

To the Corinthians

studies in Paul's first letter
by Ken Chant

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INTRODUCTION

THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

(A) HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

(1) The city of Corinth in southern Greece was founded by Julius Caesar in 46 B.C. as a Roman colony, upon the ruins of an ancient town. Within 100 years it had grown to a great cosmopolitan seaport of at least 500,000 inhabitants. Perhaps as many as half of these people were slaves.

(2) Its location on a narrow isthmus gave it both access to the sea from a port on either side, and a pleasant climate. It was a favourite site of the Roman emperors, who frequently endowed the city until it became the richest and finest in Greece.¹ It was deemed the capital of southern Greece, although it was only 80km west of Athens. It was a major centre of travel and trade, and also of philosophy (1:18-31; 15:12). The Isthmian Games held in Corinth every two years rivalled the Olympic contests in importance.

(3) The chief pride of Corinth was the great hill-top temple of Aphrodite, with its 1000 temple courtesans. The licentious worship of Aphrodite (along with numerous other deities from many nations), mixed with the varied cultures of many ethnic groups, led to a moral laxity that was scandalous even to the decadent Romans. The expression "*to live like a Corinthian*" entered the Greek language as an epithet for drunken or debauched behaviour.²

(4) Paul's work at Corinth was mostly among the lower classes, with only a handful of disciples from the upper echelons of society (1 Co 1:26-31). His converts would have been: expatriates (both slaves and freedmen); bronze and pottery workers; dock hands and sailors; artisans and shopkeepers; and the like. The church had its roots in the arrival of Priscilla and

¹ Indeed, life in Corinth became so opulent and expensive that a proverb grew out of it: "Not everyone can go to Corinth" (Horace, *Letters* Bk I, Ep. 17, Line 36); that is, only the most fortunate could obtain whatever benefit the proverb was being applied to.

² In the 18th century, during the days of the Regency, it also entered the English language. A dissipated and licentious person was called a "Corinthian", and a group of singularly dissolute young men were called "the Corinthians".

Aquila (Ac 18:2, c. 49 A.D.). Paul arrived about a year later, on his second missionary journey, and remained there 18 months (Ac 18:1-11, 18a). Our letter was written from Ephesus some 2½ years later. In between, Paul wrote another letter, but no trace of it remains (1 Co 5:9).³

(5) The occasion of the letter was probably the arrival in Corinth of a delegation from the church, who brought Paul both a report of conditions there and a letter containing a series of questions (1 Co 1:10-11; 16:15-17). Paul's reply therefore did not take the form of a doctrinal treatise (like Romans or Ephesians), but was a set of practical and ethical instructions, and a response to the queries raised by the Corinthians.⁴

This study will be built around those instructions and responses, but first notice this -

In no other letter does Paul give so full a picture of what Christ meant to him. It is clear that Jesus was a person who lived in history, for he had brothers (9:5), was a teacher (7:10; 9:14), suffered betrayal (11:23), died on a cross (1:18; 15:3), and was buried. Yet he was not simply an earthly figure. All things had come into existence through him (8:6); he had been the Rock from which the Israelites drank in the wilderness (10:4). We might assume that a pre-existent being would necessarily be eternal, but Paul does not take that for granted. God raised him from the dead (15:4), confirming him as Christ and Lord ... This Christ will soon come (1:7; 4:5), to complete the conquest of the God-opposing powers, for through him the new age of redemption has come.⁵

(B) PAUL'S INTRODUCTION (1:1-9)

- he hears a *report* - see 1 Corinthians 1:1-9
 - (a) The author (1:1)
 - (b) The salutation (1:2)
 - (c) The greeting (1:3)
 - (d) The thanksgiving (1:4-7)
 - (e) The promise (1:8-9)
- *Part One* below explains Paul's responses to this "report"; *Part Two* deals with the "letter".

³ Some scholars argue that 2 Co 6:14-7:1 is a fragment of this letter. Others claim that some parts of 1 Co and/or other parts of 2 Co belong to the lost letter. None of the arguments are fully convincing. It is safe to accept our present letters as being the genuine documents written by Paul.

⁴ Note the repeated phrase "now concerning" in 7:1,25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1. This phrase marks at least some of the places where Paul was responding to the questions he had been asked.

⁵ The Interpreter's Bible, Vol 10, "Corinthians - Introduction", by C. T. Craig; Abingdon Press, New York, 1953; pg. 9.

Part One

FROM THE “*REPORT*”

STUDY ONE

FACTIONS and INCEST

Paul's friends brought him a sad report of a disunited church, falling into immorality, involved in legal disputes, violating the eucharist, and indulging in heresy. He hastened to correct these matters in a letter

- but notice how first he concentrated on whatever good things he could say about the Corinthians; he commended before he criticised.

But then he had to address the problems that were troubling the church -

(C) FACTIONS (1:10-4:21)

- (6) The church was rent by factional divisions (1:10-16; 3:1-6,21-23).
- (7) Paul did not just rebuke them, he offered several solutions -

(a) CLING TO THE CROSS

- see *1 Corinthians 1:17-25; 2:1-3*
- the key verse is *1:21* -

“Since God has chosen by his wisdom that this world will never discover him through its own wisdom, he has also resolved that only through the foolishness of preaching will salvation come to those who believe” (1:21).

- avoid the twin snares of **(i)** “demanding signs” and **(ii)** “desiring wisdom”
- learn to be content with “*Christ crucified*” (vs. 22-23)
- pentecostals are prone to the first fault (craving miracles all the time); while the older churches are prone to the second (boasting of their sophistication and learning)
- those who are truly wise will allow room for miracles, but will also commend the quest for truth; yet their highest and best confidence will be in the cross.

(b) TRUST THE POWER OF GOD

- see *1 Corinthians 2:1-5*
- this does not contradict the previous section, because Paul distinguished between the “*signs*” sought by Jews and the unobtrusive genuine work of the Holy Spirit.
- the chief miracles of God are not those of *outer healing* but of *inner transformation*.

(c) LIVE IN THE REALM OF THE SPIRIT

- see *1 Corinthians 2:6-16*, and especially *verse 13*, which could be translated as follows:

*We talk about these things, not using words that human wisdom could have taught us, but rather words that we learned from the Holy Spirit; for it is only by using ‘the language of the Spirit’ that we can properly interpret spiritual matters.*⁶

- this entire passage is focussed on the Pentecostal event, that is, upon a glossolalic baptism in the Holy Spirit; therefore the promises in *verses 9-10, 15-16* belong in particular to Spirit-filled believers.

(d) ACCEPT ONLY SOUND DOCTRINE

- see *1 Corinthians 2:10-15*

(e) PRESERVE THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

- see *1 Corinthians 2:16-20* (note that “*you*” in Greek is here plural)

(8) Finally, Paul puts to the Corinthians a fourfold *personal appeal* (see 4:1-21) -

- “*Do not pronounce judgment before the time*” (vs. 1-5, 5)
- “*Nothing beyond what is written*” (vs. 6-7, 6)
- “*We are fools for the sake of Christ*” (vs. 8-13, 10)
- “*I appeal to you: be imitators of me!*” (vs. 14-21, 16).

(D) INCEST (5:1-13)

One of the tragic characters of ancient Rome was the stoic philosopher Seneca, who was a contemporary of the apostle Paul. Seneca began his public life as an adviser and tutor to the emperor Nero, but in later life he angered the emperor and was commanded to commit suicide. Before then, however, he had written many plays, treatises, and letters, of which a great number

⁶ "The language of the Spirit" is glossolalia; see 14:2,15-16; Ep 5:18-19; Ju 20; etc.

still survive. In one of his plays a young man, Hippolytus, is horrified to discover that his stepmother Phaedra has erotic designs upon him. He cries out -

Almighty God!
God of all gods! Canst thou hear things so foul
And not be moved? Canst see - and not be moved?
For what cause shall thy sky be rent with thunder
If no cloud dims it now? Let ruin wreck
The firmament, and black night hide the day!
Let stars run back and all their courses turn
Into confusion. Thou too, king of stars,
Lord Sun, resplendent . . . Wilt thou
Not veil thy light and flee into darkness?
Ruler of gods in heaven and men on earth,
Why is thy hand not armed, will not thy torch
Of triple fire set all the world ablaze?⁷

We are left in doubt about the horror the crime of incest aroused among the Romans! We may say then that incest is

(1) A UNIVERSAL CRIME (5:1-2)

(a) The man was committing incest with his stepmother, who, since there is no indictment of her, was probably a pagan

- had she been a Christian she too would have been thrown out of the church, as her Christian lover was
- she may have been a young woman, nearly his own age; or perhaps the relationship was based on the craving that older women sometimes have for young men; or perhaps the crime was provoked by the man's hunger for a mother-replacement.

(b) Few societies have tolerated incest: it was strictly proscribed under Roman law, and also by the Jews (Le 18:8)

- hence this sin was a scandal to those outside the church as well as within.

(c) Yet the Corinthians were "*proud*" of this behaviour!

- probably on the grounds of an antinomian distortion of the gospel.⁸

(d) Perhaps as many as 10% of families in our own society have some experience of incest. Current theory says there are 5 common causes of incest:

(i) poor relationships and/or emotional support

⁷ Phaedra Act Two; tr. by E. F. Watling; Penguin Books, London, 1970; pg. 125.

⁸ "Antinomian" = "against law", and it describes people who believe that faith in Christ alone, without obedience to any moral law, is sufficient for salvation. In its corrupt form, it left people free to practise sin, while arguing that in this way the grace of God was magnified (cp. Ro 6:1-2).

(ii) poor communications (especially about sex)

- this is often a factor in religious homes, where there may be a strong taboo about discussing such matters
- this may cause people to turn to sex only within the “*safety*” of the family, rather than risk the unknown in the outside world.

(iii) male chauvinism and/or dominance

- this too is often found in Christian homes, where the men may feel that they have a divine right to control the women in the house

(iv) a child victim of incest may continue the pattern in his/her own adult life

(v) emotional immaturity and poor impulse control in the perpetrator.

(e) Note that for a Christian sexual desire must be focussed upon one’s spouse, and no other

- this is a matter of self-discipline, in the grace of God
- Virgil (1st century B.C.) is universally recognised as the greatest of the Latin poets. In his renowned poetic treatise on rural life he wrote

Unless you make unceasing war on weeds,
And scare the birds, and check the leafy shade,
And duly pray for rain, in vain, alas,
Will you admire your neighbour’s ample store
And shake the oak your hunger to assuage.

It is a law of fate
That all things tend to slip back and grow worse;
As when a man, who hardly rows his skiff
Against the current, if he once relax,
Is carried headlong down the stream again.⁹

- in the same way, the tendency to sin must be steadily resisted, in the grace and strength of Christ.

(f) If you encounter a case of incest be very careful about how you handle it; the wisest course is probably to refer the matter to an expert

- few pastors, and even fewer lay people are equipped to handle such cases, and bungling amateurs (including pastors practising pop-psychology) have sometimes done much harm to the people they have tried to counsel
 - great scandal has been caused, and pastors, in Australia, New Zealand, the USA, and other countries have been hauled into court to answer charges of

⁹ The Georgics, Book One; tr. by K. R. Mackenzie; Folio Society, London, 1969; pg. 18-19.

negligence or malfeasance in connection with their failed attempts to handle incest cases without calling upon expert help

- it is difficult to feel any sympathy for them; they should not have arrogantly supposed themselves, without any sufficient training or expertise, able to handle any problem whatever
- in many cases the law *requires* counsellors to report a case of incest to the relevant government authority, especially when minors are involved
- note also that Paul, as a method of combating incest, did not advocate *counselling*, but *action!* - that is, the first responsibility of the church was to itself, to protect its own purity, and only then to search for some way to help the offending parties.

(2) HANDED OVER TO SATAN (5:3-5)

(a) The phrase “*handed over to Satan*” could well refer to the Roman public prosecutor (the word “*satan*” had a wide meaning in Hebrew, referring to any kind of adversary; cp. 2 Sa 19:22)

- if this is the meaning, then Paul is simply using a colourful way of telling the church to hand the offenders over to the police, to be tried in court, and punished by the secular authorities.

(b) Alternatively, the reference may be to Satan himself, and would then imply making the man vulnerable to some kind of Satanic attack

- the purpose, of course, was not crass vengeance, but rather to bring him to repentance
- which raises the question: is the same action possible today?
- can we, or should we, “*hand people over to Satan*”, to teach them not to blaspheme, and to walk in holiness?
- the next section will supply some of the answer.

(3) CLEANSE THE CHURCH (5:6-13)

(a) Notice that Paul 6 times commands the Corinthians to cast the offender out of the church (vs. 2b,5a,7a,11a,11c,13)

- we tend to major on the *size* of the church; Paul was more concerned about its *holiness*,¹⁰ because only a little corruption will spoil a whole loaf (vs. 6,7); which at once brings Paul an opportunity to point to Christ (vs. 7b,8)

¹⁰ There is here a perplexing tension. It would be foolish to place any limit on the size to which a church can grow, yet it can hardly be denied that the New Testament pictures only small churches, and the descriptions it gives of the local church, and the commands it speaks, seem to be fully workable only in such smaller churches. The kinds of disciplines and discipleship required by the New Testament are hardly achievable in a large congregation. Shall we then forbid big churches and permit only small ones? That would be absurd. I cannot discuss this problem any - continued on the next page.

- this was characteristic of the great apostle: no matter what theme he was discussing, always he saw something there that revealed some facet of the gospel, or, better, of Christ himself
- every situation was an opportunity for Paul to preach the riches of Christ!

(b) He proscribes a wide list of sins, including some that would not have been considered morally culpable outside the church (vs. 9-13; and see also 6:9-11, discussed below), for we are called to set the standard of morality that is required by God, not to allow the world to set it for us

- yet all too often Christians can be seen falling over each other in their rush to ape the fashions of this world
- yet, having said that, there is also a need for Christians not to be foolishly out of step with the surrounding culture
- so, elsewhere Paul gives two good rules: *Romans 12:18*; *Philippians 4:5*.

Illustration. Once upon a time, just as winter was fixing its chill upon the land, a mouse met a forlorn cat, and, taking a liking for her, invited puss to share her home. The two unusual friends at once started working together to put up a store of food for winter, and after much toil managed to fill a jar with rich, meaty fat. To protect their food from robbers, and perhaps from each other, they decided to hide it inside a church cupboard. But going to church, as the mouse would soon discover, was no remedy for the folly of keeping bad companions.

As the days grew darker and colder, the cat began to crave some of the tasty fat. She told the mouse that she was godmother to a new kitten, and had to go to the church for the christening. Upon arriving at the church, without a scruple of conscience, the cat went straight to the jar and licked off the top layer of fat. Later, when the mouse politely enquired the new kitten's name, puss told her that it had been called *Skin-off*.

Since the scheme had worked so well, the cat repeated it a month later, this time telling her friend that the kitten's name was *Half-gone*. The mouse was suspicious, but dared not say anything, not even when the following month the cat again attended a "christening" and told her friend that the baby was called *All-gone*.

The winter advanced still further, and since their normal food supply was now exhausted, the mouse went herself to the church to retrieve the jar. How grieved she was to find it quite empty! She knew now why the pretended kittens had such strange names, and rushing home she cast aside

further here; but let me say at least this: whether one is dealing with a large congregation or a small one, the ideal of holiness must still be earnestly striven for.

all caution and began to berate the cat most bitterly. But puss was hungry again, and finding nothing else in the larder she pounced upon the mouse and ate her up instead.¹¹

So will it happen to all who unwisely make the ungodly their companions, or who invite sin to dwell with them.

¹¹ From the collection of fairy tales by the brothers Grimm, #2 of 242, shortened by the author.

STUDY TWO

LAW and CHASTITY

INTRODUCTION

The first man in history to have the epithet “*great*” attached to his name was Alexander the Great, of Macedon (B.C. 356-323). The title was awarded him only a few decades after his death by a Roman historian. Since then it has been given to hardly more than fifty people. Two monarchs who lived before the time of Alexander - Cyrus I, and Darius I - had the honorific added to their names by later writers, and it has also been granted to three women: Gertrude the Great (a nun); Matilda the Great (ruler of Tuscany); and Catherine the Great (empress of Russia). But God wants to add such praise to *all* his saints, so that we might be pronounced “*great in the kingdom of God*”, and Paul tells us what to do either to gain or to lose this honour!

(A) LAW (6:1-9a)

(1) “*How dare you go to court!*” he cries, in a strong, emphatic, passionate protest at what he considers scandalous behaviour.

(2) It does not seem probable that Paul is prohibiting all legal action between Christians, since he has already shown (Ch. 5) that the church must act sternly against criminal turpitude

- thus his protest seems to be primarily against legal actions that deal with civil cases of personal property loss, or the mere assertion of some personal “*rights*”.

(3) Paul’s grounds for indicting such behaviour are -

(a) (vs. 2) We shall judge the world, a teaching that was common among Jewish apocalyptists -

The souls of the just are in God’s hands, and torment shall not touch them ... In the moment of God’s coming to them they will kindle into flame, like sparks that sweep through stubble; they

will be judges and rulers over the nations of the world, and the Lord will be their king for ever and ever.¹²

When the congregation of the righteous shall appear, sinners shall be judged for their sins, they shall be driven from the face of the earth ... (The) wicked ones will be driven from the presence of the righteous and the elect, and from that time, those who possess the earth will neither be rulers nor princes ... At that moment, kings and rulers shall perish, (for) they shall be delivered into the hands of the righteous and holy ones ... You righteous ones, fear not the sinners! For the Lord will again deliver them into your hands, so that you may carry out against them anything that you desire.¹³

(b) (vs. 3) We shall judge the angels (which includes both good and evil heavenly beings) thus showing the extraordinary elevation that will be ours in Christ on that day.

(c) (vs. 4-5) Surely there is enough wisdom in the church to enable justice to be done among its members? Should we not rather trust the godly counsel of Spirit-filled saints, than the worldly knowledge of secular judges?

(d) (vs. 6) It is outrageous for "*brothers*" (who should be bound together in mutual love) to quarrel in front of unbelievers.

(e) (vs. 7-8) A true Christian would rather be defrauded than bring any hurt or pain to a fellow believer.

(f) (vs. 9a) Their actions were placing their salvation in jeopardy

- One of the richest men in the USA in the latter part of the 19th century was Russell Sage. He once called upon his lawyer to discuss a law suit. Sage laid the evidence before the barrister, who was delighted: "This case is iron-clad," he chortled, "we can't possibly lose!" Whereupon Sage replied: "Then we will not go to court, for what I just gave you was my opponent's argument!"
- When Christians go to court against each other, merely to defend some personal interest, they place themselves at the mercy of their real enemy, the devil.

(4) We should measure our own attitudes and behaviour against this standard

- but too often Christians show just the same possessive grip on worldly goods, just the same grasping self-assertiveness, just the same vindictiveness and jealousy, just the same rush to defend themselves, as the ungodly do
- if any of us have been fouled by such things, we should repent and yield ourselves to the transforming grace of Christ.

¹² Wis 3:8

¹³ Enoch 38:1,3-5; 95:3. "Enoch" is an apocalyptic work, dated c. 150 B.C. It is quoted directly by Jude, and was obviously familiar to most of the other apostles, since its teaching influenced the shape of many of the major doctrines of the New Testament. It was highly regarded by many of the Apostolic and Church Fathers. (Tr. by E. Isaac; "The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha," ed. J. H. Charlesworth; Doubleday & Co, New York; 1983; Vol. One, in. loc.)

(B) CHASTITY (6:9b-20)

(1) THOSE WHO CANNOT ENTER HEAVEN (6:9b,10)

(a) Note the five categories of sin that will exclude the “*wicked*” from heaven:

- *moral crimes* (sexual immorality; adultery)
- *religious crimes* (idolatry; temple prostitution)
- *property crimes* (theft, fraud)
- *social crimes* (slander)
- *indulgent crimes* (greed, inebriation)

(b) Note (vs. 11a) how Paul had apparently gone deliberately to the lower strata of Corinthian society to find his converts (cp. also 1:26-28).

- yet not exclusively, for there were some in the church who were well-off (11:20-22; note that some owned their own homes, and were affluent, while others “*had nothing*”); some were slaves, some were free (7:20-21)

(c) Nonetheless, with such a congregation, of which so many came from the worst segments of society, raised in the most appalling circumstances, we might think, “Here is a counsellor’s paradise! Enough work to keep the finest psychiatrist going for years!”

(d) Yet notice Paul’s almost careless dismissal of all their paranoias, phobias, fears, enslavements, habits, lusts, traumas, etc

- how decisively he applies one quick remedy to the whole gamut of human hang-ups; he simply tells them -

(2) WHAT GOD HAS MADE US (6:11)

(a) “YOU WERE WASHED”

- this is in the *middle* voice, which in grammar shows human initiative; that is, before they were “*washed*” they themselves had taken action (probably through presenting themselves for baptism).

(b) “YOU WERE SANCTIFIED; YOU WERE JUSTIFIED”

- this is in the *passive* voice, which shows the divinely wrought consequences of their earlier decision (to embrace the gospel and to be baptised).

(3) SHALL WE THEN SIN? (6:12-14)

(a) If we are already justified and sanctified, surely sin can no longer affect us?

- the church at Corinth had adopted this position (5:2a), and they supported their case by a popular saying, which Paul quotes twice: “*All things are lawful for me!*”

(b) There was some truth in that saying; for there is indeed no law confronting us (with a penalty attached) that proscribes any kind of behaviour

- after all, we are now treated by God as those who are “*dead*” in Christ, which means that we are, in a sense, free to do anything!

(c) But that attitude (as we saw in the previous study), if it is taken to an extreme, can lead to *antinomian* corruption. So Paul adds three qualifications, based upon -

(i) **RELATIONSHIP**

- to encourage holiness in life he calls upon our relationship with Christ, which has four different aspects:
 - the hope of resurrection (vs. 14)
 - the fact of our spiritual union (vs. 17)
 - the indwelling Spirit (vs. 19)
 - the price that was paid (vs. 20a)

(ii) **EXPEDIENCY**

a. Everything may be lawful, but not everything is beneficial; if it hurts you, it is foolish to do it

- only a madman perseveres in destructive behaviour simply to assert some so-called “*liberty*”

b. Continued sin gradually deadens the voice of conscience, until all sense of shame vanishes and the sinner supposes that he or she can escape judgment. *Illustration:* the emperor Nero, known to history as a monster of depravity and cruelty, empty of any moral sense or tenderness, did not begin that way -

As a further guarantee of his virtuous intentions, he promised to model his rule on the principles laid down by Augustus, and never missed an opportunity of being generous or merciful, or of showing what a good companion he was. He lowered, if he could not abolish, some of the heavier taxes . . . If asked to sign the usual execution order for a felon, he would sigh: “Ah, how I wish that I had never learned to write!” He seldom forgot a face, and would greet men of whatever rank by name without a moment’s hesitation. Once, when the Senate passed a vote of thanks to him, he answered: “Wait until I deserve them!” . . . (During the gladiatorial shows) no one was allowed to be killed during the combats, not even criminals.¹⁴

- from that high moral ground, how terribly the young Nero fell, plunging into growing debauchery, until every finer feeling was crushed, and, no longer fit to reign, he was driven off the throne, saving himself from execution only by committing suicide
- his fate should be a warning to all who carelessly think that sin has no consequences.

¹⁴ Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars, “Nero”; tr. Robert Graves; Folio Society, London, 1964; pg. 215, 216.

(iii) FREEDOM

a. Everything may be lawful, but Paul refuses to be the slave of anything; therefore,

- although his body may need **food**, he refuses to fall into bondage to gluttony; and
- although his body may need **sex**, he refuses to become a compulsive and helpless fornicator

b. Surely, it is absurd to lose Christian liberty by becoming enslaved through the very act of using it! Are we not called to an exercise of strength and courage? (1 Co 15:58; 16:13) -

It's easy to cry that you're beaten, and die;
It's easy to crawfish and crawl;
But to fight and fight when hope's out of sight -
Why that's the best game of them all!
And though you come out of each gruelling bout
All broken and beaten and scarr'd,
Just have one more try - it's dead easy to die,
It's the keeping on living that's hard! ¹⁵

- But **we** are called "*more than conquerors*" in Christ!

(d) So he concludes that we should

(i) shun all harlotry, for this wickedly involves Christ himself in sin (vs. 15,16) - which indeed shows the claim of Christian liberty taken to foul extremes

- I have heard two or three pastors do this, arguing that God has given them a special dispensation for adultery, freedom to ignore his standard moral law
- but there are no excuses; the same quality of holiness is demanded from everyone in the church, no matter what their office or calling.

(ii) shun all immorality, for this is an insane crime against yourself (vs. 18)

a. Sexual immorality shatters the real nature and purpose of the body more than any other sin, because it ravages the mystery of our construction in the "*image and likeness*" of God.

b. So we should in every way honour God, not just in the spirit, but also "*with our bodies*" (vs. 19-20)

- *Illustration:* one of the great artists of the Italian Renaissance was the Florentine sculptor Donatello (1386-1466). On one occasion he made for a church a wooden Crucifix over which he took extraordinary pains -

When he had finished it, convinced that he had produced a very rare work, he asked his close friend, Filippo Brunelleschi, for his opinion. But Filippo, in view of what he had already been told by Donatello, was expecting to be shown something far better; and when he saw what it

¹⁵ Robert Service, The Quitter, st. three.

was he merely smiled to himself. At this Donatello begged him for the sake of their friendship to say what he thought of it. So Filippo, being always ready to oblige, answered that it seemed to him that Donatello had put on the cross the body of a peasant, not the body of Jesus Christ, which was most delicate and in every part the most perfect human form ever created. Finding that instead of being praised, as he had hoped, he was being criticised, and more sharply than he could ever have imagined, Donatello retorted: "If it was as easy to make something as it is to criticise, my Christ would really look to you like Christ. So you get some wood and try to make one yourself."

Without another word, Filippo returned home and secretly started work on a Crucifix, determined to vindicate his own judgment by surpassing Donatello; and after several months he brought it to perfection. Then one morning he asked Donatello to have dinner with him, and Donatello accepted. On their way to Filippo's house they came to the Old Market, where Filippo bought a few things and gave them to Donatello, saying: "Take these home and wait for me. I shall be along in a moment."

So Donatello went on ahead into the house, and going into the hall he saw, placed in a good light, Filippo's Crucifix. He paused to study it and found it so perfect that he was completely overwhelmed and dropped his hands in astonishment; whereupon his apron fell and the eggs, the cheeses, and the rest of the shopping tumbled to the floor and everything was broken into pieces. He was still standing there in amazement, looking as if he had lost his wits, when Filippo came up and said laughingly:

"What's your design, Donatello? What are we going to eat now that you've broken everything?"

"Myself," Donatello answered, "I've had my share for this morning. If you want yours, you take it. But no more please. Your job is making Christs and mine is making peasants."¹⁶

- what shape is your life taking: that of Christ, or something far less?

¹⁶ Georgio Vasari (1511-1574), Lives of the Artists, "Life of Donatello;" tr. George Bull, Folio Society, London, 1993; Vol. One (of three volumes) pg. 176-177.

STUDY THREE

FREEDOM

See 1 Corinthians 9:1-10:13.

One of the greatest citizens of ancient Corinth was the cynic philosopher Diogenes. He practised extreme self-denial, and contented himself with a large clay tub as his only home. When Alexander the Great had been elected to take his murdered father's place as the Supreme Commander of the Greek league, he went on a tour to receive the well wishes and congratulations of the nation's leaders. He arrived at Corinth and noticed that Diogenes was missing from the parade of dignitaries. So he went looking for the philosopher, and found him lying in the sun beside his barrel. Alexander extended a courteous greeting to Diogenes, and then asked if he could do anything for him. "Yes," replied the still reclining teacher, "please stand aside; you are blocking the sun!" The king's retinue roared with laughter, mocking the foolish man who could have asked for so much, but wanted so little. But Alexander said, "If I were not Alexander, I would choose to be Diogenes!"

- there is indeed much to be said for removing anything that stands between you and the blazing sun of the truth that is in Christ! (10:1)

INTRODUCTION

(1) At the beginning of our text passage, Paul is still debating the idea of Christian freedom. He asserts his *rights* and privileges in various areas, but then counterbalances that with the *duty* he has to proclaim Christ. The key verse is 9:19. In the matter of choosing between rights and duties, Paul always elects *duty* over *privilege*.

(2) But it is not all *duty*. There is also a reward to gain (9:24-26). If Paul labours, he does so for the prize offered him by God.

(3) This leads him to a central passage (10:1-13), which he introduces with an interesting phrase: "*I do not want you to be ignorant*"

- the same expression is found in 12:1; *Romans 11:25*; *2 Corinthians 1:8*; *1 Thessalonians 4:13*; and in each place the idea is: "*this is an important item, yet one that is often overlooked*"
- in our present text, the idea that is often overlooked is that of Israel as a "*type*" of the church (vs. 6, 11), and we can see here -

(A) A GLORIOUS PROMISE

(1) How wonderful were God's promises to Israel! See the extravagance of just one passage, *Deuteronomy 28:1-14*.

(2) But why such extraordinary promises? Because God's purpose is always to bring his people into "*Canaan*" (Ex 3:7-8a). The same principle is at work in the church today, for "*Canaan*" is a type of living in the kingdom of God.

(3) But first there are enemies to overcome

- for Israel, those enemies were Egypt, the wilderness, and the inhabitants (Ex 3:8b); which for us represent the world, the flesh, the devil.

(4) Israel failed to master its foes and to possess the land. What about us? That is the very issue that led Paul to give

(B) A PASSIONATE WARNING

(1) THEY CHOSE DISUNITY INSTEAD OF UNITY

(a) See *verses 1-5*. Note the three occurrences of the word "*supernatural*", followed by the tragic "*nevertheless*"

- they had the blood, the sea, the cloud, the manna, the stream, the miracles, the Rock; surely they were entitled to think that God was approving them?
- yet instead, God rejected them; and today also, the mere presence of miracles is no guarantee of divine favour.

(b) Learn this: God has a *collective*, not just an *individual* purpose

- that is, we can be *individually* saved, yet *collectively* rejected; or, *you* may be personally secure in Christ, yet your local *church* may be under the judgment of God; the Lord may be answering *individual* prayers, and granting miracles in response to personal faith, yet still be planning to chastise his *church*.

(c) The lesson we should learn is this: God wants to bring his *church*, the entire company of his people, into kingdom power

- it is not enough just to look after *yourself*; each one of us must also have a deep concern for the *body*
- we dare not be content just to get our own prayers answered; for if the church falls, we may well fall with it - just as those very Israelites who were enjoying the miracles in the wilderness also died there!

(2) THEY CHOSE COMFORT INSTEAD OF CONFLICT

(a) See *verse 7*. They decided that feasting and revelry were more appealing than Moses' command to go on and to go in (De 1:19-21).

(b) So they stayed 38 years at *Kadesh-Barnea*, which was an oasis in the Negeb desert, fed by perpetual brooks, some 50 miles inland from the Mediterranean sea. It was called "*Kadesh*" = "*Holy*", because it was deemed a miracle of God that such an abundant flow should spring out of the seared wilderness, seemingly from no ordinary watery source.

(c) Therefore it seemed a good place to stay, and indeed, God did bless them there, with the manna, the sweet spring, and preservation (De 8:4; 29:5; Ne 9:21

- yet in the end, because they were content with an oasis rather than the whole land, they were doomed to perish in that very desert which had seemed to be the source of their supply.
- just like those Israelites, many Christians today are content either (a) for their church to remain a self-contained oasis, exercising no transforming influence on the surrounding "*desert*"; or, (b) to obtain enough of God's favour to meet their basic needs - but they have no zeal to seize the higher and better promise.

(d) Don't be like they; resolve to have "*Canaan*"! Press on into all the fulness God has appointed us to obtain in Christ!

(3) THEY CHOSE THE FLESH INSTEAD OF THE SPIRIT

(a) See *verse 8*. They got out of Egypt; but Egypt did not get out of them.

(b) We never can possess the kingdom until we are extricated from the ways and motives of the world

- we are called to be a separated people (2 Co 6:14-18; and notice the glorious promises God offers to those who do "*come out from among them*").

(4) THEY CHOSE THE PAST INSTEAD OF THE FUTURE

(a) See *verse 9*, and *Numbers 21:4-6*, and note their yearning for Egypt.

(b) We are all prone to cling to the familiar

- the unfamiliar, the new, the untried, all are scary, and people would rather stay where they are, and keep on doing what they know
- like the eagle that "*stirs up its nest*" (De 32:11), so the Holy Spirit is always working upon the church, to stir the saints out of their lethargy, to arouse them to higher endeavour, to force them to fly instead of hiding safely behind their familiar routines.

(c) We need to get God's new and unique vision, for our own lives, but more particularly for the church. Notice also in scripture the following principles -

(i) THE VARIOUS STRATEGIES GOD GAVE ISRAEL

- never once did the Lord repeat a battle plan; every time Joshua, or David, or any other commander sought God for direction, he gave them a new strategy: the sound of a trumpet; hail stones from heaven; stinging hornets; thunder claps; lay an ambush; make a frontal assault; wait for the mulberry leaves to rustle; etc; etc
- so each local church needs to ask God for his particular plan for that church in its own community; the Lord may give your church a plan unlike any other he has ever used before!

(ii) THE MEN OF ISSACHAR

- see *1 Chronicles 12:32*
- may God give the same “*understanding of our times*” to us all, so that we can move wisely in waging war upon the enemy, and in accomplishing the purposes of the Lord.

(iii) THE MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

- see *Revelation 2:1 ff*; and note how the Lord had a different word for each of those churches; which suggests that today also, for each church in our city he has a special word of rebuke or of counsel, of warning or of promise, and a unique and different strategy for each congregation.

(5) THEY CHOSE SECURITY INSTEAD OF ADVENTURE

(a) See *verse 10*. They grumbled about the enemies that had to be dispossessed; but where there is “*milk and honey*” there must also be “*bulls and bees*”!

- so they had to face all those “*ites*” (Ex 3:8); they could not avoid danger; they were promised no easy path to conquest
- their refusal to accept this, their preference for a risk-free, conflict-free life, cost them their promised inheritance; instead of possessing the land, they perished in the desert.

(b) So be prepared for spiritual warfare if you are determined to possess the land of “*milk and honey*”!

- there is no possession without dispossession; you will enjoy only as much of the promised “*Canaan*” as you are able to wrest from the hands of the enemy.

STUDY FOUR

EUCCHARIST

See *1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1; 11:17-33*.

In the *Table of the Lord* we can observe -

(A) CONTINUATION

- “*this do in remembrance of me*” (vs. 24-25)

(1) Note the importance of the regular eucharist in the early church, as shown by the testimony of the Fathers.

- without exception, for the first several hundred years, all the extant writings on the matter show the early church celebrating the eucharist at least *every* Sunday
- here is one example from the middle of the 2nd century, from the writings of *Justin Martyr* (converted c. 132, suffered martyrdom c. 165):

On the day which is called the day of the sun there is an assembly of all who live in the towns or in the country; and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, for as long as time permits. Then the reader ceases, and the president speaks, admonishing us and exhorting us to imitate these excellent examples. Then we arise all together and offer prayers ... both for ourselves and for ... all men everywhere, with all our hearts. ... (Then) we salute each other with a kiss when we have ended the prayers.

Then is brought to the president of the brethren bread, and a cup of water and wine. And he takes them and offers up praise and glory to the Father of all things, through the name of his Son and of the Holy Ghost, and gives thanks that we are deemed worthy of these things at his hand. When he has completed the prayers and thanksgiving, all the people present assent by saying *Amen*.

. . . When the president has given thanks and all the people have assented, those who are called deacons with us give to those present a portion of the Eucharistic bread and wine and water, and carry it away to those that are absent.

. . . We hold our common assembly on the day of the sun, because it is the same day (on which) Jesus Christ our Saviour rose from the dead.¹⁷

(2) Over the past 200 years some evangelicals have minimised the spiritual value of the eucharist

- some have virtually eliminated it from their church life; others celebrate it once a month, or once a quarter; others celebrate it only when it is convenient to do so; others make it a mere addendum to a church service; etc
- I feel that such practices have led inevitably to spiritual loss in those churches.

(3) Christ is at the heart of the eucharist, and a church that has the eucharist at its own heart will be indestructible.

(B) CELEBRATION

- “and when he had given thanks” (vs. 24)

(1) Note that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all draw particular attention to Jesus “giving thanks” when he celebrated the Passover with his disciples

- the Greek word is *eucharisto*, and it has been used in the church from the earliest times to describe the weekly celebration of the *Lord’s Supper*.
- this indeed is one of the proofs of the resurrection of Christ: nothing less than an unshakeable certainty that Jesus had conquered death could have enabled the first Christians to take hold of a ceremony that spoke of *death* and turn it into a celebration of *life*!
- the very Table that should have made them shudder with horror, because it spoke of the dreaded cross, instead filled them with boundless *joy*!

(2) Thus when we break bread, we too should celebrate:

- our union with Christ in his death & resurrection
- our union with each other in unbreakable love
- the triumph of the church over every foe (vs. 26)

(C) COMMEMORATION

- “this do in remembrance of me” (vs. 24, 25)

(1) Protestants see the communion service as an act of *remembrance*; but Roman Catholics (and some others) see it as an actual crucifying of Christ afresh

- so the question arises: is this a *table* (of remembrance), or an *altar* (of sacrifice)?

¹⁷ Apology, Bk I, ch 65-67; dated c. 150. Taken from Documents of the Christian Church; selected and edited by Henry Bettenson; Oxford University Press, London, 1973; pg. 66,67.

- the 16th cent. Protestant Reformers began calling it the *Table of the Lord*, because they objected to the sacrificial aspects of the terms *altar* and *mass*¹⁸

(2) The idea of a “*sacrifice*” did not develop until the 10th century, when the suggestion was first made (and gradually adopted by the Roman Catholic church) that the elements of bread and wine were turned by the priest into the real body and blood of Christ

- this became the doctrine of *transubstantiation*, which holds that the elements keep the *appearance* of bread and wine, but take on the *substance* of flesh and blood
- surely though, this view defies
 - *reason*: for it requires that every priest in every church who performs the mass must work an astonishing miracle;
 - *natural perception*: for the bread and the wine still carry their natural look, feel, and taste;
 - *scripture*: which says that Christ has died *once* for all people, and will never die again; and the clear
 - *traditions* of the apostolic church; for not one of the Fathers ever suggested anything other than that the bread and wine are simple symbols of the flesh and blood of Jesus.

(3) So we should avoid foolish fables, keep to the plain teaching of scripture and the example of the early church, and observe the eucharist regularly (I think it should be weekly), with all dignity and yet with utmost joy.

(D) COMMUNICATION

(1) Nonetheless, “*remembrance*” does mean more than merely calling to mind a past event

- in Hebrew idiom, it meant “*remember with a view to action*” (Ps 25:6-7, plus many other examples)
- that is, the eucharist calls for a response of trust, joy, obedience, surrender, renewal of vows, reconciliation with God and neighbour, repentance, etc.

(2) Again we face controversy:

- do the bread and the wine really turn into the flesh and blood of Christ (as *Rome* teaches);¹⁹ or

¹⁸ From a Latin word meaning "send" or "dismiss", which was used at the close of the eucharist, to end the service, and to send ("dismiss") the people home. In the Roman Catholic church, the term "mass" had already replaced the more ancient (and more biblical) term "eucharist", and it was already closely associated with the idea of the priest making a sacrificial offering there at the church altar.

¹⁹ The doctrine is called transubstantiation - from two Latin words that mean "changing one substance into another".

- do they convey to us the actual flesh and blood of Christ, while remaining unchanged themselves (as *Luther* taught);²⁰ or
- do they simply convey to the believer all that the flesh and blood of Christ signify (as *Calvin* argued); or
- are they merely symbols, mementoes of the Cross, but conveying nothing (as *Baptists* and others maintain)?

(3) The scriptures will scarcely allow the “*Baptist*” view; we are bound to see a communication of divine grace in the eucharist

- which is to say, we reject both the magical superstition of *Rome* but also the hollow ritual of the *Baptistic* position
- the truth seems rather to be somewhere between the *Lutheran* and *Calvinist* positions; which means that at the table we also find

(E) CONFRONTATION

(1) See *verse 28*. Why must we so carefully examine ourselves before we dare to take the bread and the cup? See *verses 27,29,30-32*.

(2) So we confront here life and death!

- note that if there is power in this table to **kill**, there must be abundantly more power to make **alive**; how much then should we fear the first, and boldly grasp the second!

(3) If this power of death, and of life, is not apparent in the church, if people are neither dying nor living because of the eucharist, then it reflects the weakness of the church, not the ineffectiveness of the table

- surely, in preference to a powerless table, it would be better for our church to know the energy of the early church (see *Ac 5:12-13*), even if that meant terrifying acts of divine judgment (*Ac 5:5-11*) - at least the church in Jerusalem was holy enough to provoke the Lord to defend its purity!

(F) CONGREGATION

- contrary to the popular idea (“*if going to church does you no good, at least it won’t do you any harm*”), Paul warned the Corinthians: “*your meetings do you more harm than good*” (*11:17*; also see *vs. 18-22*)
- what a sad state of affairs: they were worse for going to church than if they had stayed home!

²⁰ This doctrine is called consubstantiation, from two Latin words that mean “together” and “substance” - hence the doctrine that, after the consecration of the bread and wine at the eucharist, the substance of those elements dwells side by side with the substance of the body and blood of Christ.

- let us then make sure that we do sincerely “*discern the Lord’s body*” (vs. 29), and that we always come together for better, not worse, to leave the service richer not poorer, stronger not weaker, healthier not sicker
- the best way to achieve that is to add one more dimension to our celebration of the eucharist:

(G) CORONATION

- here, as everywhere, Christ must be, and will be Lord!

STUDY FIVE

RELATIONSHIPS

See *1 Corinthians 11:2-16*.

The key text is *verse 10*, which highlights the fact that there is nothing so ludicrous, nor so sad, as a church that has lost the sense of the supernatural, that is, a church locked within natural wisdom and skills

- but we live, says Paul, (or should do so) in the presence of angels; that is, in a supernatural dimension, in touch with the heavenly realm, with all the resources of God's mighty warriors as close as the breath in our lungs!

From this he draws two powerful lessons -

(A) SEPARATE FROM THE WORLD IN LIFESTYLE

- see *verses 4-6, 13-16*.

(1) This was a strange argument, because

- in the *Greek* world, both sexes worshipped uncovered
- in the Jewish world, both sexes worshipped covered
- among male *philosophers* long hair was common, and revered as a mark of distinction
- so why does Paul present his rather tortured argument, insisting that Christian custom required men to have relatively short hair, and to worship with an uncovered head; while the women should have relatively long hair, and worship with a covered head?

(2) It seems that Paul was actually reaching for a distinctive Christian lifestyle

- this was the real issue, not hair or hats; he wanted every Christian to be clearly marked in society; he wanted them not only to be different on the inside, but to look different on the outside
- there should indeed be no confusion between us and the world

- yet do not press Paul's words to an opposite extreme, as some do, who suppose that they should trumpet their Christian identity by wearing gaudy gospel buttons, or by looking frowzy
- rather let our difference be deeply found in a supernatural quality of love and faithfulness in all our dealings with each other.

(3) That becomes Paul's second theme -

(B) SEPARATE FROM THE WORLD IN RELATIONSHIP

(1) Where do you look for your pattern of human relationships?

- all too many Christians allow their manners, their attitudes, their standards, to be shaped by T.V., popular magazines, and secular books
- scripture alone should be our guide and rule.

(2) In this passage Paul has two great goals -

- to put the family into divine order (vs. 3,7-9)
- to give equal power to both sexes (vs. 11-12)
- in doing so, he established the principle that both male and female are under authority; neither has final rule over the other
- they both have their rightful place; they are both under the dominion of Christ
- note also, how he talks throughout the passage about "*men and women*", not just "*husband and wife*"; so he has in mind a broad view, not just of the home, but also of the church as the family of God.

(a) THE WOMAN IS UNDER AUTHORITY (vs. 10)

Illustration: during the Revolutionary War that the Americans waged against the British in the late 18th century, much harm was done to the British cause by various guerilla bands, one of which was headed by Ethan Allen, who gained renown as the leader of a group of warriors known as the "Green Mountain Boys". Allen had the misfortune to be married to a woman who was notorious for her bad temper and foul attitudes, a truly bitter shrew. When she died, Allen was asked who should be invited to carry the coffin. He replied, "Ask any of my neighbours. There is not a man in this town who would not be glad to carry her away!"

(i) A Christian wife should yield leadership to her husband, supporting him, encouraging his pastoral role, promoting his goals

- she should do this even when he is undeserving, for it is nothing to meet virtue with virtue, or to match love with love.

(ii) A time may come when a violent, or unreasonable, or tyrannical, or unfaithful, or drunken, or befouling spouse must be abandoned; but don't give up too soon!

- some of you ladies are gardeners, and how patiently you till the stubborn soil and war against weeds, pests, and disease
- would you do less for a man?

Illustration: the American film star Robert Mitchum enjoyed a long and happy marriage - perhaps unusual for Hollywood. He was asked what he thought had made his marriage last so well, when so many others had collapsed. He replied: "Mutual forbearance. My wife keeps on believing that I will do better tomorrow."

(b) THE MAN IS UNDER AUTHORITY (vs. 10)

Illustration: when Margaret Thatcher became prime minister of Great Britain, she and her husband Denis naturally moved into Number 10 Downing Street. On the day of the move a reporter asked Denis who would wear the pants in their new house? He said, "I will. And I will also wash them and iron them!"

- the question, of course, was absurd, for husbandly authority (as Denis realised) cannot be translated to mean rule or control.

(i) Here we encounter a delightful ambiguity! The same Greek phrase ("*a veil over her head*") may mean (and is elsewhere translated) "*possessing authority*" = "an environment of authority"

- that is, the veil is a mark of *her* authority, which she wears in the presence of angels, and which she alone has the right to wear in such exalted company

(ii) In this startling way, Paul prevents the male from arrogantly assuming dominance over his wife

- his "*headship*" is not one of power, nor that of bully or boss
- rather, his role is that of the *protector* and *enabler* of his wife; guarding her from harm, and creating a context in which she can flourish and fulfil all her potential as wife, mother, woman, and Christian
- thus Matthew Henry wrote, in his commentary on Genesis:

(Adam was made) last of (all) the creatures, as the last and most excellent of all, (but) Eve's being made after Adam, and out of him, puts an honour upon that sex as the glory of the man (1 Co 11:7). If man is the head, she is the crown, a crown to her husband, the crown of the visible creation. The man was dust refined, but the woman was dust double-refined, one remove further from the earth ...

(Observe how) the woman was "*made of a rib out of the side of Adam*"; not out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, and under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.

(iii) The husband's example is Christ, who gained the right to be Head of the Church by his loving sacrifice

- and now Christ expresses that authority (just as the man should do for his wife) by *protecting* and *enabling* the church, not by acting the despot over her.

(iv) Robert Browning captured both those ideas in his striking poem, *A Woman's Last Word* (a poem that was no doubt born out of the remarkable love and sympathy that existed between him and his wife, Elizabeth Barrett) -

Be a god and hold me
With a charm!
Be a man and fold me
With thine arm.²¹

Teach me, only teach, Love!
As I ought
I will speak thy speech, Love,
Think thy thought -²²

Meet, if thou require it,
Both demands,
Laying flesh and spirit
In thy hands.²³

(v) But what if she is

a. Insolent

- she is the weaker vessel, and you the stronger, so that you might bear with her, and nurture her

Illustration: someone once asked Socrates (B.C. 469-399) why he had married Xantippe, who was a shrew and a brawler, and why he remained with her. He replied: "That I might have within my own house a school of philosophy, and thereby be disciplined every day, and trained in meekness!"

b. Incompetent

- was she not the same when you married her?
- so then, pray, and teach, and be patient
- perhaps she is only meeting your expectations of her?

Illustration: when the Cunard Line built the *Queen Mary*, they intended to call it the *Queen Victoria*. But an executive told George V that the ship was to be named after "the greatest of all English queens", and the king replied at once, "Oh, my wife *will* be pleased!"

A man (even a king) who reckons his wife to be "the greatest of all queens" is bound to have a happy marriage!

c. Insurgent

- then do not command, but persuade with love!

²¹ Protector.

²² Enabler.

²³ She fully yields to him.

(vi) And what is true of the man and the woman is equally true in reverse.

Illustration: shortly after their marriage in 1840, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert had a bitter quarrel -

Albert stalked out of the room and locked himself in his private apartments. Victoria hammered furiously upon the door. "Who's there?" called Albert. "The Queen of England, and she demands to be admitted!" There was no response, and the door remained locked. Victoria hammered at the door again. "Who's there?" The reply was still, "The Queen of England," and still the door remained shut. More fruitless and furious knocking was followed by a pause. Then there was a gentle tap. "Who's there?" The Queen replied, "Your wife, Albert." The Prince at once opened the door.

They enjoyed great love and happiness for twenty-one years, until he died of typhoid fever in 1851, aged only 42 years. The Queen never married again and wore mourning for the rest of her long life.

CONCLUSION

(1) Rid yourself of the idea that life should be fair, and that you are absolutely entitled to a beautiful, happy, loving, home

- why do you suppose the commandment says, "*thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, goods, land,*" and the like?
- it is there because life does not always work out the way we think it will
- after a few years of marriage, you may discover that you could have made a wiser choice for a spouse; or you may meet someone whom you know could make you happier
 - but that is not a sufficient reason to discard your present spouse, and so violate solemn vows made in the presence of God
- your career may not blossom as you had supposed; or events may conspire to keep you from the best of your dreams; and so on; but that is no excuse for lapsing into jealousy, or envy, or bitterness.

Illustration: Kahlil Gibran, in his remarkable work of poetic philosophy, *The Prophet*, wrote about the pleasures and the pain of love -

When love beckons to you, follow him,
Though his ways are hard and steep.
And when his wings enfold you, yield to him,
Tho' the sword hidden among his pinions
may wound you.

And when he speaks to you, believe him,
Though his voice may shatter your dreams as the
north wind lays waste a garden . . .

But if in your fears you would seek only love's peace
and love's pleasure,

Then it is better for you that you cover your nakedness
and pass out of love's threshing floor
Into the seasonless world where you shall laugh
but not all of your laughter, and weep,
but not all of your tears.²⁴

(2) We are called to live in a higher dimension, where we *do* indeed discover the sweetest happiness - but in Christ, not in material things.

(3) We live in the presence of angels; so let us walk meekly, gently, lovingly, faithfully, as those who worship Christ and hope above all things to inherit the kingdom of God!

²⁴ Karl A. Knopf, New York, 1968; pg. 11, 12.

PART TWO

FROM THE “LETTER”

STUDY SIX

MARRIAGE & DIVORCE

See 1 Corinthians 7:1-40.

Paul is often criticised for this passage, as if he had reduced marriage to the lowest level of physical gratification; but see *Ephesians 5:22-23*, where he expresses one of the noblest concepts of marriage that has ever been penned. In his letter to the Corinthians he was simply answering some questions, which apparently were:

- is celibacy better than marriage? (1-2, 6-9)
- what are the duties of each spouse? (3-5)
- is divorce permissible for a Christian? (10-11)
- what about an unbelieving spouse? (12-16)
- what about those who are unmarried? (25-38)
- can a woman marry after her husband dies? (39-40).

For an extended discussion of those questions, and of other aspects of the issue of divorce and re-marriage, see my book *Divorce and Remarriage*, which is intended to accompany this present book, and to be part of this *Vision Christian College* course.

STUDY SEVEN

MARKET

See *1 Corinthians 8:1-13*

(A) THE PROBLEM

The Corinthians had enquired in their letter whether it was permitted to eat the flesh of animals that had been sacrificed to idols. The problem was a very practical one. A considerable part of the meat sold in the market came from animals sacrificed to idols. Usually, only certain portions of the sacrificial victims were burned; the remainder became the property of the temple priests. Much of this meat was sold to butchers. Moreover, the duties of social life involved joining pagan friends and relatives in common meals celebrating family festivals. At times these meals were held in a temple and were intimately associated with the worship of a pagan deity. Even when the meal was held at home, the meat would frequently be that of a sacrificial victim.

With reference to their attitude toward this problem Paul distinguishes two groups among the Christians: those who have an enlightened conscience about Christian liberty because they have “*knowledge*”; and those with a “*weak conscience*”, who attributed a tangible impurity to sacrificial meats and felt that in eating such food they were entering into a relationship with pagan deities or demons ... (see also Ro 14:1-15:13, where Paul calls the two groups the “*strong*” and the “*weak*”).²⁵

(B) THE SOLUTION

Paul urged the Corinthians to learn the difference between two things: **knowledge** (which by itself merely “*puffs up*”); and **love** (which “*builds up*”) (vs. 1) -

²⁵ From the Jerome Biblical Commentary, in *lob*.

(1) KNOWLEDGE (vs. 4-6)

- those who are strong in faith understand that an idol is nothing, and that through the grace of God in Christ we are free from all bondage to mere ritual
- Paul rejoices in that freedom, and wishes every believer to make the same discovery
- but if that knowledge stands alone, it will breed only arrogance; hence we also need to walk in

(2) LOVE (vs. 7-13)

- not all have a good grasp of the gospel; not all are strong in faith; so beware lest your claim of liberty in Christ becomes a stumbling block to another; Paul would rather starve than be guilty of such a fault against a fellow Christian! (vs. 13)

(a) Which is better: to know about God, or to be known by God?

- there are those, says Paul, who are proud of their vast knowledge about God, and suppose that this knowledge makes them superior to ignorant or weak Christians
- they reckon that their knowledge gives them a high standing before God.

(b) Paul mocks that idea. If a choice must be made, it is far better to be known by God than merely to know about him. Who does God know? Who does he consider a friend? Only those who are motivated by the love of God (vs. 2-3).

(c) Let us then determine two things: by all means to learn all we can about the gospel; but above all, to walk in love, both toward God and toward our brother and sister.

STUDY EIGHT

CHARISMATA

See *1 Corinthians 12:1 - 14:40*.²⁶

INTRODUCTION

Paul refers to a group of people and/or spiritual manifestations that he calls “*pneumatika*” - a Greek neuter noun, which means “*things of the spirit ... spiritual happenings*” (1 Co 12:1). It reveals a spiritual dimension, normally invisible in this world, in which strange phenomena occur, some of them wrought by the Holy Spirit, but most of them arising from other sources. Paul wishes the church not to be “*ignorant*” about these matters, nor does he want them to fall short in the proper use of the true gifts of the Holy Spirit (the *charismata*).

(I) A CHARISMATIC CHURCH

(A) WE CANNOT BE CONTENT WITH A DECEIVED CHURCH

(1) There are true and false spiritual manifestations in the world and in the church, including those that are

- **fabricated** (cp. Temple of Isis in Pompeii)
- **demonic** (*City of God*, Bk 10, ch 16; Bk 21, ch 6)
- **ignorant** (cp. Sir 34:1-8)
- **uncontrolled** (cp. the Didache)

²⁶ This study is largely drawn from material in my book *Equipped To Serve*. For a more extensive commentary on these three chapters from *1 Corinthians* (that is, chapters 12, 13, & 14), see that book.

- ***genuine***

(2) we must therefore use responsible discernment, based upon the Word of God (cp. Sir 33:1-3)

(B) WE CANNOT BE CONTENT WITH A DISABLED CHURCH

Paul twice uses the word *tithemi* - “to set in place, appoint, ordain, establish” (vs. 18,28) -

- in the first reference he uses the word in a general sense, and relates it to our bodily limbs
- in the second, he takes hold of a technical meaning the word had in Bible days -

(1) “TITHEMI” AS A TECHNICAL RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION

(a) Go back in imagination to 50 A.D., to the day when a new temple is about to be consecrated in Corinth, and the idol “set” in its place.

(b) That act of formally installing the image of a god or goddess in a temple was called “*tithemi*”

- indeed, until the “*tithemi*” had taken place, the temple remained simply a building
- only the presence of the god could turn it into a holy place, a house of prayer and worship
- without the sacred image, it was simply an empty shell, lacking purpose or power.

(c) Against that background, notice how Paul contrasts the “*dumb*” idols that were “set” in the heathen temples, with the living manifestations of the Spirit that are “set” in the church (vs. 2)

- he is showing two things:

(i) despite the “*tithemi*”, the temples of the heathen were still hollow husks, for their gods were “*dumb*”; and

(ii) God has performed a true “*tithemi*” by setting in his church the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which speak and act with power.

(d) But we may add another conclusion: just as surely as the purpose of the temple was void if the “*tithemi*” did not occur, so the church is made ineffectual if it does not allow the Spirit to “set in place” (*tithemi*) the charismata

- indeed, one of the major reasons the church exists is to be a depository of the charismata; without them, the church becomes like a pagan temple, largely dumb and helpless.

(e) Then the second way in which Paul uses “*tithemi*” is this -

(2) “TITHEMI” IN RELATION TO THE HUMAN BODY

As our limbs are to our bodies, so are the charismata to the church. How healthy, how effective, is a limbless man, lacking arms, legs, ears, eyes, etc. He may still be alive, but he is not much use, either to himself or anyone else! So is a church that lacks all or some of the charismata.

Some have argued that the charismata were given to the church only during its formative years, but they were withdrawn by God after the death of the apostles

- however, Paul’s analogy of the human body precludes this
- has God’s design and purpose for the human body changed; do we need our limbs any less now than people did twenty centuries ago?
- neither has the church changed, nor does it have any less need of the charismata.

Note that Paul says the charismata are “*profitable*” (vs. 7); that is, they serve “*the common good, they are advantageous, and beneficial*”

- what folly it is then to deny, disparage, or ignore these gifts!

(C) WE CANNOT BE CONTENT WITH A DISJOINTED CHURCH

(1) Notice that *tithemi* is in the middle voice = “*for his own special purpose God has placed ...*”

- to ignore any of God’s appointments is to thwart this divine purpose; therefore, note the two groups of ministries Paul says God has placed in the church “*for his own special purpose*”
- that purpose that will be frustrated if any of the divinely ordained gifts, ministries, or functions are rejected (vs. 28)

(2) So there are:

- those who depend upon careful planning and hard work; and
- those who depend upon supernatural revelation and divine action.

(3) Notice how carelessly Paul intertwines the natural and the supernatural, the earthly and the heavenly, the human and the divine

- he refuses to make any sharp distinctions between them; they are all vital to the good health of the church
- so there is a group of

(a) “natural” functions -

“*apostles, teachers, helpers, administrators*”

- some churches can be described wholly in these terms, which by themselves create only an arid intellectualism

- but there is also there is a group of
 - (b) “*supernatural*” functions -
“*prophets, healers, miracle-workers, glossolalists*”
- some churches can be wholly described in these terms, which create only a shallow emotionalism.

(4) Paul did not make the mistake of separating these functions from each other (as these notes have just done!)

- he mingled them easily, the natural with the supernatural, the miraculous with the mundane; he knew that unless they all flourished together the church would fail in its mission.

(5) To each is given his or her proper gift and/or function in the church (12:7-11), according to what kind of person we each are -

To one is given a word of wisdom,
to another (person of the same kind, *allos*) a word of knowledge,
to another (person of a different kind, *heteros*) faith,
to another (*allos*) gifts of healing,
to another (*allos*) working of miracles,
to another (*allos*) prophecy,
to another (*allos*) discerning of spirits,
to another (*heteros*) tongues,
to another (*allos*) interpretation of tongues.

- part of the secret of knowing what spiritual gifts you may rightly claim comes from honestly knowing yourself.

(D) WE CANNOT BE CONTENT WITH A DISORDERLY CHURCH

- Paul gives two important rules:

(1) “ALL THINGS DECENTLY AND IN ORDER”

- see *1 Corinthians 14:39-40* (and cp. the discredited practice of quietism, which abrogates human responsibility for giving direction to a worship service)
- he is seeking to control the *human* spirit, not the *Holy* Spirit (vs. 14-16)
- a great mystery lies here; but these sacred gifts *are* resident in us, and it places on us an awesome responsibility.

(2) THEY MUST ACHIEVE THEIR PURPOSE

- the glory of the charismata does not rest in the fact that they *exist*, but that they achieve their *purpose* in the church:

(a) THEIR PARTICULAR PURPOSE

- see *verses. 3,5*, from which we can conclude that they will not be:
 - *critical* (harsh, vindictive, condemnatory)
 - *negative* (failing to uplift and encourage the church)
 - *directive* (taking command over the choices of the people)
- the church must “*judge*” this (vs. 29).

(i) EXCURSUS: THE USE OF THE FIRST PERSON

- because prophecy and/or interpretation issue primarily out of the *human* spirit, and because they must be “*judged*”, it seems better to avoid the use of the first person.
- if someone gives (say) a prophecy as if God himself were speaking, then they arrogate an authority to their utterance that precludes the church from “*judging*” it
- after all, how can I presume to tell *God* that he is mistaken?
- so all prophecies, interpretations of tongues, words of knowledge, etc, should be spoken in a way that leaves the hearers free to assess for themselves whether or not these revelations come from God.

(ii) EXCURSUS: WOMEN PROPHECYING (vs. 34,35)

- no one really knows what Paul meant, or why; but notice that
- his prohibition is against married women asking questions; and
- he himself allowed women to prophesy (11:5), which had to be done in the church, subject to “*judgment*”, for the “*edifying*” of the church.

(b) THEIR GENERAL PURPOSE

- arising from the above, we can say that the charismata are given to
- equip the church to be the body of Christ; that is, enabling it to do and be as Jesus himself would if he were here in the flesh; and to
- draw us into a closer relationship with Christ (12:3)

(E) WE CANNOT BE CONTENT WITH A DISUNITED CHURCH

(1) The charismata must be used from a motive of love, and their effect will be to unite the church in love (1 Co 13).

(2) Thus Paul concludes his poem on “*Love*” with an encouragement of “*prophecy*” (14:1) . . .

(II) A PROPHEYSYING CHURCH

Just as love is the mark of an individual Christian (Jn 13:35), so “*prophecy*” is the mark of the Spirit-filled church (Ac 2:17-18). Prophecy is also the key to spontaneous growth (1 Co 14:24-25).

Note, however, that the very power of this gift makes it a special target of Satan, therefore special care must be taken in its use -

(A) PROPHECY SHOULD NOT COME FROM MERE IMPULSE

(1) See 12:1-2, “ ... *you know how, when you were still pagans, you were governed by impulse, doing whatever you were moved to do ...* ”

(2) Note that the hallmark of paganism is the loss of personal volition -

(a) That kind of automatism is not something we should desire in the church; yet many Christians feel that the pinnacle of happiness is indeed to “*lose*” oneself in the Lord, to be reduced to a state of spiritual catalepsy, prostrated in the Spirit, and the like.

(b) But do we really want to emulate those pagans who surrender to religious or emotional impulse; who do whatever they are “*moved*” by their god to do; who go wherever they are “*moved*” to go?

(c) It is sad to see many Christians craving such experiences, as though they represent the quintessence of spiritual maturity and piety.

(d) They do things just because they are “*led*” to do them; each prompting is to them like the voice of God, which must be instantly obeyed; they yearn to be “*taken over*” by the Spirit, to lose control, to lose self-awareness, to be “*slain*”, and the like.²⁷

(e) That does not mean that such experiences are necessarily wrong or evil; they may be powerful, pleasant, enriching; but you should recognise that they are not intrinsically or specifically a work of the Holy Spirit, especially if they require a loss of volition.

²⁷ Such phenomena, of course, are by no means limited to Pentecostals; they are part of the religious experience of mystics in all branches of the church, and also in the great non-Christian religions. For example, one of the greatest of the English Roman Catholic mystics was the illiterate, but very intelligent, Margery Kempe (c. 1373-c. 1440). Her experiences are described in her autobiography (which she dictated), [The Book Of Margery Kempe](#). In it she talks about falling into compulsive weepings, howlings, shoutings, laughings, and the like. Here is one of many similar passages: "She told him (*her amanuensis*) how sometimes the Father of Heaven conversed with her soul as plainly and as certainly as one friend speaks to another through bodily speech. Sometimes the Second Person in the Trinity, sometimes all Three Persons in Trinity and one substance in Godhead, spoke to her soul, and informed her in her faith and in his love - how she should love him, worship him, and dread him. ... Sometimes our Lady spoke to her mind; sometimes St Peter, sometimes St Paul, sometimes St Katherine, or whatever saint in heaven she was devoted to, appeared to her soul and taught her how she should love our Lord, and how she should please him. These conversations were so sweet, so holy and so devout, that often this creature could not bear it, but fell down and twisted and wrenched her body about, and made remarkable faces and gestures, with vehement sobbings and great abundance of tears, sometimes saying 'Jesus, mercy,' and sometimes, 'I die.'" (Tr. by B. A. Windeatt; Penguin Books, 1988; pg. 75.).

(3) By contrast, see *Galatians 5:22-23*. Note that one of the true marks of the presence of the Holy Spirit in a person's life is *self-control* (cp. *Ez 2:1-2; 3:23-24*)

- hence Paul insists that we must take personal responsibility for what is happening in our own spirits (*1 Co 14:32*).

(B) RECOGNISE THE FIVE LEVELS OF PROPHECY

Paul's language makes it clear that prophecy is a direct act of the *human* spirit, and only indirectly an act of the *Holy Spirit* (cp. again *1 Co 14:14*, "*my spirit prays ...*").

This means that a prophetic gift can function with or without the presence or power of the Holy Spirit - see *1 Corinthians 12:1; 13:2; Deuteronomy 13:1-3*.

Hence we can observe *five* possible levels of prophecy:

- that which is merely *concocted*: a piece of human invention or imagination.
- that which is *demon-inspired*: a lie planted in a willing mind.
- that which is *sincere*, but *wrong*: honestly spoken, but not inspired by the Holy Spirit; arising from a mere impulse or fancy.
- that which is apparently *true*, but *wrong*: an oracle can be true, yet not necessarily inspired by God.
- that which is truly wrought by the *Holy Spirit*.

(1) FOUR NECESSARY RULES

Because of the difficulty of keeping prophecy pure, an anti-charismatic party soon arose in the church (*1 Th 5:19-20*).

But we dare not lose our charismatic identity! So the following rules become imperative -

(a) Each prophet must remain under the authority of the church: any prophet who insists upon acting independently, or resents any kind of oversight, should be rejected as false.

(b) You must not surrender your liberty to any prophet. Beware of giving too much authority to any personal prophecy (cp. *Ez 22:28b*, "... *although the Lord has not spoken, they still say, 'This is the word of the Lord!'*") Listen to each oracle with respect, but then reserve an absolute right to decide for yourself how much heed you will give to it.

(c) Prophets should strive to "*excel*" (*Ro 12:6; 1 Co 14:12*).

(d) All prophecy must be subject to judgment (*14:29*); but note:

(2) OTHER PRINCIPLES TO OBSERVE

- Sometimes false prophecies may also be true (*De 13:1-5*); so the spiritual content of the prophecy, its spiritual effect, are also important (cp. also *1 Kg 22; Je 28; Mt 7:15-23; 1 Jn 4:1*).

- Sometimes a genuine prophecy, whether of blessing (Mi 3:9-12), or of judgment (Je 26:16-19), may be unfulfilled because certain conditions (whether stated or implied) are attached to it.
- Some prophecies involve a lesser and a greater fulfilment; e.g. many Messianic prophecies were first fulfilled in Israel, or in the Psalmist; many oracles about Israel's return from exile had only a partial historical fulfilment.
- Prophecy can be misunderstood; e.g. was it Paul or his companions who misunderstood the Spirit's intent? (Ac 20:22-25, 37-38; 21:4, 9-14).
- Prophecy can have an unexpected fulfilment (e.g. some of the Messianic prophecies; many prophecies dealing with Israel).
- Prophecy can be fulfilled in principle, but not in detail (e.g. many prophecies concerning Israel and the nations).

Even the best of prophets speak only "*in part ... (and) see through a dark glass*".

CONCLUSION

Continual prophecy is the glory of the church. It is the special sign of the new era of the Spirit. Let us then never quench nor grieve the Spirit. Let us rather fulfil *Romans 12:11*, never flagging in zeal, always aglow in the Spirit, serving the Lord in the full power of Pentecost until the day Jesus comes!

STUDY NINE

THE RESURRECTION

See 1 Corinthians 15:1-58.

See my book *The Cross and Crown* for an extensive commentary on the resurrection of the dead. Additional material can also be found in *When The Trumpet Sounds*.

STUDY TEN

GIVING

See 1 Corinthians 16:1-4

Paul encourages regular, cheerful, and generous giving, based primarily on the level of affluence each person has received from God.

The early church enjoined this apostolic doctrine upon the people. Here are just two examples, from a 4th century document called the *Apostolic Constitutions* -

For the Lord says to you in the Gospel: "*Unless your righteousness abound more than that of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall by no means enter into the kingdom of heaven! Now herein will your righteousness exceed theirs, if you take greater care of the priests, the orphans, and the widows ... So therefore shalt thou do as the Lord has appointed, and shalt give to the priest what things are due to him.*" (Bk 2, ch 35) . . . All the first fruits of the wine press, the threshing floor, the oxen, and the sheep, shalt thou give to the priests, that thy storehouses and garners and the products of thy land may be blessed, and thou mayest be strengthened with corn and wine and oil, and the herds of thy cattle and flocks of thy sheep may be increased. Thou shalt give the tenth of thy increase to the orphan, and to the widow, and to the poor, and to the stranger. All the first fruits of thy hot bread, of thy barrels of wine, or oil, or honey, or nuts, or grapes, or the first fruits of other things, shalt thou give to the priests; but those of silver, and of garments, and of all sorts of possessions, to the orphan and to the widow. (Bk VII, ch 29.)

(A) PURPOSE

(1) God-directed giving will be apportioned out -

- to the **church** (in tithes and offerings, Ma 3:10-11; Ro 12:13; Sir 7:29-31; 1 Co 9:9; 1 Ti 5:17-18;)
- to world-wide **missions** (in sacrificial offerings)
- to the **poor** (Ps 41:1-3; Pr 19:17).2.2.2)

(2) See 2 Corinthians 9:6-11a, and notice the same principle in Proverbs 3:9-10; 11:24-25.

(B) PLANTING

- See *2 Corinthians 9:6*.

(1) You can trust the laws of the harvest. But note -

- They are not based on bargaining with God, but on his promise. So you should ask God what he wants you to give.
- Yet many people are reluctant to do this, because they are sure God will ask them to give more than they are willing to surrender

(2) But note the following principles:

(a) It is *foolish* to give *less* than God demands, because he will in any case eventually get what he wants, plus a “*late*” penalty (cp. Le 27:14-30, and other similar references, where the law of God insisted that the promised sum must be paid, plus an increment of 20 per cent, which was imposed as compensation for withholding the original oblation).

(b) It is *unnecessary* to give *more* than God wants. You cannot increase the blessing of God in your life merely by giving more money, any more than a farmer can increase his harvest merely by jamming more seed into the same piece of earth

- indeed, too much seed may jeopardise his entire crop; thus God says, “*I prefer obedience to sacrifice*” (1 Sa 15:22).

(3) Recognise the normal delay between sowing and reaping.

(4) This law will function for as long as earth lasts (Ge 8:22).

(C) PRUDENCE

- see *2 Corinthians 9:7*

(1) Paul shows we should *not* give:

- *reluctantly*
- *compulsively*
- *impulsively*

(2) Then he shows how we should give:

- *decisively* (“make up your mind”)
- *prudently* (“according to a plan”)
- *cheerfully* (“the kind God loves”)

(3) Thus you will gain satisfaction (not satiation), and a quality of God himself.

(D) POWER

- see *2 Corinthians 9:8*

(1) Does it seem *foolish* to give?

- then mark this: “*God has POWER (dunamis) to make every gift abound to you!*”
- and note how that most extravagant promise of *divine* giving sits in a context of joyful giving by the *Christian*.

(2) Does it seem *sterile* to give?

- consider how dead a seed looks, yet how much life is hidden there!
- likewise, there may not be much drama or apparent energy attached to our regular giving, but faith sees the promised harvest!

(E) PIETY

- see 2 *Corinthians* 9:9
- giving defines a righteous person - lavish in generosity
- see *Psalms* 112:9; and note also *verses* 1-3.

Illustration: in the early decades of this century, Prince Ibn Saud of Arabia waged a series of successful battles against the Turks and carved out the nation of Saudi Arabia, of which (in 1932) he became the first king. Many years later, when his throne was firmly established, a friend presented the king with the gift of a fine grey horse. Ibn Saud was delighted, and resolved to reward his friend in turn. He called for the book in which he recorded all such boons, and against the name of the donor of the horse he began to write “300 riyals” - a sum much in excess of the value of the animal. But as he was writing, his pen spluttered, and threw a series of small blobs along the line, which in Arabic turned the sum into 300,000 riyals. The grand vizier, standing by, drew his lord’s attention to the mistake. But Ibn Saud refused to correct it. He said: “My pen has clearly stated 300,000 riyals, so that is what you must pay. My hand wrote it, and I cannot allow anyone to say that my hand is more generous than my heart!”

(F) PROFUSION

- see 2 *Corinthians* 9:10-11

“*You will be made rich in every way, so that you can be generous on every occasion!*”

- Here is an unequivocal promise of financial prosperity!
- If it is not working for you, then the reason may be:
 - you have not “sown” richly enough
 - you have not “watered” the seed with unshakeable trust
 - you have not waited long enough for the harvest to ripen.

CONCLUSION

You should realise that God is really not interested in your *money* (Ps 50:9-15); but he is deeply interested in *you*. He wants you to give, not for his sake, not because he needs your money, but for your sake, because you need to give in order to perfect your own character. Giving is a tool that the Lord uses to bring you to maturity, to work righteousness in you, to develop tougher faith.

So God wants you to be generous on every occasion; yet to do that you must also be enriched in every way. So stir up your faith. Sow your seed. Water it. And wait with joy for the sure harvest!

FINAL COMMENTS

See 1 Corinthians 16:5-21.