

1 Corinthians: An Expositional-Devotional Study (Selected Texts)

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This study will focus on the issues that Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians. We will attempt to better understand what and why Paul wrote in order to better handle these same issues pastorally in our own church situation.

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A Quick Introduction to 1 Corinthians

1. The letter was probably written about A. D. 54-56 from Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey.
2. Corinth was the capital city of the Roman province of Achaia. Paul had planted a church there during his second missionary journey a few years earlier.
3. The letter was written in response to reports Paul received about the situation in the Corinthian church, including a letter Paul received from that church.
4. Paul wrote to correct some issues in the church.
5. This letter records Paul's third dealing with this church:
 - 1st dealing—when Paul founded the church in Acts 18.
 - 2nd dealing—when Paul wrote the “previous letter” from Ephesus (1 Cor 5:9) to address some problems of immorality (letter now lost).
 - 3rd dealing—when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to answer a letter brought to him (1 Cor 16:17).
 - This letter was probably about how the Corinthians regarded Paul's views in the “previous letter”. They probably disagreed very strongly with Paul.
6. The key point of disagreement between Paul and the church seems to be this question—“What does it mean to be spiritual?”
 - The Corinthians believed they were already as spiritual as angels as they were even speaking the language of heaven (i.e. tongues).

I. Divisions in the Church (1 Cor 1-4)

1. Paul's Greetings (1:1-9)

1.1 Paul began by describing the Corinthians as "sanctified" and "called to be holy" (v. 2).

- When people looked at them, they were supposed to see Christ at work in and through the Corinthians.
- When people look at the Church today, do they see Christ or do they see crisis?

1.2 Paul was thankful for many things (vv. 4-7).

- The Corinthians
- Their speaking
- Their knowledge
- Their spiritual gifts

1.3 But there were also issues for Paul to deal with (vv. 8-9).

- The people had abused the good things that God had blessed them with.
- However, he rejoiced in what God had done in spite of the problems.
- What can you be thankful of in your church in spite of certain problems?

1.4 The issues identified:

- There were divisions in the church.
 - quarrels and jealousy (1:11; 3:3)
 - divisions in the name of leaders (1:12)
 - boasting about human leaders (3:21; 4:6)
 - desire to be popular often leads to divisions in church (e.g. rivalry in multi-staff setting; comparison with previous leader)
- There was an unfriendly attitude towards Paul.
 - He was not wise (1:17; 2:1, 4-5).
 - He treated the people like "spiritual babies" and gave them "milk", but they wanted to be treated as "spiritual adults" (3:1, 2).

2. Paul's Answer (I) [1:10-3:4]

2.1 They were wrong to "follow Paul" (vv. 10-17).

- Paul did not save them; neither did Peter or Apollos.
- Paul did not save them, but he did preach the Gospel to them.
- Christ alone saves! They were baptized into the new life in Christ.

2.2 They were wrong to view the Gospel with human wisdom (vv. 18-25).

- The Cross of Jesus Christ is foolish in human eyes.
 - Why must an innocent man die?
 - How can a helpless man help/save others?

- Why is the Cross a stumbling block to the Jews?—the one hung is cursed by God (Deut 21:22-23).
 - But the Cross of Jesus Christ is God's wisdom.
- 2.3 They were wrong to boast before God (vv. 26-31).
- The people were lowly in the eyes of this world (who would have chosen them?)
 - Paul corrected their boasting about themselves.
 - It was God who had chosen and gifted them. God did it all.
 - God gave them their right standing before Him—it's not because of their greatness, but all because of God's grace.
 - If we want to boast, we boast in the Lord—we boast about God and not ourselves (v. 31).
 - In our successes and victories, we don't talk big about ourselves but we talk big about God—we tell others where God is in our life and give glory to Him.
- 2.4 They were wrong to rest faith on human eloquence (2:1-5).
- Paul lacked appearance and eloquence of the other travelling preachers.
 - But God's work was done—a church was founded among the Corinthian believers.
 - Paul said he preached with a “demonstration of the Spirit's power” (v. 4).
 - When we prepare to speak, it's as if everything rests on us (diligence). But when we stand to speak, it's as if everything rests on the Holy Spirit (dependence).
 - Therefore it is “not on man's wisdom, but on God's power” (v. 5)—it is all about God and not the preacher (e.g. substitute preacher for Henry Beecher the noted American preacher was snubbed when he stood up to preach).
- 2.5 They lacked wisdom from the Spirit (2:6-10).
- Paul said that if his message of the Cross had no wisdom in the minds of the intellectuals and “rulers” of his time, it was because they tried to understand from a human point of view.
 - Paul stressed that his message was indeed rich and powerful.
 - Only the spiritually mature ones would be able to understand the wisdom in his message.
 - The source of their ability to understand the Cross as God's wisdom came not from men, but from the Spirit.
- 2.6 They were behaving as if they didn't have the Spirit (2:11-3:4).
- Paul stated that only the Spirit alone knows the thoughts of God.
 - Believers have received the Spirit.
 - The Cross appears foolish to those without the Spirit.
 - Paul said that believers who misjudged his message of the Cross (and other truths in God's Word) were like unbelievers who didn't have the Spirit in them.

- As believers, we need to pray for spiritual discernment as we see and hear many things today—to ask and allow the Spirit to help us know and understand what is true and what is false.
 - Such discernment is cultivated more than taught (e.g. spending time to commune with God; feeding our mind on the things of God). [illustration: recognizing voice of a good friend speaking in a room when many people seem to be talking at the same time]
 - Paul charged the Corinthians for acting like people without the Spirit—they were worldly (of the flesh) because of their jealousy and quarrelling.
 - If they considered Paul’s message not “spiritual” for them, it was because they viewed it from a worldly perspective.
 - Paul said in 2:15 that “the spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment.” He’s telling us that the godly man is one who sees all things (even himself) from God’s point of view. How God sees us is more important than how others see us (or even how we see ourselves).
 - One main reason why Christians of many years look down on spiritual truths is because they have become too familiar with these truths. They have heard them so often and for so long that they no longer consider these as great and timeless truths anymore. They want to hear something new, something fresh, something that will give them a new excitement.
 - How spiritual you are is not based on how much truth you have known or heard, but how much you have applied even the little you have known or heard.
 - Can a Christian be worldly?
 - Jesus says that we are in the world, but we are not of the world (i.e. we do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit).
 - Paul said to the Corinthians (and to us today) that fleshly character and conduct is not for the Christian because that is against the way and will of the Spirit in him.
3. Main Idea: When we use human wisdom to understand and practice our faith, we can become divided as a church.
4. Principles:
- 4.1 The church must be loyal only to Jesus Christ and not to any man.
 - 4.2 Divisions in the church are against what the Gospel teaches—that we are all one in Jesus Christ.
 - 4.3 God can use people whom the world considers weak and foolish to do His work.

4.4 The Gospel is divinely powerful to win the lost without using worldly wisdom. (illustration: conversion of my best friend who tried to ask very intellectual questions about the Gospel)

4.5 We are dependent on God's Spirit to reveal His truths to us.

5. Question:

What is one thing that can divide the church, and if you are a church leader, how do you deal with it?

6. Paul's Answer (II) [3:5-23]

6.1 A review of the situation in Corinth

- There were factions in the name of certain leaders.
- The Gospel was turned into a kind of human wisdom and not God's message.
- There was a serious misunderstanding of the role of leaders.
- Paul now tried to get the people to see their leaders as servants and not superstars. He also tried to get them to recognize him as an apostle.

6.2 How the church should view their leaders

- Leaders are servants (vv. 5-9).
 - They are servants of Jesus Christ, NOT paid employees or past-time volunteers of the church.
 - To say "I follow Apollos" is to act as if salvation comes from men.
 - The church should regard their leaders as servants assigned by God to their work.
 - They do with one purpose—to build up the church (but it is God who actually brings the growth).
 - Everything belongs to God, both the church and the leaders.
 - Leaders should not be "worshipped" as if they are God.
 - They are only God's fellow workers in that God calls them into a partnership with Him and uses them in His work, but they are not on the same level with God.
- The church is God's field and building (vv. 10-15).
 - Paul planted and laid the foundation of the Corinthian church.
 - Apollos and the other teachers watered and built on this foundation.
 - There's a season for each leader in the life of the church—one must know when he has finished God's season for him and then moves on (i.e. do not hold on to the position when one's time is up).
 - The field and building is the church.
 - God is the owner and He calls the builders to accountability.
 - Paul was making the point that those who would come after him must build the church with care.

- Fire is coming to test the quality of each builder's work.
- If the worker has built well, the church will stand and he receives his reward.
- If he builds poorly, his work will be destroyed.
- Gold, silver, costly stones represent good building materials; wood, hay and straw represent poor ones.
- God rewards because He judges the quality of each builder's work (v. 14) and thus, we are to serve Him with our best not so much for the rewards, but because of our love for Him (i.e. reward is not the motivation, but the result of our faithful service as God blesses us by His grace).
- But what is this reward—praise of “well done” from God (4:5)?
- We cannot be sure, but we must be sure that our real motivation for working well for God is to glorify Him.
- Even if we are rewarded, it is still God's grace and not man's merit because God owes no one.
- The point: Build the church well.
- The church is God's sacred temple (vv. 16-17).
 - Division can destroy the church.
 - But the church is so important to God that He will destroy the one who destroys the church.
 - The church is God's sacred temple because His Spirit lives in it (like the Holy of Holies in the OT temple).
 - Beware of hurting the church because of personal interest.
- Boasting about man is foolishness to God (vv. 18-23).
 - Paul said that boasting about what men had done instead of what Christ had done on the Cross (crucified Christ) was not wisdom, but foolishness to God.
 - To say “I belong to Paul ...” is foolishness because all things belong to God and are given by Him as gifts to the church (even gifted preachers and teachers).
 - So, Paul changed their shout from “I belong to Paul” to “Paul belongs to you”—i.e. to think of their leaders as servants of God and not as masters of people.

7. Paul's Answer (III) [4:1-21]

- Paul spoke strongly to the Corinthians as their apostle and spiritual father.
- Yet, Paul reminded the church again that he and the other leaders should be regarded as “servants” of Christ (vv. 1-5).
 - The word “servants” (*huperetes*) in v. 1 is only used here in all of Paul's letters.
 - It refers to those slaves at the bottom of ancient warship whose work is to row the ship (“under-rowers”).



Picture of ancient Roman battleship with three tiers of rowers. The under-rowers (*huperetes*) are those in the lowest tier

(<https://tucker4cc.wordpress.com/2015/12/16/are-you-a-willing-under-rower>)

- Also, Paul said that he and the others were servants entrusted with certain responsibilities by God.
- God was their Heavenly Master and He expected them to be found faithful (v. 2).
- We are to be faithful in what God has called us to do.
- Since God is the one who causes the growth (not us), it is Him who will bring in the fruit.
- Those who are faithful are not always fruitful, but they certainly desire to be always fruitful.
- Paul said that he cared very little about how he would be judged by others, and even by himself.
- He said that only God could judge him because He's the Master and only He knew the heart of man.
- We are to be faithful in what God has called us to do with a pure heart because there will be a day of final, personal accountability before God.
- It will be hard to please everybody every time. Some people may see it as their duty to make us feel guilty no matter how hard we try. But we are to be faithful to God and not to their opinions (illustration: see only small cross [small mistake] on large piece of paper [big achievement]).
- Paul spoke against taking pride in one man over and against another (vv. 6-13).
 - The Corinthians had become proud spiritually—they thought they already had all they wanted spiritually because God had so completely blessed them spiritually (v. 8—"Already you have all you want!").
 - Paul hinted that the Corinthians didn't think too well of him now—he didn't live up to their expectations based on of their spiritual maturity (in reality, their spiritual pride).
 - Paul was no longer spiritual in their judgment of him now.

- He was regarded as weak physically, and lacking in eloquence and wisdom.
- He didn't even accepted financial support from them because according to them, he knew he was not good enough for that.
- In other words, Paul didn't look/act like a worthy apostle from their point of view.
- Paul defended himself by saying that though he might look foolish to them, but God was getting His work done through his "foolishness".
- He was like a loser on parade—in v. 9, he pictured a Roman conqueror marching and showing off his POWs in a long line for his people to make fun of them.



Captives being paraded in the victory procession of a Roman conqueror

(https://www.google.com/search?q=roman+captives+in+procession&tbm=isch&chips=q:roman+captives+in+procession,online_chips:roman+victory+parade:yag4sKLL-lc%3D&rlz=1C1CHZN_enSG999SG999&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjyqTv8Nb3AhWfjtgFHVz-BwYQ4IYoA3oECAEQJA&biw=1263&bih=577#imgcr=o9ifgSVPuouinM&imgdii=o55KCPxsZDPYyM)

- But Paul said that he was willing to be a fool for Christ's sake.
- In fact, Christ too looked foolish and like a loser on His way to the Cross, but He was completely faithful to God and finished what God called Him to do.
- Paul appealed to the Corinthians as their spiritual father (vv. 14-21).
 - He urged them to imitate him in v. 16.
 - Imitate what? Imitate his "way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church" (v.

17b). Imitate his integrity—his teaching and doing agree with each other (he walked his talk).

- Some were like disobedient children and causing a lot of hurt in the church.
- They thought Paul would not return to them, but Paul said that he would.
- However, he asked whether they would want him to come with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit—“Do you want me to come to you like an angry father or a kind father?”

8. Main Idea: When we use human wisdom to understand and practice our faith, we can end up treating gifted men as superstars and not servants of God.

9. Principles:

9.1 God loves His church and He lives in its midst—it is His holy temple.

9.2 Christian leaders must be humble servants of God no matter how successful they are in ministry.

9.3 All believers in the church deserve dignity and respect from one another.

9.4 Christian leaders are responsible before God to be faithful in their ministry, and their teaching must agree with their living.

10. Question:

If you are church leader, what are some examples of humility that you can show to your people?

II. Church Discipline and Lawsuits (1 Cor 5:1-6:11)

1. Incest in the Church (5:1-13)

1.1 A man was having an immoral relationship with his father's wife.

- Some think that she was his step-mother and not his biological mother.
- Paul viewed this as a sinful, immoral relationship.
- Both Jews (Lev 18:8; 20:11) and Gentiles had laws against such a relationship.
- But the church was proud—proud of their tolerance; proud of their spiritual freedom (free in Christ even to sin).
- The church did not do anything to correct it, and Paul had to say something against it.

1.2 Paul made a tough stand against it (vv. 1-5).

- He rebuked the church for not being filled with grief.
- He “sentenced” the man to be put out of church fellowship, and instructed the church to gather and carry out this sentence (v. 2).
- Paul probably knew that this person would remain unrepentant after hearing all the reports concerning him, especially since the affair was already known by all in the church.
- Paul made some hard sayings in v. 5:
 - He told the church to hand the man “over to Satan”.
 - One way to understand this is to take it to mean getting him out of God's temple (the church) and into the world outside where Satan rules.
 - The purpose for this is two-fold:
 - So that his “sinful nature may be destroyed”—i.e. he would learn “not to blaspheme (dishonour the Spirit with his words and actions)” [1 Tim 1:20]. Thus, it is not death of the body, but death of an unrepentant heart.
 - So that he would be “saved on the day of the Lord”—i.e. the goal of church discipline is to lead the man to repentance so that he could be restored back to fellowship and continue his Christian life until the return of the Lord.
- Church discipline is for sins that truly affect the life and purity of the whole church community.
- We must be careful so that we don't become judgmental with people even over little things. We are talking here about acting against a serious sin (“a kind that does not occur even among the pagans”—v. 1).
- The motive of love is most important in church discipline—love God (concern for His holiness), love the church (concern for its purity), and love the sinner (concern for his spiritual restoration).

1.3 Paul warned that a little evil (“yeast”) could produce big trouble if not checked (vv. 6-8).

- In the OT, God’s people took the Passover meal eating the Passover lamb and bread without yeast.
- The church today remembers Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world during our partaking of the Lord’s Supper.
- Paul linked “yeast” with “evil and wickedness” in v. 8.
- Paul was very likely telling the Corinthians to observe their Lord’s Supper without the “yeast” (the immoral man) in their midst—“Get rid of the old yeast” because they were now a new people “without yeast” in Jesus Christ (v. 7).
- The church would be in danger of being corrupted if the immoral man was allowed to remain and even to join them in the Lord’s Supper.
- The key problem seems to be that the Corinthians considered themselves as so spiritual that nothing could corrupt them—this is the problem of spiritual pride (common cause of fall of many spiritual leaders).

1.4 Paul stressed the importance of guarding the purity of the church (vv. 9-13).

- Generally speaking, Christians are free to associate with others when outside the church, even with unbelievers (“people of this world”—v. 10). Otherwise, we may “have to leave this world”—v. 10).
- But for a person who calls himself a Christian but is living in serious sin intentionally and unrepentantly, Paul says that we should not have any fellowship with him in church, even excluding him from the Lord’s Supper (“with such a man do not even eat”—v. 11).

2. Main Idea: God wants His people in the church to keep themselves pure as a person and as a body.

3. Principles:

3.1 Sexual immorality (e.g. adultery, homosexuality, and fornication) is a sin.

3.2 We dishonour our own body which is the temple of God when we commit sexual sin.

3.3 The church has the authority and responsibility to exercise godly church discipline.

4. Question:

What are some examples of loving the sinner but hating his sin?

5. Issue of Lawsuits (6:1-11)

5.1 Why Paul was disturbed by the lawsuits among the Corinthian Christians (vv. 1-6)

- Paul was disturbed because these were over small matters (“trivial”—v. 2).
- Paul was disturbed because the Corinthians were bringing their disputes into the public courts (“in front of unbelievers”—v. 6) when they could settle matters in the church.
- Paul said that they should be ashamed that they didn’t trust in the godly wisdom of the church to settle their differences but had to rely on the wisdom of earthly courts. In fact, in those days, only the rich could afford lawsuits, and the courts generally would take side with the one who’s rich and not the one who’s right.
- For believers to go to the earthly courts was not good for the spirit of Christian community and a bad witness before those outside the church (e.g. FEBC vs. Life BP).

5.2 Why Paul called on the Corinthians to be willing to suffer wrong (vv. 7-11)

- To be willing to suffer wrong in this life only makes sense because our hope in the Kingdom of God is sure—God will settle all wrongs and make all things right at the final judgment.
- Those who live according to the ways of Satan would have no share in God’s Kingdom.
- Paul said to the Corinthians—“Don’t be like these sinners!”
- Paul called on the church to live out the new life in Jesus Christ. He reminded them that “they were washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (v. 11).

6. Main Idea: Christians are to settle their differences among themselves and not bring these out to the world as this is a bad witness for Jesus Christ.

7. Principles:

7.1 Christians are more able than unbelievers to judge and settle their differences with godly wisdom.

7.2 Christians have a new identity in Jesus Christ and this requires godly behaviour before unbelievers.

8. Three Purposes of Church Discipline

8.1 Restoration

- Jesus said that if the one who sins against you listens to you, “you have won your brother over” (Matt 18:15).
- Paul called the church to forgive, comfort and extend their love for the person disciplined (2 Cor 2:7-8).

- So church discipline is not to punish, destroy or humiliate the person, but to restore him so that he can again experience God's love through the body of believers.
- There should be support structures in the church to help the sinner even before actions are taken against him—i.e. church support rather than church discipline should be the 1st course of action.

8.2 Purity of the church

- Sin does not only affect the sinner because it can affect others as well.
- That's why Paul called the Corinthians to expel the wicked man out of the church so that the purity of the church would be protected.

8.3 Public warning

- When church discipline is exercised openly, it can serve as a public warning to all.
- People will think twice before doing the same thing.
- Paul asked Timothy to rebuke openly those who sinned so that others might be warned (1 Tim 5:20).

9. Why Church Discipline is Difficult

9.1 It is not regarded as training in godly living.

- The Lord used gentle words and hard sayings to train His disciples.
- The training of God's people includes corrective church discipline if and when necessary.

9.2 It is regarded as threatening a person's freedom and privacy.

- People often think they are free to do their own thing without others controlling them because they have personal rights.
- But no Christian lives alone because he is a part of the body of believers.
- So all believers in the body have a responsibility to build up one another.
- It is not only God and me; but God, me and others.

9.3 It is shameful to expose and confront another person.

- The holiness of God cannot be mixed with the sinfulness of man.
- Yet God loves the sinner though He hates the sin.
- Sharing of failures and confronting of sins will be easier if there is a spirit of love.
- We will then feel more open to share our struggles with sin and to gently correct one another in a spirit of love ("speak the truth in love"—Eph 4:15).
- Again, the goal is not to destroy the person but to restore him in a spirit of God's love.

9.4 It will make people leave the church.

- The church must not only be concerned about numbers.

- If sin is not dealt with, the church will become weaker and not stronger no matter how big it is (like a cancerous growth). [not so much building big churches, but building healthy churches]

10. Cases Calling for Church Discipline

10.1 Divisiveness that destroys church unity.

- “If anyone destroys God’s temple (church), God will destroy him ...” (1 Cor 3:16-17).

10.2 Immorality that breaks Christian standard.

- Paul listed a number of immoral behaviours in 1 Cor 6:9-10.

10.3 False teaching that opposes Christian doctrine.

- Paul asked Titus to hold firmly to the Word so that he could encourage others with sound doctrine and refute those who opposed it (Titus 1:9).

11. Implementing Church Discipline in Church

11.1 Include church discipline in the church constitution.

- This is to let people know and agree to, and to protect the church from legal action. Should a lawsuit be filed, go for an out-of-court settlement because the goal is not to win but to be reconciled (it is also not good witness).
- Spell out the beliefs of the church in this, specify the steps, and provide the reasons from the Bible.
- Keep confidentiality so that information can be protected and not told to those who need not know. If information must be announced openly, do not say more than what’s necessary—e.g. no need to let people know the exact nature of the sin (protect privacy and ensure love).
- Do not publicize the case outside the church. But may need to inform another church if it requests a letter of membership transfer on behalf of the sinner.

11.2 Preach and teach on the church stand regarding certain sins.

- This is to preach and teach in anticipation of crisis so that people will know what the church stand is even before the problem arises.
- And no one will feel threatened when the topic is preached or taught at such a time—e.g. family-month series.

11.3 Encourage openness and love in the church family.

- Use small groups that meet regularly to help people share, encourage and correct one another openly and lovingly.
- “Wounds of a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses” (Pro 27:6). A sinner is more open to be corrected by a true friend who has been supportive and whom he trusts would confront out of love.

12. Using the Four Steps in Matt 18

12.1 Step 1: Private

- Jesus said in Matt 18:15 to go and show the sinning brother his fault. This means to point him away from his sin.
- The first step is not to tell everyone publicly but to speak to that person privately and gently so that he can come to repentance.

12.2 Step 2: Group

- If a private meeting does not work, the sinner will be confronted by a small group of respected leaders (disciplinary committee) so that there will be two or three witnesses now (Matt 18:16).
- There may be many private and group meetings before going to the next step.

12.3 Step 3: Public

- When repeated attempts at steps 1 and 2 have failed, more in the church (e.g. key leaders) are told of the case.
- The decision to tell it to the whole church or some key leaders must be made very prayerfully. While the welfare of the whole church is more important than the privacy of that one person, we should not expose him to unnecessary shame as well.
- If the person should repent, then every attempt must be made to help him go through a process of spiritual rehabilitation and restoration.

12.4 Step 4: Out of fellowship

- When all attempts to bring the person to repentance fail, the church then regards him like a “pagan and tax collector” (Matt 18:17). This means the person is treated like an unbeliever because he is not living like a believer (thus, we don’t allow him to take the Lord’s Supper just as we don’t ask an unbeliever to take it).
- However, this also means we keep on loving him just as Jesus Himself loved the pagans and tax collectors. We continue to reach out to him in love even though we don’t fellowship with him in church as he is out of it.

13. Restoring the Sinner

13.1 Putting the person out of church fellowship should not be the final thing.

13.2 The church must continue to reach out to him in God’s love—continue to counsel him.

13.3 Should the person repents one day, he must be given time to prove that he is true and sincere.

13.4 If he is proven to be true and sincere, the church must restore him back to fellowship publicly just as he was put out of fellowship publicly.

13.5 Sometimes, such a person may not be able to go back to his previous ministry, especially if he is a leader.

- 13.6 For his own good and that of the church, it may be better for him to serve in another place.
- 13.7 The restoring church should then give a strong word of support for him so that he can start afresh in the new place.

III. Honouring God in Marriage and Singlehood (1 Cor 7)

1. To the Already Married or Have Been Married (vv. 1-24)

1.1 The problem: “It is good for a man not to marry” (v. 1).

- Literally, it is “Not to touch a woman.”
- “Touch” here is used to mean “have sexual relations” (see Gen 20:6; Pro 6:29).
- It is about not having sexual relations even for two persons married to each other.
- But these were the words of the Corinthians and not of Paul. Some among them thought it was good not to have sexual relations even in marriage.
- Why did they come to such a position?
- Perhaps, some of them believed this way—“Since the body is evil, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with this wife. To so abstain is to be more spiritual before God.”

1.2 Paul said that to stop sexual relations in marriage was not correct (vv. 1-7).

- He said—“The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband” (v. 3). Should they stop sexual relations, it should only be for a time (e.g. prayer) and agreed by both (v. 5).
- Paul was single (unmarried) at the time of writing (see v. 8). But he probably had married before because Jewish men were instructed in the Mishnah (written record of the Jewish oral traditions) to marry and have children. But at time of writing, Paul was single either because his wife had died or had left him because of his change of faith.
- Paul said in v. 7—“I wish that all men were as I am” (i.e. single like him at that time).
- The real reason why he said this is not because he had a low opinion of marriage. The real reasons are found in vv. 29-35 (we will look at them later).
- However, Paul added that people were gifted by God differently. So, each one must consider how God had gifted him even in the matter of getting married or remaining single (v. 7). [I married late at age 37—my own struggle]

1.3 Paul then advised those not married at that time (vv. 8-9).

- These were people who had never been married or had lost their life partners.
- Some in the church seemed to be arguing that these unmarried ones should not think of getting married or remarried at all.
- Paul mentioned widows (women whose husbands had died) in v. 8. In the ancient world, the man acts as a “cover” to protect the woman. If the man dies, the woman loses that cover of protection, and can be easily taken advantage of in many ways.

- Though Paul said in v. 8 that “it is good for them (unmarried and widows) to stay unmarried”, he also encouraged that “they should marry” if they could not control themselves in v. 9. “It is better to marry than to burn with passion”—very practical and common-sense advice indeed!
- Actually, the word in v. 9 is only “to burn”. But it is not wrong to understand it to mean “to burn with passion” (as in NIV) because of what Paul is teaching here.

1.4 Paul moved on to advise those who were married concerning divorce (vv. 10-11).

- Those in the church who claimed that “it is good for people not to have sexual relations even in marriage” might have also said that divorce was a way to stop having such relations with the other person.
- But Paul spoke against divorce because of the teaching of Jesus (“not I, but the Lord”—see Mark 10:11-12).
- Should divorce happen, Paul also said that the divorced wife must either remain unmarried or be reconciled to her former husband (i.e. marry him again).
- Paul was speaking to women because it seems that the ones who were encouraging divorce in order to remain spiritual were the women. This could be the reason why some men might be going to prostitutes (see 6:16).

1.5 Paul advised one last group—“the rest” (vv. 12-16).

- He first clarified that he was telling them something not based on any of Jesus’ teachings here—“I, not the Lord” (v. 12).
- He told the believing person not to use “spiritual” excuses to divorce the unbelieving partner.
- However, if the unbelieving partner should insist on divorce, Paul told the believing person to let him/her go (note that it is the unbelieving partner that initiates divorce).
- The believing person would then be “not bound” to the unbeliever as a life partner (v. 15).
- The call of Paul is for the believer to “live in peace” (v. 15)—i.e. to accept whatever the situation may be (to live with an unbeliever or to let the partner go if he/she insists).
- The “mixed marriages” came about because many Corinthian couples were not Christians when they were first married, but one of them was converted at a later time.
- Paul said that the believing person “sanctifies” the unbelieving partner and children—i.e. they were set apart as objects of God’s love through the witness of the believer (vv. 14-15).
- By holding on to the marriage, the believing person became a witness for Christ, and the unbelieving partner and children had opportunities at home to be reached out for the Lord (v. 16).

- Some Corinthians felt that it was alright to divorce an unbelieving partner so that the believer could be “spiritual”.

1.6 Paul laid down a guiding principle (vv. 17-24).

- “Each should keep the status in life that the Lord has called him/her” (vv. 17, 20, 24).

2. To the Never Before Married (vv. 25-40)

2.1 Paul addressed a new problem here (vv. 25-35).

- There seemed to be a special class of women in the church who were thinking of ending their engagement to be married in order to remain “spiritual”.
- Though Paul agreed that it would be better for them to remain unmarried, he didn’t agree with their reasoning.
- Yes Paul preferred singlehood, but he stressed that it was not the only calling in life for all people. He believed that marriage was a calling of God for some people as well.
- He gave two personal reasons why he would prefer singlehood:
 - His personal belief that “time is short” (v. 29)—i.e. Christ would come again soon—and “this world in its present form is passing away” (v. 31). Thus, people should not be too engaged in the things and concerns of this life. Instead, they should be concerned about the things of eternity.
 - His personal experience taught him that he could be free to devote all his time and energy to the Lord’s work without being troubled by the cares and concerns of marriage (vv. 32-35).

2.2 Paul concluded that both marriage and singlehood were different callings of God for different people (vv. 36-40).

- Paul said that a widow (or widower) would be free to marry again, but he believed she would be happier by remaining unmarried.
- However, should she decide to marry again, the command here is to remarry a believer—“belong to the Lord” (v. 39).
- Though Paul would prefer singlehood, he saw no sin if one decided to marry.
- The NIV puts v. 38 this way—“He who marries the virgin does right”—referring to the bridegroom.
 - Some translations say (e.g. NASB): “He who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well”—referring to the bride’s father.
 - The word “daughter” is not in the original Greek. The original Greek word is “gamizo”.
 - In classical Greek, “gamizo” means “to give in marriage” (referring to the bride’s father) and

“gameo” means “to marry” (referring to the bridegroom).

- In NT times, koine Greek replaced classical Greek and the distinction between “gamizo” and “gameo” had disappeared, i.e. both could be taken to mean “to marry” (referring to the bridegroom)—see “The First Epistle to the Corinthians”, Revised Edition (The New International Commentary on the New Testament) by Gordon Fee.

3. Main Ideas:

3.1 Most people are called to marry, but singlehood is a valid call of God for some. Thus, single people are not second-class people in church.

3.2 Divorce is never encouraged in the Bible.

4. Principles:

4.1 Sex in marriage guards against marital unfaithfulness.

4.2 Marriage is a covenant (not a contract) and sacred to God.

4.3 God does hate divorce, but He does not hate divorced people (Mal 2:16).

4.4 Same-faith marriage pleases God.

5. Applications:

5.1 Keep healthy sexual relationships in marriage.

5.2 Work hard at keeping the marriage together even in the most difficult circumstances, especially for the Christian.

5.3 Treat divorced people with compassion and not with condemnation.

5.4 Choose to marry one who is a believer.

6. Dealing with Divorce and Remarriage

6.1 There are four ways to view divorce and remarriage biblically:

- One: No divorce, no remarriage.
- Two: Divorce on grounds of marital unfaithfulness, but no remarriage.
- Three: Divorce and remarriage on grounds of adultery and desertion only.
- Four: Divorce and remarriage on various grounds because of God's grace.

6.2 The church can respond to divorce and remarriage by way of ...

- Agreeing that human sin has frequently led to marital failure.
- Agreeing that divorce is a violation of God's intention because of hardness of human heart, leading to people trying to blame one another (i.e. there is no one completely “innocent” party).
- Agreeing that marital failure, regardless of reasons, leaves the family broken and wounded.

- Agreeing that the church needs to provide healing and discipleship for all cases of marital failure.
- Agreeing that persons who have experienced marital failure have not committed the unpardonable sin, and thus may remarry with the Lord's blessing and provided that:
 - They have identified and owned up to how they have contributed to the breakup.
 - They have repented of the wrong on their part.
 - They have experienced healing for their wounds and transforming grace that empowers them to have healthy relationships.
 - They intend to marry in the Lord and honour God's intention for their marriage henceforth.

IV. Idol Food (1 Cor 8; 10:14-33)

1. Identifying the Problem

1.1 Idol worship in Corinth

- Serapis
 - This is a Greco-Egyptian god invented during the 3rd century BC on the orders of Ptolemy I of Egypt as a means to unify the Greeks and Egyptians. This god was used to signify abundance and resurrection.
- Apollo
 - This is a multi-talented Greek god of prophecy, music, intellect, healing, and plague.
- Aphrodite
 - This is the Greek goddess of beauty, love and sex.
- People would invite their friends to the temples of these idols for worship on occasions like seasonal feasts, births and marriages.
- Food would be sacrificed.
 - Some would be consumed by the priests.
 - Some would be eaten at the feast in honour of the god.
 - Some would be for sale at the market.

1.2 Eating at the temple

- Three important things to note:
 - Some Christians were eating at the temple and encouraging others to do so (8:10).
 - Paul forbade eating idol food in the temple because to so eat was to participate in idol worship at the “table of demons” (10:14-22)—e.g. the Chinese 7th month festival.
 - But Paul did not forbid idol food bought from the market to be eaten as a non-religious meal in the home, unless someone objected because he did not feel right about it (10:23-33).

1.3 The view of the Corinthians

- Some were attending feasts in the temple (8:10).
 - Maybe they had received invitations from friends.
- Some had magical view of the Lord's Supper and baptism (10:1-22).
 - They thought nothing could harm them because they participated in the Lord's Supper and baptism; that they would receive special protection from God.
 - They said—“Since there is only one God and idols are nothing, it does not matter what or where we eat. We are also protected because we observe the Lord's Supper and are baptized. So, we can accept invitations to eat in the temples.”

- Paul had to warn them from Israel's history in the desert where almost all who left Egypt with Moses died because they disobeyed God.
- Paul warned them not to mix eating in the idol temple with taking the Lord's Supper in the church.

2. Paul's Reply

2.1 Love is more important than knowledge (8:1-13).

- Corinthians boasted—"We have knowledge."
 - Paul replied that knowledge "puffs up", but love "builds up".
 - The Corinthians thought that their knowledge was full, but Paul told them that true knowledge meant to be known by God not as a person who would know all the secret mysteries of God, but as a person who would live by love.
- A weak (new) believer might view an idol to be a god.
 - He didn't feel good accepting an invitation to eat in an idol temple.
 - But there were some believers who felt super-spiritual about themselves.
 - They had no problem accepting an invitation to eat in an idol temple because an idol was nothing to them.
- The weak believer was stumbled by the super-spiritual believers.
 - First, the weak believer was offended at how freely the super-spiritual believers socialize in the idol temple.
 - Second, the weak believer was pressured to copy the action of the super-spiritual believers even though he didn't feel right doing it.
 - In this sense, the super-spiritual believers sinned against the weak believer because the strong should protect the weak, not bully them.
- Paul did not permit the super-spiritual believers to eat at religious feasts in the idol temple.
 - To eat at these feasts is more than just socializing with friends, but in reality, to join in worship of the idol.
 - Though an idol is not a god, it is a "face" behind which a demon is served or worshipped.
- Paul's instruction to the super-spiritual believers—"Do not use your freedom to stumble the weak brother. Instead, use your love to help or win him."
 - In Chap 9, he used himself as an example of how he used his freedom to do certain things or not to do certain things in order to help/win others, especially in matters that did not affect his relationship with

God—e.g. his rights as an apostle to receive financial support from the church.

2.2 How a mature believer should use his spiritual freedom (10:23- 33).

- Can a believer eat idol food bought at the market in a home setting?
 - Paul gave a general “yes” (vv. 23-24).
 - But he’s not answering what is right to do, but what is helpful to do; not what is good for me, but what is good for others.
- When in the privacy of one’s own home (vv. 23-24):
 - Since everything belongs to God, one can eat anything.
- When invited to eat at an unbeliever’s home (vv. 27-30):
 - Eat whatever is laid on the table (v. 27).
 - But if someone says, “This is sacrificed food,” then do not eat for the sake of that person (v. 28).
 - This objecting person is probably a pagan worshipper because he used the term “sacrificed food” (*hierothuta*) and not “idol food” (*eidolothuta*) in 10:28—because he would regard what’s offered to his god as sacrifice and not idolatry.
- We are to hold two things in balance (vv. 31-33):
 - One, eat freely and thankfully; act not out of selfishness, but concern for others.
 - Two, the word “stumble” (*aproskopi*) in v. 32 means “offend”—i.e. we eat or don’t eat as the situation permits in order not to offend.
 - The motive of not offending is not to please as many people as possible, but to save as many people as possible with a good Christian witness of love for others (v. 33).

3. Decision Making for Eating or Not Eating Idol Food

3.1 Situation 1: Does eating mean participating in idol worship?

- If yes, then do not eat (1 Cor 10:14-22).
 - Eating is participating in idolatry.
 - Eating is sharing with demons.
 - Eating is making God angry.

3.2 Situation 2: Will eating stumble others?

- If yes, then do not eat (1 Cor 8:10; 10:28).
 - Weak Christians may be stumbled.
 - Non-Christians may think that a Christian cannot eat (so for good Christian witness, we abstain from eating).

3.3 Situation 3: Do I feel wrong eating it?

- If yes, then do not eat (1 Cor 8:7).

- You feel guilty about your eating—"But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Rom 14:23).
- Do not condemn another who decides to eat because he feels right about it since this matter does not affect our relationship with God (1 Cor 8:8).

4. Main Ideas:

- 4.1 Everything is permissible when there's freedom, but not everything is beneficial when there's no love.
- 4.2 Do not act to stumble someone. You are not wrong in God's sight for doing that thing, but you are wrong in God's sight for not acting in love for others.

5. Principles:

- 5.1 Christian freedom grows as Christian understanding grows.
- 5.2 Our Christian freedom must be sacrificed when it causes others to sin.
- 5.3 Guidelines to help exercise godly freedom in all that we do or do not do:
 - Does the Bible allow it?
 - If "no", don't do it.
 - Does our conscience allow it?
 - If "no", don't do it.
 - Three further questions if "yes" to above two questions
 - What is the effect on other Christians?
 - Choose to refrain out of love, not act out of knowledge.
 - Love is more important than knowledge.
 - What is the effect on my spiritual life?
 - Our decision to refrain or act must not only build up others, but also mature ourselves in personal discipleship.
 - Spiritual health is more important than freedom.
 - What is the effect on non-Christians?
 - Our abstention or action must be our witness to glorify the Lord and draw unbelievers closer to Him.
 - The Gospel is more important than rights.

6. Question:

In what ways can Christians "stumble" other people because they use their Christian freedom wrongly?

V. Proper Conduct in Church Worship (1 Cor 11:2-16; 14:33-35)

1. Women to Cover Head in Church Worship (11:2-16)

1.1 What's the nature of the problem (vv. 2-6)?

- Head covering?
- Hair length?
- Hairstyle?
- The problem likely had to do with head covering.

1.2 Paul applied the word "head" to three relationships.

- Christ and man
- Man and woman (husband and wife)
- God and Christ

1.3 What's the meaning of "head" in v. 3?

- Physical head?
- Source or origin (as in Eph 4:15)?
- Authority (as in Eph 1:22)?
- "Head" here is likely taken by Paul to mean 'authority'.
 - Man is head of woman has reference to wife's submission to her husband (as in Eph 5:22-24), i.e. the authority of husband.
 - God is head of Christ cannot mean the Father is source or origin of the Son since this views Christ as created by God.

1.4 What's the meaning of head covering in first-century Corinth?

1.5 Mark Finney (Professor of Biblical Studies in University of Sheffield, UK): "Corinth in the first century was an honor-shame society. In such a society, there is a strong emphasis on clearly defined gender roles. A rejection of these roles would bring shame—not only on the individuals directly involved, but also on one's husband or wife, one's family, one's wider community of friends and associates, and in a religious context on one's deity. Paul's argument here is one based on distinctive and suitable gender roles for a worshipping community under God. On the issue of head-coverings, then, Paul insisted that in light of the potential presence of visitors, the women were to maintain certain boundary markers by wearing a head-covering. Paul insisted that transgression of the conventional boundary for the women had the potential to bring shame and the loss of honor."¹

1.6 Why were some married women coming to church worship without head coverings?

- They claimed to be spiritual like angels.
- They looked down on the married state, and so, very ready to leave their husbands (after all, angels do not marry).

¹ https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.299952!/file/JSNT.pdf

- They looked down on the differences between man and woman observed in their culture (after all, angels are neither male nor female).

1.7 Paul did not approve the conduct of these women.

- “If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off ...” (v. 6).
 - A very common practice among ancient nations was to shave the hair of conquered peoples. The shaved head was a sign of shame and humiliation. Slave women often had their heads shaved.
 - Paul said that if a woman refused to wear a head covering, then let her cut off all her hair. In other words, let her be even more shameful by cutting her hair off so that she would look like a man. He was saying this not as a suggestion but as a disapproval of what some women were doing—i.e. not covering their head.
(<https://www.reformedonline.com/writings/biblical-worship/0/head?+covering>)
- Paul was disapproving them for breaking the practice of proper differences between man and woman in their culture.

1.8 Paul supported head coverings in worship by using an argument from creation (vv. 7-12).

- Man is the image and glory of God.
 - The existence of man through God's direct creation has brought honour and praise to God.
 - Man then is to live in relationship to God so as to bring glory to his Creator.
- Woman is the glory of man.
Woman is the glory of man since she was created from and for him (vv. 8-9).
 - Paul said she could pray/prophecy but must do it with her head covered. If not, she would bring shame to her man whose glory she was by breaking the practice of proper differences in their culture.
 - Glory is the opposite of disgrace, and so, it has the idea of honour.
 - Wives honour their husbands when they observe the proper differences between man and woman in church and at home. In Corinthian culture, every decent married woman would wear a head-covering to indicate that she was under the cover of a man who was her husband.
- Paul said that God's angels were watching the worship of God's people (v. 10).
 - They wanted to see good order and proper conduct.
 - They wanted to see if a woman would “have a sign of authority on her head” (literally, “have authority on her head”).

- This was Paul's call to the woman to exercise control of her freedom in Christ by keeping the proper differences between man and woman in that time and culture—i.e. to cover her head in church worship.
- Paul clarified that man and woman were not independent, but interdependent of each other (vv. 11-12).
 - This interdependence should be seen in church life and home life as man and woman exercised their functional differences designed by God Himself to complement and not compete with each other.

1.9 Paul was not teaching an absolute requirement, but something that could change from culture to culture (vv. 13-16).

- Paul was answering the question—"Is it proper for a woman to pray/prophesy with her head uncovered?"
- Answering people in that culture, Paul said "no!"
- Paul was concerned about having proper order when men and women came together to worship God.
 - God created man and woman with real differences—in terms of biology, function and behaviour.
 - E.g. man and woman should dress and behave properly according to who they are as male and female when they come together in worship.
 - For the woman, Paul said that the mark of proper dressing up and behaving would be to cover her head when she prayed or prophesied.

2. Women to Remain Silent in Church (14:33-35)

There are six interpretations of these verses:

2.1 These were not written by Paul, but added later by someone else.

- But no existing manuscripts have these verses missing.

2.2 Two, these were not Paul's personal words; he was just repeating the words of the Corinthians.

- In this letter, Paul corrected the Corinthians more for their liberal (can do) than their conservative (cannot do) attitude.

2.3 Three, these were Paul's absolute commands that forbade women in every way to speak in church.

- But why then did Paul allow women to pray or prophesy in church on condition that she put on a head covering in 11:5?

2.4 Four, Paul was trying to be sensitive to the culture of that time.

- In Bible times, society was very much male-dominated. Women would not take up any role that would appear to be dominant over men. They were also urged to dress modestly according to the customs of the time. Both men and women were expected to observe the proper differences between man and woman in society. Women should not rebel against their place in life (1 Peter 3:1-6).

- The Bible is not anti-culture per se. Rather, the Bible is supra-culture (above culture)—i.e. if the culture of the day is in alignment with biblical teachings and good Christian witness, it could be observed appropriately. However, if the culture of the day is not in alignment with biblical teachings and good Christian witness, it has to be informed, corrected, and changed—i.e. redeemed by biblical revelation and teachings.
- In Bible times, women were not educated and confined to home duties. Thus, a woman in ancient Bible times would not be expected to be educated enough to speak with wisdom.

2.5 Five, Paul was not against women speaking in general, but he was specifically against them questioning the meaning and validity of prophecies in the context of 1 Cor 14.

- The word “speak” in 1 Cor 14 refers to four kinds of speech—i.e. tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecy, and evaluation of prophecy.
- The first three are spiritual gifts distributed regardless of man or woman—i.e. man and woman can speak them.
- However, evaluation of prophecy to the church body would ultimately be the responsibility of the church leaders (often all men at least in the first century). In fact, the order of topics from vv. 27-33 is—tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecy, and evaluation of prophecy. So, Paul picked up on the topic of speaking in terms of discerning the truth of prophecy from vv. 34-35.

2.6 Six, some married women might be disgracing their husbands by publicly voicing their questions/views in response to a teaching or prophecy in church worship.

- They might be talking noisily with one another at their own women’s sector in the worship hall, instead of asking their husbands at home what they didn’t understand. Note that early days of Christian worship had adopted the “style” of orthodox Jewish synagogue worship in which men and women were seated separately.
- Paul told them to behave “in submission” as the Law had instructed—i.e. let the husband be her head and learn from him at home.

3. Main Idea: God wants the church to worship together in a fitting and orderly manner so that He will be glorified, the body will be edified, and the lost will notice her good witness.

4. Principles:

4.1 Cultural practices could be observed in church worship IF only they are in alignment to biblical revelation and teachings.

4.2 Men and women are interdependent in the Lord.

5. Question:
What are some things we do in church that are culturally good, but not necessarily commanded by God?
6. Some Thoughts on Women in Ministry
 - 6.1 Jesus' twelve apostles were all male because He intended to send them out to spread the gospel, to seek food and shelter, and to even face danger as they go.
 - This would not be proper for a woman in Bible times. However, many women were among Jesus' larger circle of disciples (Luke 8:1-3), and many women also held important positions in the early Christian Church (Acts 1:12-14; 18:18-28; 21:7-9; Romans 16:1-16).
 - 6.2 There are biblical examples of women in leadership.
 - Some of the great leaders and prophets of Israel were women (Exodus 15:20; Judges 4:4-5; Esther 4:15-17; Luke 2:36-38).
 - 6.3 Paul's proclamation of equality (Galatians 3:26-29) and Jesus' willingness to accept women into his larger circle of disciples (Luke 8:1-3, 10:38-39) should be our guiding principles—e.g. Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus in Luke 10:39.
 - 6.4 In fact, women took as large a role in the early church leadership as they were spiritually gifted and allowed by the customs of their society so that those outside the church could not talk bad about Christ and His church (Acts 1:12-14, 18:24-26, 21:7-9; Romans 16:1-16).

VI. Biblical Use of Spiritual Gifts and Love (1 Cor 12-13)

1. The Problem

1.1 Paul is here addressing a problem in the worship life of the church.

1.2 Paul lists down spiritual gifts at least four times between 1 Cor 12-13 (gift of tongues appears at end on each of these lists).

- 12:8-10
- 12:28
- 12:29-30
- 13:1-3

1.3 This suggests that the Corinthian believers were placing too much importance on speaking in tongues, and also using it in worship in a disorderly manner (Gordon Fee).

- The Corinthians seemed to view tongues as the status symbol for being spiritual.
- Paul was trying to correct them by teaching them that love is the most excellent way—love that seeks and uses spiritual gifts to build up the church. Love is the motivation that gives the gifts their value.

2. Paul's Answer

2.1 The test of being Spirit-led (12:1-3)

- “Now about spiritual gifts” (v. 1)
 - The word here is “pneumatikon” (“spirituals”) and not “charismata” (“spiritual gifts”).
 - Paul often uses “charismata” to refer to spiritual gifts (12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31), but he does use “pneumatikon” for gifts in 14:1.
 - Before they were Christians, they seemed to think that they were spiritual when they spoke/chanted in unknown tongues.
 - But after they became Christians, Paul told them that if they were really led to speak/pray by the Holy Spirit, they should speak/pray to lift up Jesus Christ as Lord in a manner that would be understood by others (“Jesus is Lord!”).
 - No Spirit-led Christian can say/pray that Jesus is cursed. Perhaps, when the Corinthian believers were still unbelievers, some might have been led to speak/pray “Jesus be cursed” in their pagan worship.

2.2 Understanding what spiritual gifts are (12:4-7)

- They are “charismata” (v. 4)
 - They are “gifts of grace” or “free gifts”.
 - They are given by God because of His grace and goodness, not because of our own merits.
 - They are not a sign of a person being more spiritual than another.

- Thus, no need for one person to feel better or more spiritual than another.
- Rather, there should be humility and gratitude before God.
- They are “diakonia” (v. 5).
 - They are “services” or “ministries” to do the work of a servant.
 - Greatness is not measured by the number of gifts you have or what gifts you have.
 - Rather, a great servant in God’s sight is one who is willing and humble enough to serve faithfully with whatever gift(s) he has.
- They are “energema” (v. 6).
 - When gifts are used, the energy and power of God is at work in and through the Body of Jesus Christ.
- They are “phanerosis” (v. 7).
 - When gifts are used, God’s nature or way is shown and made clear to us, especially if there is ignorance or confusion.
 - Any gift that does not make God’s nature or way clear, and confuses people is either not from the Spirit or not used in the right manner.

2.3 The need for diversity within unity (12:8-11)

- The Corinthians seemed to view tongues as the status symbol for being spiritual. Thus, all should speak in tongues.
- This attempt to make everyone speak in tongues (forced uniformity) led to tension in the church.
- So Paul had to say what he was saying here. Gifts may or may not be the same, but the same Spirit empowers us to serve one God and one another in the same Body.
- Paul told them that the use of different gifts was to bring diversity within unity, not division in uniformity.
- The list of gifts here is not meant to be complete. It is to tell us that there are so many gifts all given by God as He wills, and so, it is wrong to prefer one gift and look down on another.
- “Glossolalia” can be a tongue unknown in this world (as in v. 10) or a language in this world but unknown to the hearer/speaker (i.e. a foreign language as in Acts 2:4).

2.4 Understanding the Church as Christ’s Body (12:12-31)

- The Body is not one member, but many (vv. 12-13).
 - Paul reminded the Corinthians that they were one Body and experienced one Spirit working in and through them.
 - The words “baptized” and “drink” in v. 13 were used by Paul to refer to the Corinthians being incorporated into one Body in Jesus Christ.
- There should be healthy regard of all gifts in the Body (vv. 14-31).

- Members of the Body are not to be envious of one another's gift.
- To do so is to consider your own gift (and yourself) as less important in God's sight and in the Body.
- The other way is also true—we are not to look down on the gift of another because this means we consider his gift (and him) as less important in God's sight and in the Body.
- Paul called on the Corinthians to “eagerly desire the greater gifts” (v. 31a).
 - It is alright to seek or desire some gifts, but it is not right to demand that God must give them to us.
 - The greater gifts that Paul is referring to here are those that do not bring spiritual pride to us, but do build up the Body.
- Paul then moved on to show the Corinthians the “most excellent way” of using spiritual gifts, even the so-called “greater gifts” (v. 31b).

2.5 The most excellent way of using spiritual gifts (1 Cor 13)

- The key point of Paul—“Without love, all gifts are nothing.”
 - The first place given to love is to show the character of God—God is love.
 - Love will endure and will be forever.
 - Spiritual gifts will end “when perfection comes” (v. 10).
 - Gifts are only for temporary use in our imperfect world; they are only for this present and imperfect age.
 - When perfection (“teleios” means “full maturity/completeness”) comes—i.e. the end-time age when God completes His work of redemption—spiritual gifts will be of no use no matter how great they may be, but love will remain forever.
 - The child-man comparison in v. 11 is Paul's way of talking about two ages—the present age of imperfection and the end-time age of perfection.
 - The “face to face” image in v. 12 is Paul's way of saying that when the end-time perfect age comes, we will then know God to the fullest complete degree like He now knows us completely.

3. Main Ideas:

3.1 Different spiritual gifts are given by God to Christians as He wills so that that they can use these to worship Him in unity and to serve one another without pride or envy.

3.2 The most excellent way to use spiritual gifts is the way of love because it builds up people and relationships.

4. Principles:

4.1 Spiritual gifts are for the purpose of building up the church.

4.2 We do not receive spiritual gifts according to merit or ability, but as God sees fit according to His grace.

4.3 Unless motivated by love, spiritual gifts do not benefit the believer.

5. Question:

Can two differently gifted leaders—e.g. one in teaching & preaching and the other in pastoral care & counselling—work well together in church and in God's love? Explain.

VII. Biblical Use of Tongues and Prophecy for Orderliness (1 Cor 14)

1. The Importance of Understanding What is Spoken (vv. 1-25)

1.1 Why Paul preferred prophesying (vv. 1-5)

- Paul mentioned one of those “greater gifts”—prophecy (v. 1).
- It is clear that the misuse of tongues was one of the Corinthians’ big problems (i.e. without interpretation – v. 2).
- Tongues that are not interpreted have no value in building up the church collectively even though it may be edifying personally to the tongue-speaker.
- That’s why Paul said in v. 5b that “he who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified”.
- In other words, tongues when interpreted are like prophecy, containing instruction and encouragement that will build up the church as a whole (i.e. prophecy edifies the whole church, not just the person who prophesies – vv. 3-4).
- There are two shades of meaning in the word “prophecy” in the New Testament.
 - One has to do with the telling of some future event before it happens with reference to God’s plan in salvation:
 - Mark 7:6
 - Matt 11:13
 - 1 Pet 1:10
 - Jude 14
 - Luke 1:67
 - John 11:51
 - Rev 10:11
 - Here in 1 Cor 14, the meaning has to do mainly with:
 - The “strengthening, encouragement and comfort” of the church as a whole (vv. 3, 31).
 - The persuasion of unbelievers to come to faith in Jesus Christ (vv. 24ff).

1.2 Problem with tongues in the Corinthian Church (vv. 6-12)

- The need to understand what is spoken if it is to benefit the listener (v. 6).
 - Revelation
 - Knowledge
 - Prophecy
 - Teaching
- Paul gave three examples of this principle (vv. 7-12).
 - One, musical instruments must play a clear melody if it is to be appreciated.
 - Two, trumpets must sound clearly if soldiers are to be rallied for battle.

- Three, foreign languages need to be interpreted for they do not make sense to those who have not learnt them.
- Thus, we are to seek to build up the church by doing our best to use gifts in such a way that they make sense to and benefit all (v. 12).

1.3 A solution to the problem (vv. 13-17)

- What must a person do if God has given him the gift of tongues?
 - Pray for the ability to interpret because ...
 - This gift of interpretation benefits the tongue-speaker first (v. 14).
 - This gift will also benefit others, i.e. it will help them to agree with what is said by the tongue-speaker, joining him in saying “Amen” (vv. 16-17).
- Paul’s personal example (vv. 18-19)
 - He had the gift of tongues and used it often, but privately on his own.
 - Publicly in church, he would rather speak words that people could understand so that he could teach them in a way that made sense to them.

1.4 Paul’s preference for prophecy (vv. 20-25)

- Paul said that placing too much importance on tongues without concern for others was childish behaviour (v. 20).
- Paul warned against the wrong use of tongues publicly in church (vv. 21-25).
 - He read from Isa 28:11-12 which spoke of God’s judgment on disobedient Israel at the hands of the Assyrians (v. 21).
 - So the sign in v. 22 was a sign of God’s judgment on His people.
 - Paul was saying that the language of the Assyrians (a foreign tongue) who invaded Israel was a sign of God’s judgment on unbelieving Israel when the nation was conquered.
 - The problem between v. 22a and v. 23:
 - Paul first said in v. 22a that tongues were a sign for unbelievers.
 - Then in v. 23, he seemed to discourage using tongues as a sign before unbelievers because they would think that the tongue-speakers were out of their mind as they could not understand what was spoken.
 - Why did Paul seem to contradict what he said in v. 22a with what he said in v. 23?
 - It is because he was using sign with reference to Isa 28:11-12. The sign in these Old Testament verses was God’s judgment not on Israel’s enemy (i.e. the Assyrians who spoke in a foreign tongue that the Israelites could not understand), but on Israel for their disobedience and unbelief in God.

- So Paul called on them to use prophecy instead of tongues when they come together in worship in vv. 24-25 because of two reasons:
 - i) Unbelievers who came and heard the prophecy could understand what God was saying to them and be convicted of their sins and believed that God was really there.
 - ii) Believers could hear and understand the prophecy of encouragement and comfort, and be strengthened in their faith and faithfulness.
- For these reasons, Paul preferred to use prophecy rather tongues when believers and unbelievers came together.

2. The Importance of Orderliness (1 Cor 14:26-40)

2.1 An example of order and freedom in worship (vv. 26-33a)

- Paul stressed that everything must be done to build up the church.
- Paul gave some guidelines on how tongues should be used.
 - No more than two or three may speak.
 - They are to speak one at a time (v. 27).
 - There is to be interpretation after each tongue.
 - If interpretation is not possible, then the person is to remain silent and say his prayer silently to God (v. 28).
- Paul then gave some guidelines on how prophecy should be used.
 - Two or three may speak.
 - They are to speak one at a time.
 - The others must “weigh carefully” what is said (v. 29).
 - This is also the same with tongues that are interpreted (for the interpreted tongue is like prophecy).
 - The one speaking prophecy is never so Spirit-filled that he is not able to control his speaking and becomes disorderly—“The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets” (v. 32).

2.2 Why did Paul call on women to remain silent (vv. 34-35)?

- This remaining silent has to do with questioning prophecy (refer to earlier topic on “Proper Conduct in Church Worship”).
- It seems that there were some married women doing this.
- Paul had to stop them because:
 - These women were causing disorder and disturbing peace when the church came together—“God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (v. 33a).
 - These women were embarrassing their own husbands and other men as it was only proper for men to ask questions during worship in the time of the early church (they followed the synagogue style in their early form of worship).

2.3 Using gifts in a fitting and orderly way (vv.36-40)

- Paul warned the Corinthians to take his words seriously.
- They should not do what they liked as if they had a special word from God to others or from God to them only (v. 36).
- He told them that those who were truly spiritual would agree that what he had written to them was really from God (v. 37).
- If they would not take his words seriously, God would also not take them seriously and do His work without them (v. 38).
- Every gift has a place in the church, but for each to be used to build up the church, it must be used in a “fitting and orderly way” (vv. 39-40).

3. How to Use Prophecy with Care

3.1 Don't say, “God told me ...” But say, “I sense God is leading me to say ...”

3.2 Ask important questions:

- Does the prophecy glorify God rather than the speaker?
- Does the prophecy support the teachings in the Bible?
- Does the prophecy build up the church?
- Is the prophecy a truth spoken in love?
- Does the speaker show humility and godliness?
- Is there strengthening, encouragement and comfort in the message of the prophecy, or just “vain and repeated” words?

3.3 Carefully consider the message of the prophecy.

- Don't believe too easily (gullible) and don't disbelieve too quickly (sceptical).
- Be teachable to the Holy Spirit by asking—“Is it true? If true, how does it apply to my life?”

4. Main Idea:

For tongues and prophecy to be edifying in corporate worship, they must be used in an orderly manner and be understood by people.

5. Principles:

5.1 Tongues and prophecy in worship are for the purpose of building up the church and not merely for personal fulfilment.

5.2 Disorderly worship does not build up the church, and gives a bad witness before unbelievers who do not understand what is going on.

IX. Biblical Stewardship in Christian Giving (1 Cor 16:1-4)

The April 1982 issue of *Money* magazine contains a report on how various churches and synagogues in the US responded to increasing costs and decreasing donations from members.

- A synagogue in suburban Minneapolis took some of its members to court to collect their unpaid pledges. The judge ruled that their pledges (ranging from \$167 to \$1,000) were legally binding, even though these people had left the congregation.
- A Catholic Church board asked its members to contribute half of the savings gained from a recent federal income tax cut.
- Bake sales, bazaars, and bingo games have all become accepted means of providing the church with additional funds.

Indeed, it is no wonder that many people think Christians are hustlers trying to wrench some hard-earned money out of the hands of others.

But Paul's method of fund-raising is a far cry from what most of us have come to expect. Before we consider Paul's instructions concerning a love and faith giving, let us first consider the kind of man Paul was, especially in relation to money.

1. Paul and Money

- 1.1 Paul's mentor was a man named Barnabas. Barnabas was a noble saint who set an example for the church in Jerusalem when it came to giving. Acts 4:36-37 reads, "Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet."
- 1.2 This is the man who took Paul under his wing when Paul was first saved, and when none of the apostles wanted to have anything to do with him (see Acts 9:26-27).
- 1.3 When Agabus and other prophets came down to Antioch from Jerusalem to announce that a great famine was about to come upon the world, the newly formed church at Antioch took up a collection for the saints in Judea, and these funds were sent with Barnabas and Paul (aka Saul) to the saints in need (see Acts 11:27-30).
- 1.4 Paul knew full well that as an apostle, he had the right to be supported financially by those to whom he was ministering. But he chose to waive this right, preaching the Gospel at no cost to the Corinthians so that the Gospel might not be hindered (see 1 Cor 9:1-23).
- 1.5 Thus when Paul came to Corinth, he worked as a tentmaker along with Aquila. And when Paul finally ministered full-time to the Corinthians, it was because of the financial support he received from the Macedonians (see Acts 18:1-5; 2 Cor 1:7-9; Phil. 4:15, 18).

- 1.6 Paul purposed not to be a burden to the churches where he served by requiring them to support him. In the midst of warning the Ephesian elders of false teachers, Paul reminded them that his hand was never in their pockets—"I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:33-35).
- 1.7 It was not Paul who had gotten fat from the Corinthians. If anything, the Corinthians were taken advantage of by the false apostles (see 2 Cor 11:20). Paul, on the other hand, was "poor" in their midst—"Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you! For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world" (1 Cor 4:8-13).
2. Instructions on Christians Giving (vv. 1-4)
- 2.1 The last thing Paul talked about was money.
- That's why he had left the matter on giving till the last chapter of 1 Corinthians.
 - However, some Christians and others seem to wish we would never talk about money, especially when it comes to reminding them of their responsibility towards others.
 - The verses in 1 Cor 16 are there because the Corinthians needed to hear them, and we today need to hear them just as badly.
- 2.2 The connection of vv. 1-4 to the context
- VV. 1-4 flow very logically out of Paul's teaching on the resurrection in Chapter 15.
 - Paul concluded by assuring the Corinthian saints that due to the resurrection of our Lord, and thus the resurrection of the dead, our labour and toil is not in vain in the Lord. No wonder Paul can now speak to his readers about making a contribution to the poor.
 - This is one of the ways the Christian can "lay up treasure in heaven" (Matt. 6:19-21).

- Furthermore, the contribution to the saints which Paul has instructed the Corinthians to prepare, is that which will be delivered after he arrives at Corinth. So Paul's discussion of his travel plans logically follow in vv. 5-9.
- Giving to the poor is an eternal investment which will be delivered to the saints in due time.

2.3 The need which required a contribution

- There are all kinds of people seeking contributions. But the need which occasions Paul's instructions is a special one.
- Since our text does not give us a great deal of detail about this need, let's look at those texts which give us more insight about the need in Jerusalem.
 - First, we know from other texts the need was that of the Jewish church in Jerusalem and Judea.
 - Acts 24:27—Paul, as he stood before Felix, told the governor why he had gone to Jerusalem—"After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings."
 - Rom 15:23-26—"But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem."
 - Second, we know from the early chapters of Acts that the saints in Jerusalem gave generously of their means to meet the needs that existed among the poor among them (see Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-37)
 - Third, the stoning of Stephen brought about a persecution which forced many to flee from Jerusalem (see Acts 8:1-2).
 - The means of meeting the needs of the poor saints in Jerusalem had been depleted in the church that was there.
 - Fourth, it appears that while things were becoming tough for the Jewish saints in Jerusalem, things were also becoming very difficult for Jews elsewhere.
 - The famine which Agabus and other prophets predicted took place during the reign of Claudius (see Acts 11:28). It was Claudius who during his reign, ordered the Jews out of Rome (see Acts 18:2), which is why Priscilla and Aquila met up with Paul in Corinth.
 - Jewish believers elsewhere in the world were having hard times of their own, so they were not able to do much to help their brethren in Jerusalem and Judea.

■ Heb 10:32-53—This text (written to Jewish saints) seems to best describe the situation in Jerusalem and Judea, which created the need for outside help from Gentile churches—“Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.”

3. Guidelines for Giving

3.1 Paul was not reluctant to speak about money as and when necessary.

- As you read vv. 1-4, it is quite obvious that this is not the first time Paul has spoken to the Corinthians about money.
 - Paul's words in these four verses assume prior knowledge of his readers. He speaks of “the collection for the saints” in v. 1, but he does not say which saints or what the need is.
 - This strongly suggests that Paul's words in these verses are a follow-up to something he has already said to the Corinthians about this collection.
 - From Paul's words in 1 Cor 5:9, we assume that Paul has already written an earlier letter to the Corinthians before 1 Corinthians.
 - And in Paul's next letter to the Corinthians after 1 Corinthians, he will speak more thoroughly on the same matter (see 2 Cor 8 & 9).
 - Indeed, Paul speaks of giving more than once, but as and when necessary and appropriate. However, money is often not much spoken about in ministry because it is an “unpopular” subject.

3.2 Paul is open and direct when he speaks about money.

- Is there any doubt that Paul wants the Corinthians to give money? All too often people after our money today do not tell us up front what they want from us.
 - But Paul is direct and up front about what he expects of the Corinthians concerning giving.

3.3 Paul's instructions concerning obligation to the poor brethren are consistent with biblical revelation on this matter.

- The Old Testament Law required the Israelites to contribute to the needs of their brethren and others (see Lev 19:9ff; Deut 15:7-11).
- The prophets had a great deal to say about Israel's duty to the poor, and their oppression of the poor was one of the reasons

God brought judgment upon Israel (see Isa 10:2; Jer 2:34; 5:28; Ezek 16:49; 18:12, 17; 22:29; Amos 4:1; 5:11-12; Zech 7:10).

- Our Lord also taught about obligation to the poor (Matt 19:21; Luke 14:13; 19:8), as did the apostles (Rom 12:13; Gal 2:9-10; 6:10; James 2; 1 John 3:15-18).

3.4 Paul's instructions regarding this collection for the poor were given as a command.

- Paul says he is instructing the Corinthians to do what he "directed" the Galatians to do. The word "directed" is a strong word, used of military orders (see Acts 23:31; 24:23), of the instruction of our Lord (1 Cor 9:14), and of the directives of Paul with full apostolic authority (1 Cor 7:17; 11:34; Titus 1:5).
- Paul said in 16:2—"... each one of you should set aside ..." This matter of giving to the poor brethren in Jerusalem was not an option, but a duty. Paul's instruction to give is to every single Christian believer, i.e. "each one of you should set aside" (not "some of you").
- Indeed, most churches would not have a lack of funds if all of their members gave, even if some could not give much (see Acts 2:4-46; 4:32-35).

3.5 Paul did not set down a rule as to how much each must give.

- There are no numbers or percentages given which must be met—no quotas. Paul left the amount to be given up to each saint.
- The Corinthian believers were not instructed to give what they did not have but to give out of their prosperity.
- The Old Testament practice of giving one-tenth (tithe) is a good guide, but not a rule in New Testament Christian giving.
- In fact, proportional giving as taught in the New Testament (i.e. the more you have, the more you are to give) is more than percentage giving in the Old Testament (as in tithing).

3.6 Paul instructed the Corinthians to consider their contribution consistently and to determine what they would give on the "first day of every week" (1 Cor 16:2).

- The "first day of the week" was the day our Lord was raised from the dead (see Matt 28:1; Mark 16:2) and also the day on which the church met (see Acts 20:7; Rev 1:10).
- They were told to set the money aside at home.
- Paul wants them (and us today) to make our own decisions regarding our responsibilities to our needy brethren.

3.7 Paul refused to employ pressure or persuasive tactics to increase the giving of the Corinthians.

- Paul wanted the money to be saved up so that no collection would be made in his presence—they were not giving to Paul but to others as channels of God's blessing to them.

- He instructed the Corinthians to give, but he did not use gimmicks to motivate giving.
- Saving up to give over a period of time not only allowed the Corinthians time to give generously, but also gave them time to give this money purposefully.
- Paul wrote here in 1 Corinthians so they would not have to give when he arrived and saw them face-to-face--he really wanted their decision to give to be divinely prompted, rather than prompted by human persuasion or presence.

3.8 Paul employed every possible means to reassure the Corinthians that the money given would be used just as designated.

- Paul's intent and desire was to raise funds and then distribute them in a way that would avoid any appearance of impropriety.
- Paul indicates how important it is that donated funds be handled in an appropriate and accountable manner (see also 2 Cor 8:17-21).
 - When the gifts are gathered to be taken to Jerusalem, some men of the Corinthians' choosing will take the funds, and Paul will send a letter of introduction and explanation for these chosen men to bring along with them.
 - If deemed appropriate, Paul will accompany them too.
 - Paul's method minimizes the dangers which arise when large amount of money is collected.
 - Each one stores up his or her own contribution at home, and when the funds are gathered, a delegation of trusted men take the funds personally to the designated recipients.
 - These men do not let the funds out of their possession until they have handed them over to the church leaders concerned who will then distribute them accordingly (see Acts 11:30).

3.9 Paul is also calling and challenging the body of Christ in Corinth to look beyond themselves.

- The body of Christ is to be aware of the needs of needy brethren in distant places, and to minister to their material needs as the Lord so leads and enables.
- Christians are blessed by God in order that they in turn can bless others in His name—we are not to store God's blessings for ourselves only, but to share them with those who are in need.

4. Main Idea:

How we handle money as stewards of God will determine how much responsibility we will be given in the really important things (see Luke 16:11-12).

5. Questions:

5.1 What are some characteristics or qualities to look for in people who are entrusted to handle financial matters in the church? Explain why.

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5.2 Is it a wise thing to keep confidential the identities of people who give and how much they give? Explain why.