

... We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.
1 Corinthians 1:23, 24

Listen carefully and you will hear, from time to time, a yearning among twentieth-century Christians to go back to the early church. The first-century church is often idealized, romanticized and held up as the model to emulate. Paul's correspondence with the Corinthian church should cure any illusions we might have about the perfection of the New Testament church. Here we find a church torn by divisions, affected by sexual immorality and involved in inner-church law suits. The Corinthian church lacked discipline, had a sizeable anti-Paul contingent within the membership, included those who showed up drunk for public worship and those who abused the gift of tongues. There also appears to have been a questioning of the doctrine of the resurrection and, perhaps, a loveless spirit among the rank and file of this body of believers.

1 Corinthians is a pastoral letter. Paul writes to the church which he established on his second missionary journey in about March of 50 A.D. As far as we can tell, Paul spent about eighteen months in Corinth before moving on to Jerusalem and then to Ephesus for an extended stay lasting for about two and a half years.¹

It was during his time in Ephesus that Paul wrote four letters to the Corinthian church. Our Bibles contain the second and fourth of these letters.² 1 Corinthians is a letter of deep pastoral concern. Paul sees the threat to Corinthian church life as coming from within the church itself. The Corinthian believers were in trouble at almost every imaginable level. They had come to know Christ in the context of an exceedingly decadent society and, not surprisingly, they brought much of their former way of life into the church. Our letter contains the loving yet firm urgings of a missionary-pastor who is desperate to restore the spiritual life of a particular body of believers.

¹ See Acts 18 and 19 for Luke's record of Paul's travels during this period of his life.

² Paul refers to a *previous letter* in 1 Cor. 5:9 which produced some misunderstanding. Between the writing of what we call 1 and 2 Corinthians Paul wrote a *sorrowful* letter which probably contained a very stern rebuke for those who had not yet responded to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians.

Corinth

Corinth was a strategically located city with a colorful history. Look at a map and one will notice Greece is divided into two parts. In the south is the Peloponnesus which is *attached* to the north by a four-mile-wide isthmus. Corinth was located on this isthmus. All overland traffic would pass through Corinth. Time and danger made Corinth a bustling seaport. Ships would avoid the treacherous waters to the south and save 250 miles of sailing by pulling into one side or the other of Corinth. There they would unload their cargo, carry it across the isthmus and reload it on another ship. Smaller vessels would be dragged across on rollers. So dangerous was the *long way* around the peninsula that mariners had a saying, *A sailor never takes a journey around Malea until he first writes his will.*

Corinth had been destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. After a one hundred year period of dormancy the city was rebuilt by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony in 44 B.C. By the time of our letter the city of Corinth contained a population roughly the size of Santa Barbara-Goleta-Carpinteria, about 250,000. Corinth was populated by former slaves who had attained their freedom and was truly a Greco-Roman city. It had Roman laws, culture and religions yet Greek influences were present in these same areas. Corinth was a wealthy city which *lacked a landed aristocracy* (Fee, p. 2). It was a city of opportunity, a place to go and make money.

As a center for trade, travel, entertainment and cultic practices, Corinth was the San Francisco, Los Angeles or London of the ancient world. With the hustle and bustle came vice and degeneracy. Aristophanes coined the term *korinthiazō* (= to act like a Corinthian) to describe those whose life was characterized by fornication.¹ Though the oft quoted “statistic” that Corinth had one thousand prostitutes serving at the temple of Aphrodite is probably in error, this city boasted a decadence in public life which would make most of us blush.

J. C. Pollock sees Corinth as a strategic city from a missionary point of view.

Corinth was the biggest city Paul had yet encountered, a brash new commercial metropolis. . . . It squeezed nearly a quarter of a million people into a comparatively small area, a large proportion being slaves engaged in the unending movement of goods. Slaves or free, Corinthians were rootless, cut off from their country background, drawn from races and districts all over the empire. . . . a curiously close parallel to the population of a 20th Century “inner-city” . . .

Paul had seen a Christian church grow and flourish in the moderately-sized cities he had found in Macedonia. If the love of Christ Jesus could take root in Corinth, the most populated, wealthy, commercial-minded and sex-obsessed city of eastern Europe, it must prove powerful anywhere.²

¹ Fee writes, *The Asclepius room in the present museum in Corinth provides mute evidence of this facet of city life; here on one wall are a large number of clay votives of human genitals that had been offered to the god for healing of that part of the body, apparently ravaged by venereal disease.*

² J. C. Pollock, *The Apostle*, cited in Prior, p. 13.

The Church

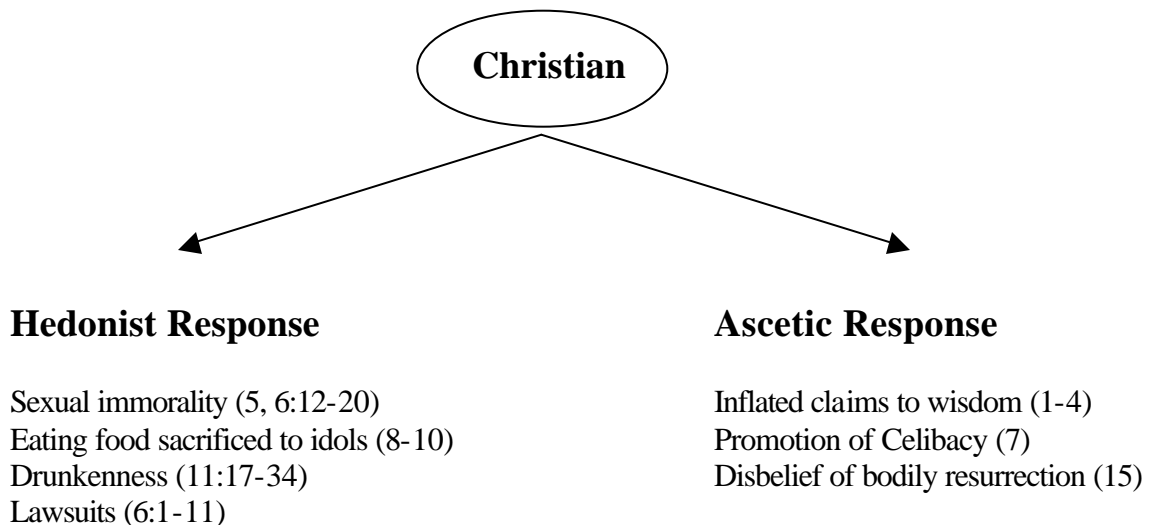
In this cosmopolitan context Paul planted a church which, in one way or another, reacted to its immediate cultural and religious surrounding.

[F]resh from their immersion in the many pagan religions of the community, most of the Corinthian Christians had not adequately broken in numerous ways from the immorality of the prevailing culture that surrounded them. And, although this culture and these religions reflected stunning diversity, certain perspectives predominated across the board in the Greco-Roman world. (Blomberg, p. 24)

The most important of these perspectives is called *dualism*. This Greek philosophy held the world of matter to be inferior and therefore evil. The world of spirit was good and to be sought after. This worldview led to two views of one's bodily appetites. First there were the hedonists (pleasure seekers) who said, *Since the body doesn't mean anything, pursue any pleasure which feels good*. At the other extreme were the ascetics who sought to deny the body any and all of its cravings.

Many in the Corinthian church brought their Greco-Roman orientation to life with them after they became believers.

All of the major problems of the Corinthian church can be viewed as stemming from one or the other of these two outworkings of dualistic thought—either asceticism or hedonism. (Blomberg, p. 25)



Gordon Fee, in his massive (880pp.) and magnificent commentary on our letter, argues that Paul's posture in this epistle is combative. The Corinthian church had turned, to some extent, on Paul. Accordingly, the apostle has to reestablish his authority over the

church while convincing them to change their errant behavior and the theology which led to that behavior (Fee, pp. 6-7). At the heart of 1 Corinthians, therefore, is Paul's defense of himself and his apostleship.¹

1 Corinthians is concerned primarily about the behavior of these new Christians. The letter shows, perhaps more acutely than any other in the New Testament, the conflict between walking *in Christ* and living as a pagan. Paul is concerned with the church's behavior, but, as Fee observes, Paul is ever concerned with the theology which gives rise to inappropriate behavior.

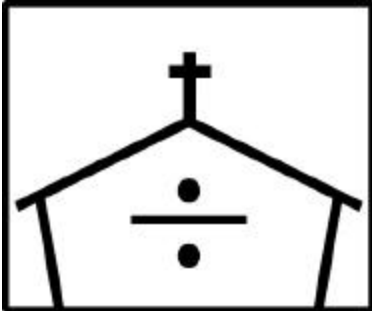
Outline

- ◆ Introduction (1:1-9)
- ◆ Paul's Response to Reports from Chloe's Household (1:10—6:20)
- ◆ Paul's Response to a Corinthian Letter (7:1—16:12)
- ◆ Concluding Comments (16:13-24)

Sermon Notes. . .

¹ See especially 4:1-5; 5:3; 9:1-27; 14:36-37.

Study One
A Divided Church
1 Corinthians 1:1-17



We might say that fighting comes with family life. The brothers' playful wrestling match becomes a bit hostile and soon it grows out-of-hand. Mom and Dad, who love one another dearly, quarrel bitterly over the *Visa* bill. When cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents and grandchildren are a part of the mix, the opportunities for gossip, backbiting, taking sides, and even outright war, are very great indeed.

The local church is the family of God's people, and the people act like it. They love each other dearly and devour one another regularly.

John MacArthur, who has pastored the same church for over thirty years, writes,

Quarreling is a reality in the church because selfishness and other sins are realities in the church.

But this pastor's attitude toward church infighting is anything but lighthearted.

Because of quarreling the Father is dishonored, the Son is disgraced, His people are demoralized and discredited, and the world is turned off and confirmed in unbelief. Fractured fellowship robs Christians of joy and effectiveness, robs God of glory, and robs the world of the true testimony of the gospel. A high price for an ego trip! (MacArthur, p. 24)

Before going on in this study, read 1 Corinthians 1:1-31. Jot down any initial observations and questions you have of this chapter.

Notes and Questions:

We could outline chapter 1 as follows:

- ◆ Greetings and affirmation of the Corinthian church (1:1-9).
- ◆ A plea for unity (1:10-17).
- ◆ A plea for Godly wisdom (1:18-31).

Our study will look at the first two sections of this chapter.

1. Greetings and affirmation of the Corinthian church (1:1-9).

Take away 1:1-9 and the picture of the Corinthians would be almost completely negative. Paul writes to a church in desperate need of repair.

It was a large church—many Corinthians were converted to Christ. It was full of cliques, each following a different personality. Many Christians were very snobbish: at fellowship meals the rich kept to themselves, and the poor were left alone. There was very little church discipline: a lot of laxity was allowed, both in morals and in doctrine—an all-too-common combination. They were unwilling to submit to authority of any kind and the integrity of Paul's own apostleship was frequently questioned. There was a distinct lack of humility and of consideration for others, some being prepared to take fellow-Christians to court and others celebrating their new-found freedom in Christ without the slightest regard for the less robust consciences of fellow believers. In general, they were very keen on the more dramatic gifts of the Spirit and were short on love rooted in the truth. (Prior, p. 19)

Read 1:1-9 with the above statement in mind. How is it that Paul can be so positive?

Look for the following as you read:

To whom does the church belong? Is it Paul's church?

Notice how Paul plays on the word *call*. Compare 1:1, 2, 9 and 1:23-24, 26. What is Paul teaching the reader about the church with his repeated use of this word?

Read 1:4-9 carefully. Before Paul begins what must have been a difficult letter to write, insofar as it is loaded with criticisms and corrections, he affirms God's role in the Corinthian church.

What affirmations does Paul make concerning God's work in the Corinthians?
How could this section apply to Santa Barbara Community Church?

What promises do you find which would have lent the reader assurance for the future? How do these promises lend assurance to you?

Respond to the following:

We need to register this primary truth—Paul looks at the Corinthian church as it is *in Christ* before he looks at anything else that is true of the church. That disciplined statement of faith is rarely made in local churches. The warts are examined and lamented, but often there is no vision of what God has already done in Christ. (Prior, p. 23)

Do we at Santa Barbara Community Church have the right balance between looking at what Christ has done and looking at the *warts* of our church life? How do you see this played out in our conversations?

2. A plea for unity (1:10-17).

Paul addresses four major areas of concern in the first part of this letter.

- ◆ Factions (1:10—4:2)
- ◆ Incest and a lack of church discipline (5:1-13)
- ◆ Lawsuits among believers in the church (6:1-11)
- ◆ Sexual immorality (6:12-20)

1:10 What are the three pleas of Paul's prayer for the Corinthian church?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The Greek words Paul chose in this verse are instructive. The apostle had heard there were *divisions* in the church. The Greek word he employs is *schismata* or schism. Paul longs for the church to be *perfectly united*, that is, *made complete* or, *mended* in unity.

Paul mentions four factions in the church: the Paul clique, the Apollos clique, the Peter clique and the Christ clique. Commentators speculate as to the emphasis of each group.

The Paul group emphasized Christian liberty.

The Apollos group emphasized sophisticated preaching, rhetoric and logic.¹

The Peter group emphasized the Jewish character of the Christian faith.

The Christ group de-emphasized human leadership. *We trust Christ and Christ alone. . . He tells us what to do! We love Jesus!*

What is Paul's initial answer to the factionalism of the Corinthians? What is his point regarding baptism?

Cults generally have great success in being united. A totalitarian leader sets the agenda, and those willing to follow, toe the line. Diversity of ideas or opinions are not tolerated. How can a church be united, yet non-cultic?

¹ Apollos was from Alexandria, Egypt. He was well educated and an excellent orator. See Acts 18:24-28. He was one of the teachers of the church in Corinth (cf. Acts 19:1).

God has blessed the American church with some notable leaders (Charles Colson, J. I. Packer, Billy Graham, John Piper, Christian Schalesky, et. al.). How can we learn from these gifted individuals, appreciate their work and their leadership while avoiding this factionalism which plagued the Corinthian church?

Have you ever been a part of a church torn by schisms? What was the effect on your Christian pilgrimage? How does that experience affect you presently?

For over two decades Santa Barbara Community Church has been spared the pain of serious division. We have not experienced a church split. Why do you think this is the case? What steps can we take to preserve the unity God has created?

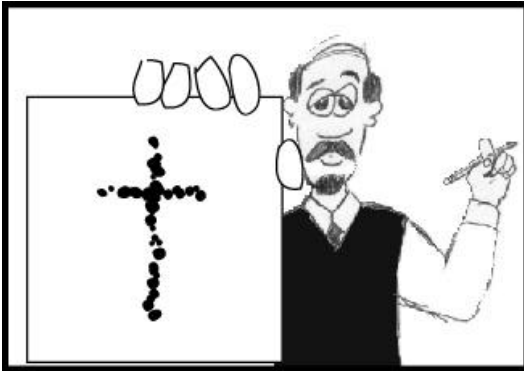
Spend time as a group praying for SBCC. Pray for her leaders (elders, homegroup leaders, teachers etc.). Pray that we would remain a church united! Use Paul's prayer (1:10) as a model for your prayer as a group.

Sermon Notes. .

Study Two

The Foolishness of God

1 Corinthians 1:18-31



“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Isaiah 55:8-9

It is all too possible for twentieth-century believers to speak of the *cross* in a casual manner. We may find ourselves quoting verses which speak of the benefits of Jesus’

crucifixion (Rom. 3:25), wearing a golden cross around our neck or putting a cross on the back of our \$35,000 car. We probably sing about the cross each week, often times forgetting the scandal of the crucifixion.

Crucifixion was the most cruel form of capital punishment ever devised. The idea was to kill the victim as slowly as possible. It was probably invented by the barbarians in northern Europe and then adopted by both the Greeks and the Romans. Cicero called crucifixion *crudelissimum taeterrimumque supplicium*, “a most cruel and disgusting punishment.”¹ Cicero was so horrified of this form of capital punishment that he said, *The very word “cross” should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen, but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears.*

The Jewish mind appreciated the physical horror of the cross and coupled this with the “curse” of God. Deuteronomy 21:23 says that *anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse*. It was simply inconceivable to the Jew that God’s messiah would die on a cross.

For the Greeks, the cross was folly. They viewed God as the *un-moved mover*. God was passive.

[T]o the Greek idea the first characteristic of God was *apatheia*. . . ; it means total inability to feel. . . . A God who suffered was a contradiction in terms. . . . God of necessity was utterly detached and utterly remote. (Barclay, pp. 20-21)

Certainly 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 would have been a shock to both the Jewish and the Greek mind. As Paul begins this letter he holds up the cross of Christ as the ultimate expression of God’s power.

¹ Cited in John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, (IVP, 1986), p. 24.

Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

1 Cor. 1:22-25

Again, read chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians. What new insights do you have after last week's study? What questions, in particular, do you have of verses 18-31?

Notes and Questions:

We come to the third section of chapter 1: **A plea for Godly wisdom (1:18-31).**¹

1:18 As you examine this section notice the gravity of our options. The message of the cross is either *foolishness* or the *power of God*. The cross is *foolishness to those who are perishing*. It would be difficult for Paul to be more forthright. The word *perish* means

definitive destruction, not merely in the sense of the extinction of physical existence, but rather of an eternal plunge into Hades, and a hopeless destiny of death, in the depiction of which such terms are used as "wrath and fury, tribulation and distress."²

Read over these verses again. Notice Paul's various uses of the word *wisdom*. The apostle contrasts Godly and worldly wisdom. Make a list of the characteristics of each as you read.

Godly Wisdom

Worldly Wisdom

¹ See p. 6.

² DNTT, vol 1, p. 396.

1:22 examines three different approaches to God. The Jewish way, the Greek way and the apostolic message of the cross. Work together as a group to explain each of these. Where do we find examples of the Jewish mind, the Greek mind and the Christian mind in our culture?

How would Paul describe the American way to God?

We might be tempted to understand this section of 1 Corinthians as merely an affirmation of Christian wisdom when contrasted with the surrounding Jewish and Greek ways of thinking. Paul's concern goes deeper. He is upset with the way in which the Corinthians were seduced by worldly wisdom. C. K. Barrett writes,

[I]t is not the world's false boasting in its wisdom and ability that caused Paul to write 1 Corinthians, but the same false boasting in the church. . . , where Christians were glorying in men and wrongly evaluating their gifts. They can only do this because they have forgotten that their Christian existence depends, not on their merit, but on God's call and the fact that the Gospel is the message of the Cross. (Barrett, p. 40)

1:26-31 How do the *foolish things*, the *weak things* and the *lowly things* shame the wise?

What encouragement do you find for yourself in this passage?

Respond to the following statement which might be heard from a pulpit or a homegroup somewhere: *1 Corinthians proves that Christianity is an anti-intellectual faith.*

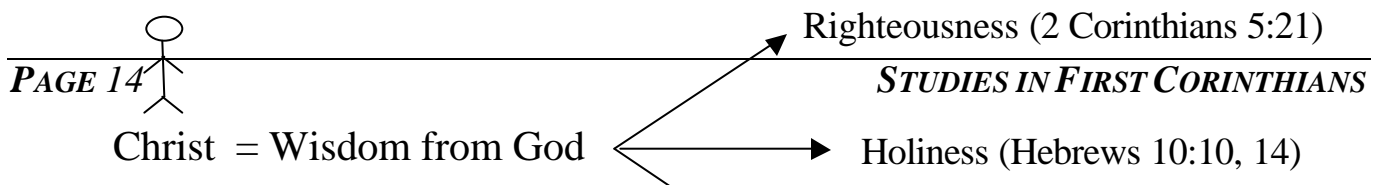
Apologetics is that branch of theology which seeks to defend the Christian faith. An apologist will present a reasoned approach to Christ, a rationale for belief. In light of this section of our chapter, evaluate the role of the discipline of apologetics. Consider the following quotation.

This paragraph (vss. 18-31) puts apologetics in its proper place. . . Compelling arguments for the faith must always be formulated, but only the convicting work of the Spirit will ever use them to bring people to Christ. . . . Murphy O'Connor offers the salutary reminder that "any attempt to make the gospel palatable by bringing it into line with the tastes of those to whom it is preached distorts it, because in this case the criterion is made the expectations of *fallen* humanity." In so doing, it loses its power. (Blomberg, p. 56)

Examine your own heart and mind. Examine your drives, motives, goals and aspirations. Scrutinize your thoughts, actions and habits. Does your life reflect the *wisdom of God*, or, the *wisdom of the world*? How is this evidenced in the areas listed above?

How can we cultivate lives of Godly wisdom?

1:30 speaks of the utter centrality of Christ in salvation. Look up these verses. Define each of Paul's terms (righteousness, holiness, redemption).



Chapter 1 concludes with a quotation from Jeremiah 9. To appreciate its power we need to read it in context:

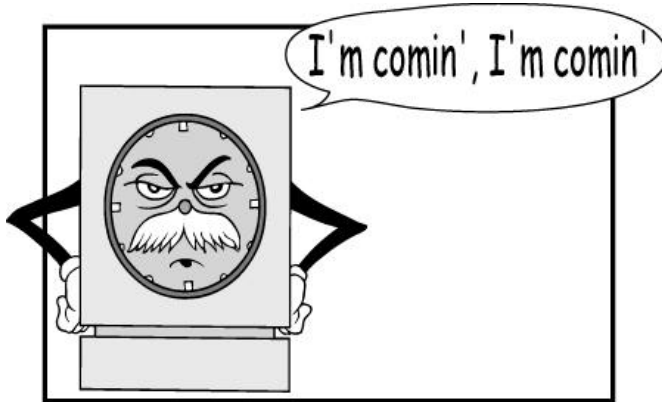
Thus says the LORD: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the LORD; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the LORD.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 (NRSV)

Spend some time together *boasting* in your understanding and knowledge of God!

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Three
Before Time Began
1 Corinthians 2:1-7



The *isms* of history ultimately prove to be disappointing. Communism, socialism, fascism, consumerism, secularism. These and a host of other worldly philosophies fail to answer life's basic questions: Who am I? What is my real problem? What is the solution to that problem? What is the purpose of my existence?

William James (1842-1910) was a philosopher and psychologist of religion. In 1901-1902 he delivered the Gifford lectures in Edinburgh which were later published as The Varieties of Religious Experience. James anticipated the despair which would so characterize the twentieth-century during a time which was exceedingly optimistic.

What [man] craves is to be consoled in his very powerlessness, to feel that the spirit of the universe recognizes and secures him, all decaying and failing as he is. Well, we are all such helpless failures in the last resort. The sanest and best of us are of one clay with lunatics and prison inmates, and death finally runs the robustest of us down. And whenever we feel this, such a sense of the vanity and provisionality of our voluntary career comes over us that all our morality appears but as a plaster hiding a sore it can never cure, and all our well-doing as the hollownest substitute for the well-*being* that our lives ought to be grounded in, but alas! are not.¹

Paul announces to the Corinthians and to us the grand purpose of God who gives our life purpose and splendor.

... [W]e speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

1 Corinthians 2:7

God's secret wisdom was destined for our glory. At the outset, what does this verse mean to you?

¹ William James, Varieties of Religious Experience (Mentor, 1958), p. 53.

Read 1 Corinthians 2. Try reading these 16 verses out loud (whisper if you are in a library). This should help you make sense of these verses. Paul uses the words *spirit* and *spiritual* repeatedly and with different meanings. As you read make a few notes of those things which are confusing and those comments which are encouraging. Share these thoughts with your group.

2:1-5 draws to a conclusion Paul's argument begun in 1:18.

In every possible way Paul has tried to show them the folly of their present fascination with wisdom, which has inherent within it the folly of self-sufficiency and self-congratulation. (Fee, p. 90)

In vss. 1-5 Paul wants the church to see that he too had to reject self-reliance when he first brought the gospel to Corinth.

The content of Paul's message was not sophisticated rhetoric (though Paul was certainly capable of that), but the simple message of the cross.

2:3 states that Paul came in *weakness, and fear, and with much trembling*. Does this sound like the apostle we read of in Acts?

Consider Acts 18:1-11.

What does 1 Corinthians 2:3 tell us about Paul's approach to preaching? What does this verse tell us about what we should look for in a preacher?

Respond to the following:

One wonders how much contemporary preaching is in fact cross-centered. Ours is an age of user-friendly, seeker-sensitive techniques for church growth. (Blomberg, p. 59)

How should this verse (or this chapter) inform our own efforts at sharing the gospel with our neighbor? How does this section address our fears as we step out in ministry?

2:4 speaks of a *demonstration of the Spirit's power*. There is no indication in the text that Paul has in mind the performing of *signs and wonders* in Corinth.¹ Rather the Corinthians themselves were the demonstration of the Spirit's power. They had come to know Christ, thus renouncing the folly of the world. Their transformation was the work of God's Spirit.

Again, notice how 2:4-5 completes the thought of 1:18.

The message of the cross, which is folly to the "wise," is the saving power of God to those who believe. The goal of all the divine activity, both in the cross and in choosing them, and now in Paul's preaching that brought the cross and them together, has been to disarm the wise and powerful so that those who believe must trust God alone and completely. (Fee, 96)

If we stopped reading at 2:5 we might get the idea that Paul is anti-wisdom. Verse 6 begins with a strong adversative, *But*. . . (translated *However* in the NIV).² This single Greek word forms Paul's transition. Having debunked worldly wisdom he goes on to exult in the wisdom of God!

Examine vss. 6-7. What is the wisdom of Paul's message?

Two words warrant attention:

¹ Paul certainly did perform such signs and wonders. See 2 Corinthians 12:12.

² The NASB reads, *Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away. . . 1 Cor. 2:6*

- ◆ **Mature** in verse 6 should not be understood as a reference to a spiritual elite among the Corinthian church. On the one hand *mature* is the equivalent of “being saved.”¹ On the other hand, *maturity* is the goal of Paul’s discipleship ministry. He longs for every believer to grow up *into* Christ (Colossians 1:28).

- ◆ **Secret** in verse 7 is the Greek word *musterion* from which we get our word *mystery*. The NASB translates the word *mystery*. In the New Testament this word generally refers to that which was once hidden but now is revealed. A crucified messiah to the Old Testament Jew was an unthinkable concept. But the cross is the revelation of God’s *secret wisdom*.

Read Ephesians 4:11-13 and Colossians 1:28. Are you a “mature” Christian? Take a moment and do a spiritual inventory of your life. Are you on track? Are you on a growth curve? Would Paul address you as a *mere infant* (3:1) or as one who is *mature*? Share two or three areas for your own growth for which your group can pray.

2:7 contains a beautiful golden nugget revealing God’s plan of salvation. We learn that *God’s secret wisdom* has been *destined for our glory before time began*. The Greek word Paul uses here is *proorizô* (προορίζω). It means *to decide beforehand, to preordain, to determine, or to predestine*.

God’s wisdom is *for our glory*. What does this mean? Compare the following verses:

- ◆ Romans 8:17-23

- ◆ Romans 8:30

- ◆ 1 Corinthians 15:50-52

- ◆ Colossians 1:22

- ◆ 1 Corinthians 13:12

¹ *Mature* (*telios*) can mean “perfect” (KJV) or “complete,” but can also refer to a person who has full membership in a group, one who is fully initiated. Here Paul uses this term in the same way it is used in other forms by the writer of Hebrews (6:1; 10:14) to refer to salvation. **Those who are mature** are those who are redeemed and are completely trusting in Jesus Christ. (MacArthur, p. 60)

When we ponder the glorification of the believer we consider the fullness of that believer's salvation. Those who place their faith in Christ will one day be finally vindicated before God (Romans 5:9-10), morally and spiritually perfected (Ephesians 1:4), and bodily restored (1 Corinthians 15).

This is central to Paul's message to the super-spiritual Corinthians. They will have to wait for glorification.

2:7 in plain language, means that God planned our salvation before the world began.

Sixteenth-century Protestant Reformer John Calvin said this verse *declares that. . . the Gospel had been appointed for us, for our enjoyment of it.* (Calvin, p. 53, emphasis added). This ought to boggle our puny minds with delight. From all eternity God planned to redeem a people to share in His glory!

What is your response to this truth? Share a word of praise with God and with your homegroup.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Four

Two Kinds of People

1 Corinthians 2:8-16



What is the difference? Why is it that some who hear the gospel story respond and are saved while others laugh? Why does the Christian faith *make sense* to three siblings while the fourth embraces secularism? How is it that a husband and wife, who see so much of life in the same way, who enjoy the same activities, share the same bed and love each other so deeply, how can they be divided over the *truth* of the cross? How is it that some can sit in the worship services of Santa Barbara Community Church week by week and not place their faith in Christ?

We could ask these questions in a more positive way. Why is it that I came to faith? Why did my sister place her faith in Christ? What happened to prompt so many of us to turn to Jesus for the salvation of our very souls?

As Paul continues his letter he grapples with these questions. He wants the puffed up Corinthians, so enamored of worldly wisdom, to understand their salvation entirely as a gift from God! Paul wants this church to see that without the enabling work of the Holy Spirit, the cross would make no sense, the things of God would be alien to their thinking and they would be forever lost in their sin (1:18).

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18—2:16. Notice how 2:8-16 fits into Paul's concern for the Corinthian church. What initial thoughts and questions do you have of 2:8-16?

Notes and Questions:

The latter half of this chapter has been used, often, to give support to the idea of a spiritual elite within the church. Some have used this passage to defend the notion that there exist *regular* Christians and *super* Christians. The latter are endowed with a special portion of the Holy Spirit and usually manifest this endowment by speaking in tongues or performing miracles. But nothing could be further from the truth. The apostle is aghast insofar as he has to address the Corinthians as *mere infants* in 3:1. He wants all of them to be *mature*.

Gordon Fee, who calls himself a *Pentecostal New Testament scholar*, cringes at such an interpretation, calling it *180 degrees the opposite of his intent*. Ponder the following

quotation with your homegroup. Savor its truth. Be prepared to explain it to one who doesn't understand it.

Paul's concern needs to be resurrected throughout the church. The gift of the Spirit does not lead to special status among believers; rather it leads to special status vis-à-vis the world. But it should do so always in terms of the centrality of the message of our crucified/risen Savior. The Spirit should identify God's people in such a way that their values and worldview are radically different from the wisdom of this age. They do know what God is about in Christ; they do live out the life of the future in the present age that is passing away; they are marked by the cross forever. As such they are the people of the Spirit, who stand in bold contrast to those who are merely human and do not understand the scandal of the cross. Being spiritual does not lead to elitism; it leads to a deeper understanding of God's profound mystery—redemption through a crucified Messiah. (Fee, p. 120, emphasis added)

2:9 is often used as a verse describing heaven. With the above study in mind evaluate this interpretation. Is Paul speaking of heaven or of *God's secret wisdom*? Share the reasons for your answer. (Note verse 10 as you think through your answer.)

2:10-16 Read these verses with the questions posed at the beginning of Study 4 in mind (see p. 23).

Consider the following outline as you read.

Revelation 2:10-11

The Holy Spirit knows *the thoughts of God* and *reveals* these thoughts to us.

Inspiration 2:12-13

The Holy Spirit makes known to the apostles God's truth. *The 'we' vocabulary most naturally refers to the specific ministry of Paul and his fellow-apostles.* (Prior, p. 53)

Illumination 2:14-16

The Holy Spirit confirms the truth of the message in the hearer.

How would you answer the questions at the beginning of this week's study? What is the difference?

Notice the sustained contrast in vss. 14-16. Make a list of the differences between the person with the Spirit and the person without the Spirit.

Spirit Person  **Natural Person** 

2:14 The NIV is quite interpretive with its rendering *The man without the Spirit*. . . The Greek word is *psuchikos* (ψυχικος) and means *natural*. It is used in opposition to *pneumatikoi* (πνευματικοι), spiritual. The NASB reads,

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

How do the characteristics of a Spirit person and a natural person affect your understanding of your conversion and your growth in Christ? Consider also,

- ◆ Ephesians 2:1-5

- ◆ Romans 5:6

What does this final paragraph in chapter 2 teach us about the effectiveness of our evangelistic efforts? In light of vs. 14 how should we speak of Christ to our non-believing friend at work?

The content of our chapter is stunning as we ponder.

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

1 Cor. 2:14

Peterson paraphrases this verse,

The unspiritual self, just as it is by nature, can't receive the gifts of God's Spirit. There is no capacity for them. They seem like so much silliness. (Message, p. 341)

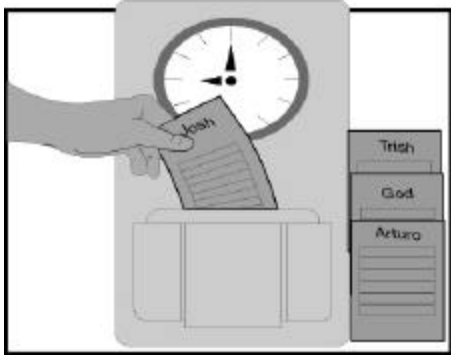
Because 1 Corinthians 2:14 reveals God's truth, we have God to thank even for our conversion. C. H. Spurgeon preached a sermon on September 4, 1855 to 12,000 people in a field in London. As he summoned his listeners to turn to Christ he uttered these words.

. . . Herein rests the power of the gospel. It does not ask your consent; but it gets it. It does not say, will you have it? But it makes you willing in the day of God's power. . . . The gospel wants not your consent, it gets it. It knocks enmity out of your heart. You say "I do not want to be saved"; Christ says you shall be. He makes your will turn round, and then you cry, "Lord save, or I perish!" Ah, might heaven exclaim, "I knew I would make you say that"; and then He rejoices over you because He has changed your will and made you willing in the day of His power. If Jesus Christ were to stand on this platform tonight, what would many people do with Him? If He were to come and say, "Here I am, I love you, will you be saved by me?" Not one of you would consent if you were left to your will. He himself said, "No man can come to me except the Father who hath sent me draw him."¹

If we love Jesus the love itself is a gift from God. God's Spirit enables us to respond to God. Praise!

¹ John 6:44 The quotation is from The Forgotten Spurgeon by Iain Murray (Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), p. 93.

Study Five
God's Fellow Workers
1 Corinthians 3:1-23



Maturity in the Christian life should be the normal experience of every believer. When we yield to Christ his Holy Spirit dwells within us. This empowering presence of God should, to be redundant, empower us. Our lives ought to reflect the transformation of our hearts. Sadly, the Corinthian church was all too un-transformed. Paul spent 18 months with this church and now writes them three years after his departure. *I'd like to speak to you like grown-ups, but you are still babies (3:1)!*

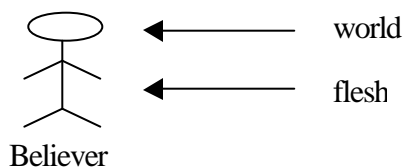
The church's tendency to be factious, hero worshipers, to divide into different camps (Paul, Apollos, Peter, Christ), is evidence of their lack of maturity.

Chapter 3 of 1 Corinthians, at the very least, teaches us of God's sovereignty over his church. Since it is God Himself who causes the church to grow, hero worship is entirely out of place for God's people.

So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

1 Cor. 3:7

Indeed the Christian's task is formidable. When we "get saved" God's Spirit empowers us, but we still wrestle with the *world* and with our own *flesh*. At times each of us feels like we are losing the battle.



In these early chapters of 1 Corinthians Paul presents a sustained contrast between worldly and Godly wisdom. The former is filled with pride and produces no benefits. The latter is based on the scandalous teaching of a crucified messiah who *is the wisdom of God (1:24)*.

At the end of chapter 2 Paul drew a contrast between the saved and the unsaved, between the *spiritual* and the *natural*, between those who are able to *understand* the things of God and those who cannot apprehend the things of God due to their fallen nature.

At the beginning of chapter 3 Paul's contrast is between believers who are yielding to the Holy Spirit and believers who are not. The former he calls *spiritual* and the latter he calls *worldly* (NIV) or *fleshly* (NASB).

Read 1 Corinthians 3. Try to write a broad outline of Paul's flow of thought. Summarize each paragraph in your translation of this chapter. Again, make note of those verses which confuse you. What questions do you have of this chapter?

Notes and Questions:

3:1-3 This paragraph, like several others in chapter 3 has been the springboard for much debate. Is Paul saying there are three classes of people? Are some *natural* (2:14, NASB), some *spiritual* and others *worldly*, or *fleshly* (NASB) (3:1-3)? In other words, is Paul teaching there are two classes of believers, the *spiritual* and the *worldly*?

By saying that he "could not address [them] as spiritual," he seems to be allowing that there are "unspiritual" Christians—which is both true and not true. It is *not* true in the sense that the Spirit is the crucial factor in whether one is or is not a believer; one cannot be a Christian and be devoid of Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:9; Gal. 3:2-3; Tit. 3:5-7). On the other hand, the Corinthians are involved in a lot of unchristian behavior; in that sense they are "unspiritual," not because they lack the Spirit but because they are thinking and living just like those who do. (Fee, p. 123)

This is precisely why Paul is so chagrined in 1 Corinthians. He writes to men and women who are indeed indwelt by God's Spirit, but who, nevertheless, act as though they are *mere humans* (3:3). The Corinthians are not acting on their new identity in Christ.

Read the verses listed in the quotation above. Describe the Holy Spirit's role in your life at the present time. In what ways are you living according to the *flesh*? In what ways are you living according to the *Spirit*? How can your group pray for your increased maturity?

3:5-9 What metaphors (word pictures) do you find used for the church? Paul's favorite word-picture for the church is to see it as the *body of Christ*.¹

What do the images in these verses add to the *body* metaphor? How does Paul draw out the agricultural metaphor?

What are the implications for our life as a church? How should we pray for our church with these verses in mind?

Who did the planting and watering in your spiritual life? How have these people helped you?

Paul and Apollos are called *God's fellow workers* in 3:9. What is the task on which they worked? How does this image inform your understanding of your role as a believer? What does *fellow worker* with God mean in the outworking of your Christian life?

What does this section teach us about leadership and authority in the church?

Compare Luke 22:24-27.

Respond to the following:

Authority in the church, truly Christian authority, comes from those who lay down their lives for their brethren in service and availability. Any other authority is worldly authority and is to be rejected. (Prior, p. 57)

¹ Both Ephesians and Colossians are thoroughly preoccupied with the body metaphor. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul will have some great fun with this image.

3:10 Paul claims to have laid the foundation of the Corinthian church as an *expert* (NIV) builder. This translation might miss the irony in Paul's letter. The Greek word is *sophos* (σοφος) and means *wise*. Paul is not bragging about what a great (*expert*) church planter he was. To the contrary, he looks back to the *wisdom* of the message of the cross.

3:10-15 have been misused by many to prove a point Paul wasn't concerned about. Some wrestling with the Calvinist-Arminian debate as to whether a believer can lose his or her salvation will point to this text to support one position or other. Some in the Roman Catholic tradition use this paragraph to teach a doctrine of purgatory. But these debates are entirely beside Paul's concern in this passage. Paul is warning those in the Corinthian church that their efforts within the church will be judged by God!

Think about what this paragraph teaches, indirectly, about the importance of the church. We are *fellow workers* with God, called to serve his purposes. He will judge our work examining its eternal durability! Sunday School teachers, homegroup leaders, those who disciple other believers, those who pick up the phone to encourage another believer, each of these is involved in a profound work of God.

If we are involved, therefore, in building up the life of God's church, we need to pray both that our good resolutions and our acts of faith may be impregnated with the power and grace of God, and that our motivation may be solely that the name of Jesus Christ may be glorified. If that is the character of our Christian service, we shall *receive a reward*. (Prior, p. 60)

Do you pray for God's will to be done and for his purposes to be accomplished in Santa Barbara Community Church? Be sure to reserve time to do this as a homegroup. Let us be careful not to "play church," but to "be the church" in the power of God's Spirit.

3:15 teaches that God will judge your work. Read this verse carefully. It doesn't teach that your work will affect your salvation. Paul goes out of his way to point out that believers are secure. But the believer's work for God will be scrutinized. Is this a new concept to you? In what ways does it (or should it) motivate you?

3:16 Paul is building momentum in this chapter. *Don't you know* is an expression of exasperation. In his 13 letters Paul uses this phrase ten times. Nine of these are in 1 Corinthians. Surely Paul is disappointed in the Corinthian's failure to apply what they in fact, already know.

What is it that the Corinthians should know? What are the implications for our church life in the twenty-first century when we ponder this stunning truth?¹

3:18-23 How does this paragraph complete Paul's argument which began in 1:18?

3:21-23 Compare the last sentence of this chapter in two translations.

NIV

So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas (Peter) or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

NASB

So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas (Peter) or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.

Notice Paul's assurance. The major categories of life are secure in God (the world, life itself, death, the present and the future).

¹ **3:17** has been used by many to make a point Paul is not trying to make. When Paul says *If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him* he is not making a categorical statement as to whether a believer can lose his salvation. Fee clarifies,

That these people were members of the Corinthian community seems beyond reasonable doubt; that Paul is also serving up a genuine threat of eternal punishment seems also the plain sense of the text. The theological resolution of such tension will lie either with the concept of the visible church being composed of more than the real church, destined by God for glory, or with the supposition that some, who by all appearances do belong to the community of faith, have, for reasons beyond our understanding, opted out and are once again pursuing a path leading to destruction. The net result is the same in either case. Paul does not consider any of the Corinthian "bent ones" to be there—yet; and the warning is intended to keep it from happening. (Fee, p. 149)

Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: "Mine!"

Abraham Kuyper¹

Sermon Notes. . .

¹ This is from Kuyper's speech at the founding of the Free University of Amsterdam, October 20, 1880. The speech was titled, "Sphere Sovereignty."

Study Six

Fools for Christ

1 Corinthians 4:1-21



The believer is a person caught “between the times.” On the one hand we live with the blessings of the cross. We live in the age of the Holy Spirit. We enjoy what the New Testament writers call *the fullness of Christ*.¹ On the other hand, Christians wait. They suffer, they are persecuted, their families fall apart, they lose their jobs, they contract diseases. Accordingly, those who love Jesus long for his appearing, for his power to be completely manifest on earth as it already is in heaven.

The Corinthians, it appears, had become a bit too comfortable in Corinth. They had an inflated view of their own spirituality which was coupled with the idea that the entire blessing of the Messianic Age had arrived.² Accordingly there was an anti-Paul element in the church due to his theology of waiting. Paul drips with sarcasm.

Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings —and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!

1Cor. 4:8

1 Corinthians is most likely the third or fourth letter of the thirteen written by Paul which we find in our New Testament.³ 1 Corinthians 4 is the most intimate glimpse we get of the apostle himself to this point in his writings. Here we find out what makes Paul tick. We find a view of his hardships and of his interpretation of those sufferings. In Paul we find a man whose identity was thoroughly shaped by his relation to Christ. Paul was *of Christ* (3:23) and *in Christ Jesus* (4:17).

Read these 21 verses at least two times (it takes little over two minutes to read this chapter aloud). The chapter will sound very un-familiar, very un-Paul. These verses

¹ See John 1:16; Romans 15:29; Ephesians 1:10, etc.

² Scholars call this an “overly realized eschatology.”

“Realized eschatology” refers to the blessings of God’s kingdom that are available to believers in this age. Overly realized eschatology thus implies that the Corinthians saw all of the blessings of the age to come as available to them immediately, without an adequate appreciation of the gap that still remained between what they were and what they would be only after Christ’s return.

(Blomberg, p. 25)

This fits well with the fascination the Corinthians had with *worldly wisdom*. Greek philosophy, or at least “Gnostic” Greek philosophy taught that a person could have some special knowledge, or fullness in this life.

³ Paul’s first letter was (most likely) 1 Thessalonians, followed by 2 Thessalonians. Some scholars might place Galatians as Paul’s earliest epistle.

contain a whole range of emotions and arguments. Paul will be both sarcastic and sincere, truculent and tender, crystal clear and confusing.

On your second reading consider the following:

How does chapter 4 fit into Paul's flow of thought to this point in 1 Corinthians?

Write a few sentences summarizing Paul's thinking. Where is he going in this chapter?

Jot down any questions you have of this chapter.

Notes and Questions:

We might break this chapter into three paragraphs.

1. Paul's Servant Leadership (vss. 1-5)
2. The Corinthian's Puffed-Up Spirituality (vss. 6-13)
3. Paul's Fatherly Concern (vss. 14-21)

4:1 Paul employs two word-images to show his relation to the Corinthian church. He calls himself and Apollos *servants of Christ* who have been *entrusted with the secret things of God*.

Servants is not the normal New Testament word translated in this way. Here we find the word *hupertes*, under-rower. It originally referred to a galley slave who rowed a Roman ship. In other words, Paul is a servant of Christ in the sense that he is simply doing the job he was given.

Entrusted (NIV) or *stewards* (NASB) refers to a manager of an estate. The manager was in submission to the owner but had authority over the other servants of the household.

Consider these two images. What do they teach us about Paul's relation to the Corinthian church?

Notice how verses 2-5 make sense when we understand these two words. Paul, is not terribly concerned about the Corinthian's assessment of his apostleship, nor is he overly introspective (*I do not even judge myself*). Paul is concerned with the Lord's final evaluation of his work and ministry.

Consider this section (4:1-5) along with the following verses. What do these passages teach us with regard to the way we should treat leaders in the church?

◆ Hebrews 13:17

◆ James 3:1

In 4:4 Paul speaks of having a *clear conscience*. How could the man who persecuted the church to the extent of presiding over the martyrdom of Stephen have a clear conscience?¹ What do you think Paul means when he uses this phrase?

How does your answer affect your view of your own past? Does a *clear conscience* mean we will never have feelings of guilt? What is the difference between feelings of guilt and feelings of sorrow regarding the past?

4:6 goes to the heart of the Corinthian problem.

Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. (NASB)

¹ See 1 Cor. 15:9; Galatians 1:13; Acts 8:1.

Paul uses this word four times in this section (4:6, 18, 19; 5:2). The word means to puff up, to inflate, or to blow up. The Corinthians had become *puffed up* with their own wisdom! They had it right. They no longer needed Paul's instruction or authority.

4:7 *What do you have that you did not receive?* Augustine claimed that these words summarize the Bible's teaching about grace.

No man could ever have known God unless God had revealed Himself; no man could ever have won his own salvation; a man does not save himself; he is saved. When we think of what we have done and can do and when we think of what God has done for us, pride is ruled out and only humble gratitude remains. The basic fault of the Corinthians was that they had forgotten that they owed their souls to God. (Barclay, p. 44)

As you grow older in your Christian faith, are you becoming more or less aware of God's grace? Explain. Why might an "older" Christian be tempted to forget the truth of 1 Corinthians 4:7?

In what areas might Santa Barbara Community Church be tempted toward spiritual pride? What can we do to prevent ourselves from becoming proud?

As a group take a few moments to stop and thank God for the things you have received by His grace.

4:8-14 Here we find Paul incredulous with the pride of the Corinthians. Note the contrasts Paul draws between his apostolic ministry and the Corinthian's sense of spirituality. List Paul's descriptive terms.

Paul/Apollos

Corinthian Church

4:9 contains a powerful picture. When a Roman general returned from a battle he would be greeted by the city of Rome so that he could show off the spoils of the victory. The prisoners would be part of the procession. At the end of the procession were those prisoners who would be put to death in the arena. James Moffatt translates this verse,

God means us apostles to come in at the very end like doomed gladiators in the arena.

Read 4:9 along with 4:8. Paul includes a quite bitter irony in these two verses. What is it?

It is no wonder that Paul moves from this vivid word-picture to his claim

We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ!

What does this paragraph (4:8-14) say to those of us who are living out a “comfortable Christianity”? What does the phrase *fools for Christ* mean to you personally? Have you ever felt this way?

It is evident that leadership/ministry was costly for Paul both physically and emotionally. What is the cost of being a leader in the church in our time and place? How costly is it to be a leader in Santa Barbara Community Church (homegroup leader, Sunday school teacher, youth leader, etc.)?

Reading and discussing this text probably produces a dissonance in each of us. How could Paul have had it so bad when I have it so good? Paul calls himself *the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world*. We might be tempted to respond with guilt (*How come I'm not like that???*), or with a martyrdom complex (*I'll live my life in such a way that I'll become that*).

Gordon Fee issues a challenge to those of us living a comfortable Christian life.

We need to become more aware of the Corinthian side of this text than we tend to. That is, we try desperately to identify with Paul, when in fact we are probably much more like the Corinthians than any of us dare admit. . . . Perhaps if we were truly more like our Lord, standing more often in opposition to the status quo with its worldly wisdom and more often in favor of justice, we too would know more about what it means to be scum in the eyes of the world's “beautiful” or “powerful” people. In any case, we greatly need to recapture Paul's eschatological [future] perspective so that neither wealth nor want tyrannizes us. (Fee, p. 182)

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Seven
Bread Without Yeast
1 Corinthians 5:1-12



Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor-theologian during the rise of Adolf Hitler. As a Lutheran, Bonhoeffer was shocked at the complacency of the church in the midst of Hitler's atrocities. He wrote a book entitled The Cost of Discipleship which challenged the idea of the believer fitting

comfortably into his or her world.¹ Bonhoeffer criticized the notion of *Cheap Grace*.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession. . . Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. . . . Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves.²

When Christ calls us, Bonhoeffer argued, he calls us to “come and die.”

The Corinthian church liked drinking from the cup of cheap grace. It appears they wanted all of the Jesus that fit into their prior way of life. They wanted the gospel, provided the gospel didn't want them. They wanted *grace without repentance*.

Read this short chapter. Compare translations if you have more than one. Before going on in this study answer the following questions.

- ◆ We find two concerns in this chapter. **First**, there is the immorality itself. A man who calls himself a Christian is engaged in sinful sexual behavior. **Second**, Paul is concerned about the blasé attitude of the church toward this man's sin! Which of the two concerns seems most prominent in Paul's mind? To whom is this chapter addressed? Why?

¹ This is not the place for an extended treatment of Bonhoeffer's life, but suffice it to say he lived what he taught. He was safely domiciled in New York, teaching theology when the war broke out. He left his teaching post and went to Germany to participate in a plot to overthrow Hitler. Bonhoeffer was caught and imprisoned. In the end, just a few days before the end of the war, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed at Flossenberg prison camp.

² The Cost of Discipleship, (Macmillan, 1937), p. 47.

- ◆ **5:1-5** What is Paul's specific instruction to the church on how it should have (and should now) deal with this person?

- ◆ **5:7** Note the last words of this verse, *as you really are*. Why would Paul say this to the Corinthian church?

Notes and Questions:

5:1 Paul couples the most common word for sexual immorality (*porneia*¹) with the comment that the Corinthian case is of a variety *which does not occur even among the pagans*. This is saying a good deal in the context of the sexually saturated society of Corinth. Demosthenes captured the spirit of the age when he wrote,

We keep mistresses for pleasure, concubines for the day-to-day needs of the body, but we have wives in order to produce children legitimately and to have a trustworthy guardian of our homes.

In other words, the church had to go a long way to out-do the paganism of their era.

5:2, 6 Notice again the problem of pride (arrogance and boasting) in the church. Read these verses carefully. What do you think the church was proud of?

5:4-5 What Paul is recommending is not entirely clear. First there is the issue of how to translate the verb. Notice the dramatic difference of the NASB from the NIV.

NASB

In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus. . .

NIV

When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present. . .

¹ *Porneia* (πορνεία), literally means, *resorting to prostitutes*. In the New Testament it is the most generic word for sex outside of marriage and is often translated *fornication* or, in the NIV, *sexual immorality*. Hodge writes, *The word is used in a comprehensive sense, including all violations of the seventh commandment..* (Hodge, p. 53)

In the NASB Paul is the one who does the delivering *in the name of our Lord Jesus*. . . In the NIV the church does the delivering. The NASB emphasizes Paul's apostolic authority. The NIV emphasizes the church's ecclesiastical responsibility. Both are possible from the Greek text. Based on context, which do you think Paul had in mind?

A more important question is, What does it mean to *hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord?*

What Paul was desiring by having this man put outside the believing community was the destruction of what was "carnal" in him, so that he might be "saved" [in the end]. (Fee, p. 212)

Try to explain these verses in your own words. What benefit to the man did Paul hope to accomplish?

5:8 reads

Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.
(NASB)

The verb *to celebrate* is in the present tense and refers to the church's perpetual celebration of what God has done in creating a forgiven, and purified, people this side of the cross.

5:8 The church is described as *bread without yeast*, i.e., a sanctified community. This is the bread of *sincerity and truth*.

Think about these two words which describe the church. What do they tell us about the way in which the church should deal with sin. Compare this with the teaching of Jesus in John 3:19-21.

Notice the NASB translation above of 5:8. There we find the words *leaven* and *unleavened* as opposed to the NIV translation *yeast*. The latter is probably misleading. Or at least it fails to capture the nuance of Paul's thinking. There is a difference between bread made with yeast and bread made with leaven. Yeast is always fresh. Leaven was a part of a prepared batch of dough which was held back for the future batch of dough. This fermented dough would permeate the new batch and make another portion of bread.

Although the OT does not expressly so specify, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as well as being a religious celebration, was probably a health provision. Because of the fermentation process, which week after week increased the dangers of infection, the Israelites were commanded once a year to purge their homes of all leaven (Exod. 12:14-20). During the Feast they would bake only unleavened bread, from which dough they would then start up the process again after the Feast. Thus in the NT leaven became a symbol of the process by which an evil spreads insidiously in a community until the whole has been infected by it (cf. Mark 8:15). So it was in Corinth. Their problem was that they were not taking this matter seriously, either the evil itself or their danger of being thoroughly contaminated by it. (Fee, p. 216)

5:9, 11 At the very least, Paul is instructing the church to separate themselves from this man who is sexually immoral because he *calls himself a brother*.

Paul says, *do not associate* with such a person and, *With such a man do not even eat*. The Greek verb translated *do not associate* means *to mix up*, or, *to mingle with*. The word could refer to either social intimacy or, more severely, to all social contact.

Paul had meant [the] deliberate maintenance of close fellowship with professing Christians who were persisting in blatant sin. (Prior, p. 79)

5:13 concludes with a quotation found several times in book of Deuteronomy, *Expel the wicked man from among you*, or, *Drive out the wicked person from among you*. (NRSV)¹

¹ Deuteronomy is the record of three sermons given by Moses to the people of Israel, preparing them to enter the land of promise. As they entered the land there was the desperate need for purity among the population lest they become like the Canaanite cultures they were dispossessing. The *wicked man* who was to be *expelled* applied to a prophet who called the people to serve other gods (13:5); to the person who was already serving pagan deities (17:7); to the person who brought false witness against another (19:19); to the kidnapper (24:7); to the woman given in marriage with the pretense of virginity (22:20-21); to the adulterer (22:23); to the man who compels an engaged virgin to have sex and the virgin who had sex with him (the man because he violated the virgin and the virgin because she didn't *scream for help*) (22:23-24).

Church discipline, i.e., the notion of breaking off fellowship with one who calls himself or herself a believer but insists on maintaining a lifestyle contrary to God's revealed will, sounds quite harsh to some of us. Consider the following passages. How do they fill in the purpose and methodology of corrective church discipline?

- ◆ Matthew 18:15-20

- ◆ 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 (Note: many think this is a reference to the same man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5. The supposition is that the man had repented of his sin and now Paul is instructing the church to welcome this person back into the fellowship of the larger body of believers.)

- ◆ Acts 5:1-11 (!)

- ◆ 1 Timothy 1:19-20

- ◆ 2 Thessalonians 3:10-14

What are the positive advantages to church-life and personal discipleship which arise from loving and consistent church discipline?

How have you seen church discipline operate in your life and in the church? (Examine the Matthew 18 passage carefully. You may have seen and experienced more church discipline than you thought).

Often we think of church discipline as the heavy-handed lowering of the boom on some wayward soul. Notice the corporate dimension of 1 Corinthians 5. Paul never addresses the leadership of the church. To the contrary he addresses the entire church! It is not the responsibility of a few leaders to "do" church discipline. The responsibility falls upon the entire church.

Consider the following verses in this regard.

- ◆ Galatians 6:1
- ◆ James 5:19-20

Respond to the following quotation.

The world is waiting to see . . . a church which takes sin seriously, which enjoys forgiveness fully, which in its time of gathering together combines joyful celebration with an awesome sense of God's immediacy and authority. (Prior, p. 79)

How can Santa Barbara Community be such a church?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Eight

Judging the Angels

1 Corinthians 6:1-11



Rights. Your rights, my rights. Civil rights, gay rights, minority rights, women's rights, animal rights. The right to *life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness*. Isn't that last phrase in the Bible? We live in an era which takes the notion of individual rights for granted. When our rights are violated we protest and, often, we go to court.

If ours is a litigious society, Corinth was more so. Going to court was virtually a form of entertainment for the Greeks.

If there was a dispute in Athens [or Corinth] the first attempt to settle it was by private arbitrator. . . . If that failed to settle the matter there was a court known as The Forty. The Forty referred the matter to a public arbitrator and the public arbitrators consisted of all Athenian citizens in their sixtieth year. . . . If the matter was still not settled it had to be referred to a jury court which consisted of two hundred and one citizens for [small cases] and four hundred and one for cases involving [large sums of money]. There were indeed cases where juries could be as large as anything from one thousand to six thousand citizens. . . . It is plain to see that in a Greek city every man was more or less a lawyer and spent a very great part of his time either deciding or listening to law cases. (Barclay, p. 56)

Paul is shocked and deeply upset that the Corinthian church is acting like their unsaved neighbors in Corinth.

Read these eleven verses at least two times. On your second reading note Paul's use of the following:

- ◆ Shock! (vss. 1, 6)
- ◆ Rhetorical questions (vss. 2-4; 5b-6; 7b)
- ◆ Sarcasm (vs. 5)
- ◆ Warning (vss. 8-11)

Some of the material contained in these verses is probably confusing. What initial questions do you have of this text?

Look over these verses again. Is there anything contained within them which indicates that Paul is anti-justice, or anti-law? Is Paul against the assertion of an individual's *rights* in a public court of law? Consider his example:

- ◆ Romans 13:1-7

- ◆ Acts 16:37

- ◆ Acts 28:19

Friedrich Nietzsche, the famous atheistic philosopher who proclaimed *God is Dead*, once said of the church, *I would believe in their redeemer if they acted as if they were redeemed.*

In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul is, again, chagrined that this church is acting in such a way so as to dishonor God. The Corinthians were behaving like Corinthians. Paul was unimpressed.

Crucial to the whole argument is Paul's view of the church as an eschatological [end times] community, whose existence as God's future people absolutely determines its life in the present age. In light of these eschatological realities, matters of everyday life are trivial, and the pagan courts who concern themselves with such trivialities are themselves trivialized. . . . The absurdity of the Corinthian position is that the saints will someday judge the very world before whom they are now appearing and asking for a judgment. (Fee, p. 230)

Gordon Fee, along with other New Testament scholars, enjoys applying the word *eschatological* to the church. The church is an *eschatological community*. What this means is this: The church is marked by the signs of the end (the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, etc.) yet the church is waiting for the end. The church lives *between the times*. Christ has come, Christ is coming again. The privilege of the believer is to live the life of the future in the present age.

Paul assures the Corinthians of their high position and calling. *Do you not know that we will judge angels?* In light of this grand reality the utter triviality of an earthly lawsuit is exposed. *Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?*

Is the notion of *judging angels* new to you? Consider your high position as it is pondered in the following verses:

- ◆ Romans 6:4-11

- ◆ Ephesians 2:4-10

- ◆ Matthew 19:27-28

What does it mean when Paul says *we will judge angels*?

One cannot be dogmatic, but I am inclined to think that glorified believers will help judge the fallen angels and exercise some rule over the holy angels. If Christ was exalted above all the angels (Eph. 1:20-23), if we are in Him and are like Him, and if we are to reign with Him, it must be that somehow we will share in his authority. (MacArthur, p. 138)

Because of our high position in Christ, we should be able to settle earthly disputes within the family of God.

Notes and Questions:

6:2 Paul calls the lawsuits of the Corinthians *trivial cases* (NIV). The word could be translated *totally insignificant*.. Why does Paul speak so lightly of such a legal dispute?

6:4 is very difficult to translate from the Greek to English. Compare translations. The NIV sees this verse as a command. In the NASB it is a question. The verse has virtually opposite meanings when we compare these two translations. MacArthur probably has it right when he writes,

If two Christian parties cannot agree between themselves, they should ask fellow Christians to settle the matter for them, and be willing to abide by that decision. (MacArthur, p. 139)

Have you ever seen this lived out in the church? Share any examples with your homegroup. What was the result?

If this in-house judgement fails to satisfy, or if one of the parties refuses to submit to brotherly mediation, what is to be our response? See vs. 7b. Compare Matthew 5:39-40.

6:5 One scholar says this verse contains *the most biting sarcasm found in the letter*. Why? What is the key word in the sarcasm? Think back over what we have learned in the early chapters of 1 Corinthians.

6:6 Paul seems to be addressing a specific lawsuit between two believers in the church. How would these verses inform our view of litigation in general. Is it right for a Christian to go to court with an unbeliever?

Imagine the following scenario: A good friend comes to you and tells you he is going to get a divorce from his wife. She has, it turns out, been *sleeping around*, is pregnant with another man's baby. She plans to marry the father as soon as her divorce is final. Both parties consider themselves to be *believers* and want to end the marriage *as cleanly as possible*. She takes all the blame on herself and is willing to tell even her best friends, *My husband did nothing wrong, I simply fell in love with another man. I'm such a jerk!* But, there is the little matter of a \$20 million dollar inheritance her husband will receive in three months time. She would like to split the money in half. He says to you, *She is leaving me. . . the money should stay in my account! Should I call an attorney?*

Based on 1 Corinthians 6, how should you counsel your friend?

6:9 should not, as in the NIV, be seen as a new paragraph. On the contrary, the verse begins with the word “or,” connecting it closely to verses 1-8. Consider the punctuation of the NASB:

6:7 Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? 8 On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that {your} brethren. 9 **Or** do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? . . .

Explain how this severe warning fits with the beginning of the chapter.

What impresses you when you read the list of sins in verse 10? Again, compare translations.

Notice the tension in vss. 9-11. Paul issues a very strong warning to the Corinthians. *Do you not know*, people who sin like this will not go to heaven! Then we have a list of sins which are exclusionary. In verse 11 the apostle comes back to affirming the Corinthians' standing before God because of what Christ has done for them.

For Paul there is to be the closest possible relationship between the experience of grace and one's behavior that evidences that experience of grace. Paul himself is as concerned as anyone that the latter (right behavior) should not be perceived as coming first or as leading to the former (the experience of grace). But those who concern themselves with grace without equal concern for behavior have missed Paul's own theological urgencies. (Fee, p. 248)

Be prepared to explain this statement to a “visitor” who just dropped in to your homegroup.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Nine

Bought at a Price

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

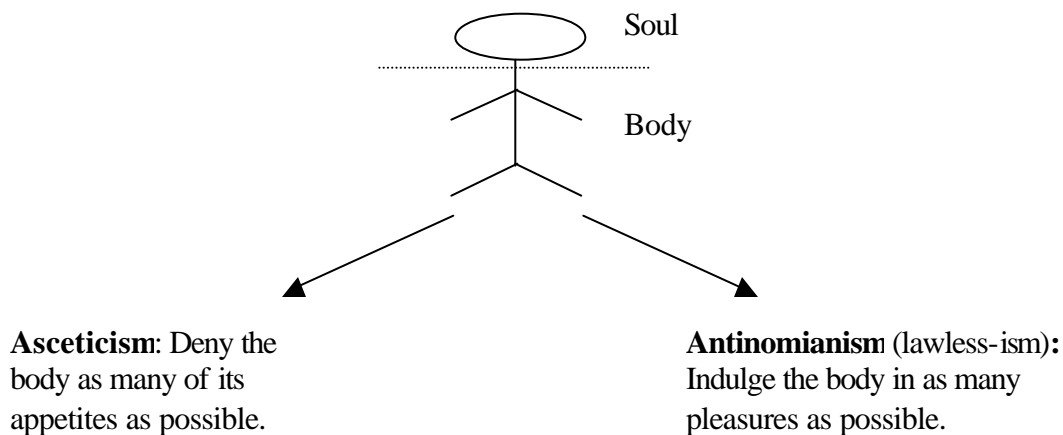


Dear Abby: I am a twenty-three year old liberated woman who has been on the pill for two years. It's getting pretty expensive and I think my boyfriend should share half the cost, but I don't know him well enough to discuss money with him.¹

In the 1960s *hippies* and *yippies* marched on the streets of America shouting slogans which sound pretty corny today: *Make love not war*, *If it feels good, do it*, and, *Sex makes free*. The *Flower Children*, and the members of *Students for a Democratic Society* were looking for liberation from the strictures and the mores of their parents' generation. Their efforts were met with success. By the 1970s the sexual revolution was in full bloom. Universities featured co-ed dormitories, divorce was de-scandalized by being declared a *no-fault* legal adjustment. By the 1980s and 1990s Western culture entered into what can only be called a period of sexual chaos. The *pill*, abortion, and more recently RU-486, separated sex from the notion of having children. Various antibiotics made sex, seemingly, separate from the threat of disease.

In such a climate it is no wonder that even in the church many are seduced by our culture's understanding of sex and sexuality. We might hear someone say, *Hey, be realistic, I'm in my late twenties and not married. How can you expect me to abstain?*

The Corinthians had an even more elaborate justification for sexual immorality. The Corinthians were, apparently, deeply influenced by Greek philosophy which taught that the body is unimportant while the spirit is supreme. One thinker, Epictetus said, *I am a poor soul [spirit] shackled to a corpse*. A proverb in circulation said, *The body is a tomb*. A view of people which includes a *low* view of the body and a *high* view of the spirit leads in one of two directions.



¹ From *The Best of Dear Abby*, p. 242.

As we come to the end of chapter 6 Paul will address the lawless (antinomian) crowd in the Corinthian church. In the early verses of chapter 7 the apostle will address the ascetics.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 carefully. Before going on in this study try to articulate (in writing) Paul's argument. What is Paul's main point in this section?

Again, before going on, notice two key words in this section: *sexual immorality*, and *body*. What is the significance of each? This passage contains some of the most important material in the New Testament with regard to a Christian's view of the body. What view of the body is presented?

Paul is, to say the least, deeply upset with regard to Corinthian indulgence. List the specific reasons why we are to abstain from sex outside of marriage. Be prepared to share your answers with your homegroup.

◆ 6:13b

◆ 6:14

◆ 6:15

◆ 6:17

◆ 6:18

◆ 6:19-20

Notes and Questions:

6:12-13 Paul uses two popular slogans in these verses. The first, interestingly, may be a perversion of Paul's own teaching. Paul is often called *the apostle of liberty*.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Gal. 5:1

The church may have abused the liberty which Paul taught.

Be careful to capture Paul's argument. Fill in what is missing below from vss. 12-13.

<i>Everything is permissible for me</i>	but	
<i>Everything is permissible for me</i>	but	
<i>Food for the stomach and the stomach for food</i>	but	
<i>The body is not meant for sexual immorality</i>	but	

F.F. Bruce explains the inclusion of the slogan about the stomach.

This too may have been part of the libertine argument: since food and stomach alike will pass away, why attach religious importance to either—or, for that matter, to sexual relations? Paul agreed that food and drink and the like were “things which all perish as they are used” (Col. 2:22); in respect of them the conscience of the Christian was subject to no man's judgment (Rom. 14:3; Col. 2:16). But sexual relations were on a completely different footing: they affected the personality of the parties involved as food did not. (Bruce, p. 63)

6:15-17 The word *members* in verse 15 means, literally, *limbs*, i.e., arms and legs. The imagery is graphic. The word the NIV translated *unite* is *kollômenos*. It means to be *glued together*.

Paul is asking, *Shall I take the limbs of Christ and glue them on to a prostitute?*

It would be a severe mistake to think of this passage only in reference to sex with prostitutes. To the contrary Paul's words invite us to hold high a Christian view of sex which sees the activity as good, pleasurable and honorable in God's eyes, yet as an activity which is reserved for marriage.

Paul's quotation of Genesis 2:24, *The two shall become one flesh*, is the foundation of all biblical sexual ethics. In sexual intercourse two people are being united in a profound way. The *one fleshness* of the sexual union is paramount. Premarital and extramarital affairs are wrong because the partners attempt to isolate the union of their bodies from the union of their very persons. Deviant sexuality (homosexual relations, pederasty, pornography, bestiality etc.) suffers from this same fundamental attempt to segregate *genitalia* from the complete person.

6:18a How do you (or can you) apply this verse in your life? What does it mean to you to *Flee sexual immorality*?

6:18b How would you interpret this warning? How is it that sexual sin is *a sin against the body itself* (NRSV)? In what sense is sexual sin unique? Consider verse 20 as you formulate your answer.

Respond to the following quotation by C. S. Lewis:

The truth is that wherever a man lies with a woman, there, whether they like it or not, a transcendental relation is set up between them which must be eternally enjoyed or eternally endured.

Screwtape Letters (letter 15, par. 5)

6:19-20 Two images are used here. The body is a *temple*, and the believer has been *bought* by God. The first refers to God's dwelling place and the second is an image of the loss of freedom due to being purchased as a slave.

Don't you know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? Paul used this same image in 3:16 of the whole church. The community of believers is the dwelling place of God's Spirit. But here he sees a person's body in the same way!

What Paul seems to be doing is taking over their own theological starting point, namely that they are "spiritual" because they have the Spirit, and redirecting it to include the sanctity of the body. The reality of the indwelling Spirit is now turned against them. They thought the presence of the Spirit meant a negation of the

body; Paul argues the exact opposite: The presence of the Spirit in their present bodily existence is God's affirmation of the body. (Fee, p. 264)

How could the truth of these verses be helpful in fighting sexual temptation?

Paul concludes this paragraph with the words

. . . therefore glorify God in your body. (NASB)

This is the positive counterpart to fornication. Have you ever thought of giving God glory *in your body*? In what ways can you fulfill this command?

Read the following verses from the Old Testament. Each of these paragraphs describes God's temple in Jerusalem. What do these passages say about God's presence in his temple? What was the appropriate response of God's people to the temple? How can we, as Christians, honor God as he resides in the temple of our body?¹

- ◆ 2 Chronicles 7:1-3
- ◆ Habakkuk 2:20
- ◆ Haggai 1:1-11

The Corinthians tended to undermine the physical body. Since the non-material self was all important, the body didn't matter too much. Our culture tends to magnify the body. We value *hard bodies*, we go to the gym, we work out to achieve a level of fitness. What does this text have to say to us about our understanding of our bodies? Do we have a better perspective on the body than the Corinthians?

¹ To say God "lives" in the temple is a figure of speech. Solomon was aware of this when he dedicated the temple in Jerusalem, "But will God really dwell on earth with men? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (2 Chr. 6:18). So also when we say our body is the *temple* of God's Spirit. This is an image which conveys the intimacy Christians enjoy with their heavenly Father.

How would your potential sexual sin be a sin not just against your own *body*, but against the entire *body of Christ*?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Ten

Marriage and Un-marriage

1 Corinthians 7:1-16



With chapter 7, Paul's letter turns a corner. *Now for the matters you wrote about*¹ . . . The apostle begins to answer questions he received from this struggling church. A preview of what is to come:

Paul answers questions about:

Marriage and divorce 7:1

Virginity 7:25

Food offered to idols 8:1

Spiritual gifts 12:1

A special offering 16:1

Apollos 16:12

Each of these sections begins with the formula, *Now about* . . .

Chapter 7 forms a unit. It contains Paul's instructions on marriage, divorce, Christian vocation, what we would call singleness (virgins), and widowhood. While study eight will concentrate on verses 1-17, read the entire chapter. Brace yourself. You will find material which sounds very unfamiliar. Some of this will be a bit embarrassing to discuss. Some of it may be painful to discuss.

As you read these forty verses attempt to get the big picture. Think of what we have studied with regard to the Corinthian church. Make a list of Paul's main ideas. Share this list with your group. What questions does this chapter provoke? Summarize Paul's view of celibacy, marriage and divorce (see next page).

¹ Paul probably received these questions from the party of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus who paid the apostle a visit in Ephesus (see 16:17).

Main Ideas:

Questions:

Summarize Paul's view of celibacy, marriage and divorce.

The notion of contentment dominates this chapter. Whether it is marriage, singleness, circumcision or even being a slave, Paul advises contentment. Consider 7:17:

Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.

We might outline the chapter as follows:

- 1-7 —to the married: stay married with full conjugal rights and responsibilities
- 8-9 —to the *unmarried* and widows: it is good to remain unmarried
- 10-11 —to the married (both partners believers): remain married
- 12-16 —to those with an unbelieving spouse: remain married
- 25-38 —to *virgins*: it is good to remain unmarried
- 39-40 —to married women and widows: the married are bound to the marriage;
- 39-41 —when widowed it is good to remain that way.¹

The first half of this chapter deals with those who are married while the second deals with the yet-to-be-married.

A careful look at each of the parts as outlined above indicates that in both sections there has been some considerable pressure within the church to dissolve or abstain from marriage. Paul's response on both sides is the same: "Stay as you are."
(Fee, p. 269)

¹ Based on Fee, p. 268.

Notice Paul's balance on the question of marriage. He cannot help but agree that non-marriage is a good state to be in, but he refuses to capitulate to those in the church who pushed some version of asceticism (cf. chart p. 51).

7:1 It is good for a man not to marry.

7:28 . . . if a virgin marries, she has not sinned.

Notes and Questions:

7:1 reads, literally, . . . *it is good for a man not to touch a woman*. The NIV paraphrases, *It is good for a man not to marry*. The figure of speech, *to touch* is a bit more graphic than the NIV would have it. We could translate the verse, *It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman*.

This raises the question, "Whose phrase is this?" Is this the voice of the Corinthian ascetics who are arguing against all sexual activity? Or is this Paul's view of marriage and sex in general? Read the following verses (2-7). How would you answer this question? Why?

7:5 is a present imperative coupled with a negative particle. It should read (as in the NASB) *Stop depriving one another* (implying that this is what they were in the habit of doing). With this in mind, verses 2-4 make wonderful sense.

7:2 is in the present tense: *let each man be having his own wife* etc. Paul is speaking of sexual fulfillment and duty within marriage.

How do these verses inform your understanding of a biblical view of sex in marriage? For married people: Have you ever thought of sex as a duty in marriage? Is Paul's emphasis on serving or being served?

What is Paul's one reason for marital abstinence? What qualifications does he place on abstinence (you should be able to find several)?

Husbands and wives, discuss the following quotation together. Do you find this to be true in your marriage? What strategy can you adopt to become better prayer-partners?

Any honest survey of the prayer-life of Christian couples would establish two common factors: one, that couples often find praying together the most difficult part of their relationship; two, that it is the husband particularly who encounters the greater problems in getting down to prayer with his wife. The reasons for this are not obvious, but are probably linked with the immense natural pride of the male in not wanting to reveal any lack of self-dependence in front of his spouse, and prayer *par excellence* expresses a dependence on Someone who is greater and stronger. (Prior, p. 119)

7:2, 7, 9 Why is celibacy impractical for most believers according to this section?

7:8, 10, 12 Who does Paul address in each of these sections? What does he say to each group?

Addressee	Instruction	Provision
Vss. 8-9		<i>But. . .</i>
Vss. 10-11		<i>But. . .</i>
Vss. 12-15		<i>But. . .</i>

7:10-14 We can read between the lines in these verses. Obviously some were questioning marriage in light of their commitment to Christ.¹ If these were the only verses in the Bible, how would you articulate your position on divorce?

Consider Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. What does this add to the perspective from 1 Corinthians 7?

7:14 is difficult. It sounds as though Paul is saying the unbelieving mate is somehow saved or purified by the believing partner. Calvin, among others, sees this verse as teaching that the believer will not be tainted by the unbeliever.

By all appearances a believing wife might seem to become unclean from contact with an unbelieving husband, so that the partnership is unlawful. Yet it turns out differently. For the godliness of the one does more to 'sanctify' the marriage than the ungodliness of the other to make it unclean. Accordingly a believer can live with an unbeliever with a clear conscience, for, as far as sexual intercourse and ordinary everyday relations are concerned, the unbeliever is sanctified, so that he or she does not contaminate the believer with his or her uncleanness. In the meantime this sanctification is of no personal benefit to the unbelieving partner. (Calvin, p. 148)²

As in this entire paragraph, Paul wants to give the Corinthians every reason to stay married.

Read 1 Peter 3:1-2. How does this help us understand 7:14?

¹ Notice Paul distinguishes between his own teaching and Jesus'. This does not imply that Paul is in any disagreement with Jesus' teaching, nor that Jesus' teaching is authoritative and Paul's is not. To the contrary, Paul, at many junctures in this letter, wants to establish his apostolic authority with the anti-Paul group in the church. Hence he makes the distinction. In 7:40 Paul does allow the reader to disagree with him insofar as he is expressing his own *judgment*.

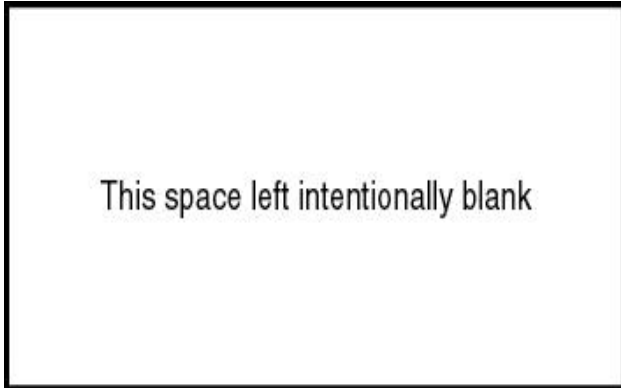
² John Calvin was one of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century.

How has this study informed your view of marriage, sex, and divorce? What attitudes and experiences did you grow up with which run counter to Paul's teaching here? Is there much for you to un-learn from your pre-Christian life in these areas? How does a person *reform* or, *remold* their thoughts and behavior in the sexual arena?

Spend time as a homegroup praying for Santa Barbara Community Church with regard to sexual purity.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Eleven
Vocation and Virgins
1 Corinthians 7:17-40



The question *What am I going to do with my life*, permeates the modern mind. Somehow our computers, palm-pilots, cell phones, large screen televisions and luxury cars fail us. As one writer put it, *We have too much to live with and too little to live for*. We live, collectively, without an overriding sense of purpose. Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy complained that the scientific worldview, which shaped

his era and ours, was impotent in answering life's big questions: *What shall we do and how shall we live?*

Paul is writing to a church located in a city which was thriving. Business was good, the restaurants were full, the geography was spectacular. But what did it mean to follow Christ in this Santa Barbara-like setting?

Paul wants the members of the church to live out their God-given vocation. Some of the super-spiritual, *wise* believers in the church were teaching that, because of their great spirituality, all earthly relations should change. *No more sex in marriage* (7:1), perhaps even marriage itself should go (7:10-16). Paul puts the brakes on such thinking in the latter half of this chapter by teaching the Corinthians about Godly vocation.

Vocation. Do you know the word? It comes from a Latin word which means *to call*. Vocation and calling are virtual synonyms.¹

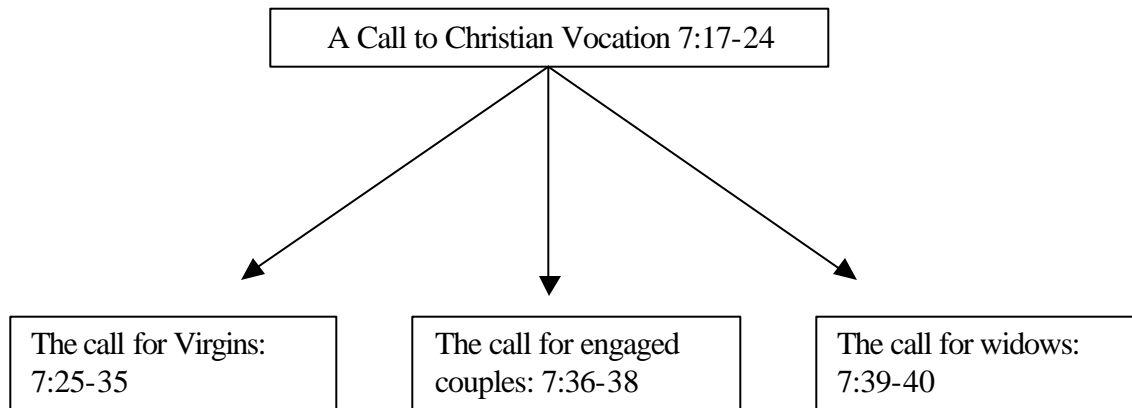
Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion, dynamism and direction lived out as a response to his summons and service.²

Paul wanted the Corinthians to have the sense of being called to serve Christ in every area of life.

¹ *Vocation* is from a Latin root while *calling* is from an Anglo-Saxon root.

² From Os Guinness, *The Call* (Word, 1998) p. 29.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:17-40. Consider the following outline as you read:



Notes and Questions:

7:17, 20, 24 Look closely at these three verses. Paul advises contentment. How does this speak to you and your situation in life right now?

7:17 What is the basis of Christian contentment?

7:19 We might be tempted to gloss over this stunning statement: *Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing.* This statement would have been met with horror by any Jew in Paul's time. Circumcision counted for everything. Circumcision was the Jew's sign that he stood in God's favor!

Paul moves quickly to an ethical principle: *Keeping God's commandments is what counts.* Status means nothing to God. Obedience is God's will.

Read Philippians 4:11-13. What was Paul's secret in this area? How are you cultivating this truth in you own soul?

In this paragraph Paul speaks of remaining in either the *situation of circumcision/uncircumcision* or of *slavery*. Perhaps in both cases we might think, *How could anyone change either of these anyway?* Actually change in both instances was frequent.

Both circumcision (being Jewish) and slavery were huge social barriers in Greek society. Some Jews had a painful operation to make themselves look un-circumcised.¹ Slaves had the possibility of purchasing their freedom with years of hard work and devotion.

In each case, Paul is bold enough to assert, the salvation of God in Christ has rendered [circumcision and slavery] null and void. Any man or woman in Christ has been so re-made that earthly status, or lack of it, is irrelevant. It is a distraction, therefore, for Christians to become obsessed with either issue. (Prior, p. 130)

In your opinion, is this text teaching against self-betterment? Is Paul saying, *Once a busboy always a busboy?* Why? Why not?

What is the practical value of this paragraph? What difference does 7:17 make to those in tough marriages? To those longing to be married? To the man who hates his job and feels he has no other option? Personalize this. How does God's *assignment* and God's *call* affect the way you see your circumstances?

I. About Virgins 7:25-35

We should be aware that there is some debate as to what Paul means by *virgins*. Three views are possible.

First, Paul may be answering a question posed from the Corinthians about a man giving his daughter in marriage (see the NIV margin translation).

¹ James Michener describes an instance of this in his novel *The Source*. The purpose of the operation was to enable Jews to participate in sporting events (conducted in the nude). In the church the issue was probably that of the uncircumcised being told that they needed to have this operation to be a true Christian (see the book of Galatians).

Second, Paul is speaking of the *spiritual* party in Corinth who were living together but not having sexual relations. The NEB takes this view with the translation, *On the question of celibacy, I have no instructions from the Lord, but I give my judgement. . . (7:25), and But if a man has a partner in celibacy and feels that he is not behaving properly towards her. . . (7:36)*

Third, Paul is speaking to what we could call *singles* in the church. He is addressing whether or not they should marry.

This third view answers the most questions with the fewest problems. Paul speaks of *virgins* six times and of *getting married* eight times in 7:25-40. Clearly he is finishing his answer to those in the church who said *It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman* (7:1).

Read these verses carefully. Notice Paul's eschatological (end times) perspective in 7:26, 29, 31). Clearly Paul expects persecution for the church.

The apostle writes to the Corinthians as he would to an army about to enter on a most unequal conflict in an enemy's country, and for a protracted time. (Hodge, p. 77)

Make a list of the advantages of being *single* from Paul's perspective. What opportunities for ministry are better suited for the unmarried?

Paul's era was persecution-prone. As he writes 1 Corinthians he bears fresh wounds from his own ordeal in Ephesus (Acts 19). Very early on in his ministry he was able to catalogue the oppression he experienced (2 Corinthians 11:16ff.). We live in a society which is quite friendly towards believers. How does this difference affect the interpretation of our passage?

In Santa Barbara Community Church many are married and many are unmarried. Some in each group wish their status were otherwise. How can the *single* person in our church

gain a helpful perspective from these verses? With these verses in mind is it advisable to pray for a mate? Why?

II. About the Engaged 7:36-38

Probably the spiritual elite of Corinth told the engaged to postpone marriage for as long as possible. What is Paul's advice?

Write your own paraphrase of 7:36.

What do these verses teach us about sex and engagement?

III. About Widows 7:39-40

The New Testament instruction regarding marriage is simple: Marriage is for life. The death of either the husband or the wife frees the surviving mate from the contract (Romans 7:1-3).

Rodney Clapp lends a good summary of Paul's teaching in this chapter.

Marriage and parenthood are chosen limitations. Singleness is for many Christians an unchosen limitation. Yet Paul can find freedom in the ordinary, nitty-gritty qualities of all these limitations: Are you single? Then live as a Christian in that state. Are you married? Then live as a Christian in that state. Are you a slave? Are you circumcised or uncircumcised? "In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God" (1 Cor 7:24). For Paul, vocation is no towering mystery, It is simply the condition in which "you were called."¹

¹ From Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, (IVP, 1993), p. 112.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Twelve

Freedom and Obligation

1 Corinthians 8-9



Eating is often a ritual. Meals can be (and should be) tremendously social affairs for human beings. Families have a daily convocation around the dinner table. Food is passed, stories are told, manners are learned, each member's turn is taken. Often the group

participates in preparation and clean-up. Animals fuel. Humans, of all cultures and in all times, dine. The style is different, the menu varies, the quantities differ, but *homo sapiens* is a creature who likes to enjoy a good meal with friends and family.

But what if one lives in a society where food (meat) is tied to the gods? What if the equivalent of *going out to eat* is *going to the pagan temple*? Such was the dilemma for the Corinthian church. Paganism and dining fit hand in glove.

Sacrifice to the gods was an integral part of ancient life. It might be of two kinds, private and public. In neither case was the whole animal consumed upon the altar. Often all that was burned was a mere token part of it as small as some of the hairs cut from the forehead of the victim. In *private* sacrifice the animal, so to speak, was divided into three parts. First a token part was burned on the altar. Second, the priests received as their rightful portion the ribs, the ham and the left side of the face. Third, the worshipper himself received the rest of the meat. With the meat he gave a banquet. This was specifically the case at times like weddings. Sometimes these feasts were in the house of the host; sometimes they were even in the temple of the god to whom the sacrifice had been made. (Barclay, p. 80)

Barclay continues,

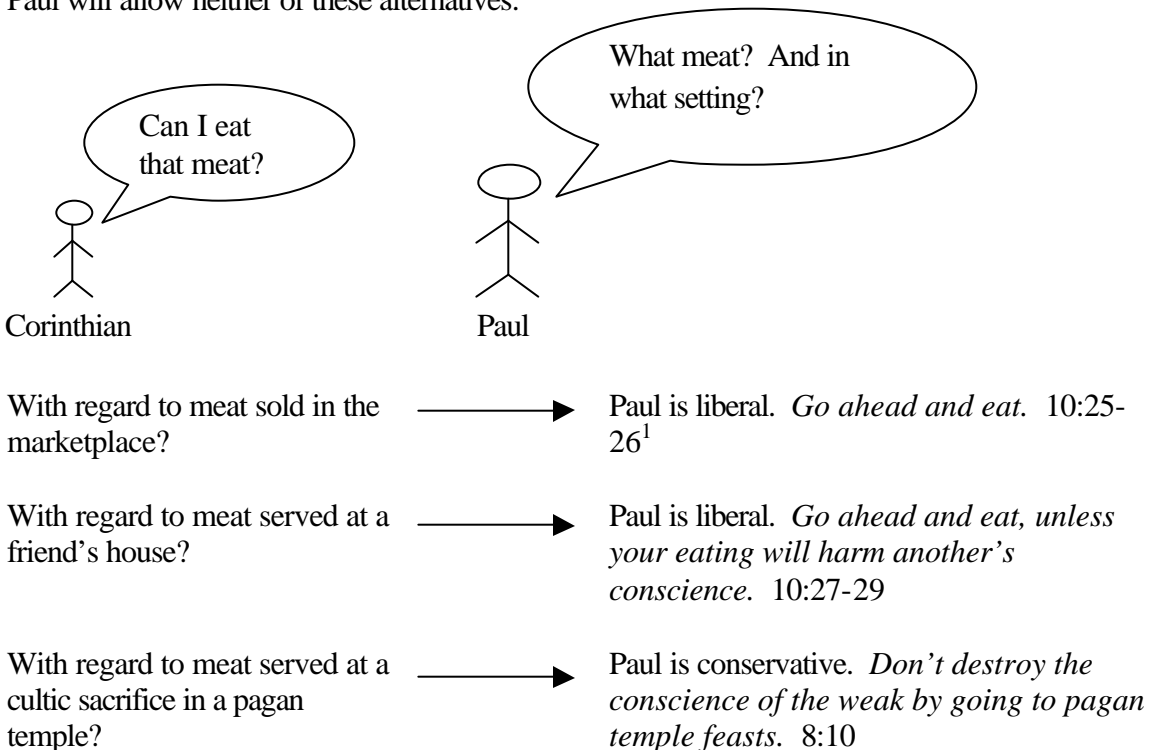
What complicated matters still further was this—that age believed strongly and fearfully in demons and evils. . . . They were always lurking to gain an entry into a man's body and, if they did get in, they would injure his body and unhinge his mind. . . . These spirits settled on the food as a man ate and so got inside him. One of the ways to avoid that was to dedicate the meat to some good god. . . . It therefore followed that a man could hardly eat meat at all which was not in some way connected with a heathen god. (Barclay, p. 80-81)

The section of 1 Corinthians (8:1—11:1) deals with the topic of *things sacrificed to idols*. Three specific questions are at the forefront of Paul's concern.

1. Purchasing *idol food* in the marketplace.
2. Eating *idol food* in a friend's home.
3. Participating in cultic meals in an idol temple.

Behind the scenes we can sense the parties favoring legalism and license. Some in Corinth seem to be saying, *Free in Christ. Eat whatever, whenever.* Others, perhaps, argued in the other direction, *This food is tainted. Stay away from all of it!*

Paul will allow neither of these alternatives:



We can outline these three chapters in the following manner:

1. The principle of love over knowledge (8:1-13)
2. Paul's example of this principle (9:1-27)
3. A warning to flee pagan idolarty (10:1-11:1)

Read the 13 verses of chapter 8. Paul draws a contrast between *knowledge* and *love* in verses 1-2. The rest of the chapter makes application to this distinction. As you read through these verses how does *the way of love* and *the way of knowledge* answer the

¹ As in the case of circumcision (7:18) this statement runs directly against Paul's Jewish background.

question of eating *food sacrificed to idols*? What arguments does Paul use to persuade the Corinthians to be sensitive to the *weaker* believer?

The Way of Knowledge

The Way of Love

Read Romans 15:1-2. Paul deals with this same issue (rights vs. deference to the weak) in Romans 14-15. Notice Paul's guiding principle. We behave *not to please ourselves*. What application can we make to our own lives from this principle? How might you limit your Christian freedom for the sake of a *weaker* brother or sister?

Think of this question in another way: How might your *knowledge* hinder the faith of a new Christian?

Notice Paul's use of the word *conscience* (8:7, 10, 12). Paul is speaking of recent converts who seem to want to withdraw entirely from Corinthian culture.

Almost anything we do is an offense to someone who calls himself or herself a Christian. There are brothers and sisters in Christ in Santa Barbara who would be offended by eating meat, going to movies (regardless of the rating), women wearing pants, men wearing shorts, etc. etc. Should we, therefore, attempt to streamline our lives to the extent that the fewest possible number of fellow Christians would be offended? Why? Why not?

As we study chapters 8-10 it will become clear that Paul is prohibiting Corinthian participation in pagan feasts. The activity is wrong ethically (8:1-13) and theologically (10:14-22). What application can we make to our own time and place? Is it permissible for Christians to celebrate Halloween? To go to or participate in Solstice parade? To wear a crystal?

It would be difficult to be prepared for 1 Corinthians 9. Brace yourself as you read these verses. We will probably find ourselves saying, *Where did this come from?* Paul will employ no fewer than 16 rhetorical questions.

After an opening salvo in which Paul reasserts his apostleship (vv. 1-2), he sets out to defend himself against those who are calling him into question (v. 3). The “defense” turns out to be a vehement insistence on his “rights” to their material support (vv. 4-14). With every kind of available argument he contends that “If others have the right of support from you, shouldn’t we have it all the more?” (v. 12a). Yet after all that, the conclusion in vv. 15-18 is not that they should therefore support him; it is the precise opposite—an explanation, indeed defense, of his policy of not accepting that for which he has just argued so strenuously. That is unusual argumentation under any circumstances. (Fee, p. 392)

We have seen that one of the issues for Paul was the crisis of his authority in the church of Corinth.¹ Paul’s prohibition against eating in pagan temples has been challenged with theological arguments and with the questioning of his apostolic authority.

The theological arguments were dealt with in chapter 8.

We all possess knowledge (8:1).

We know that an idol is nothing at all (8:4).

We know that food doesn’t bring us closer to God. Nor does it distance us from God (8:8).

In chapter 9 Paul launches his attack on his detractors. He seems to be answering two specific charges. First, his failure to accept financial remuneration for his work has been used to diminish his authority. Second, the inconsistency of his dietary habits (he ate like a Jew when he was with Jews and like a Gentile when he was with Gentiles) showed he was a hypocrite.

Read 1 Corinthians 9 with the above in mind.

What does 9:7-14 teach us about *supporting* Christians in some ministries (Inter Varsity, foreign missions, pastors, etc.)?

¹ See Introduction p. 1, along with 4:1-5; 5:3-5; 9:1-27; 14:36-37.

How can the receiving of financial benefits be an hindrance to ministry (9:12)?

List the apostolic rights Paul has given up for the sake of his greater ministry. See vss. 4-5, 11-12, 14, 18-19. Why do you think Paul is so adamant about *not* receiving financial support for his ministry?

What *rights* are there in your life which you could give up in order to better spread the gospel?

9:19-23 show Paul's passion to win men and women to Christ. The changes in his behavior from setting to setting do not indicate he is *wishy-washy*. To the contrary these changes are evidence of his conviction and passion.

What four groups does Paul mention in these verses? Are these four groups or two names for two groups?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

How can we apply this concept to our own lives? How can we become like *Santa Barbarans* in order to win them to Christ?

In 9:23 Paul concludes this section with a statement of the passion of his life!

And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it. (NASB)

How do *all things* of your life reflect your passion for the gospel?

9:24-27 Corinth was the home to the Isthmian Games every two years. The event made the city a haven for athletes in training. Paul concludes this chapter with a warning against spiritual flabbiness. The super-spiritual of Corinth had forgotten the disciplines of the Christian life.¹

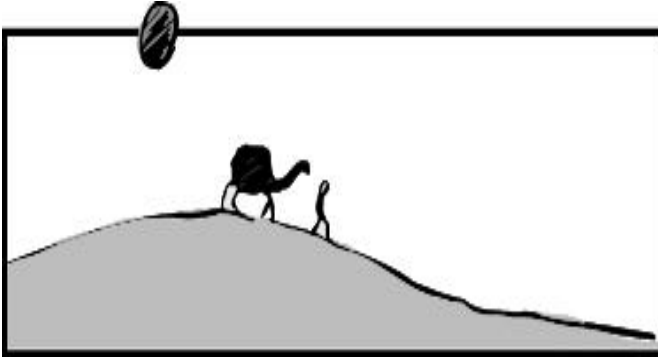
9:26 Paul says that he doesn't run *aimlessly*. What does this image teach us about discipleship and ministry?

Think about your own Christian pilgrimage. Do you spend more time in physical exercise or on spiritual development? Share (confess?) your disciplines with your group. What are your Bible reading habits? Your prayer habits? Your personal and corporate worship disciplines? Spend time praying for one another in this regard.

¹ It would be a mistake to see Paul as fearful that he could lose his salvation if he doesn't work hard enough (9:27). Paul stakes this entire letter on the work of Christ which secures our salvation (1:17-2:5). *Paul's fear was not that he might lose his salvation, but that he might lose his crown through failing to satisfy his Lord* (cf. 3:15). (Morris, p. 140) Fee adds,

. . . [D]oes Paul actually mean that one can fail to obtain the prize? Some would say no, but usually because of a prior theological commitment, not because of what the text itself says. While it is true that in 10:13, after the severe warnings spelled out in vv. 1-12, he once again puts his confidence in God to "keep them," it would be sheer folly to suggest thereby that the warnings are not real. Paul keeps warning and assurance in tension. (Fee, p. 440)

Study Thirteen
Bodies in the Desert!
10:1—11:1



Seasoned believers have a corresponding joy and sorrow in their Christian lives. When God adds a man or a woman to his church, when an individual comes to trust in Christ, the old-timer's eyes will well-up with tears of joy. On the other hand, there is the pain of watching some walk away from the faith once professed.

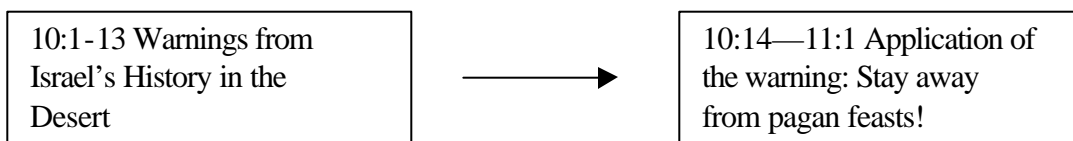
In this chapter we find some of the severest warnings of the New Testament. Paul is concerned for the spiritual survival of some in the Corinthian church. *Be careful*, Paul says, *lest you fall* (10:12). The apostle writes not to the weak, but to the supposedly strong, to those in the church who were confident in their wisdom and super-spirituality. By now we have seen that many in the Corinthian church were spiritually puffed-up. Paul's authority was questioned even as the Corinthians flaunted their freedom. Their pride remained unchecked.

Chapter 10:1-13 is a commentary on the warning contained in 9:27. The apostle is earnest, the Corinthians are to stay away from pagan festivals lest they be *disqualified for the prize*.

Before going on in this study, read these 34 verses. Make a few notes of the questions you have and the verses which stand out.

Notes and Questions:

Our text is easily divided into two sections:



BODIES IN THE DESERT!

10:1-13 take us back to the Exodus and wilderness period of Israel's history. Why does Paul refresh the Corinthian's memory with these Old Testament lessons? See verses 6 and 11. Consider Romans 15:4.

Notice the specific privileges enjoyed by Israel during Moses' time. Take a minute to read the corresponding Old Testament passage.

Privilege	Old Testament Text
Guided by God in the cloud	Exodus 13:21-22
Crossed the Red Sea	Exodus 14:22-29
Ate manna and quail in the desert	Exodus 16:4, 35
Received water as a miracle	Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:11

In spite of these miraculous events *God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert* (10:5).

Paul alludes to the event at Kadesh-Barnea when Israel as a nation decided the promised land was too difficult to conquer. Yahweh was incensed with Israel's lack of faith.

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: "How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. So tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say: In this desert your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected.'"

Num. 14:26-31

10:6 literally reads *to keep us from lusting after evil*. What was the evil Israel lusted after? It is spelled out in verses 7-10. Again, take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with the Old Testament background of Paul's concerns.

Israel's Negative Example	Old Testament Background
<i>Idolaters</i>	Exodus 32:1-6
<i>Sexual immorality</i>	Numbers 25:1-9 ¹
<i>Testing the Lord</i>	Numbers 21:4-9
<i>Grumbling</i>	Numbers 16:41-50

10:11 ties the entire Bible together. Here Paul sees the experiences of Israel and the narrative of Scripture fulfilling the eternal purposes of God.

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.

The entire Old Testament has been pointing toward the new people of God, the church. Therefore, participation in idolatry is all the more unthinkable.

In what ways should living in *the fulfillment of the ages* affect the way in which you approach your Christian life?

10:11-13 What practical effect do these warnings have as you ponder them? Consider especially verse 12.

10:13 What comfort does Paul offer in this verse? How have you experienced this in your life? What does this verse teach us about God's sovereignty (authority)?

10:14 Note the abrupt and absolute conclusion Paul draws. What verse in 1 Corinthians have we studied which uses the same phrase?

¹ Numbers says 24,000 died while Paul says 23,000 died. *Both are obviously round numbers, and in addition Paul may be making some allowance for those slain by the judges (Nu. 25:5).*

10:16 Paul says the communion cup is a *participation in the blood of Christ* (and so also the bread). The word used is familiar to many of us, *koinônos* from which we get our word *fellowship*.

But what does this mean? What are we doing when we celebrate the Lord's supper? The issue has divided the church since the time of the Protestant Reformation.¹ John Calvin, who navigated the stormy waters of that period is helpful.

Keep controversy out of it, and everything will become quite clear!² It is true that believers are bound together by the blood of Christ, so that they become one Body. It is also true that a unity of that kind is properly called a *koinwnia* or communion. . . . For it is necessary for us to be incorporated, as it were, into Christ in order to be united to each other. Besides, Paul is discussing here not a mere human fellowship, but the spiritual union between Christ and believers, in order to make it plain from that, that it is an intolerable sacrilege for them to be contaminated by communion with idols. Therefore from the context of this verse we can conclude that the *koinwnia* or communion of the blood is the alliance which we have with the blood of Christ when He ingrafts all of us into His body so that He may live in us, and we in Him. (Calvin, p. 216)³

¹ This chapter is pivotal in Protestant theology which maintains that the number of sacraments is two, as opposed to seven. Blomberg notes the irony: *[I]n general, 10:1-22 is not about the sacraments or ordinances at all. Paul is not arguing from Jewish and pagan practices to draw conclusions about these Christian rituals, but from the aspect of fellowship inherent in the Christian and Jewish rites to demonstrate the communion with demons that takes place in the pagan idol feasts.* (Blomberg, p. 194)

² Right.

³ Fee wrestles with this passage and makes several helpful observations. First he points out that the primary emphasis of the text is not to teach about the Lord's Supper, but to prohibit participation in pagan feasts. Second, he draws attention to the Jewish background of the meal being described (vss. 16-18). In verse 16 the NIV translation says, *the cup of thanksgiving*. Literally this is *the cup of blessings* which was a common part of Jewish meals. It referred to the final blessing of God at the conclusion of a meal. Third, Fee draws attention to the understanding that Yahweh was present at the meal (Deut 12:7 for example). So also, in paganism the god was thought to be present. And, in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, Jesus was present. He hosted the first "Lord's Supper," and the early church understood him to be present when the church gathered (1 Cor. 5:3-5).

But what the evidence does not seem to allow is a sacramental understanding of the meal itself, as if they were "participating in the Lord" by the actual eating of the food, as though the food were the Lord himself. Neither the language and grammar nor the example of Israel nor the examples from the pagan meals allow such a meaning. The "fellowship," therefore, was most likely a celebration of their common life in Christ, based on the new covenant in his blood that had previously bound them together in union with Christ by his Spirit. . . . It is this unique relationship *between believers* and *with their Lord*, celebrated at the meal, that makes impossible similar associations with other "believers" at the tables of demons. (Fee, p. 467)

How do these verses inform us of the way we should approach the Lord's Supper week by week? What changes can you make in your preparation for celebrating the Lord's Supper?

10:20-21 Paul has agreed with his Corinthian antagonists that an *idol is nothing* (8:4). But participating in pagan festivals is *something*. To partake in this activity is to have fellowship with demons.

The *devils* make use of men's readiness to worship idols. Thus, when men sacrifice to idols, it cannot be said that they are engaging in some neutral activity that has no meaning. They are in fact sacrificing to evil spirits, like the people spoken of in Deuteronomy 32:17. To share food is to establish fellowship. Thus they are entering into *fellowship* with *devils*. (Morris, p. 147)

The third world church often has a much more vivid awareness of the demonic forces at work in the present age than the Western church. Why do you suppose this is the case? What can we learn from this text about the reality of *devils*? Consider Romans 16:19 and 1 Corinthians 14:20 as you formulate your answer.

10:23—11:1 How does this final paragraph draw together the various threads of Paul's teaching from 8:1—11:1?

10:31—11:1 What three commands do you find in these verses? Notice how they form a basis for all Christian behavior.

What does it mean to *do all for the glory of God*?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Fourteen
Women, Men and Worship
1 Corinthians 11:2-16



Worship. What images spring to mind when you hear that word? Do you picture a 55 minute service with three hymns, a solo, sermon and benediction? How about a frenzied meeting of swaying, praying, rockin' to a praise band and study of the Word? What about the church gathered in silence to wait on God? Is it possible to have a service of

worship without observing the Lord's Supper? And just how should that Supper be *observed*?

We don't have to think too long or too hard to realize that what we call *worship* comes in many forms and in many styles. The Corinthians' worship was, predictably, a mess. It included, evidently, drunken revelry, class distinctions, jealousy, and perhaps, the sexually stimulating unveiling of women in worship.

Paul will devote four chapters to correcting three areas of difficulty.

- ◆ The issue of women's attire when praying and prophesying (11:2-16)
- ◆ The proper observance of the Lord's Supper (11:17-34)
- ◆ The abuse of speaking in tongues in public worship (12-14)

14:40 summarizes Paul's chief concern: . . . *all things should be done decently and in order.*

Read 11:2-16. Without trying to interpret these verses, trace Paul's argument. What does he appear to be saying to the Corinthians about women, men and worship? What is Paul's major concern in this paragraph?

Notes and Questions:

11:2-10 This is unquestionably a difficult text. Dozens and dozens of books have been written in the past two decades which wrestle with this passage. Rest assured we will not attempt to have the final say on the various debates in this study guide.¹ There are numerous problems for interpreters of these verses:

1. Following the logic of Paul's argument.
2. The meaning of key terms is not precisely clear.
3. We don't fully understand the cultural context into which Paul wrote.²

After all of these difficulties we face the added difficulty of applying the text to our own time and place.

11:2 Paul employs a "yes but" logic in these chapters. Here he praises the Corinthians for their passing on of the *traditions*. Then in verse 3 he says, *but you've taken this too far*. The apostle is concerned with the propriety of Corinthian dress during times of worship, specifically of women's dress.

Historians point out that women wore a veil (*kalumma*) in public. Loose women of high Corinthian culture (mistresses) along with temple prostitutes appeared in public without a veil. A slave woman had her head shaved.

Now there was no special 'dressing-up' for attending the fellowship-meetings of the church at worship: the men came without any head-coverings;³ the women came with them, as in normal everyday life. Apparently in the 'excitement' of the worship, certain women were tempted to throw back their head-dresses⁴ and allow their hair (which they always wore long) to fall loose. . . . This naturally caused severe distraction to the men at worship and was, in addition, a denial of the submission in the Lord of married women to their husbands. (Prior, p. 180)

11:3 The word *head* can mean *chief*, *ruler* or, *source*, *origin*. Which meaning best fits the context of Paul's instruction? Consider verses 8-9 as you answer.

¹ If you are confused after studying this passage you are in good company. Charles Hodge writes, *There is scarcely a passage in the New Testament which has taxed the learning and ingenuity of commentators as this. After all that has been written, it remains just as obscure as ever.*

² See, Fee, pp. 492.

³ Contrary to the way a Jewish man would worship in a synagogue.

⁴ Corinthian women were not veiled over their face, as in Arab cultures. Paul is referring to a covering of the hair.

11:3 has been used to teach a strict hierarchy in marriage. *Jesus gets his orders from God the Father, the man gets his orders from Jesus and the woman gets her orders from the man. . .*

Read the following carefully. Respond to Fee's interpretation of this passage.

. . . Paul's concern is not hierarchical (who has authority over whom), but relational (the unique relationships that are predicated on one's being the source of the other's existence). Indeed, he says nothing about man's authority; his concern is with the woman's being man's *glory*, the one without whom he is not complete (vv. 7c-9). To blur that relationship is to bring shame on her "head." This means that the middle clause [in verse 3], "the man is the head of woman," refers to the creation account also alluded to in vv. 8 and 12. "*The man*" would refer to Adam, and "the woman" to Eve; thus "the man is the source of the woman's life." But as v. 12 makes plain, that is only part of the story; in a much more significant way, "all things," both man and woman, "come from God." (Fee, p. 504)

For marrieds only: How does the principle of *headship* play itself out in your marriage? Has this been an area of dispute in your union? In your marriage have 11:3 and 11:11-12 been complimentary truths or contradictory ideas? Explain.

What can those of us who are married glean from 11:11-12? Paul says, *Everything comes from God*. How should that truth affect our marriage?

11:8-10 What is in mind here? How does the woman's coming from the man in the creation story make her his glory? Consider Gordon Fee's response:

. . . Paul really is reflecting the sense of the OT text to which he is alluding.¹ Man by himself is not complete; he is alone, without a companion or helper suitable to him. The animals will not do; he needs one who is bone of his bone, one who is

¹ Genesis 2:18ff.

like him but different from him, one who is uniquely his own “glory.” In fact, when the man in the OT narrative sees the woman he “glories” in her by bursting into song. She is thus man’s glory because she “came from man” and was created “for him.” She is not thereby subordinate to him, but necessary for him. She exists to his honor as the one who having come from man is the one companion suitable to him, so that he might be complete and that together they might form humanity. (Fee, p. 517)

11:10-11 Morris points out that these verses mean exactly the opposite of what many traditional interpretations have put forward.

Paul’s meaning then, is that by covering her head the woman secures her own place of dignity and authority. At the same time she recognizes her subordination. . . [But] what Paul has been saying might easily be understood of an undue subordination of women. This is far from his thought. There is a partnership between the sexes and *in the Lord* neither exists without the other. The man must not vaunt his place. (Morris, pp. 154-155)

With the above quotations in mind we might say the purpose of 11:2-16 is fairly simple!¹ Paul wants the Corinthians to practice undistracted worship. Accordingly, women in the church should show proper respect for their husbands by heeding social customs of Corinth.

What application can we make to the worship services of Santa Barbara Community Church? What guidelines would you suggest for a woman’s attire at one of our meetings?

Are men and women more alike or more different? Specifically, what is the theological difference between the sexes? As you conclude, discuss the following quotation as a group.

Each human being is to give glory to God by being what God intends him or her to be. The man is to be truly masculine and the woman truly feminine. Without allowing stereotypes of either to dictate our perceptions, but rather basing our understanding of what it is to be fully human on the perfect model of Jesus. This principle will make us chary of going overboard on the modern theme of ‘unisex’. The fullness of Christian worship can be experienced only as each man and each

¹ This is groundbreaking! In the history of the church no one has yet called this passage “simple.”

woman, created for God and redeemed by God, allow their humanness to be expressed according to God's pattern. (Prior, p. 184)

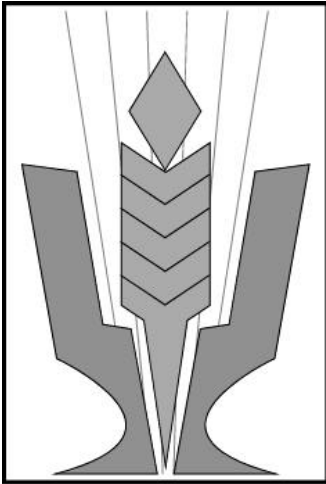
What does it mean to give God glory *as a man*, or, *as a woman*? What is it to be *truly masculine*, or, *truly feminine*?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Fifteen

The Lord's Supper

1 Corinthians 11:17-34



A service of worship has peaks and valleys. As the church gathers to worship there should be time for sharing and for silence, for exuberant praise and contemplative prayer. A worship service requires leadership and time for the church to respond to what God is doing. There needs to be a plan for the time allotted and the provision for spontaneity. A worship service is ultimately a celebration of the Word, a celebration of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the twin peaks of a Protestant worship service are Word-centered. We gather to *speak* the Word (we have a sermon and sharing from the Word) and we gather to *eat* the Word. At some point in our worship we remember the body and the blood of Jesus. We ponder the effects of his death on a cross. Symbolically, we eat and drink Christ as we confess our sins and celebrate our

forgiveness.

For the early church, the celebration of the Lord's Supper appears to have been at the conclusion of a meal. The meal and the *eucharist*¹ were so intertwined that sometimes it is difficult to ascertain whether the phrase *breaking bread* refers to the meal or to Lord's Supper (see Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11).

In the Corinthian church the observation of the Lord's Supper was fraught with problems. To repeat a familiar noun, their worship was a mess.

Before going on in this study, read 11:17-34. What three or four divisions do you find in these verses? For some this may be new material. What questions do you have about the Lord's Supper?

Read Matthew 26:17-30 for a different account of the Lord's Supper. Note the Jewish cast of Matthew's account. What does this add to the account in 1 Corinthians?

Notes and Questions:

¹ *Eucharist* means thanksgiving. It is one of the terms used to describe the Lord's Supper.

We might outline this passage as follows:

1. Corinthian perversion of the Lord's Supper (11:17-22)
2. The purpose of the Lord's Supper (11:23-26)
3. A warning against the abuse of the Lord's Supper (11:27-34)

1. Corinthian perversion of the Lord's Supper (11:17-22)

How many problems can you find in the Corinthian observance of the Communion from these verses?

11:19 contains a perplexing phrase. In a letter which has condemned *divisions* (1:10-17; 3:1-23) we learn *there have to be differences among you*. . . Some interpreters see this as a use of irony. Others see this as an instance of Paul's realism. Between the first and second comings of Jesus there will be divisions in the church.

11:20-22 It appears that the early church met house to house. Naturally, those with larger homes would provide meeting places for the body of believers to assemble. Corinthian homes of the wealthy had a dining room and an atrium or a courtyard. The dining room was relatively small while the courtyard could seat 30 to 50 guests. The divisiveness in these verses suggests that the wealthy were providing meals for their closest friends in the dining room while the poor waited in the atrium and remained hungry. This is the meaning of 11:22b: . . . *Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?*

As it is, chaos seems to rule the order of worship: *For as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk* (11:21).

Notice 11:22. What two problems does Paul address? How is it that the Corinthian worship services *despised* God's church?

11:22, 27 Look at both of these verses carefully. To take the Lord's Supper inappropriately is both to *despise the church* and to *sin against the body and blood of the Lord*. In other words, this perverse observance of the Eucharist is serious! How do these verses affect the way in which we should prepare for the taking of Communion?

2. The purpose of the Lord's Supper (11:23-26)

11:23-26 What two purposes do we find for observing the Lord's Supper?

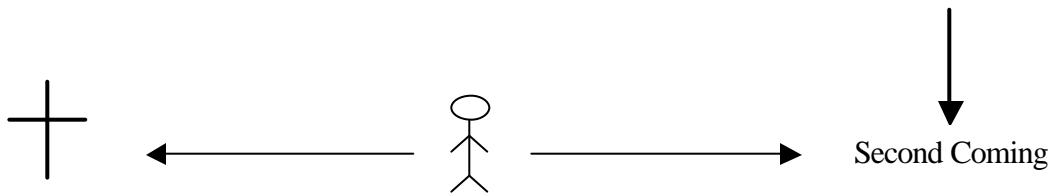
Of these two purposes, which is most meaningful to you as you celebrate the Lord's Supper? Why?

11:25 What did Jesus mean when he said the cup is *the new covenant*? Compare the following verses:

- ◆ Jeremiah 31:31-34

- ◆ Hebrews 8:1-13

11:25-26 Notice the backward and forward look from the communion table.



When you celebrate the Lord's Supper which view is most prominent in your thinking? Why? Why would it be helpful to have both views in mind?

3. A warning against the abuse of the Lord's Supper (11:27-34)

11:27 is a serious warning. In the NIV the verse reads,

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

The words *sinning against* are not a part of the Greek text. Actually Paul says, to eat in an *unworthy* manner is to be *guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord*.

Essentially you become guilty of *shedding* the blood of Christ: *i.e.* you place yourself, not in the company of those who are sharing in the benefits of his passion, but in the company of those who are responsible for his crucifixion. (Prior, p. 189)

The question, of course, is what does it mean to eat and drink in an *unworthy manner*? This cannot mean to be a sinner is to be unworthy. Those who know they are sinners are, in fact, the only people qualified for the Lord's Supper. So, what does it mean to eat in an *unworthy manner*? Two hints to help with your answer: consider the comment below by Gordon Fee and consider the context of verses 17-22.

The Lord's Supper is not just any meal; it is *the* meal, in which at a common table with one loaf and a common cup they proclaimed that through the death of Christ they were one body, the body of Christ; and therefore they are not just any group of sociologically diverse people who could keep those differences intact at this table. . . . To fail to discern the body in this way, by abusing those of lesser sociological status, is to incur God's judgment. (Fee, p. 564)

This implies still another view from the communion table. We view ourselves as a part of the *body* of Christ.

11:29 Two interpretations of the word *body* are possible. The traditional interpretation sees this as a reference to the *body* of Christ. Hence, the communicant is to *recognize* the death of Christ as he or she takes communion. Others see this as a reference to the church. If this is the case, 11:29 looks back to 10:17.

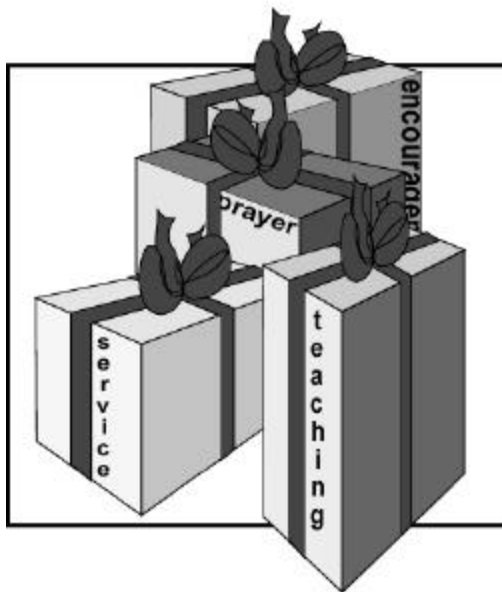
11:30 Paul sees a connection between the abuse of the Lord's Supper and weakness, sickness, and even death. What is the purpose of these maladies? See 11:32. Has this ever been a part of your experience?

The Corinthians seemed to be in danger because the Eucharist became rote. They enjoyed their feast, and oh, by the way, *The night he was betrayed*. . . Santa Barbara Community Church could fall into a similar difficulty. We observe the Lord's Supper nearly every week. How can this remain something other than *going through the motions*?

Spend time as a homegroup celebrating the Lord's Supper. Eat and drink. Remember and proclaim!

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Sixteen
Gifts and Body
1 Corinthians 12:1-31



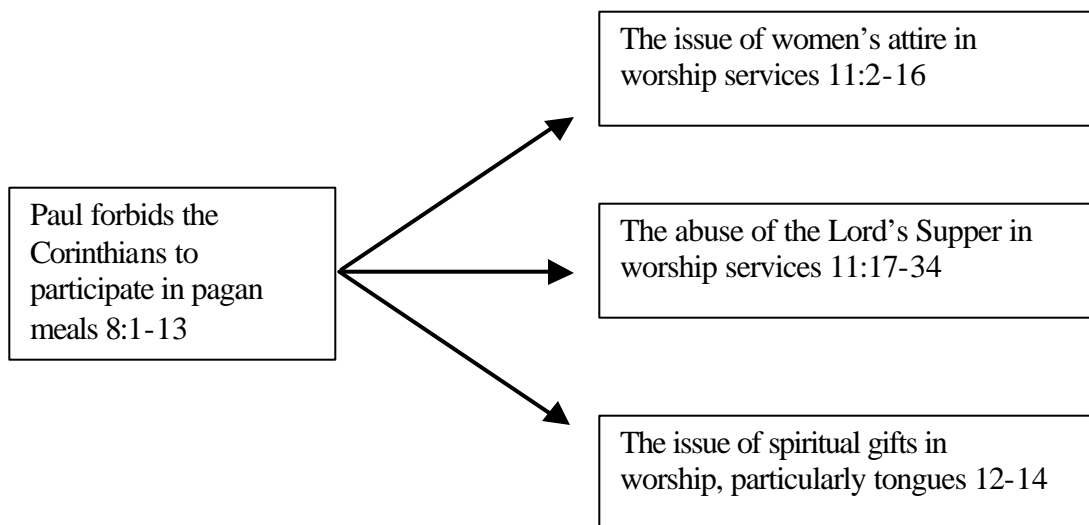
Much of the uniqueness of Christianity, in its original emergence, consisted of the fact that simple people could be amazingly powerful when they were members of one another. As everyone knows, it is almost impossible to create a fire with one log, even if it is a sound one, while several poor logs may make an excellent fire if they stay together as they burn. The miracle of the early church was that of poor sticks making a grand conflagration. A good fire glorifies even its poorest fuel.

Elton Trueblood

How do I fit in? What is my role? Do I have anything to offer? These questions, along with many others like them, fill the mind of those

struggling to break in to a church family. The New Testament writers insist upon the absolute indispensability of every member of the Body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12 is the high-watermark of New Testament teaching on this subject.

Since 8:1 Paul has been wrestling with the Corinthians over their practices of worship. He moves from his absolute prohibition of participating in pagan festivals to three areas of concern:



Chapter 13 forms something of an interlude. Paul takes a break from this argument by putting first things first, i.e., the necessity of love to govern every aspect of the Christian life.

There is evidence that the spiritual elite of Corinth felt themselves to be angel-like. The physical side of one's self was thought to be unimportant and sexual distinctions were thought to be meaningless. Therefore there was no need for sex (7:1-7), women and men could dress in the same manner in worship (11:2-16), and there was no need for a body in the future (15:1-58).

As it turns out, being *spiritual* means the opposite of what Paul's Corinthian opponents thought. Spirituality is quite earthy. Spiritual gifts are seen as the means of serving the body of Christ.

The abuse of the gift of tongues permeates these chapters. Paul refers to the gift repeatedly and in each of the lists of gifts he makes (12:8-10, 28, 29-30; 13:1-3, 8; 14:6, 26).¹ In these chapters Paul does not forbid the use of tongues in public worship, but he will insist that all spiritual gifts be used for the building up of the body of Christ and that they are used *for the strengthening of the church* (14:26).

Before going any further in this study, read 1 Corinthians 12. What initial thoughts, reactions and inspirations do you have? What questions does the text raise?

Again, before going on in this study guide, consider the following questions:

What would make some members of Santa Barbara Community Church *feel* unconnected to the Body, or useless in the Body?

Consider Paul's response in verses 14-20.

¹ All of Paul's references to this gift are in 1 Corinthians.

Conversely, why might some in the church *feel* puffed-up, indispensable or superior to others?

Consider verses 22-25. How can we practice the beauty of these verses in our church?

Notes and Questions:

12:1 Notice the first words of this chapter. Paul is again answering one of the questions he received from the Corinthians (see page 57).

Why does Paul start with verses 1-3? What is the relation between calling Jesus *Lord* and all that follows? (You may want to come back to this after working through the chapter).

12:4-6 What are the three parallel statements made here? Do you think the three nouns (*gifts, service, working*) are synonyms? Why?

What is Paul teaching about God in these verses?

Notice how utterly practical the working of God is in the life of a believer.

The Spirit must not be “spiritualized.” He operates in the body and his business there is to produce visible glory, which all who have eyes for reality can see.¹

12:7 What is the stated purpose of *the manifestation of the Spirit*?

Notice how 12:7 becomes something of a thesis statement for the list of gifts which follows. Paul wants the Corinthians to know that each of the gifts (not just tongues) is a *manifestation* of the Spirit in the life of the church. *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given.* . . . Paul refuses to grant a foothold to those who claim the status of super-spirituality.

Consider the various New Testament lists of gifts. We find 20 gifts listed (see next page). None of these lists match exactly. The point seems to be simply that God empowers his people for ministry. To put it another way, God does not call us to a task without a corresponding gift for that particular endeavor. In the words of Leon Morris,

...the local ministry could be exercised only because its members also possessed a *charisma*. The New Testament does not envisage any ministry carried out apart from God’s good gift. It is also to be borne in mind that all church members had a “ministry” of some sort. “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man” (1 Corinthians 12:7) says Paul as he proceeds to the subject of ministering, and other references make it quite plain that this is no idle expression. Thus when he is giving directions for public worship, the same writer can say, “when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine...”²

1 Corinthians 12:7-11	Romans 12:6-8	Ephesians 4:7-11	1 Peter 4:7-11
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¹ Tom Smail, *Reflected Glory* (Hodder, 1975), p. 29.

² Cited in Michael Griffiths, *Grace Gifts* (Eerdmans, 1978), p. 69.

<p>Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.</p> <p>To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.</p> <p>All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.</p>	<p>We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.</p> <p>If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.</p> <p>If it is servicing, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.</p>	<p>But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." . . .</p> <p>It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,</p> <p>to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.</p>	<p>Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.</p> <p>Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.</p>
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It is popular to speak of a person’s *primary* gift and then of *secondary* gifts. Think about your Christian life. Where do you think God has primarily gifted you? What are some of your *secondary* gifts? How are you employing these gifts *for the common good* (12:7).

12:12 begins with the preposition *for* (not translated in the NIV). This verse should be seen as explaining verses 4-11. Paul builds analogy upon analogy in this chapter. The unity and diversity of God (vss. 4-6) leads to the manifestation of the one Spirit through many gifts. So also, the church is one body, with many parts.

12:13 What is the common denominator among Christians according to this verse? What does this truth say to those who would make the reception of a certain gift (usually tongues) a sign of a higher level of spirituality? Compare the following verses.

- ◆ 1 Corinthians 2:10-14
- ◆ Galatians 3:2-3
- ◆ Romans 8:14-17

Notice the difference between the NIV and the NASB in the translation 12:28. In the NIV we would think Paul is referring to people. In the more literal NASB we find Paul is referring to gifts.

NIV	NASB
1Cor. 12:28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.	1Cor. 12:28 And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, {various} kinds of tongues.

[This] probably suggests that the first three items [apostles, prophets, teachers] are not to be thought of as “offices” held by certain “persons” in the local church, but rather as “ministries” that find expression in various persons; likewise the following “gifts” are not expressed in the church apart from persons, but are first of all gracious endowments of the Spirit, given to various persons in the church for its mutual upbuilding. (Fee, p. 619)

Paul uses the analogy of a human body to describe the church. In an effort to get to know one another better, share what part of the body you think you are. Are you a *hand, foot, eye* or _____? How does this play itself out in church-life?

David Prior summarizes 1 Corinthians 12-14 with the following statement. What is your response? Are you truly *spiritual*?

To be truly ‘spiritual’ drives a person neither to ecstasy nor to individualism nor to other-worldliness, but into the life of the local church as an expression of his personal commitment to Jesus as Lord and to his body here on earth. (Prior, p. 195)

This chapter proclaims both the unity and diversity of the church. There is one church with many gifted individuals. Paul wants the reader to grasp the sovereignty of God with regard to both particular gifts and particular roles in the church.

What four verbs does Paul use to show God’s sovereign control of his church? What do the following verses teach us about God? What do they teach us about the way in which we should view the church?

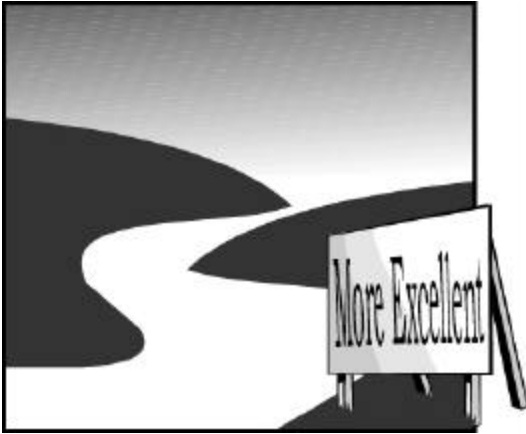
- ◆ 12:11
- ◆ 12:18
- ◆ 12:24
- ◆ 12:28

Often we “discover” our spiritual gifts when others point them out to us. (To put this in another way, one of our gifts might be pointing out the gifts of other people.) Our homegroups have met for at least 14 weeks by this point. We are getting to know one

another. Come prepared to share with the members of your group what you sense their spiritual gifts to be. Encourage one another by applying this chapter.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Seventeen
A More Excellent Way
1 Corinthians 13:1-13



1 Corinthians 13. The passage is the highwater mark of Paul's writings. This chapter has been lauded, honored, read at weddings, posted in picturesque frames, memorized and lionized. New Testament scholar Henry Alford said of this passage, *[It is] a pure and perfect gem, perhaps the noblest assemblage of beautiful thought in beautiful language extant in our world.* Adolf von Harnack understood the chapter as *the greatest, strongest, deepest thing Paul ever wrote.* Billy Graham once claimed to read this

chapter every day before he began his work.

A great study of 1 Corinthians 13 could read as follows:

1. Read and memorize these verses.
2. Spend the rest of your life putting them into practice.

Before going on, read this short chapter aloud. Read it from as many translations as you have available. Can anyone recite the chapter from memory? Why is it so popular? What impressions do you have after reading this chapter?

Again, before going on in this study, think through the chapter in its context. How does this chapter fit with Paul's overall concerns for the Corinthian church? Notice 12:31a and 14:1.

Notes and Questions:

Consider the following outline of our chapter:

1. The necessity of love (13:1-3)
2. The nature of love (13:4-7)
3. The permanence of love (13:8-13)

The context of this *love chapter* is highly significant. It comes right in the middle of Paul's correction of Corinthian worship. Paul is not setting love over against spiritual gifts. He is saying that spiritual gifts exercised apart from love are useless!

Gordon Fee sets this chapter in the context of the letter.

At issue have been opposing views of "spirituality." They speak in tongues, to be sure, which Paul will not question as a legitimate activity of the Spirit. But at the same time they tolerate, or endorse, illicit sexuality, greed, and idolatry (5:9-10; illustrated in 5:1-5; 6:1-11; 6:12-20; 8:1—10:22). They spout "wisdom" and "knowledge"; but in the former they stand boldly against Paul and his gospel of a crucified Messiah, and in the latter they are willing to "build up" a brother by destroying him (8:10-11). In short, they have a spirituality that has religious trappings (asceticism, knowledge, tongues) but has abandoned rather totally genuinely Christian ethics, with its supremacy of love. (Fee, p. 627)

13:1 There may be another reference to paganism in this verse. Possibly the *gong* and certainly the *cymbal* was used in pagan worship on the streets of Corinth. Both were single toned instruments incapable of producing melodious music. They were used to either drive away demons or to attract a particular deity (Prior, p. 228). To use one's gifts without love is no better than practicing paganism.

13:1-3 What gifts does Paul reference here? What is the tragedy of gifts without love?

How would one know if he was using his gifts without love?

The word *love* in our language can mean a great many things. Often it is understood in its romantic or emotive sense. To love means to feel. This is not what Paul has in mind.

Paul uses the Greek word *agapé* (ἀγάπη). The word, one of four from the Greek language which are translated simply as *love*, was not used for sexual or romantic love. Nor was it the word used for friendship. Leon Morris defines *agapé* as

... love for the utterly unworthy, a love which proceeds from a God who is love. It is a love lavished upon others without a thought of whether they are worthy to receive it or not. It proceeds rather from the nature of the lover, than from any merit in the beloved. (Morris, p. 181)¹

As Fee puts it,

Love is not an idea for Paul, not even a “motivating factor” for behavior. *It is* behavior. To love is to act; anything short of action is not love at all. (Fee, p. 628)

With this in mind, is it possible to *love* someone without liking that person? Explain.

Respond to the following quotation from C. S. Lewis. Practice this principle at least once this week and report on the outcome to your homegroup.

The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you “love” your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less.²

¹ Since this passage is so well known we might recall the KJV which translates *agapé* as *charity*. This goes back to the Latin Vulgate of the 4th century. Jerome didn’t want to use *amor* because it was too sensual in its connotations. He chose *caritas* (charity) as a substitute. John Wycliffe, who produced the first English Bible in the 14th century, used the word *charity*. The KJV followed suit in the 17th century. Another comment by Morris is fitting.

Agape was not in common use before the New Testament, but the Christians took it up and made it their characteristic word for love. It is a new word for a new idea. Whereas the best concept of love before the New Testament was that of a love for the best one knows, the Christians thought of love as that quality we see displayed in the cross. (Morris, p. 181).

² From *Mere Christianity* (book 3, chapter 9, paragraph 5).

13:4-7 Write your own paraphrase of these verses. Define in your paraphrase *patience, kindness, envy* etc. Paraphrases are usually longer than the original. Go ahead and have some fun with this. *Love means that when my two-year-old son stamps his feet and spills his milk on purpose I discipline him with gentleness rather than in rage.* Be prepared to read your paraphrase to your group.

Make a list of the positive and negative attributes of love from the translation of the Bible you use. Which of these do you need to develop in your life? Which are strongest in your life? Pray for one another in this regard.

Positive

Negative

13:8 contains the often quoted phrase, *Love never fails*. In what sense does love never fail?

It seems Paul has in mind the eternal endurance of love in contrast to the temporal nature of spiritual gifts. What three gifts does Paul reference in 13:8? Why would he choose these three for the Corinthian church? Compare 12:8 to understand the third of these gifts.

13:9-10 Notice again Paul's eschatological concerns (see p. 46). He wants the Corinthians to see their present spiritual gifts in light of the coming glory of God. Gifts are temporary, love is eternal. Gifts belong to this age, love belongs to this age and the age to come.

What does Paul mean when he speaks of *perfection* coming in 13:10? Believe it or not, the interpretation of this word has been an area of contentious New Testament debate.

Some see this as a reference to love itself. When the Corinthians grow up they will quit seeking certain sensational gifts (prophecy, tongues and knowledge).

Others see *the perfect* as a reference to the fullness of the New Testament canon. In other words, when the New Testament was complete there would be no need for these “sign” gifts which validated the message of the apostles.

A third view is to see *the perfect* as a reference to the second coming of Christ.

In light of Paul’s contrasts (verses 11-12) how do you interpret this verse? Which interpretation seems most likely? Why?

13:11 Be careful to see the point made here. Paul is not contrasting *immaturity* versus *maturity*. Children are supposed to behave like children. Men are supposed to behave like men. The apostle contrasts the present with the future. He wants the super-spiritual Corinthians to realize the gifts, which give them so much pride, will one day cease to exist.

Think about the spiritual gifts God has given you. If you are exercising them faithfully they probably shape your identity to some extent. How does the truth of this verse serve as a warning to you?

Love is what God in Christ has shown and done for ‘others’ in their helpless plight and hapless estate as sinners. In love we take God’s side, share his outlook and implement his design; and we treat our neighbors as we know God has treated us.¹

Ponder the love of Christ as you conclude this study. Read and marvel at the following verses. In what ways do they stimulate you to live a life of love?

◆ Romans 15:1-7

◆ Romans 5:6-8

¹ From Ralph Martin, *The Spirit and the Congregation* (Eerdmans, 1984), p. 56.

- ◆ Ephesians 5:1-2

Read and memorize 1 Corinthians 13. Spend the rest of your life putting it into practice.

Sermon Notes...

Study Eighteen
Prophecy and Tongues
1 Corinthians 14:1-40



One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is that of *tongues*. The Greek word used is *glôssa* (γλῶσσα). It can be translated either *tongue* or *language*. In Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit descends upon the church in a unique way, the manifestation of the Spirit's presence is speaking in foreign languages. Those who received the Spirit preached in

dialects they previously did not know. And those who heard required no interpretation. The book of Acts says,

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.
 Acts 2:4 (NASB)

The gift of tongues referred to in 1 Corinthians 14 seems to be a different gift than the phenomena Luke refers to in Acts. In Acts the gift of languages was used to preach the gospel. Paul's concern for Corinth is that tongues prevents the preaching of the gospel. Tongues here is more like a prayer language (14:6-12) than a voice preaching intelligible words. *Tongues* in Acts are addressed to visitors in Jerusalem. *Tongues* in 1 Corinthians 14:2 are addressed to God. In Corinth, if one speaks in tongues during a worship service, an interpretation is required.

As noted in Study 16, the abuse of the gift of tongues seems to be one of the major faults of the super-spiritual elite at Corinth.¹ Chapter 14 is the climax of the concerns Paul began in 11:2. Throughout this section the apostle has argued for orderly worship. In chapter 12 his emphasis was on the diversity of gifts. In chapter 13 he stressed the unity of love. All of this has been building to chapter 14.

Before reading any further in this study, read 1 Corinthians 14:1-40. Notice the running contrast Paul draws between two gifts, tongues and prophecy. As you read, make a list of what he says about both gifts(next page). Toward the end of the chapter, verses 22-39, look for the purpose of these gifts for the church and the effect of these gifts with regard to the unbeliever.

Tongues

Prophecy

¹ See p. 94.

- ◆ The purpose of tongues is _____.
- ◆ The purpose of prophecy is _____.
- ◆ The effect of tongues is _____.
- ◆ The effect of prophecy is _____.

Notes and Questions:

Chapter 14 falls into three paragraphs or sections.

1. Paul compares and contrasts the gifts of tongues and prophecy (verses 1-25).
2. Paul gives guidelines for the use of both gifts in public worship (verses 26-36).
3. Paul warns the super-spiritual in the church of Corinth (verses 37-40).

At the outset notice Paul's major concern: the building up of the church! He repeats the word *edify* seven times (14:3, 4, 12, 17, 26).¹ Many churches have been divided by the use and abuse of the gift of tongues. What do these verses say to those who would make tongues a divisive issue?

14:1-5 Work through these verses carefully. Paul seems to say tongues is prayer directed toward God. Prophecy is God's word directed toward the congregation. Therefore prophecy is more valuable for a worship service. But look at verse 5. With regard to their value,

¹ The NIV renders this verb three different ways, *strengthening*, *edifies*, and *build up*.

Prophecy = Tongues + Interpretation

The reason in both cases is the building up of the church. Why would this be the case?

Whatever else we may ask when reading this chapter, we must come to the question, What does Paul mean by the gifts of tongues and prophecy?

The Gift of Prophecy:

The gift of prophecy is often seen as synonymous with that of preaching or teaching.¹ But a close examination of the passage forbids interpreting this gift strictly as a synonym for preaching. First, Paul wants everyone in the church to have this gift (14:1-5). Second, the gift of prophecy involves spontaneous utterance from the Spirit of God (14:30) while preaching involves preparation and delivery (2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Timothy 4:2). David Prior, a pastor-scholar writes,

We must not trivialize [prophecy] in our attempts to understand it, nor must we make it so specialized that it lies beyond the reach of most Christians. To equate it with expository preaching is to fall into the latter danger. A church in which everybody is an expository preacher (or any kind of preacher for that matter) would be a nightmare, and is manifestly not what Paul wants for the Corinthians. Equally, it is very easy to empty the gift of prophecy of its unique, immediate and distinctive content. It then becomes nothing more than sanctified common sense. The evidence of the Scriptures and of church history (early and current) makes such a conclusion invalid. (Prior, p. 236)

So what is the gift of prophecy? Michael Green, also a pastor-scholar, gives a simple definition. Examine this carefully in light of our chapter. Does it fit with what Paul is saying? Compare Green's definition with the notes you made on page 108.

[Prophecy is] a word from the Lord through a member of his body, inspired by his Spirit and given to build up the rest of the body.²

¹ Ray Stedman, for example, writes, *The gift of prophesying. . . is basically the explanation of the present in light of the revelation of God. The closest term we would call it by today is "expository preaching", unfolding the mind of God and applying it to the daily struggles of life.*

² From *To Corinth With Love* (Hodder, 1982), p. 74. The gift of prophecy is the most frequently mentioned gift in the New Testament. Elsewhere Green points to the widespread mention of this gift . . . not only in Jerusalem and Caesaria, but in Antioch (Acts 11:27, 13:1), Corinth, Thessalonica (1 Thess. 5:19, 20) and the churches of Asia Minor (Rev. 1:3). Both Luke and Matthew indicate that

With Green's interpretation in mind work through 14:29-33. Put into your own words what Paul is saying to the Corinthian church. What safeguards does Paul place around the use of this gift?

How do we see the gift of prophecy manifest in Santa Barbara Community Church? Should we encourage this gift more than we do? How?

14:3 What three words does Paul use to describe the effect of prophecy in the church? How do these words affect our use of this gift?

14:29-33 Write a paraphrase of these verses to Santa Barbara Community Church. Read this to your homegroup.

During the sharing time of your worship services. . .

14:33 The NIV translators made a decision to split this verse and begin a new paragraph. This is possible, but far from necessary.¹ Paul is making a theological point as he brings order to the gift of prophecy. *The character of one's deity is reflected in the character of one's worship.* (Fee, p. 697) Paul is concerned that the Corinthian church looked like Greek paganism in its worship services. The apostle wants to replace disorder with *peace*.

Jesus anticipated a continuation of prophecy among His followers (Matt. 10:41f.; Luke 11:49). (I Believe in the Holy Spirit (Eerdmans, 1975), p. 169.

¹ The NASB reads, . . . *for God is not {a God} of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.*

14:33b-36 *As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak.*

What do we do with these verses? They don't fit with what Paul has already taught in 1 Corinthians. In 11:5 the apostle gave instructions to women concerning how to pray and prophesy in worship settings! Here he says women should remain silent. Blomberg lists no fewer than seven different ways scholars handle these perplexing verses.¹ It is quite possible that Paul is simply saying, *Be quiet*. The Greek word translated *speak* can be the equivalent of *chatter*. A word of prophecy was uttered and the women, who may have been seated together after the pattern of a Jewish synagogue, began to discuss it among themselves.

Prior acknowledges the difficulties of this section but offers a helpful comment.

It seems the principle of submissiveness was being ignored (*they should be subordinate*, 34), that a spirit of defiance was uppermost (*it is shameful. . .*, 35), and that an isolationist tendency was turning these wives into arbitrators of their own church and even doctrine (*Did the word of God originate with you?*, 36). In other words, these married women were the source of some of the arrogance in the Corinthian church which Paul has already had cause to castigate (4:7ff.; 5:2ff.; 6:1ff.; 8:1; 13:5). (Prior, p. 252)

The Gift of Tongues:

As noted above, the gift of tongues as described in 1 Corinthians does not seem to be the same manifestation of the Spirit which Luke describes in Acts 2. Gordon Fee summarizes Paul's teaching on this gift. Read this quotation along with the verses cited.²

1. Whatever else, it is Spirit inspired utterance; that is made plain by 1 Corinthians 12:7 and 11 and 14:2. . . . As with all Spirit-empowered activity, Paul held it in high regard *in its proper place*.
2. The regulations for its community use in 14:27-28 make it clear that the speaker is not ecstatic or out of control. Quite the opposite: the speakers must speak in turn, and they must remain silent if there is no one to interpret.
3. It is speech essentially unintelligible both to the speaker (14:14) and to other hearers (14:16), which is why it must be interpreted in the assembly.
4. It is speech directed basically toward God (14:2, 14-15, 28); one may assume, therefore, that what is interpreted is not speech directed toward others, but the "mysteries" spoken to God.

¹ Gordon Fee is so taken back by verses 34-35 that he dismisses them as a later addition to Paul's letter. He then spends ten pages of his commentary building an impressive case.

² From *Paul, the Spirit and the People of God* (Hendrickson, 1996), pp. 169-170.

5. As a gift of private prayer, Paul held it in the highest regard (14:4, 5, 17-18 . . .)
...

Paul shows considerable ambivalence toward this gift. On the one hand, with regard to its use in the public assembly, although he does not condemn it, he is obviously not keen on it. In any case, tongues should not occur at all if there is not an interpretation. On the other hand, as a gift of private prayer and utterance, Paul speaks of tongues quite favorably, obviously a topic that for Paul is very personal and private. The breakdown for him has occurred when what is personal and private comes into the public assembly, since it has no facility for strengthening the others. Here again the central focus on corporate life comes to the fore.

14:23-25 Notice again the value of both tongues and prophecy for the “visitor” to the Corinthian church. What is the net result of each gift (see your answer on p. 108)?

Paul is trying to restore order to worship services which had become chaotic. If we were able to go back in time and visit the Corinthian church we would be shocked. To put things in our parlance, the Corinthians were anything but “seeker-sensitive.”

The unbeliever who visits when tongues are spoken will say, *you are mad*. (NASB)

The Greek words translated *you are mad* (23) do not mean fit for the asylum, but under the influence of some spiritual force on a par with those active in the mystery-cults. In the Corinthian context, Paul means that the net result of believers all speaking in tongues in a time of worship is that the very people they are keen to win become convinced that Christianity is like any other mystery-religion. . . They have not been initiated into the secret vocabulary and practice; therefore they leave. (Prior, p. 248)

These verses (14:23-40) are Paul’s final word on the orderliness of a worship service. Notice how he leaves room for both form and spontaneity. Most services of worship in the American context (SBCC included) are far from bedlam. Our worship, like Corinthian worship, reflects our culture. We know when the service will begin and when it will end. Often there is a printed program which is followed precisely. In most of our churches the visitor could hardly say, *You are mad*. Would *You are planned, programmed and a bit boring* be more likely?

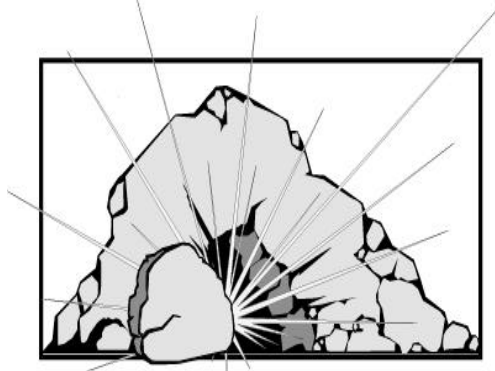
Think together as a homegroup how Santa Barbara Community Church might apply

1 Corinthians 14 to our church life. Recognize the obvious, we are not Corinthians. We live in a different time and place. Our challenges are quite unlike theirs. We are not going to have five-hour worship services, and we won't have the problem of drunkenness at those services. We don't have a background in pagan mystery religions.

How can this chapter inform our worship?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Nineteen
The Third Day
1 Corinthians 15:1-58



To a greater extent than it is anything else, Christianity—at least the Christianity of the New Testament—is a religion of resurrection.

So says New Testament scholar C. F. Evans.¹ But from the beginning this doctrine has come under severe attack.

The modern western world has emptied itself of the supernatural. Things happen according to the laws of science. Cause and effect. The laws of nature. Every action is followed by an opposite and equal reaction. . . . Miracles are for children's stories, the raising of the dead is from ancient mythology.

Rudolf Bultmann, a German New Testament theologian of the twentieth-century, rejected the supernatural even as he studied what we call God's Word.

No one who is old enough to think for himself supposes that God lives in a local heaven. There is no longer any heaven in the traditional sense of the word. The same applies to hell in the sense of a mythical underworld beneath our feet. And if this is so, we can no longer accept the story of Christ's descent into hell or his Ascension into heaven as literally true. We can no longer look for the return of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven or hope that the faithful will meet him in the air (1 Thess. 4.15ff.).²

Modern people, in other words, are too sophisticated to believe in either the past resurrection of Jesus or the future resurrection of the dead.

Interestingly, the resurrection was the central offense of the Christian faith in New Testament times. Paul found himself in a good deal of trouble because he affirmed both the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and the future resurrection of believers.

When defending himself against Agrippa Paul asked,

“Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?” (Acts 26:8)

Before Felix (and the Sanhedrin) the resurrection was the central issue.

¹ *Resurrection and the New Testament*, (Naperville, 1920), p. 1.

² From *Kerygma and Myth*, (S.P.C.K., 1953), p. 2.

“It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.”
(Acts 24:21)

Amazingly, the future resurrection was an issue for the Corinthian church. *How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*¹ (1 Corinthians 15:12)

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-58. Keep the following outline in mind as you read. What is the key statement in each section? Share your findings with your group.

Make a few notes of those verses and arguments which are confusing. Which verses stand out? Try to catch the flow of Paul’s argument.

Outline:

1. The Fact of the Resurrection (15:1-11)
2. The Centrality of the Resurrection (15:12-19)
If there is no resurrection . . .
3. The Consequences of the Resurrection (15:20-34)
4. The Nature of the Resurrection Body (15:35-50)
5. The Time of the Resurrection (15:51-57)

¹ The issue in Corinth is not the resurrection of Jesus, but the resurrection of believers in the future (15:12). Why would some in the church deny this teaching? There are several possibilities. Perhaps these were Jewish believers in the church who carried the thinking of the Saducees with them into the Christian life. The Saducees denied the resurrection of the dead altogether. Those denying the resurrection might have been Greeks (or influenced by Greek philosophy) who saw the soul entrapped by the body. The goal in Platonic (Greek) thinking was to get away from the body, not to be eternally tied to it. A third possibility is that the church was infiltrated by Gnostic ideas. If this were the case there would have been the outright denial of the resurrection of Jesus (such a reading of our chapter is certainly possible). A fourth possibility is that the Corinthians had what is often called an “overly-realized” eschatology. The super-spiritual elite would have argued that the resurrection had already happened spiritually (see 2 Timothy 2:17-18). In any event, we cannot be sure. Readers of this study guide will have to wait until the resurrection and ask Paul for themselves.

6. The Implication of the Resurrection (15:58)

Notes and Questions:

15:3-8 contain the heart of Paul’s gospel. First, notice the little phrase, *For what I have received I passed on to you.* . . . What do you think Paul’s purpose is in this statement? Consider Galatians 2:1-10.

15:3-4 Jesus truly died and was resurrected from the grave.

If he was buried he must have been really dead; if he was buried, the resurrection must have been the reanimation of a corpse. . . . If he was buried, and was subsequently seen alive outside his grave, the grave must have been empty, and may well have been seen to be empty. (Barrett, pp. 339-340)

What is the theological benefit of Christ’s death? What is the benefit of his resurrection (see Romans 4:25)?

Death of Christ

Resurrection of Christ

15:4-7 Notice Paul’s insistence that the resurrection really happened. This is the earliest and most complete record of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances.¹ Consider the weight of Paul’s references.

1 Corinthians 15:4-7	Gospel Account
Jesus appeared to:	
<i>Peter (Simon)</i>	Luke 24:34
<i>The Twelve</i>	Luke 24:36-49; John 20
<i>More than five hundred</i>	Not recorded in the Gospels. Possibly this took place in or near Galilee where Jesus spent most of his time.
<i>James</i>	Not recorded in the Gospels. This appearance probably was the catalyst for

¹ *This is the most striking and important account of the resurrection appearances in the New Testament.* (George Ladd, *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus*, (Hodder, 1975), p. 105)

	James conversion. Jesus' "half-brother" was not a disciple during his earthly ministry (Mark 3:21, 31; John 7:5)
<i>All the apostles</i>	Probably a reference to the ascension (Acts 1:1ff.)
<i>Paul</i>	A reference to Paul's Damascus Road experience with the risen Jesus. Acts 9:1ff.

15:8 is somewhat shocking. When Paul calls himself *one abnormally born*, he uses the Greek word for a miscarriage or an abortion. Commentators point out it was a term of abuse.

Perhaps it had been hurled at Paul by his opponents. He was not a handsome man (2 Cor. 10:10), and they may have combined an insult to his personal appearance with a criticism of his doctrine of free grace. (Morris, p. 207)

15:12-19 speaks of the centrality of the resurrection. Paul writes almost in staccato fashion. Why is the resurrection so crucial for the believer? You should be able to find six or seven specific implications of the resurrection (or non-resurrection) of Jesus. List these implications. What difference do they make in your life?

15:29 is perplexing to say the least. Here we find Paul speaking of *being baptized for the dead*. The practice has no New Testament support. Nor is there any evidence that the early church practiced vicarious baptism. Nor does the theology of Paul, with its emphasis on personal faith as the means of justification, allow for the legitimacy of the practice. Perhaps Paul is using the example of an inappropriate practice of the Corinthian church (vicarious baptism) to further his argument for the resurrection. The ceremony, which does not receive his approval or condemnation, would be meaningless if there was no future resurrection of the dead.¹

15:32-34 Why do these verses appear in this chapter? What are the practical and ethical implications of a right understanding of the resurrection? What is the relationship between one's behavior and one's convictions regarding the future?

¹ The interpretations of this obscure verse are many. John Calvin thinks Paul is talking about the baptism of those about to die. *Why should baptism be administered for those on the verge of the grave if there is no resurrection?* (Calvin, pp. 328-331)

Consider 2 Peter 2-3.

15:35-49 What can you say about the nature of the resurrection body from these verses? Make a list of the attributes of our resurrection body.

In 15:44 Paul describes our bodies with two adjectives, *natural* and *spiritual*. Fee explains.

. . . [T]hey do not describe the “stuff” or composition of the body; nor are they values words as in 2:14, describing the essential difference between those who belong to God and those who do not. Rather, they describe the one body in terms of its essential characteristics as earthly, on the one hand, and therefore belonging to the life of the present age, and as heavenly, on the other, and therefore belonging to the life of the Spirit in the age to come. It is “spiritual,” not in the sense of “immaterial” but of “supernatural,” as he will explain with the help of Scripture in v. 45, because it will have been recreated by Christ, who himself through his resurrection came to be “a life giving Spirit.”¹ (Fee, p. 786)

1 Corinthians 15 teaches neither reincarnation (a completely different existence after death) nor obliteration (the end of existence at death). Instead, the Bible teaches resurrection. What expectation can we have of both continuity and discontinuity from this life to the next life? See especially verses 42-55. In what ways do you expect we will be the same after the resurrection? How will we be different?

15:50 has been called *the fundamental principle* of this pivotal chapter. How does this verse tie both the chapter and all of 1 Corinthians together?

¹ Unquestionably Paul is using these adjectives for shock value. *Psychikos* (natural) and *pneumatikos* (spiritual) are both used to modify *sôma* (body). Throughout this letter Paul has been addressing the self-identified *pneumatikos*, the super-spiritual Corinthians who saw no need for a body.

15:58 Read this verse in light of 15:1-2. The great resurrection chapter is symmetrical. Without a future resurrection Paul's labor and the Corinthian's faith is *in vain*. If the dead will be raised the believer's *labor* is *not in vain*.

Pretend your entire homegroup consists of unbelievers. They are not antagonistic to the faith, but the group wants to know why the death and resurrection of Jesus are necessary components of the Christian drama. Based on this entire chapter, how would you answer their question?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Twenty
Maranatha!
1 Corinthians 16:1-24



Throughout 1 Corinthians we have seen a church at odds with Paul. We have also seen Paul's deep concern for the spiritual viability of a church running off course. The apostle planted the church, Apollos watered the seed and God caused the church to grow (3:6). Certainly chapter 15 is the climax of this letter. Chapter 16 is epilogue.

Before signing off Paul has two more questions to address which he received from the party of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (16:17). First, he answers a question about the need for financial assistance to the Jerusalem church (16:1ff.) and second, he addresses the impending visit of Apollos to Corinth.¹

This chapter, as the entire letter, is full of tension. Make sure you accept Timothy (16:10-11). *Be on your guard. . .* (vs. 13). *If anyone does not love the Lord—a curse be on him* (16:22). Paul gives final warnings to his antagonists within the church and then concludes with a single Aramaic word which captures the tension of the ages, *Maranatha*.

The word is delightfully ambiguous. What does it mean? The Aramaic has been transliterated into Greek and then again into English by the time we read it. The translator has to make a decision on how to break up the consonants and vowels.

Marana tha means *Our Lord Come*, while *Maran atha* means *Our Lord has come*. Obviously, both possibilities are true. And Paul, throughout this letter has sought to have the Corinthians appreciate both truths. The believer is living between the times, between the first and second coming of Christ!

Read these 24 verses. What tone of voice is Paul using? Make a note of the verses which stand out in your initial reading.

Notes and Questions:

¹ Each of these responses begin with the familiar words, *now about*. See p. 57.

Paul answers two questions in this chapter sent to him from Corinth. But these two questions hardly dominate the chapter. Indeed, the 24 verses are hard to outline. The following grid, hopefully, is broad enough to accurately represent the chapter and narrow enough to help us think through these verses.

I. The collection for the Jerusalem church (vss. 1-11)

II. The coming of Apollos (vs. 12)

III. Concluding Matters (vss. 13-24)

A. Exhortations to the church (vss. 13-18)

B. Final Greetings (vss. 19-24)

16:1-11 One of Paul's concerns during this period of his life was the poverty of the Jerusalem church. As we read of Paul's concern, we find a portrait of a church which was to be both international and independent.¹ Read the following verses. What do they tell us about Santa Barbara Community Church's responsibility to the international church?

◆ Acts 11:27-30

◆ Acts 24:17

◆ Romans 15:25-28

◆ 2 Corinthians 8:13-14

Look at 1 Corinthians 16:2 carefully. What principles of giving (tithing?) can we learn from this verse? How are you applying these principles in your life?

In the NASB 16:2 reads,

¹ No fewer than five Roman provinces are mentioned in this chapter: Galatia (1), Judaea (3), Macedonia (5), Achaia (15) and Asia (19)! Prior notes, *These areas of the Roman Empire reflect very different cultures and conditions: European and Eastern, Jew and Arab, Greek and Roman, urban and rural.* (Prior, p. 279)

On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.

As a group, respond to the following quotation by Garry Friesen.¹ Look up the passages the author cites. Discuss these together.

It is not difficult to compute 10 percent of one's income; but how much is "as he may prosper"? It is neither a specific amount nor a particular percentage. The rich should be "rich in good works" (1 Timothy 6:17-18). Those who have nothing are not expected to give anything (2 Corinthians 8:12). Those who have less than enough are to receive from others who have more than enough (2 Corinthians 8:13-14). Those who have little give the little that they can (2 Corinthians 8:2-3). Increasing prosperity should result not only in an increase in the amount given, but in the percentage given. Many Americans should think in terms of 15, 20, 40, or 60 percent of their income. Their "abundance" (2 Corinthians 8:14) should make them abundant givers.

16:13-14 Write your own (extravagant) paraphrase of these verses. Read this to your group.

16:15-18 What do we learn about ministry from these verses? Why is the *household of Stephanas* noteworthy? How can your life increasingly reflect a similar devotion?

Take a moment and thumb through the pages of this study guide. Think about your study over the past 20 weeks. How has Paul's letter to this first-century church been of benefit to your Christian pilgrimage? What changes has this epistle provoked? How has God been at work in your life? In our church?

¹ Garry Friesen, with Jay. Robin Maxon, Decision Making and the Will of God (Multnomah Press, 1980), p. 263.

When all is said and done, we might summarize Paul's desire for the Corinthian church with the following words. The apostle wanted their faith to make a difference. Instead of merely reflecting Corinthian culture and the paganism which was so pervasive in Greek society, Paul wanted the church to have an identity shaped by the first and second advent of Christ. The Lord had come. Jesus was *the power of God and the wisdom of God* (1:24). But Jesus is coming again. The Corinthians would have to wait for the fullness of their blessing in Christ.

I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (15:50-52)

In the between times, Paul yearned for this church to live as those who had been redeemed.

In the second century, the Athenian statesman Aristides observed the behavior of Christians. He was favorably impressed. Aristides saw what Paul longed for.

They walk in humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them and they love one another. They despise not the widow and they grieve not the orphan. He that has, distributes liberally to him that has not. If they see a stranger, they bring him under their roof and they rejoice over him as if he were their brother. For they call themselves brothers, not after the flesh but after the Spirit and in God. But when one of their poor passes away from the world and any of them see him, then he provides for his burial according to his ability. And if they hear that any of their number is in prison or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs. And if it is possible that he may be delivered, they deliver him. And if there is among them a man that is poor and needy and they have not an abundance of necessity, they will fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with his necessary food.

May the above quotation be an apt description of Santa Barbara Community Church. God help us. *Maranatha!*