



The Church

INDWELT BUT INSENSITIVE (JOHN 15:26)

Thoughts from 1 Corinthians

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Forward

*Visiting with our feet on the lower wire of the fence, he said,
“Pastor, you don’t have to plant weeds!”*

- Glenn Danson

Intro: Receptive to His Indwelling

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It was early in my ministry and like so many young pastors I carried the elements of a Messianic complex. I found myself in the junkyards of Brooklyn searching for the son of one of my parishioners. Mom was certain that Robert was in trouble with the law and with the mafia. Her “rescue my child” was a challenge; it also became an opportunity to watch God at work.

The numerous junkyards searched turned out to be unsuccessful, but this one seemed the epitome of success and so I presented my case. In doing so I sensed an unseen someone standing next to me and confidence pervaded my every word. Within minutes I had found the correct row of cars and there lay Robert, sound asleep. It was a lesson to be oft repeated over the years; it was a comprehension of His promise: “But I tell you truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.” (John 16:7) The experiences have been numerous and far more graphic than that moment; always they have been accompanied with the knowledge that “the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because they do not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.” (John 14:17) What might have been the cessation of a 33 year life has continued. He prayed to the Father that we would have “another Helper” of the same kind, (John 14:16) and thus, 2,000 years later we continue to experience His presence, His power, and His purposes without interruption.

“Comforter” conveys the connotation of strength; that is, the person of the Holy Spirit provides for the believer, the Christian, the necessary strength for any situation that arises. While the worldling does not “see” Him, we see Him through faith and experience His enablement. The promise of His presence for every believer, in all permanency, is most re-assuring as we face life in its many facets, be they physical, spiritual, mental, etc. ...ALL!

Naturally, we have a tendency to place emphasis on those experiences that we consider more relevant to our predominant characteristic of makeup --- intellect, will, or emotions.

Another aspect of emphasis is the timing of each encounter. Our lives are experiencing constant change and as a result, I may sense the Holy Spirit more ascendant in a particular area at a given moment than ten years prior or later. It is not that He was not there all of the time; I may not have been alert to His working because

of my focus, my prioritizing. Difficulties in health may appear so predominant that I was not alert as to how He was ministering to an individualized need in another area --- my family, my church, my work-a-day world.

Delving into 1 Corinthians it became obvious that the many problems confronting that congregation were not unlike our current church problems and that the solutions of that day were appropriate for the corrections necessary today. Corinth was filled with corruption; immorality abounded in conjunction with the temple of Aphrodite and its 1,000 prostitutes; alcohol flowed in abundance. Those who became Christians found themselves struggling to find agreement as to understanding what true sanctification was all about. It would not just mean removal from the moral life style of the past, but the adoption of an entirely new life style that would affect every aspect of their living. It meant more than a willingness to “die” for Christ, it meant living for Christ; it meant appropriation of an attitude that “died daily” with Christ. (Galatians 2:20) The attitude of early believers surpassed the idea of martyrdom with that of living in the power of the Holy Spirit, come what may by opposition of the world, the flesh, or the devil.

The promise that Christ made had been fulfilled at Pentecost. (Acts 2) It was actualized consistently as recorded throughout The Book of Acts as well as in the New Testament churches. His promise was that He would be with us “forever”. He has been sent at the behest of the Father; He is the person resident as we move through the storms and conflicts of life. It is His understanding of the minute details of every encounter and His enabling as my support that will bear me up and on to victory.

The opening verse of 1 Corinthians speaks of their “sanctification”, along with “all who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours”, is preparatory to dealing with the many problems that they were facing. They had been uniquely “called” of God to “sanctification”, or as one translation puts it: “to holy living”. That “call” originated in the heart of God and produced “fellowship” in the Son; also it was accompanied with the “faithfulness of God.” It is also stipulated that they are “saints”, but they were not living “saintly”. Intricately woven together one sees that in these designations the apostle is making them aware of who they are, what God expects to do in and through them; in particular, as it relates to the problems that exist in this congregation.

The “Comforter”, the “strengthening one”, is the “sanctifying one” Paul refers to in his opening words. He chooses and calls us to be set apart from all that I was to who and what I am in Christ, and in the indwelt presence of the person of the Holy Spirit. It is obvious the eyes of the ‘saints’ had become subject to the “old” nature as over against the “new” nature, acquired at the New Birth. Let us approach our reflections or studies from this perspective.

Chapter 1: Comforter in the Midst of Division

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1 Corinthians 1

A giant rears its head of power and even the most committed groups of Christians have experienced “divisions”. Sadly, it comes in the name of rightness and has as its goal, “righteousness”. Without a conscious effort to retain Christ as central to the situation and the leadership of the Holy Spirit as our helper, good intentions can deteriorate into infantile arguments. The intricacy of “completing” the body of believers functioning in Corinth had turned to competing. (1 Corinthians 1:10) This desire toward exactness produced a gradual elevation of egocentricness. However, those involved did not even recognize that their spiritual lives were deteriorating; that instead of the “same mind and in the same judgment”, dissension had developed. People were arguing over by whom they were baptized. Obviously, they argued over whose baptism was more effective. What a pathetic development!

Consider how ridiculous their plight; “I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas”. With the epitome of spiritual superiority, “I am of Christ”. (1 Corinthians 1:12) The person of Christ and the message of Calvary had dissolved into bickering, and the only one finding delight in that which was taking place was the devil. Baptism “buried with Christ in His death and raised with Him in new life”, had lost its significance because of petty divisiveness to something totally irrelevant. By whom was I baptized??? There is little sympathy toward such conduct. It reminds us of “political correctness” in our present age. There is to be no tolerance to dividing the message of Calvary or argumentativeness over things that are hair splitting and unsupported by the clear teaching of Scripture. “Cleverness of speech”, the equal to intellectual superiority in “new” interpretations to water down the simplicity of the preaching of Christ crucified, resurrected, and returning, is to be avoided.

There is the reminder by Paul for them to keep focused on what some might call “foolishness”, but which in reality affected theirs and others salvation. To those who are destined to “perish”, (1 Corinthians 1:18) the Gospel will never make sense or receive acceptance; we are not to allow that type of thinking to effect what we, in faith, believe and thus practice. We are not in competition with the world and its belief system; the “foolishness” of God is stronger than men.” (1 Corinthians 1:25)

The church of Corinth had sufficient “intellectuals” that felt they were in the intellectually superior group. However, it is radical and rationalized thinking that wants to demean

the Gospel. What we have that allows the exuding of confidence is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit of God. He is the Promised One that makes us sufficient! The “worldlings” thinking, that treat believers as “foolish, base, despised” forgets that they are “chosen” (1 Corinthians 1:28) by God; not just self, but others in the congregation were chosen by God and are equals. Believers have nothing of which to boast except to boast in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:31)

Further! When a problem develops in the church, you can be certain it will spread like wildfire... the devil sees to that. How it is handled, and it should be tackled immediately, reveals the maturing element of all that are involved. We should be driven back to the “wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” (1 Corinthians 1:30) It is really quite simple; Christ prayed and God the Father sent the Holy Spirit to help us, to enable us, to strengthen us so that our dependence is not on self, but on HIM and the principles of Holy Writ; the Scriptures.

Instead of explosiveness, “in quietness and in confidence” (Isaiah 30:15) the problem should be fogged into invisibility! Instead of piousness and divisiveness pervading, which originate in the flesh, the words of James 3:10 should surmount the occasion ...”Brethren, these things ought not to be.” Conflicts should end in a resonated: “Behold, how they love one another.” (1 John 1:11)

There is no justification for continuing conflicts to be active amongst believers. We are indwelled by our Paraclete. As our Helper, He enables us to rise above divisiveness and be expressions of oneness, even as we are in HIM.

Chapter 2: Comfort in Comprehending the Holy Spirit

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1 Corinthians 2

One of the most pronounced weaknesses amongst believers of the Scriptures is that of the ministry of the Holy Spirit of God. Some endeavor to focus on the sensationalizing and others succumb to reducing Him to an “it”. Suffice to say, there is a difference between intellect and wisdom. The Book of Proverbs illustrates this and Paul amplifies it by calling the believers attention to the difference between the two. His dependence was on the Holy Spirit to enlighten the intellect to a comprehension of what appeared to be foolishness, from a human standpoint.

Paul had felt “weakness and fear and trembling” (1 Corinthians 2: 3), however the promised Holy Spirit had produced enlightenment and the message of Calvary made sense. Peace and serenity, through His “power” created a restfulness of faith that pervaded his heart. It has pervaded the hearts of men and women from that day to this; and the death, burial, resurrection, and return of Christ is made real, fortified through the ministering work of the Holy Spirit, alone.

The explosiveness of what took place with the proclamation of Paul’s message from the Lord, “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” was a work of the Holy Spirit. The apostle describes it as in “power”. We are advised of the Holy Spirit’s knowledge and teaching abilities through-out this 2nd Chapter of 1 Corinthians. We are the recipients of such a ministry, which leaves us deeply “appraised”. We “have the mind of Christ”! Let us catch the value of that empowerment that stands in marked contrast to the intellectualism of the non-Christian or the weak Christian. It was that endowment that made Christianity rise above the norm of that hour and will cause it to rise above the norm of this hour... spiritual thoughts, spiritual words, spiritual actions!

Pivotal to any church ministry should be the proclamations of the Gospel... keep Christ and His ministry clear, central. Long ago I read: “The church is not a place for the display of eminent Christians, but a schoolhouse for the training of the imperfect.” If ever there was a time in history when this has been reversed, it is currently. Suave and emotionalism has replaced the “power” of the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:4) One wonders if we have unconsciously adopted an attitude toward maneuvering people into the things of the Lord. “Persuasive words of wisdom” in verse 4 of 1 Corinthians 2, accents that process amongst the Corinthian believers as over against the message

and method of the apostle Paul. The appraised value of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit thru God's WORD soars above intellectualism of any degree at any hour of history.

The "rulers of this age" (1 Corinthians 2:6, 8) do not and cannot understand the workings of the great COMFORTER. He changes our attitude toward the Scriptures, toward God, toward the world, toward others, toward ourselves. There is no area of our lives that should not experience transformation when the Holy Spirit takes up residence. He is described as the "dynamite" (Acts 1:7, 8) that rocks our thinking, our living, and our future longings. The songwriter said it: "Things are different now". It is a realization of answered prayer from the lips of Jesus. The world still approaches its message as: "without understanding"; and that should not surprise the believer for Paul says, had they understood, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." (1 Corinthians 2:8)

"Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that GOD has prepared for those who love Him." Isaiah 64:4; 65:17

Contrast takes place when the Holy Spirit of God takes up residence in the life of the one who submits to the message of the Gospel and His leadership. The heart is melted by the warmth of the Holy Spirit's ministry. That action accomplished more by way of ministry to the church than any intellect could assert. Apparent to any pastor, (under-shepherd), is the presence of one in his congregation and even more apparent on his church board.

We are advised of the Holy Spirit's knowledge and teaching abilities throughout the 2nd chapter of 1 Corinthians. We are the recipients of such a ministry, "spiritual appraisal" as gifted to us through the Holy Spirit. In fact, Paul writes: "we have the mind of Christ". (1 Corinthians 2:16) He is the strengthening factor of our new found faith. There is no excuse to approach the Word of the Lord or the work of the Lord without the reasoning and strengthening ability of the Holy Spirit of God.

With these thoughts in mind, re-read 1 Corinthians 2 and John 14 thru 17. Further, because we have the "mind of Christ" let us catch the value of that empowerment that stands in marked contrast to the intellectualism of the non-Christian. It was that endowment that made Christianity rise above the norm of that hour and will cause it to rise above the norm of this hour. Remember: Spiritual thoughts, Spiritual words, and Spiritual actions. To avoid His leadership will generate problems comparable to those that developed at Corinth. The flesh will rule, arguments will materialize, opinions will formulate groups of those pro and con. And the congregation will experience a "split". Friends will experience division and all of this because the "flesh" was ruling and the ONE who is our "Comforter" has been forgotten and betrayed.

Chapter 3: Comfort in Him Who Labors in and Thru Us

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1 Corinthians 3

Infantitis is what it might be called! Even though one has knowledge of the Holy Spirit and His indwelling of us, there is the resorting to a fleshly approach of our labors, operating on a level as Paul refers to as “babies on milk”. We become followers of people instead of the Lord. We pride ourselves on identifying our doctrinal distinctiveness on the person whose ministry with which we can most readily identify as over against the One who has truly saved us, Jesus Christ. Our labor for God is nullified because our motivation has become squelched. Later in the chapter it is said that it will be “tested by fire”.

Churches get off target; people get off target. The ninth verse gives our identity: “For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.” Our foundation is Jesus Christ and therefore we are to exercise caution and discipline as to the manner of our labor so that it achieves eternal rewards; it is to be built upon the foundation of Jesus. “Mere men”, words used at the conclusion of 1 Corinthians 3:3, make for clarity of understanding when you see people continuing to actively pursue “jealousy and strife”. The fact that the apostle had to revert to that problem within the assembly because some are arguing over whom they follow reveals just how immature these brothers and sisters have stagnated. Two thousand years have passed and the problem is as rank today as it ever was. We know what Dr. Dispensation, Brother Revelation, and Prophet Postulation says, but we are not certain what the Scripture declares. I know that the Psalmist says that God holds his and my hand, but He, God, tells me through James that I have to learn to hold my tongue. The apostle calls attention to the day when all of our actions will be “tested by fire”. That is when our work will be revealed as on or off target. If our construction is destruction it will be revealed as useless and the quality of our work “worthless”. Any “rewards” will be negated. Only that which stands the test will be rewarded.

Again the apostle reminds the believers of Corinth, and every age to follow, of our uniqueness in Him; we are His temple, His dwelling place, His holy residence. Our wisdom must become “foolishness” in that we believe Him and His Word. In such an identification, we belong to Him and He belongs to us. It is important, it is imperative, that we exercise all labors in light of the one in whom we dwell and who dwells in us. That is what Christ prayed for! The Holy Spirit is the enabler of the Christian life. One

plants, another waters, but the increase is of God... is that not humbling? There's an old saying: "A good carpenter does not blame his tools" and a Christian does not blame his immaturity on God. We are to grow and assist each other in growing. The more I understand about God and His attributes, the more I understand my own limitations and His limitlessness.

The matters of the Lord and the church are to be bathed in prayer and understanding of God and His Word, not in the "craftiness" of intellectuals. Paul notes that such people, those using only the intellect to approach spiritual matters, are "useless". (1 Corinthians 3:20)

Our intertwined relationship in Christ is emphasized in these statements: "For all things belong to you... you belong to Christ... Christ belongs to God." (1 Corinthians 3:21-23) Because such a relationship exists, the all-encompassing compatibility is the guarantee of how we inter-relate positionally and should inter-relate practically. "YOU BELONG TO CHRIST AND CHRIST BELONGS TO GOD" (6:23)

Chapter 4: Comfort in Being a Steward

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1 Corinthians 4

While there are some ego's that thrive on taking oversight roles, that is not always the case. In fact, growing into such a position usually equips a person more adequately than their assumption of a role to which they have not been accustomed. One can imagine the challenge that confronted these new believers at Corinth in determining each person's gift in organizing the local assembly. (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:11-12)

Each person is entrusted with a "stewardship". (1 Corinthians 4:1) The idea of the word relates to one who cared for the properties of another. They would be held accountable to the owner for the duty performed. Understandably, a person in such a position is not going to bat 100%. He is responsible for overall performance. We have been entrusted with certain aspects of the Lord's work, for which we will be held accountable. In particular, our entrustment relates to the "mysteries of God." In this case it refers to a person being found "trustworthy". (1 Corinthians 4:1, 2)

The awesomeness of this entrustment should affect the carefulness with which we administer our responsibility. However, resorting to the enablement of the Holy Spirit of God, the One who indwells every believer, we have a confidence of His accompaniment through the most difficult of entrustments. We are to act in His strength, His wisdom, and for the glory of our Savior. We are but "servants", of which we must never lose sight. In the end, we must be found "trustworthy". (1 Corinthians 4:2)

Obviously, Paul had been "examined" by some of his critics who concluded that he was a failure. He responds by noting that a time will come when he will be judged by the Lord Himself. He is confident of what he has done and the purity of his motivation in performance of his duty. So sure is he of his actions that he rests the case with the Lord alone to be the judge, the One who will "bring to light the things hidden in the darkness, and disclose the motives of man's hearts." (1 Corinthians 4:5) Every man will be rewarded in accordance with his faithfulness in stewardship, and Paul reminds us that he is not excluded. To catch the attention of the Corinthians, Paul relates how he considers their judgments to be but a "small thing --- His feathers are not ruffled by such ignorant interpretations of his motivation.

Sometimes we feel as though we want to let the empty kettles clang, at other times we realize that such people create more dissension in the ranks and this might lead to arrogance on their part. Arrogance can bring devastation to a congregation, more so to a young assembly of believers. Unbridled, undisciplined, and suddenly you have a split church. How then is such a situation dealt with? We are back to the basics, the “Comforter”. It is not a situation that allows for less than the implicit strengthening ministry of the Holy Spirit. Get the picture of how much more we need His ministry in this respect than in those sensationalized moments of protection or intervention. If I die it is all over in a matter of moments; if I live, this becomes a catalyst on how God can and will work in a congregation for years to come.

Suddenly, a brother is placed in a position of stewardship within an assembly. If he forgets for a moment that the stewardship is a gift and not something to boast about (1 Corinthians 4:7) he begins to assert his own goals. He buries the knowledge that he is a “servant”. Remember, “A servant should be occupied with washing the stranger’s feet, not pouring boiling water over his head”. To gird oneself with a towel indicates his acceptance of the subservient role he is called upon to conduct. The words: “you are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings” (1 Cor. 4:8) are graphic, drawing the reader back to the spiritual actualities that are inherent. He immediately chides them about temporal possibilities versus spiritual realities. Maybe, just maybe, he would have the opportunity to live like a king with them. Ruling and reigning sounds grandiose, but it is quite easy for that to supplant a servant’s heart.

The picture of a man who has identified himself with Christ as Savior and Lord is illustrated through a series of contrasts (1 Corinthians 4:9). We are not first, but last; we are not in exalted positions, rather we are as men “condemned to death”. We are but “spectacles to the world and angels”. While you are “prudent”, we appear to be “fools for Christ’s sake”. You are “strong”, whereas we are “weak”. You are “distinguished” while we are relegated to being “without honor”. (1 Corinthians 4:10) “Spectacles”, those in a theater or those in a gladiatorial contest! Perhaps it might even refer to a Roman general displaying captured prisoners. We are objects of display for the purpose of magnifying Jesus Christ.

The contrasts continue in what follows and there is not much by way of encouragement from a human standpoint for any man or woman to assert an allegiance to Jesus Christ. Look at what one had to endure, and any who would follow could expect... hunger, thirst, poorly clothed, roughly treated, homeless, toil, reviled, persecuted, slandered, scum, and dregs. (1 Corinthians 4:11-13) One has to wonder how many would become followers of Christ, preachers of the Gospel, if they knew this type of remuneration was their lot in life.

The demand on converts to Christianity exceeds even the things afore mentioned. It carries with it the accompaniment of taking up the cross to follow Jesus. Instead of reaction, we adopt the attitude of the Apostle. "We work, we bless, and we endure", responding with His attitude toward his enemies. (1 Corinthians 4:10)

When learning of the Christ responsive attitude, some people feel ashamed. The purpose in presenting these things does not have that as its goal; the goal is to make us aware of a growth in Christ likeness through the power of the Holy Spirit's enablement. With such development, the church becomes a powerful force in a wicked and perverse world. Ultimately people see what the Comforter is doing in each of us.

Feeling a deep affinity to those who he had been instrumental in bringing to a saving faith in Christ, the apostle feels a sense of freedom to beckon them to become imitators of him. He has not abandoned them to others for instruction, nor is he exempting himself from a life that reflects the Lord Jesus. Rather, he holds himself deeply accountable on their behalf. (1 Corinthians 4:16)

While visualizing theirs and his responsibility, he makes it known just how deeply his concern is reaching into his life. He sends Timothy to reinforce his teaching and his love. Timothy was considered as his own "son" and so he is sacrificing in order to strengthen the brethren. This younger man was obviously considered the epitome of what Paul had been speaking... a son intent on following in the footsteps of his "father" in the Lord. He is competent for the occasion. Also, Paul is not trying to place expectations on one group of Christians that he does not place on another. Time or place does not lessen our obligations that need fulfillment through obedience. Christ "who is the same yesterday, and today, and forever", (Hebrews 13:8) remains relevant to every situation, in every congregation. While there are some who would be quick to say: "Times have changed, things are different!"; there is a failure to admit that "the world, the flesh, and the devil" are gradually infiltrating the saints, and the real change should be the appropriation of the leadership of the Holy Spirit in the minute details of our lives.

Once again there is a reference to arrogance. Some were acting as though Paul would not come back to Corinth and therefore they felt confident in their actions. Obviously, the problem then has remained inherent amongst believers. There is the assurance that it must be dealt with and would be dealt with in "power". We are back to the ministry of the Comforter; the One Who would show His strength through the brethren who would remember His indwelling presence, power, and purposes for them as over against those who had been usurping their leadership roles. Love and gentleness are preferential to a rod. While the rod may be necessary for those who refuse to be corrected, it remains as the alternative action. The action against arrogance or any other necessary correction is a "spirit of gentleness." (1 Corinthians 4:21)

Chapter 5: Comforter & Moral Disorders

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1 Corinthians 5

Because the words "is", "has", and "arrogant" appear as relating to this particular problem in the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 5:1, 2) there is reason to believe that this is a continuing relationship that has not been dealt with and is in need of attention. It specifically refers to the male person and thus might imply that the female was not in fellowship with the believers; perhaps she was an unbeliever. The immoral action involves this individual with his father's wife.

While we understand that forgiveness means the past is forgiven, it is this persistence to ignore moral standards that becomes an issue. One, who refuses to accept instruction and correction, ignoring repentance, should be removed from the assembly. Matthew 18 is clear on the subject: Private and personal dealt with... end of the subject; failure to resolve; only then take one or two to endeavor to resolve the matter; still failure to resolve... only then go to the congregation. Always remember what was said at the end of 1 Corinthians 4: "with love and a spirit of gentleness". Note again that the subject is not an object of gossip, but rather an object of "mourning".

When immoral activity persists within the assembly without resolution, the ultimate is the removal of the "arrogant" person. One has to wonder which of the sins is the greater. The issue now is dealt with in the power of the Lord Jesus. He is turned over to "Satan" in the hope and prospect that ultimately he will experience a renewed relationship with the Lord, relinquish association with the immoral relationship, reject the "fleshly" relationship oriented by the devil, and be saved in the "day of the Lord Jesus." Dr. Charles Ryrie notes: "This evidently means that the church was to discipline this sinning brother by committing him to Satan's domain; the world (1 John 5:19), and to Satan's chastisement, the destruction or ruin of his body (flesh means 'body' here) through sickness or even death. Destruction does not mean annihilation but ruin. Persistent sin often leads to physical punishment." (1 Corinthians 11:30; 1 John 5:16-17)

Sometimes we patronize ourselves with pride of how tolerant we are of people with other practices or beliefs, (1 Corinthians 5:6) "boasting "about things that should be embarrassing, completely forgetting that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump". (v7) We boast about our "love" and display our ignorance of sound Scriptural principles. Even though we are "sanctified" we are willing to allow exposure to a "little leaven" and

in the process display that ere long we will be compromising. Christ our Passover has been sacrificed; for what reason? To be the sin bearer on our behalf! That in turn leads us to leave behind anything less than “sincerity and truth”. (1 Corinthians 6:8) Our position in Christ, pardoned, demands a life of separation to Him. If the man of the “world” feels comfortable in our churches we need to examine what we believe and practice.

Concerning immoral associations, Paul notes that we cannot escape some things that are necessary for living. However, we can be clear about not associating with a “brother” who is living to please the devil. We are certainly not to be tolerant of immoral conduct in the assembly. In the eventuality that the individual repents and seeks forgiveness and restoration, we are to be reminded of the principle...”or with love and a spirit of gentleness.” (1 Corinthians 4:21)

Judging situations in the church is one thing. However, the church has no responsibility to be involved with someone “outside” the church. (1 Corinthians 5:12, 13) Perhaps this is the reason behind why the woman is not mentioned for judgment in this immoral situation. As indicated earlier, there is the possibility that she was not a believer. Moral situations that develop in a church cannot be ignored, and the guilty persons are to be “corrected” or “removed” if they do not repent. A significant reason is because they are spectacles, both to the “world and to angels.” (v9) Once removed they are no longer the responsibility of the assembly, but of the Lord!

The apostle further defines a number of practices that require attention at the same level... covetous, swindlers, idolaters, immoral persons, revilers, or drunkards. (1 Corinthians 5:12) No arrogance is to be tolerated. There is clarity concerning our sanctification because of the relationship that we have obtained in Christ and resident presence of the Holy Spirit who empowers us to that newfound lifestyle.

Judging situations in the church is one thing; however, the church has no responsibility to be involved with someone “outside” the church. (1 Corinthians 5:12, 13) Perhaps this is the reason behind why the woman is not mentioned for judgment in this immoral situation. Remember that we indicated earlier the possibility that she was not a believer. Dealing with situations that exist because one member of a family is a “brother in Christ” and the other member of that family has no attachment to the assembly, requires clearly defined Christ like love and compassion. (v21)

Chapter 6: The Comforter & Spiritual Matters

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1 Corinthians 6

“What! Know ye not?” That little phrase, or its equal, appears numerous times in 1 Corinthians. Paul finds some things that are almost unbelievable. Some folk are so intent on secondary issues that they would disgracefully allow such matter to end in a civil court. It would be better to suffer a wrong than to perpetuate a problem to this level. Surely there are those in the congregation who are sufficiently mature to resolve a matter.

As mentioned preciously, matters that develop between “believers”, the instruction is pointed; they are not to be referred to the civil courts, but rather to consideration between fellow believers. The reasoning is laid out for us in the most practical fashion. Someone may say: “I know my rights!” The truth is that they may be wrong!

Matters that are criminal in nature are mandated for consideration by the state. Matters that are more specifically interactions between brothers in the assembly are to be dealt with at that level. The result of doing this in a fashion that meets Scriptural criteria will naturally benefit the entire congregation. Simply put, the unrighteous would have little inkling of what God says on the matter. While the civil law may be applicable outside the Church, as God conditions us through the moving of the Holy Spirit, we gradually discover that we must apply the Word of God in resolving the issue. It is more becoming to the Christian and his relationship within the assembly.

In the 2nd verse of 1 Corinthians 6, we are reminded of the fact that “the saints will judge the world.” We should begin applying Scriptural instruction in a fashion that is equivalent with the manner of the future judgement. The ministry of the Holy Spirit makes us “competent” for such a responsibility. Appropriate application of His presence and strengthening will ultimately produce a much greater satisfaction to all, than something adjudicated by a court that is void of believing brothers intent on the Lord’s will on the matter. (Matthew 19:28; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6)

Another of the arguments set forth is the manner on which judges are chosen for the courts, versus the manner of leadership chosen for the Church. It is shameful to choose both on the same basis. Spiritual matters should be settled between spiritual brothers and a mature spiritual basis. Those involved in the decision making should be considered as mature, capable, and competent; aligned only to the Word of God. Just

suppose that something cannot be resolved to my personal satisfaction... Then I should be willing to accept the decisions of those responsible and rather to suffer in my own mind that God is teaching me. And I would rather suffer for the wrong even to being defrauded. Winning before men is not necessarily winning before the Lord. Leave the matter in God's hands. Leaving it does not mean leaving it until another time; it means to let the matter rest with the Lord. Toward the end of John 14:27, we are told we through the Comforter would find peace. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled; nor let it be fearful".

The Apostle slips in a phrase that should catch our attention. Those selected for leadership capacity in our churches should meet Scriptural qualifications. A "business man" in the world does not necessarily make for quality eldership in the Church ... "do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the Church?" (1 Corinthians 6:4) This is probably why so many of our churches have become "business ventures". Our son said it clearly, "We have lots of preachers, but few pastors."

Another thought is dropped into our thinking by the Apostle. "On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren." (1 Corinthians 6:8) Just suppose a list was published of all the things wherein we had been the defrauder. A list of sins that involve moral looseness or laxity is found in verses 9, and 10 and the pointed result: "will not inherit the kingdom of God." Such things are spoken of directly. The redemptive work of Christ, "washed, sanctified, justified" cleanses any person who places themselves in faith beneath His blood. Further, God releases them from that pattern of living and says: "such were some of you" (1 Corinthians 6:11)... but no more! Be sure to catch what the Apostle is saying... one cannot justify participation in sin that is the pattern of the past. You have been sanctified, (1 Corinthians 1:2; Acts 20:32) you are being sanctified, (John 17; Ephesians 5:26) and you will ultimately be sanctified. (1 Thessalonians 5:23) Everyone has "skeletons in the closet". Remember how God and others handled you. Apply Scriptural principles! Body, soul, spirit, are all affected the moment Christ is invited to be Savior. We are dealing with weaknesses in a BROTHER.

Another key that fits the lock that opens the box is the statement: "Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren?" Am I to believe that God in His Sovereignty called out a group of brethren unto salvation and equipped them with gifts (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4) never provided a single brother capable of judging a church problem? Calling on a "worldling" when we have the "Comforter" is declaring our ignorance or unwillingness to follow the clear cut mandates of Holy Writ!

Just to reiterate the principles he has already presented, the apostle emphasizes: that the believers body is the “Temple of the Holy Spirit”, the residence. Where I go, He goes! He is “in you”. I am no longer “my own” for I have “been bought with a price”, out of the slave market of sin. I am to glorify God in my body! Look and treat fellow believers as you would want to be treated, or make the effort to go a step further in imitating the person of Jesus! WHAT A CHAPTER!!!

Chapter 7: The Comforter in Marriage

By, Rev. Ted Cowen, © Commitment 2017

1 Corinthians 7

While we do not have the exact wording of what was communicated to the apostle, we do have the basics of this particular problem. Perhaps the best way to understand the contents of this passage is to begin with a principle that Paul presented to the church of Ephesus (Ephesians 5:32). “The mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the Church.” Contextually, the marriage relationship is a type of Christ and the Church. With that burned into our thinking, the text of 1 Corinthians carries an import that was not only significant in that day, but needs re-emphasis for today. With all of the problems that manifested themselves in the seven churches of Revelation, they are still addressed as “the church”. God wanted them to “repent”. While still “the church”, there was the necessity of restoration.

Questions from the brothers at Corinth are being addressed. Obviously, there was far too much of following the world and approaching the marriage relationship using the world’s definitive methods. That is out of the question for a person who has been joined to Christ; he has but one criterion by which his / her marriage is defined... THE WORD OF GOD!

The good and the best are to be clearly defined. There is a good point: “a man can refrain from ‘touching’ a woman. The Passage unfolds the possibility that some men can find it within their thinking and action not to have a bride. That may also be true for certain women, pertaining to a husband. However, because the majority of people find the natural desire for a “helper suited for him”, (Genesis 2:18) is complimentary to living for both sexes, it is quite natural and acceptable to marry. In fact, if physical and psychological desires permeate the mind toward sexual activity, the proper thing to do is “marry”, and have one’s own mate. This action should provide for divinely acceptable sexual activity.

There are many passages of Scripture that deal with the subject of marriage; a few are included here: (John 2:1-11; Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 Timothy 5:14; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 3:1-7) It is a fact that both members hold certain privileges and responsibilities each to the other. (1 Corinthians 7:4) Paul follows this up in verse 5 by explaining that a certain mutuality exists for sexual participation, and that refraining from fulfillment should only

take place by agreement of both parties. Prayer and agreement are integral parts of abstaining, lest Satan gain an advantage in their marriage.

Here and there Paul injects little thoughts that are most graphic to the subject; for instance, verse 6... "I speak this by way of concession, not of command". Some interpreters say that means that this is not a direct quote from Christ himself. I can hear him saying: "While I do not have a direct word from God, common sense should be sufficient to the occasion."

He reiterates in verses 7-9 that some people have more sexual drive than others. If one finds themselves driven with "passion", the convicting work of the Holy Spirit will tell them that they will be captivated with lust which will invariably lead to sinful activity. Marry! You may have more freedom if you are not married because your responsibilities do not carry accountability for a family; but you may have the obstacle of being driven by sensual desires. Whether Paul may have been married and become a widower, or he may never have married has been debated; however, it is obvious at this point that he is without a spouse and that allows him greater flexibility in his service for Christ. Most important is to understand that God grants the "gift" of either position, or that this is an ordained method of dealing with "burning with passion".

The statement of verse 10 and following is forceful. In the process of becoming Christians, some individuals felt that they should so separate themselves from what the non-Christians were doing and that they should leave their spouses in order to live closer to what God had commanded. Paul counters such action with the prescription that if the non-believing spouse is satisfied to remain with the believing spouse, they are to remain together if at all possible.

While divorce is a last resort, it is accompanied by certain understanding—it should be a last resort. (1 Corinthians 7:10) Second, it should have the flexibility of restoration. (1 Corinthians 7:11) A priority of thinking in any marriage consummated prior to salvation should include the realization that put you together, and included in that relationship is a "sanctified" position for the spouse, and children, and their salvation. It becomes an opportunity to see an entire family saved and serving our Lord Jesus Christ. Refuse to install guidelines or timelines on God. Personally, I believe that any two Christians can and will fall in love, or again fall in love if they put Christ in the center of their relationship. Little is said in Scripture about a second marriage for the Christian. Most positions established are an assumption. For me personally, I have long held that what the courts begin in reference to divorce, they should continue.

The insertion of this section on circumcision is an illustration of the previous portion and the subsequent portion on marriage. "Each man is to remain in that condition in which

he was called.” (1 Corinthians 7:20) God did not make a mistake in allowing your marriage or the timing of your “calling” in Christ... ”but when it pleased God to reveal His Son in me”. (Galatians 1:15, 16) From a slave of sin to a bond-servant of Jesus Christ... a servant of love! A circumcised person should not consider being uncircumcised, and a married person should not be considering divorce because one has become a Christian and the partner is unsaved; a clearer statement cannot be found than that: “if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband, and that the husband should not divorce his wife.” (1 Corinthians 7:11)

Contrast is a key component as Paul deals with what has been a confusing situation in Corinth. The “logical”, from a godly and Scriptural standpoint focuses on a simple, yet profound, truth.... ”You were bought with a price; do not become the slaves of men.” (1 Corinthians 7:23) We can resort to the methods of men or the mind of Christ. Who owns me? Is my focus on the human or on the eternal?

In elaborating on this theme Paul resorts to using the “virgin” as an illustration of the good versus the best. Ideally a person can have more freedom in serving Christ if he or she does not have the Biblical responsibilities of a partner; there is the ability to focus on “body and spirit”. (1 Corinthians 7:34) Marriage is accompanied with a responsibility to “please her husband”; this is equally mandatory for her mate. A single person has more flexibility “to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord. (1 Corinthians 7:35)

It is interesting to observe the mention of the daughter / father relationship and the understanding of each other? Often we see the daughter / mother relationship in a deep mode of love and appreciation, but here we see the injection of the father. Many have re-worded the wedding ceremonies to include the mother when the traditional giving away of the bride takes place, but are fathers more, or less involved than they should be in their daughters upbringing? Parental upbringing of a family is a joint investment and obligation, and certainly commands the understanding of our children’s desires and needs of the future. Nothing can impact the attitude toward marriage more than the husband / father relationship, to the mother / wife relationship, to each other.

Marriage is both divine and civil. The State has taken that position. Whether we accept or reject their law becomes very personal to both those getting married and the person conducting the ceremony. While each may have an opinion on interpreting the totality of Scripture or of the State laws, neither should try to force that interpretation upon another. Both have boundaries and these should be adhered to mutually.

A restrictive note, along with a freedom memorandum is injected... The woman is “bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to marry to

whom she wishes, ONLY IN THE LORD.” (1 Corinthians 7:39) We do not have the liberty to “adjust” what God has declared; we adjust and adapt to any direction that is now open to us. Our circumstances have become a Divine appointment to a new area, accompanied by the promised presence of the Holy Spirit for enablement to fulfill it. To emphasize this he concludes the thoughts with “I think that I also have the Spirit of God.” (1 Corinthians 7:40) One is always happiest if they choose to remain in the appointed path.

Chapter 8: The Comforter in Discussing Foods Offered to Idols

By, Rev. Ted Cowen, © Commitment 2017

1 Corinthians 8

“Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies”. Another problem that needs a resolution! The apostle presents both in that opening verse. The one leads to an obvious “chip on the shoulder”, while the other leads to humility. You can be sure that Paul’s hearing of this problem was not new, and they did not have cell phones to hasten the message. The arguments were on the fleshly level, devoid of the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and unconcerned about the growth and development of new converts. We are all ready to identify problems in others, but not in ourselves. One bit of leaven permeated the entire congregation, and it did not take long to manifest itself.

While new believers should be learning to “grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”, they are learning instead to battle the brethren with arrogance. (2 Peter 3:18) It is not only despicable; it is going to have a long range effect on each other. Love has been lost. Anytime such activity surfaces, I can tell you from experience that it will probably continue long after the original combatants are pushing up daisies.

Paul has said that all have knowledge; thus we see the problem having moved to where some are indicating they have a better comprehension of what God would say. Interpretation and application enters the “arena”... that is how the Church has now been identified in a majority of cases... the Battling Boys against the Bastion! Sad! Sad! Sad! Splitting and splintering is everywhere.

Roy Laurin noted that an idol is “an invention of imagination and superstition”. It amounts to a god that does not exist and yet is worshipped as though it did exist. “There is only one God, the Father from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through HIM.” (1 Corinthians 8:6) The believers have established that something unimportant is important; that is, “meat that had been offered to idols” should not be eaten. One is immediately hearing an echo from Timothy’s address from Paul... I paraphrase it: “It is important that you do not place immature individuals in positions of leadership.” Maturity is necessary to avoid people getting unfocused; Hebrews 12:2 “fixing your eyes on Jesus”.

While meat offered to idols means little or nothing to me, to some others it might be offensive. How important is it to win my argument and lose my brother in the process?

Given time and Study of the Word I might well find myself learning from him. Applying that principle, I backed away from a confrontation with an unbeliever and years later had the joy of leading him to Christ. At his death I was invited to participate in his funeral. Liberty might be restrained for the purpose of assisting the immature or an unbeliever. Remember the opening words of this chapter? “Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.” Love manifests itself in that instead of my “rights”, the other individuals edification becomes my concern. I should gladly acquiesce without compromise of my convictions from Scripture. Who is going to profit in the process of arguing the matter? A time to solidify the subject will arrive at a more opportune moment. Avoid destroying a younger brother. Love should move every facet of our being.

Caught up in the current atmosphere of “Political Correctness”, a large number, more likely a majority of Christians avoid completely many moral and ethical issues spelled out with clarity in the sacred Scriptures. Avoiding issues has never been prescribed; handling them with love as the catalyst is the demand, but never to the point of demeaning the individual. God has unlimited attributes and they do not have to be compromised one for the other to procure growth in our spiritual lives. The apostle beckons us to keep love a pre-emptive. Romans 14:1 is illustrative of the need to separate weakness and heresies and their acceptance, or rejection in a Christ like manner.

“Stumbling block”, “stumble” are mentioned in verses 9 and 13. They are not haphazard admonitions of convenience; they are referred to in relationship to your “brother”. How much I value my brother in Christ will be evident in how I treat him in light of our conflict of convictions. Primarily, be flexible enough not to make him stumble. Grace should lead to graciousness.

Meat offered to idols may find little space in our society, and yours and mine in particular. A missionary working in another culture may find it a realistic problem and find it necessary to deal with in the process of a convert’s spiritual growth. There are dozens more in our own society. With the exemption of love, our “rights” may well become “wrongs”. One has to admit that Paul gave us something to chew on!

Chapter 9: The Comforter and Workers

By, Rev. Ted Cowen, © Commitment 2017

1 Corinthians 9

There is a uniqueness that exists between a Christian and the one who led him to a personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! That bond lends and obligates both parties to dimensions of mentorship beyond the routine. Such was the case with Paul and the Corinthians! It reminds me of a pastor that I knew years ago. He was not the greatest preacher, but he was a soul-winner. Most of his congregation, and it was considerable, were comprised of people that he had led to a personal relationship with Christ. They saw beyond his preaching abilities, he was their father in the Lord; the kinship created confidence and respect. He spoke, they listened!

So entwined was Paul with the Corinthians, and so enormous their problems, that he felt compelled to present them with his credentials and thus lend credence to his admonition to follow. As in the previous chapter, he willingly forfeits his “rights” to enhance his message and their spiritual growth. He does it with the idea of incredulity. Certainly they know the things to which he was entitled! Try using common sense and think beyond the frivolity of your accusations! In fact, you will find this idea of “I cannot believe you are not cognizant of this “truth” in numerous places in this Epistle.

By the time he reaches the 7th verse, and those which follow, he uses the illustration of a vineyard and the owner having the right to its fruit, and the flock herder having a right to milk. Even the ox can munch in the process of threshing. While we have experienced the grace of God and our justification is by faith, (the law no longer being the governing factor in our religious practice) the very core elements of the law, the principles upon which these laws were enacted, are practical by way of application and common sense.

The key that opens the door toward spiritual maturity in matters of this nature is “hope”. Whether the “plowman” or the “thresher”, they are to plow in HOPE. It is the ultimate of our belief! We have a hope that beckons us to develop an ongoing process that conforms us more fully to the likeness of Jesus. While we do this, we recognize that the ultimate of this maturation will take place when we shall see HIM face to face. In the interim, we are to recognize that “balance” in between the spiritual and material is achievable when we live in HOPE as the ultimate.

The 11th verse brings with it an impact that should negate many problems in our churches, just as the Apostle intended it at Corinth. Added to our “hope” comes the idea of “hindrances”. Frequently, believers, these folk at Corinth along with the folk of our era and location, become stumbling-blocks, creating obstacles to others finding or following Christ. The devil has sufficient resources to instill objections in people’s

minds without assistance from the saints with their un-saint-li-ness. This is especially true when believers go to war with believers. Is it not strange that these folk have expectations of one that they did not have of another? The 13th verse illustrates this perfectly when it lays out the idea that Temple servants under the law had expectations relating to their support and Christians, involved in the work of the Lord, should be able to expect similar support. The problem in a modern setting is to balance the basis of need for a servant with his desire or aspirations of worth. Because our churches are run so much like businesses today, the problem is multiplied.

When asked by a church board what I expected for a salary, I replied:

- 1) You can average out the income of the congregation as a determination.
- 2) You can average out the income of the Board of Elder / Deacons. (I always noted that in doing this, most churches, qualified or not put business men on the Board and that automatically makes a higher salary).
- 3) You can pay me what you think I am worth and that will let me know how long I remain your pastor.
- 4) You will pay me whatever you wish and my family will take that as indication from the Lord as to how we should adjust our living.

It is important that we understand the underlying principle here is that Paul emphasized: "The Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel." (1 Corinthians 9:14) It was the very method that our Lord employed as He traveled and preached during His earthly ministry.

1 Corinthians is a very practical Book that should enhance the ministry of every congregation. However, it is isolated to a hit and miss category because it crosses swords far too often with modern Christian living. There is more to come!

The Apostle is conscientious about the manner in which finances were handled; so much so that he asserts his willingness to "die" (1 Corinthians 9:15) rather than have a justifiable accusation lodged against him as pertaining to preaching for financial benefit. He is adamant to this end. He is preaching the gospel because this is that to which God has called him; that with which God has entrusted him. It is a "compulsion"! He understands his obligation and does so to the extent that he says: "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel." He understands clearly that it is a "stewardship". Much more is said, but not as a whip.

In illustrating the truth further, Paul reminds them of appreciation toward those involved in salvation and growth in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 9:11, 12) At the same time he does not want this relationship to be a hindrance. He desires to enhance their thinking toward reasonable response to the servants of the Lord. He continues that line of thinking through verse 14.

Subsequently he reverts back to the importance of this message, but not to the purpose of securing for himself. You can almost feel him saying: "I would rather starve than try to enforce your assistance toward me. I find this to be a boasting point... I depend on

God alone for my provision.” His priority is to obey God’s calling and instruction and allow God make the provision in the way He sees expedient, including making tents, when necessary.

It can be safely said that Paul made clear the Scriptural authority and justification for the support of one serving the Lord. Further, the passage unfolds so as to make clear that he is never to get his priority out of balance and become enamored with financial gain or remuneration as over the distribution of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Watch carefully that the “need” does not become “greed”! The end of the 18th verse is a classic: “so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.” There it is again: “my right may be wrong”. In fact, verse 19 is another of those verses that “socks it to us”, as the old saying goes.

Every believer has a stewardship that should prioritize their life and lifestyle. (Recall the gifts mentioned in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4) While no longer under the law and its obligations, (the Old Testament), the burden of a soul without a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, or a Christian bent on scripturally objectionable conduct, should become the cornerstone of our service for Jesus Christ. I am but a servant! In Romans 1:1 he likens himself to a “bond-servant... a slave of love. Here he sets forth with clarity that his goal is the winning of souls for the Savior.

Certain flexibilities are in order for securing his aspirations. Verse 20 and following lead us to conclude that we are to bend but not break. The “law of Christ” is like a refiner’s fire in dealing with our morals and our ethics. Instead of diminishing the gospel message or watering it down it inculcates pliability. Grace comprehended every aspect of our living in becoming the instrument that affects the salvation of another: “I have become all things to all men, so that I might by all means save some.” (1 Corinthians 9:22)

The Christian life is a race. Discipleship requires discipline. One forfeits many “rights” in order to secure the prize. Self-control is mastering the body tongue to toe. The idea is to strive for achievement at the highest level; to avoid any possible disqualification. Winning the race with eternity’s values in view should be the aspiration of every believer; it is accompanied with the imperishable.

Chapter 10: The Comforter in Regards to Self-indulgence

By, Rev. Ted Cowen, ©Commitment 2017

1 Corinthians 10

Frequently chapter divisions of the Scriptures allow a thought to be incomplete; I see these two chapters (9, 10) in a harmony that is inseparable. Reflection on the past clarifies how we may all have the same amount of knowledge but arrive at different conclusions. Such conclusions may be derived as from the Lord, while others may be fraught with the world, the flesh, or the devil. It is easy to be led astray if we miss a basic truth. To illustrate this, the apostle said in verse 4, “and the rock was Christ”. Somehow, He got lost from the thinking of the majority of those fleeing the land of Egypt. Me, my, and I surfaced and unacceptable worship resulted... “The people sat down to eat and drink and stood up to play.” (v7)

The examples of Holy Writ should so imbed our thinking that we could not “miss the boat”; it happens. What started in discussion among the brothers degenerated into arguments and gradually, of what speed I am uncertain, to unholy worship, idolatry (v7) and “immorality”. (v8)

We would like to think that “grumbling” is not sinful, but God punished the children of Israel for that conduct toward Him. We rest on the mother-lode of bountifulness from the hand of God and still we grumble at the apparent obstacles that cross our paths and fail to see that these are there as “examples”; lessons of instruction from the Master Teacher.

Further... as has been indicated previously, a major factor that permeated the Church at Corinth was pride and it filtered into every aspect of the social and spiritual lives of these believers. Though they were purchased by the redemption that was in Christ, they had not been brought from the past influences. Grace had affected rescue from the law, however, it did not permit lawlessness. There was a remnant who understood the transition, but it was only a remnant. The fifth verse of our chapter, (1 Cor. 10) makes that clear.

We should be grateful that God has not chosen to act toward the Church for two thousand years as He did with Ananias and Sapphira. (Acts 5) He also illustrated His desire toward Israel with the death of 23,000 in the 8th verse of 1 Cor.10. The words: “Nor let us try the Lord as some of them did” (v9) is a warning that will be amplified in succeeding verses and the chapter that follows.

Grumbling, to us, is oft treated with passiveness; in reality it is despicable to the Almighty. We are reminded of the forcefulness of this in this group of verses when we read: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide a way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it." (v12, 13) Grumbling in effect says that we have reduced His sovereignty in our thinking and actions and resorted to a form of idolatry. Something or someone has been given permission to reign in the place of the Holy Spirit, the strengthening one.

Inasmuch as the Israelites "grumbled" in their travels from Egypt, and because the church at Corinth was doing much the same, we find this reminder: "Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved." (v6) They had lost their focus and what they thought they "needed" had turned into idolatry, immorality, and displeasure toward God. Any trust that they once enjoyed toward Him had become mired in self-pity; every encounter that should be a reminder of His goodness and graciousness had become blurred... their god was a bunch of gods, and their "need" was reduced to "greed". They marched like lemmings to the precipice of death. They refused to recognize the warning signs, even though they are there for theirs and our example. The men of "faith" (Hebrews 11) had and have been delegated to the bin of the forgotten.

Our text amplifies how the believer is sometimes restricted in his conduct by ethics as well as Scriptural injunctions. We may be able to recognize that "meat" offered to an idol does not bother our conscience, but others, some belligerently so, will go so far as to push something in your face, for the purpose of demeaning your commitment to the Lord. Every believer is to be reminded of their body as a temple of the Holy Spirit. Where we go and what we do is important. As men and women who have been separated unto Christ, one should not be a participant in things that contradict or question our commitment. An old friend used to say: "If it is doubtful, it is dirty." Dr. Charles Ryrie notes: "Glorify God by seeking the welfare of your Brother." Keep your objective, the salvation and growth of a believer in view. The devil delights in diminishing our commitment to sanctification! (1:2)

Positive in our thinking of every believer should be the aspiration of seeking to follow the imitation of Christ. The enablement to this end is the indwelling, the endowment, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit of God. As has been said so often concerning Him, "from resident to president." (11:1)

Chapter 11: The Comforter in Attire

By, Rev. Ted Cowen, © Commitment 2017

1 Corinthians 11

After stating that we were to be imitators of Paul as he was of Christ, the Apostle confronts another growing problem in the congregation of the “righteous”... the demeanor with which we carry ourselves.

First, get clear in our thinking the order and purpose of God’s intention for the human race. Man was the creation of God. Woman was made from and for man. Man was created for the purpose of fellowship with God and tending to God’s creation. He was made in the “image” of God and thereby acquired the distinction of having the ability to fellowship with God... something we see taking place in the beautiful setting of Eden. (Genesis 2, 3) When man fell and became a “sinner”, God initiated a restoration of that spiritual relationship through the redemptive work of Christ. Page after page it unfolds throughout the Bible manifesting a love that God has for the human race.

Another problem; times have not changed. The centuries roll by and there is always something surfacing because we are human and the weeds do not need fertilizing. The flesh presents problems and we, through choice and carelessness, feed the objectionable to development.

A segment of the congregation forgot that God gave “gifts” for the manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s ministry. They got mixed up on the reason of the creation, the order of their creation, and the distinction of a desire for service and God’s appointment to a specific service. They became enamored with their self-serving interests. It appears that they forgot their roles in life and decided that traditions could be thrown out completely. Freedom did not permit flippancy, then or now. A conservative decorum should accompany the conduct in an assemblage of God’s people at worship. The lewd woman who got saved should so attire herself as to being attractive and God fearing, but not so as to be distracting. The man should not have to tell everyone, “I am the boss.” So enamored with self and so proud of position, the marks of superiority bedecked a number of individuals.

Once a man or woman embraces Christ as Lord and Savior it follows that he or she should remember the principles of Holy Writ. We no longer represent the world, the flesh or the devil; we represent our Lord Jesus Christ. Naturally, we are monitored by the world, but we are mentored by our Lord. The Principal of decorum has not changed simply because the date in history has changed.

Who was created by God, in what order, for what purpose, has not been abolished as to principle. Granted, the phrase “but if it is disgraceful” (1 Corinthians 11:6) would give

some levity and allow for cultural changes, there is the ultimate conclusion that a man or woman is to retain a modest approach to attire so as to present a conclusion on the part of others that they are subservient to Christ. This is especially practical with people in leadership capacity, be it man or woman.

The devil has methods without number to invade the territory of the saints. Israel's journey from Egypt to the Promised Land makes for an ideal illustration. The see-saw experiences from victory, to defeat, to victory, etc. should suffice to make us alert to his antics. The fact that he visits what should be one of the believers most sacred experiences (the Lord's Supper), is not surprising. First it was dress, attire. There is no room for "contentiousness" (1 Corinthians 11:16) to develop in a congregation as a result of acceptable or un-acceptable attire. Simply put, it behooves us to indicate that our Lord is deserving of the best as we worship Him.

Here, when our attention should be fixed on "in remembrance of Him", (1 Corinthians 11:24, 25) it had been degraded; they were celebrating with a feast, some were gluttonous and some went hungry; some even got drunk. Contentions were obvious! Instead of harmony, discord abounded. They had lost sight of the purpose for which the "supper" was intended; "this do in remembrance of ME." (1 Corinthians 11: 24, 25)

Self-examination through reflection in the mirror of God's Word is a must for every believer. The daily visit to the "prep" room each morning is a deep sense of responsibility in facing the day before us. After all, we do not see ourselves as prepared if we remain in our "night clothes". No man is prepared for the "Lord's Supper" if he has un-confessed sin in his life.

The need for self-judgment, "rightly" dealt with, will avoid many problems. This is especially true in congregational associations amongst smaller groups! We are made aware of the principle, "But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged." (1 Corinthians 11:31) Because everyone knows each other, in the smaller assemblies, there is a greater tendency to experience greater criticism, justified or not.

Persons who prepare themselves "at home" can avoid creating a devil's delight in the congregation. Once again we are made aware of the necessity and value of the Holy Spirit's ministry of applying personal and community appropriation by every child of the KING.

The inner man, as also the outer man, should go to the dressing room before engaging in the Lord's Supper....

- Reading the Scriptures
- Searching the heart for sin
- Confessing and seeking forgiveness (before man/ before God)
- Clothing one-self in acceptable attire
- Avoiding all possible obstacles/hindrances
- Fixing our attention on JESUS only

Chapter 12: The Comforter in “Gifts”

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1 Corinthians 12

The New American Standard Bible utilizes the word “varieties” in verses 4, 5 and 6; it also uses “various” in numerous other places. Obviously, the saints at Corinth must understand that we are not replicas that are stamped out with a press that negates our identity as individuals. In the context of this entire passage you see the Holy Spirit delegating gifts, ministries, and effects (1 Corinthians 12:4, 5, 6) to various individuals. In light of this you must conclude that He knows the character of the individual and blends him / her with a gift or gifts that enhance his / her ability in service. They had been pagans who worshipped idols; those idols could not think or speak... nothing but mutes. They have now embraced a living God. His tri-unity can be conversed with through prayer and leading of the Holy Spirit.

Somewhere in my past I read: “Union—Not uniformity”! Many of the problems at the church in Corinth were tied to their culture. From paganism to Christianity demanded that they leave behind some things and adjust to others that were in keeping with Biblical principles.

Again the ministering work of the Holy Spirit of God is brought to the forefront. (1 Corinthians 12:3) His leadership had become replaced with an added mixture of self and opinions that were fleshier. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in us makes the program of God in the church unique. God imparts gifts--wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and does so through the Holy Spirit, individually, just as He wills.” (1 Corinthians 12:11) This activity of the Holy Spirit is for “the common good”. (1 Corinthians 12:7) The gifts are not for display, nor are they for the purpose of showing superiority; they are to be utilized for the benefit of the members of the church, as previously indicated. All too frequently the body of believers endeavors to function devoid of considering His leading through another individual’s gift. They consider one person to be superior to the other-. Shame!

To pour a little coal on the fire! The Apostle proceeds to show the various functions of the human body and pointedly asserts that we see some parts more worthy of honor. It is only when one part does not function as “normal” we suddenly realize their worth. How long do you think people will continue to come to the church if the building was not kept clean? Again comes the challenge to utilize your gift. May we ask if you, in conjunction with others in the church, (Pastor, Elders, Deacons, etc. all) have identified your gift? Each of us is to function within the sphere, the scope of our gift and ability and these are to assist to that end.

“God has placed the members, each of them, in the body, just as He desired.” (1 Corinthians 12:18) One lady told me that her cousin “had a heart of gold, but it took a heart of brass to put up with her.” Were we not to learn from that individual? Recognizing these facts, through the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we as a congregation are to acknowledge what God has done to chip, shave, or sand us through individuals? They are equally important in God’s program to us.

Here we catch the instruction also that we are not to try to fit someone into a position for which he / she is not qualified or gifted in God’s placement program. The many are ONE. God does not “compose” the “body” with inadequate individuals to meet the need. (1 Corinthians 12:24)

Divisiveness has no place in the function of the Body of Christ. Each individual is to be committed to the truth: “that the members may have the same care for one another.” (1 Corinthians 12:25) This cannot be secured if we use boxing gloves or hoe handles, or even a hot head. I, me or my must focus on the knowledge that my every action effects everyone in the “body”-- be it “honor or suffering”.

Let me suggest that individuals endeavor to identify their gift, and why it is apparent to them that this is the case. Contact those individuals responsible for your activity in the church and have them confirm or not your gift. Do not approach them wearing your feelings on your sleeves. While other portions of Scripture indicate other possibilities, these will suffice

- Wisdom
- Knowledge
- Faith
- Healing
- Miracles
- Prophecy
- Distinguishing of spirits
- Tongues
- Interpretation of tongues

In the knowledge that we are “baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13), we are “placed” in that body” (1 Corinthians 12:18), we are “composed in the body”, and it is all done by “GOD” (1 Corinthians 12:24). He also appointed “first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrators, various kinds of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:28-30). Everyone does not have every gift, nor are they expected to do so.

The smoothness of the 31st verse in the Berkley Translation makes for simplicity in understanding how in the process of trying to understand the spiritual gifts provided by God, the brethren had forgotten how this tool should be used... “But you aim hard for the choicest graces. And yet, I will show you a course that runs higher.” That too finds amplification in the 13th Chapter in four letters: L O V E!

Chapter 13: The Comforter and Love

By, Rev. Ted Cowen, © Commitment 2017

1 Corinthians 13

Ponder for a moment: “Love is a gift and a grace”. Love is the “more excellent way of 12:31. Love stems from the word “charity” and encompasses the thought of both the ideas of social and moral practices. It manifests itself through graciousness in pursuing needs of others instead of personal aspirations, which all too often amounts to greed in its myriad forms.

While love may conjure feeling, that should not be the basis of our actions. If our actions emanate from obedience to the Lord, down the road a step or two we may discover that feeling has been generated. Once again the balanced activity that we exercise in obedience to the Instruction of the Holy Spirit and His leadership is paramount. Activity is what is generated when I use my gift for self- aggrandizement.

Some years ago my wife and I visited the “pan yards” in Trinidad. Of course, the time for a visit “par excellence” is around midnight. We listened with gripped attention as the music from the “pans” (Steel Drums), which were once little but discarded 55 gallon drums had been fashioned and perfectly tuned into instruments of exquisite preciseness. It was amazing! That is when 1 Corinthians 13:1 became fresh in my thinking: “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.”

The word “if” appears numerous times in this 13th Chapter. In essence, it is saying “not everyone has every gift; yet, using the ones you have, guided by the principle of love is essential.” To utilize the gifts imparted to us is the indwelling presence of God the Holy Spirit. A tour of the Book of Acts will reveal how He, the Holy Spirit of God, exercised His presence in and through His faithful servants as they followed His leadership. Having read the early verses of 1 Corinthians 13 and arriving at this juncture, one can see how there is a changed working of the Holy Spirit from Acts 2. However, we also see how the believers needed rebuking because they had become dependent of their own abilities. It is not who I am that is important in the work of Christ, it is who HE is. It is not what I feel, but what is HIS will?

Paul is not about to leave the subject entirely. In case, just in case, I am responding to people’s needs with my God given gifts and have not LOVE, “it profits me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3). There are those, like the Pharisees, who stand on the corners and brag or boast and sing: “How Great I Am!” Bragging, boasting about moving mountains or a willingness to be burned at the stake and yet: nothing!!!

The subject would not be addressed except there were “gifted” individuals in the church at Corinth who had swollen egos. They were misappropriating their gift. Their ministry was being hindered and ineffective. The words “nothing” and “profits me nothing” might sound strongly worded, but they are realistic. So prevalent were the problems at Corinth that the apostle utilizes the words “unrighteous and the word “truth” in verse 6. He is not just calling out a problem of a personality; it is a SIN problem that must be culled. We must also take note of one who stands by “truth” and learn to rejoice with that individual.

An additional challenge surfaces with the introduction of: “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:7). It is not saying that I should acquiesce to “sin”, for he has just given me instruction concerning standing by and rejoicing in truth. Paul is saying that my conduct toward others should be permeated by love, which emanates from the love, which originates from God, and now engulfs my activity. It is not to be misconstrued by indicating approval to unrighteous acts toward God or man.

While latitude of interpretation may be applied to the timing of the things that are “done away” or “cease” (tongues, prophecy, knowledge), for certain the things that are “partial” will be done away” (1 Corinthians 13:10). The written Word, the ministry of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, had just begun. The “childish” things could be “done away”. Leaving behind “childish things”, which are more obvious as we mature in Christ and experience the leading of the Holy Spirit, is illustrated by expressing LOVE.

Using the mirror as an illustration (remember that a mirror in that day did not have the reflective ability of a modern mirror), Paul says that we only see “dimly”. Limited perception of the God of all Glory, the Christ of Calvary, the indwelling Holy Spirit, Heaven, is sufficient to keep one excited about what exists for me in the portals of eternity; but for now, all of it is “limited”. When we reach “the great beyond” and see Him “face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12) there will be no bounds, as here... all-be-it perfect... limitless.

I read somewhere that “Faith will end in sight, Hope will end in presence, and Love never ends.” It is to the joy of every Christian that we be reminded that we are building for eternity. The songwriter put it: “With eternity’s values in view.” The greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13) Love is not transient, it originates in the heart of the lover of our souls... love is reciprocal... it is in Him, it is of Him, it is through Him... the eternal God Himself! It is an eternal wellspring! “Faith, hope, love... the greatest of these is LOVE”!!!

“Faith ends in sight... Hope ends in presence... Love never ends!!!

Chapter 14: The Comforter and Prophecy

By, Rev. Ted Cowen, © Commitment 2017

1 Corinthians 14

Our daily exercise program should be the pursuit of LOVE. It is not something that is exclusive of other gifts; rather it incorporates them into their utilization of each and every gift. Further, I should seek to discover if there are “unused” gifts in my storehouse, which I have not included in my repertoire of service for Christ, which need to be expanded upon. Perhaps the utilization of my initial discovery of what gift I possessed has helped me to develop in other areas of which I was not aware.

As indicated previously, the problems at Corinth have been manifesting themselves in our churches consistently for two thousand years. Bogged down in frivolities we miss the priority mentioned in the first verse of this chapter, and therein miss much of what follows... prophecy.

The responsibility of the believer is the speaking forth, with clarity, of things taught in the Scriptures. Sixty years ago a noted Bible scholar said: “Prophecy in the Old Testament emphasized “foretelling” as over against the New Testament emphasizing “forth-telling”. Whether you agree or disagree with that thought, what is stressed is that in the church, people should be capable of understanding what is being proclaimed. To present a subject in a language that is not discernible is confusing to the point of people not even being able to say, or not say, Amen!

The third verse speaks clearly to what is expected when an assembly of believers gathers for the purpose of prayerfully worshiping and studying the Word of God. Look carefully at what is said in that 3rd verse: “He who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.” It is not conducive to the benefit of believers if one speaks “mysteries”. The question we face is quite simple... Are we trying to impress others, boost our self-image, or benefit our audience, the church? (v5)

Obviously there is a place for “tongues”. It is through an interpreter. The tone of the text would clearly indicate that what is beneficial is an interpreter who is identified as being capable of sharing what has been spoken. This individual negates the possibility of improper communication and results in edification in the congregation, the church. The 6th and 18th verses indicate how the Apostle restrained himself from using tongues which were at his disposal.

Paul uses an excellent illustration to further his argument. It has to do with sounds that develop from harps, trumpets, bugles... they are distinct, clearly discernible. In the event that you have two people who have a different language, endeavoring to communicate, they become “barbaric” to each other. Learn to pray with “the spirit” and

with the “mind”. That balance will enable those present to say “Amen”. If one is not familiar with a language he should have an interpreter with whom he is confident. Just suppose you use “ten thousand” words that are not discernable; of what benefit are they? Would a “Thank you!” or an “I love you!” accomplish more than an intellectual tirade of verbosity in an unknown language? Surely we get his point... five words versus “ten thousand.” (v19)

Arriving at the 21st verse and those that follow, we have an unfolding of the purpose of “tongues”. Tongues were necessary to confirm that the message of the gospel was for all people and languages. That the presence of the Holy Spirit was not restricted to the Jewish people, but His baptism was to all peoples in all nations. Clarity of this statement is in keeping with Acts 2 and Matthew 28:19, 20. Once an individual experienced salvation, through a personal faith in Jesus as the Messiah - the promised Redeemer - he needs prophecy in order to grow and mature. As the assembly gathers and shares this new experience, so distinct is their transformation that an unbeliever who enters will see the effect of the Holy Spirit’s ministry in and through them, that he too will fall before God and worship Him. Do people visit our churches because they see HIM at work in transformed lives? Or do they come because of the music, the multiplicity of programs, etc.? Is it possible that we are enamored with “oiling the equipment” and forgetting to utilize HIM? Reading verse 25 shows us how we should be affected by the Holy Spirit’s ministry... “God is certainly among you.

It is beyond question that guidelines are in order within an assembly of believers as they exercise their gifts. The reason is quite simple; there are some who would believe they have gifts that they should begin to exercise, and that the assembled brothers / sisters in the Lord would benefit if they took the podium. However, the assembly knows that if allowed, more detriment or confusion would result.

An illustration surfaces immediately. One can speak in a tongue / language but an interpreter must be present. There should be leadership in the assembly competent to “pass judgment”. (v29) A limited number should participate. (2 or 3) The assemblage should be so ordered that it is conducted “one by one” (v31) and as a safeguard, when one prophesies, he can be interrupted by a more mature brother who elaborates on the subject in light of established teaching.

It is imperative that the established goal of an assembly, such as Corinth, is to avoid confusion and develop peace. (v33) We have never seen a time wherein confusion abounds in the church such as the present. One has to wonder why the apostle injects verses 34-35, unless he had a premonition of the present. I take the liberty of quoting Dr. Charles Ryrie on these verses, as well as 1 Timothy 2:12. “Whatever this restriction means, it must include tongues and prophecy. See verses 27 and 29, where the same Greek verb for speak is used... “I do not allow a woman to teach.” Women are not to assume the office of teacher in the church. Women may teach as long as they do not usurp authority over men in the church. Older women are specifically entrusted with teaching younger women (Titus 2:3-5). The injunction is based on the relationship of man and woman in the original creation (Gen. 2:18; 3:6).

Realizing that some would argue concerning the authority with which Paul speaks, that they would go so far as to question his spirituality and prophetic ability beyond theirs, the apostle says: “the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. “But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.” (v38)

Again, the apostle sees a few of the super-saints ready to misinterpret what he has said; you can prophesy and you can speak in tongues, but make certain that you follow certain stipulations... ”All things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.” (v40)

Chapter 15: The Comforter and the Resurrection

By, Rev. Ted Cowen, © Commitment 2017

1 Corinthians 15

“Now” naturally indicates that there is more to come. An “under-shepherd” seldom exhausts the need / needs of his congregation. There is ever a “prophecy” (noted previously as something “told forth”), that has been derived from self-examination, the Scriptures, congregational experiences, etc., that require attention. While he is never to “lord” it over his “sheep” (1 Peter 5:3), he is to carefully present God’s Word so that it might be “preached, received, and stood upon”. (v1) Many are the persons who can quote the Scriptures but fail to “hold fast” to its contents; mainly because they never truly “received” them. To them the Bible is but a convenience that supports their established ideas; they grab the scraps but not the meat.

Bishop Armach said: “The resurrection is the rock from which all the hammers of criticism have never chipped a single fragment.” That is the subject of this chapter... “Christ died for our sins... Christ was buried... Christ was raised on the third day... Christ appeared to Peter... Christ appeared to the twelve... Christ appeared to more than five hundred brethren... Christ appeared to James... Christ appeared to all the apostles... Christ appeared to me (Paul). All of this took place “according to the Scriptures”. Herein (The Scriptures), ONE RESTS; they are the final authority from God. The appearances of Christ following His resurrection lend credence to the prophecies foretold and fulfilled in minute detail. Christ conquered the grave. In so doing, He solidified the plan of redemption for which the critics have not, and will never find an answer.

Mystery of mysteries surfaces; why God should include Paul, or any of us, in His plan of salvation is unfathomable... BUT, He did! Perfection providing an escape from imperfection and condemnation is what grace is all about; God sees man incapable of escape from the bondage of sin. In love He designs a redemptive plan of perfection... Christ, God the Son, leaves the glories of eternity, offers Himself as a perfect sacrifice on behalf of sinful man, and extends forgiveness through simple faith in His atonement. What man found impossible to achieve, God provided in Christ. (John 3:16-18) “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life; For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has

not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Not only did Paul experience this salvation, but so did the Corinthians. (v11)

It is hard to imagine that some people did not have clarity about the resurrection of Jesus, for it is the lifeline of Christianity... Christ lived, Christ died, Christ arose is the cornerstone of our forgiveness now, and the promise and hope that encompasses our eternal future. The grave is not the end! It is but the final step of our interlude here on earth. It has become the introduction of our expectations... RESURRECTION! How pitiful to believe less! (v19)

The final piece of the puzzle of life and death is when death is “abolished”. There are steps to lead up to this. The picture unfolds in verses 20 through 34. From Adam and Eve on the inevitable appears... man dies and goes to the grave. When Christ arose, the first fruits of the resurrection appear, and “As in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.” (v22)

Every effort that man can think up is exerted to make deaths visit more pleasant... the beautiful caskets, the flowers, the poems, the white washed graves, the memorial gardens, even cremation so that the ashes can be thrown to the wind, or the concrete reef in the ocean have become evident to make that moment of defeat more pleasant. However, the apostle notes the unfolding of events leading up to that moment when death shall be “abolished”. (v26)

The resurrection of Christ inflamed the mind and heart of the apostle. It captured the hearts of those that heard about and gave witness to the authenticity to the prospect that the greatest part of a man’s life is his expectation concerning the future. It was the resurrection of Christ that gave assurance of sins forgiven. Without clarity of conviction on this matter, life and death remains a pitiable experience and man himself is to be pitied. (v19) Christ remains the “first-fruits” of the resurrection... From the creation of Adam and Eve and their subsequent sin that led to death, the prospect of forgiveness and a resurrection to eternal life has been the earmark of Christianity. All of the enemies of Christendom would seek to eliminate this glorious truth but such efforts have remained and will remain unavailable.

The “spiritual is not first, but the natural, then the spiritual”. Life here is “earthy” but eternity future is “spiritual”. (v34) It originated in “heaven” and therefore projects our thinking to the “heavenly”. The “earthy... flesh and blood” (v 50), cannot inherit the “kingdom of God”, thus, the resurrection to a “spiritual body”... the perishable, which leads to the grave, yields to the spiritual or imperishable. Mortality is subject to immortality through Jesus Christ. How accurate the statement: “Death – A physical incident in an immortal career.”

Chapter 16: The Comforter and Giving

By, Rev. Ted Cowen, © Commitment 2017

1 Corinthians 16

Once again we see a problem of the past surfacing which is readily identifiable to the subject of finances. The New Testament emphasizes “gifts” and “offerings” on the part of believers. Currently, the manner in which money is handled is not without problems, many of which are explained away as justifiable in light of it being “given to the Lord”. Another aspect of this is that if the persons involved in these ministries were doing this work in the secular world, they would be worth far more. It is not hard to rationalize our thinking along these lines.

There appears to be a change in money matters with the founding of the Christian church. A strong focus is directed toward “the collection for the saints”. After all, persecution was rampant toward anyone who proclaimed Jesus as the promised Messiah. The brothers in Christ who were “better off”, would no longer donate money toward the ongoing of Judaism; they sensed the responsibility and privilege of assisting other believers in other locations.

In making reference to the “churches of Galatia”, one senses that you can include all of the churches appropriating a similar pattern on how this may be done in unquestionable fashion.

It was to be conducted by bringing one’s gifts, which they had set aside out of their “prosper”, to the assembly on the “first day of every week”. It thus eliminated the possibility that people would be second guessing their planned giving and not follow through on that with which the Lord had blessed them. The assembly would be responsible to control these gifts so designated, and see that they were delivered to other believers who were going through difficult straits. Here too is the care with which this administration should select guardianship of the gifts. By all appearances, Paul avoids remaining directly involved. Local leadership surpasses charisma.

I was told some years ago: “Ted! You do not know how to take an offering.” I considered that a compliment. Giving should be an act of worship. Acts 5 and 2 Corinthians 8 are excellent illustrations of God’s concern over what is entailed in giving. Paul did not want giving to be an “after-thought”; it should be a disciplined delight.

One undoubtedly notices that the apostle advises the brethren that they choose those that should be “delivering” the gift to Jerusalem. He might give advice, write a letter, or even accompany them, but they should do the delivering. The discipline of applying the leadership of the Holy Spirit is woven intricately throughout this process. Catch the word “fittingly” and that which it encompasses. The thought of Paul and an accompanying group makes clear understanding that the finances are to be handled without any possibility of question being raised at any step along the way.

Next the apostle addresses his “plans”; however, he uses great flexibility. How often I have been corrected of the Lord when I have had my plans fixed only to discover that He has more appropriate plans or timing. In the 9th verse we see how “open doors” and “adversaries” can produce changes of direction. Both are subject to the leadership of the Holy Spirit who can direct or re-direct our every plan. It is not unusual for us to be excited about the direction that God is leading when doors are “open”; it is usually difficult to have comfort concerning His superintendency when “adversaries” abound in our next endeavor.

No spark of jealousy is found in the verses that follow. Timothy, Apollos, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus are brothers in Christ, and they are worthy of support from the brethren at Corinth. Endorsing them brings delight to the heart of the apostle. They have stood with him and he now stands with them as they endeavor to visit Corinth. A word spoken “in season” can often enhance a ministry that may be heretofore limited in scope.

Each of these brothers has particular needs. At the same time they are presented as worthy endeavors that should be supported in one fashion or another as of the Lord. The 13th and 14th verses give indication that Paul senses there is still a maturing process that is needed in Corinth. While he does not say there is need to “grow up”, he does say: “Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.” If they fail to read between the lines what is contained therein, they are obviously more immature than even he thinks.

We need to catch the confidence Paul expresses about these brother’s in Christ. The believers are to be “subject” to such people. He further injects a little “dig” when he says: “they have supplied what was lacking on your part, for they have refreshed my spirit and yours.” We all need a little prodding once in a while!

Can we find a little “kinship” in the 19th verse when greetings are sent from Priscilla and Aquila and the church that is in their house? We are subject to the pressure of “bigness” these days... we forget the small assemblies, often those meeting in “homes”. It was a pattern in the early church. Never underestimate what God is doing in small places! Further, recognize the value of a greeting. My heart has been deeply

enriched when a brother from another country brings greetings to our assembly from their assembly.

Envision the thrill that must have been to these believers to know that Paul was greeting them “in my own hand - Paul.” While it probably was only these last few verses to which he refers, it had to be a spiritual stimulant to know that he wanted to personalize the entire message he had sent. As tough as he had been throughout this address, he zeroes in on the idea that there is direction from the Lord, and that the love for the Lord will create action conducive to that love.

As he moves from the greeting of a “holy kiss”, which was in contrast with that of Judas and his hypocrisy, he warns them of the difference between talk and walk. Less than activating love results in a curse.

To all of what has been already said he adds: “Maranatha”... or, Our Lord Come! Just imagine, 2,000 years ago this idea saturated the minds of believers. John emphasized it in Revelation 22:20. It should be the rallying call for all believers of any age. Jesus is returning and that right soon. It is another reason for action that bespeaks readiness on our part. The world is doing everything possible to destroy the truths of Scripture and a call for obedience to its commands; even to endeavoring to identify themselves as Christians. We must not be misled. The person who wants to agree that God is love has a responsibility to reciprocate to His love, with love.

Paul’s closing amplifies this. As hard and as harsh as this Epistle sounds, he has written it: “My love be with you all in Christ Jesus.”

Selah! Think on These Things.

Concluding Thoughts

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On occasion I will watch briefly a religious program on Television or listen to one on radio, but seldom do I stay through an entire program. I find myself being critical! Naturally, I have to visit the Word of God, reflect in the mirror in self-examination, and conclude that I have to give account to God for myself, not for what I have found objectionable in others.

However, like the Prophet Jeremiah, I can have a pity-party or go on doing what God has laid on my heart, operating as close to what I believe to be His will as possible.

1 Corinthians is a book that discloses the weakness that existed in that Assembly. It is obvious, that Jesus promised the presence of the Holy Spirit (who arrived at Pentecost and now indwelt believers), had been by-passed as they made decisions within that “church”. They were allowing their old ways of practice and leadership to manage spiritual matters

This little book was not intended as an exposition or word study; it is a simple diagnosis of their problems and ours. Asking ourselves if we are alert to what is happening to the Body of Christ is its objective. Hopefully, yours will be to do your part in correcting in a graceful manner our weaknesses and a return to the Holy Spirit’s leadership.