

## **Introduction**

In this booklet, I want to continue our in-depth study in the Book of I Corinthians – Paul’s very practical letter to the Church in Corinth. I recommend that you study booklet number 18 before reading this booklet, as it will provide the background needed to better understand the truths God wants us to learn in this final section of I Corinthians.

**MINI BIBLE COLLEGE**

**INTERNATIONAL STUDY BOOKLET NINETEEN**

**Verse by Verse Study of First Corinthians  
(Part 2)**

## **Chapter One**

**“Man and Woman, God and Christ”  
(I Corinthians 11:1-16)**

In chapters 8, 9 and 10 of First Corinthians, Paul shared with us his philosophy of ministry, which was his philosophy of life: “You cannot serve others and be self-serving.” But after the opening verse of chapter 11, he approaches another problem that existed in the Corinthian church — the role of women in the body of Christ. In verse 6 of chapter 11 he writes: “If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and **if** it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head.” The “if” in that verse is very significant.

In Corinth, prostitution was a very real part of the culture, even in the pagan temple worship. If a woman wanted everybody to know she was a prostitute, unlike most women, she did not wear a veil or a head covering, and she wore her hair cut very short. Short hair was a badge of prostitution in the Corinthian culture.

In the house churches of Corinth, some of the women — because of their internal spiritual revolution and the freedom they had experienced in Christ believed that in worship they should feel free to take off their head coverings when they prayed or prophesied.

Paul begins to address this problem very tactfully in verse 2: “Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.” This word “traditions” is very important. Apparently, in the early churches, decisions had to be made about these cultural matters, and Paul shared what he thought would be wise for them in their culture. If he did not have a specific Scriptural basis for them, he called those instructions “the traditions”.

In verse 3 he continues to address the problem of the women who are taking off their veils in public worship: “Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head — it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a

disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.” (3-10)

What is Paul saying in this passage? First of all, it is clear that he is saying that these women are wrong to take off their head coverings in public worship because of what it meant in the Corinthian culture. In the spirit of being “all things to all men” (see 9:22), making adjustments so as not to lose opportunity to be a witness, Paul is clearly writing that these women should cover their heads. He writes that **if** it is a shame in your culture for a woman to have short hair, or not wear a veil, then she should be veiled, and wear her hair long for the sake of her witness.

And then he writes an amazing thing for a former Jewish Rabbi. He writes that when a man prays or prophesies, he should not have anything on his head. It is the custom even today, among more orthodox Jews, to wear the tallith, a kind of prayer shawl, on the man’s head. But Paul is writing here that men should be unveiled in the presence of God.

Paul is really writing that the relationship of the husband and the wife is very much like the relationship between Christ and God. It is obvious that God the Father is over the Son, and that the glory of

the Father is the Son's first concern. And yet, we hear the Son say, "I and the Father are one," by which He means that they are working together in perfect harmony (John 10:30).

As he and Peter do consistently, Paul is using the relationship between Christ and the church, and the oneness that existed between Jesus and the Father, as the inspired biblical model for marriage (I Peter 2:25; 3:1,7; Ephesians 5:22-27). He is not writing that the woman is nothing and the man is everything. He is writing that the woman and the man relate in the same way that Jesus, the Son, relates to God the Father. The husband is over the wife in the sense that he has the responsibility for the home and family, and the authority to go with that responsibility. But, as the Father was over the Son, and yet the Son and the Father were one, in perfect harmony with one another, and in many senses equally God, in the same way it is possible for a man and his wife to have an over/under relationship with absolute equality.

Study these first sixteen verses of First Corinthians 11 in depth, and I believe you will see them to be profound. They tell us something of the role and function of a devout man and woman in a Christ-centered marriage, and also about the equal worth of the man and the woman. They also address a problem that was primarily a cultural problem and should have a cultural application. These cultural problems and their cultural applications should be distinguished from those biblical teachings about marriage that are supra-cultural, like the fact that the models for a Christ-like marriage

are the relationship between the Son and the Father, and the relationship between Christ and the church.

## **Chapter Two**

### **"The Lord's Supper or Your Supper?"**

#### **(I Corinthians 11:17-34)**

At verse 17 of I Corinthians 11, Paul begins to address still another problem in the church at Corinth. When they celebrated the Lord's Table, they apparently preceded that celebration with a "love feast". People apparently brought food from home.

In the Church at Corinth, some of the believers were slaves who were very poor. These poor people were unable to bring any food and were hungry when the meal was served. Instead of putting all the food on a common table and sharing it equally, they ate in little groups. Some people were gorging themselves with food while others in the room were hungry as they watched their brothers and sisters eating. Can you imagine that in a community of believers?

There must have also been a lot of wine there, and by the time they got to actually celebrating the Table of the Lord some of the people were actually drunk! This was the problem Paul addresses beginning at verse 17: "In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first

place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.”

He gives us a fascinating rationale for the way God uses divisions among believers: “No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval.” (11:19) One good thing we can say about divisions among believers is that God uses their differences to reveal those who have His approval.

Paul then gives this beautiful instruction that is frequently read when believers celebrate the Table of the Lord today: “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same way, after supper He took the cup, saying ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.” (23-26).

This passage gives an inspired solution to the appalling problem of the Lord’s Table being defiled in the church at Corinth. The chapter ends with Paul writing: “If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.” (34)

Based on this verse, many churches today believe it is unbiblical to have a kitchen in their church, or to have any kind of a meal together as a church. I think that is an extreme interpretation

and application of this verse. It was not the fact that they were eating that was the problem, but the fact that they were committing the sin of gluttony, were not sharing with those who had nothing to eat, and were getting drunk, that Paul correcting in this passage. I do not think Paul would prohibit the fellowship among believers that takes place around a meal. Sharing a meal together is consistently used in the Scripture as a metaphor for the deepest level of fellowship (Revelation 3:20; Luke 14:16-24).

### **The Table of the Lord**

What is the meaning of the Lord’s Table? Throughout more than twenty centuries of church history, the followers of Christ have not agreed as they have answered that question. Some have answered that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ when believers meet around this table. This is called “transubstantiation”. Others say that the Holy Spirit is only with the bread and the wine in a very special way. They call that “consubstantiation”. Still others believe that the Lord’s Table is only a symbolic memorial of the sacrifice of His body and blood for us, because Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of Me.” They believe, that the night before His death on the cross, Jesus said, “This is the way I choose to be remembered.”

It is interesting that this symbolic picture of Himself, which Jesus gave the Church to observe until He comes again, in some ways, is not a beautiful picture. In fact, it is a tragic picture of our

Lord. It is a picture of Christ crucified. But, of course, when we realize that it represents the love of God, which brought salvation into this world, it is really a very beautiful picture. As he deals with an awful problem in the church at Corinth, Paul gives us important instruction regarding the Table of the Lord.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Look Up, Look In, and Look Around**

##### **(I Corinthians 11:17-34)**

The instructions the Apostle Paul gives the church in I Corinthians 11 for celebrating the Lord's Table have been read at millions of communion services. I would like to spend one more chapter on this subject because it is so very important. Paul continues his teaching at verse 27: "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. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord we are being disciplined

so that we will not be condemned with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment." (27-34)

As Paul continues to address the problem of the blasphemous way the Table of the Lord was being observed in the church at Corinth, he gives us another beautiful jewel of instruction. First of all, he makes the very obvious observation that the purpose of this sacrament, which was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ, is that we might come together, and look up. It is called, "communion" by some, because its purpose is to maintain our union with Christ.

Paul writes that to come to this Table "in an unworthy manner" is very serious sin. In verse 30, he writes: "That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep." Paul is actually teaching: "That is why many of you are weak and sick, and many have died."

First of all, we are to come looking up, believing in what the Table represents. This Table represents the Gospel that saves us. It also represents the union we have with the risen, living Christ. As the bread and wine, through digestion and then circulation, become part of every fiber our physical beings, we celebrate the miracle that we are in union with Christ.

Next, the Lord's Table asks us to look in: "A man ought to examine himself." (28) This reminds us of a great truth taught by Jesus: that we must judge ourselves first, and then we will be

equipped to judge others (Matthew 7:1-5). This is an important principle to apply as we approach the Lord's Table.

There are two more looks we must take as we come to the Table of the Lord. (1) We must look back to the cross of Jesus Christ and (2) we are to look forward to the return of Jesus Christ. The cross of Christ is the central theme of the Scriptures. The Old Testament focuses the meaning of the cross through animal sacrifices, and the New Testament looks back to the cross.

Remember that Jesus was celebrating a Jewish Passover with His Jewish apostles when He turned that primary traditional [implies extra-biblical] Jewish worship form into the central Christian worship form. This is the only instruction Jesus gave His apostles about how His church should worship Him! The Passover meal commemorated the miraculous deliverance of the children of Israel from their cruel slavery in Egypt. At that time a lamb was slain, and some of the blood was smeared on the doorposts of each believer's home. When the death angel of Jehovah saw the blood sprinkled there, he passed over that house, and the firstborn in that house was not taken (Exodus 12:12-13).

When Jesus celebrated that Passover with the apostles, He told them He would not eat that meal again until it had been fulfilled (Luke 22:15,16). He was telling them, that when He died on the cross, He became the fulfillment of all that was represented by the Passover Lamb. We are to look back to the cross when we celebrate the Table of the Lord.

And then we are to look forward at the Lord's Table because Jesus said, "Do this to remember Me until I come." (26) So, when we gather around the Table of the Lord, we look forward to the hope of His Second Coming (Titus 2:13).

Finally, in this corrective Communion instruction, Jesus and Paul teach that we are to look around when we come to this table. Communion is not only vertical. It is horizontal. There are so many places where that is taught in the New Testament: "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5:23) The Apostle John tells us bluntly, at the end of the fourth chapter of his first letter, that if we say we love God and do not love our brother, we are liars, because the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationship with our brother are inseparable.

The communion table also teaches that spiritual discipline when Paul tells us to wait until all are present before we partake. If things are not right in your horizontal communion with your brothers and sisters, and you know that you are going to celebrate the Lord's Table on Sunday, go get right with your brother or sister. Reconcile the communion in your horizontal relationships, because you know you are going to be celebrating the vertical relationship of your communion with Christ.

## **In Summary**

The inspired instruction of Paul in this great passage that shows us how to approach the Table of the Lord commands us to look up, look in, look back, look forward, and look around when we come to the Table of our Lord.

### **Chapter Four**

#### **Now Concerning Spiritual Things**

##### **(I Corinthians 12:1-11)**

As we approach chapter 12, we come to a major new division in this magnificent pastoral letter. The first eleven chapters are the corrective section, and we are approaching the constructive chapters of this letter.

In the first eleven chapters, Paul writes specific solutions to specific problems as he addresses the problems he learned from the house church of Chloe, and from the letter he had received from this church. But now, in the remaining chapters, he is going to prescribe general spiritual solutions that could solve all the problems in the Corinthian church - and in our churches today.

The first three chapters of this general solution section might be called, "The Function of the Holy Spirit." Paul is going to tell the

Corinthians (and you and me), how the Holy Spirit wants to function in a church.

You cannot help but wonder about the spiritual status of these Corinthians. Paul calls them "saints," but then he describes all their problems. He then calls them "carnal" and tells them they are spiritual babies. When we get to chapter twelve, we receive the diagnosis of the Apostle Paul concerning the spiritual status of the Corinthians: the Corinthian believers are spiritually ignorant! They were not ignorant of the fact of the Holy Spirit, but they were ignorant about the function of the Holy Spirit in a local church.

In chapter 13, he addresses what he calls in other places "the fruit of the Spirit." (Galatians 5:22,23) There are two major works of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. One is the work of the Holy Spirit in us, which Jesus labeled the new birth. But, if you look for the prepositions "on" or "upon" as you read the Book of Acts, you will see that the Spirit also does a work upon us in order to work through us as His human agents.

The work of the Spirit upon us is associated with ministry. The evidence or proof that the Holy Spirit is doing His work in us is the fruit of the Spirit. The proof that the Spirit has come upon us to use us for ministry is what Paul calls, "the gifts of the Spirit". The gifts of the Spirit equip us for various kinds of ministries. In chapter 12, Paul is telling us how the Holy Spirit functions in a church.

Paul shares his second spiritual solution in chapter 13. This is the famous Love Chapter of the Bible. It tells us that love is the great

evidence of the Spirit's work in us. The essence of the Love chapter is that the work of the Spirit upon us can never replace the dynamic work of the Spirit in us. A principle that is often applied in the Scripture is: "It is not either/or, but both/and." We should all pray for the miracle work of the Holy Spirit in us, and upon us.

In chapter 14, Paul is going to teach the order that should prevail among us, when the Holy Spirit is doing His work in us, and upon us. These great chapters, where Paul teaches the Corinthians – and you and me - about spiritual things, are the heart of this letter.

Paul will introduce his fourth spiritual solution in chapter 15, when he will write a masterpiece on resurrection. Not only the death and resurrection of Jesus, which are the Gospel of Jesus Christ that saves us, but our own resurrection — both in the last days and in the daily resurrection power that gives us victory over sin.

He will present a concluding spiritual solution in chapter 16, when he gives instructions for a collection for the suffering saints in Jerusalem. The last chapter of this letter is more than a post-script, and a closing word of greeting. Paul deliberately places stewardship among the spiritual things that are general solutions to the problems of this church.

So, we have specific correctives for what Paul calls, "carnalities" in the first eleven chapters of this letter, and general, spiritual solutions to all the problems of the church at Corinth (and in our churches today), in chapters 12 through 16.

There are two observations we should make in this second division of Paul's First Corinthian letter. Paul writes that it is wrong to be ignorant of the function of the Holy Spirit. The exclamation we hear all the way through the letters of Paul is, "I would not have you to be ignorant." Be sure to make a second observation at the end of chapter 14, where Paul writes: "If any man thinks himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant." (I Corinthians 14:37,38)

Paul shares magnificent spiritual truths in these three chapters, and at the end of them he essentially writes: "If you are an authentic spiritual person, then you will acknowledge that the truths I have written here are the commandments of the Lord. But after I have shared all this truth with you, if you are still ignorant, it is because you choose to be ignorant, and I choose to respect your choice and leave you in your ignorance."

Paul is also writing in these general, spiritual solution chapters that it is wrong to ignore the function of the Holy Spirit. If you understand from studying these chapters how the Holy Spirit wants to function in this world, and you choose to ignore the work of the Holy Spirit, you are being disobedient and you could be missing out on your ministry as a believer. Paul will also tell us it is wrong to idolize certain gifts or manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

**Chapter Five**  
**Gifts and Ministries**  
**(I Corinthians 12:1-6)**

The first eleven verses of First Corinthians 12 lead us into what I consider to be the heart of this letter. I now want to consider these verses one at a time. In verse 3, the Apostle Paul is obviously addressing demonic activity that was associated with the idol worship in Corinth. The people who were worshipping and offering sacrifices to these idols were worshipping and offering sacrifices to demons (10:19-21; 12: 2, 3).

When people were worshipping idols, evil spirits moved them to curse Jesus. Paul writes: “Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

The doctrinal basis of fellowship in the New Testament churches was simply three words: “Jesus is Lord.” Jesus said, “Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple.” He also said, “If you do not put Me first, ahead of parents, children, or spouse, you cannot be My disciple. And He said, “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:25-35)

What did that mean to the people who heard Jesus speak those words? It meant you had to be willing to die for Jesus, or you could not be His disciple; that Jesus Christ had to be more important

to you than any possession or person in your life, or you could not be His disciple. Paul is teaching the same truth when he writes this doctrinal basis of fellowship for the New Testament Church.

How do you see that achieved in the life of a believer? According to Jesus, for people to come to the place where they can see God’s kingdom, and enter into a relationship with Him whereby He is, in fact, their King, they must be born again. This is what Jesus told Nicodemus (John 3:3,5). Paul agrees with Jesus when he writes, that to come to the place where we say with both our lips and our life, “Jesus is Lord,” we must have an experience of the Holy Spirit, or we must be born again.

Now, with that as an introduction, in verse 4 Paul begins to give us the great teaching of these three chapters on the function of the Holy Spirit in a local church. Paul emphasizes two concepts in this chapter. According to Paul, when the Holy Spirit is functioning properly in a church, that church will be characterized by diversity and oneness. Observe how frequently Paul repeats these two concepts in this chapter. How can these two opposite principles co-exist in a church? In the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul pulls these two opposite principles together when he tells us that such a church functions like a human body. There is great diversity between an eye and an ear, a hand and a foot. But that diversity functions with an amazing unity, because all these diverse members of a body are under the control of one Head.

In the last half of the twentieth century, there has been a revival of interest in the Holy Spirit. As we interpret our experiences of the Holy Spirit, we must be careful not to create a lot of division and confusion because we are tempted to make some mistakes in the way we label our experiences with the Holy Spirit. For example, have you ever heard people refer to a Spirit-filled believer, pastor or church? The implication is: there are two kinds of believers, pastors or churches. There are Spirit-filled believers, pastors and churches, and then there are all those other believers, pastors and churches - who are never Spirit-filled.

Is that what the Bible means when it describes believers being filled with the Spirit? All believers are commanded to: “Be filled with the Spirit.” (Ephesians 5:18) The original language literally commands us to “Be, being filled with the Spirit.” In the Greek language, this instruction is structured in a way that it is clearly a commandment and not an option for an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? We are told in the Book of Acts that Peter, “filled with the Spirit,” preached that great sermon on the Day of Pentecost. Later we read, “Peter, filled with the Spirit,” preached and thousands were saved. Still later we read, “Peter, filled with the Spirit,” did this or did that. Now, in between those times when Scripture does not tell us Peter was filled with the Spirit, was he filled with the Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is not a liquid. The Holy Spirit is a Person, and we either have the Person of the Holy Spirit in our lives or we do not. The real issue is not, “How much of the Spirit do we have?” but “How much of us does the Spirit have?” When He has all of us, then we are filled with the Spirit.

A Spirit-filled believer is a Spirit-controlled believer. Before Paul commanded us to be, being filled with the Holy Spirit, he wrote: “Be not drunk with wine, which is excessive, but be, being filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Ephesians 5:18) Just as a person who is drunk is under the influence, or control of alcohol, we are to be under the influence, or control of the Holy Spirit.

Paul is telling us in this chapter that, when we and the members of our church are Spirit-filled; our church will be characterized by an amazing diversity and oneness. As Paul expresses it here, “There are diversities of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit.” (4) Since spiritual gifts equip us for spiritual ministries, verse 5 reads, “There are differences of ministries.” That means different ways of serving God. There is a diversity of gifts, and then growing out of these diverse gift patterns, there is a diversity of ministry patterns. In a Spirit-controlled church, the members of that body do not have the same gifts, or the same ministries.

Then in verse 6, he writes: “God works through different men in different ways, but it is the same God who achieves His purposes through them all.” The gifts and ministries of the Spirit are not given as we will, but as He wills (11). Perhaps that is what is meant here in

verses 4, 5, and 6 when Paul writes that the gift pattern is diverse, the ministry pattern is diverse, and the way God works through these gift and ministry patterns is not always the same. But he emphasizes the fact that it is the same Spirit Who is working, or functioning, in and through all these diverse gifts and ministries. These manifestations of the Spirit are given to profit the whole church.

**Chapter Six**  
**The Gifts of the Holy Spirit**  
**(I Corinthians 12:7-11)**

This passage describes the diverse spiritual gifts in a local church, which is the body of Christ. We read: “To one is given, by the Spirit, the word of wisdom.” (8) I am convinced this means the gift of preaching and teaching the Word of God with the insight to apply and illustrate what the Word means to us.

Paul also writes that to some in the body, God gives “gifts of healings by the same Spirit.” (9) Do not think only in terms of physical healing when you read this. Remember that the spiritual dimension of a human being is of greater value than the physical, because the spiritual dimension is eternal, and the visible, physical dimension of a man or woman is temporal. Therefore, inward,

spiritual healing is of even greater value than outward, physical healing.

We also read in verse 10: “to another, prophecy.” A prophet is one through whom God speaks. I am persuaded, that when pastor-teachers, or evangelists are preaching with the unction of the Spirit upon them that is prophecy because God is speaking through them.

Paul then writes: “to another, discerning of spirits.” (10) Paul pointed out in the opening verses of this chapter, that before they were converted to Christ, these people were completely controlled by the evil spirits associated with idol worship. How do we know we are being controlled by the Holy Spirit, and not by some evil spirit? The answer is that we need the Word of God and the gift of discernment in the body of Christ.

Then he also writes in verse 10: “to another, different kinds of tongues.” What is Paul talking about? We know that on the day of Pentecost there was a miraculous spiritual phenomenon when the language barrier was broken down. When Peter preached his great sermon and the apostles praised God, one tongue was spoken. Everyone understood it, no matter what his or her native language might have been. It was a great miracle. The message preached by Peter and the apostles was intended for the ears of men. That is why it is labeled “prophecy” by the prophet Joel and the author of the Book of Acts (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17,18).

I will have more to say about tongues when we get to the fourteenth chapter of this letter, where Paul will begin that chapter by

writing that a person who is speaking in tongues is speaking, not to men, but to God. He will tell us that men cannot understand them because, in their spirit, they are speaking mysteries - not languages, but mysteries (14:2). That is not the same thing that happened on the day of Pentecost. Two different kinds of tongues are described, by Luke in the Book of Acts, and by Paul in this letter to the Corinthians.

Look over this list of gifts in verses 7 through 10, and acquaint yourself with them. As you consider the spiritual gifts listed in I Corinthians 12, you should try to discover what kind of spiritual gift pattern the Holy Spirit has given you. Then you should look for ways to exercise the gifts you suspect He may have given you.

Paul concludes his teaching about these spiritual gifts by writing: “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as He determines.” (11) This is how the Holy Spirit works. He gives gifts like these to people in the body, which equips them for their ministries.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Five Fingerprints of a Healthy Church**

#### **(I Corinthians 12:4-19)**

After his great passage on how spiritual gifts become ministry patterns, Paul goes on to another part of this great teaching. He takes these two opposite principles - diversity and oneness - and brings them together by telling us that a church functions like a human body.

What is a church? What is the essence and function of a church? Jesus tells us, “I will build My church and the powers of Hell will not be able to stop Me from building My church. We read that He is now walking in the midst of His churches (Matthew 16:18; Revelation 1:12,13,20). What are the evidences that our church is part of the church the risen, living Christ is building and visiting today?

There are more than sixty billion fingers in this world and every single one of them has a unique fingerprint. Law enforcement agencies all over the world can identify you and me by our fingerprints. Does the church Christ is building have “fingerprints” that can identify that church? In other words, if our church were accused of being part of the Church Christ is building today, would there be enough evidence to convict us?

In the New Testament, I have found what I am convinced are ten “fingerprints” that can identify the church where Christ is

building and blessing with His divine presence today. These “fingerprints” not only identify the church Christ is building, they can give us an understanding from which we can monitor the health of a church.

I find these fingerprints in two places. The first five fingerprints can be found when the Church was started, or in what we call “The Great Commission” that gave birth to the Church. Jesus commanded the apostles: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

The Book of Acts is a record of how the apostles and disciples of Jesus implemented that Great Commission. Their objective in preaching the Gospel was to make disciples, whom they were to baptize and teach. This Commission literally reads: “Make disciples; going, baptizing, and teaching.”

So, on the day of Pentecost, when three thousand Jews were converted, the apostles knew what to do with them. We read that those who were converted “Devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (Acts 2:42) This describes the beginning of the Church of Jesus Christ, and this is where I find the first five “fingerprints” of a healthy church.

On the “right hand,” think of the “thumbprint” as evangelism. The apostles preached the Gospel to people and brought the converts into the Church. The “index fingerprint” represents teaching. In obedience to the Great Commission, the apostles taught the people who were converted on the Day of Pentecost. The “middle fingerprint” is fellowship. These disciples who were converted through the preaching of the apostles were not only evangelized. They continued in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship. The “ring fingerprint” is worship. They expressed their love for the risen, living Christ through the breaking of bread with the apostles. This means they celebrated the Lord’s Table together. I label the “little fingerprint” the fingerprint of prayer because we read that the new disciples continued in prayer with the apostles.

I find five more fingerprints in this twelfth chapter of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, which I believe is the greatest statement in the New Testament about how a church is designed by the living Christ to function in this world.

## Chapter Eight

### Five More Fingerprints of A Healthy Church

(I Corinthians 12:12-24)

I mentioned in the last chapter that the fingerprints on the right hand of a healthy church are: the thumbprint of evangelism; the index fingerprint of teaching; the middle fingerprint of fellowship; the ring fingerprint of worship, and the little fingerprint of prayer.

In this profound chapter, I find five more fingerprints of a healthy church. According to this inspired description of how the church is to function, the thumbprint on the left hand is unity, or oneness. When we listen to Jesus praying five times that His church might be one, we might expect that fingerprint to show up.

The index fingerprint on the left hand is diversity. Paul is essentially saying that if two of us are exactly alike, one of us is unnecessary. He uses a hideous metaphor to make his point when he raises the question, if the whole body were an eye, then how would it hear anything, and if it were an ear how would it smell anything? (17) Can you imagine a 75-kilo eyeball, or an 80-kilo ear? The beauty of diversity makes a human body attractive and a human body without diversity would be hideous. Unity without diversity is uniformity. A Spirit-controlled church has unity without sacrificing the diversity of gifts and ministries.

The middle fingerprint is plurality. “The body is not made up of one part but of many.” (14) Many churches have gifted pastors

and that is wonderful. However, when the church meets, the pastor should not be the only one to exercise his spiritual gifts. That is not a plurality. Every time the words that describe the leaders of the church are found in the New Testament, those words are plural. The church is not to function like the body of a disabled person. The church is to function like a healthy body in which all the members of the body function. The body of Christ needs the work of all its members to function as God intended.

The ring fingerprint would be empathy, or love for each other. If one member suffers, all the members of that body suffer. “Behold, how they love one another.” That is what they said of the church in the first generation. May that be what they say of the true church of the living Christ today.

The little fingerprint on the right hand could be called equality. Every member of this body is equally important. In the inner ear there is a little bone that controls our equilibrium. We cannot see it, and we never think about it, but if it were removed we would fall on the floor and be like a fish out of water. In the church there are little members of the body like that. They may be unseen, but they perform a function that is a critical part of the life of the body of believers. All those members of the body, whether they are up front, or in the background, they are all equally important to the function of the body of Christ.

Unity, diversity, plurality, empathy, and equality; those are five more fingerprints of the church based on this profound teaching

of the Apostle Paul in this dynamic description of the nature and function of the true church of the risen, living Christ.

### **Problems Maintaining Unity and Diversity**

Paul addresses several problems as he profiles and applies the diversity and oneness of the church. The first problem is what we might call, “spiritual discrimination.” In the church at Corinth there were people who received gifts from the Spirit, like the gift of tongues. When they received this gift of tongues they thought they were more spiritual than those who did not receive this gift.

This problem of spiritual discrimination exists in churches today. Many people believe that the gift of tongues is a “credential” gift. If you have not received that gift, those who have treat you as if you are not even a spiritual person. That is spiritual discrimination. If I were a young believer, I might be seriously hurt if people discriminated against me because I did not have the same spiritual gifts they have. Paul is addressing the effect of this kind of spiritual discrimination when he writes: “And if the ear should say, ‘because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body?”

The next problem focused by the Apostle Paul might be called “spiritual depreciation.” Many believers are insecure spiritually. So, if someone says to them, “You are not gifted the way I am, and that means you are not an authentic believer,” they begin to depreciate, or undervalue, the spiritual gifts God has given them.

Ultimately, the problem Paul is concerned about here is the problem of spiritual division. The sequence is that spiritual discrimination leads to spiritual depreciation, and that problem can lead to the division of the body of Christ. If I am treated like a second-class citizen in the church I attend, if there are other churches available, I will find a church where I am not going to be treated that way. Now we have the problem of division. Spiritual discrimination unfortunately sometimes is expressed as believers gather together in groups according to the gifts they have been given, excluding those who have not received the same cluster of spiritual gifts they have received.

Five times in His prayer for the church, Jesus prayed that we might be one (John 17). How tragic to think that believers can permit the evil one to use the function of the Holy Spirit, Who was given by Christ to cultivate and maintain our oneness, to cause division and fracture the oneness for which He prayed.

**Chapter Nine**  
**The Body of Christ**  
**(I Corinthians 12:27-31)**

As we come to the conclusion of our study of chapter 12, how shall we summarize this wonderful teaching of the Apostle Paul? First of all, be sure to observe that the Apostle Paul makes the point more than once that God is the One Who has put this body of Christ together. We do not have the spiritual gifts that we desire. We have the spiritual gifts that He wills for us to have. Paul writes: “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills ... But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be.” (11,18) That is referring, of course, to the body of Christ, the Church. In other words, God put the body of Christ together precisely the way He wanted to, with a diversity of gifts and ministries, and a oneness as they function together because they are under the control of one Head, the risen, living Christ.

Observe, that the gift of tongues, the one that people in the Corinthian church were apparently making a credential gift, is mentioned last in a priority order of preference (see 12:10). If we were going to make one of the gifts of the Spirit a credential gift, the gift of tongues is the last one we should choose.

God obviously wants this sacred diversity of gifts to exist with unity in the body of Christ. All these diverse people — who are

now even more diverse because they have been endowed with diverse gifts of the Spirit — can exercise their spiritual gifts, and work together in a supernatural way, because they are all controlled by the living Christ.

Paul prioritizes some of the ministries and leadership roles of the church as he makes another list for us (28). He writes: “First apostles.” Some say this means the original twelve apostles. When they passed from the scene that was the end of that ministry pattern. Others say the word “apostle” really means “missionary” or “sent one”. So, we can apply this gift to missionaries, or to people who are led to plant a church or start a ministry, because that can be considered an apostolic gift pattern.

Then, Paul writes: “second prophets.” Prophets are those who speak for God, or those through whom God speaks as they teach and preach the Word of God. Next, he writes: “third teachers.” The Great Commission prescribed, that when disciples are made, they are to be taught. That is why we should expect to find people in the church with the gift of teaching. Now Paul lists “workers of miracles, healers.”

Then, “helpers, administrators.” These practical gifts have not been mentioned before. All the spiritual gifts are not as pastoral as faith healing or preaching the Word of God. How desperately churches and ministries that are raised up to implement the Great Commission need good administrators! And here we find helpers,

which means people who simply help to get things done. Finally, at the bottom of the list, Paul mentions again the gift of tongues.

Paul asks these questions as he concludes this chapter: “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” (29, 30) The obvious and expected answer is “No.” If two of us are exactly alike, one of us is unnecessary. If any one of us had all the gifts, we would not need the other members of the body. But as God has arranged it, no one has all the gifts. For that reason we are all necessary, and we all need each other. Praise God, He has made us all unique, and that makes every one of us necessary members of the body of Christ.

**Chapter Ten**  
**A Symphony of Love**  
**(I Corinthians 13)**

The thirteenth chapter of this letter is considered the Love chapter of the Bible. We should realize, however, that as great a Love Chapter as it is, love is not the primary subject here; the primary subject is spiritual gifts. Before we consider this chapter verse by verse, we will gain insight into this great chapter if we consider the context in which Paul wrote these inspired words about

love. This profound statement about love follows a magnificent teaching about spiritual gifts, and that profound teaching concluded when he wrote: “Earnestly covet the best spiritual gifts, but let me show you something even more excellent than spiritual gifts.” (12:31)

With those words as his introduction, Paul then wrote the great Love Chapter of the Bible. The conclusion of chapter thirteen is really the first verse of chapter fourteen: “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts.” We are told at the beginning of this wonderful treatise on love to earnestly covet the best spiritual gifts, and we are told at the conclusion of this chapter to earnestly desire spiritual gifts (12:31; 14:1).

In this chapter, Paul will contrast love with spiritual gifts that were highly esteemed by the Corinthian believers. Sometimes, a jeweler uses a black velvet background to display his diamonds. In the same way, Paul is bringing the subject of love into his argument here, as a background, that we might have better perspective on spiritual gifts. We know this because he is teaching us about spiritual gifts in chapter twelve, and he returns to the subject of spiritual gifts in chapter fourteen.

Chapter thirteen profiles the evidence of the great work of the Holy Spirit in us. The chapter is like “A Symphony of Love” in three movements. The first movement is the first three verses. I call this first movement “Love Compared.”

In these three opening verses, the Apostle Paul compares love with things that were highly valued by the Corinthians, as believers, and as cultured Greeks. For example, as believers, they valued the gift of tongues, and as Greeks they valued eloquence. So, he begins by writing: “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only blaring brass, or a clanging cymbal.” (1) In other words, I am only a lot of noise if I speak in tongues, or with Greek eloquence without love.

He then compares love with the gift of prophecy, understanding all mysteries, having all knowledge and enough faith to move mountains. He declares, that even if I have all these things, without love, I am nothing. He goes on to write that if he gives all his money to the poor, and if he gives his body to be burned as a martyr, but he does not have love, “It profits me nothing.” (3) The Apostle Paul is making the statement, as he compares love with the things these Corinthian believers valued most, “Nothing I am, nothing I have, and nothing I do can ever replace the importance of love in my life.”

I call the second movement of this love symphony, “Love Clustered.” (4-7). In his devotional classic on this chapter, entitled, The Greatest Thing in the World, Henry Drummond wrote of these verses: “The concept of love is passed through the prism of Paul’s Holy Spirit-inspired intellect, and it comes out on the other side as a cluster of virtues.” He called this second movement, “Love Analyzed.”

There are different Greek words in the Scriptures for love. “Eros” speaks of erotic love. “Phileo” represents a brotherly kind of love. But it is the concept of love that is represented by the Greek word “agape” that is passed through the prism of Paul’s Holy Spirit-inspired intellect in these four verses. This unselfish, agape love can only be understood in terms of a cluster of virtues. He presents fifteen virtues in verses 4 through 7 and tells us, that if we have this agape love, we will find ourselves behaving in these ways.

The third movement of this love symphony is in verses 8 through 13. I call this third movement, “Love Commended.” In the final movement of this magnificent love symphony, Paul shows us why love is incomparable. He shows why each of the qualities with which he compared love in the first movement cannot replace love. This final movement concludes with these words: “In this life there are three lasting qualities - faith, hope and love. But the greatest of them is love.” (13,) As he contrasts and commends love in this third movement, Paul shows us why love is the greatest thing in the world.

Why are faith, hope, and love the three eternal values? Faith is an eternal value because Scripture informs us, that without faith, we cannot come to God or please Him (Hebrews 11:6). What about hope? Hope is the conviction in the hearts of human beings that there is something good in this life, and it is going to happen to them. We also read in the Book of Hebrews: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen.” In other words,

faith gives substance to our hopes. Hope is important because it leads us to faith. And faith is important because it brings us to God.

Paul is saying here that love is greater than hope and faith, because love is not something that brings us to something that brings us to God. This agape love he is profiling here is God. (I John 4:8,16) When you discover this agape love, you have discovered God. You have discovered the divine presence of God, because this love is the essence of His being. That is why he concludes that love is the greatest thing in the world.

No wonder Paul began this chapter writing, “Let me show you something that is greater than spiritual gifts.” Small wonder that he tells us this love is incomparable and the greatest thing in the world. And we can understand why, after he tells us about agape love, he writes: “Follow after love and desire spiritual gifts.” Spiritual gifts are important. Desire them. But make love your great aim, because God is love.

## **Chapter Eleven**

### **A Cluster of Virtues**

#### **(I Corinthians 13:4-7)**

At the heart of the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, we must examine this “cluster of virtues,” which is the essence of the love that is the essence of God. Paul cannot define love any more than he can define God. But he does tell us, here and elsewhere in his writings, that if the Holy Spirit of God lives in our hearts, the evidence of that miracle will be these fifteen virtues (Galatians 5:22,23). This means that in these verses we not only have love clustered, or analyzed. If we want to know more about who and what God is, we must examine these virtues one at a time because they not only analyze love; they are an analysis of the essence of God.

First, Paul tells us that, “Love suffers long.” This is often translated “patience,” but the original Greek word actually indicates a love that is merciful, meaning unconditional love, and a love that does not avenge itself, even when it has the right and the opportunity to get even.

Next, we read that, “Love is kind.” This Greek word means, “love is easy”—easy to live with, easy to approach. Love is sweet. Love is good. Love does good things. All those concepts are wrapped up in the Greek word that is translated as “kind.”

Paul then tells us, “Love does not envy.” Another way to understand the word Paul used suggests an unselfish commitment to another’s well being. In other words, sanctified altruism. You are not only concerned about the well being of the one you love; you make an unselfish and deliberate commitment to the well being of the one you love.

The next quality is: “Love does not parade itself.” This means it is not boastful. It is not a braggart. The person who has this quality will have no need to impress others. Next, Paul writes: “Love is not puffed up.” Love is not conceited, proud, or arrogant. In other words, love is humble.

He then writes: “Love does not behave rudely.” Love has good manners, behavior that is courteous and polite because it is other’s-centered. And then, “Love is not easily provoked.” This means not easily upset. “Unflustered” or “not touchy” are good translations that convey what it means to have this quality. Between these two qualities, Paul tells us that, “Love does not seek its own.” If you have this quality of love in your heart, you will not be self-centered or self-seeking. You will not be seeking your own way. Love is not touchy and behaves properly because it does not seek its own way.

The next four virtues are also grouped together: “Love thinks no evil” in the Greek, means that a person with this kind of love does not keep a record of the mistakes and failures of the one being loved. They have what you might call a “sanctified memory.” In fact, Paul

writes that this quality of love “does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.” These two virtues are saying something like this: You are not pleased when your love object fails. You do not want to see them fail, and you grieve when they do. Rejoicing in the truth means that you are pleased when the truth prevails in the life of the one you love.

When Paul writes, “Love bears all things,” this also is not the best translation because the Greek actually suggests, “Love covers all things.” You want your loved one to succeed spiritually, and when they do fail, you do not tell others about it. When they tell you about their failures, you can keep them in confidences.

“Love believes all things,” means that love believes the best about the love object. Love has the faith to see and believe in the potential of the one they love. “Love hopes all things” means that love joyfully waits for the fulfillment of what it sees and believes concerning its love object. When Paul writes: “Love endures all things,” he means that love perseveres while it awaits the fulfillment of what it believes and hopes to see in the life of the one being loved.

After presenting these fifteen virtues, Paul writes: “Love never fails.” (8) The Greek word here suggests, that the one who is loving has the confidence to hope, believe, and endure because they know this love is not coming from them. This love is coming from God, and this cluster of virtues is an expression of the miracle that God lives in them and is expressing Himself through them. Since God is love, and these virtues reveal the love that God is, this love

will never fail, because God will never fail. We fail to access and appropriate God, we fail to love, and love objects do not always receive this love, but this love God has for us and through us for others never fails.

**Chapter Twelve**  
**Eccentric Love**  
**(I Corinthians 13:4-7)**

The great Love chapter of the Bible is telling us that love is incomparable because God is love, and the quality of love compared, clustered, and commended in this chapter is God. It is because this quality of love is God, Love is incomparable and irreplaceable.

These fifteen virtues do not exhaust the list of virtues that express agape love. They are simply some examples of spiritual virtues that will come out of the life of someone who is filled with the Spirit of the One, Who, in His essence, is love. When you examine the fifteen virtues that define and express the love that is God, there is a sense in which you could say this love is “eccentric” because it is “decentral.”

The Corinthians accused the Apostle Paul of being eccentric, or “off center.” We all have a center around which our lives revolve. For most people, that center is self, or selfish gain. The Corinthians

recognized the obvious reality that Paul did not have the same life center as the center that was driving their lives. Paul agreed with them (II Corinthians 5:13).

Aerospace engineers have given us a new word — “decentral.” When a satellite is in an irregular orbit and malfunctioning, they call the satellite “decentral” because the center of its orbit has shifted. When you study these fifteen virtues express agape love, this would be a good word to describe something they all have in common. If you have this love in your life because the Holy Spirit lives in you, there is a sense in which you are eccentric because you are decentral. You will be considered eccentric by the people of this world because you have a different life center. You will be decentric because your life center shifted when the risen, living Christ established His residence in your heart.

Another observation about this cluster of virtues could be that these virtues are expressed externally because they are first experienced internally. They are an outward expression of an inward reality. For example, we could say that this love is outwardly indestructible, because inwardly, this love is unconditional. When you love someone with agape love, by the grace of God you can say, “My love for you is not based on your performance. My love for you is unconditional. Nothing you do or say will make me stop loving you. This love is tough. This love can take anything you do or say, because I am loving you with the love of God.”

So much of what passes for love is conditional because human love is usually based on performance. So many children are loved conditionally. Parents may say explicitly, or implicitly, to their children, “If you make good grades, and give us no trouble, then maybe we will love you.” That makes a child very insecure, because even if they do perform this week, how do they know they will be able to perform next week?

If a woman believes she is loved by her husband, only because of her sexual performance, she may think, “What if I get sick? What if I get pregnant? What if I can no longer perform? Will he love me then?”

If a man believes he is loved by his wife simply because he is a great provider, he may think, “What if I lose my job? What if I get sick and can no longer provide? Will she love me then?”

Finally, this love is outwardly impossible unless, inwardly, it is spiritual and a miracle. You cannot love people this way in your own strength. It is only because God is the miraculous source of this love inwardly that we have the capacity to express this love.

## **Chapter Thirteen**

### **The Solution that Never Fails**

#### **(I Corinthians 13)**

As you read this first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, be sure to make the observation, that this love chapter can be a general spiritual solution to all the problems he has addressed in the Corinthian church so far. For example, the first problem he addressed was the problem of the division in their church. What was really at the heart of that division? Pride, arrogance, and self-centered, self-seeking was at the heart of their division. While he gave them a specific solution to that problem in the first four chapters of this letter, when the apostle teaches that love is humble and others-centered, he is giving this church a general solution to their problem of division.

In chapter five, Paul addressed the problem of the brother who was having an affair with his stepmother. Observe that at the heart of Paul’s inspired solution to that problem is a love for Christ, a love for His Church, and a love for the fallen brother. All church discipline in Scripture is based on the principle of loving, reconciling, and restoring our brother.

In chapter six, they were suing each other, and Paul, at the heart of that specific solution, asked, “Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated if that would preserve the witness of the church in the city of Corinth?” (7) You see, love does not pursue

selfish advantage. It does not seek its own way. So agape love would be a general solution that would solve the problem of their suing one another in the courts of the city of Corinth.

Certainly the spirit of the specific teaching about marriage in chapter seven is agape love. What is the specific cause of most of the problems in the marriages of believers? Selfishness. What is the general solution for selfishness? The agape love, which is so eloquently presented in chapter thirteen.

When he addresses the problem of eating meat offered to idols, he writes: “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” (8:10) The specific solution Paul prescribed was not whether it was right or wrong to eat that meat. The issue was; how much do you love the weaker brother who thinks it is wrong? Jesus Christ loved that weaker brother enough to die for him. Do you love him enough to give up a plate of meat?

In the chapters that address the gifts and ministries of the Spirit through His Church, the principle of love is emphasized again and again when he gives his specific solutions in chapter twelve. Spiritual gifts and ministries are not to edify you, but to edify your brother. They are given for the good of all the other members of the body. In chapter 14 the concept that you are to build up, or edify the other members of the body is mentioned more than forty times. That chapter is really all about servant-centered, others-centered love.

Even when you read the application of the Resurrection Chapter (15) you find love. When you understand the Gospel of the

death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that has saved you, the application is that you must always be abounding in the work of the Lord that others might experience that salvation. And love is obviously the spirit of the collection for the suffering saints at Jerusalem in chapter 16, that too is a beautiful example of the general solution, which is found in the agape love of chapter thirteen.

All the way through this Corinthian letter, you have specific solutions to specific problems. When Paul finishes his specific correctives for the carnalities in the church at Corinth, when he begins chapter twelve by writing: “Now concerning spiritual things, I would not have you to be ignorant,” he is introducing general, spiritual solutions to their problems. Along with the function of the Holy Spirit, the order that is to result in the edification of everyone in the church, resurrection, and stewardship, agape love is his priority and general solution to all the problems in the Corinthian church. So this great Love Chapter is the heart of the Corinthian letter. The general solution to all the problems in the church at Corinth is found in this wonderful chapter.

**Chapter Fourteen**  
**The Edifying of the Church**  
**(I Corinthians 14:1-5)**

In chapter fourteen, Paul is again addressing the subject of the gift of tongues. When you consider this subject in the Book of Acts and this letter of Paul, you must come to the conclusion I described when I gave my commentary on the way Paul mentioned tongues in the twelfth chapter of this letter. The tongues spoken at Pentecost are not the same as the tongues Paul addresses in this letter to the Corinthians. The tongues that were spoken on the Day of Pentecost were called prophecy, because a prophet is one who speaks for God to men, and those tongues were addressed to the ears of men (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17,18).

Paul begins his teaching about the gift of tongues here in this chapter by telling us that the one who is speaking in tongues is not speaking to men, but to God. The tongues that are mentioned seventeen times in this chapter are addressed to the ears of God, not the ears of men.

“For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.” (2)

The Scriptures tell us that God has given us music so that, when we are in the presence of God in worship, and have an intense need to express the inexpressible, we can express the otherwise

inexpressible to God through music. That is why God’s people have always been a musical people. David exhorts us to come before His presence with singing (Psalm 100:2). David had four thousand priests who did nothing but praise God on instruments that he, himself, had made for worshipping God(I Chronicles 23:5).

From the way the twelfth chapter concludes, it is obvious that everyone does not have this gift of tongues, nor should everyone expect to have this gift. This gift should not be considered a credential gift, which means the one with this gift is an authentic spiritual person, and those who have not received this gift are not as spiritual. If any of the gifts Paul mentions in chapter twelve were to be considered a credential gift it would be the gift of prophecy. After telling us that he who speaks in tongues is speaking to God, Paul writes: “But everyone who prophesies speaks to men,” and there are three results of this “unto edification, exhortation, and comfort.” A prophet is one through whom God speaks His Word to His people to edify, or build them up. Since the objective of all these spiritual gifts is that all things are for the edification of the church (26), the one with the gift of prophecy is greater than the one who speaks in tongues.

Paul makes a clear statement in verse four when he writes that when a person speaks in an unknown tongue, he is edifying himself. But, the person who prophesies, the person through whom God speaks His Word, is building up the church. That is why he then writes: “ ... I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is

greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.”

Again, observe the emphasis that the purpose of all the spiritual gifts is that the church might be edified. So according to Paul’s inspired teaching, if tongues are spoken in the church, or in the assembly, there must be an interpreter. Anything that happens in the assembly must benefit the whole assembly.

**Chapter Fifteen**  
**Decently and in Order**  
**(I Corinthians 14:6-22)**

The Apostle Paul strongly discourages the exercise of the gift of tongues when the church is assembled together. He does reluctantly lay down some ground rules for the exercise of this gift when the whole body comes together: There should never be more than two or three occurrences in a given meeting, these should be one at a time, and there must always be an interpretation. The interpretation is commanded because every one attending the meeting must be edified. The tongues without an interpretation would only edify the one who is speaking in the tongue. That is unacceptable to the apostle.

In verse 6, observe that he writes: “If I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation, or knowledge, or prophecy, or word of instruction?” In other words, there has to be a proclamation, a preaching, or a teaching of what the Word of God says and means, for me to edify you.

Then he concludes in verse 9, “So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will only be speaking into the air.” Paul writes elsewhere: “Seeing we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech.” (We must use words that are easy to understand!) (II Corinthians 3:12)

Concerning the gift of tongues, Paul continues: “Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me.” (10, 11) (If you do not understand the language, how is there going to be any edification?)

“So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church. For this reason, anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.” (12-15)

Paul is teaching that, even when you are alone in your prayer closet, if you experience this phenomenon, you are to pray for an interpretation so that you will be even more edified. But then he brings the subject back to the context of the assembly in verses 18 and 19: “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.”

What he is continuously emphasizing is that, in the assembly, all the church must be edified, by all that happens when the church assembles together. Then he summarizes by saying in verse 20, “Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.” Grow up, in other words. That means it is better to be a little naive and childlike in your innocence and purity than to be cynical. But he is primarily saying, grow up in your understanding.

Paul called these Corinthians “babies” in chapter three (3:1). In the third movement of his love symphony in chapter thirteen, he taught by example that we should put aside our childish ways. Now here, for the third time, he is telling these Corinthians that they are children, spiritually and intellectually.

### **Women Speaking in Church**

In the closing verses of this chapter, there is a very controversial passage that prohibits women from speaking in church. Paul even goes so far as to say that it is a shame for a woman to

speak in church. Some cultural perspective will help us to understand these difficult verses.

In the house churches of Corinth, scholars believe the custom of seating women and men on opposite sides of the room was followed. Since women had very little education in the cultures of that day, women were apparently unable to understand the teaching. They were involved in chatter with each other. They were also asking their husbands about the meaning of the teaching. This must have been very distracting, because they were calling across the room to their husbands. That explains the instruction that they are to wait until they arrive at home to ask their husbands questions.

In chapter eleven, Paul gave instructions about women praying and prophesying in church. This has to mean that he was not strictly prohibiting women to speak in church. It was only their chatter and the questions they were asking their husbands across the room that were labeled as shameful by the Apostle Paul.

## **Chapter Sixteen**

### **Let All Things Be Done for Edification**

#### **(I Corinthians 14:26-36)**

In these eleven verses, Paul is summarizing what he has taught in this fourteenth chapter. Even though he has addressed the issue of tongues at great depth and mentions tongues seventeen times, as I have observed, the real subject of this chapter is mentioned more than forty times. That subject is that when the church assembles, all things must be done for the edification, or the building up of the whole church.

This summary of his teaching is also a thorough instruction of how believers should worship when the church meets. If you live in a culture where there are many churches, if you attended a different church for twelve Sundays, you would be impressed with the fact that those churches have very different forms of worship. Suppose you opened your New Testament, asking yourself, “Which of these churches is correct in the way they worship God and Christ?” You will discover that the only instruction Jesus gave His church about worship forms was when He instituted what we call, “Communion,” or “The Table of the Lord.” The passage referenced at the beginning of this chapter of my commentary is the most thorough instruction in the New Testament regarding how the church should worship.

As we summarize this summary, observe some of the principles Paul shares in verses 26 through 36. First of all, there

should be participation by everyone present. When we come together, every one of us should have something to share - a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation (26). Then he writes that the prophets, which I believe to be the preachers or teachers of the Word, should not be only one, but two or three (29). As these two or three prophets take their turns sharing the Word, if something is revealed to someone else, the one who is speaking should be quiet and let the others share (30). The thinking is, if everybody comes with something to share, and everybody has the opportunity to speak in turn, all will be instructed, comforted, exhorted, and edified.

Paul is describing something similar to what is considered the most effective method for teaching a college class today. This is called a “seminar”, and is emphasized in graduate courses, or in small, intellectually sophisticated colleges where the classes are small and the students are especially gifted. The professor is primarily a resource person, and each student takes a turn presenting, discussing, and defending before the class a paper he or she has written. This is considered the most effective way for students to learn because there is discussion and interaction. In principle, that is precisely what Paul was prescribing two thousand years ago when he wrote these eleven verses.

What is it like when our churches come together today? Does everyone have something to share? If you belong to a church where these principles are applied, perhaps in a small group setting, all

week long you will be in the Word. You will be searching for a Psalm, a teaching, something the Lord has revealed to you personally, knowing that when the body comes together, you are going to have the opportunity to share. But if you are never given that opportunity, you are probably not going to come with anything to share. To make this order of worship work, everyone must bring something when they come, and everyone must have the opportunity to share what they bring. In this church order of worship, people will have the opportunity to exercise their gifts, and those gifts will grow and flourish.

There is a similar instruction for worship outlined in the Book of Hebrews (10:21-25).

Both these passages that tell us how we should worship, share a common principle. That principle is that when we assemble ourselves together with other believers, our objective should be to consider one another, how we might edify and bless the other believers who meet with us.

May I ask you a personal question? Why do you go to church? Many believers attend church for what they can get from the church service. Observe in both these passages, that what most believers go to church to receive, these passages instruct believers to receive from the Lord before they go to the assembly. When they become part of the worship experience, their objective should be to, “Consider one another, how to provoke one another to love and good works.”

Even though to many, the fourteenth chapter of First Corinthians is considered The Tongues Chapter of the New Testament, the real emphasis of this chapter is found in these words of Paul: “Let all things be done for edification.”

## **Chapter Seventeen**

### **What Is the Gospel?**

#### **(I Corinthians 15:1-4)**

Suppose I gave you a pen and some paper and then asked you to write your answer to this question: “What is the Gospel?” Imagine that I asked you to accompany your answer to my question with some references to verses of Scripture. How would you answer my question?

Jesus commissioned His apostles and disciples to declare His Gospel to every creature in every nation on earth (Mark 16:15). If we take His Great Commission seriously, we should begin our obedience to that command given to the church by making sure we know precisely what that Gospel is.

According to the Apostle Paul, the Gospel consists of two facts about Jesus Christ. Paul writes: “Now let me remind you, brothers, of what the Gospel really is ... Jesus Christ died for our sins just as the Scriptures said He would, ... and He arose from the dead

just as the prophets said He would.” (I Corinthians 15:1,3,4) That is the correct answer to the question, “What is the Gospel?” Paul began this letter by telling the Corinthians that when he came to Corinth, he was determined to know nothing among them but Jesus Christ and Him crucified (2:1,2). He concludes this letter by reminding them that he preached Christ crucified and resurrected.

Have you discovered that to the authors of the four Gospels, Resurrection Celebration is far more important than Christmas? When the Apostle John wrote his Gospel, he devoted approximately half his twenty-one chapters to the thirty-three years Jesus lived on earth, and half his chapters to the last week Jesus lived. Of the eighty-nine combined chapters of the four Gospels, four chapters cover the birth and first thirty years Jesus lived, while twenty-seven chapters cover the last week Jesus lived. Why is the last week of the life of Jesus so very important, and why is Easter far more important than Christmas to those who wrote the inspired biographies of Jesus?

The obvious answer to these questions is that during that one week, Jesus died and was raised from the dead for our salvation. An answer that is not as obvious is, that during that one week, Jesus Christ demonstrated eternal life, which is the framework or perspective through which all those who believe the Gospel should view life and death, and establish their priorities for living their lives in this world.

In the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, after clearly stating that the Gospel is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Paul focuses like a laser beam on that second Gospel fact - the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He writes fifty-eight inspired verses, showing, in a devotional and practical way, what the resurrection of Jesus Christ should mean to you and me. In this great chapter of the New Testament, the Apostle Paul pulls back the veil of the grave and shows us there is life after death, life beyond the grave.

Every Sunday the followers of Jesus Christ gather to worship Him, they are celebrating that second Gospel fact - Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Have you ever wondered why the apostles, who were all Jews, changed their day of worship from the Sabbath (seventh) Day to the first day of the week? If you read carefully, you will see that they never call Sunday the “Sabbath”. The first day of the week is called “The Lord’s Day” by the apostles because that was the day Jesus rose from the dead. Every Sunday the Church gathers for worship is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, because on the first day of the week, Jesus declared and demonstrated the absolute eternal value of resurrection and eternal life.

In Paul’s masterpiece on resurrection, the thrust of his message is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a prophecy, a proof, a prototype, and a preview of the awesome miracle, that at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, there will be a supernatural resurrection of all believers, both living and deceased. According to Paul, that great miracle is proven beyond all doubt, predicted and proclaimed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead for our salvation. The Good News (Gospel) is that when Jesus died on the cross, God laid on His only beloved Son all the chastisement we rebellious human beings rightly deserved for our sins. In this way, God exercised and satisfied His perfect justice. God also expressed His perfect love when Jesus died on the cross. The beloved Apostle John points to the cross and says, “Here is love. Not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world.” (I John 2:1,2)

When you place your faith in the death of Christ on your behalf and personally trust Him to be your Savior, you have entered into the salvation for which Jesus Christ died and rose again (Isaiah 53; II Corinthians 5:21; I Peter 2:24).

The Greek Word that is translated “confess,” is a compound Greek word that is composed of the Greek words for “sameness” and for “speaking”. To “confess” literally means to “speak sameness” or to agree with God. That is the sense in which we are exhorted in the New Testament to confess Jesus Christ (I John 4:1-6). As you consider the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, I challenge you to speak the same thing, and to agree with God about the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ.

The prophet Isaiah shows us how to confess that Jesus Christ died for our sins. Isaiah wrote: “All we like sheep have gone astray;

we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:6)

This verse begins and ends with the same word, the word “all.” The first “all” of this verse is the bad news that every single one of us has gone astray and turned to his or her own way. As you consider that first “all” of this verse, do you believe that “all” includes you?

The last “all” of this verse is the Good News that God laid on Jesus Christ the sins or iniquities of us all. Do you believe you are included in the last “all” of this verse? When you, by faith, include yourself in both “alls” of this great verse of Isaiah, you are confessing the eternal value that Jesus Christ died for your sins.

### **The Resurrection Chapter of the Bible**

The fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians is all about resurrection. In this chapter, Paul is going to show that resurrection — not only the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but also the resurrection of deceased believers — is very much a part of the Gospel he preached when he came to Corinth. That is why he begins this chapter by saying, “Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you - unless you believed in vain.” (1, 2)

Paul then focuses the Gospel he had preached: “What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” (3, 4)

The Gospel is really two facts: the death of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Many people believe the Gospel is only one fact - the fact that Christ died for our sins. The death of Jesus Christ, when we put our faith in it, means forgiveness, but the resurrection of Jesus Christ, when we put our faith in that second great Gospel fact, means fellowship with the Christ, Who can actually give us the grace to be and do all the things that He is calling us to be and do. Those two facts make up the Gospel.

Now Paul goes on for fifty-eight verses to discuss that second Gospel fact, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is probably because, in the letter the Corinthians wrote to him, they had questions and doubts about resurrection. It may be that the whole idea of resurrection was an intellectual problem for these philosophical and intellectually sophisticated Greeks.

This chapter is primarily about resurrection, but it begins with a clear and precise statement of what the Gospel is. Do you understand what the Gospel is? It may be that you are not a follower of Christ because you have never really heard the Gospel yourself. The first four verses of this chapter will give anyone a clear statement of what the Gospel, which means “Good News,” truly is.

Jesus Christ died on the cross, not just for the sins of the world, but for your sins and mine.

You may think, as you consider believing in Jesus, that you could never live like the followers of Christ are called and instructed to live. Well, you are absolutely right. You will not be able to live that way without the dynamic power of the risen, living Christ in your life. That is why you need to understand that the second fact of the Gospel is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This means that He is alive, He is real, and you can have a relationship with Him that will give you the grace to live the way a disciple of Jesus Christ is to live.

If you have never placed your trust in Christ, will you believe the Gospel right now? If you do, then you will know salvation. Once you experience that salvation, come with me into the rest of this magnificent chapter and see what the Good News of resurrection can mean to you — both now and when you face the undeniable reality of your death.

**Chapter Nineteen**  
**Faith in the Facts**  
**(I Corinthians 15:1-10)**

As we study the Resurrection Chapter of the New Testament, it is important for us to realize that Jesus Christ is not only an historical figure. He is not a dead prophet, a dead teacher, or a dead leader. As we study the person of Christ in the Scriptures, we discover that He is the Word become flesh, or God in human form. When He dies on the cross, He dies on the cross for the sins of the world in general, and our sins in particular. When we put our faith in that finished work of Christ for us on the cross, our personal salvation is the result.

But Jesus Christ also rose from the dead. In the Upper Room before his betrayal by Judas, He shared with the apostles that there was going to be a new arrangement. After His death and resurrection, He was going to be in this world in such a way that it would be possible for them to have an even more intimate relationship with Him than they had while He was with them in a physical body. That new arrangement has been in place for two thousand years now. When you put your personal faith in the fact of the resurrection, the result can be intimate fellowship with Him.

One of the greatest arguments for the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the life and ministry of the Apostle

Paul. What turned Saul of Tarsus, the great Christ-hater, into the great apostle of Jesus Christ? It was the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We cannot explain the life of the Apostle Paul apart from the word “experience”. He had at least three major experiences. He had a Damascus Road experience, but he also had an Arabian Desert experience. He claims that he was in the desert of Arabia for three years where the risen Christ taught him all those things he shares with us in his theological masterpieces (Galatians 1:11-2:10). He also had a heavenly experience (II Corinthians 12:1-4). In this resurrection chapter, he claims that it was meeting the risen Christ that turned his life around. He writes: “Last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.” (8)

Then he gives us a great statement about himself: “For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them.” (10)

Many people think Paul is being an egotist here, but you will see that he is no egotist if you make a serious study of all his writings. Be sure to observe here this important qualification: “Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” Paul acknowledges that he was not the one who did all these things. What he is saying is not boasting, but an actual fact. He did work more effectively than all the other apostles put together - by the grace of God that was given to him.

Paul's emphasis here is primarily on the result of all this apostolic work: "Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed." (11)

### **Resurrection Applied**

Beginning with verse 12, he is going to take up this fact again: If the resurrection of Jesus Christ is true, then the resurrection of the deceased followers of Jesus Christ is also true. The rest of the chapter is not going to focus so much on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but on the resurrection of all believers.

The Corinthians not only doubted the resurrection of Jesus, they primarily doubted the teaching of Paul that believers will one day be raised from the dead. Throughout the rest of the chapter Paul is therefore going to link the resurrection of Jesus to the resurrection of all the followers of Christ.

Carefully read these first eleven verses as an introduction to this Resurrection Chapter. As you read, realize that Paul is focusing the resurrection of Christ, both as a part of the Gospel, and as a transition to the subject of our own resurrection. This chapter should mean a lot to us when we face the reality of our own death, or the death of a loved one.

## **Chapter Twenty**

### **The Four Conquerors**

#### **(I Corinthians 15:12-22)**

Beginning at verse 12 Paul tells us that the resurrection of the believer is vitally linked to the resurrection of Jesus. If we have the faith to believe in the miracle of the resurrection of Christ, we should then have the faith to believe it is possible for us to be raised from the dead one day. However, if Christ did not rise from the dead, then there is no resurrection of the dead for anyone. Always try to follow the logic of the Apostle Paul. He writes: "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses (liars) about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead."

"But if He did not raise Him from the dead, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." (12-19)

Are you following the inspired argument of Paul? These two resurrections are vitally connected. The resurrection of Jesus was the

proof that the resurrection of the believer is possible. The miracle of our own resurrection will usher us into the eternal dimension.

Next Paul goes into a teaching that I think is fascinating. He writes: “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a Man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” (21-22)

Paul writes an expanded version of this same truth in a passage to the Romans, which we might call, “The Four Conquerors”. (Romans 5:12-21) He profiles four things that conquer. You might think of them as four kings. First of all, he writes, there was King Sin. Sin entered this world and abounded until it conquered. Sin then reigned in this world.

Paul tells us that King Death came right after King Sin. When death entered this world as a consequence of sin, death abounded until it conquered all humanity. Death here means both literal, physical death and spiritual death, as in “The wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23) Sooner or later, death conquers every one of us, and the only reason death conquers us all is because sin has conquered us all. The first two kings Paul profiles in his profound words to the Romans, we will call “The Bad News.”

But then he tells us the Good News. He also writes that King Jesus entered this world and abounded in this world until He conquered and reigned, making it possible for us to reign in life through our relationship with Him. So, the third King is Jesus and the fourth king is potentially, King You and King Me. We can enter

into life, and then abound in abundant life in Christ (John 10:10). We can reign in life through Jesus Christ, and be more than a conqueror through Him (Romans 5:17; 8:37). All this is an amplified version of what Paul is writing here in abbreviated form in verses 21 and 22).

These two words, “in Christ”, are two of the most beautiful words in the New Testament. Paul uses these two words “in Christ”, ninety-seven times in his writings. What does it mean to be in Christ? To be in Christ is something more than being in church. It is even something more than being in the ministry. To be in Christ means to be located in a Person, related to a Person the way a branch is related to a vine. Jesus Christ is alive and well on planet Earth as the result of His resurrection. It is possible for us to abide in the living, risen Christ as branches, with Him as our Vine (John 15:1-16).

In his writings, the Apostle Paul will tell us that he is continuously in Christ. Everything he does, he does in Christ, by Christ, and for Christ. Christ became the center of his life. And that is what he means when he writes: “In Christ all will be made alive.” We do not experience real life until we are in Christ.

**Chapter Twenty-one**  
**The Spiritual Body**  
**(I Corinthians 15:23-46)**

In these verses, Paul tells us there is an order to resurrection. “Each in his own turn,” he writes. If you have studied the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, you know, that when Christ comes, He will call out of this world those who are in Christ. We read that: “The dead in Christ shall rise first.” (I Thessalonians 4:16) The believers, who are alive when He comes, will be radically changed to be prepared for the eternal state. We will get into that more a little later. But here in verse 24, he writes, “Then the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.”

In verse 30 Paul raises the question, “And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I die every day — I mean that, brothers — just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’” In a sense, he is continuing to say here what he said in verse 19: “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.”

In verse 33 he rebukes the Corinthians by quoting a Greek proverb: “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’” He is suggesting here that the Corinthian believers have

been corrupted by the values of the Greek Corinthian culture around them. In verse 34 he writes, “Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God — I say this to your shame.”

Paul is shocking the Corinthian believers into coming back to the values of a follower of Christ, and back to appreciating what a vital part of their values resurrection must be. He is focusing here the eternal values of the believer. He is essentially saying, “Because you have allowed your character to be corrupted by the culture of which you are a part, there are actually people in the city of Corinth who have no knowledge of God. You should be ashamed!”

I think those are awesome words that ought to shock all of us back to our senses and challenge us to recover the values of people who believe the Gospel. Paul wrote to the Romans that if we want to discover and do the will of God for our lives, one of the steps he prescribes is that we “Be not conformed to this world.” (Romans 12:1,2) Jesus taught that we are to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13-16). These two metaphors mean that we are to impact and revolutionize our culture, not to be impacted by the culture in which we live. Paul is teaching the same truth in these verses.

At verse 35 he begins to get to what I consider to be the heart of this great Resurrection Chapter. He now answers two questions that were being asked by the Corinthians: “How are the dead raised?” and “What kind of body will they have?” These are two very

obvious questions to anyone who is really thinking about the issue of the resurrection of believers. How does it happen? And what kind of a body will people have when they have been resurrected?

To answer these resurrection questions, Paul uses the illustration of a seed planted in the ground. This is a beautiful illustration of what I call the inspired logic of this apostle. You see, the Corinthian believers, being Greek intellectuals, were saying, “We do not believe in resurrection because we do not understand it.” I think Paul is reasoning: “Now listen, you believe a lot of things that you do not understand. You put a seed in the ground, and when that seed dies and ceases to be a seed, God gives it a new body. It may be the body of a beautiful Easter lily. Even though you may not understand that miracle, you believe in that miracle.”

In those days, many people raised enough vegetables to feed their families. They invested substantially to plant their gardens because they believed those seeds they planted would produce vegetables. That is why Jesus and the Old Testament writers and prophets emphasized the metaphor of planting and harvesting. Paul is reasoning that they show by their gardens that they believe in the miracle of planting and harvesting even though they really do not understand how a seed becomes a flower or a vegetable.

Paul is reasoning that the human body is just like that seed. The body, according to this inspired scenario, is not buried, but planted. He concludes: “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is planted is perishable, it is raised imperishable;

it is planted in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is planted in weakness, it is raised in power; it is planted a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is also a spiritual body.” (42-44)

Here is a beautiful description of what resurrection is. Scripture teaches that man is at least two parts. He has a physical part, the tangible, material part that you can see. And there is the spiritual part of him, the part you cannot see. The physical part of man, when he dies, corrupts, and is planted in the ground in corruption. But, even as a seed ceases to be a seed that it might produce an Easter Lilly, to prepare our bodies for the eternal state, our corruptible body has to go through a miracle that will make that body incorruptible. When the body is planted, it is dishonorable, but it will be raised in glory. The body is the absolute epitome of weakness when it dies, so it is planted in weakness. But when it is raised it will be raised in power.

Now he gets into a great teaching. “It is planted a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.” (44) A spiritual body? What in the world is a spiritual body? I believe John tells us that the nature of our resurrected bodies is yet to be revealed. He writes: “What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him (then) as He is (now)” (I John 3: 2).

Is our resurrection body going to be exactly like the resurrected body of Jesus? In the first chapter of John’s first letter,

he emphasizes the truth that he has seen and handled the resurrected body of the risen Christ. However, when he gets to his third chapter, he writes that what our resurrection bodies will be like has not yet been revealed.

But, in this great resurrection chapter, we have the clear teaching of Paul: There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body. He goes on to say, “The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual.” (15:46)

As you continue to study this chapter, give some thought to this: What does Paul mean when he writes that we have a natural body and through the miracle of resurrection, God is going to give us a spiritual body?

**Chapter Twenty-two**  
**Victory Over Death**  
**(I Corinthians 15:46-58)**

The Corinthians had two questions about the resurrection of believers. Those questions were: How the dead will be raised, and what kind of body they will have? Paul answers that: “There are two kinds of bodies. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. The natural body comes first, and is followed by the spiritual body. The first man was of the dust of the earth and the second Man

was from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the Man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the Man from heaven.” (47-49)

Paul is writing that we are made to live in two worlds, not only one. We are issued a physical body so we can live on Earth. At the heart of this resurrection chapter, Paul is telling us that we were also designed by our Creator to live in heaven. Our God will one day give us a spiritual body that will equip us to live in heaven for all eternity.

To live in this second, heavenly dimension, we must experience the miracle of death and resurrection. He is telling us here that two things must be accomplished through the miracle of our death and resurrection. Our corruptible body must experience a miracle that will make it incorruptible. And our mortal spirit must experience a miracle that will make it immortal. When our body has been made incorruptible and our spirit immortal by the miracle of resurrection, we will be ready to live in heaven with God and Christ, forever!

**Life in Two Dimensions**

Have you ever watched a dragonfly in flight, using its magnificent double wings to fly from one flower to another? Sometimes it hovers like a helicopter, still and suspended in space. The dragonfly can actually hover in flight like that all day long.

These amazing creatures are an absolute marvel of aerodynamics with their two sets of wings that can keep them perpetually flying.

The dragonfly actually spends the first one to four years of its existence at the bottom of a body of water. During the first years of its life, if you were to take a sample of an underwater dragonfly into a laboratory and do a scientific study, you would discover that this underwater creature is equipped with two respiratory systems. The underwater dragonfly has a respiratory system that enables it to inhale water through its long narrow body and derive oxygen from the water, as many underwater creatures do. You would also discover, however, that this fascinating creature has a second respiratory system that will one day equip it to breathe air when it enters into its second dimension of life.

When the underwater, first existence of the dragonfly has been fulfilled, it rises to the surface of the water, climbs up on the land, dries its wings in the sun, spreads those two magnificent sets of wings and gloriously begins the second dimension of its existence. The dragonfly is obviously designed by God to live out its existence in two dimensions.

In this magnificent resurrection chapter, Paul is telling us we have that in common with the dragonfly. According to Paul, we, also, were designed by God to exist in two dimensions. God issues us an earthly body to live out our life here on earth, and God is going to issue us a heavenly body that will equip us to live forever in the second, eternal dimension of our providentially planned existence in

heaven.

Figuratively speaking, if we were to perform a laboratory study on a born again believer, we would discover that the born again believer, like the dragonfly, is equipped with two life systems. Every authentic believer is equipped with an earthly body, or life system, that enables the believer to live out the first dimension of his or her life. We would also discover that every true believer is equipped with what Paul calls “the new creation”, or “the new man”, or “the inward man”. According to Paul, this miracle work of creation by the Holy Spirit, like the dragonfly’s second respiratory system, anticipates the spiritual body God is going to give all believers, which will equip them to live eternally in heaven.

The dragonfly is an aeronautical wonder in its second dimension of life. When believers are supernaturally resurrected, when God gives you and me spiritual bodies that will equip us for our second and eternal dimension of life, imagine what we will be like!

Near the end of the New Testament, in the First Epistle of John, this aged leader in the New Testament Church, reflects on who and what we are as believers, and who and what we are going to be. He tells us that what we shall be has not yet been revealed, but it is going to be marvelous beyond anything we can imagine, because in heaven, we will be exactly like the risen, living Christ is now (I John 3: 1, 2)!

When Paul gets to verse 50, he comes to his exciting conclusion in this great Resurrection Chapter. He writes: “I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” This is a profound statement. What is the heavenly dimension like? Paul is telling us we will not have physical bodies there, because the kingdom of God is incorruptible and our physical bodies are corruptible.

Paul continues in verses 51 and 52: “Listen, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep,” which means not everyone will die, because there will be people living when Christ returns. “But,” he writes: “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.”

This is giving us, again, some teaching about future things. The Apostle Paul taught us what we call “the Rapture of the Church.” Paul wrote that Jesus Christ is going to come and take His Church out of this world. When that happens, the dead in Christ will be raised (I Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Now when he writes: “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” he is teaching, that if we are living when Christ comes, we must be totally transformed, in an instant, to be prepared for heaven. The Greek words here are literally, “in an atomo”. This literally means the smallest measure of time possible. A modern application could be that we will be atomized.

The point is that we must either be totally changed by death and resurrection, or otherwise, because flesh and blood cannot enter into the kingdom of God. We simply cannot take our corruptible body into an incorruptible heaven. As he so eloquently writes in verse 53: “For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”

Then he comes to this conclusion in verse 54: “When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’” In other words, the miracle of resurrection has taken place and death has been conquered. The word, “resurrection” literally means, “victory over death”.

No one who really understands the Gospel and believes it experientially should fear death. Through this total and complete change we will experience when the Lord comes back, we will conquer the problem of death. Resurrection will take the sting out of death. So, to us, the grave is a victory. Our literal death and literal resurrection will remove the sting from sin and the strength from the law that condemns us.

No wonder Paul exclaims: “Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (57) And, as always, there is a conclusion to Paul’s inspired logic that we should take to heart. Because all these things are true, he writes: “Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give

yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” (58)

**Chapter Twenty-three**  
**Now Concerning the Collection**  
**(I Corinthians 16)**

After lifting us into the heights of heaven in the resurrection chapter, Paul brings us back down to earth by the way he begins the last chapter of this intensely practical, pastoral letter: “Now concerning the collection.” We find an interesting episode in the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul when we focus the details of this particular collection. Paul had difficulty being accepted by the believing Jews in Jerusalem. This was possibly because he had carried out such hostile persecution of these Messianic believers before his conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1, 2).

I find it to be touching that the one who was once a Christ hater and killer of the followers of Christ, is now taking up a collection for the Jewish believers he once persecuted, who were now suffering in Jerusalem and Judea due to a great famine. The greatest dynamic that always has made the church of Jesus Christ a powerful force in this world is the grace of God, changing lives.

As he prescribes some very practical instructions regarding this collection, he gives us some important stewardship principles. These principles are profoundly amplified in the sequel to this letter (II Corinthians chapters 8 and 9). His instruction in this chapter reads: “On every Lord’s Day each of you should put aside something from what you have earned during the week, and use it for this offering. The amount depends on how much the Lord has helped you earn.” (16:2)

There are two things that are remarkable about this verse. One is that he mentions the first day of the week. Is it not interesting that by this time, the Lord’s Day, as the apostles always called it, is not the seventh day of the week, but the first day of the week?

There are many proofs of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. One of them is that the Church of Jesus Christ chose the first day of the week to be the day of worship because it was the day the Lord rose from the dead. It is therefore significant that Paul writes: “Upon the first day of the week” each giver should put aside funds for this collection.”

And then he gives us this principle: “ ... as God has prospered him.” What is the basis on which people should determine how much they should give to the work of the Lord? In the Old Testament the standard was the tithe, which was the first tenth of a person’s income. God gave the people of Israel the tithe as a standard of measurement to show them if He was first in their lives. (God always knew the measure of their commitment to Him.) They

were also instructed to give offerings, which were to be over and above the tithe. Beyond that they also made sacrifices, which David defined when he declared that he would not offer to God as a sacrifice, that which cost him nothing (II Samuel 24:24).

But when we come to the New Testament, the issue is stewardship. Stewardship eclipses all these other standards, because stewardship is an acknowledgement that everything we possess already belongs to God. As a steward of that which is His, the critical issue of stewardship is to be faithful in the way we manage His resources. The criterion for giving in the New Testament is “As God has prospered us.” Paul will teach in his next letter to these Corinthians, that stewardship is not based on what we do not have, but on what we have.

And then we see here the principle of integrity in the way that which is given is managed by those who have the responsibility to deliver this collection to the suffering saints in Jerusalem. Paul directs that they were to appoint men to accompany their offering (3). We see here the principle of accountability. There can be a tragic lack of accountability in the body of Christ. There are ministries that have had millions of dollars received for which there has been no accountability. That should not happen in the body of Christ. As Paul takes up this collection, observe how carefully he insists that there be accountability.

In the two chapters I have referenced in Second Corinthians, Paul holds up to the Corinthians, the giving patterns of the

Philippians (II Corinthians 8,9). The church at Philippi was Paul’s favorite church and was the church that consistently supported him financially. They were spiritually mature regarding stewardship principles to the degree that Paul permitted them to have a major and continuous partnership with him as the primary support base for his ministry.

In the last chapter of this letter Paul writes: “If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. No one, then, should refuse to accept him. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers.” (10-11)

Timothy is such an interesting character. He appears to be a timid, shy, extremely sensitive young man. When Paul wanted to communicate a great truth, he liked to wrap that truth in a person, and very often Timothy was that person. When Paul wanted to show his favorite church in Philippi how to live a Christ-like life, he sent Timothy to live with them. He writes to the Philippians: “I do not have anybody that will love like Timothy will. He will naturally love you because he is not self serving. He is not selfish in the way he relates to people.” (Philippians 2:19-21)

In verse 13 he begins his closing exhortation. “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love.” Paul often ends his letters with such exhortations. And then he passes on greetings from people like the

household of Stephanas. And he mentions other people that are known to him. Most of Paul's letters will end with these greetings.

Then observe in the very last verses: "The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house." (19) The church in Corinth met in the houses of people like Chloe, and Priscilla and Aquila. "All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. If anyone does not love the Lord — a curse be on him. Come, Oh Lord! The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love to all of you who are in Christ Jesus. Amen." (20-24)

Paul's salutation in all of his letters was: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." Paul believed that if you have the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in your life, then you have the favor, blessing, and power of God working in your life. Without the grace of God, the life he lived, modeled, and prescribed was impossible. So, there was nothing he could wish for people greater than the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Paul closes his letters in this way, he is saying: "By the grace of God, I can live this life for which I have been saved and to which I have been called, and you can, too - by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul began this letter calling these Corinthians "saints" and telling them they were called to be saints. He also told them God was faithful and could equip them to fulfill the purposes

for which He had called them. Paul actually concludes this letter the same way he began (1:1-3,9).

I trust this study of I Corinthians has helped you grow in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in your life. His Grace is the power you and I must have to live the life for which we have been saved, and to which we have been called, by God and Jesus Christ as saints living in a sinful world.