

FIRST CORINTHIANS

SECTION FOUR-- 2:1-16

“Solving Church Problems”

Second Problem: “Disregard for Apostolic Authority”

Verse 1-- “And I, brethren, when I came to you...”

- a. Paul refers to his initial work in Corinth, recorded in Acts 18:1-18a, where he spent more than eighteen months preaching to both Jews and Greeks. “Many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.”
- b. His teaching was devoid of eloquent speech and worldly wisdom, such as the people of Corinth were accustomed to experience when they were taught the philosophies and human religions of the day. His detractors said of him, “His letters are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” (2Cor.10:10).
- c. Paul’s education and experience [See Acts 22:3; Gal. 1:14] likely had equipped him to match the teaching attributes of other teachers, but he deliberately avoided to exercise his capabilities in that regard so as to allow emphasis where it belonged-- on the message rather than the messenger. He wanted his hearers to say, “What a *wonderful Jesus* Paul preaches,” not, “What a *wonderful preacher* is this Paul who tells us about someone called Jesus.”

Verse 2-- “For I determined not to know anything...”

- a. The focus of Paul’s teaching was entirely on those things that related to the sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of the world. Other matters were extraneous to his purpose for being in Corinth, so he did not spend time on them.
- b. It required courage and conviction to preach “Christ *crucified*,” because that was an unwelcome message to Jews and Gentiles alike. Jews could not understand why their long-awaited Messiah, who was supposed to deliver them forever from the oppressions of other nations, would have instead been killed by one of their national enemies. And Gentiles thought it ludicrous that one who was promoted as a “god” could have been so powerless as to have been forcibly dragged before the courts and brutally crucified at the hands of mere human beings.
- c. Paul could have highlighted facts about Jesus other than the crucifixion that would have made Him a much more attractive candidate for their attention:
 - (1) He was a great and novel *teacher* who employed effective teaching methods;
 - (2) He was a *worker of miracles*, whose “performances” had surpassed all the deeds of others who claimed special powers from God;
 - (3) He was a *benevolent and liberal philanthropist* who on occasion had fed thousands of hungry people at once;
 - (4) He was a *sympathetic and sensitive champion of the downtrodden* who had paid loving attention to little children and who was known to have rescued an adulterous woman from a group of religious fanatics;
 - (5) He was a *model citizen* who insisted on paying his taxes, even if in an unusual way, and who taught others to “give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar.”
- d. All other impelling attributes of Jesus Christ would have been meaningless unless they

were joined to the fact of His *crucifixion*!

- e. Dedication to the unpopular cause of a crucified Christ would be the highest possible test of humility and faith on the part of converts.

Verse 3-- “I was with you in weakness...”

- a. Was it actual “bodily weakness” to which Paul alludes [he was beset with some “thorn in the flesh” (2Cor.12:7)], or was it only a weakness perceived by his adversaries because his teaching style and his eloquence did not match those of some other teachers?
- b. His “fear and trembling” certainly did not spring from his being afraid of persecution [See Acts 14:19-22] or from any uncertainty about his message [See Romans 1:16,17.] Rather, he was conscious of the weakness of his “earthen vessel” as compared to the enormity of his responsibility to preach salvation (2Cor. 4:7).
- c. Perhaps his recent “failure” at Athens to make many converts (Acts 17:34) increased his awareness more than ever that his work in Corinth must not allow the opportunity for great success there to go uncultivated. The Lord promised that He had “*many people in this city*” (Acts 18:10).

Verses 4, 5-- “And my speech and my preaching...”

- a. Paul likely possessed “tools” of his own [e.g., speech, persuasion, logic, etc.] that could have been enlisted to win the souls of the lost.
- b. However, God had armed him with greater weapons than those. He had the signs and wonders of an apostle imparted to him to carry the fight against Satan and his angels at Corinth.
- c. Additionally, the gospel he preached had *inherent* power to change men’s lives so dramatically that tender hearts found it hard to resist [See Rom. 1:16,17; 1Cor. 6:9-11.]
- d. Faith [hope] is the anchor of man’s soul. If that faith is placed in *man’s stability*, it will sooner or later be shattered by *man’s instability*.
- e. Faith that is grounded in the things of God’s kingdom will never be shaken, because the kingdom is unshakable (Hebrews 12:28).

Verse 6-- “However, we speak wisdom ...”

- a. Paul’s wisdom was not the kind that might be indentified with “this age” [the present culture] or with the eminent scholars and philosophers [“rulers”] of that time.
- b. The wisdom displayed in God’s kingdom is also unlike that of earthly kingdoms and governments [“rulers”]. Even the mighty Roman Empire would before long fade into the obscurity of past history.
- c. Worldly wisdom is useless for spiritual advancement, because the spiritual world is so different from the physical world [See 2Cor. 4:16.] Those who rely on the guidance of human determination to shape their lives will “come to nothing” [of lasting value] because “it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jer. 10:13).
- d. Paul spoke “wisdom” [i.e., “seeing things as God sees them”] to everyone, but only the “mature” [deliberate truth-seekers] recognized it as *true* wisdom. The gospel is either an “aroma of death to death” or an “aroma of life to life” (2Cor. 2:16), depending on one’s perception of its message of *Christ crucified*.

Verses 7-9-- “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery...”

- a. God’s wisdom had been *hidden* [thus, a “mystery”] from man’s understanding through the ages past. Not even the Old Testament prophets or the angels of heaven had access to a real comprehension of God’s plan for redemption (1Peter 1:9-12). But--the plan has now been *revealed* in this present [gospel] age by the Holy Spirit through the revelation of New Testament apostles and prophets (Rom.16:25,26). Full understanding is now manifest to all nations. [See Eph. 3:3-5; 5:17.]
- b. The true wisdom of God’s plan had one goal-- the glory [“doxa”] of men. [“An opinion, hence honor from a good opinion”--W.E. Vine]
Ephesians 1:4-7 describes how sinful man is glorified through this gospel:
 - (1) He could be made “holy and without blame;”
 - (2) He could be “adopted” as God’s own son;
 - (3) He could be made “accepted” through Jesus Christ;
 - (4) He could have “redemption” and the “forgiveness of sins.”
- c. The plan was “ordained” [NKJV]-- “foreordained”[ASV] or “decreed” [RSV]-- by God long before it could be implemented.
- d. The *wisdom* was ancient [“before the ages”] but the *revelation* was new.
- e. Men “co-operated” with God’s plan because they were ignorant of its true origin (Acts 3:17). However, ignorance was no excuse for their participation in the crucifixion of the Messiah. They had every opportunity to learn and appreciate God’s wisdom (Matt. 27:54), but worldly minds are repelled by gospel truths (Isaiah 64:4).
- f. God “prepared” the “things” of salvation, but they cannot be *seen* or *heard* by the unaided [by inspired revelation] eye, ear, or heart.
- g. Salvation’s “things” belong to lovers of God who keep His commands (John 14:15).

Verses 10-13-- “But God has revealed them to us...”

- a. The apostles could understand God’s wise plan by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They validated the inspired message with the “power of God” bound up in the miracles they were able to perform (verse 4) to convince doubters.
- b. Paul enlisted his miracle-working power to make his case against false accusers at Corinth when they challenged his authority as an apostle (2Cor. 12:11,12).
- c. “Deep things” were unrevealed things. The Spirit alone could “search” them out [“to examine into”--Thayer].
- d. An uninspired teacher [without the Spirit’s help] could no more know God’s mind [plan] than one man could know another’s thoughts without outside help. This was the very situation in which false teachers found themselves as they tried to teach their own version of the “gospel” to enhance their standing among the Corinthians.
- e. The apostles’ message was not “according to man” (Gal. 1:11,12). Pretenders among them spoke out of the “spirit of the world” [“kosmos”-- “...the present condition of human affairs, in alienation from and opposition to God” (Vine); “he that is operative in the world [the devil]” (Thayer)]
- f. Paul’s detractors had no doubt resorted to currying favor with the Corinthians to attract them to their teaching (2Cor. 10:12,18; 2Tim.4:3). That was an unacceptable tactic for teachers who relied entirely on things given to them by God.

- g. The things *received* from God were the only things *spoken* [taught] by Paul and other inspire preachers.
- h. *Words* as well as *thoughts* were chosen for the apostles by the Spirit. Human judgment about vocabulary was not trustworthy to select the right words to properly express God's thoughts to lost men. The message had to be *precise*! Only *verbal inspiration* could insure that men fully understood what God meant!
- i. Of course, the Spirit used the vocabularies and backgrounds of inspired speakers and writers, but the Spirit selected the *exact* words that would convey each thought of the Lord-- "Combining [ASV] spiritual thoughts with spiritual words."
- j. **Source (God)----Vehicle (Spirit)----Reaction (Apostles Speak)---Corinthians**
Paul's message was entirely dependable!

Verses 14,15-- "But the natural man does not receive the things..."

- a. The "natural" man cannot "receive" ["favorably make one's own"--Thayer] the gospel because he is uninspired to do so. His human reason tells him that "God's things" are too foolish to follow (1:21,23; Jer.10:23). Divine wisdom can only be *known* [accepted as divine] through spiritually-inspired "discernment" ["determining the excellence or defects of a person or thing"--Vine].
- b. The "spiritual" [inspired] man can accurately discern *all* things [relating to salvation], and his assessment of God's wisdom cannot be successfully challenged by any un-inspired teacher, such as those who had challenged Paul at Corinth.
- c. Another possible meaning [but not as likely]: worldly-minded people ["animal man"--James Macknight] cannot appreciate God's things as spiritually-minded people do. [See Acts 2:15-16.] This is because they limit their thinking by worldly principles, not because they need "enabling grace" to aid their understanding (Eph. 5:17).

Verse 16-- "For, 'Who has known the mind of the Lord'..."

- a. No man has enough wisdom to instruct God about how to save man (Isaiah 40:13). His plan is perfect and cannot be changed by even the most appealing or worldly-wise teacher. [See Galatians 1:6-9.]
- b. God's "mind" [*nous*-- "counsel, purpose" (Vine)] can be known only by those who possess the "mind of Christ." The Father and Son think as *One* (John 17:22). Both participated in the Spirit's revelation of the divine purpose.
- c. Although not even the apostles could "instruct" [correct or validate] the Lord, they *could* through their inspiration instruct all uninspired sinners about how to follow God's plan. That was the purpose for which they were sent into the world (Mark 16:15,16).
- d. The gift of inspiration has been removed from the church (1Cor. 13:8-10), but we still have the message that inspiration provided to those of us who are uninspired. Our New Testament still allows us to "know the mind of God" about our salvation.

FIRST CORINTHIANS-- QUESTIONS

SECTION FOUR 2:1-16

1. Paul's preaching at Corinth de-emphasized what two popular features of preaching? (1)
2. What had been Paul's focus in his teaching as an apostle? (2)
3. What things characterized Paul's preaching and what things did not? (3-5)
4. God's wisdom was spoken in a "mystery." What does that mean? (7, 8)
5. To what does the promise in verse nine refer?
6. Who revealed the meaning of God's plan to the apostles? (10)
7. Explain the illustration of revelation used by Paul in verses 11-13.
8. Is the revelation of the gospel verbal or general? Did that method of revelation eliminate any use of the apostles' vocabulary or background?
9. To whom does the gospel message appeal? Why? (14,15)
10. Why was it foolish for a worldly person to challenge the teaching of an apostle? (16)

FIRST CORINTHIANS

“Solving Church Problems”

SECTION FIVE-- 3:1-23

Third Problem: “Misplaced Loyalties”

Verse 1-- “And I, brethren, could not speak to you...”

- a. There is nothing wrong with being a “newborn babe” in Christ (1Pet. 2:2), but spiritual growth is an absolute necessity for all Christians, especially for new converts (2Peter 3:18). It is unacceptable for disciples of Jesus forever to remain “babes in Christ.” After a reasonable period of time, they should become knowledgeable enough to teach others (Heb. 5:12). They should “leave” [change their primary focus] the first principles of the gospel and progress into the “weightier matters of the law” of Christ. These are the principles that determine the right response to life’s problems as they arise from time to time.
- b. Many in the church at Corinth had not made suitable progress toward maturity. They were not yet spiritual-minded enough to react appropriately to the various situations that troubled the unity of the congregation. Their urgent need for guidance in these matters made it imperative that Paul send this letter.
- c. It is not always possible to approach people as we suppose they should be approached. Paul “could not” speak to some as “spiritual” hearers, but as to “carnal.” This altered the way he dealt with the topics needing attention at Corinth. He no doubt subscribed to the proposition that we must “take people where they are and move them to where they ought to be.” This does not mean compromising the truth; it may simply be a way of “becoming all things to all men, that by all means we might save some.”

Verses 2-3a-- “I fed you with milk and not with solid food...”

- a. This problem of immaturity was not peculiar to Corinth. The Hebrew disciples were also bothered with similar circumstances (Heb. 5:12-6:3).
- b. The “milk” of God’s word is appropriate for those who are “babes” in understanding so they might “grow” (1Pet. 2:2). New converts can become confused and overwhelmed by trying to deal too quickly with the more complex “solid food” of the gospel. A good foundation of “first principles” is important to healthy growth in the truth.
- c. Paul was understanding of the fact that these brethren had been novices in the doctrine of Christ while he worked among them soon after their conversion (Acts 18:1-18). Even eighteen months of teaching did not equip many to make good decisions about confronting the crises that were to arise in the church. A letter from him previous to this one (5:9) had not made enough of a change in them. Now, three or four more years after leaving Corinth, years in which they should have become much more discerning of good conduct as Christians, he must survey their status and pronounce them: “you are *still* carnal.”
- d. “Carnality” [“having the nature of flesh, i.e., sensual, controlled by animal appetites, governed by human nature, instead of by the spirit of God”--W. E. Vine] is always the enemy of spiritual growth in the Lord. It is the normal condition of spiritual “babes.” “Babes” are recognized by their: (1) need for much attention; (2) need for constant

prodding to duty; (3) over-sensitivity to criticism; (4) timidity toward opportunities to serve; (5) inability to determine proper action or to follow through on decisions. These obstacles to growth must be confronted and overcome as quickly as possible.

Verse 3,4-- “For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you...”

- a. Paul was not merely *supposing* that these Corinthians had not matured appropriately. Hard evidence for that conclusion was available to him: (1) Envy was evident among them; (2) They were divided in their loyalties to various teachers; (3) They were in active conflict with one another about the comparisons of excellence they made regarding these teachers.
- b. Hatreds, contentions, jealousies, dissensions, envy, etc. are all listed among the “works of the flesh” that are “contrary to the Spirit” (Gal. 5:17-21). God’s people must not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (Gal. 5:26). It was obvious to Paul that some of these church members had not yet felt the full impact of those truths.
- c. The first impulse of a “natural” [”carnal”] man is to become defensive when criticized. “Why would you accuse us of such behavior?” they might respond. A specific example of their carnality was offered by Paul: some of them were giving excessive spiritual loyalty to uninspired teachers. Rather than excite these loyalties further, the apostle uses his own name and that of Apollos to illustrate his charge (4:6), an accusation he had already made in this letter (1:12). We cannot know just who the real teachers were, but the Corinthians knew, and now they knew that the misplacement of their “*follow-ship*” of these men was wrong and hurtful to the unity of the Corinthian church.

Verses 5-8-- “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos...”

- a. There are no offices of *status* in the church, only offices of *service*. All members of the body are equal in rank and importance, with each one contributing his particular ability toward the welfare of the whole body (1Corinthians 12).
- b. Paul, Apollos, and all other teachers who had labored acceptably at Corinth in the conversion and strengthening of each member were but [only] *ministers* [“servants”] by whom the Lord had redeemed the lost. The spiritual blessing of salvation had not been dependent on the prestige or ability of the *minister* [tool] employed to serve, but on the wisdom and power of the God who had enlisted their service. It is to the credit of the “planter” who first teaches the gospel and to the “waterer” who subsequently reinforces and enhances the initial teaching that they *did* what they were gifted to do. This is true with regard to all who simply perform their appointed service in the church, regardless of what that service might be (1Peter 4:10).
- c. In God’s work no man is “anything,” i.e., no man is indispensable. The *work of God* must be done, but it does not have to be done by some certain person. While we honor those who serve well in the kingdom for their work’s sake (1Thes. 5: 12,13), we must never support anyone’s quest for personal glory. Perhaps this poem will help us to keep things in perspective:

THE INDISPENSABLE MAN

--Anonymous

Sometime when you're feeling important;
Sometime when you ego's in bloom;
Sometime when you take it for granted
You're the best qualified in the room.

Sometime when you feel that your going
Would leave an unfillable hole;
Just follow this simple instruction
And see how it humbles your soul.

Take a bucket and fill it with water;
Put your hand in it up to the wrist.
Pull it out and the hole that's remaining
Is a measure of how you'll be missed.

You may splash all you please when you enter;
You can stir up the water galore.
But stop and you'll find in a minute
That it looks quite the same as before.

The moral in this quaint example
Is to do just the best that you can.
Be proud of yourself, but remember:
THERE'S NO INDISPENSABLE MAN!
--YOU, TOO, CAN BE REPLACED!

- d.** Paul, who claimed the office of apostleship, and Apollos, who certainly enjoyed a natural talent for eloquence and perhaps also had a supernatural gift, would have been the *expected* recipients of special honor from the Corinthians. They were teachers who had made a definite and positive impact on their lives. But even special honor to them would have been inappropriate. Moreover, in reality it was *not* to Paul and Apollos to whom attention was being directed, but to lesser-endowed men and probably even to men who were not teaching and behaving as gospel teachers should (2Cor. 11:16-21).
- e.** We do not know the details of Apollos' work at Corinth. He went there after teaching John's baptism at Ephesus and then learning better from Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18: 25,26) It is only reported that in Corinth "he greatly helped those who had believed through grace" (Acts 18:27). This is likely the work of "watering" to which Paul referred.
- f.** In a garden, it is necessary that there be a planter and a waterer if plants are to germinate and grow to maturity. Skill in planting and persistence in watering surely play a role in producing a good crop. However, these are functions in gardening that many

can perform. The real secret of agriculture is in the *seed*, not the sower. Without good seed, even the most skillful planter and the most persistent waterer cannot expect to succeed. Only God places the power of reproduction within the natural seed, and only God can use the power of the spiritual seed (Luke 8:11) to convert the lost.

Verse 9-15-- “For we are God’s fellow workers...”

- a. Men who labor in the kingdom are clearly not “*fellow workers*” [NKJV] *with* God, i.e., equal with God in the work. The KJV says, “For we are laborers together with God;” The ASV has, “For we are God’s fellow-workers;” The Confraternity: “We are God’s helpers.” The RSV possibly states it best: “We are fellow workers *for* God.” Men, even apostles, were on an equality with one another, but not with God.
- b. The *agriculture* theme continues: “You are God’s *field*.” Inspired teachers [Paul and others] had first sown that field with the word of truth (Luke 8:11), but only by the power and guidance of God. It was in God’s hands alone how the field would be sown and cultivated.
- c. Paul initiates in verse nine a *construction* theme to further stress his point that men must not elevate one another as they strive to build [up] the church at Corinth or elsewhere. Christians are *God’s* building, not man’s, and it is beyond the authority of any teacher [even an apostle, and certainly not an uninspired man] to change the plans for the building.
- d. All who participate in building God’s church must build according to *His* blueprint. It was necessary for someone possessed of an infallible message, and who had infallible proofs to confirm that message [a “wise master builder” like Paul], to lay the foundation precisely as it should be laid. Those who followed in building were also constrained to “take heed” how they did their work. Their building had to be done “on” Paul’s foundation-- in complete harmony with what he had taught. They must not mar the excellence of the master builder’s foundation by adding any careless or corrupt construction to a “work in progress.”
- e. Paul had laid down “Jesus Christ” as the perfect foundation on which to build a sound and active church at Corinth. This foundation included not only the proclamation of His life and teaching but also His death by *crucifixion* for man’s salvation (2:2). Any teacher who differed with Paul’s “whole counsel of God” about Jesus-- His life *or* His death did *not* build on Paul’s foundation.
- f. Numerous teachers may participate in the “building” of a church. Some may do exemplary work by teaching the whole truth (Acts 20:20,21). Their work [converts who are like precious metals and stones] will persevere and flourish even amid the “fire” of trials, because it cannot be destroyed by the onslaughts of Satan. Contrariwise, those whose efforts rest on something other than truth will discover that their work [wood, hay, straw] is combustible. The “Day” [trials?, or the second coming?] will ultimately manifest whether there has been some bad work done by bad teachers at Corinth. Good work and good teachers will be vindicated at the same time, if not before.
- g. There is a reward in store for faithful builders inherent in the faithfulness of those whom they bring to the Lord. [See 3John 4.] At the same time, a faithful teacher’s personal reward is not dependent on the faithfulness of his converts. Each person is responsible

for his own faithfulness--the teacher for his teaching, and the one taught for his adherence to what he is taught.

Verses 16,17-- “Do you not know that you are the temple of God...”

- a. It is not just any building upon which teachers do spiritual work. It is “God’s building,” but it is even more than that. When teachers teach, they are building “God’s temple,” the most special building of all! Whether Paul referred to the Jewish temple or some pagan temple [with which the Corinthians would have been more familiar], this building is the one upon which the entire practice of religion is focused. If this building is not right, neither can worshipers in the building be right. How vital it was that all construction comply with the divine pattern provided by God for a *perfect* building!
- b. It is God’s purpose that His temple [the church] should consist only of people who are spiritually perfect (Matt. 5:48) because they have been crafted according to a perfect gospel. When spiritual Israel is “led by the Spirit” by following God’s word, the Spirit of God “dwells” in His temple (Romans 8:14).
- c. The perfect image of Christ (Col. 1:27) in His people is “defiled” when they are led astray by false teaching and their holiness is thereby compromised. It is a *serious* disobedience to lead or to be led into error. “Be ye holy as I am holy.” (1Peter 1:16).
- d. False teaching had defiled God’s temple [church] in Corinth by:
 - (1) Deceiving many with *error* about marriage (chapter 7); compromise with idolatry (chapter 10); the resurrection of Jesus (chapter 15);
 - (2) Promoting *compromise* with morality (chapter 5); Christian ethics (chapter 6).

Verses 18-23-- “Let no one deceive himself...”

- a. Self-deceit is everywhere warned against. E.g., “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Gal. 6:7). It is easy for any man to convince himself that he is smarter than he really is. We may “seem” to ourselves and to others that we are truly wise because we are conversant with some of the wisdom of this “age” (2:6).
- b. When tempted toward the smugness of self-importance, one would do well to stop and remember that *true* wisdom comes from above, not from beneath the heavens. Consequently, if one wishes to be wise in ways that will make him useful in the kingdom of God, let him “become a fool” in the eyes of the world by immersing himself in the “foolishness” of the gospel message (1:18, 25), which reveals the wisdom of God.
- c. Depending on human rather than divine wisdom was not peculiar to Corinth in the time of Paul. This has ever been one of man’s most dangerous frailties. Paul cites two of many warnings about this peril that are available in the Old Testament. Job (Job 5:13) and David or some other writer (Psa.94:11) both caution against being brought down by the very devices of the world to which men turn for advancement.
- d. From all his previous reasoning to show the folly of behaving like those Corinthians who had chosen up sides in things pertaining to the church, Paul pronounces his final admonition to the offending parties: “Therefore let no one glory in men.” This they had done when they had committed their loyalties to [Paul], [Apollos], [Peter] (1:12).

- e. There was no reason whatever for them to feel any need for enhancing their own spiritual status by elevating one leader above another and then declaring loyalty to that leader. *There is no place for such competition in the Lord.* Everything needful to their successful life in the body of Christ had been richly provided for them through the revelation of the divine wisdom in the gospel. [See Romans 8:28.] All things helpful to salvation were readily available to them by means of:
- (1) The inspired teaching about Jesus and the Christian life provided by teachers such as Paul, Apolos, and Cephas;
 - (2) The providential control of earthly events and situations for their welfare;
 - (3) The opportunities offered in life for them to serve God faithfully;
 - (4) The ultimate blessedness of the dead when they “die in the Lord” (Rev. 14:13).
- f. The strongest assurance possessed by Christians that they need not depend for their salvation on anything or anyone not related to “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (2:2) is the knowledge that they enjoy a very special relationship to the Savior, just as He shares a special relationship with the Great God of all the earth. “He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has *both* the Father *and* the Son” (2John 9).

FIRST CORINTHIANS-- QUESTIONS

SECTION FIVE 3:1-23

1. What are two levels of religious maturity, and what kind of nourishment should each receive? (1,2)
2. What obvious situation at Corinth was proof to Paul that many of the church members were “carnal”? (3,4)
3. Name three tasks involved in the conversion of the Corinthians and the person to whom each is attributed. (6)
4. How are the “planter” and the “waterer” one? (8)
5. Which part of the spiritual “house” at Corinth had Paul been responsible for? Why could he alone accomplish this? (10)
6. What kinds of material could be built on Paul’s foundation? (12)
7. Explain how “fire” will reveal each builder’s work. (13)
8. What two possible outcomes are attached to a preacher’s work of converting souls? (14,15)
9. What two things are called the “temple of God” (or, “Holy Spirit”) in First Corinthians? (3:16 and 6:19) Which one is intended in 3:16?
10. What is meant by “all things are yours” in verse 21? Name some of these things mentioned by Paul.

FIRST CORINTHIANS

“Solving Church Problems”

SECTION SIX-- 4:1-21

Fourth Problem-- “Judging Unrighteous Judgment”

Verses 1-- “Let a man so consider us...”

- a. Having established that the Corinthians’ salvation was secure in Christ and that it was dependent on no man, Paul opens the subject of their misjudgment and bad treatment of him and other inspired teachers of the gospel. Had they given proper respect to his apostleship and to the teaching already offered through his inspiration, many of the divisive problems at Corinth would never have arisen.
- b. While the apostles were servants of Christ, as were the Corinthians, they nevertheless had been entrusted with certain special powers unavailable to most. They were stewards [“the manager of a household or estate”--Vine] of the mysteries [elements of the gospel] of God. As such, they had a responsibility to see that the integrity of the gospel was protected from any who would alter it in any way.

Verse 2-- “Moreover it is required in stewards...”

- a. Stewardship is not a self-appointed role. An appointment must precede the service. A prudent owner will always appoint only those he judges qualified to be stewards, because the status of his investment depends on good management of his property. The teachers at Corinth who challenged Paul’s apostolic authority had assumed stewardship over God’s “field/building” [church] and proposed to “manage” its business of teaching and other activity in any way they saw fit.
- b. These “wanna-be stewards” were not at all faithful to the heavenly plan. They apparently did not hesitate to edit Paul’s previous teaching to suit themselves and to encourage, either by active or passive behavior, several practices that were clearly not in keeping with the apostles’ doctrine. This pseudo-stewardship was intended to bring popularity and personal power to the guilty men who were its practitioners.
- c. Unlike his accusers, Paul’s responsibility as a steward of “God’s things” always weighed heavily on his mind. He knew:
 - (1) He *had* received a *personal* appointment from Christ to be His steward;
 - (2) He must answer directly to the Master for his use of his apostolic stewardship;
 - (3) The welfare of the church rested on the shoulders of his stewardship at Corinth;
 - (4) The eternal destiny of precious souls depended on the faithfulness of his service.
- d. All Christians are stewards of God’s grace in a measure more limited than Paul’s stewardship, but our stewardship is very real and very important nevertheless. We, too, are *required* to be faithful to our duties in the kingdom (1Peter 4:10).

Verses 3-5-- “But with me it is a very small thing...”

- a. It was not that Paul was insensitive to the criticisms of others about his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ. He was willing to become “all things to all men that I might by all means save some” (9:22). However, he refused to be concerned enough about what others thought of him to neglect or compromise the responsibilities of his stewardship (Acts 20:26,27).

- b. The standards by which some at Corinth measured his apostleship were not the standards by which his apostleship was measured by God, the only One who really mattered.
- c. Even Paul himself was not allowed to pass judgment on himself as a preacher-steward of the gospel. Of course, there were things he *could* judge about himself:
 - (1) He knew that he was sincere in what he did as God's servant (Acts 23:1);
 - (2) He knew that he always worked hard to accomplish his goals as a minister of Christ (15:10);
 - (3) He knew that he was uncompromising as a defender of the faith (Gal. 2:11).
 Paul was unaware of anything in his life and work that would disqualify him as a faithful steward of Jesus. Still, his ultimate worthiness as a steward was in God's hands alone. All he could do was to "keep on keeping on" and leave the judging to God.
- d. Meanwhile, it was altogether inappropriate for uninspired men at Corinth to fly in the face of God's obvious endorsement of Paul's apostleship by his special powers (2:4) and to challenge his authority and his work there. Rest assured-- *whoever* might be operating deceitfully as God's steward would be exposed for his dark deeds and his evil heart. On the other hand, truly faithful stewards would be recognized and rewarded by a Judge who cannot be fooled!
- e. Paul's warning to the pseudo-stewards: "You know you're not genuine--don't let the 'coming of the Lord' find you still practicing your deceptions!"
- f. Paul's warning to the followers of the pretenders: "Blind guides and blind followers both will fall into the ditch--you'd better switch guides before it's too late!"
- g. Many of the Corinthians were in spiritual trouble because their judgment about their spiritual leaders was flawed. The remedy for their problem: **"Do not judge according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment"** (Jesus--John 7:24).

Verses 6-- "Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred..."

- a. Paul has tried to make his condemnation of the partyism at Corinth as personally in-offensive as possible. Among those who had been caught up in the problem, some were no doubt well-meaning in their mistake of misplacing their loyalties with unworthy men. He seeks to remove his criticism to a level that would accomplish its purpose without causing unnecessary recriminations by those who were targeted by his accusations.
- b. The Corinthians knew that Paul, Apollos, and Peter were *not* responsible for fostering the party spirit in the church. Otherwise, he would not now be condemning what he and the others had promoted. Those who *were* responsible were well known by name, and calling those names was not essential to reprimanding their practices.
- c. Using the names of Paul and Apollos in the place of the real offenders served *two* purposes: (1) Paul's lesson against division could be taught effectively without raising even more polarization about leadership than already existed at Corinth, and, (2) An appeal to the common good sense of the Corinthians would show that if it were wrong for *inspired* and *God-sent* men to seek personal followings, how much worse was it for *un-inspired* men to do so!
- d. Peace and unity could prevail at Corinth only if everyone would remain content with

“what is written.” A previous letter (5:9) had contained instructions for them now unknown, except for directions about contact with “sexually immoral” people. Perhaps that letter also addressed the evils of division as this one does. If so, they had not yet “learned” its intended lesson-- how wrong it is to participate in anything that results in church members becoming “puffed up” [defensive and jealous] against one another.

Verses 7,8-- “For who makes you differ from another?”

- a. Their judgment about where to place their loyalties was “unrighteous” not only because it violated apostolic teaching but also because it contradicted their own religious experience and common sense.
- b. If they had elevated opinions of themselves, or if they thought too highly of their self-acclaimed leaders, because some possessed *either natural* or *spiritual* gifts, division over such things was completely inappropriate. It was only God who could have made them “differ” in their abilities. *Leaders and followers* alike depended on God, not man, for whatever distinguished them from their peers. Glory goes to Him, not to them. Furthermore, if *supernatural gifts* were at the bottom of their problems, they should remember that it was men such as Paul, whom they now were dishonoring by disparaging his gifts and abilities, who had been the agents by whom God had favored them with their own gifts.
- c. The offending leaders and teachers at Corinth were so full of their self-worth and had been given the devotion of so many blind followers, that they thought they already were “reigning” in well-deserved supremacy over the religious scene at Corinth.
- d. These self-appointed “rulers of the faith” saw no need for interference from the apostles or anyone else. They had reached the pinnacle of success and popularity “without” Paul. But-- their real worth lay only in their own imaginations (Compare Rev.3:17.). If they were men truly worthy of respect as leaders at Corinth, they would have gladly sought to *follow* the leadership of the apostles, not to *undermine* it. If they were really what they *thought* they were, Paul would have been the first to rejoice in their achievements and to be gratified that he had played an important role in their effectiveness.

Verses 9-13-- “For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last...”

- a. Paul seeks here to contrast the high opinion that many had of his critics and the low regard in which the same brethren held him and his co-laborers in the gospel. The pretenders were given royal treatment, while the apostles received only ill treatment by the same people. It was ironic that those *not* appointed by God were so favored by others, while those who *were* His appointees seemed have no certain prospect in this world but death at the hands of Jesus’ enemies.
- b. It is likely that Paul “thinks” [as a man] here just as other men thought about the apostles. Based only on what men could see, it appeared that God had only a thankless life and an ignominious death in store for each of them. It *seemed* that He planned to make a “spectacle” [show] for both men and angels to see, as the apostles went from one disappointment to another. All the while, unworthy men, such as those at Corinth, enjoyed the accolades of the very people whose spiritual welfare they had placed in jeopardy.

- c. The apostles were never promised lives of safety, ease, or popularity. Instead, they knew that the path to their goal would be strewn with danger, hardship, and even death (Matt. 10:16-26). Still, those who “endured to the end” would be saved, for the death of His saints is *precious* in the eyes of the Lord (Psa. 116:15).
- d. Considerable interest would be shown by both men and angels while they observed what happened to the apostles as they carried out their appeal to a lost world. Of course, the reaction of each group would be different from that of the other. Worldly men would take varying degrees of pleasure in seeing the apostles, who proclaimed destruction for people such as they were, suffer for having preached that ominous message. On the other hand, angels, who desired to “look into” the relationship between God and Christians (1Peter 1:12), and who were charged with the responsibility of providing “service” for the saved (Heb. 1:14), would be anything but pleased to witness the sufferings of God’s ambassadors.
- e. Just how ***unrighteous*** was the Corinthians’ judgment between the apostles and the popularity-seeking teachers is seen in his next remark about the two groups:

<u>The apostles</u>	<u>The false teachers</u>
(1) Considered <i>fools</i> for preaching truth;	(1) Considered <i>wise</i> for preaching error;
(2) Judged <i>weak</i> in bodily presence;	(2) Judged <i>strong</i> in bodily presence;
(3) <i>Dishonored</i> by those they had saved.	(3) <i>Honored</i> by those they had deceived.
- f. The consequences of the Corinthians’ ***unrighteous judgment*** of the apostles was alarming, since their ill treatment came from people for whom they had sacrificed so much: hunger, thirst, poorly clothed, beaten, homeless, labor with their hands [considered by Greeks as unfitting for teachers], reviled, persecuted, defamed, looked on as the “filth of the world” [useless men used by the Greeks only in emergencies].
- g. It is likely that Paul implies that the ***same unrighteous judgment*** that had caused him so much harm had led to exactly opposite treatment for his opponents. While he struggled to survive, they were given only lavish support by many in the church.
- f. In spite of having received only negative experiences in return from his brethren, Paul’s response was unflinchingly positive: “We bless; we endure; we entreat.” What a man!!

Verses 14-16-- “I do not write these things to shame you...”

- a. There were some things about which Paul thought it proper to shame offenders, such as going to law against their brethren (6:5) and keeping company with blasphemers of the truth (15:34). However, since the matters under discussion involved him personally, he chose not to make arguments that might be judged as self-serving and that might be used against him by unscrupulous people at Corinth.
- b. A warning was called for, because people guilty of such behavior as theirs were openly in defiance of heavenly authority in preference to worldly considerations. They needed to make a big change-- and shame might make them defensive rather than repentant. A stern warning from someone whom they *knew* truly cared for their welfare might make a difference in their thinking.
- c. It was Paul who had “begotten them through the gospel.” [See Luke 8:11; 1Pet. 1:23.] A special bond usually exists between the convertor and the converted. Though they might have “ten thousand” other teachers, some of whom might act from ulterior

reasons, Paul's motives should be unquestioned and his genuine concern for their spiritual welfare unchallenged. He, as their "father," had no greater joy than to know, as the apostle John observed, that his "children" walked in the truth (3John 3).

- d. The apostle's desire for their relationship with him was not for them to *praise* him, nor could he take pleasure in their *berating* him as some had done. What he wanted was for them to imitate him! "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (11:1). Following his inspired teaching and his godly example of living would assure them of eternal salvation, regardless of what that thought of his physical attributes when compared to those of his detractors.

Verses 17-21-- "For this reason I have sent Timothy to you..."

- a. Paul's "ways" were right ways. They were healthful not only for the Corinthian church but also for *every* church, because they were the ways of Christ. He expected no more of these people than he did of all brethren everywhere. The requirements of obedience were the same, and the reward for obedience was the same for all Christians, regardless of where they practiced their obedience. (See Acts 10:34,35.)
- b. Timothy was Paul's "adopted" rather than "begotten" son in the gospel (Acts 16:1,2). He had not yet arrived in Corinth when this letter was written (16:10). The church should take notice, however, that Timothy was not being sent to take Paul's place.
- c. The self-important leaders and their defensive followers should be warned that when Paul came there, he would settle the problems of division with whatever methods he might find necessary, including weapons of "power."
- d. The integrity of the kingdom rested not only in the word of truth which produced faith within the hearts of converts but also in the power of the signs and wonders that were given by the Lord as unassailable evidence of the heavenly origin of that truth. [See Hebrews 2:1-4; Mark 16:15-18.]
- e. The choice was theirs-- would Paul's arrival at Corinth mark a time for good fellowship and rejoicing in the gospel, or would it be an occasion for further rebuke and punishment? We have no doubt about what Paul wanted it to be, but we also remember that he was not unwilling to take violent measures when the situation called for them [See Acts 13:8-12 .] Knowing the nature of "church trouble," we may have reason to wonder about the attitudes he might encounter in some of the members when he finally came on the scene.

FIRST CORINTHIANS-- QUESTIONS

SECTION SIX 4:1-21

1. What were two characteristics of Paul's apostleship? (1)
2. The most fundamental requirement for serving God is _____. (2)
3. Did Paul think that he was a sinless man? Why or why not? (4)
4. Did Paul prohibit all judgment before the "Day of the Lord"? How do you know? (5)
5. What lesson could the church learn from Paul and Apollos that would help to solve a basic problem at Corinth? (6) (Also, 3:6-8)
6. What had the Corinthians "received," and from whom had they received it (them)? (7)
7. Name some contrasting descriptions of the apostles and the Corinthian teachers. (10)
8. What were some things suffered by the apostles in order to preach to the Corinthians? (11-13)
9. What role had Paul played in the salvation of the Corinthians? (14-16)
10. What does Paul claim about his "ways" that might seem remarkable to many members of churches today? (17)

FIRST CORINTHIANS

“Solving Church Problems”

SECTION SEVEN-- 5:1-13

Fifth Problem-- “Lack of Commitment Against Sin”

Verse 1-- “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you...”

- a. “Sexual immorality” is, literally, “fornication” [Gr.-*porneia*]. The term sometimes is applied to unlawful intercourse involving unmarried persons; it sometimes is broad enough to include married individuals [adultery]. Here, it involves incest [virtual if not actual] between a “wife” and her husband’s son. More about that particular relationship we cannot know.
- b. The KJV and ASV [“fornication”] are preferred, because “sexual immorality” is increasingly being applied to all sorts of illicit sexual behavior, whether sexual intercourse is involved or not. And so, justification for divorce is now popularly attributed to many behaviors other than the long-understood infidelity of fornication [See Matt. 19:9.]
- c. Fornication and adultery have always posed a very great problem for mankind. The Gentiles among whom Paul worked had historically viewed such activity as normal, acceptable, and even to be encouraged under certain conditions. It was customary for many of the pagan religions such as were practiced at Corinth to include the use of temple prostitutes [male and female] as a part of that practice.
- d. It is not at all surprising that someone in the Corinthian membership had fallen victim to a prevailing sin in the culture of the city. The undesirable lifestyles of a community usually find their way into churches in that locality.
- e. “Sexual immorality” [fornication] has always posed a severe problem for the people of God in both Testaments:
 - (1) Twice in the Ten Commandments the Lord warned the Jews about the sins of the flesh: “Thou shall not commit adultery” (Exo. 20:14) and, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” (Exo. 20:17);
 - (2) While in the wilderness, the nation fell to the temptation of fornication with the Midianite women, and 24,000 (Numbers 25:9) [23,000--1Cor.10:8] fell dead as the consequence of their lascivious behavior;
 - (3) Israel’s repeated breach of the Law against idolatry (Exo. 20:2-6) was very often called “fornication” or “adultery” to signify the violation of the covenant between them and their faithful God. (E.g., 2Chron. 21:11; Ezek. 16:31,32 [KJV]);
 - (4) The apostolic judgment about Gentiles keeping the Law included “abstain from fornication” as an especially dangerous practice common among Gentile nations (Acts 15:19,20).
 - (5) Both adultery and fornication are included in the list of “works of the flesh” and they will prevent a person from “walking in the Spirit” and “inheriting the kingdom of God” (Gal.5:16, 19-21).
 - (6) The totality of the earth’s corruptions by the “great harlot Babylon” is called “fornication” when the final assignment of God’s vengeance is made (Rev.19:2).
- f. The fornication in the Corinthian church not only involved fornication, a violation of God’s marital arrangement, but also an assault on the trust within family relationships upon which any stable society must depend. This fornication was so deviant from

common decency that it was “not even named [‘of things which are called by their own name because they are present or exist (as opposed to those which are unheard of)’-- Henry Thayer] among the Gentiles.”

- g. Does Paul show a somewhat shocked reaction [“it is *actually* reported”] to the news of this sinful situation? He was probably not too unsettled to learn about the sin, but he was deeply distressed that it was still “among” them--it was being tolerated by people who were supposed to be dedicated to personal sanctification (1:2).
- h. Thayer comments on the meaning of *porneia* in 1Cor. 5:1: “*a. prop.* of illicit sexual intercourse in general...(that this meaning must be adopted in these passages will surprise no one who has learned from 1Co. vi. 12 sqq. how leniently the heathen regarded this vice and how lightly they indulged in it; accordingly, all other interpretations of the term, such as of marriages within the prohibited degrees and the like, are to be rejected)...”

Verse 2-- “And you are puffed up...”

- a. A faction in the Corinthian church seems to have found it natural to become “puffed up” [footnote: “arrogant”] about anything that seemed to infringe on their determination to be independent and free to make whatever choices they wished in spite of apostolic teaching to the contrary:
 - (1) Some were “puffed up” about the divisive parties in the church (4:6);
 - (2) Some were “puffed up” over the “ways” Paul taught in every church (4:18,19);
 - (3) Some were “puffed up” about the incestuous relationship at Corinth (5:2);
 - (4) Some were “puffed up” over differences in spiritual gifts in the church (13:4).
- b. It appears that the problem here was not so much that anyone was defending the right of a Christian to indulge in fornication. What rankled Paul’s critics was that he had the “audacity” to presume to tell them what should be done about it. It had become a contest between their self-inflated human conceit and his claim to authority for directing their behavior in a situation they considered to be “their business,” not his.
- c. The obvious and appropriate reaction by the church to this sin of fornication was “mourning” rather than arrogance. The harm that had come to the individuals involved, as well as to the congregation which had allowed its image of purity to become tainted by its failure to show the proper response to the sin, was good cause for mourning and no cause at all for arrogance.
- d. Except for their inaction to rectify a bad situation, the sinner involved could already have been “taken away” [“removed,” “put away”] from the fellowship of faithful people, and the congregation could have by now done a lot toward repairing its reputation for a lifestyle that was different from that of the pagan population around it.

Verses 3-5-- “For I indeed, as absent in the body, but present in spirit...”

- a. Paul wrote these instructions from Ephesus and did not intend to come in person to Corinth for a while (16:8). However, his attention to the hurtful situation reported to him could not wait for his physical presence in Corinth. Urgent action was needed, and needed immediately.
- b. Paul’s “spirit” [interest, concern] was totally devoted to a remedy for the environment

- of toleration displayed by many of the Corinthians. His directions are clear and certain:
- (1) The procedure outlined carries the “‘name’ [authority] of the *Lord* Jesus Christ;”
 - (2) Action disclaiming the sinful situation must be taken publicly [“gathered together”];
 - (3) Apostolic authorization [“my spirit”] must be acknowledged in the transaction;
 - (4) The “power” of Jesus [His ability to bless or condemn *all* persons involved, depending on how each one reacted to His instructions] should be stressed to everyone;
 - (5) “Deliver” the sinner to Satan. Let it be known that he now belongs to the devil, not to the Lord.
- c. Two main purposes are given for these extreme measures to address their problem:
- (1) To “destroy” the sinner’s “flesh,” i.e., to move him to cease his sinful behavior;
 - (2) To “save” his spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus [the judgment].
- d. Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians reveals that this disciplinary action was successful in accomplishing its purposes (2Cor. 2:6-8). Repentance was produced where needed, and an errant but repentant Christian renewed his journey to heaven.
- e. Discipline is still needed in churches today, not only because of its two *main* purposes [c, above] but also because it embodies other desirable outcomes:
- (1) It honors the character of our Lord and proclaims His intolerance of sin;
 - (2) It honors the character of His church as a “set apart from the world” institution;
 - (3) It recognizes the influential nature of sin--“a little leaven leavens the whole lump;”
 - (4) It employs the only recourse available when a member deliberately violates the “honor code” of Christian conduct. The church cannot levy fines or impose jail sentences, but it *can* use spiritual weapons against sin, and they are *powerful*!

Verses 6-8-- “Your glorying is not good...”

- a. Their arrogance against Paul’s oversight of this situation was not “good.” It was not good for the sinners involved, and it was not good for the welfare of the rest of the congregation. Any delay in applying God’s remedy would certainly result in a deterioration of their willingness to combat sin and error in the future. Churches lose their identities when they lose their eagerness to oppose evil in all its forms.
- b. This letter was written before Pentecost [probably 57 A.D.] (16:8). The Jewish Passover may have been just ahead or just behind. Regardless, Paul now employs an analogy based on Passover regulations to emphasize the grave error of allowing sin to remain in the Lord’s church once it is uncovered.
- c. The Law directed that all leaven be thrown out before celebrating the Passover. No leaven was allowed to be used by the Jews during the feast. When the Passover observance was completed, a “new lump” of leavened bread could be mixed for use in the household. [See Exodus 12:14-20.]
- d. The prohibition of leaven emphasized the Jews’ obligation to abandon sin in grateful response to God’s “passing over” their firstborn before they left Egypt. The blood of the slain lamb was a substitute accepted by God for the “blood” [death] of their children and animals.
- e. Christ is the Passover lamb that was sacrificed in the place of spiritual death. The appropriate response to that sacrifice by those thereby redeemed from destruction is a “feast” [Christian life] free of sin [leaven]. Of course, we are never free to resume

contact with sin [leaven], because our unleavened “feast” [Christian life] never ends.

- f. Malice [on the part of some toward Paul] and wickedness [on the part of those connected with this problem of sinful conduct] should be “thrown out” of the house [church] of God’s people. The “unleavened bread” of righteous practices and righteous attitudes would serve those people better as they “kept the feast” to honor the Lamb.

Verses 9-11-- “I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company...”

- a. Paul obviously had written an earlier letter to the church, now lost to us, which had also dealt with the problem of accompanying with sinners. However, his previous admonitions had evidently gone unheeded.
- b. One anticipated response by those who would detract from Paul’s instructions about the strict handling of sinful violations in the church was, “Paul would make us isolate ourselves from virtually everyone if we disassociate ourselves from fornicators.” Whether or not that would be true if Paul had included *all* fornicators in his restrictions, it might make an good argument for those looking for something to use against him.
- c. Paul recognized that the Corinthian world was so filled with heinous sins-- fornication, covetousness, extortion, and idolatry-- that it would, indeed, be extremely difficult for Christians to maintain *any* contact with non-Christians if his prohibition included the world as well as the church. He “*certainly*” had not meant that. How could disciples “go into all the world” and seek to save “the world,” if they could have no association *with* “the world” that needed the gospel? Jesus’ plan was to send saints “into” the world to get sinners “out of” the world! [See Matthew 28:18-20.]
- d. His intention was to prohibit Christians from close fellowship [“to keep company”] with known sinners in the church [“anyone named a brother”]. Such fellowship might be construed to be toleration, if not approval, of sinful behavior by sanctified disciples.
- e. “Keeping no company” included a refusal “to eat with” brethren who are guilty of the sins named [and others not here named]. Social eating has in most societies signified an equality and a mutual acceptance of one another among those eating together. Such a message should not be transmitted by the social interaction of faithful Christians with brethren who are judged unworthy of spiritual equality and acceptance.

Verses 12,13-- “For what have I to do with judging those...”

- a. Neither Paul nor the membership at Corinth had been assigned the task of “judging” people outside that membership. Our responsibility is toward those “inside” the body. “To judge” [*krino*] is “to separate, select, choose; hence, to determine, and so to judge, pronounce judgment”--W.E. Vine.
- b. Separating and pronouncing judgment was appropriate for the church as it pertained to its own members [congregation]. It was not the province of the church to deal with the spiritual status of outsiders. That judgment must be left to God alone, and He is perfectly capable of handling that judgment perfectly. “Depart, ye cursed...” (Matt. 25:41).
- c. We need to pay close attention to what God has charged *us* to do, and leave other matters in His hands to resolve. Our work is to “put away from yourselves that wicked person.”

FIRST CORINTHIANS-- QUESTIONS

SECTION SEVEN 5:1-13

1. What sin had been reported to Paul? (1)
2. How had some at Corinth reacted to his attention to this sin? (2)
3. What action(s) did Paul direct the church to take? (4,5)
4. What was the purpose expressed for this procedure? (5)
5. Ignoring sin in the church is dangerous to the whole body. Why? Explain. (6)
6. Living for Christ is likened to what practice of the Jews during a special celebration.? (8)
[See also Leviticus 23:4-8.]
7. How does the Passover of the Jews relate to the people of God under the New Covenant? (7)
8. What kinds of sinners are to be avoided [not fellowshiped] by Christians? (10,11)
9. How does a Christian express his attitude toward “brethren” guilty of those sins? (11)
10. What implication is made by Paul about communicating with the church at Corinth? (9)
11. Should Christians judge others? Explain (13) [Also see John 7:24 and 1Cor. 15:33]

FIRST CORINTHIANS--

“Solving Church Problems”

SECTION EIGHT--6:1-11

Sixth Problem-- “Bad Brotherly Relationships”

Verse 1-- “Dare any of you, having a matter against another...”

- a. Differences will arise between brethren, and between brother and non-brother, despite efforts to live in peace (Rom. 12:18). The civil courts have been established to deal with the Christian and the unbeliever, but Paul prescribes another remedy for disputes when all who are involved are Christians.
- b. Jesus had clearly described the procedure to be followed when saints disagree: (1) Settle your differences personally, if possible; (2) if not, take witnesses to validate the claims of the innocent against the guilty; (3) if all personal efforts fail to resolve the problem, take the matter to the church for spiritual counsel and influence; (4) as a last resort, the offending brother(s) should be disciplined for disobedience to God’s laws governing brotherly love (Matthew 18:15-17).
- c. Paul appealed to the civil courts of Rome when he was mistreated (Acts 25:11). Where both parties to a dispute cannot be expected to be bound by *spiritual* law, resort to *civil* law is the normal recourse available to a believer. Even so, a Christian should be cautious that his influence [“light”] is not harmed by entering into litigation against another person.
- d. Paul’s implication was that some members were *knowingly* violating Jesus’ directions for such situations and were “daring” [“bringing oneself to do a thing”--W.E.Vine] in their actions against brethren. They were allowing self-interest to suppress the behavior that was appropriate for saints to exhibit.
- e. Lawsuits between brethren signify to observers that God’s law is inferior to man’s law in regulating the lives of Christians. If the righteous cannot properly discern between right and wrong, how can they expect the unrighteous to do so?

Verses 2,3-- “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?”

- a. Paul asks *six* times if these Corinthians “do not know” something that they should have known. Evidently, they had previously been instructed accurately about these matters, and his implication may be that unscrupulous teachers had been allowed to erode their confidence in apostolic teaching. Human wisdom had left them really *knowing* much less about important things than they *thought* they knew.
- b. One truth lost to them was that “saints will judge the world.” The *factuality* of this statement is clear; the *methodology* of how that takes place is not so clear. Several explanations have been offered:
 - (1) Just as the repentance of Nineveh and the acceptance of wisdom by the queen of Sheba will “judge” [“condemn”] the unrepenting and unaccepting world (Matt. 12: 41,42), so the saints’ pursuit of harmony without litigation in the courts will condemn the world’s need to settle matters of difference legally. So, why would the saved choose behave in a way that God has already condemned?
 - (2) The saints are now judging the world by preaching the gospel, which condemns the disobedient in consequence of their disobedience.

- (3) Christians will “assist” Christ in the judgment by their assent that His judgment is righteous and fair.
- (4) The church is *represented* in Christ when He judges, as mankind was represented in Adam when he sinned (Rom. 5:12).
- c. Regardless of *how* saints will judge the world, it is obvious that, since they are capable of judging in such weighty things, they should be able to make good judgments about much less important matters.
- d. Moreover, “angels” will be judged by the saints. Again, the details of this judgment are uncertain. Probably, it is *evil* angels and it is their disobedience that will be judged [condemned] in much the same way as the unrighteousness of the world will be condemned by the righteousness of the faithful. [See 2Peter 2:4.]
- e. Paul contrasts the judgments of the “other [spiritual] life” with those of “this [physical] life.” The former are significant; the latter are “trivial” [vs.2, RSV].

Verses 4-7a-- “If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life...”

- a. The KJV suggests that even the least esteemed [as a judge] in the church would be better able to render fair settlements between brethren [based on righteous principles] than any unbelieving judge in the civil courts.
- b. The ASV and the NKJV suggest that it is civil judges who are least esteemed [as godly and fair-minded men], and who are “of no account in the church,” before whom some brethren were “laying” their disputes.
- c. These offending brethren apparently thought that there were none *in* the church wise enough to solve their problems. This assessment, of course, stood as an indictment of the worldly wisdom promoted and practiced by the false teachers. If that wisdom was inadequate to resolve “trivial” matters between brethren, how could it be so desirable in deciding the substantive issues now facing the Corinthian church?
- d. This reliance on valueless principles should be the source of *shame* to them rather than the reason for the great *pride* which had virtually divided the church.
- e. Paul answers his own question about the inadequacy of worldly wisdom by making an objective statement about the real situation at Corinth. It was *bad* that any “brother goes to law,” because that often reveals an ungodly spirit. It was *worse* when he “goes to law against brother,” because he follows man’s way instead of God’s way of resolving controversy. It was *worst of all* that unbelievers are preferred to believers as judge in these unpleasant matters.
- f. God’s judgment of their behavior was undeniable: when brethren sue brethren, “it is an *utter failure* for you” [NKJV]. It was “altogether a defect in you” [ASV] and it was “a defeat for you” [RSV].

Verses 7b-11-- “Why do you not rather accept wrong?”

- a. Sometimes hard choices have to be made as part of being faithful to Christ. We must “take up our cross” of self-denial in order to promote the true image of the kingdom. “Why do you not rather accept wrong?” than to participate in doing wrong? “Let yourselves” [NKJV] be defrauded, if that is the way to avoid disparaging the *brotherhood* of the Lord’s church in the civil courts!

- b. These instructions obviously are directed to members who refuse to trust the judgment of their brethren in resolving their disagreements. Disputes *should* be laid to rest. The image of brotherhood is as surely marred by the ongoing and unsettled quarrels of members as it is by participants seeking solutions in the wrong way.
- c. It was wrong for members to sue other members even when they were convinced that they had *good* cause for their action. How much more guilty were those Corinthians who dared to take brethren to court in *unjust* lawsuits? Some seemed willing not only to violate God's law of resolving disputes but also rushed into court and added sin to sin by utilizing the civil law to press a fraudulent advantage over fellow Christians!
- d. It should be obvious even to insensitive members that "the unrighteous" cannot "inherit the kingdom of God." Participation in God's kingdom is dependent on a high level of righteousness (Matt. 5:20). Paul's task here is not to defend the role of "righteousness," but to convince unrighteous defrauders that they *are* unrighteous.
- e. Paul lists several different kinds of "unrighteous" sinners who are to be excluded from the fellowship of the kingdom. Most of the Corinthians would probably agree with his list. However, the last sinners in the list are "extortioners" [KJV, NKJV, ASV]. The RSV calls them "robbers;" the Confraternity [Catholic] Bible says, "greedy." These are the people previously called "defrauders," because they wrongfully used the law to abuse other church members.
- f. The "respectable" [to many] practice of taking brethren to court is no less sinful than the recognized wickedness of the other activities that will keep people from inheriting the kingdom.
- g. Paul has already called attention to several of these depraved behaviors (5:11). "Extortion" here receives a double condemnation to emphasize its inappropriateness for seekers of the kingdom. It here companies with numerous other sins that will cause people to be lost.
- h. These sinful practices were common to Corinthian culture and had been common to some *saints* before they were "washed" (Acts 22:16), "sanctified" (1Tim. 2:21), and "justified" ["pronounced to be righteous or right"--Vine].
- i. All *sin* is the antithesis of the expected holiness and purity of born-again children of God. Sin in the lives of Christians is wrong in its every form and cannot be tolerated by faithful disciples (Gal. 2:17)!

(Questions on this Section are included with questions on Section nine)

FIRST CORINTHIANS

“Solving Church Problems”

SECTION NINE-- 6:12-20

Problem Nine-- “Defiling God’s Temple”

Verses 12-14-- “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful.”

- a. Many of the Corinthians were deeply troubled by the question of the rightful place of various foods in the Christian’s diet. They were especially perplexed about whether or not they had permission to eat meats that had been offered to idols. These questions will be discussed in chapters eight and ten as Paul further deals with their church problems.
- b. “Sexual immorality” [fornication and adultery] were huge issues in the culture of the city and demanded apostolic attention in any discussion of the lifestyle of the saved. At least one brother stood convicted of this sin; perhaps others were also guilty of participation in it, or were much too tolerant of its existence in and out of the church.
- c. Perhaps some had transposed the seriousness of these two practices: eating meats and engaging in lustful activities. They were “up tight” about the meats, but tended to overlook the damnation attached to sins of the flesh. Their thinking needed to be corrected.
- d. “All things are lawful” was a favorite theme of Paul’s. [See 1Cor. 10:23; Gal. 5:23.] It was a principle often misunderstood and misapplied by others. It is likely that false teachers at Corinth had twisted his toleration of *indifferent* practices into a defense for *unacceptable* practices, even sexual immorality. [See 1Peter 2:16.]
- e. Sin is never lawful for anyone! Things not sinful in themselves *may* or *may not* be lawful for the Christian, depending on their circumstances and their consequences. Sometimes innocent activities can exert “power” over us that hinders our influence over people or enslaves us in some way so that we can no longer be effective and productive in work of the gospel. Innocent things can easily become questionable if we do not exercise care. They are “not helpful” [NKJV, RSV]; not “expedient” [KJV, ASV]. “Expedient”-- “profitable; an advantage; one who has his feet free”--Vine.
- f. God has provided foods for the stomach [as an example of Paul’s “all things”] as man sees fit to use them. All foods have been cleared for man’s enjoyment if received with thanksgiving (1Tim.4:3,4). Under the rule of expediency, exceptions would be:
 - (1) Foods that violate their intended purpose [e.g., grains and fruit made into alcohol];
 - (2) Foods that harm the general welfare [e.g., drugs and alcohol];
 - (3) Foods that gain control over the eater [e.g., addictions that lead to gluttony, obesity, and poverty].
 - (4) Foods that are spiritually offensive and cause weak Christians to stumble [e.g., the marketplace meats of chapter eight].
- g. The question of meats is relatively unimportant as compared to that of fornication. Both foods and man’s stomach are only temporary physical provisions. Fornication is a physical act, but it carries tremendous spiritual consequences. It defiles not only man’s body but also his soul. It is the only sin that in its first occurrence completely severs the offender from Christ.

- h. The body has a higher purpose than to be employed in lust. The Lord promises to provide for the needs of the body ["the Lord for the body"], but He expects it to be used in righteous ways ["for the Lord"].
- i. Man's body has a higher goal than physical gratification. It will be raised to a glorious state in the life to come if it has been given due respect in this life. Satan uses man's body as a vehicle for sin; God can use the same body in the resurrection as the ultimate proof of His divinity and power. [See 1Cor. 15:28.]

Verses 15-17-- "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?"

- a. Man's physical body is a part of his membership in Christ's spiritual body. He uses it extensively to serve Christ in that body.
- b. Is it appropriate for a Christian to transfer the use of his body from the service of Christ to the service of "harlotry" [probably a reference to the employment of harlots in the pagan temples at Corinth]? Of course not! [See Matt. 6:34.]
- c. "The two shall become one flesh" is a fact applied to the legitimate marriage of one man to one woman (Genesis 2:24). It is also a fact that the sexual joining of male and female will impose a great influence by each party over the other. This becomes a positive influence in a lawful relationship, because it is a good relationship that will result in good qualities in both parties, such as concern, care, tenderness, etc. On the other hand, illicit sexual contact will degrade the character of its practitioners. It will lead to feelings of guilt, shame, deceit, disloyalty, etc.
- d. Sexual purity is consonant with the Christian's marriage to Christ. Being joined to Christ in a spiritual marriage will result in the enjoyment of "one spirit" with Him. We will then have qualities like His and thus fulfill God's purpose for our lives. [See Matt. 5:48.]

Verses 18-20-- "Flee sexual immorality."

- a. Only three words are necessary to provide guidance away from the pitfalls of the lust that prevailed so widely among the citizens of Corinth. Further comments may explain the urgency of his admonition, but the easy-to-remember "flee sexual immorality" is enough to keep them from falling into sin.
- b. Various explanations of verse eighteen are available:
 - (1) "All temptation to sin originates outside the body, including fornication. Fornication is peculiarly against the body, since it separates the body from union with Christ [its main purpose]."-- B.W. Johnson.
 - (2) "Other sins than fornication affect members of the body, such as stomach, lungs, etc., that will not relate to the future state of the body (Rev.7:16), but fornication joins the *whole body* to a harlot and severs the body from union with Christ. This strikes at the very essence of the future state of the body."-- J.W. McGarvey.
 - (3) "All sins we commit come from the spirit and not from the body (Matthew 15: 18, 19). Some sins, specifically fornication, are against (hurtful to) the body. All sins defile the spirit, some harm the body."-- R.L. Whiteside.
 - (4) Other explanations that are less satisfactory.

- c. The individual human body serves as a “temple” [holy place] for the use of the Holy Spirit in accomplishing the Lord’s work in this world. It is the instrument necessary to the Divine Plan for mankind. The church is also said to serve that purpose, because God utilizes it as a collectivity of many bodies to do His will.
- d. We are “not our own” to use our bodies as we see fit. We belong to the Spirit of God to use as *He* sees fit. This opportunity to serve as the tools by which the Divine Three execute the will of heaven is precious, and it is possible only because the Son paid the price of precious blood (1Peter 1:18,19).
- e. Christians are obligated by Christ’s purchase to glorify God in their “temples” by using their bodies *and* spirits as God wishes (Matt. 5:16). This is the “whole of man” (Eccl. 12:13).

FIRST CORINTHIANS-- QUESTIONS

SECTIONS EIGHT AND NINE 6:1-20

1. What practice by church members did Paul condemn? (1)
2. What two things will Christians judge in the future, and what two things should they judge now? (2,3)
3. What type person should be employed as a judge in the church? (5)
4. Rather than go before unbelievers, Christians should be willing to suffer what consequences of disputes with their brethren? (7)
5. Who are the “unrighteous” who will not go to heaven? (9,10)
6. How had church members overcome the guilt of their past sins? (11)
7. What sin (already condemned in 5:11 and 6:9) is condemned at length in this chapter? (13-20)
8. For whose glory is the human body to be used? (13)
9. It is appropriate that the Christian’s body be joined to whom and not to whom? (15,16)
10. In what two ways must the child of God glorify his Father? (20)

FIRST CORINTHIANS

“Solving Church Problems”

SECTION TEN-- 7:1-40

Eighth Problem-- “Confusion About Marriage”

This section [chapter seven] begins the *second* main division of First Corinthians. The first dealt with problems that had been reported to Paul by the “household of Chloe” (1:11). This part addresses matters contained in a letter sent to the apostle by unknown persons and under unknown circumstances (7:1).

Additionally, this chapter contains answers to several questions about marriage that were of concern to the Corinthians. Their confusion apparently sprang from the current environment out of which they wrote. A “present distress” served as the foundation for some of Paul’s apostolic advice. Of this “present distress” we know nothing in particular. The epistle was sent to Corinth about 57 A.D. The first *documented* persecution against the church was launched in and around Rome in 64 A.D. by emperor Nero. The “distress” referenced by Paul may have been local, or he may have alluded to a persecution that would inevitably spread to Corinth and elsewhere. Such a persecution could not be viewed as very far in the future in the light of what was about to occur at Rome.

The questions asked by the Corinthians may be reconstructed from the discussion Paul offers about various aspects of the marriage relationship.

Verses 1-9-- “Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me..”

- a. “*Is it better for Christians to be married or single?*” appears to be the first question.
- b. Paul’s answer: “It is good not to touch [marry].” This runs counter to God’s original plan for men and women, which was, “It is not good that man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Obviously, something had changed. Paul answered within the context of their concern about the “present distress.” Circumstances sometime alter non-essential matters, but never things necessary to salvation.
- c. Paul’s response not to marry is tempered as a “concession” and not a “commandment” in verse six.
- d. Under *all* circumstances, if one must choose between marriage and immorality, the *option* of marriage for Christians becomes a *necessity*.
- e. Marriage fulfills its purpose only when husband and wife both fulfill their roles in the relationship. Each must render [pay] the physical affection *due* the other. Marriage is a sacred contract in which both parties agree to an appropriate sexual union. For either person to refuse to honor this promise is to be guilty of “defrauding” [KJV, ASV] or “depriving” [NKJV] the other of his/her *right* as a spouse.
- f. A *mutual* agreement to abstain from sex is advisable only if both partners spend the agreed-upon time in “prayer” [intensive spiritual activity that requires a singular focus]. Even this arrangement must be governed by the ability to remain apart without sin.
- g. The “concession” may apply specifically to this period of abstinence, or it may include the whole of Paul’s discussion to this point.

- h. Clearly, Paul did not prefer that marriage be denied to all Christians. The single state was better only because of dangers involved in the “present distress.”
- i. Not everyone had the “gift” of enough self-control over his body to forego marriage altogether. Paul was exceptional in this respect. [See 1Cor.9:27.]
- j. If practicable, *all* unmarried persons, including those widowed, would be wise not to enter into a relationship that might raise difficulties as they tried to serve the Lord.
- k. These were to *remain* single, not to *become* single. The married life is honorable (Heb. 13:3). It mirrors the bond between Jesus and His church (Eph.5:23-32). Prohibiting marriage would be a sign of apostasy (1Tim. 4:3). Still, the single life, if it can be lived purely, might prove to be expedient under circumstances of persecution.

Verses 10,11-- “Now to the married I command...”

- a. “*Is marriage to be dissolved by Christians if it is better to be unmarried?*” was the second question in the minds of some of the Corinthian Christians.
- b. Paul’s response comes *directly* from Jesus’ teaching while on earth (Matt.19:3-9). The wife is not to “depart” [divorce]; the husband is not to “put away” [divorce] his wife. Among the Jews, only men could divorce, but the Greeks allowed both men and women that option in dissolving marriage [B.W. Johnson]. Paul covered both situations in this prohibition of divorce.
- c. A wife who is driven by extreme circumstances to feel impelled to leave her marriage despite apostolic instructions to the contrary must not for any reason remarry. This would constitute adultery if her divorce was not for the cause of “fornication” on the part of her husband. These same restrictions must apply also to her spouse.

Verses 12-24-- “But to the rest I, not the Lord, say...”

- a. “*Should Christians remain married to unbelievers?*”
- b. Paul’s answers to their questions came from his inspiration as an apostle (Jn.16:13; 1Cor.14:37) and as such carried the authority of command [unless otherwise specified--verse 6].
- c. Jesus had on earth taught nothing specific about believers and unbelievers being married. Nevertheless, Paul’s response came by revelation and enjoyed the same standing as the Lord’s personal commands (Gal.1:11,12).
- d. Belief and unbelief have no bearing on the sanctity of the marriage vows between any husband and wife, nor can either be cause for the dissolution of their marriage. There is, of course, no reference here to the *making* of such a relationship, which involves a serious judgment about the wisdom of a mixed marriage.
- e. A mixed marriage is *legitimate*, if not wise. Both spouses are “sanctified” [set apart as acceptable] for the marriage. This “sanctified” state is not “saved,” because unbelievers *cannot* be saved (John 3:16).
- f. Children born to such a union are also legitimate. Only legitimacy can produce legitimacy. [See Matt. 7:17,18.] The actions taken by Ezra and Nehemiah in the Old Testament would not be appropriate to this situation.
- g. Maintaining the mixed marriage is decided by the unbelieving partner. The Christian, who is under obligation to Christ, has no right to dissolve the union, because Christ’s

- law forbids such an action (Matt. 19:3-9).
- h. Should the unbeliever decide to divorce his/her Christian spouse, the believer is not “bound” [“held by constraint of law or necessity”--Henry Thayer] to maintain a relationship that has been broken unilaterally by another.
 - i. Christians are charged to live at peace [“between individuals”--Thayer] with all men (Rom. 14:19; Heb. 12:14). The believing partner must not be the *source* of the disharmony that fosters divorce nor the *reason* that a spouse chooses to depart.
 - j. Sometimes unpleasant things must be endured to maintain a marriage. The worth of such sacrifices can be measured only by the worth of a spouse’s soul. As long as hope can be held for a spouse’s conversion, the Christian must do everything possible to keep the doors of opportunity open. Who better than a spouse can reach the other if the believer labors to live before the unbeliever as a Christian should?
 - k. Personal circumstances that do not impact one’s salvation negatively should not be deliberately discontinued by disciples after conversion as if they were suddenly inappropriate for converts. This was true of both circumcision [customary distinctions between Jews and Gentiles] and slavery. It was *also* true of marriage! No more drastic change in that relationship is required of believers than in the others.
 - l. Relationships need not be changed unless a change enhances one’s opportunity to better serve the Lord. Dissolving a marriage, of course, cannot serve that purpose because the unscriptural divorce involved is *sinful* in itself, and we cannot “sin that grace may abound” (Rom. 6:1,2).
 - m. Christians are completely under bondage to please the Lord in *all* they do, including their conduct in a marriage. In the Master/slave connection, the Master always dictates the terms of service. Other men [slave or free] have no voice in what the servant should do. Only Christ’s will is relevant in the determination of a Christian’s behavior in the marriage relationship.
 - n. Paul’s final word about believer/unbeliever marriages: “Brethren, let each one remain with God in that *calling* in which he was called” [NKJV].

Verses 25-35-- “Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord...”

- a. “*Should unmarried people seek to be married?*”
- b. This is another situation not directly addressed by Jesus while on earth. Again, however, Paul had received inspired information to answer this question. His “judgment” is *not* mere human opinion. Rather, it was “trustworthy” [*pistos*-- “faithful; to be trusted; reliable”--Vine] because it originated with the Lord and not with Paul.
- c. The teaching that follows is given within the context of the “**present distress**,” which accounts for the concessions made later to those who might be affected in different ways by whatever persecution is referenced by the apostle out of his heavenly wisdom and foresight.
- d. The first response-- “remain as you are”-- is general in nature and not intended to cover every situation in which people might find themselves. Some of these special circumstances will be dealt with in the following verses.
- e. Those not “bound” [by marriage vows] should not plan marriage in their immediate future. Those “loosed” [by death (Rom.7:2) or divorce (Matt.19:1-3)] would best

not seek another mate. The reasons for this response are explained later.

- f. As if to allay any anxiety that might be fostered by his first response, Paul quickly offers a concession. If one decides that the problems caused by not marrying are greater than those that might arise from marriage, he [or she] may marry without sin. However, the “trouble in the flesh” that will come from the “present distress” is real, and those who decline his warning may live to regret their decision.
- g. The time was “short” [“very short”--RSV] until the “distress” would be upon them. “Within half a generation the whole Roman world was turned up by civil war, three emperors in succession were slain, and Jerusalem was destroyed.” [B.W. Johnson]
- h. “From now on” the saints would face increasingly difficult circumstances that would place enormous pressures on their faithfulness. Those who were involved in various earthly relationships would suffer most because of those relationships. Whether one’s marriage brings suffering, happiness, prosperity, or pleasure, *none* of this will serve to shield believers from the onslaughts of persecution. All that will protect them from their persecutors is “pleasing the Lord.”
- i. The problem for married Christians during oncoming trials was not that they would *deliberately* choose to become less dedicated to serving Christ. However, the nature of a good marriage is such that husbands and wives are motivated to the preferential treatment of their spouses, oftentimes subconsciously. Without the loyalties that accompany marriage, disciples are better able to concentrate on those loyalties of *time* and *energy* that rightfully belong to Jesus Christ. Despite efforts to the contrary, “there is a difference between a wife [or husband] and a virgin.”

Verses 36-38-- “But if any man thinks that he is behaving improperly...”

- a. These verses seem to be directed toward the fathers of unmarried daughters. They, of course, held almost complete control of their daughters’ lives and would make the decisions that had to be made about their marriages.
- b. If a father decides that it is unwise to forbid marriage to a daughter who arduously seeks the wedded state, and especially if she is past the usual age for daughters to take a husband, he [the father] has divine permission to fulfill her desire. It is not a sin on his part any more than it is sinful on the part of the bride and groom.
- c. Because of the impending pressures of persecution, the general counsel, “Do not marry,” is the best advice to follow. Therefore, unless it is “necessary” [the “pros” outweigh the “cons”], a father should shield himself from the complications of an expanded family [son-in-law and probably grandchildren] and his daughter from the temptations already cited by Paul.
- d. It all comes down to the final assessment: it is *all right* [no sin involved] to allow the marriage to take place; it is *better* [to wait] for a better time to proceed with wedding plans.

Verses 39,40-- “A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives...”

- a. “*Should a widow remarry?*” was the fifth and last question asked by the Corinthians.
- b. The law of God forbids any remarriage to another while one’s spouse is alive [unless, of course, the spouse has been sexually unfaithful to the marriage].

- c. The death of a spouse releases the other from the obligations accompanying the marriage and the surviving spouse is free [from the previous marriage bond] to re-marry another person of his/her own choice. The person chosen must not be in violation of God's law concerning divorce and remarriage (Matt. 19:1-9).
- d. Paul places one restriction on the choice of another husband by a widow who considers remarriage. She must marry "in the Lord." This obviously specifies that the new mate be a Christian or not ineligible for her to marry (Matt.19:9).
- e. Even if a widow should follow Paul's guidance about whom to marry, she would be "happier" if she "remains as she is." The same reasons for his advice to those desiring marriage for the first time also apply to a widow who wants to be married again. Family responsibilities would complicate her ability to give complete devotion to the cause of the Lord.
- f. Three possibilities exist about Paul's restriction on the widow's choice of a new husband:
 - (1) This is a permanent restriction placed on a widow's remarriage that is intended to be respected from that time forward. If so, why was this restriction placed on a widow and not on a virgin? While most agree that it is always *better* for Christians to marry Christians, there is no clear statement that renders an alternative choice sinful. May one *assume* that the first marriage also had to meet the same standard as the one legislated for the widow? What circumstances might make a mixed marriage more dangerous for a widow than it might for a first-timer?
 - (2) This was another effort by Paul to protect widows from the pressures of the "present distress," just as he had sought to shield those who had never been a party to marriage. Therefore, this was a temporary regulation that would not apply under more favorable circumstances. Thus, as part of his answer to the question of a widow remarrying, Paul stipulates the she, like the virgin, would do *better* not to remarry at all. Should she choose to do so anyway, a Christian husband would offer support and encouragement to her in times of trial and would naturally make a more logical choice for remarriage.
 - (3) It may be, in the light of the problems presented by (1) and (2), Paul simply intended the phrase, "in the Lord," to limit eligible choices for the widow to men who were not in violation of the Lord's rule of divorce and remarriage. Hence, no greater burden was placed on her selection of a mate than was true for those who had never married.
- g. Although both positions pose difficulties, the second seems to fit more consistently within the context of the entire discussion of marriage and the "present distress" in this chapter.

FIRST CORINTHIANS-- QUESTIONS

SECTION TEN

7:1-40

1. Marriage is designed by God to keep people from what sin? (2)
2. Why was it good for those who were unmarried to remain so? (8, 26)
3. What was the command of the Lord about the marriage vow? (10,11)
4. In what way did Paul's teaching about divorce differ from that of Christ? Was his teaching any less binding than the Lord's? (12-16)
5. What two social circumstances does Paul use to teach that the gospel is not intended to cause great social upheaval? (17-22)
6. Why was Paul "trustworthy" to teach things about marriage that Christ had not taught personally? (25-- Also, see 2:16.)
7. What was Paul's reason for advising that unmarried people remain unmarried? (26, 28)
8. What was the basic "difference" between married and unmarried men and women during the "present distress"?
9. Which man did better-- the one who encouraged his daughter's marriage or the one who discouraged it? Why? (36-38)
10. Had God's law about divorce been changed because of circumstances?
11. What restriction was placed on widows who remarried? What do you think that means? (39, 40)

FIRST CORINTHIANS

“Solving Church Problems”

SECTION ELEVEN-- 8:1-13

Ninth Problem: “Abusing the Liberty of Conscience”

Verses 1-3-- “Now concerning things offered to idols:...”

- a. Another problem about which some of the Corinthians were bothered, and about which they had written to Paul to resolve some of their concerns, involved situations attached to the eating of meat that had been initially offered as worship to an idol.
- b. Some Christians had no hesitancy in eating such meat as part of a meal to which they had been invited by others. They were emboldened by their “knowledge” to participate in such meals even in the pagan temple where the animal had been offered to a false god. Others, however, were anxious that this participation was fraught with danger to others and could easily become the source of great harm to the convictions of those who were weak in the faith.
- c. David Lipscomb and J.W. Shepherd offered this information about the handling of meats that were used in idolatrous rituals at Corinth and other places:

“The Christians at Corinth and throughout the Gentile countries had been reared in idolatry, and revered and worshiped idols. Idols were worshiped by sacrificing animals to them. [When an animal was offered in sacrifice to an idol, or to a false god represented by an idol, only a small part, such as the legs wrapped in fat, or the intestines, was consumed by the fire on the altar. The remainder was eaten by the sacrificer and his friends, or those who were invited to the sacrificial feast, which took place either in the temple or in the adjoining grove, and to these feasts Christians were invited (verse 10); or the remainder of the flesh, after what was burnt in honor of the idol, as their requisite by the priests, would be sold by them in the markets, and the heathen would partake of it as meat of peculiar sanctity.”] --[Commentary on First Corinthians](#).
- d. This burning issue about eating meats was easily settled in the minds of some members on the sole basis of *knowledge*. It was a simple matter of acting according to one’s understanding of the truth about *any* matter in question. Knowledge had become an unintended weapon in the hands of insensitive and selfish people and now threatened to destroy in weak saints the newly-discovered truth that was the most basic of all gospel principles: “There is *one* God, and Him *only* shall you serve.”
- e. Paul, as a Jew, had “knowledge” from a babe that there is only one God. Perhaps also as a Jew he knew only too well how being favored with special knowledge could lead to pride and arrogance toward others with whom such knowledge had not been shared [See Romans 2:17-20 for Paul’s comments about Jewish pride.].
- f. Following the resolution of the question about Gentiles keeping parts of Moses’ Law, the apostles, elders, and brethren at Jerusalem had written explicitly that Gentile converts should “abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from fornication” [Acts 15:20]. These were practices closely aligned with the religions of pagan idolators. It would seem that these prohibitions were intended to protect them from the temptations of returning to their former error.
- g. Although their knowledge about the true nature of idolatrous worship had already served to shield the faith of the more mature Gentile Christians from such temptations,

it would not protect other church members who yet did not fully understand the total loyalty demanded by the Lord. It would require much more teaching before they would reach that goal. [See 1Cor. 10:14-33; 2Cor. 6:14-18.]

- h. Thus, Paul's statement that "we *all* have knowledge" must be taken as irony. All did *not* understand equally the dangers inherent in eating meat in pagan temples (verse 7).
- i. Paul saw the need to push another issue that had been ignored in the controversy surrounding this question: do knowledgeable Christians have an unrestricted right to do things their *own* consciences approve, regardless of the fact that their actions within such liberty may well undermine the convictions of disciples weaker in the faith?
- j. The question of whether or not meats offered to idols may be eaten by some Christians must be answered not only on the basis of **knowledge**, but, just as importantly, on the basis of **love**.
- k. Those members who "thought" that their superior knowledge granted them license to make decisions that really sprang from their own personal desires had never learned a fundamental lesson. Knowledge must be tempered with a love that will constrain us to "look out not only for our own interests but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4).
- l. The brother whose love for others weaker in faith will determine his behavior in controversial issues has acquired true *wisdom*-- "the ability to see things as God sees them." God loves those who really love their brethren and who will treat them accordingly.

Verses 4-6-- "Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols..."

- a. One group of brethren at Corinth leaned heavily on the knowledge they had absorbed about the difference between the true God and the gods of their former religions. And from this knowledge had sprung a disregard for the absence of that understanding in another group of weaker saints.
- b. These knowledgeable members had done well in mastering "Christianity 101." What they had learned was fundamental to everything else to be learned as disciples of the Christ. No doubt, Paul and other teachers had worked hard to convince them that:
 - a. Idols are nothing more than the physical handiwork of the craftsmen who had made them from wood, stone, or metal [See Isa. 2:8; 44:9-20.];
 - b. There is only one authentic God who is worthy of man's devotion.
 - (1) His *Existence* is declared by the elements of the natural world (Psa.19:1);
 - (2) His *Personality of Oneness* is declared through His revelation of Himself (Acts 17:24ff.).
- c. Pagan religions offered worshipers many gods in heaven and on earth to revere and serve. Typically, each city had its own deities. Every phenomenon of nature and every incident in the lives of human beings was supposedly controlled by the arbitrary and unyielding rule of superbeings who displayed an alarming similarity to the bad behavior of the humans they dominated. It is no wonder that Paul described many of these idolators as "very religious" (Acts 17:22).
- d. "Our" God is entirely different from "theirs." He is a *Father* to every man, and He treats His worshipers as any good father treats his children. He seeks every man's good. From Him flow all "good things" to satisfy the needs of devotees (James 1:17).

In return, we are “for” Him by respecting Him and obeying His guidance.

- e. It is important for Paul to call attention to the rightful place of Jesus in the “new” religion embraced by the Corinthian converts. There is *one* God, but there is also a *Godhead* within which Christ functions as the “one Lord” through whom all things were made (Col. 1:16). “*Christ crucified*” (1:23) was the key element in their rescue from the ignorance of idolatry and the dissipation of pagan religion. They must never forget that it was through Christ that they had always lived physically (Acts 17:28; Gen. 1:26) and now “lived” spiritually (Rom. 6:3-5).
- f. If every Christian had a thorough understanding of these truths, Paul’s discussion could have ended here, and probably would have. If only the spiritual well-being of the “strong” were at issue, the conclusion was obvious: “eating meats in the pagan temples is an indifferent matter of choice and it won’t hurt you.”

Verses 7,8-- However, there is not in everyone that knowledge;...”

- a. The homage paid to graven images and to the gods they represented was deeply ingrained in the new Christians. It had been very difficult for some to replace their sensitivity toward the former objects of their devotion with a clear conviction of truth about the “new” God they now sought to follow. They had some mixed feelings about both the old ways of idolatry and the new ways of the gospel. They feared *not* to show some bit of reverence for the idol, on the possibility that it *did* possess some bit of supernatural power over men. Yet, they had learned enough about the real God that they knew He might be displeased with what they were doing. Consequently, they were confused about the right course of action, and their “conscience, being weak is defiled” because its loyalties were divided. [See Matt. 6:24.]
- b. One truth that these weak brethren had failed to absorb was that eating food and being spiritually acceptable to the true God are *not* synonymous. Unlike the pagan religions, where eating of the animal sacrifices was basic to the practice of the religions, God’s kingdom did not consist of “food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).
- c. Therefore, spiritually, eating or not eating the meats in question did not matter to God. In and of itself, a Christian’s stance on this issue had no bearing whatever on his standing with the Father.

Verses 9-12-- “But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours...”

- a. “Beware” means that danger is real and near. No one could know for sure that eating meat in a pagan temple would *always* make a weak brother stumble and fall, but it *had* happened [evidently], and it *could* happen again. Only a fool ignores danger when it is pointed out to him.
- b. The strong always have an obligation to protect the welfare of the weak (Rom. 15:1). A refusal to respect this responsibility that results in harm to a “[weak] little one” will bring severe punishment to the offender (Luke 17:1,2).
- c. Paul illustrates his admonition (verse 9) with a concrete example (verse 10). The “indifferent” practice of eating meat in the temple by a “strong” member can easily send a “mixed signal” to the mind of a “weak” member and lead him to alter his

conviction about Christians avoiding the “*appearance* of evil” (1Thess.5:22 [KJV]). He may *suppose* that he can imitate the behavior of the “strong” man without sinning, but his own participation in the feasts might bring upon him doubts and fears that result in his falling back into old ideas and old reactions to the pagan environment.

- d. The “strong” can become weak in their consideration for others’ faith when they insist on doing whatever they judge to be an innocent activity. The “weak” can become even weaker because of the bad example set by a “strong” brother. His weakened spiritual condition can deteriorate to the point of his “*perishing*.” A saved man can be lost to sin! [See 1Cor. 10:12; Acts 8:18-24, etc.]
- e. A careless attitude toward the conscience of a brother displays not only a disregard for the soul of the other Christians but also a complete rejection of the purpose for which the Savior was *crucified*. Jesus’ action on the cross *saved* the brother from spiritual destruction; our actions can effectively *condemn* that same brother to eternal hell. This is clearly a “sin against Christ” for which the “strong” Christian will pay.
- f. J. W. McGarvey and Philip Pendelton have an interesting comment about the situation faced by “weak” brethren at Corinth:

“Corinth was full of temples, and sacrifices were daily and abundant. Part of the meat of these sacrifices went to the priests, part was burnt on the altar, and part was returned to the worshiper. The priests’ and the worshiper’s parts were frequently sold to the butchers, who in turn vended the same in the public markets. Such sacrificial meat was so plentiful, and was so indistinguishably mingled with other meats, that a Christian could hardly avoid using it unless he refrained from meat altogether. He could not attend any of the public banquets, nor dine with his pagan friends or relatives, without being almost sure to eat such meat. The Jews illustrated the difficulty, for wherever they lived they required a butcher of their own who certified the meat which he sold by affixing to it a leaden seal, on which was engraved the word *kashar*-- “lawful.” Under such circumstances the strong -minded made bold to eat such sacrificial meat, contending that the idol, being a nonentity, could in no way contaminate it. But there were others having less knowledge, and weaker consciences, who could not shake off the power of old habits, thoughts and associations, and who could not therefore free themselves from their former reverence for the idol, but looked upon it as representing *something*-- a false something, but still a reality. To such the sacrificial meat was part of a real sacrifice, and was contaminating. In answering, therefore, Paul states the correctness of the position that the idol, being nothing, does not contaminate meat sacrificed to it, and urges that the Christian’s knowledge of God and relationship to him preclude all thought of reality in idols. But, nevertheless, because it is a cruel sin against Christ to wound those already weak in conscience, he pleads that the strong use forbearance, not privilege; love, not knowledge lest they make the death of Christ of none effect as to such weaklings. The principle may be applied to many modern amusements and indulgences which the strong regard as harmless, but which they should rejoice to sacrifice rather than endanger weaker vessels.” [Commentary on Corinthians, pp. 86,87.]

Verse 13-- “Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble...”

- a.** Paul was willing not only to make of himself a “living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1) for the Savior, but he was equally willing to forego whatever was necessary to sacrifice in behalf of the saved. [See 1Cor. 9:22.]
- b.** Paul’s vow about eating meat apparently applied not just to meat eaten in pagan temples, for likely he had never done that at all, but to meat as a part of his daily diet. He obviously was not normally a vegetarian, but he was more than willing to become one, if by doing that he could protect the integrity of faith in the hearts of weaker brethren. What a remarkable Christian! What an example for all of us!

FIRST CORINTHIANS-- QUESTIONS

SECTION ELEVEN 8:1-13

1. What common effects do “knowledge” and “love” have on those who possess them? (1)
2. What questionable activity at Corinth was examined by Paul in the light of knowledge and love? (4)
3. Knowledge assured that its possessor would understand what facts about God and idols? (4)
4. What reality of the pagan world is addressed by the punctuation [parentheses] employed in verse 5?
5. How could liberty enjoyed through knowledge become a weapon against some Christians? (9)
6. Is it possible for a Christian to sin and be lost? What word does Paul use that provides a clear answer to that possibility? (11)
7. Why is there more involved in some behavior by Christians than merely how it affects others? (12)
8. What sacrifice would Paul be willing to make rather than to offend a weaker brother? (13)

FIRST CORINTHIANS

“Solving Church Problems”

SECTION TWELVE-- 9:1-27

Tenth Problem: “Misunderstanding Paul’s Motives”

Verses 1-6-- “Am I not an apostle? Am I not free?...”

- a. It is an easy matter to misjudge someone else’s motives. Jesus warned, “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Matt. 7:1). Assessing motivation often plays a big role in our determination of whether the actions of others are justified or not.
- b. Paul had not always conformed to the “pattern” of apostolic behavior. His background was different from the others; he had been chosen by Jesus in a way different from the other selections. He was not married; and he frequently decided against being supported financially by the churches among which he worked.
- c. It seems that the last two choices that Paul had made for himself, being single and unsupported, were seized upon by his adversaries to be used as weapons in their attack on his apostleship. While it seems hard to understand how anyone could question his apostolic commission in the face of his diligent labors and his display of supernatural powers at Corinth, apparently, that is exactly what some dared to do.
- d. The old adage, “If you can’t kill the message, kill the messenger,” was a tactic adopted by the teachers who were jealous of Paul’s advantages as an apostle. They could not compete with him in an open contest of credentials to determine whom the church should believe and follow at Corinth. So, they resorted to the next best thing: question the authenticity of those credentials. If Paul did not always *behave* as other God-chosen men behaved, then he must not really be God-chosen but acting on his own authority or on the authority of someone other than Jesus Christ.
- e. Jesus had faced the same attack when the Jewish leaders refused to acknowledge the origin of His divinely-powered miracles (Luke 11:15). Paul’s opponents probably did not go as far as the Pharisees did, and we can’t be certain how they approached the matter of his miracles, but they had some success in undermining his apostolic status. The book of Second Corinthians is largely the record of Paul’s defense of his apostleship among the Corinthians.
- f. Since his personal choices and his apostleship were being tied together, Paul was eager to explain his choices, and to explain them within the same context of sacrificing for the benefit of others that had been his subject in chapter eight. He had refrained from the usual behavior of apostles because he wanted to be careful to give his best to the Corinthians and never to become the cause of stumbling by any of them. Surely, they could understand that he was “free” to make his own decisions about such spiritually indifferent things as marriage and financial support.
- g. There were two groups of people at Corinth who needed to hear his defense: (1) the challengers of his apostolic authority who were more dedicated to their *own* quest for influence than to their desire for truth, and who were *not likely* to be moved by anything he had to say; (2) those whose confidence in Paul had been shaken by the underhanded tactics of his detractors, and in whom confidence *could likely* be restored by a forthright discussion of the real issues involved in this ongoing dispute in the church.

- h. Two lines of argument were available to Paul: (1) his absolute credentials to teach as an apostle of Christ, and (2), the observable positive outcomes of his work as an apostle while among the people there. His first point was: “I have seen Jesus with my own eyes [which was a qualification for apostleship--Acts 1:21,22], because He wanted me enough to be an apostle that He appeared to me after His ascension into heaven.” His second argument was, “Could a pretender affect your spiritual lives as positively as I did as an apostle? Could you really be so completely deceived by me if I were just an *insincere* teacher who would receive no benefit from you other than your appreciation? You are the real “seal” [proof] of my apostleship!”
- i. Paul focuses on suspicions held by his opponents about his refusal to be supported in his work at Corinth in a series of questions that others had already asked. He wants them to be aware that the reasons for his unusual behavior were all for *their* benefit, not *his*:
 - (1) He had a right as their teacher to “eat and drink” at their expense, but he had chosen not to exercise that right lest he be criticized for having ulterior motives;
 - (2) He had a right to be married and to charge the church with her expense, but he feared that a wife might distract him from total devotion to the spiritual needs of the church at Corinth and elsewhere; [See chapter 7:32,33.]
 - (3) While at Corinth, Paul had first stayed with Priscilla and Aquila and had worked with them as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3). Even after the church had grown enough to provide support to him, he took help from other churches to be able to work at Corinth (2Cor. 11:8) so that none might accuse him of being more interested in his own benefit than in theirs (2Cor. 12:14). We know nothing about the circumstances surrounding Barnabas’ teaching without financial support.

Verses 7-10-- “Who ever goes to war at his own expense?...”

- a. Having raised the same questions about financial support that had first been raised by the false teachers and their followers, Paul now offers to answer those questions by using both scriptural principles and their own innate sense of what is right.
- b. Soldiers, farmers, and shepherds are supported for their work, and no one argues against their right to such support. Why should it be different with those who perform much more worthwhile labor in preaching the gospel of salvation?
- c. Scripture endorses the right of teachers to receive pay for their teaching, as does human experience. The Law of Moses instructed those who utilize animals in their work to see that those animals are cared for in return for their labor. Paul’s argument is that this stipulation was intended not only for the welfare of the animals but also to assure that *all* workers may expect to share in the fruits of their work.

Verses 11-14-- “If we have sown spiritual things for you...”

- a. Spiritual work is not exempted from compensation. When He sent out the apostles and the seventy disciples on limited commissions, He provided for their support while they fulfilled their responsibilities (Matt. 10:9; Luke 10:7). His intentions under the Great Commission are no different.
- b. The comparative values of spiritual and material things should make it obvious to those who “exchange” their money for salvation that that are making a *very* favorable trade.

- c. The Corinthians had no problem with the false teachers asking for their money as compensation for their work, the results of which were suspect. Why should they be disturbed at the idea of *Paul* receiving pay for his undeniably beneficial works performed among them?
- d. Objections to paying Paul were serious enough for him to decide not to allow that to become an issue at Corinth. He was more than willing to “endure all things” rather than become any hindrance to the success of the gospel in that city. He stood as a demonstration of his previous lesson about giving up personal rights under the gospel in consideration for the spiritual well-being of others (chapter eight).
- e. All religious communions provide for the support of those who spend their time and efforts in the practice of those religions. Priests in both Jewish and Gentile temples “partake of the offerings of the altar.” Similarly, teachers in God’s “new temple” [the church] are permitted to exercise the same privilege.

Verses 15-18-- “But I have used none of these things...”

- a. Paul had a right to be supported for his work at Corinth, as he has proved from several sources, both practical and scriptural. However, he had not “used” this right to secure any remuneration from the church there. Nor had he allowed plain facts to change his own determination to preach without pay. His reasons were twofold:
 - (1) It was better for the progress of his preaching not to accept money, lest some might misconstrue that as an emphasis on material goals and not spiritual;
 - (2) He had a real *inner* need to sacrifice for the gospel beyond ordinary limits as his way of trying to compensate for the ungodly things he had inflicted on the church when he was a “blasphemer, a persecutor, and insolent” (1Tim.1:13). Making his own way while preaching was one way of filling that need.
- b. The “boasting” [“joy”--Barnes], i.e., the satisfaction he felt when he could in a small way “pay back” God for his abundant mercy in saving the “chief of sinners,” was important to Paul. He rejoiced in taking the gospel where it had not gone before (2Cor. 10:13-18), and he took it “without charge” when circumstances permitted.
- c. Simply doing the work of an apostles was, in itself, not enough to make Paul feel that he was “making up” for his actions as an enemy of the church. He had not, after all, chosen to preach. He had been “put into the ministry” (1Tim.1:12) when God chose him to become a minister to the Gentiles. [See Acts 9:15,16.] “Necessity” was laid upon him to do what he was called to do [“against his will” (without choice)], and he would suffer “woe” if he refused his calling by the Lord.
- d. It was as a “steward” [perhaps a slave] that he discharged his *duty* to His Master. It was as a “free man in Christ” that he *volunteered* to work without pay [“willingly”] when it benefited His Master’s kingdom. He could not help but feel good about that. That was a “reward” he cherished, and it one which he would not give up just to exercise his right [“authority”] to be paid for his preaching, especially since some would be suspicious of his sincerity if he accepted money from them.

Verses 19-23-- “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all...”

- a. Paul had the *liberty* to use all rights of a Christian and of an apostle under the gospel,

but instead he became a servant [slave] to all men in order to save as many as possible. He elected to accommodate the *prejudices* and the *preferences* of others, as long as doing so did not violate the truth. This, he believed, would give him better access to reach lost people with the saving gospel. He now furnishes several examples of his *modus operandi*.

- b. He tried to exhibit a sympathetic understanding of Jewish customs and practices. He circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3) as an allowable custom and not as a requirement. He sponsored the Jewish vows of four men and took them into the temple (Acts 21:24), and he showed respect for the observance of Jewish feasts (Acts:20:16). The ASV and the RSV insert, “not being myself under the law.” It was important that all understand that Paul’s behavior about these things was *accommodative*, not *legislative*.
- c. Others [Gentiles] had no background in the Law of Moses, so his acting as a Jew in matters of Jewish customs would make no impression on them. He also tried to treat Gentile culture as gently as possible when he sought to correct their religious errors. The city clerk at Ephesus disputed the charge that Paul had been guilty of “robbing temples” or “blaspheming” the goddess Diana in his teaching against idolatry (Acts 19:37). He was very complimentary of the religious zeal of the Athenians as he taught them about the true God (Acts 17:22). He even used quotations from their poets in making his own points about the gospel (Titus 1:12; Acts 17:28).
- d. Paul was careful to make it clear that *none* live “without law,” but that *all men* are at *all times* under the law of accountability to God. None are now responsible to the Law of Moses, which has been nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14), but all are now accountable to Christ’s law [the gospel]. Those who accept the gospel will be blessed by their acceptance; those who reject it will be punished for their rejection.
- e. The apostle certainly intended to be considerate of the weakness of brethren who had problems with meats (chapters 8 and 10) and other things of indifference. Indeed, he would make every effort to avoid offense to *anyone* whom he might approach with his message of the cross, especially if sensitivity to their personal circumstances might increase his chances of winning them to Jesus.
- f. “The gospel’s sake” governed Paul’s every action as he pursued his labors at Corinth. Faithfulness on his part would take him to heaven, as it would save them as well.

Verses 24-27-- “Do you not know that those who run in a race...”

- a. The willingness to sacrifice one’s *liberty* in controversial but indifferent questions is crucial to peace in the church and salvation in heaven. Their inquiry about eating meats offered to idols had exposed a need for more emphasis on how brethren must consider one another’s “hangups” if harmony is to prevail in their congregation. Paul has answered their questions (chapter 8), he has used himself as an example of the behavior he advocated (chapter 9), and now he will clinch his argument with an illustration they would easily understand-- “scenes from the sports scene: racing and boxing.”
- b. There were four great games held regularly in Greece: Olympic games [dedicated to Jupiter]; Pythian games [honoring Appolo in the city of Delphi]; Isthmian games [nine miles from Corinth]; and Nemsean games [at the city of Nemea]. Paul likely

refers to those contests held close to Corinth, but the same principles of athletics would have been common to all of them.

- c. All contestants in the games understand that only *one* competitor can be awarded the prize for winning the race. Yet, so desirable is the prize for winning the race, *all* runners are willing to sacrifice whatever is necessary to be prepared for the contest. We do not “run” against one another in our “race” for heaven, and everyone who runs faithfully will receive the Lord’s reward. Nevertheless, the “new man” must compete against the “old man” and against the temptations that would weigh us down as we run. [See Hebrews 12:1.]
- d. Every contestant trained intensively for many months in preparation for the games. He endured the exercises and the routines of training that sometimes were painful. He gave up indulgences that he normally enjoyed in exchange for things that were often unpleasant. All this was because he wanted to win the prize, which was only a “perishable crown” [At Athens: an olive wreath; at Corinth: a pine wreath; at the others: a garland of laurel or parsley].
- e. It was not the prize itself that was the goal of the athlete, but the glory and the privileges that came with it. That made every sacrifice and self-denial experienced in training very worthwhile. Still, the glory of the “corruptible” crown would soon fade away and be forgotten, as happens to every such human accomplishment.
- f. How much more worthwhile are our sacrifices if they help to win a prize that is “incorruptible” and that won’t fade away (1Pet.1:4)? Our “crown” is one of: *righteousness* (2Tim.4:8); *life* (Rev.2:10); *glory* (1Pet.5:4).
- g. Paul did not run “uncertainly” [“obscurely”--out of God’s sight--Macknight] but always with an awareness that he was accountable to God for keeping his eyes on heaven’s goal so that he would not stray from the appointed course that leads there.
- h. He did not fight by wildly flailing his arms. Every blow [action] was deliberate and with purpose as he fought Satan and his angels at Corinth and elsewhere. His treatment of everyone, including “weak” Christians, and his behavior in situations where others might be offended by his wrong choice, had always been designed to strengthen faith, not tear it down.
- i. The body is intended to implement the determinations of the soul in God’s service. Nevertheless, the body can control the soul’s devotions to God and defeat those devotions if its lusts are indulged. Paul denied worldly lusts (Col. 3:5) and used his body both to work at a job while at Corinth and to carry the gospel to all who would listen as he preached “Christ crucified.”
- j. The apostle’s greatest fear was to become: “disqualified” [RSV]; “rejected” [ASV]; a “castaway” [KJV] after he had preached to others about what was required to win the prize of eternal life. If he preached self-denial and did not deny *himself* the liberty that was his right in Christ, he would be just as lost as anyone else who had made the same mistakes of selfishness and arrogance toward others.
- k. Every athlete stood an examination to assure that he was qualified as a citizen and as a man of good character and behavior. The *herald* who announced the rules to the contestants would also proclaim disqualification for those who were unfit, and they would be banished in disgrace [“castaway”] from the arena. Nobody wanted that!

FIRST CORINTHIANS-- QUESTIONS

SECTION TWELVE 9:1-27

1. In what way were the Corinthians Paul's "seal" of apostleship? (2)
2. What rights did Paul have that were also enjoyed by other apostles [and teachers]? (4-6)
3. What examples did Paul use to justify his being supported while he preached at Corinth? (7-10, 13)
4. What law of sowing and reaping does Paul cite? (11)
5. What underlying principle helped Paul determine which of his rights should be exercised? (12)
6. What was the great reward that Paul cherished as he preached the gospel as an apostle? (18)
7. Name the classes of people Paul sought to convert by becoming to them as unoffensive as possible. (20-22)
8. What personal trait is necessary, according to Paul, for an athlete to be successful? (25)
9. What are the differences between the rewards given for physical runners and spiritual runners? (25)
10. What fear did Paul entertain about himself and his preaching? (27)

FIRST CORINTHIANS

“Solving Church Problems”

SECTION THIRTEEN-- 10:1-33

Eleventh Problem: “Abuse of Liberty--Idolatry”

Verses 1-5-- “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware...”

- a. Paul dealt with the question about eating meats in pagan temples in chapter eight. He then used himself and his apostleship in chapter nine as an example of “practicing what he preached” about eating meats. In this chapter he intends to be even more emphatic to these Corinthians that they rethink all the situations in which they might find themselves involved with meat that had been sacrificed to an idol and to be sure that they behaved in every situation so as not to compromise their own faith or to cause other Christians to make a similar mistake.
- b. A strong argument against doing anything that involves God’s people with idolatry can be made from Jewish history. Idolatry is what brought God’s wrath upon the nation, despite His previous favor toward them. With most of them God “was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.”
- c. Most Corinthian church members were Gentiles, and so the Jewish “fathers” who are cited as an example for the Corinthians were not really *their* “fathers” at all. However, in the same sense in which Abraham is the “father” of *all* the faithful (Romans 4:11,12), these Jews might be viewed as the spiritual forebears of all Christians of a later date. Paul’s emphasis is simply that these Old Testament disciples had received a favored status with God that could suddenly be revoked by disobedience, and New Testament disciples could lose their relationship to the Lord just as suddenly if they made mistakes similar to those made by the Jewish nation.
- d. Gentile Christians might or might not be as familiar with the circumstances of Jewish history referred to by Paul, as Jewish converts would have been. It was important to his point that he specify certain details of the example he used. He seeks to draw a parallel between the ancient history and the modern experiences of people when they fall from faithfulness into unfaithfulness.
- e. The fathers were baptized [“covered up,” “immersed”] in cloud and sea and “all” passed from bondage in Egypt to [potential] freedom in Caanan. This was the defining act that involved them in a *new* covenant relationship with God (Exo. 14:29-31). The Corinthians similarly had been baptized into a new covenant of salvation (1Cor.12:13). “All” the Jews had been baptized into Moses [i.e., into his leadership and control]; “all” the Corinthians had likewise committed themselves to the sole leadership and control of Christ when they were baptized into Him. [See 1:12,13.]
- f. “All” the Jews ate of spiritual food [manna and quail] and drank of spiritual drink [water from the rocks (by the power of Christ) in the wilderness] to strengthen them both physically and spiritually in their travels. “All” the Corinthians were strengthened for their arduous journey by spiritual food and drink offered to them by the same power and goodness of Jesus.
- g. Even though “all” were initially acknowledged by God, not “all” survived to enjoy the blessings of the Promised Land. Most fell [from war, disease, serpents, plagues, etc.],

and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness because they displeased God by their disobedience.

Verses 6-10-- “Now these things became our examples...”

- a. It is not enough just to be *aware* [vs. 1] of the disappointing outcome of God’s early dealings with the Jewish nation. Nor is it adequate merely to be impressed with the awfulness of their punishment by a disappointed Benefactor. Later generations like the Corinthians must see that these things *happened* as *examples* [vs.11], and they were *written* to serve all who came afterward as a serious warning that *God will not tolerate willful sins among His people!*
- b. The sins of which the Jews had been guilty were the *same* sins that now put some of the Corinthians in spiritual jeopardy. First listed is “*lusting after evil things,*” which includes the specific transgressions that are mentioned.
- c. J.W. McGarvey and Philip Pendleton make these remarks:

“...Paul proceeds to show their perfectness as examples to the Corinthians in that they fell by the five sins, viz.: lust, idolatry, fornication, tempting Christ, murmuring, which were the besetting sins of the Corinthians--and of all succeeding generations. In the case of Israel the punishment was directly and visibly connected with the sin, that their history might be used to instruct future generations; for in this life punishment is not, as a rule, summarily and immediately meted out to sinners. In fact, if we judge by appearances only, we might sometimes even think that God rewarded crime and set a premium on sin. The Scripture record shows that such appearances are deceptive, and that God’s punishments are sure, though they may be long delayed. Israel lusted for what God withheld and murmured at what he provided them (Num.11:4,33,34). As Israel looked back with regret on the flesh and the fish, the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic which they had left behind in Egypt, so the Corinthians were disposed to go back into the old life and heap up to themselves philosophical teachers, attend idolatrous feasts, etc.
- d. Involvement in *idolatry* had caused Israel’s initial confrontation with God and Moses. While Moses was in the mount, Aaron made a golden calf for them to *see* and to *touch* in their devotions. The True God was far removed, and He was untouchable and invisible to them (Exo.32:17-25).
- e. With idolatrous thoughts in their hearts, the people gave themselves over to idolatrous behavior like they had witnessed in Egypt. They “sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play” (Exo.32:6). The KJV describes them as “naked;” the ASV says they were “broken loose;” the NKJV portrays their actions as “unrestrained” (Exo.32:25). Some believe that not only were they “dancing’ lewdly but also were engaging in acts of fornication while under the influence of idolatrous exhilaration.
- f. A second episode in Israel’s betrayal of God’s providential care is recorded in Num. 25:1-3. This time it was “fornication” [KJV, ASV; “sexual immorality”-- NKJV] with the women of Moab that led to their downfall. Paul says [vs. 8] that twenty-three thousand fell, while Moses wrote (Num. 25:9) that the number was twenty-four thousand. There is no definitive explanation for the apparent discrepancy, but it might simply be that, as some suggest, that since the Jews usually dealt in round numbers, and if the actual number fell between the two figures given, Moses perhaps cited the maximum and Paul the minimum number of persons involved.
- g. The nation had also “tempted Christ [God]” [KJV, NKJV; “made trial of the Lord”-- ASV] in the wilderness when they questioned heaven’s concern for their welfare

(Num.21:4-9). Fiery serpents caused “many” of them to die.

- h. A third destructive action by Israel was murmuring, a sin of which they were guilty on numerous occasions. Once, they complained about the dangers of the journey away from Egypt (Num. 14:1-4). Although God delayed His punishment for this wickedness, He promised that all the murmurers would fall in the wilderness (Num.14:26-30). Later, they challenged the leadership of Moses and Aaron (Num. 16). When Dathan, Abiram, On and their families were “destroyed by the destroyer” [God’s death angel?-- 1Chron.21:15], others criticized that the “people of the Lord” had been killed needlessly. Then, God sent a terrible plague among the Jews and destroyed, according to Paul, “some of them.” Moses reported the number as “14,000+” (Num.16:49).

Verses 11-13-- “Now all these things happened to them as examples...”

- a. There is a lesson for us in *each* of the incidents Paul cites as part of his general warning to Christians: “do not lust after evil things” as God’s people had lusted earlier.
- b. Each transgression was written, first by Moses, now by Paul, to *warn* those serving God “in the end of the ages” [“last days”--Heb.1:2] about the need for caution.
- c. Paul’s conclusive admonition to be derived by the Corinthians from the history of their Jewish counterparts is: “*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*” God’s New Testament people can fall if guilty of the same sins [and others] that brought retribution to His Old Testament nation.
- d. This chapter and earlier chapters reveal that many at Corinth were participating in the previous sins of the Jews. They were compromising with idolatrous practices around them; they were tolerating fornication; they tempted Christ when they questioned His wisdom by questioning the wisdom of His inspired teachers; and they murmured against God when they challenged Paul’s authority over them as an apostle.
- e. The danger of falling is *real*, but the watchcare of a faithful God is just as real. He will never expect of us more than we can do. The Corinthians faced numerous temptations from the idolatry and dissolution of their society. They had many hard decisions to make as they tried to be loyal to the Christ who had been crucified for them. It was encouraging to know that they *could* resist every temptation if they *would*, because God would be faithful to make a way of escape for them. They could be faithful if they looked for the way God provided and took it without hesitation or doubting.

Verses 14-22-- “Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.”

- a. It would seem that what Paul has already said about eating with idolators in their temples would be enough to cause the guilty to abandon that practice. However, the apostle has something else to add to his examples from Jewish history to stress the sheer foolishness of what some of them were doing.
- b. If the members who insisted on their right to eat in the temples had not been by now duly impressed by the historical references, perhaps they could be reasoned with on the basis of their own common sense. Paul knew they were proud of their “wisdom” (4:10). Now he wants them to face some facts and draw some inescapable conclusions on their own.
- c. The Lord’s Supper afforded them an opportunity for “communion” [“sharing; joint

participation”] with the body and blood of the crucified Savior. Christians could not eat the Supper properly without feeling a “oneness” with the Christ, whose body and blood they ate and drank [figuratively]. Neither could the “many” fail to feel a “oneness” with one another as they all shared in the Supper as equals. A common faith in the benefits of the body and blood of Jesus, joined with a common commitment to His leadership, would impart to all the worshipers in a church a sense of unity and brotherhood so necessary to their functioning as *one body*.

- d. The phenomenon of identity was not restricted to eating the Lord’s Supper. Old Testament worshipers experienced this same sense of identity with their altar [in the sacrificial process]
- e. Paul has already declared that there is no substance to anything connected with idol worship (8:4). That fact, however, is not cause enough to allow the continuation of questionable practices that dilute the loyalty owed Jesus by “strong brethren” and that quite possibly may lead to the spiritual destruction of the “weak.”
- f. In his next letter to the Corinthians, Paul will ask, “And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?...Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord” (2Cor. 6:14-18). Now he tells them, “I do not want you to have fellowship [“communion”] with demons.” Their identity belongs only with Christ, not with demons. To the Jews, a demon was an evil spirit; to the Greeks it was usually a demi-god, a minor being somewhere between God and man.
- g. It was *physically* possible to eat at both the Lord’s table and the table of demons. That was exactly the behavior Paul wished to stop. However, it is impossible to engage *spiritually* in both feasts, because that would involve an inner conflict of loyalties. If some Christian supposed that he had faith strong enough to withstand any sense of commitment to a demon, he still had a responsibility not to misguide members with a weaker faith who might be destroyed because of his influence.
- h. God is a “jealous God” and has never tolerated less than total loyalty in His people. He has always demonstrated a determination to punish those who violate that trust. Who is foolish enough deliberately to test that resolve?

Verses 23-26-- “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful;...”

- a. Paul had made the same declaration in chapter 6:12. There it was said to show his unwillingness to allow even indifferent matters to bring him under their power. Such things became not “helpful” to his efforts to serve God.
- b. Here, he applied his rejection of “lawful” things to situations where those things would not be “helpful” [KJV and ASV-- “expedient”--“profitable”] because they would not “edify” [“build up”] other people in the faith. His statement rises out of his discussion of the propriety of Christians eating meats offered to idols.
- c. The ASV and RSV both omit “for me” from Paul’s observation. It is not only Paul who must be careful in the use of “lawful things.” Every action of any Christian must be tempered by a purpose to do only good toward weak brethren.
- d. Now, a new element is introduced into the question about meats. Not only were some meats being eaten in the pagan temples, but some were being eaten at home by saints after being sold in the markets along with others meats not related to an idol’s feast.

The “guilty” meat was indistinguishable from the “innocent meat.”

- e. No food is to be “refused” if received with thanksgiving (1Tim.4:4), because only God, rather than false gods, provides every good gift to man from His “fullness.” An obvious exception to this principle lies at the center of the “meat” controversy at Corinth.
- f. Another situation not previously addressed involves invitations to Christians to eat meals with pagan friends or acquaintances. Again, ignorance becomes a deciding factor. If one does not *know* that what is served has been associated with demon worship, he may eat in good conscience without asking questions.
- g. The scenario changes: someone else, perhaps a weak Christian, is also present at the meal. This person believes [for reasons unknown] that the food *was* idol-related. That changes Paul’s instructions completely-- “don’t eat!”
- h. Despite one’s still-present conviction [conscience] that the meat is “clean” because it comes to man from the Lord’s “fulness,” the conscience of a weak brother [or even the conscience of someone sympathetic to the idol who might be encouraged in his idolatrous leanings?] requires abstinence from eating.
- i. Two questions raised here by Paul both have the same answer. “Why should my *liberty* [to participate in indifferent but controversial matters] be judged [condemned] be someone else’s conscience?” “Why, if I can participate with a perfectly clear conscience because of what I know about the truth, should anyone have a reason to speak evil of what I have done?”
- j. The answer comes back: “Because you *have no right* to participate in questionable things if your participation results in offending the weak and causing them to stumble!”
- k. The overriding principle that the Corinthians can draw from this entire discussion of their question about how Christians should deal with meats offered to idols is: “*Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*”
- l. God will be glorified by Christian behavior only when Christians learn to avoid giving offense to any man, Jew, Gentile, or weak fellow-Christian, by *knowingly* engaging in an activity that sends “mixed signals” about the truths of the gospel.
- m. The salvation of others was uppermost in Paul’s attitude about doing whatever he did. Some things that he had a right to do had no impact on his personal salvation, but they might prove to be dangerous to the faith of others. Those things he avoided to protect the weak. Other things he might not choose to do if they were not things that might cause others to be attracted to the gospel. Those were things he did. He tried his best to “please all men in all things.” His “pleasing men” referred, of course, just to *indifferent* things, where the choice was *his*. He declared in another context that if he should try to please men in things that *do matter* to God, he would not be a servant of Christ (Galatians 1:10).

FIRST CORINTHIANS-- QUESTIONS

SECTION THIRTEEN 10:1-33

1. Into whom had the Israelites been baptized? What does that mean? (1,2)
2. What things are designated by Paul as “spiritual”? Why were they called “spiritual”? (3,4)
3. How did God express His displeasure with the Israelites? (5)
4. What lesson should the examples of the wilderness teach New Testament Christians? (6)
5. Name the sins of the Jews that resulted in their fall in the wilderness. (7-10)
6. What warning and what hope does Paul extend to Christians? (12,13)
7. The main lesson in this chapter for the Corinthians is perhaps found in verse 14. What is it?
8. The Lord’s Supper is a communion [sharing] in the sacrifice made by Christ [verse 16]. How does that fact relate to Paul’s teaching about idolatrous feasts? (18, 25-29)
9. What two different behaviors might a Christian display at a private dinner? Why show a difference? (25-29)
10. What ultimate goal does the Christian have as he does all “to the glory of God”? (31-33)

FIRST CORINTHIANS

SECTION FOURTEEN-- 11:1-16

“Solving Church Problems”

Twelfth Problem-- “Disorders in Worship: Coverings”

Verse 1-- “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”

This verse, unfortunately, has been situated at the beginning of chapter eleven, rather than at the end of chapter ten, where it properly belongs. It is obvious that Paul here makes a plea for the Corinthians to imitate the attitude of self-sacrifice manifested by both Christ and himself. The verse has no real connection with chapter eleven.

Verse 2-- “Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things...”

- a. Not all the “brethren” had kept the “traditions” delivered to them. Paul has already dealt with numerous problems generated by some members who had not complied with his previous teaching. [See 1:12; 3:3; 5:1,2; 6:1; 8:11, etc.]
- b. Some of the brethren had tried to conform and had made known their concern about the deviations of the others in both oral and written communications sent to Paul. It must have been for the encouragement of these “brethren” that he saw fit to insert this brief “pep talk” before he launched into his treatment of additional problems.

Verse 3-- “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ...”

- a. “But”-- some of the Corinthians needed to correct some bad attitudes and practices concerning the exercise of spiritual gifts in the church, and particularly in the worship. Paul’s counsel about this problem will be delivered in chapters eleven, twelve, thirteen, and fourteen. His discussion may be divided into these topics:
 - (1) Spiritual gifts as they relate to established authority-- chapter 11:2-16;
 - (2) Spiritual gifts as they relate to the division of service-- chapter 12:1-31;
 - (3) Spiritual gifts as they relate to personal attitudes-- chapter 13:1-13;
 - (4) Spiritual gifts as they relate to public worship-- chapter 14:1-40.
- b. Paul “wants them to know” that *nothing* is altered by the presence of spiritual gifts in *any* of these relationships. The same attitudes of respect, service, love, and humility are expected of all Christians, with or without spiritual gifts. These gifts are intended to *enhance* the effectiveness of their service to God, not *interfere* with it.
- c. The first attention is given to a misunderstanding about the effect of spiritual gifts on normal man/woman relationships. The Lord’s long-standing line of authority was:
God (Eph.4:6)----*Christ* (1Cor.3:23)----*Man* (Gen.3:16)----*Woman* (1Tim.2:11,12)
The **authority** remained unchanged in a church blessed with spiritual gifts of various kinds, despite some changes in **behavior** brought about by the use those gifts. Paul reminds the Corinthians that the head of man *is* Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God. Respect for normal authority was the foundation principle for solving their problems related to men, women, and the use of spiritual gifts.
- d. Although Paul does not specifically *state* their problem, we know from his discussion that it involved whether men and women [especially] should have their heads “covered” when they worshiped. Evidently, some were thought to be disrespectful of established

practices in the city of Corinth because of their disregard of sensitive relationships between the sexes.

Verse 4-- “Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered...”

- a. Paul begins with the man’s behavior within his role of authority over the woman. It is important to look closely at the language he employs:
 - (1) “Praying”-- the act of petitioning God in either inspired or uninspired words. The prayers recorded in the Psalms, among others, were Spirit-inspired. Some of the prayers in the early church were “with the Spirit” (1Cor.14:14-17).
 - (2) “Prophesying”-- a spiritual gift listed with others in 1Cor.12:10. This word signifies a “speaking for God” under His direct guidance. Henry Thayer says:

“...to speak forth, speak out; hence, properly ‘one who speaks forth;’ ‘to divulge; make known,’ ‘announce;’ therefore properly, ‘interpret; hence, an interpreter or spokesman for God; one through whom God speaks, one who speaks forth by divine inspiration; in the N.T. one who, moved by the Spirit of God and hence his organ or spokesman, solemnly declares to men what he has received by inspiration, esp. future events, and in particular such as relate to the cause and kingdom of God and to human salvation.” (p.553, Lexicon)
 - (3) “Or”-- a coordinating conjunction that “controls words, phrases, and clauses of equal rank.” (Harbrace Handbook of English)
 - (4) “Covered”-- “to cover up, to cover oneself; having [something] down the head” (W.E. Vine).
 - (5) “Dishonors”-- “to treat shamefully, to insult” (Vine).
 - (6) “His head”-- Christ [verse 3].
- b. Some men who “prayed” also “prophesied.” Both actions were to be governed by directions to sustain basic laws of *authority* (Gen.3:16).
- c. “Praying” and “prophesying” are not expressly limited in the language of this passage to their exercise in *public* worship, which might raise the question, “Do these rules apply also to private devotions or to *any* other situation? If the problem was one of how others perceived their practices of covering and uncovering their heads, it would seem that those practices would have involved situations where unknowing people would have had occasion to observe how church members behaved in worship.
- d. Paul does not explain *why* man must not cover his head. In the absence of specific information, we can only conclude that the *customary behavior* of men, as men, in the city of Corinth became the determining factor in regulating the behavior of Christian men when they worshiped.
- e. A covering [veil] generally signified a state of subjection. Jewish men did not cover their heads in worship until a later time. Gentiles had long regarded the covered head as symbolic of submission to a visible authority. Tertullian [150/160-220/240 A.D.], one of the “church fathers,” declared, “We Christians pray with *outspread hands*, as harmless; with *uncovered heads*, as unashamed; *without a prompter*, as from the heart.”

Verses 5,6-- “But every woman who prays or prophesies...”

- a. Instructions for the behavior of women is addressed next. It is likely that it was some of the women, rather than the men, who were causing the disturbance about coverings. It is also likely that their action consisted not in *failing to put on* a head covering when

they “prayed or prophesied,” because women of that culture normally always wore a veil when in the public presence of men, but in *taking off* their veils while they used their spiritual gift(s) when the church met to worship. Their mistake was in supposing that the rule of inequality in authority was suspended while they exercised their gifts. The truth was that “equality in gifting” by God in no way implied that women could under *any* circumstances do something that would bring the church into disrepute among the people of the world. The church would be judged only by the accepted practices of the people among whom they lived.

- b. So, the rule for women is: Women of the *same class* as the men [leading in some aspect of the public worship], and performing the *same acts* as the men [praying and prophesying], must have their heads covered [“covered up”--totally] or she dishonors men. This rule sustains the basic law of authority and submission even during the employment of spiritual gifts [women are not to usurp authority over men--1Tim.2:12].
- c. Later, and seemingly in the absence of spritual gifts, Paul specifies another **manner** in which women acknowledge their role of submission. They must “be in silence” in the church (1Tim.2:11). Women with spiritual gifts could not be bound by **silence** in the worship, for then they could not use their gifts of “praying and prophesying.” So, here they are to show by their **coverings** that they were staying in “their place.”
- d. Women “prophetesses” had been common in the Scriptures. Miriam, Deborah (Judges 5:31), Huldah (2Kings 22:15), and Anna (Luke 2:36-38) are but a few of many. All had been “adorned with a meek and quiet spirit”-- not by “putting on apparel” (1Pe.3:3-6). Joel had foretold that women would possess spiritual gifts in the church (Joel 2:28), in a prophesy fulfilled at least by Philip’s daughters (Acts 21:9) and by these women at Corinth, if not by a number of others.
- e. The question sent to Paul must have been, “Is it right for women with spiritual gifts to lay aside the symbols of their subjection and assert their equality with men while they exercise those gifts, even though doing so seems to provoke animosity among unbelievers?”
- f. When women within the culture of Corinth were guilty of shameful behavior, it was customary to shave their heads to proclaim their shame. Paul observes that one kind of such behavior is no worse in the eyes of the world than another, so women who defied the accepted rules about wearing veils in public deserved to “wear” bald heads so the world would know that their bad conduct was considered shameful by the church.

Verses 7-9-- “For a man indeed ought not to cover his head...”

- a. The prevailing custom at Corinth dictated that men should *not* appear in public with their heads covered, and women *should* wear a covering. Both practices were designed to declare the control of men over women in that culture. Consequently, practices in the church should be consistent with society, lest society disparage the church for revolutionary tendencies. Therefore, the man wore no covering when he prayed and prophesied, because it was *natural* that he possess such “leadership” gifts. It was *unnatural* that the woman take a public role in assemblies, so the covering became a sign to all, believers and unbelievers alike, that she still *recognized* her rank of submission even as she *acted* in a manner that under ordinary circumstances would have said otherwise.

- b. Man was first made in God's image (Gen. 1:17) To Adam was given dominion over all other creatures, and he exercised his authority by naming them all. (Gen.2:19,20). Woman was formed *from* the man to be a *suitable helper* for him. Adam also named the "woman," who had been taken out of man (Gen.2:23), establishing his authority over her from the beginning. Man was the "glory" ["of good reputation, praise, honor"-Vine] of God when he filled his role as leader; woman was the "glory" of man when she was content to follow his lead. Eve breached that trust when she negotiated with Satan, and terrible consequences ensued (Gen.3).

Verse 10-- "For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head..."

- a. This "reason" refers back to verses 7-9. Because God initially gave man the place of authority in the relationship between the sexes, women should *at all times* display respect for God's arrangement, even as angels manifest their respect for the place of subservience given to them (Heb.1:7; Jude 6). Even while leading worship activities, she should wear a *symbol* of [man's] authority on her head.
- b. McGarvey observed:

"Hence women [praying and prophesying] ought not to do away with the veil while in places of worship, because of the symbolism; and they can not do away with the subordination which it symbolizes, because it rests on the unalterable facts of creation. To abandon this justifiable and well-established symbol of subordination would be a shock to the submissive and obedient spirit of the ministering angels (Isa. 6:2) who , though unseen, are always with you in your places of worship."

Verses 11,12-- "Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman...:"

- a. God has differentiated between man and woman with regard to *authority* but not with regard to *value* "in the Lord" [in the church]. Perhaps it was to demonstrate that fact that God gave spiritual gifts to women as well as to men.
- b. At any rate, women are in no way demeaned as Christians when they submit themselves to man's authority in the church or in society generally. Woman is *from* the man, but man is dependent for his very existence on the role of women as mothers. Each sex depends on the other for the execution of God's plan in the church.

Verses 13-15-- "Judge among yourselves..."

- a. Let your *common sense* determine whether women should pray [or prophesy] in the assembly with uncovered heads while they utilize their miraculous gifts.
- b. Using an illustration from "nature" [custom, habit--"the native sense of propriety"--Thayer], not from Scripture, Paul calls upon *their* judgment to substantiate the argument for women's coverings that he has just made from the account of creation.
- c. The way in which men and women "by nature" [established societal practice] wear their hair shows an [innate (?)] regard for God's line of authority. In most cultures, and certainly at Corinth, men wore *short* hair and [respectable] women wore *long* hair.
- d. Long and short hair styles are "given" to women and men by the culture, not by the Scripture. Men's hair will normally grow as long as women's, but the *treatment* of the hair is a practical demonstration that men and women normally wish to observe their respective roles in God's intended line of authority--in the church and out.

- e. Although men have sometimes worn long hair [e.g., Absalom], at Corinth it was a “shame” to do so. Conversely, it was as shameful for women to have short hair. Adding another covering in worship added “glory” to woman’s role of submission, just as the man *left off* a second covering as a proclamation of his dominant position in God’s order of things.

Verse 16-- “But if anyone seems to be contentious...”

- a. No allowance can be made for contentions about this symbolism of authority because this is not only a matter of custom to be observed at Corinth but also should be applied in all the churches where women possess spiritual gifts.
- b. Any contention that challenged the instructions given by Paul would be a direct assault on the wisdom of God that was responsible for the hierarchy of authority that those instructions were designed to regulate.
- c. Only in cultures similar to that in Corinth, where the wearing or not wearing of coverings carried a declaration about authority within the man/woman relationship, would modern-day Christians be constrained to observe the restrictions in the assembly as here imposed by the apostle.
- d. McGarvey and Pendleton make these summative remarks:

“Knowing the argumentative spirit of the Greeks, and being conscious that it was likely that some would even yet want to dispute the matter, despite his three reasons to the contrary, Paul takes it entirely out of the realm of discussion into that of precedent. The settled and established practice of the church had from the beginning followed the course outlined by Paul, which showed that other apostles besides himself had either established it by rule, or endorsed it in practice. In this appeal for uniformity Paul makes it clear that churches should strive to make their practices uniform, not variant. Paul is here discussing how men and women should be attired when they take a leading part in public worship. He will speak later as to whether or not women should take any such part at all in public worship (ch. 14:34,35; 1Tim.2:12). We to-day as males worship with uncovered heads in consequence of Paul’s *instruction*, but not for his *reasons*. It is now an expression of reverence, which the Jew expressed by taking off his sandals...In Western countries a woman’s hat has never had any symbolism whatever. We see nothing in Paul’s argument which requires us to make it symbolic. The problem in Western assemblies is how best to persuade women to take their hats off, not how to prevail upon them to keep them on. The principle, however, still holds good that the woman is subordinate to the man, and should not make any unseemly, immodest, vaunting display of an independence which she does not possess.” [Commentary, p. 113]

(Questions on this Section are included with questions on Section Fifteen)

FIRST CORINTHIANS

SECTION FIFTEEN-- 11:17-34

“Solving Church Problems” Thirteenth Problem--“Disorders in Worship: the Supper”

Verses 17-22-- “Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you...”

- a. Paul seems here to turn to another question posed by the letter-writers. The behavior of some with regard to coverings in worship was not praiseworthy, and neither was the conduct of those who were abusing the observance of the Lord’s Supper as part of that worship. Both forms of misconduct were “for worse” and not “for better.”
- b. He had already addressed the divisions over human leaders in the early chapters of this epistle. Now, he speaks to a different sort of division among them. This problem involved discord over eating the Lord’s Supper. Some were acting as selfishly and insensitively in this matter as others [or the *same* ones?] had behaved about lining up behind uninspired teachers, going to court against brethren, eating meats in pagan temples, etc.
- c. It is possible that the problem about the Lord’s Supper arose out of another supper that was often eaten prior to the Lord’s. The *agape*, or “love feast,” was supposed to offer an opportunity for sharing physical blessings and to display love and unity among all brethren, regardless of social and material rank. This practice had the potential for great good among the members, but its abuse brought division, hard and hurt feelings, and other outcomes exactly opposite to those intended.
- d. It was impossible to move from one supper to the next and leave behind the negative atmosphere created when the affluent refused to share food and fellowship with the disadvantaged members, and when some overindulged and others went hungry. Under the shadow of divisive actions generated during the “love feast,” it was “not to eat” [“not possible to eat”-ASV] the Lord’s Supper in the frame of mind necessary to the true brotherhood that *must* be manifested in its eating.
- e. While there was nothing inherently wrong with their “love feasts,” they became the source of much that *was* wrong! Still, they served a God-approved purpose: they demonstrated graphically which church members possessed the love required of them and which did not. God did not *approve* of their wrong attitudes, nor did He *cause* them. Rather, He *allowed* circumstances to [“must”]come about that would *test* hearts and *identify* those that “were approved.”
- f. Why do you engage in these public suppers that result in so much disharmony? If you cannot conduct them for your benefit, why not just discontinue them altogether? If you insist on eating together, then use your houses and make the suppers private affairs, where you can “divide up” as you choose without causing so many disturbances. Do not “despise” [“think little or nothing of”--Thayer] the church-- keep such things *out of it!* The “love feasts” were so productive of harm among participants that the twenty-eighth canon of Laodicea [from an early “church council”] forbade their practice in church buildings, and the fifty-eighth canon likewise prohibited their conduct in private houses.

Verses 23-32-- “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you...”

- a. Paul now reminds all the saints just what the Lord’s Supper is all about: what it signi-

fies and how it ought to be observed by Christians. He had taught these principles to them previously ["delivered"], but apparently they had forgotten or disregarded what he had said.

- b.** The Lord's Supper was not intended to be connected with the observance of the Passover or any other meal. It had been instituted "after [the Passover] supper."
- c.** Paul's descriptions and directions corresponded to the events that transpired after the Passover Supper before the crucifixion of Jesus. Details of that event are found in Matthew 26:26-30, Mark 14:22-26, and Luke 22:14-20.
- d.** Significant to Paul's discussion are these facts:
 - (1) Two elements comprised the Supper-- unleavened bread and fruit of the vine;
 - (2) Both were representative of the *new* Passover Lamb who had been slain on the cross for the salvation of all men;
 - (3) The bread reminded of the Lord's body; the "cup" [contents--fruit of the vine] recalled the blood of atonement;
 - (4) Jesus' body was "given for" them; His blood was "shed for" them--"for the remission of sins;"
 - (5) Jesus first "gave thanks" before distributing the bread and cup;
 - (6) The disciples were charged to partake of both parts of the Supper "in remembrance of me;"
 - (7) Jesus would not eat the Lord's Supper with them again until the kingdom [church] had come.
- e.** The apostle adds in his instructions to the Corinthians that when they ate the Supper they "proclaimed the Lord's death till He comes." Commemoration of His death is a validation of faith in His resurrection, ascension, and return to judge the world. The serious implications of that last truth must necessarily lend seriousness to the manner in which the Supper is treated.
- f.** Anyone who mistreats the observance of the Supper ["unworthy manner"] is regarded by God as mistreating the body and blood of Jesus just as the angry mob had done when they demanded the crucifixion of Christ some years before.
- g.** Only each participant can accurately and honestly test the "manner" in which he shares in the Supper with other Christians. Each must make certain that there is both "spirit" and "truth" in his eating and drinking at the Lord's table. He must "discern" ["separate, make a distinction, discriminate"--Thayer] the body and blood-- he must see *more* than bread and juice!
- h.** The unworthy eating, accompanied by the unhealthy strife among members, had sapped the spiritual energy of many ["weak and sick"]. Some had given up trying to be faithful ["sleep"].
- i.** If Christians would practice self-examination in the light of divine instructions about their duties (2Cor.13:5), they would be able to correct their mistakes about such things as the Lord's Supper. Then, it would not be necessary for the Lord to condemn them for those errors.
- j.** Correction is never a pleasant experience. However, chastening [rebuke] is essential to our obedience and will help to keep us out of the condemnation promised to those who do not obey the gospel (2Thes.1:8,9).

Verses 33,34-- “Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat...”

- a. Their “coming together” to eat at the “love feasts” and then at the Lord’s table had not been productive of spiritual good. Instead, their commitment to faithfulness had been severely impaired.
- b. Paul discouraged the continuation of the love feasts if the Corinthians could not handle them any better than in the past. However, participation in the Lord’s Supper was *not* optional or subject to human regulation. They must “come together to eat” that meal.
- c. The key to so eating that it would be a blessing to them was to “wait” for one another. “Wait” is, literally and primarily, “to take or receive from” [Vine]. Hence, the proper eating of the Supper was to be “taking and receiving from one another”-- a sharing or *communion* with one another and with the Lord-- a feast of spiritual *unity* rather than a meal of division. This it had not been before. This it must become if they were to be approved by God.
- d. The Corinthians should eat their private meals at home and avoid the temptations of physical appetite and the pitfalls of spiritual selfishness that would continue to plague their observance of the Lord’s Supper if they continued to mingle it with what had become only a common meal to many of them.
- e. If there were other problems and concerns associated with the Lord’s Supper that had not been addressed, Paul promises to deal appropriately with them when finally he came to the city. The points he had discussed were the most pressing issues. Things of lesser consequence could wait until later.

1. What line of headship (authority) does Paul cite? (2)
2. To demonstrate this arrangement of headship, Paul instructs men and women to do what while “praying and prophesying”? (4,5)
3. What does “nature” teach us about the length of hair? (14,15)
4. What situation at Corinth caused them to assemble for the worse, not for the better? (17,18)
5. What is one reason Paul assigns for factions in the church? (19)
6. Describe the abuse of the Lord’s Supper mentioned in verse 21.
7. Whose example did Paul use in teaching about the Supper? (23)
8. What underlying purpose is given for observing the Lord’s Supper? (24,25)
9. The Supper proclaims what past and what future events? (24-26)
10. What kind of eating of the Supper will make a person “guilty”? Of what? (27)
11. How can a person avoid condemnation in eating the Supper? (27-29)
12. Give Paul’s prescription for pleasing Christ when people eat the Lord’s Supper. (31,33)

FIRST CORINTHIANS

SECTION SIXTEEN-- 12:1-31

“Solving Church Problems” Fourteenth Problem: “Misunderstanding Spiritual Gifts: Their Importance”

Verse 1-- “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant...”

- a. Whether this subject was included in Paul’s letter because he had been asked questions about spiritual gifts by the Corinthians, or because he had heard from others that there were problems over such gifts, we cannot know. Regardless, Paul considered the situation serious enough to deal with in depth.
- b. Perhaps Paul would want them to have some general information about gifts:
 - (1) Spiritual gifts were first given to the apostles to “guide them into all the truth” (John 14:26) and to remind them of Jesus’ teachings (John 16:13);
 - (2) The apostles had the power to confer these gifts upon others (Acts 8:14-17);
 - (3) Gifts enabled the church to know and to make known God’s will and to confirm it by a demonstration of miraculous power;
 - (4) Gifts were intended to be a blessing to church members who could employ them in furtherance of the gospel. However, possessing the “showy” gifts could tempt their possessors to become boastful and to present themselves as more important to the church than others were. Those who had more “humble” gifts could be tempted to be envious of the “greater” gifts.
- c. There were presently in progress at Corinth multiple abuses of spiritual gifts. Each one needed attention. Paul uses not one chapter, but three, to lend his authority to the principles and procedures that would bring them into the relationship with spiritual gifts intended by the Lord when He first blessed them with their possession and use.
- d. *Chapter twelve* addresses the distorted values that were being placed on the various gifts and the relative importance of their possessors to the functioning of the church.
- e. *Chapter thirteen* focuses on the fact that **love**, unlike the miraculous gifts of which they were so proud, is lasting and is the most necessary “gift” of all in allowing the church serve God as He intended it should.
- f. *Chapter fourteen* discusses the function of the gifts possessed by those at Corinth and how each gift is designed to enhance the performance of the church as it sought to follow the Lord’s plan for faithful churches.

Verses 2-6-- “You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols...”

- a. It was important that the Corinthian Gentiles, having been exposed to the *professed* existence and manifestation of miracles as part of the pagan religions, should understand that the gifts from the true God were *real* and *different* from those.
- b. Simon the sorcerer had “astonished” the citizens of Samaria and had claimed to be something great” because of his pretended powers (Acts 8:9).
- c. Revelation chapter thirteen speaks of a “beast” [false religion] who would perform “great signs” to deceive people into erroneous practices as part of the effort to enhance the power of the “first beast” [government] over men. He would “rain fire” on

- the earth and cause the image of the first beast to “speak”.
- c. These references possibly indicate something of the widespread influence of pagan “miracle-working” and how easily the general population might be duped into placing their confidence in systems of idolatry.
 - d. Idols were but “dumb” images with no inherent value to men at all. Although it is said that pagan priests oftentimes used speaking tubes to make it appear that idols spoke to men, thoughtful individuals could detect the deception and understand that idols never conveyed any truth to their devotees nor did their “miracles” serve any useful purpose.
 - e. “Christ crucified” had been the central theme of the gospel preached at Corinth. No pagan idol, priest, or teacher would ever *confess* that foundation fact, and no apostle or true teacher of the gospel would ever *fail* to do so. The reason for that basic difference was that only the Holy Spirit could generate that doctrine, and the priests and teachers of idolatry had *no* connection to the Spirit like the teachers of the gospel did.
 - f. The same Spirit who was responsible for the singular truth about Jesus was also the singular source of all spiritual gifts in the church. Whereas worshipers of idols must go from one temple to another, seeking one blessing or another from gods who “specialized” in one thing or another, the Christian can look to one God for *every* needful endowment. There was no plan or uniformity in “many gifts, many gods,” but “many gifts, one Spirit” ensures a unity of purpose and a cohesive function among all the available miracles in the church.
 - g. Another concept was also crucial to understanding about spiritual gifts. Although the gospel recognizes but *one God* from whom all gifts come (Jas. 1:17), that God is really a *Godhead* (Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:20; Col. 2:9). The three Persons in the Godhead are nevertheless a Unity, each occupying a relationship to spiritual gifts that is consonant with the relationships of the other two:
 - (1) The Holy Spirit is the immediate *giver* of all the gifts (verse 4);
 - (2) The Lord [Jesus] is the *governor* of the function [ministry] of the gifts (verse 5);
 - (3) The Father [God] is the *co-ordinator* of the giving and use of gifts (verse 6).

Verses 7-11-- “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one...”

- a. The Spirit’s work in the church was “manifested” [“open to sight; shining”--Vine] by the different gifts He gave to different members.
- b. The gifts were not given for the personal benefit of any recipient, but for the spiritual health of the whole church. Each gift was to be employed in keeping with its intended use, and not as its possessor saw fit. Apparently, those with gifts that might be of benefit to supply personal needs or to solve personal problems [e.g., healing sickness] were not allowed to use the gifts in that way.
- c. Paul lists *nine* specific spiritual gifts that evidently had been distributed by the Spirit among the general membership of the church. Some of them had been given to the members at Corinth. We cannot know, of course, to what persons or in what numbers these gifts had been imparted.
- d. These nine gifts and their functions were:
 - (1) The *word of wisdom*: since this gift is distinguished from one of “knowledge,” it possibly related to the initial reception of revelation by those usually called

“prophets.” Some associate this gift only with the apostles, to whom was revealed the complete gospel. “Wisdom” is “the ability to see things as God sees them.” The word that God sent to the minds of the apostles and prophets allowed them to transmit doctrine to the saints that was *exactly* the way God saw it.

- (2) The *word of knowledge* [*gnosis*- “*seeking to know...divine truth*” - -Vine] could have been supernatural power to enable others to teach effectively the revelation that had been received by the prophets.
 - (3) *Faith* obviously was more than the faith that “comes by hearing the word of God.” This faith was clothed in power that could cast out demons and could even move a mountain if its removal was necessary to the execution of God’s will (Matt.17:19,20).
 - (4) *Gifts of healings* were frequently used to restore the sick to health. Instances of the apostles healing the sick are prominently recorded in Acts [e.g.,5:15,16] and some elders were probably endowed with similar power (Jas.5:14,15).
 - (5) The *working of miracles* was power to perform various miracles other than the “healing” made possible by the previously mentioned gift. It would include power to *punish* (Acts 13:8-11) as well as power to bless. James MacKnight identifies this gift with the “inworking “ of powers, that is, “the bestowing on persons the ability to impart the power of working miracles to others.” Simon offered money to possess this gift (Acts 8:18,19). MacKnight and David Lipscomb both believed that this power was not restricted to the apostles, but no clear example of anyone else using this power is found in the New Testament
 - (6) *Prophecy* involved receiving direct communications from heaven. How this gift differs from the “word of wisdom” is unclear, but some [McGarvey and Pendleton] suggest that it included “merely foretelling things of a temporary or personal nature, as in the case of Agabus (Acts 11:29; 21:9-11).”
 - (7) *Discerning of spirits* perhaps played a significant role in distinguishing between false and true teachers of the gospel. “Test the spirits, whether they are of God...” (1John 4:1).
 - (8) *Different kinds of tongues* were useful when the early disciples encountered different nationalities of people in the preaching of the gospel. On Pentecost, numerous languages [tongues] were spoken by the apostles to offer the gospel to everyone present. Chapter fourteen of this letter will deal with the uses of tongue-speaking in the local assemblies. This gift was highly prized by many of the Corinthians. Note that “tongues” were commonly-spoken languages that the speaker had never learned, and not the ecstatic gibberish so often associated with that term today.
 - (9) The *interpretation of tongues* was needed when some spoke in tongues that others could not understand. Paul forbade saints to use tongues in the local assemblies unless someone could interpret. Sometimes this gift was given to a person who also could speak in tongues (1Cor.14:13).
- d. Although these nine gifts differed significantly one from another, all nine were given to the church by the “*same Spirit*,” and that single source gave assurance that the proper

use of each gift was harmonious with the use of all the rest. Furthermore, as Paul will stress in the remainder of this chapter, there should be no discord among those who possessed the various powers, because the success of the church in fulfilling its mission required that all gifts work *together* in *unity*.

Verses 12-17-- “For as the body is one and has many members...”

- a. With this verse, Paul begins a lengthy discussion comparing the functions of the human body with the workings of the spiritual body of Christ. This comparison will occupy the rest of the chapter.
- b. The apostle goes from the known to the not-so-known as he first reminds the disciples that their physical bodies are composed of many unlike members that must work in harmony for the well-being of the whole body. Although each member supplies *some* of the body’s needs, no single member can furnish *all* needs. Only the *totality* of the members can do that.
- c. “So also is Christ.” Paul will now expand upon this brief truth to emphasize that the spiritual body [church] of Christ is also dependent on a proper relationship among all its members and that this dependency extends to the use of the spiritual gifts about which misconduct apparently had arisen.
- d. Fundamental to a satisfactory understanding of the role of gifts was the knowledge that all Christians were in the *same body* [church] because that is where the Lord placed them when they were baptized into Christ (Acts 2:47). Baptism is “by one Spirit” because men are *led* by the Spirit (Rom.8:14) in His word to be baptized (Acts 2:38; Gal.3:27). Furthermore, it was into [“of”--ASV] the *same Spirit* that all had been “drinking” [developing as Christians] since their conversions. Their uniform treatment by God indicated the uniform response to spiritual gifts that was expected of them.
- e. The biological “fact” upon which the physical body operates is the same fact that determines the operation of the spiritual body: many parts must work *together* to accomplish what needs to be done. Additional facts will illustrate this truth.
- f. The relative worth of each body member [foot, hand, ear, and eye] to the overall well-being of the body is measured only by its satisfactory performance of its own particular function. A hand and a foot can do different things, but neither can furnish to the body what the other can do. A hand cannot take me where I want to go, but neither can a foot put on my shoe and tie my shoelace so the foot can do its work! So it is with the interdependence among all our physical members. Each is important to the whole body because it offers something that no other member can do.

Verses 18-27-- “But now God has set the members, each one of them...”

- a. Paul’s analogy continues, but the focus now shifts to the relative roles of members of Christ’s *spiritual* body, the church.
- b. God has “set” [the differing gifts of] members into the overall functioning of the body in accord with His divine knowledge of what is best for the entire body. His decisions do not always agree with what *we* think is best (Isa.55:8,9).
- c. It would be foolish for one part of human body to disparage the function provided by

another part. It was equally foolish for one member of the spiritual body to try to diminish the importance of another's gift. This obviously had become the practice of certain members of the congregation at Corinth.

- d. Not every spiritual gift was *equal* to every other gift. Revelation, for example, was more fundamental to salvation than healings. However, healings could be used as an entree for receiving the gospel. Such an interdependence could not be ignored. So, *every* gift offered a vital service to the comprehensive plan of God. "Where would the body be" if some gifts were not exercised because they were judged unimportant?
- e. Some members of both physical and spiritual bodies may be thought to be "weaker" ["more feeble"--ASV, KJV] than others, but that does not make them so. Thoughtful persons understand that unseen members, such as kidneys and lungs, are *necessary* if the body is to function properly.
- f. Other members may be considered "less honorable" [presentable] to others; some are adorned with clothing, makeup, and other things to make them more attractive. Still others are given special attention to ensure their modesty. Whatever differences may exist among the members of both physical and spiritual bodies, the lesson is clear: "stronger" members ought to *honor* [support] "weaker" members rather than to disparage them.
- g. God has so endowed the church with various gifts with the intention that each gift-bearer work harmoniously with every other gift-bearer in a way that will discourage any division of feeling or purpose among them, and will instead promote brotherhood.
- h. What is good for one member is good for all; what hinders one hinders all in achieving the goal of offering God a pleasing service. Chrysostom, an early church leader, said, "When a thorn enters the heel, the whole body feels it, and is concerned: the back bends, the fore part of the body contracts itself, the hands come forward and draw out the thorn, the head stoops, the eyes regard the affected member with extreme gaze. When the head is crowned, the whole man feels honored, the mouth expresses and the eyes look with gladness."
- i. Calling their attention again to his central lesson, Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are the [spiritual] body of Christ and that these acknowledged facts about the humanity of one body must also be applied to the spirituality of the other. "Ye are the [whole] body of Christ, and you must work in unity as the individual parts."

Verses 28-30-- "And God has appointed these in the church..."

- a. The focus shifts again. Now, Paul will stress the importance of the *work* that must be done with the spiritual gifts. *Possessing* a gift holds no special virtue; *using* a gift responsibly is all that matters.
- b. Responsibilities for the faithful exercise of the gifts, corresponding to the spiritual gifts previously listed, are related. These positions of service were "appointed" by God to execute everything that needed to be done in *taking* the truth to the lost and in *keeping* the truth in the lives of the saved.
- c. The RSV addresses the list of services as follows: "First apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues."

- d. The “order” of God’s appointments possibly reflects His evaluation of those appointments. First is the work of apostleship, limited to only a few. Second, the work of prophesying, and, third, the function of teaching the truth. These three gifts all have to do with *conveying* the gospel, God’s only “power unto salvation.” Other works were subservient to those three. Perhaps Paul intended to put the proud possessors of other gifts “in their place” by not assigning them a precise numerical ranking. It is interesting that, in the listing given of these gifts, speaking in tongues appears last of all. That must have surprised many of the Corinthians, who were convinced that the most desirable gift to be had was that of tongue-speaking.
- e. It is not altogether certain who were the persons called “helpers” [“helpers”] and “administrations” [“administrators;” “governments”-- KJV]. Some have suggested that since deacons in the local church are helpers to the elders [and to the rest of the congregation] in doing the work of the local group, these “helpers” might be the deacons. Similarly, since elders oversee or administer [root-- “minister”] the affairs of the local church, they perhaps are the “administrators” in this listing. If so, it would appear that some elders and deacons were empowered with miraculous assistance in carrying out their responsibilities.
- f. “Interpretation of tongues” or its equivalent does not appear in the list at the end of the chapter. It may be included in “varieties of tongues.”
- g. Not even the apostles, who possibly possessed all or most of the nine gifts of the Spirit, could alone accomplish everything that had to be done in the early church. Nor could the prophets, teachers, and others who were gifted to serve. Just as the hands, feet, etc., were interdependent in the physical body, the possessors of the special gifts could succeed in saving the lost by working together in harmony and with singularity of purpose.
- h. Some gifts were “greater” than others because they were more fundamental to the proclamation of the gospel, upon which the entire mission of the church rested. “Prophecy” and “teaching” fell within this category. The apostleship was no longer available as a work to which even the most faithful could aspire. Those who were most devout might desire to accomplish the greatest possible good for the Lord and would regard the “greatest” gifts as the best way to do that.
- i. There was a “better way” to serve the Lord than simply to possess a spiritual gift, and that better way certainly did not include the boastings, jealousies, and the intense competition that dominated so much of the gift-related behavior of some of the saints at Corinth. Paul’s explanation of the “better way” in chapter thirteen will reveal a “better way” for us even today. His “better way” will speak to our consciences in this century as it did to theirs in the first century.

FIRST CORINTHIANS-- QUESTIONS

SECTION SIXTEEN 12:1-31

1. Verse one shows us the main teaching to be emphasized in this chapter. What is it?
2. How were the Gentiles led while in error, and how are we led to know the truth about Christ? (2,3)
3. What things were different and what things were the same in the church at Corinth? (4-6)
4. Name the various gifts of the Spirit given to the early church. (8-10)
5. Who determined which gifts were given to which people? (11)
6. What comparison does Paul make to teach about unity among the gift-receivers? (12)
7. Summarize the teaching about body parts and gifts. (14-25,27)
8. What is the lesson about suffering and rejoicing? (26,27)
9. List the different levels of miracle-workers in the early church. (28,29)
10. Which gifts were the Corinthians permitted [encouraged] to desire? (31)

FIRST CORINTHIANS

“Solving Church Problems”

SECTION SEVENTEEN--13:1-13

Fifteenth Problem-- “Overlooking Love”

This chapter of First Corinthians is one of the most familiar and best-loved chapters in all the Bible. Paul’s profound discussion of **love** apparently arose from the problems facing the Corinthian church about dealing with sin, not treating other saints as brethren, displaying selfishness in the eating of certain meats, and inappropriate behavior regarding spiritual gifts. In all of these matters there had been an obvious lack of love among the members, and the apostle believed that if they could develop a proper feeling for one another, it would become much easier to *solve the church problems* that threatened the unity of the body of Christ.

Some have considered this chapter to be unconnected with the teaching about spiritual gifts in the chapters preceding and following it. On the contrary, this “love chapter” has *everything* to do with the Corinthians’ problem about spiritual gifts, which really was a problem about a lack of *love*.

“The test and measure of love is how much of his own pleasure he is willing to forego for the well-being of the object of his love. The test of a mother’s love for her child is how much of her selfish pleasure she will forego for the good of the child; the test of a husband’s love is how much of his selfish pleasure he will deny himself to make his wife happy; the test of a child’s love for its parents is how much of its pleasure it will forego to please the parent.

“Man’s love for God is measured by his willingness to sacrifice his own pleasure and his own ways to please God. ‘This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments’ (1John 5:3).

“[Love is] an active desire to do good...it can only be manifested by doing...what God’s law directs; this will bring the highest and only true good, and so is the manifestation of love.” -- David Lipscomb, Commentary

Verses 1-3-- “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels...”

- a. False conclusions about spiritual gifts and their importance had been harbored by many of the Corinthians and had resulted in arrogance, jealousy, and unwarranted humiliation within the membership of the church.
- b. It appears that divisiveness within the congregation could largely be laid at the feet of tongue-speakers. The ability to speak in heaven-imparted languages seems to have been the most highly-prized of all the gifts. Those who possessed tongues were excessively proud of their gift; those who didn’t have that gift became envious of those who did. Some tended to devalue the other gifts they had and doubted their own personal value to the body since they couldn’t speak in tongues.
- c. Paul’s purpose was to convince those affected by misconceptions about tongue-speaking that *nothing* is worth having if it becomes the cause of alienations among God’s people. Tongues, like all other spiritual gifts, were intended to *assist*, not *hinder*, the whole body in accomplishing its mission.
- d. As he had done in the sensitive issue of human leaders [chapters three and four], Paul uses himself rather than those actually guilty of the misconduct to illustrate the truth he wishes to teach. He could do this because he possessed the gift of tongues more than

any of them (14:18). If *he* could discredit himself as a disciple by abusing *his* gift, how could other tongue-speakers hold themselves innocent when *they* violated the trust God had placed with *them*?

- e. The “tongues of men” [unlearned human languages] were highly valued among the Corinthians. “Tongues of angels,” if available to men, would be even more prized and would transport mortals into another spiritual level altogether. [See Heb.2:7; Psa.8:5.] Even so, possessing tongues of *all* kinds would be of no spiritual benefit to the possessor if he failed to use his gifts in behalf of others.
- f. It was even more a distortion of God’s grace to misuse His gifts [of tongues] than to create inferior musical instruments that make no “certain sound” (1Cor.14:7,8) from fine Corinthian brass, for which the city was known.
- g. The exercise of other spiritual gifts must likewise be motivated by love for others and a genuine desire to do them good. Even the reception and transmission of God’s revelations [“mysteries”] to man [by prophecy and gifts of wisdom and knowledge--12:8,10] was valueless to the recipient without proper intentions. So, also, was an extraordinary “faith” that could “move mountains” when necessary (Mark 11:23). Paul apparently had all these gifts and strove to employ them for the good of everyone.
- h. The “helps” [“helpers”] in 12:28 perhaps were deacons or others endowed with powers to execute their work in behalf of others. Just *doing* something for another, whether it involves the sacrifice of one’s *goods* or the ultimate sacrifice of one’s own *life*, is only an empty gesture without real love for the other. Paul no doubt had sacrificed his possessions many times, and he would make the greater sacrifice of his life for his fellowmen in just a few years (2Tim.4:6).

Verses 4-7-- “Love suffers long and is kind...”

- a. It is easy to *claim* love for others but more difficult to *demonstrate* it by our behavior. Love’s identifying characteristics were so foreign to the interrelations at Corinth that Paul felt compelled to offer a short course in the appropriate treatment of one another-- *with* or *without* spiritual gifts.
- b. Albert Barnes makes this observation about Paul’s description of Christian love:

“Paul now proceeds to illustrate the *nature* of love, or to show how it is exemplified. His illustrations are all drawn from its effects in regulating our conduct toward others, or our intercourse with them. The *reason* why he made use of this illustration, rather than its nature as evinced toward *God*, was, probably, because it was especially necessary for them to understand in what way it should be manifested towards each other. There were contentions and strifes among them; there were of course suspicions and jealousies, and heart-burnings; there would be unkind judging, the imputation of improper motives, and selfishness; there were envy, and pride, and boasting, all of which were inconsistent with love; and Paul therefore evidently designed to correct these evils, and to produce a different state of things by showing them what would be produced by the exercise of love.”
- c. Love prompts people *to do six things for* others, and it prevents people *from doing eight things to* others. It is apparent that the members at Corinth at whom these remarks were aimed were manifesting a woeful lack of love by *not offering to* their brethren the kind of treatment recommended by the apostle, and by *directing at them* behavior that cannot possibly flow from hearts guided by love.
- d. “Love suffers long and is kind.” Love would not allow the ridicule and scorn of those

with “better gifts” to be answered in kind by members with “lesser” powers. Instead, love always behaves as Christ behaved, “Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return...” (1Pe.2:23). Paul recommended “heaping coals of fire” by returning good deeds for bad, just as Solomon before him had suggested (Rom.12:17, 20; Prov. 25:21,22).

- e. “Love does not envy.” Parents don’t envy their children, nor do husbands and wives envy the good fortune of each other. Love renders envy impossible. Yet, envy lay at the center of many of the problems relating to spiritual gifts at Corinth.
- f. “Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up.” Jesus condemned the hypocrites for praying in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen of men (Matt.6:5). Tongue-speakers [and perhaps others endowed with special powers] were guilty of the same sin when they flaunted their supposed superiority before the members who lacked similar gifts. Men who serve God through love will always “hide themselves behind the cross” and strive to draw attention to the crucified Savior rather than to themselves.
- g. “Love does not behave itself rudely [“unseemly”--ASV].” Love is not “arrogant or rude” [RSV]. The assemblies at Corinth probably were beset with interruptions, distractions, and manifestations of bad feelings by some toward others (1Cor.14:26-33). Disrespect, disconsideration, and intimidation likely marred the unity of spirit that should have characterized brethren who were supposed to be seeking the same goals when they employed gifts that had the same purpose.
- h. “Love does not seek its own [way].” Paul’s admonitions about tongue-speakers and prophets speaking out of turn, at the expense of order and understanding, certainly indicate that some with those gifts were abusing the privileges afforded them by the Lord. Only a person with an inflated sense of self-importance would be insensitive to the feelings and needs of other members who had gifts of their own to exercise, would always insist on “going first,” and would attempt to dominate the activities of the assembly.
- i. “Love is not provoked.” It would be hard to keep a pleasant and cooperative spirit in the face of the uncalled-for misbehavior of those who were acting offensively when the church met for worship [and probably at other times, too]. Yet, this is what real love will produce, even toward the offenders. Negative reactions to bad treatment would only make the gatherings of the saints less worthwhile than ever. “Two wrongs don’t make a right.”
- j. “Love thinks no evil.” Human tendencies are inclined to attribute bad motives to the actions of others, especially when those actions run counter to our own preferences. The higher road for the *abused* would be to give the *abusers* the benefit of any possible doubt, and to try to be patient with them in the hope that they will see the error of their way and do better. Trying to work *with* those who misbehave always brings more positive results than choosing to work *against* them. That would have been Paul’s advice to these gifted saints who were at odds with one another.
- k. “Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.” Some of the tongue-speakers and prophets were clearly out of line (chapter 14). They obviously “deserved” the rebuke Paul gave them for their transgressions. Those not guilty of similar behavior should not feel nor display any sense of gladness or satisfaction that these offenders had “gotten what was coming to them.” Such a reaction would only widen the rift between the *advantaged* and the *disadvantaged*. Instead, try to be understanding and patient with those whom

Paul had rebuked. Try to help them see the truth about themselves and their gifts and move them *gently* into a more productive role in the congregation. Then, rejoice that such a needed change [“the truth”] had been made.

- l. “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” This quartet of healthy reactions to unhealthy treatment is added to the spiritual advice in the previous verse and is directed again to members who were being offended by the intimidation of those whose pride had drawn them into arrogant and insensitive conduct. It would be hard to repress their natural desire to retaliate against people who had mistreated them, but it was important to do so. It might be hard to believe that any radical change in the bad behavior was likely to happen, but their faith in the innate goodness of the out-of-order members might be just the thing that would bring change about. Hope for improvement in the conduct of misdirected brethren would allow those who were suffering the consequences of their misdirection to endure [“to sustain an assault”] their maltreatment. Hope would envision a more brotherly environment in the Corinthian church.

Verse 8-- “Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail...”

- a. Love is *always* productive of good in the Lord’s church. Spiritual gifts *may* be, if they are properly understood and appropriately used. Love not only never fails to serve its holy purpose, but its essential role in man’s salvation will never cease as long as time remains.
- b. On the other hand, spiritual gifts, even those as important to the life and development of the early church as prophecy, tongue-speaking, and supernatural knowledge of God’s word, were limited in their purpose and temporary in their existence among the disciples of Jesus.
- c. The church of Christ one day would be able to flourish in the absence of the gifts thought then to be so important to its welfare. All gifts would be taken away from their possessors when their purposes in the church had been fulfilled. However, God’s kingdom could *not* survive then or at any time later without love as the foundation of *all* brotherly relationships. In that sense, it was more important to have love than to have a gift.

Verses 9, 10-- “For we know in part and we prophesy in part...”

- a. Not everyone possessed every gift available to the church, with the possible exception of the apostles. Certainly, those who “knew” and those who “prophesied” were not separately invested with all knowledge and all revelation. That fact in itself should have made them more humble about the gifts they had and more aware of the need they all had for one another in the administration of their gifts.
- b. The spiritual gifts among the members at Corinth and elsewhere were given to allow things helpful to the progress of the gospel to be done that could not have been done without them. The “partial” revelations to the gifted were an immeasurable blessing to the early church, but a far greater blessing would come to the saints when God’s divine plan was at last complete [“perfect”] in the composite message of all the writers of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. [See Jude 3; 2Tim.3:16.]
- c. The “in part” gifts of knowledge and prophecy are contrasted by Paul with the “perfect” [complete] revelation to come later. Perhaps he intended to say that those gifts were a

“part” of the “perfect,” and that the truths then being conveyed through the gifts would later be incorporated into the final, full exposition of truth in the New Testament. At any rate, it is clear that all miraculous gifts would be removed when that full revelation had been made available to lost mankind.

- d. It is significant to note that only *prophecy* and *knowledge* are cast in the role of “part” revelations coming to the church at Corinth. *Tongue-speaking* receives no mention at all as having anything to do with the important partial communications from the Lord. This was surely a surprise and a great disappointment to those who gloried so much in the possession and use [misuse] of tongues.
- e. “*That* [not “who”] is perfect [complete]” is the *law of Christ* and not *Christ Himself* (Jas.1:25; 2Tim.3:16,17). The gifts are gone; Jesus has not yet “come.”
- f. McGarvey and Pendleton offer these thoughts about the temporary nature of supernatural powers in the church:

“Prophecies, tongues and knowledge--three supernatural gifts though they were-- were mortals compared with the divine spirit of love. They were needful in developing the infant church, but as that institution passed onward toward maturity and perfection (Heb.5:12-14; 6:1; Eph.3:14-21; 4:11-16), they were outgrown and discontinued, because from them had been developed the clear, steady light of a well-instructed church. They were thrown aside, therefore, as the wheat stalk which has matured its grain; or, to use Paul’s own figure, put away as the speech, feeling and judgment of childhood when they have produced their corresponding faculties in manhood....All Christians who mistakenly yearn for a renewal of these spiritual gifts, should note the clear import of the words of the apostle, which show that their presence in the church would be an evidence of immaturity and weakness, rather than of fully developed power and seasoned strength.”

Verse 11-- “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I thought as a child...”

- a. Parents anxiously await the first words of their child. They delight in those simple syllables and proudly report them to other adults. Yet, how rudimentary and ordinary those words are when compared to the speech of that same infant as he matures into a young adult. Even so, the miraculous powers bestowed on the early church were highly applauded and admired, despite their severe limitations. A fully-revealed gospel would, like the adult compared to the child, provide far more satisfying guidance to God’s body than the partial gifts ever could.
- b. “Childish things,” necessary to the growth of the child, are no longer useful to the man. Those things are discarded when their purpose has been served, and things more appropriate to maturity are placed into service. In the same way, gifts had a necessary place in the infancy of the church, but full maturity was not possible for Christians until they had full access to the complete revelation of the New Testament that sets out God’s plan for Christian maturity.

Verse 12-- “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face...”

- a. Ancient mirrors were not nearly so clear as those we have today. Only somewhat vague images could be seen when one looked into them. The real appearance might be significantly different from the perception gleaned from a brass mirror. At best, partial prophecy and partial knowledge could only present an incomplete impression of God’s plan at any given moment. The advent of the perfect New Testament would provide a

“face to face” opportunity for people to “see” God as He really is.

- b. Men could only partially “know” God through part-by-part messages from Him. The brighter day of full revelation would allow all seekers of truth to know [understand] God as He even then knew them and their aspirations for better things. [See 1Cor.2:11-13.]

Verse 13-- “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three...”

- a. Faith [non-miraculous], hope, and love “*now*” [at that time] remain and are essential to the survival and prosperity of every Christian:
 - (1) We are saved by faith in Christ. Without faith we would remain disobedient to God’s commandments and display no love for our Great Benefactor (1John.5:3).
 - (2) We are also saved by hope (Rom.8:24). Hope motivates us to action, and the action of obedience enables us to please our Savior (John 15:10).
 - (3) We are just as surely saved by love-- love of God and love of our brethren. (Gal. 5: 6; 1John 4:16).
- b. Until such time as our salvation in heaven becomes a reality, faith, hope, and love must continue to *abide* in the church. At that time, however, faith will be turned into sight, and hope will be fulfilled in the absolute reception of God’s promises. There will no longer be any need for those now-essential attributes. But ***love*** will never change at all, because *God is love* and the Christian’s eternal relationship with God and with other Christians will not be dependent on using tongues, prophecies, or other miraculous powers, but by using the most precious and most permanent gift of all--the gift of being able to ***love!***
- c. How foolish and how spiritually immature it was for the Corinthian church members to place so much confidence in things that were partial and temporary and to ignore the tremendous importance of practicing an all-embracing love that should have characterized every contact they had with their brethren.

FIRST CORINTHIANS--QUESTIONS

SECTION SEVENTEEN 13:1-13

1. What miraculous gifts does Paul refer to as he begins to teach the importance of love? (1,2)
2. What non-miraculous deeds does he discuss? (3)
3. All Christian activity [miraculous and non-miraculous] must be carried out with what motivation? (1-3)
4. List the *negative* characteristics of humans that love is *not* associated with. (4-6)
5. List the *positive* things that love promotes in us. (6,7)
6. What things will fail and what will endure? (8,13)
7. Did any one person possess a complete revelation from God? How do you know? (9)
8. What is “that which is perfect”? (10)
9. *Partial* knowledge and performance are compared to what things? (11,12)
10. *Complete* knowledge and performance are compared to what? (11,12)
11. Among things that are permanent in the church, what is greatest? (13)

FIRST CORINTHIANS

“Solving Church Problems”

SECTION EIGHTEEN-- 14:1-40

Problem Sixteen: “Misunderstanding Spiritual Gifts:
Purpose and Function”

Verse 1-- “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts...”

- a. Having dealt at length in chapter thirteen with the relative superiority of love over any of the spiritual gifts, Paul now proceeds to show that many of the Corinthians have acted childishly about their gifts of tongues. They had: (1) neglected to “pursue” real brotherly love as the foundation of their relationships with one another; (2) chosen instead to pursue spiritual gifts as the badge of spiritual worthiness; (3) mistaken the relative values to the church of prophesying and tongue-speaking, opting for tongues; (4) abused the use of their gifts of tongues in the church assemblies.
- b. Paul immediately sets them on course by urging that they “pursue” [NKJV] love, an action requiring much more intense effort than simply “following” [KJV, ASV]. The attainment of love is important enough to do whatever it takes to achieve it.
- c. It isn’t an “either/or” pursuit in which they must engage. They were also urged to *desire* [”earnestly”--ASV] the spiritual gifts they so treasured. The two goals were not mutually exclusive; they could have and use gifts within the context of brotherly love if they would “in understanding be mature” (verse 20).
- d. Those longing to possess a spiritual gift should exercise wisdom in making their request of God. As our culture puts it, “Go for the Gold!” Prophecy was a far better [more useful] gift than tongue-speaking, so why settle for less than the best?

Verses 2-4-- For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God...”

- a. There was no more important work performed in the early church than the reception and transmission of the gospel truth to men. Several of the available spiritual gifts were associated with that work, the most notable being the gift of prophecy. Tongues were also a means of delivering God’s truth, but only when there were spiritually-endowed interpreters present in the assemblies to translate the tongues [languages] into forms that could be understood by those present.
- b. When a tongue-speaker received a message in a language foreign to the assembled audience, and there was no translator available, the delivery process must stop. Using his “strange” language without its being interpreted would benefit no other person in the congregation. The speaker could not “speak” to men in any helpful manner.
- c. It is unclear under what circumstances the tongue-speaker could personally understand the message he received clothed in a language “unknown” to the others. It is clear that even when he could not set forward his teaching through an interpreter, he received a blessing [encouragement] in realizing that he had been favored to receive the teaching. Either silently or in private, he could speak his “mysteries” to God in the spirit.
- d. On the other hand, the gift of prophecy was unencumbered with the problems of translation. The prophets could forthwith relay their revelations to the people and provide instantaneous “edification,” “exhortation,” and “comfort.” [See Acts 20:32.]

- e. The tongue-speaker without an interpreter could only strengthen himself in his self-awareness of being a gift-recipient. However, a prophet could perform a priceless service to the entire church. Facing that bit of information must have been a great shock to the egos of the tongue-speakers, who had flaunted their impressive performances before the whole congregation at the expense of everyone else.

Verse 5-- “I wish you all spoke with tongues...”

- a. Tongue-speaking was a valuable gift and was useful in accomplishing the work of the primitive church. Although it might have served some secondary purpose in preaching to people of different languages, that does not seem to have been part of its intended function among early disciples. Rather, the ability to speak in languages that they had never learned enabled the tongue-speakers to:
 - (1) Confirm the revelations delivered by inspired men as messages from God (Mark 16:17,20; Heb. 2:1-4; Acts 2:33).
 - (2) Edify those in an audience who could understand the language being spoken (Acts 2:7-11; 1Cor.14:27);
 - (3) Signify to “unbelievers” who understood the language, but who had no interest in hearing the messages of the prophets, that those messages were genuine and worth their attention (1Cor. 14:22).
- b. Paul encouraged the *proper* use of the tongues they could speak. He himself was able to speak in many languages (verse 18). Nevertheless, people wished for less than the best when they desired to speak in tongues rather than to speak forth God’s word of salvation through the gift of prophecy.

Verses 6-11-- “But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues...”

- a. Again, Paul inserts himself as an example to illustrate their grave mistakes. If something questionable would be wrong for *him* to do, then surely they could see how the same thing would be wrong for *them*.
- b. Paul would not waste his time and theirs by using his gift of languages to teach them if he knew they could not understand the meaning of the language[s] he used. Then, the goals he always pursued in his work, revelation, knowledge, prophesying, and teaching, would all be totally frustrated because no communication could take place. Precious opportunities for learning would be wasted.
- c. Other illustrations of the foolishness of tongues-for-tongues-sake are drawn from the musical and military worlds:
 - (1) No one would enjoy a concert by flute or harp unless the musician is skilled in producing musical sounds that make “musical sense.”
 - (2) A trumpet signal to an army might result in disaster if the troops don’t recognize what the sound was supposed to alert them to do.
- d. Paul’s point is simple: just like these other situations, when they speak in their tongues in the assembly, and there is no interpretation of those languages to the congregation, they talk only “to the air,” and that is an abuse of their gifts.
- e. All languages have but one purpose: to allow sensible communication from one person to another. Each language is “significant” from the others, possessing its own

peculiar characteristics. Communication cannot take place through the use of any language unless both speaker and hearer understand the meanings of its particular sounds.

- f. The “tongues” received from God to be used in His work were *common languages*, not unintelligible expressions of emotionally-charged speakers. They were *meant* to be understood by people who normally spoke them (Acts 2:11). Interpreters were inspired to translate the content of tongue-speaking for those who *didn’t* know the language(s) being spoken. Without being interpreted, the languages posed a harsh barrier to achieving common ground between a speaker and a hearer from differing cultures. This confusion of languages has divided nations since the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11).
- g. Nothing derogatory was intended by Paul in his use of “barbarian.” The Greeks considered all people as “barbarians” who could not speak their language, regardless of their culture level. The NKJV and the RSV both employ the term, “foreigner.”

Verses 12-- “Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts...”

- a. Tongues played an important role in many assemblies of the early church. It certainly could not be wrong to desire such a gift, if one’s motivation was pure. However, the *more important* gift of prophecy was also available to some, and the more godly among the members could *best* serve the Lord’s cause in Corinth by obtaining and using a gift that thus far had been seriously underrated as a gift-seeker’s first choice.
- b. Prophecy, not tongue-speaking, would enable them to “excel” in serving both God and their brethren.

Verses 13-17-- “Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue...”

- a. Some members were already gifted with the use of tongues and had become very proud and jealous of that gift. Paul does not intend to diminish the importance of languages in the assemblies, but he does wish to recommend to the tongue-speakers something that would enhance their highly-prized gift. They should pray for the additional ability to *interpret* what they spoke in other languages. This indicates that some with tongues could interpret, and others could not. Those who couldn’t were hindered in their effectiveness by the need for someone else to complete their communications to the church.
- b. *Praying* and *singing* were both carried on by tongue-speakers in the languages with which they had been endowed. Messages of encouragement and instruction apparently were clothed in these songs and prayers. Two elements were necessary for the transmission of such messages: (1) the “spirit,” i.e., the reception of the message from the Holy Spirit to the speaker’s spirit, and, (2) the “understanding” of what the message meant, either by the speaker or the hearer, or by both. It is unclear whether or not the speaker always knew what his song, prayer, or discourse meant, but it is certain that without a translator many of his hearers did not.
- c. The gift of tongues was self-limiting. The speaker might “give thanks *well*,” but his effectiveness in helping someone else (“edified”) was restricted by the absence of

an interpreter. A second gift was required for its greatest usefulness.

Verses 18,19-- “I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all...”

- a. We have examples of Paul speaking in Greek and Hebrew (Acts 21:37,40). We cannot know how many other languages he could use, or if there were any limitations placed upon his use of tongues.
- b. The apostle’s use of contrast must have struck home at the pride felt by the tongue-speakers. They likely had been guilty of “much speaking” in the church assemblies. They had insisted on “having their say” regardless of how many might speak or for how long. *Quantity* was as important to them as *quality*. But Paul declares that if he could choose between the comparative value to the church of the dominating tongue-speakers and the dominated prophets, five words that could be understood were worth more than ten thousand that could not.

Verses 20-22-- “Brethren, do not be children in understanding...”

- a. The behavior of the tongue-speakers was detrimental to the “understanding” of others who did not comprehend any meaning in their utterances. Moreover, it was destructive to their own “understanding” [awareness] of just how undesirable their conduct really was. They were like “babes” who had no grasp on reality while living in a fantasy world of physically attractive but valueless playthings. That was unacceptable in Christians who should have been *assisted* toward spiritual maturity by the gifts they had received. On the other hand, their behavior was anything but childlike when they displayed malice, jealousy, and ill-will toward one another because of their attitudes about spiritual gifts.
- b. Evidently, the tongue-speakers were directing their gifts toward a mostly “home-crowd” of believers in the assembly, even though the “home folks” could not understand what they were saying.
- c. The “law” (Isaiah 28:11,12) had warned God’s people that they would be “taught” by people who spoke a foreign language, since they had refused to listen to their own prophets who had spoken to them in their common language. The Assyrian tongue was a “sign” [proof] to unbelieving Jews that the prophets’ words were true, despite their unpopularity.
- d. The tongues of the Corinthians were still intended as a “sign” for “unbelievers” who would not listen to the inspired messages of the prophets in the church. Unbelievers [in need of hearing the prophets] would become convinced that revelation was being delivered in the church when they witnessed the phenomenon of miraculous tongues.
- e. Prophecy was *not* a *sign*, but a *substance*. Signs could not save the lost, but the message of prophecy could. When the tongue-speaker had done his work, and when the attention of unbelievers had been arrested, only the work of the prophet could open the door into heaven through which men could step in obedience to the prophet’s teaching of the gospel.

Verses 23-25-- “Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place...”

- a. Paul poses a situation when many participants would be present [“whole church”]

speaking in many different languages. His illustration will demonstrate just how pointless and harmful the abuses of tongues at Corinth really were.

- b. If the assembly were to be dominated by the tongue-speakers to the exclusion of the prophets [as probably was the case], a non-Christian who did not speak any of the languages being used would be impressed-- but in the wrong way! He would think that everyone was “out of his mind.” Paul possibly implies that not only was there a *multiplicity* of languages being spoken but also that they were being spoken *simultaneously* to add to the confusion. The prophets would never have a chance to do their work!
- c. Contrariwise, prophets who spoke so as to be understood even by unbelievers would “judge” [condemn] the unbelieving sinner for his evil deeds and “convince” him of his urgent need to repent and change his ways.
- d. The word of inspiration is “sharper than a two-edged sword” and will “reveal the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). Offenders often conclude that it is *their* offense, rather than someone else’s, that the sermon focuses on. And that often makes the lesson *personal, relevant, and effective*.
- e. Is not the ultimate goal of every congregation to help *all* people get to heaven? What a great work the prophets were doing when they spoke with understanding and caused a lost man to repent [“fall on his face”] and “worship God.” What a great entree to other lost people would be enjoyed when the converted man “reported” that this was truly a congregation of God’s people!

Verses 26-33-- “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together...”

- a. Paul has dealt enough with situations and illustrations. Enough has been said to convince sincere members that drastic changes needed to be made in the conduct of their assemblies. Now it is time to set out the regulations for their future meetings.
- b. The pervading purpose for the employment of *every* gift-- whether inspired or uninspired-- is “edification.” Unless psalms, teachings, tongues, revelations, and interpretations can find a place in the assembly to *edify*, then they have no place at all!
- c. The first requisite for edification is order! Paul’s rules are simple and clear:
 - (1) Only two or three may speak in tongues at any assembly;
 - (2) Each speaker must take his turn and not interrupt or dominate the speaking time;
 - (3) An interpreter must be present to translate for the church; if not, no tongue-speaker may use his gift in that assembly;
 - (4) Tongue-speakers rendered silent by the absence of interpreters may commune with God and with their own spirits in silence while other activities are taking place.
- d. Regulations for prophets were also important to an *orderly* assembly:
 - (1) Only two or three prophets could share in the *planned* participation of any given service;
 - (2) Their participation would obviously be by turn;
 - (3) [All] others should keep silent and listen while each prophet spoke to the congregation. They should “judge” the prophecies delivered by the prophets.

- (a) This “judging” may simply involve considering the relevance and applications that should be made to the lives of the hearers.
- (b) It might include the exercise of the gift of “discerning of spirits” (12:10). Early Christians were cautioned to “test the spirits, whether they are of God” (1John 4:1).
- (4) New revelations would take precedence over those already disclosed and explained. These *unplanned* prophecies might be transmitted through any one of the prophets present in the meeting.
- (5) No prophet should claim an inability to take his turn in speaking or to remain silent when he was not scheduled to give his prophetic message to the church. Prophets could *always* control themselves in conformity to the rules of the assembly.
- e. All participation in worship services at Corinth must conform to the maxim that whatever causes confusion rather than harmony in the assemblies of the church does not originate with God and does not enjoy His approval.
- f. This same measure of propriety applied to “all the churches of the saints” and not just to the situation at Corinth. Paul taught his ways in “every church” (4:17).

Verses 34,35-- “Let your women keep silent in the churches...”

- a. There seems to have been a problem in the Corinthian worship services with women who in some way interfered with the conduct of the activities. “Let them ask their own husbands at home,” suggests that some women were publicly asking questions of the prophets or others that would have better been reserved for the privacy of their homes.
- b. Some have suggested that the women of this prohibition were only the “wives of the prophets.” This is not, however, sustained by the text or the context. Women have historically been discouraged in the Scriptures and in Jewish practice from taking a leading role in public assemblies. The uniform rule has always been, “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence” (1Tim. 2:11,12).
- c. Of course, there was one clear *exception* to this rule of silence for women. Those who had the ability to “pray and prophecy” (11:5) in a fashion similar to the activities of men (11:4) were as obligated as the men to exercise their gifts, even when that involved breaking silence. But even then, those women were subject to certain restrictions in order to avoid the appearance of insubordination (11:10).

Verses 36-38-- “Or did the word of God come originally from you?...”

- a. “The hit dog always barks.” Some of the offenders might be offended at Paul’s rebuke of their abuses of tongue-speaking and prophesying. If so, they should be reminded that the gospel did not originate in Corinth, but in Jerusalem. Why should anyone expect the “rules and regulations” about assemblies to be determined by the preferences of members at Corinth or elsewhere? God made the rules, and He showed no partiality or prejudice in applying them to the church at Corinth.
- b. The apostle John declared that the litmus test for inspiration is the confession of

Jesus Christ as the Son of God (1John 4:2,3). The same kind of test would confirm the integrity of anyone claiming to be an inspired prophet or tongue-speaker at Corinth. "God is not a God of confusion," and He would never allow someone to perform by His inspiration while denying the inspiration of an apostle of Christ. Nay-sayers in the church who were inclined to challenge Paul's restrictions on their activities should be careful!

- c. Those who insisted on opposing Paul's regulations could persist in their "ignorance" [real or pretended] and take their chances with a God who had never looked favorably on those who accept His grace and reject His authority. Those chances were not very good!

Verse 39-- "Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid..."

- a. Set your sights on the highest gift-- prophecy. With it you can offer the greatest service to your brethren and to the world, because by it the saving gospel is revealed.
- b. Tongues can also offer a worthwhile, if lesser, benefit to the church. Those with that gift should not be reluctant to use it, but they should be very careful to observe the restrictions that God has placed on its use. Also, they must guard against cultivating a pride that often accompanied the gift of tongues in the early church.

Verse 40-- "Let all things be done decently and in order."

- a. This theme has already been presented to the Corinthian brethren. The entire discussion of spiritual gifts has emphasized strongly the need for courtesy and consideration among all brethren.
- b. Not only was it essential to the spiritual health of the Corinthian church for order to prevail in all its activities, but it was also crucial to a favorable impression upon the lost. Their conversion must be the highest goal for the congregation. Souls were hanging in the balance-- theirs and those of others!

FIRST CORINTHIANS-- QUESTIONS

SECTION EIGHTEEN

14:1-40

1. What spiritual gift was the most desirable of all? (1)
2. Tongue-speakers [uninterpreted] edified whom? Prophets edified whom? (4)
3. What musical instruments are used to illustrate the importance of being understood in the church? (7,8)
4. What problem arose when a language was spoken in the church but was not understood? (11)
5. What two functions did some in the church perform with respect to miraculous communication? (13)
6. What special gift did Paul possess that he might choose not to exercise? Why not? (18,19)
7. Tongues were especially intended for whom? Prophesying? (22)
8. What might be the ultimate effect on unbelievers if “all” should speak in tongues? If “all” should prophesy? (23,24)
9. What restrictions were placed on tongue-speakers in the assembly? (27,28)
10. What were the regulations for prophesying? (29-32)
11. A fundamental test of a real spiritual gift was what? (37)
12. What feature of God’s character should be displayed by the church in every assembly? (33,40)

FIRST CORINTHIANS

“Solving Church Problems”

SECTION NINETEEN--15:1-58

Seventeenth Problem: “Misconceptions About the Resurrection”

This chapter of First Corinthians was written by Paul either in answer to some questions that had been asked him (7:1) or in response to a report he had received (1:11) concerning certain misconceptions held by the Corinthians about the realities of a bodily resurrection. The Greeks believed that man’s soul was imprisoned by his physical body, and his highest goal was to achieve complete separation of the soul from the body. In their thinking, resurrection was not only impossible, it would be altogether undesirable if it were possible.

Evidently, teachers under such Grecian influence had made serious inroads into the convictions Paul had fostered while working among them. Some of the brethren were denying every aspect of a bodily resurrection; others espoused only the resurrection of the soul; still others, like some false teachers at Ephesus, may have been claiming that the resurrection was already past (2Tim.2:18). There were a number of dangerous ideas rampant among church members that demanded the attention of the apostle.

Several questions possibly had been raised, or several erroneous positions had been taken about the resurrection that might be addressed in the form of questions:

- (1) Can there really be such a thing as a bodily resurrection from the grave? [Verses 1-34]
- (2) What kind of body will the resurrected have? [Verses 35-49]
- (3) What will happen to living people when Jesus returns? [Verses 50-54]
- (4) Can we expect the resurrection to end the universal reign of death? [Verses 55-58]

Question One: “Is a Bodily Resurrection Possible?”

Proof from the Scriptures that *Christ* was raised:

Verses 1-4-- “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached...”

- a. Paul had already “preached” the gospel of the resurrection to these people some time earlier when he first labored at Corinth. They had “received” this gospel as true, “standing” as believers in the very facts some now were ready to reject. Others of their number continued to “stand” on their original convictions.
- b. It was only “by” that gospel of death and resurrection that they had been saved from sin and had become Christians. Actually, it was “by” *obedience* to the gospel that they enjoyed that blessing (1:13; 12:13). Salvation could now be maintained only if they held fast to the truth about what Jesus had done to make salvation possible for them.
- c. The “gospel” is the “good news” about Jesus. Many things about the Christ were “good news” to lost men, but Paul specifies a few of the most significant blessings:
 - (1) Christ died for our sins just as the Scriptures promised He would (Isa.53:8);
 - (2) He was buried as foretold in the Scriptures (Isa.53:9);
 - (3) He rose on the third day as the Scriptures had prophesied (Psa.16:10; Isa.53:10).

Proof from eyewitnesses that Christ was raised:

Verses 5-11-- “...and that he was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve...”

- a. Jesus first appeared to faithful women following His resurrection (Matt.28:9,10), but Paul for some reason does not include them in his list of witnesses to a risen Christ. The appearance to Peter is not recorded directly, but reference to it is found in Luke 24:34. Jesus’ manifestation to “the twelve” is likely the one reported in Luke 24:36-43 and in John 20:19-24 when Thomas was not present. Only *eleven* apostles then comprised the group, but “the twelve” was a term commonly applied to the group when spoken of as a whole.
- b. More than five hundred disciples saw the raised Savior *at the same time*. This probably was pursuant to Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 26:32 and 28:7,8. Large numbers of His followers were no doubt still in Gallilee. Their testimony was invaluable because of such a host of eyewitnesses. Their declarations would be mutually supportive; witnesses among so many would yet be easy for any interested party to locate for confirmation.
- c. This “James” is most likely the Lord’s own brother, who at first rejected His divinity (Mark 3:21, 31-35). James later became a prominent leader in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:13ff; Gal. 1:19). Many suppose that the Lord’s appearance to James accounted for his conversion. “All the apostles” also saw Him (Acts 1:2,3).
- d. The most compelling evidence to Paul of Jesus’ resurrection was his own experience on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1-9). His *personal* contact with Jesus could *not* be disputed; his conviction rested upon no other outside himself. Even though his witness arose out of unusual circumstances, *he knew what he knew* and would not be shaken from faith in a Lord who had by the power of God risen from the dead!
- e. Christ’s appearance to Paul, of course, enabled him to offer *personal proof* of Jesus’ resurrection and of the possibility of resurrection for *all* who believe in Him. His work as an apostle to the Gentiles would be severely impaired if he had to rely only on the testimony of *others* when he proclaimed the gospel of resurrection.
- f. Paul was qualified to be an eyewitness to Christ’s release from the tomb in a manner far different [“untimely”] from the other apostles. He was far too late in time and far too deficient in faith to qualify in the usual way. It was not the result of a “natural” birth [choice] into the apostleship that he became the world’s most ardent champion of the resurrection story. He was “snatched” into service through the direct intervention of Jesus into his plans. His service was “appointed” (Acts 22:10); it was what he “must” do (Acts 9:6).
- g. Paul’s staunch commitment to *persecute* Jesus argued strongly against any effort on his part to *defend* Jesus’ claim to resurrection. Yet, he became its chief advocate. Others might be accused of self-interest when they preached a risen Christ, but not Paul. [See Gal. 1:13,14.] Genuine conviction was the *only* explanation for the radical change in his attitude toward the Lord.
- h. *All* of the apostles preached an identical message about Christ’s deliverance from death because all had *seen* Him alive, and all *believed* what they had seen. Christians in every place shared a common faith in the resurrection because they, too, accepted the strong evidence they were given. It should be no different with the Corinthians.

Consequences of *denying* the possibility of resurrection:

Verses 12-19-- “Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead...”

- a. The same divine power that could raise Jesus can also raise His disciples (Rom.8:11). The plainly-stated mission of Jesus was to receive His followers into His eternal home (John 14:3), but flesh and blood cannot inherit that place (1Cor.15:50). Resurrection is *essential* to the realization of God’s plan.
- b. If the apostles had been preaching fiction rather than fact about the resurrection, not only were they self-convicted as evil men but also those who had relied on their testimony had gained nothing and lost much as the result of putting faith in faithless men.
- c. It was clearly evident-- if dead physical bodies *cannot* be raised because of their very nature, then neither could Christ’s body be raised for the same reason. When one denies the possibility of resurrection, he must either also deny the *physical* component of Jesus, thus rejecting the first fundamental fact of the gospel (John 1:14; 1John 4:3), or reject any correspondence between Jesus’ triumph over physical death and ours (John 6:39,40; 2Cor.4:14; 1Thes.4:14), which was always affirmed by gospel teaching.
- d. Christians have much invested in their Christianity, too much to abandon without good cause. If the evidence for their faith were shallow and vulnerable, that would be one thing. But it is unthinkable to surrender the reality of forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven just because someone dares to challenge the wisdom and power of the Almighty God to do what He has promised.
- e. Reunion with loved ones is one of the gospel’s most precious rewards. How sad to think that dear ones have “perished” and will never again be seen! And, if one believes in sin, how troubling to know that they have “perished” in hell. Who would deliberately exchange their hope for bleak despair?
- f. Devotion to a lost cause is always “pitiable,” not so much because victory is impossible, but because the same energy and time could be devoted to something else in which the battle could be won. If *this* life is all the Christian has, how foolish he has been to give up *everything in life* for a prospect that is nothing more than a mirage (Mark 8:34-38). Who could have understood this better than Paul, who had sacrificed so much for the cause of Christ (2Cor. 11:23-33)?

Bodily resurrection is not only *possible*--it is *real*!

Verses 20-28-- “But now Christ is risen from the dead...”

- a. The Jews were commanded to present a sheaf of grain before the Lord, accompanied by designated sacrifices, as an earnest of the approaching harvest. In the same way, Jesus serves as an earnest of the approaching resurrection of the rest of humankind. The Jews could be confident that God would cause the completion of a good harvest if they were faithful to show their faith in His mercy and power. Christians can also be confident of enjoying a resurrection from the grave to eternal life if they maintain faith in the same mercy and power of the same God. Jesus has been “waved” before God as a surety that the raising of all others will follow.
- b. Adam sinned first, but all his offspring also sinned, albeit in a different way. All men,

then, deserve to die as sinners. God was *just* in passing the sentence of death upon every descendent of Adam. However, God is more than justice. His *mercy* has arranged for men to regain through Christ what they lost through Adam. Both physical and spiritual life are offered now in the place of physical and spiritual life lost as the consequence of the first man's disobedience (Romans 5:12-21).

- c. Of course, Paul is focusing on the question of resurrection as it concerns the righteous. While *both* good and bad will be raised physically because of Jesus, the resurrection of disobedient men will not be a happy event (John 5:28,29). Spiritual resurrection to eternal life [reward] is reserved for the faithful, and the wicked will go away into everlasting punishment (Matt. 25:46). It should comfort Christians to know that, although they must suffer *physical death* as their physical heritage from the "first man Adam," *spiritual life* is their precious inheritance from the "last Adam," Christ (1Cor.15:45).
- d. God's order of firstfruits, then harvest, is to be observed in man's resurrection as well. First, Christ is raised, then His disciples. First the promise of resurrection, then the fulfillment at His return in judgment. The wicked will be raised at the same time as the righteous (John 5:28,29), but their emergence from the grave is a sentence, not a promise. It is about the *promise* to the faithful that Paul speaks.
- e. The kingdom [church] will be "delivered" to God at the time of resurrection, when earth-time will be no more. Everything that has stood in opposition to the glorious culmination of God's plan for His redeemed will be forever destroyed-- death, rule, authority, and the power of Satan and his agents in the world.
- f. Christ is now reigning on His throne in heaven. All authority was given to Him by the Father (Matt. 28:18). His mission as King over this earth is to "destroy the works of the devil" (1John 3:8). At His return, every plant which was not planted by the Father will be "uprooted" (Matt. 15:13). Only that which is "born of God" will survive the cataclysmic events attending the second coming and the end of time. Until then, Jesus' reign is exercised through His church, and His people actively work to defeat every influence of Satan in the world.
- g. The "last enemy" of Jesus is death, for it stands in staunch opposition to man's realization of eternal life. Eternal life may be enjoyed only by an eternal spirit and a body rendered suitable for that spirit by the change God makes in it (1Cor.15:51). The natural process of death is a process of decay, not revitalization, so man's body must not terminate in natural death if it is to inhabit heaven. When death is overcome, the way into heaven is opened.
- h. Everyone should understand that the Father has at no time been subject to the reign of the Son. It was the Father who subjected everything else to the rule of the Son, and when the Father's plan for the culmination of things has been completed in the reign of the Son, Christ will return complete rule to His Father in the heavenly world and will cease His own reign over the material world. God truly will be "all in all."
- i. Christ's divinity is not diminished by His becoming voluntarily subjected to the rule of the Father. Each Person in the Godhead has filled a particular role from eternity past to the present. Jesus "learned obedience" even as a dutiful but divine Son on earth (Heb. 5:9). Father and Son agree (John 17:21) on the *same* plan for eternity-- the Son will be subject to the Father.

- j. Paul's points in this discussion about death, its destruction, Christ's reign, and the ultimate dominion of the Father in eternity are:
- (1) Only Christ's rule through the church can destroy His every enemy;
 - (2) This task must be accomplished to fulfill the Father's plan for the world;
 - (3) The last and greatest enemy to this fulfillment is death;
 - (4) Death, too, must be destroyed if man is to enjoy God's heavenly provisions;
 - (5) Man is incapable of destroying death, but God has the power to destroy it forever;
 - (6) The Father will accomplish this goal when He raises the dead bodies of the saints;
 - (7) Having completed the goal of His reign, Christ will return all control to the Father;
 - (8) Opposing the resurrection opposes *all else* in God's grand scheme of things!

Behavioral consequences of belief and disbelief in the resurrection:

Verses 29-34-- "Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead..."

- a. The difficulty encountered in understanding Paul's references to "the dead" is evident. We may never arrive at any definitive explanation, but there are certain things that *we know* that will prevent us from adopting an erroneous view about his meaning and may help us in arriving at a satisfactory position:
- (1) We *know* that every individual is responsible for his *own* salvation (Phil.2:12);
 - (2) We *know* that judgment will be based on one's *own* works (Rom.14:12; 2Cor.5:10);
 - (3) We *know* that baptism must be preceded by faith and repentance (Acts 2:36-38);
 - (4) We *know* that no second chance is promised to anyone (Heb.9:27; Luke 19ff);
 - (5) We *know* that baptism pictures Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Ro.6:3-5);
 - (6) We *know* that baptized people have the hope of a happy resurrection (Rom.6:8).
- From these things we *know*, we may reach some conclusions:
- (1) Baptism "for the dead" cannot be an act of one person for another;
 - (2) Baptism "for the dead" is no more important to the lost than "believing for the dead" or "repenting for the dead," both of which would be impossible;
 - (3) Baptism "for the dead" cannot offer a second chance to those who were not obedient in "this present world" (Titus 2:12).
 - (4) Baptism *is* part of man's preparation "for the dead"-- for the time when he will enter the ranks of dead saints awaiting Christ's coming (1Thes.4:13,14);
 - (5) Baptism *is* essential to the hope of being raised to eternal life (John 5:29);
 - (6) Baptism *is* pointless if not done in confidence of a resurrection (Rom.6:8).
- We may reasonably conclude that Paul was attributing the ongoing baptism of sinners at Corinth to the hope of the resurrection when obedient men will be rewarded. If we *deny* the very basis upon which we teach and practice baptism, are we not foolish? The Corinthians themselves offered the first and best reason for keeping faith in the resurrection.
- b. Paul's own experiences confirmed over and over his personal convictions of a bodily resurrection of the dead. He and others had "stood in jeopardy" from wild beasts at Ephesus [details unknown] and from numerous additional tribulations (2Cor.11:23-31).
- c. Paul's deprivations for the sake of the gospel were as foolish as the act of baptism if "in this life only we have hope..." (verse 19). One would better use his time in pleasure than in sacrifice, as Isaiah had told the Jews long before (Isa. 22:13), and as some Greek

philosophers were recommending to the citizens of Corinth in the time of Paul.

- d. Some of the Corinthians had been deceived that the resurrection was only a false hope. Their initial “good habits” [about faith in the resurrection] had been corrupted [compromised] by the influence of false teachers. W. E. Vine says that this saying was originally attributed to Menander, a pagan poet, and became a well-known proverb.
- e. Doubt about the reality of the resurrection apparently had encouraged some to engage again in sinful practices previously abandoned in preparation “for the dead.” Paul warns that they should be ashamed because they had listened to teachers who did not have the “knowledge of God” (1Cor.12:8) that he possessed as an inspired apostle (1Cor.2:10-13). “Wake up” before it’s too late!

Question Two: “How Can the *Effects* of Physical Death be Overcome?”

Verses 35--49-- “But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised up?’”

- a. It was normal that some would question the possibility of a bodily resurrection such as Paul had proclaimed in the city of Corinth. After all, the whole concept runs counter to all that we know about the decay of a dead body. And, too, there was no *visible* evidence [in *their* experience] that anyone had lived again after death. Perhaps they had heard claims for the resurrection of some saints following the crucifixion (Matt.27:52, 53), of Dorcas (Acts 9:40-42), of Eutychus (Acts 20:9,10), and perhaps of Paul himself [?] (Acts 14:19,20). But all those would die again. *This resurrection was different!* The corruption of death would somehow be overcome completely, they were told.
- b. Paul proceeds to show that the *anticipated* process of death and revival is not so foreign to the *observable* process of death and revival seen in nature. There was no reason to question the power of God to solve the “problems” of the resurrection, when that same power is demonstrated every seedtime and harvest in the production of the food supply.
- c. The first mystery about a resurrection was: “How can man’s body die and then be alive again and ready for an eternal existence in a more glorious world?” Every farmer knows by experience that only through death can seeds produce their harvest. From the corrupting seed comes the new stalk, blade, ears, and other grains. The new plant is akin to the seed, but it is also far different and much more desirable. So it will be with man’s body; its change will produce another body, but one far more glorious than the one from which it sprang.
- d. The second mystery was: “If there is a radical change when our present bodies are raised from the graves [or wherever and in what circumstances they may be], how can we expect that they will retain their identities? Will they still be *us*?” God gives each kind of seed its own identity when it dies and brings forth a more impressive plant. He is jealous to maintain the identity of all His creation, and identities are never merged:
 - (1) All flesh is similar, but each kind is different from the rest; one kind never changes into another kind;
 - (2) Heavenly and earthly bodies have separate identities and different characteristics, but each always exists as itself, not as another kind of body;
 - (3) The more familiar “heavenly bodies,” the sun, moon, stars, etc., vary in glory and function, but each occupies a peculiar and needed place in our universe. They all

share the qualities that make them “glorious,” but each remains distinct from the rest as it plays out its role in God’s heavens.

- e. “*So also is the resurrection of the dead.*” God’s same eternal laws of order and continuity will be seen in His new creation of mankind in the resurrection as exist in all His other institutions:
- (1) As with a seed, the body will pass from corruption [death] to incorruption [life];
 - (2) As with a seed, the new body will surpass the old body in glory;
 - (3) As with a seed, the ordinary [single grain] will become the extraordinary [fully developed plant with greatly increased potential];
 - (4) As with all creation, each man’s identity will be preserved in the resurrection;
 - (5) As with all creation, God will adapt the new man to the new environment so as to fulfill the plan that He has for him.
- f. All these wonderful provisions to be realized in the resurrection would be impossible if all things continued to be governed by mere physical law. However, there are also spiritual laws under God’s governance that will replace natural laws in the resurrection. Natural bodies will be buried by natural law; they will be raised as spiritual bodies by spiritual law. The human mind cannot comprehend the wonders of spiritual law, but it can trust that law to accomplish whatever needs to be done in working out every complexity about the resurrection that the mind can generate.
- g. An understanding of the differences between the *physical body* and the *spiritual body* is crucial to a firm faith in the resurrection upon which the gospel rests:
- (1) There *is* a natural body and there *is* a spiritual body-- both are realities;
 - (2) The natural body comes from Adam; the spiritual body will come from Christ;
 - (3) Adam was *given* his physical life; Christ is the *giver* of spiritual life;
 - (4) Only natural [physical] life was known to man before Christ; now spiritual life is available through Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection;
 - (5) Adam’s inheritance to his progeny is the *grave* [dust] from which Adam himself came; Christ bequeaths *heaven*, from which He came, to His children;
 - (6) Adam, as a natural man, cannot provide an escape from the grave to his descendants; Christ, as a spiritual Man, does offer a resurrection from the grave;
 - (7) The natural man has been bound in Adam’s “image” ever since Eden. The consequences of the punishment imposed on the first human pair are ever upon him (Gen.3:16-19); after the resurrection, the spiritual [saved] man will bear the new and better image of Christ-- “...we shall be like Him...” (1John 3:2).

Question Three: “How Can There be a Resurrection if All Have Not Died?”

Verses 50-54-- “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit...”

- a. God’s unchangeable law prevents the coexistence of the physical and the spiritual. The [eternal] kingdom of heaven, therefore, will not be populated with both physical and spiritual bodies. Physical bodies, unchanged, are subject to corruption of all sorts. Heaven excludes the undesirable things [Rev.22:3-- “no more curse”] that came to the physical man through Adam’s curse (Gen3:17). Corruption will be unknown there.
- b. How can heaven’s timetable for the resurrection be met (John 5:28,29), if the natural

- body must die before it can be transformed? At Christ's coming, must the living wait for their redemption? Will the living die suddenly and have no proper burial?
- c. This "mystery" needed an explanation, and a simple one was offered. Those living at Jesus' return will *not* die; their physical bodies will be changed "in a moment... at the last trump" into the same spiritual nature as will be given to the bodies of raised saints. Thus, "we shall *all* be changed."
 - d. No exception can be made to the change that must be experienced by all those who inhabit physical bodies. Anything *corruptible* must become *incorruptible*. Things that are *mortal* must exchange that for *immortality*. This is the universal rule for enjoying eternal life in heaven.
 - e. Since death is the ultimate manifestation of corruption and mortality, then, when nothing more of either one remains, the prophet Isaiah's promise will finally find its fulfillment: "Death is swallowed up in victory." This last victory over sin and Satan will be made possible by the death of the Savior and by the resurrection of all the dead by His power.

Question Four: "Will Death Be No More After the Resurrection?"

Verses 55-58-- "O Death, where is your sting?..."

- a. Paul quotes from Hosea to answer this question. The passage actually reads in the Hebrew text:

"O Death, I will be your plagues!
O, Grave. I will be your destruction!"

 Paul draws from the Septuagint translation of the passage:

"O, Death, where is your punishment?
O, Grave, where is your sting?"
- b. Death will no more threaten the saved following the resurrection. Nor will the grave have any ability to sting the righteous, for God will have destroyed the grave forever.
- c. Prior to the resurrection, death and the grave keep their dread hold on the natural man because of sin. Death is the natural consequence of man's sin. And sin exercises its power over man because of God's law against sin. If there were no breaking of God's commandments, there would be no sin. If there were no sin, there would be no death. Man has no one to blame for physical death but himself, and once involved in sin, man cannot extricate himself from sin's terrible consequences.
- d. Man cannot earn his victory over the grave, nor can he manage a way to escape death (Heb.9:27). He is indebted altogether to God who *gives* man the opportunity to be free from his ever-present fear of the grave and beyond. God has mercifully done *for* man what he cannot do for himself. Our victory is the free gift of God purchased by the precious blood of Calvary's Lamb (1Pet.1:18,19). "*Hallelujah, what a Savior!*"
- e. ***Therefore--*** don't give up the faith or the fight, brethren! If God has made so much available to you through Christ's death and resurrection, and if He has made provision for a resurrection of your own, after which the eternal bliss of heaven will be yours to enjoy, don't jeopardize His gifts by shopping with His critics. The Almighty knows your labor, and it will be graciously rewarded-- "*Abound in the work of the Lord!*"

FIRST CORINTHIANS-- QUESTIONS

SECTION NINETEEN 15:1-58

1. What are four basic truths of the gospel mentioned by Paul as he begins this chapter? (3-8)
2. How many witnesses are listed by Paul as having seen the risen Lord? (5-8)
3. What had made it possible for Paul to overcome great obstacles to the apostleship? What were the obstacles? (8-10)
4. What basic truth of the gospel did some of the Corinthians deny? (12)
5. List some of the consequences that follow the acceptance of this false position. (13-19)
6. What two persons are basically responsible for man's relationship to sin and death? (21,22)
7. What is the last enemy to be conquered by Christ? (25,26)
8. Paul's teaching in verse 29 has been grossly perverted. Do you know how?
9. The differences between natural bodies and resurrected bodies are illustrated by what examples? (35-44)
10. What does Paul say will happen to those who are living when Christ returns? To the dead? (50-53)
11. The application of the resurrection teaching is made in verse 58. What is it?

FIRST CORINTHIANS

“Solving Church Problems”

SECTION TWENTY-- 16:1-24

“Tying Up Loose Ends”

In this last chapter of First Corinthians, Paul seeks to give brief attention to several matters before the letter is sent to the church at Corinth. After giving his apostolic guidance for gathering a collection for saints in Jerusalem, he devotes most of the rest of the chapter to references to persons related in some way to himself and to the church at Corinth. A few instructions for the church members to follow are offered before he closes his writing, and finally a stern warning to everyone concerning the need to love the Christ.

Verses 1-4-- “Now concerning the collection for the saints...”

- a. Some years before these words were written to the Corinthians, a great famine was foretold to Christians at Antioch, the first church populated principally by Gentiles (Acts 11). Those Christians responded promptly, and when the need arose, they sent relief to the elders of the Jewish churches in Judea by Barnabas and Paul. Paul surely was impressed with the warm reception of Gentile relief by Jewish saints, and he later sought to broaden this effort among the Galatian churches (Acts 16: 6ff), Macedonian churches (2Cor. 9:2), and others. Among the “others” was the church at Corinth (Acts 18). Paul decided [with divine guidance, no doubt] that not only would it be good for these churches to assist their poverty-stricken sister churches [especially in Jerusalem] but also that such an effort might soften feelings between Jewish members and Gentile members everywhere (2Cor.9:11-15).
- b. Although Corinth apparently had at first responded readily to Paul’s requests for their participation in this collection for poor Jewish saints, their follow-through was slow in coming. He gave them explicit directions about how to carry out their promised collection [as in this passage]. Still, their part of the project was incomplete a “year later” when he wrote the second letter to the church (2Cor. 9:2). Perhaps unsettling spiritual conditions had deterred them from their purpose. Maybe it was something else. At any rate, their “readiness” was commendable; their “completion” wasn’t (2Cor.8:11).
- c. Whether the Jewish saints were still suffering directly from the the famine of 45 A.D., from its lingering consequences, or from some other cause altogether, we cannot know. We can be certain the the need was great and urgent, whatever its cause.
- d. These directions to the church for an “orderly” prosecution of their efforts to assist the poor saints in Jerusalem had also been given to the “churches of Galatia” to follow as they also shared in this work of relief. Uniformity was the rule, not the exception, among New Testament churches, not because of human decisions reached by conferences, synods, councils, etc., but because the apostles were consistent in the guidance they gave to the churches.(1Cor.4:17; 7:17).
- e. This “collection” was not a setting aside of funds at home, as some contend. Rather, it was a formal appointment to be observed at the weekly assemblies of the churches. Its purpose was to avoid any need for collections [“gatherings”--KJV] when time came for its disbursement. “Storing up” at home would not meet that purpose.

- f. System and order were important to the accomplishment of Paul's goals for this collection. His instructions were clear:
- (1) When-- "upon the first day of ["every"--RSV] week." This was meeting day for worship among New Testament churches (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Heb.10:25).
 - (2) Who-- "every one of you." All members were included. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). No member should be restricted from this weekly opportunity to get a spiritual blessing.
 - (3) What-- "lay by in store." "The words do not mean *to lay by at home*, but *to lay by himself*, I.e., let him take to himself what he means to give."
--Charles Hodge (First Corinthians, pp.363-364)
 - (4) How-- "as he may prosper" [ASV, RSV]; "as God hath prospered him" [KJV]; "as he has a mind to" [Confraternity]. A *proportion*, not a figure, is specified. 2Cor.9:6,7 sets guidelines for the amount and the attitude of the giver.
 - (5) Why-- "that there be no collections when I come." Efficiency and urgency were important to the execution of this project. Paul also wanted the matter of the collection to have been taken care of by the time he came to Corinth. This would allow him to use his time in addressing any unresolved problems among the members.
- g. Paul was very careful to protect his integrity from charges of dishonesty or greed. He intended for others, selected by the Corinthians, to take actual charge of the contributed funds (2Cor. 8:21). At this time, he was uncertain about making plans to travel in person from Corinth to Jerusalem. We know from Luke's account of the events behind these words that he *did* make the journey (Acts 24:17) in the company of several brethren from various churches (Acts 20:4). We do not know whom the Corinthian church chose as its messenger(s) to carry their gift.

Verses 5-7-- "Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia..."

- a. James taught us that, "you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'" Men's plans are always subject to change. Paul supposed at this writing that he would be going through Corinth on the way to Macedonia and then back to Corinth before traveling to Jerusalem with the collected funds [if indeed he should go to Jerusalem]. To "spare" them a possibly unpleasant visit, he later chose not to follow that plan, but to go directly to Macedonia before returning to Corinth (2Cor.1:23). They needed more time to correct the problems he has addressed in this first letter.
- b. Paul had made no claim for infallibility in forecasting his schedule. In him was not "yes," or "no," so that he alone determined his own future; nor was it "yes" *and* "no," betraying duplicity unbecoming an apostle. In Christ was "Yes." He would lead; Paul would follow (2Cor.1:19,20). Nevertheless, Paul received severe criticism from some at Corinth for changing the itinerary he had promised in an earlier letter to Corinth, to which access has not been preserved (1Cor.5:9).
- c. Originally, Paul planned a short visit ["on the way"] at Corinth before going into Macedonia. Now, he intends first to travel through Macedonia and then to stay with the Corinthians during the approaching winter months. This would allow time with

them to help them with their problems. Luke informs us that this plan was carried out (Acts 20:2,3).

Verses 8,9-- “But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost.”

- a. This letter was being written from Ephesus, and his preaching there was opening many doors of opportunity. We read of his labors in Acts 19, where for two years he utilized the school of Tyrannus and from there spread the word throughout Asia to both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:9,10). But there were many “adversaries.” Many people were disturbed about his preaching, and the image-makers raised opposition to it.
- b. First Corinthians was written from Ephesus between Passover and Pentecost of A.D. 57. Paul remained at Ephesus as long as the “great and effective door” was open. Then, he went to Corinth to pass through another door of opportunity to assist another church in solving its problems.

Verses 10-12-- “Now if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear...”

- a. Timothy and Erastus had been sent into Macedonia while Paul was enjoying success in Ephesus (Acts 19:22). Before Timothy had time to reach Corinth, Paul received the report from there about the bad spiritual climate. Titus was dispatched to Corinth with Paul’s response in this First Corinthian letter. He would go *directly* to Corinth, so he might possibly intercept Timothy prior to his arrival there and send him back to Paul. If not, the church at Corinth should treat Timothy well as a representative of the gospel. He should not have to bear any of the resentment toward Paul that might be expressed by certain members.
- b. Apollos had earlier been at Corinth (Acts 19:1). He apparently was highly regarded by the Corinthians (1Cor.1:12). Paul had “strongly urged” him to return to Corinth, but he declined. We cannot know why. Some think they detect a rift between Paul and Apollos. Others suppose that Apollos had been ill-treated at Corinth when he was there and did not wish to be subjected to more abuse. There is no real basis for either conclusion, and Paul relates Apollos’ promise to come to Corinth at a more opportune time.

Verses 13,14-- “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong...”

- a. These words of encouragement are often found in Paul’s writing to churches and individuals. Each exhortation is a short, one-word exclamation, but each one is filled with images of duty and responsibility and of stern challenges to excel in the cause of the Lord.
- b. These brethren need to be reminded again, before the letter is closed, that *love* is perhaps the one thing they *most* need to improve. Nearly all of the problems he has addressed in this letter have arisen out of a lack of genuine love among brethren. An entire chapter [thirteen] was devoted to this need, but Paul recognizes that this likely was not enough to straighten out everything that needed straightening.

Verses 15-19-- “I urge you, brethren--you know the household of Stephanas...”

- a. Stephanas and his household were among the few personally baptized by Paul in

Achaia (1Cor.1:16). They were the “firstfruits” of many more who were converted in the area (Acts 18:8). Since their conversion, they had manifested a deep devotion to the work for which Paul had come to Corinth. They had worked and labored untiringly with Paul and other faithful men in “ministering to the saints.”

- b. Those who exhibit faithfulness in the Lord’s work should be respected for their work’s sake (1Thes.5:13).
- c. Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus possibly were the messengers who carried the letters between the church at Corinth and Paul. If so, we can understand that Paul was encouraged when they came representing brethren whom he loved and who now asked his apostolic advice about troublesome issues. In turn, these men would “refresh” the spirits of the Corinthians who still had respect for Paul when they went back with his personal expressions of love and concern for their well-being (16:24) and with those of other brethren in various churches (16:19).

Verses 12-24-- “The churches of Asia greet you...”

- a. The kiss was a form of greeting often exchanged between people of the culture at Corinth. Paul frequently spoke of the kiss as a greeting among brethren. His emphasis probably was that the kiss should be “holy” if exchanged between “holy” people.
- b. This letter could be authenticated by the presence of Paul’s personal signature. It was important that the churches be certain that the communications they received in Paul’s name were worthy of their confidence and obedience. “Many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1John 4:1).
- c. A final warning to any insincere and disobedient persons who might choose to ignore or challenge what Paul has written-- “If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ [“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”], let him be accursed.”
- d. “O Lord, come!” Jesus will come in wrath against all who refuse to obey the truth (Rom. 2:8,9). The seriousness of this warning cannot be exaggerated. This is a prospect that no thoughtful person would wish to face. Paul’s adversaries at Corinth would do well to consider the vulnerable position into which they had thrust themselves through their opposition to his apostolic authority.
- e. Paul’s interest in these brethren was far too great to leave them with a statement that might be misconstrued as bitter and vindictive. Instead, his last words will be words of comfort and encouragement-- “God’s *grace* and my *love* be with you--
Amen.”

FIRST CORINTHIANS-- QUESTIONS

SECTION TWENTY 16:1-24

1. What congregational responsibility does Paul first discuss in this chapter? (1,2)
2. How can we be sure that this was a public activity rather than a private one (i.e., at church rather than at home)? (1,2)
3. What change of plans did Paul make for which he was later criticized by the Corinthians? (5-8) [See 2Cor. 1:15,16.]
4. Which of Paul's companions in the gospel did he say would soon be coming to Corinth? Which one would not? (10-12) [See Acts 19:22.]
5. What motive should underlie all that the Corinthians did? (14)
6. What do we know about the family of Stephanas? (15)
7. What had Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus done for Paul? (17)
8. Who had a church in their house? Where have we met these individuals before? (19) [See Acts 18:1-3.]
9. What had Paul written with his own hand? Why? (21)
10. What was Paul's attitude toward those who do not love the Lord? (22)