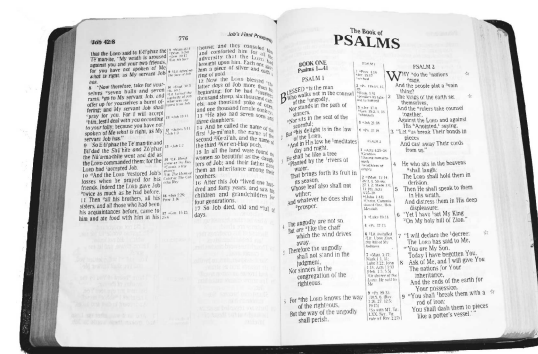


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



July 2016

Bible readings from 1 Corinthians chapters 1 to 11

The head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God

Paul praised the Corinthians for remembering him and for keeping the traditions that he had delivered to them (2). These traditions were the teachings that he had received from the Lord Jesus (cp. 11:23; 15:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:15). It appears that there was some confusion at Corinth concerning the place of women in the church, just as there is in many churches today. The apostle writes, *‘I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God’* (3).

Some women in the church at Corinth were praying and prophesying with their heads uncovered which was a denial of the headship of man. Head covering was a mark of subordination to man. Just as it was shameful for man to cover his head by having hair as long as that of a woman while praying or prophesying, it was shameful for a woman to have no head covering (short hair that made her look like a man (4–5). We will look further at this subject in tomorrow’s notes.

Verse 3 is misunderstood by many. *The head of Christ is God* does not mean that Jesus is inferior to God; he *did not consider it robbery to be equal with God* but humbled himself when he took human flesh (Philippians 2:6). The difference is in function, not in being. Though *the head of woman is man*, it does not mean that women are inferior to men (cp. Galatians 3:28). Some who do not accept the inspiration or authority of the Bible accuse Paul of despising women. That is not true (cp. Romans 16:1–2)! What he does teach is that a woman must not exercise authority over her husband, nor over the men in the church; she is not allowed a public teaching ministry over men (cp. Ephesians 5:22; 1 Timothy 2:12).

There are many able women in our churches and there are many ministries for them but they must not be appointed as elders (overseers) in the church (1 Timothy 3:1–5). **We are thankful for the faithful and sacrificial service of many women, especially in most churches. Where would we be without them?**

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Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God

The apostle now returns to the theme of Christian liberty and respect for the conscience of one's neighbour (see chapter 8). Our freedom must be conditioned by our concern for others (23–24) and a desire to live for the glory of God (31).

We are given some guidelines for eating meat which is obtained from animals killed in ritual worship: *'Eat whatever is set before you and do not ask whether your meat had been previously offered to idols for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it'* (27–28). The person telling you this may associate the meat with idol worship and you should abstain for his sake lest he believe that you are indifferent to idol worship as well as for your own conscience' sake. You must always remember that idols are nothing *for the earth is the LORD'S, and all its fullness* (25–30). You may not have to face this particular problem but the lesson here is to be thoughtful and sensitive to other Christians.

The Word of God is quite clear concerning all that we eat or do – *Whatever you do, do all to the glory* (the honour) *of God* (31). Our aim must always be to please God. The gospel is offensive to many but we must not give offence by thoughtless, careless or any other unchristian behaviour (32). Paul had been an example of this rule and he urged the Corinthians to follow his example (11:1). Are you a good example for others to follow? **Let us work out these principles in our lives each day, seeking to glorify God in whatever we do and at the same time giving no offence to others.** It is not always easy, but the grace of God does work wonders in our lives.

*Ye souls redeemed with blood
And called by grace divine,
Walk worthy of your God
And let your conduct shine;
Keep Christ, your living Head, in view
In all you say, in all you do.*

(William Gadsby)

1 CORINTHIANS

The city of Corinth was conquered by the Romans in 196 BC. After a period of opposition, the Romans destroyed the city in 146 BC and sold its citizens into slavery. Julius Caesar had the city rebuilt in 46 BC and by the time Paul arrived there on his second missionary journey (AD 51 or 52), the population had grown to 500,000. Corinth, a busy port and prosperous trading centre, was a religious city with 26 temples and shrines. Pagan religion does not demand a holy lifestyle! Corinth was infamous for its vile and depraved way of life.

Paul spent eighteen months preaching and teaching in Corinth and a church which included both Jews and Gentiles was established (Acts 18:1–8). Some were saved from a wicked lifestyle (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). Paul wrote his first letter to them during his three years at Ephesus (AD 55–57; see Acts 19:1–41; 20:31; 1 Corinthians 16:5–8, 19). He had heard alarming news of division and disorder in the church and he wrote to deal with this (1:11; 5:1). He also answered a letter sent to him by the Corinthians themselves, in which they raised a number of problems (7:1). Paul began his answers to most of these problems with the words, *'Now concerning'* (7:1,25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1,12).

Outline of 1 Corinthians

1. Introduction (chapter 1:1–9)
2. Division in the Church (chapters 1:10 to 4:21)

An appeal to end divisions	–	1:10–17
The cause of these divisions	–	1:18 to 4:13
Exhortation and warning	–	4:14–21
3. Disorder in the Church (chapters 5 and 6)

Incest	–	5:1–13
Lawsuits	–	6:1–11
Immorality	–	6:12–20

4. Difficulties in the Church (chapters 7:1 to 16:12)

About marriage	–	7:1–24
About virgins	–	7:25–40.
About food sacrificed to idols	–	8:1 to 11:1
About the covering of women’s heads in church		11:2–16
About abuse of the Lord’s Table	–	11:17–34
About spiritual gifts	–	12:1 to 14:40
About the resurrection of Christ and of believers		15:1–58
About the collection	–	16:1–11
About the return of Apollos	–	16:12

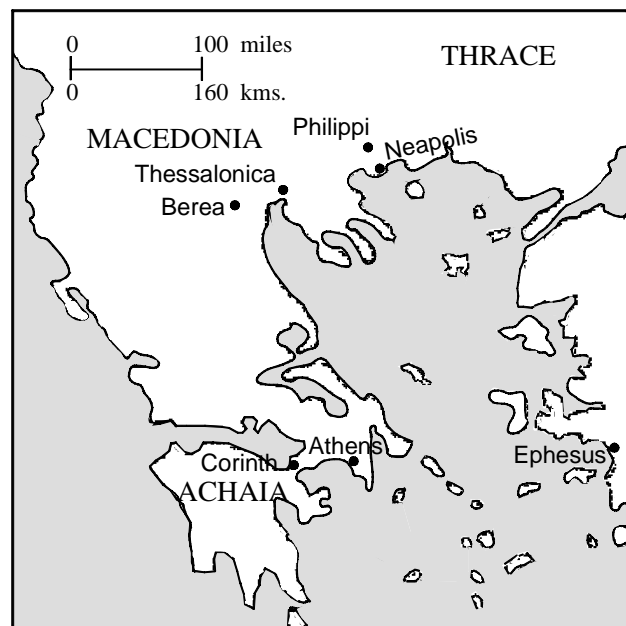
5. Closing exhortations, greetings and prayers (chapter 16:13–24)

For further reading: 1 Corinthians by Peter Naylor (A Welwyn Commentary published by Evangelical Press).

1 and 2 Corinthians by Charles Hodge (published by Banner of Truth).

Called to be Saints by Robert G. Gromacki (published by Baker Book House).

Macedonia and Achaia



But God is faithful

The Corinthians may have imagined that they were more prone to temptation than others because they lived in a city which was a cesspit of wickedness and sexual immorality. They had no excuse for yielding to temptation, however, and neither do we. Paul reminds us that temptation *is common to man; but God is faithful* (13). The Lord will never fail us if we trust in him and walk with him. Satan is called ‘*the tempter*’ (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5) but he cannot do as he pleases with us. *God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.* The faithful God has called us *into the fellowship of his Son* (1:9). By walking in fellowship with the Lord Jesus, we will know his help when we are tempted (Hebrews 2:18).

We must *flee from idolatry* (14). **If you feel that this admonition is unnecessary for a believer, you do not know your own heart.** We may not worship idols of wood, stone or metal, but there are other subtle forms of idolatry into which we may fall. Covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5); it is also possible to make an idol of sport, pleasure, hobbies, home or possessions. The devil will do everything possible to ensnare us. Let us be on our guard and flee idolatry!

At the communion service, we take the cup of blessing and the bread which symbolize the death of Christ and also speak of our communion, our fellowship with him (16–17). Paul reminded the Corinthians that it was totally incompatible for them to take part in any non-Christian ritual and also partake of the bread and the cup at the Christian communion service. Sacrifices in pagan temples are sacrifices to demons and any multi-faith worship is offensive to God (18). We do not come to an altar of sacrifice but to *the Lord’s table* (21). Any doctrine of a priest sacrificing Christ again (as in the Roman Catholic Mass) is a denial of the once for all sufficiency of Christ’s death to save us (Hebrews 7:27; 9:28). ***God is faithful. Let us be faithful to God and live to please him!***

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall

Having written of his fear of being disqualified (9:27), Paul reminds us of the Israelites who were disqualified from entering the promised land because of their sin. The word *all* is found five times in verses 1 to 4. They had all enjoyed great privileges, being led by the cloud on their journey to Canaan. They had all seen many miracles in Egypt, but the outstanding miracle was the safe passage through the Red Sea. They had all been miraculously fed and they all *drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them*, the Lord Jesus Christ. What more could a people want than the loving provision and the presence of Christ among them? Yes, Jesus was with them – he has been actively working from eternity past, long before he took human flesh. They had been greatly blessed, *but with most of them God was not well pleased* (5).

The Israelites are an example to warn us. They were punished because they lusted after evil things – idolatry and sexual immorality (7; cp. Exodus 32:1–35; Numbers 25:1–2). They tempted (tested) Christ by their ingratitude (9; cp. Numbers 21:1–6) and they were always complaining (10; cp. Exodus 16:2; Numbers 14:26–37).

Careless Christians can fall into dreadful sins and we must discipline ourselves and exercise self-control (9:27). This means that we have to keep our eyes from lusting after sinful things (cp. 1 John 2:16). We are not to gaze at things which will arouse sinful desires. We must shut our ears to filthy conversation or gossip. We are to keep our hands from sinning and our feet from walking in sinful places. We must always watch over our thought life remembering that Satan is out to destroy our Christian testimony. **Never deceive yourself into thinking that you could not fall into any of those sins into which the Israelites fell.** *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall* (12). Charles Hodge comments, ‘None are so liable to fall as they who, thinking themselves strong, heedlessly run into temptation. This probably is the kind of false security against which the apostle warns the Corinthians, as he exhorts them immediately after to avoid temptation’ (AN EXPOSITION OF 1 AND 2 CORINTHIANS, Page 106).

Called to be saints

In his greetings to the church at Corinth, Paul writes that he has been *called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God* (1). The Greek word translated ‘*apostle*’ means ‘a messenger’. In the New Testament the word usually refers to those who were sent by Christ himself (*‘the twelve’* – 15:5). They had seen the risen Christ (Acts 1:21–26) and he sent them to preach the gospel. They taught the things that they had heard from Christ. The church was *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets* (Ephesians 2:20). There have been no apostles in this special sense since the first century. Paul was an apostle in this restricted sense (15:7–8; cp. Galatians 1:1). Churches also appointed ‘*messengers*’ to serve the Lord and to meet needs in other places (eg. 2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25). These men were not apostles however.

Paul mentions Sosthenes in his opening greetings (1). It is apparent that he was known to the Corinthians and some link him with the ruler of the synagogue at Corinth, assuming that he must have become a Christian (Acts 18:17). There is no real evidence to support this view as Sosthenes was a common name at that time.

Only a few, such as Paul, were called to be apostles (1), but all Christians are *called to be saints* (2). The Greek simply reads, ‘called saints’. A *saint* is someone who is *sanctified in Christ Jesus* (2; cp. 6:11). To be *sanctified* or *holy* means to be set apart to God, to glorify and to serve him. The Christians at Corinth were far from perfect, but they were all *called to be saints* and Paul thanked God for them (4). Those who are *called to be saints ... call on the name of Jesus Christ* (2; cp. Acts 7:59; 9:21). Have you called on the Lord Jesus to forgive you and to save you from your sins?

We live in a society that is as debauched and corrupt as the wicked city of Corinth. Let us examine our own lives. Let us repent of all that is unholy and ask God to give us the grace to live as we ought – as saints!

Enriched in everything by him

Paul thanked God *always* for the Corinthian Christians and for God's grace in their lives (4). Peter Naylor points out that 'Paul's gratitude was not so much for the church as for the transforming work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts. The apostle knew that there is no other way in which the Lord saves men, or by which they experience his mercy.' (WELWYN STUDENT COMMENTARY ON 1 CORINTHIANS, page 25).

The Corinthians enjoyed many blessings from God. They *were enriched in everything* by Christ Jesus *in all utterance and knowledge* (5); they owed every blessing of their salvation to Christ. The Greeks set much store on knowledge and oratory (22; 2:1–4) but they were ignorant of the gospel. God had revealed to the Corinthians (and he does to us also), the knowledge of the gospel and of his will through his word. This is a wonderful privilege!

'*The testimony of Christ*' (6) probably refers to the witness of the apostles to the death and resurrection of Christ (cp. 15:3–4). God had enriched the Corinthians with spiritual gifts; Charles Hodge observes, 'They were second to no other church either as to knowledge or spiritual discernment' (AN EXPOSITION OF 1 AND 2 CORINTHIANS, Page 12 – Baker Book House edition).

The Corinthians were *eagerly waiting for the revelation* (second coming) *of our Lord Jesus Christ* (7). The Lord Jesus would keep the Corinthians to the end so that they would be found *blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ* (his second coming – 8; cp. Jude verses 24 to 25). *God is faithful* and he will never fail us. He had called the Corinthians *into the fellowship of his Son* (9). We too have been called into the fellowship of his Son. This fellowship includes personal prayer, bringing to him our worship, thanksgiving and requests. **To know the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and as the Friend who never fails us is wonderful indeed!** Are we really enjoying this privilege?

I discipline my body

The Isthmian Games held at Corinth every three years were ranked second to the Olympics. There was only one prize for each event in those ancient games and athletes subjected themselves to rigorous discipline in order to win a victor's laurel crown. The word *competes* (25) is the Greek word from which our English word 'agony' is derived. Think about the rigorous training of today's athletes in the hope of winning an Olympic medal. They subject their bodies to many hours of exercise while maintaining a healthy diet. The discipline continues day after day, year after year. They put to shame many of us who profess to love the Lord. Discipline involves self-control (*temperate in all things*, 25) and it is not aimless (26).

We do not compete for laurel crowns or earthly honours, but for *an imperishable crown* which will be given to us when we reach heaven (25). Are you running to obtain such a crown (24)? Paul writes, '*I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified*' (27). This verse does not teach that a Christian can lose his salvation, but he can lose his reward (cp. 3:13–15). The Bible makes it quite clear that a true believer is saved for eternity; he cannot be lost.

We are to exercise ourselves to godliness (1 Timothy 4:7). This means that we must set time aside for personal prayer, Bible reading and meditating on God's Word; we must discipline our thought life and feed our minds with good Christian books. We must avoid things which are harmful to our souls and put to death sin in our lives. Make no mistake about it, this is hard work. **Let us reject a lethargic way of life; it does not please our Lord and Saviour. We have a crown to win; let us go for it!**

*Christian! seek not yet repose,
Cast thy dreams of ease away,
Thou art in the midst of foes,
Watch and pray.*

(Charlotte Elliott)

For the gospel's sake

The word *gospel* is found seven times in our reading (14, 16, 18, 23). Preaching the gospel was Paul's life. His love for the Lord Jesus and for men, women, boys and girls motivated and compelled him to preach the gospel. — *For necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel* (16). He had a burning desire to reach sinners with the good news of his Saviour.

Paul willingly gave up his rights and liberties *for the gospel's sake* (23) — He worked to support himself in order to pioneer the cause of Christ, though he was entitled to receive support from the new churches (14,18). Though Paul would never compromise his Christian principles or water down truth, he would go to any length to win sinners to Christ (19–22). He became as a Jew to win Jews because he loved them and earnestly desired their salvation (cp. Romans 9:1–3; 10:1). He made contact with sinners and so must we. The Lord Jesus was criticised by his enemies for being a *'friend of tax collectors and sinners'*. He came to seek and to save those who are lost (Luke 7:34; 19:10). We will not win men, women, boys and girls to Christ if we display harsh attitudes.

These verses are a great challenge and rebuke to us. Paul was 'on fire' for God! He loved his Saviour so much that he gladly and sacrificially served him. What are you doing 'for the gospel's sake'?

Paul's words *'I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some'* (22) are used by many to justify the use of entertainment, clowns and wild music such as rap and rock to reach sinners. They are not taking the gospel to sinners but are lulling them into a false sense of security. Stephen Rees gave two excellent addresses on this text which can be downloaded from the 'God's Glory, Our Joy website. Go to 2012 Conference Sermons – www.ggoj.org.uk

*Go, labour on; spend and be spent,
Thy joy to do the Father's will;
It is the way the Master went;
Should not the servant tread it still?* (Horatius Bonar)

That there be no divisions among you

Paul was alarmed to hear from members of Chloe's household that there were contentions (or strife) in the church at Corinth (11). He rebuked them for their divisions and lack of unity (10–17) and pleaded with them, *'Brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment'* (10). Paul deals with some of these divisions later in his letter.

The Corinthians indulged in elevating some of the Christian leaders as cult figures, while despising other men of God. They may have boasted that they had been baptised by Paul, or by Apollos who later went to Corinth (Acts 18:24 to 19:1). Those who considered themselves most spiritual pointed out that they followed Christ (12). Paul fired questions at them, *'Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?'* (13). The answer in each case is, 'Of course not!' They were so pathetic with all their petty arguments.

Paul was thankful that he had only baptised a few of the Corinthians (14–16) and thus could not be accused of being a cause of division in the church. If we do not make every effort to maintain unity in our own church (10; cp. Ephesians 4:1–3), we deny our Christian calling. Satan knows that a divided church is a weak church which will not be effective in its work of evangelism. He wants to cause division and havoc in every gospel church. Some churches are split over personality clashes and such trivial matters; this is tragic and harmful to the testimony of Christ. **Pray now that the Lord will keep you from being divisive and that you will always be aware of Satan's crafty schemes.**

*How sweet, how heavenly is the sight,
When those who love the Lord
In one another's peace delight,
And so fulfil his word!*

(Joseph Swain)

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing

There are only two classes of people – *those who are perishing* (the Greek word is also translated ‘lost,’ eg. Luke 19:10) and *those who are being saved*. How do we know to which class we belong? The answer is found in verse 18: *The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*. If you consider the message that Christ died for sinners to be foolish, you are not a Christian, you are lost!

Men and women are the same today as they were in the first century AD. The Jews would not believe without *a sign* (or ‘miracle,’ 22; cp. Matthew 12:38; John 2:18). The preaching of the cross was a stumbling-block to them. Our English word ‘scandal’ is derived from the Greek word ‘skandalon’ translated *stumbling-block*. The Jews were outraged and offended to hear that the promised Messiah would die in weakness for sinners. Such a message was scandalous to their ears and they refused to accept it.

The Greeks thought that they could reason their way to God by their own wisdom (22). The Gentiles in the Roman Empire were much influenced by Greek culture and they considered the message of the cross to be foolish. Human wisdom and reason meant everything to them. If something did not seem reasonable (eg. Christ dying for sinners and rising from the grave) they would not accept it. If they could not explain it, they refused to believe it (eg. Acts 17:32; 26:22–24).

When God calls us and the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and opens our eyes, things are different. We discover that Christ who died in weakness is *the power of God and the wisdom of God*. What was once foolishness to us is now wonderful and wise, *and the weakness of God is stronger than men* (24–25). **We have a wonderful Saviour! Let us proclaim the message of the cross to those who are perishing. God does open the hearts of those who are ignorant. He opened our hearts!**

Those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel

Paul had stated that he would willingly deny himself the liberty of eating meat rather than cause a brother to stumble (8:13). He now reminds the Corinthians that though he was entitled to live by the gospel, he had denied himself this right when he had been among them. Some of his critics at Corinth had criticized Paul for this, taking it as an indication that he was inferior to the other apostles. Paul begins by defending himself and his ministry. They should have seen that they themselves were a proof of his apostleship (1–2). He did have the right to be married like the other apostles, like Peter (Cephas) and the brothers of the Lord (eg. James). He had the right to have regular food and drink and to refrain from working for a living, but he had denied himself these liberties (4–6).

Those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel (14). Paul gives three examples from everyday life to illustrate this principle (7):

1. A soldier does not go to war at his own expense.
2. The man who plants a vineyard is entitled to eat of its fruit.
3. The herdsman is entitled to drink milk produced by his flock.

The apostle reminds us of the Old Testament law which commanded that the ox which treads out the grain must not be muzzled to prevent it from eating the grain. God is surely more concerned for his servants than for oxen (8–10)! The priests and Levites who served God in the temple were entitled to a portion of the offerings made on the altar (13). Those who sow spiritual things in the church are entitled to reap of the material things of the members (11). The Lord Jesus has commanded that *those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel* (14; cp. Matthew 10:10). Some Christians do not believe that they should have to support a full-time pastoral ministry. I would have thought that this passage of Scripture alone would be sufficient to convince them that they are wrong. **Many of my readers accept their responsibility to support the full-time ministry of their pastor. Do you?**

Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies

Paul deals here (and in Romans chapter 14) with a problem which was common to Christians in the first century. Much of the meat on sale in the market-place had been used in idol sacrifices. Should Christians eat this meat? Some Christians felt at liberty to eat the meat knowing that there is only one God and that idols are nothing more than lifeless blocks of wood or stone (4–6). Others strongly felt that to eat meat offered to idols was to identify with them and was a sin against God. Their conscience was weaker through lack of knowledge (7).

Paul points out that food does not affect our spiritual standing before God (8). We must not, however, allow our Christian liberty to become a stumbling-block to those who have a more sensitive conscience than we in certain matters. Our thoughtless behaviour could encourage them to violate their own conscience and bring untold harm to their Christian life and testimony. Christ died for the weaker brother and we must remember that when we sin against any Christian, we also sin against Christ (9–12)! Those who have a weak conscience must not be allowed to become tyrants, imposing their scruples upon us, where they have no biblical mandate for their particular views.

We have liberty to behave in any manner which does not violate the commands of God, but there are things which are doubtful. We may, for example, feel at liberty to take alcoholic drink in moderation (there is no dispute that excess or drunkenness is sin). Our liberty could be a stumbling-block to another Christian, especially if he had had a drink problem before his conversion. Far better to abstain than cause another Christian to stumble and to wound his weak conscience (12–13).

We must beware of knowledge leading to pride. *Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies* (1; cp. 4:18). We should be more concerned for the well-being of our fellow-Christians than for our own self-gratification. **Do you have enough love for others in your church that you are prepared to deny yourself for their sake?**

He who glories, let him glory in the LORD

This chapter ends with a quotation from Jeremiah, chapter 9: *He who glories, let him glory in the LORD* (31). The word ‘glory’ means to ‘boast’ (as translated in the English Standard Version). No Christian dare boast that he has been saved through his own wisdom or good works. Why should we ‘glory in the LORD’?

- Because our calling does not depend upon human wisdom, influence or status (26). Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, was a very influential Christian woman in 18th-century England. She said of this verse, ‘How I thank God for the letter ‘m.’ Without that letter I would be excluded from God’s kingdom. The Bible does not say “not any”, but “Not many”.’
- Because God chooses those things to accomplish his purposes which are foolish, weak, base and despised in the eyes of men (27–29). He uses *things which are not*. Charles Hodge comments, ‘Those who are entirely overlooked as though they had no existence ... too insignificant to be noticed at all ... God brings to nothing *‘the things that are’* i.e. those who make their existence known and felt, as opposed to those who are nothing’ (AN EXPOSITION OF 1 AND 2 CORINTHIANS, Page 23 – Baker Book House edition). We must never resort to gimmicks and entertainment, nor rely on ‘great personalities’ to bring us success in our gospel work. To do so is a failure to trust in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. God is pleased to use ordinary folk like us in his work. To him be all the glory!
- Because we owe everything to the Lord. *Of him you are in Christ Jesus*. He is our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, our redemption (30). **Let us beware of pride and never boast in ourselves or in our own gifts and abilities, but rather glory in our wonderful God and Saviour!** *He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.*

*Forbid it Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God.*

(Isaac Watts)

I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ

The apostle now recalls how his preaching among the Corinthians conformed to the principles set out in yesterday's reading (1:26–31). His preaching methods were not patterned on worldly wisdom nor on fine oratory. He did not declare the testimony of God *with excellence of speech or wisdom* (1), but he had been with them *in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling* (3). Perhaps we find it hard to imagine such a great missionary as Paul lacking in self-confidence. He felt his own insufficiency in undertaking his work for the Lord. He knew that in himself he was nothing; his confidence was in God alone (cp. Philippians 3:3–7)! If you feel weak and fearful in your work for God, you are in good company. Take heart!

Though Paul's preaching lacked the polished, persuasive words of human wisdom, it was *in demonstration of the Spirit and of power* (4). He wanted to see the Corinthians place their faith not *in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God* (5). The preaching of the cross is essential! There is no gospel without the preaching of the death and resurrection of Christ to save sinners. Paul wrote, '*For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified*' (2). Unbelievers may scorn this message, but, oh, how sweet it is to those whose eyes the Lord has opened! We were reminded in chapter 1 that the power of God is demonstrated through this glorious message. Dead sinners are raised to life in Christ through this preaching. *The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God* (1:18) There can be no real demonstration of the Spirit and of power, without the preaching of Christ crucified and risen (cp. 15:3–4).

We should pray much that the preaching in our churches will always exalt Christ and be in '*demonstration of the Spirit and of power*'. You may not be called to preach, but you are able to share your wonderful news with those around you. How are you doing?

How he may please the Lord

Paul's phrase, *Now concerning virgins* (25; cp. verse 1) indicates that he was dealing with another question addressed to him by the Corinthian church. The Greek text has the definite article 'the' — '*the virgins*' which indicates that he is referring to the unmarried women in the Corinthian church. The apostles received their teaching directly from the Lord Jesus (cp 11:23; 15:3), but Paul had not had any teaching from Jesus on this matter. He gives his own opinion as a trusted servant of Christ. *The present distress* concerns some particularly difficult circumstances (perhaps persecution?) at the time Paul wrote to the Corinthian church (26). We must always keep eternity in view because *the time is short* (29, 31).

If you are married, you should not seek release from your marriage (a divorce – 27). If you are divorced, you should remain single and not seek a wife. Paul adds that if you remarry, you have not sinned (28). Peter Naylor comments, 'Writing specifically to the Christian whose marriage to an adulterous partner has been terminated, he gives his reluctant permission for a further union' (COMMENTARY ON 1 CORINTHIANS, page 146).

The single person is able to devote more of his (her) time than the married believer, to consider *how he may please the Lord* (32–35). **Those who are single should not spend all their thoughts in fretting about their singleness, but use their 'freedom' to serve the Lord in ways not available to those who are married.**

Verses 36 to 38 refer to the Christian father and the giving of his daughter in marriage, bearing in mind *the present distress* at Corinth. Concerning those who are widowed, Paul lays down four principles:–

- A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives (39).
- Death severs the marriage bond (39; cp. Romans 7:2–3).
- Widows are free to remarry (39; cp. 1 Timothy 5:11,14).
- Christian widows may only be remarried to a believer (*only in the Lord*, 39).

Keeping the commandments of God is what matters

Peter Naylor points out that these verses turn from the subject of marriage to the wider issue of contentment (COMMENTARY ON 1 CORINTHIANS, page 139). Christians should consider remaining as they are not only as singles or marrieds, but also in other circumstances. A circumcised Jew who becomes a Christian should not have surgery to remove the sign of circumcision (18). Peter Naylor also comments that there were instances of such a practice in Jewish history. On the other hand, an uncircumcised man who is called by the Lord, should not seek to be circumcised. These things are unimportant, *but keeping the commandments of God is what matters* (19).

The apostle goes on to write of Christians who are slaves. The Christian slave should accept freedom if the opportunity arises, but contentment, whether slave or free is all important. The Christian who is not a slave should never sell himself into slavery because he has been *'bought at a price.'* He is *'Christ's slave'* (21–22).

The issue of contentment is very relevant to us all. We may find ourselves in difficult circumstances, we may struggle with our lot in life and long for better things, but we can know contentment. The apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians as one who had learned to be content in whatever situation he found himself (Philippians 4:11–12). The apostle wrote those words to the Philippians as a prisoner for the sake of the gospel. In whatever calling we have, we are *with God* and God is with us (24). That makes all the difference!

If you are struggling in your marriage, in singleness, in a difficult work situation, remember that as one who has been *bought at a price, with the blood of Christ, you are precious to God.* Remain with God (24); he is with you to bless you and to use you. Seek to glorify God at all times (6:20).

The wisdom of God

Notice the emphasis on *the wisdom of God* (7) and the Holy Spirit in these verses. Those who are mature in Christ will highly prize spiritual wisdom and recognize its surpassing worth over *the wisdom of this age* which will come to nothing (6). The apostle wrote, *'But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory'* (7). When the New Testament uses the word 'mystery' it does not mean something mysterious, beyond the reach of human understanding, but something which can only be known through the revelation of God by the Holy Spirit (10–13; cp. Colossians 1:26–27). *The natural man* (the unconverted man) *does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him* (14; cp. verse 8). Spiritual wisdom is hidden from the lost because they are blinded by Satan (2 Corinthians 4:3–4).

Notice that this wisdom is not really new. It is *the hidden wisdom of God ordained before the ages for our glory*. This wisdom was ordained by God for our glory before he made the world (7). Just think of that! *The Lord of glory* was crucified *for our glory* (7–8). **I can hardly take that in, it is just so wonderful. And more! – He has prepared glorious things for those who love him (9).** Think of some of the things that God has given to us and prepared for us:– forgiveness and cleansing from sin, reconciliation and peace with God through the blood of the cross, freedom from the power of Satan and sin, inexpressible joy, eternal life and heaven. All of these things freely given to us by God (12). Hallelujah!

Brendan, one of Columba's evangelists during the sixth century AD went to preach in the court of King Brude in Scotland. The king asked Brendan, 'If I accept the gospel and become Christ's man, what shall I find?' – 'Ah, sire,' replied Brendan, 'you will stumble on wonder upon wonder, and every wonder true!'

Babes in Christ

We must always remember that spiritual unity is based on love of truth and obedience to God's Word (John 17:11,17,19), and that truth must never be compromised (cp. Galatians 1:6–10). It is a fact however, that local churches are often divided through pride and self-seeking, when their members should be working together in defence of truth. This is a sign of spiritual immaturity. Paul had earlier written, '*We speak wisdom among those who are mature*' (2:6–7) but he was not able to speak to the Corinthians *as to spiritual people, but as to carnal* (fleshly), *as to babes in Christ* (1–4). The envy, strife and petty divisions found among the Corinthians was typical of worldly behaviour; it was not Christian (3).

Are you envious of other Christians who may possess gifts or material things which you do not have? Such an attitude is unworthy of a child of God. Never entertain envy in your life. It will drag you down, spoil your prayer life and keep you from growing in grace. We have different personalities, abilities and gifts and we are at different stages in the Christian life. These differences should strengthen us, rather than weaken us, but the devil will use them to cause problems. We must not allow him to do so.

You would be amazed to see an adult feeding only on milk and baby food but Paul described the Corinthians as *babes in Christ* who were unable to take the solid food of God's Word (1–2; cp. Hebrews 5:12–14). **Are you able to digest the solid food of God's Word? Do you live by its teaching or do you allow childish behaviour to spoil your life?** Are you able to explain the way of salvation to an unbeliever? Can you explain the great doctrines of the Christian faith and support them with Scripture references? If you cannot truthfully answer 'Yes' to these questions, you are still a *babe in Christ*. You need a good, balanced diet from God's Word. You need to *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (2 Peter 3:18).

The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife

Paul emphasises that when he writes concerning divorce, he is confirming the teaching of the Lord Jesus (1). The Bible is quite clear – divorce between Christian couples should be unthinkable. We speak of 'the marriage bond' and this is reflected in the word '*bondage*' in verse 15. Married couples are bound to each other and they are not permitted to walk away from their marriage (27). It is a sad fact, however, that at the present time, many professing Christians have yielded to the permissive attitudes of the world and have disregarded verses 10 and 11 (cp. Matthew 19:8–9). Having said this, we rejoice in the conversion of those who were divorced (and perhaps remarried) before they turned to Christ. They should not be regarded as second class Christians. Their divorce before they were converted is not the unpardonable sin.

A Christian who marries an unbeliever is disobedient to God's Word (39; cp. 2 Corinthians 6:14) but some were already married at the time of their conversion. '*The rest*' refers to these Christians who are converted after marriage while their spouse remains an unbeliever (12). **The new Christian will certainly face problems in such a situation but this is no excuse for seeking a divorce (12–13).** Divorce is only permissible if the unbelieving partner refuses to live with the Christian spouse (15).

The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife (14). This does not mean that they are saved by proxy, but that they, and the children in a Christian's home have special privileges. They are under a Christian influence and they can see the gospel lived out in the Christian (cp. 1 Peter 3:1–2). Paul's encouragement to the Christian in such circumstances is, '*How do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?*' (16).

But each one has his own gift from God

The Corinthians had written to Paul seeking advice on marriage and divorce and the apostle now answers their questions. What does he mean by *it is good for a man not to touch a woman* (1)? Paul is not forbidding marriage (to do so is a sign of apostasy, 1 Timothy 4:1–3) nor is he suggesting that celibacy is better than marriage. It was better for the Corinthian singles to remain single for a time *because of the present distress* (26 – probably an economic or political crisis at that time, or persecution).

The Corinthian Christians had similar problems to those that we have in the western world in the twenty-first century. They faced many pressures from the sexually immoral society in which they lived. We too are under constant pressure from a very sophisticated marketing industry to conform to the wicked ways of our immoral society. Paul pointed out that sex is a gift from God which is right and proper within marriage (1–5). Husbands and wives must not deprive one another of their marriage rights except for a time given to fasting and prayer. Even then, Paul warns that Satan is an intruder who will seek to take advantage in the most spiritual of Christian marriages (4–5).

Both single and married states are gifts from God: *But each one has his own gift from God* (7). They are also recognized as a calling (17, 20, 24). Paul was a single man but he acknowledged that not everyone could cope with being single and that such Christians should seek to marry (7–9). I do not underestimate the heartache and loneliness that some single Christians suffer. They pray for a partner and wait in hope. What else should they do? They must accept their present state as a gift and calling from God and seek to serve him in it if they would be content (17–24). **Who knows what surprises the Lord has for those who seek first his kingdom and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33)?**

Let each one take heed how he builds

The foolish Corinthians had divided into groups which centred around an admiration for different apostles and church leaders. Paul wanted them to see things from a true perspective. He and his fellow-workers were all servants (*ministers*) of God (5) and it was wrong to argue and divide into factions over their preference for one above the other.

Paul likened his work for God to that of a farmer and then to that of a wise master builder. He had originally taken the gospel to Corinth to plant the seed, and Apollos went later to water what was sown. Christian leaders have different gifts and personalities but their success depends upon God (6–7). They are *God's fellow workers* and the church is *God's field* and *God's building* (9). The harvest only comes after months of watering and nurturing. There is no easy way or instant success in the work of God.

Let each one take heed how he builds (10–11). We are building on a sure foundation, the Lord Jesus Christ but what kind of structure are we erecting? We will build with flimsy materials if we compromise truth or biblical principles to obtain success in the work of God. We will have to give an account on the day of judgment when our work will be tested. Will we joyfully receive our reward from the Lord because our building is of precious metals and stones which will survive the test? Will we be ashamed because our building of wood, hay or straw is consumed in the fire (12–15)? **We must never be careless in our work for God but give him our very best. Have you got your priorities right? How is your work for the Lord? Are you laying up eternal treasure in heaven?**

*O not for thee my weak desires,
My poorer, baser part!
O not for thee my fading fires,
The ashes of my heart!*

(Thomas Hornblower Gill)

Do you not know that you are the temple of God?

Corinth's pagan temples were places of wicked and lewd religious ritual, but the temple of God is totally different; it is holy. The Bible describes the church as *'a holy temple in the Lord ... a habitation of God in the Spirit'* (Ephesians 2:21–22). Paul reminded the Corinthians that as a church, they were the temple of God: *'Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?'* (16). The Holy Spirit dwells in the church and we must seek to maintain godliness and truth as our great priority. This will have a great bearing on all aspects of our church life such as our worship, our preaching, our teaching, and our evangelism.

There is something worse than erecting a flimsy building upon the true foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is to destroy a good and solid building. Paul goes on to give a solemn warning: *'If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy'* (17). The words *defile* and *destroy* are translated from the same Greek word. **If we defile our church by embracing false teaching, by leading unholy lives or by promoting division, God will destroy us.** This grim warning should make us tremble. Church membership involves great responsibilities.

We must beware of pride in our intellectual abilities and wisdom (18). The wisdom of this world esteems the message of the cross to be foolish (1:18,21) but *the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God* (19). Paul urged the Corinthians to reject the wisdom of this world and also to stop glorying in men (21). Hero-worship of Christian leaders is not helpful and can easily encourage division as it did in Corinth (3–4, 21–22; 1:12). He repeats his statement. *'All things are yours'* (21,22). We have a great inheritance in Christ and we belong to an almighty, precious Saviour (22–23). We must glory in the Lord and not in men (1:31). Let us make every endeavour to keep our temple (the church to which we belong) holy and free from division. We are *called to be saints* (1:2).

You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body

In Greek and Roman society there was little concern for sexual purity and Corinth was a vice-ridden city. The same attitudes prevail today resulting in many thousands of broken hearts and broken homes. We must not allow ourselves to be influenced by the standards of the world but rather by the Word of God. When we become Christians, our bodies become *members of Christ*. They belong to him (15)! They are also temples of the Holy Spirit (19). Dare we become joined to a prostitute or indulge in any other sexual sin? – *'Certainly not!'* retorts the apostle (15–16). If our bodies are littered with sin, they are unacceptable as dwelling places for the Holy Spirit. We must *flee sexual immorality* (18). We must not encourage sinful desires by reading pornographic literature or by gazing at filthy internet web-sites or questionable television programmes. We must flee every temptation to sin.

We are not free to do just as we please. The Word of God challenges us, *'You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's'* (20). Our souls are priceless (Mark 8:36) and the Lord Jesus made a priceless sacrifice to save us from our sin! He laid down his own life to redeem us with his own precious blood (1 Peter 1:18–19). He allowed evil men to mock him, humiliate him, torture him and crucify him to save us from condemnation. He has bought us so that we will live to please him. **We owe it to God to glorify him in our bodies by keeping them from sin and by serving him. Surely this is no hardship if we love him!**

*To thee, thou dying Lamb,
I all things owe;
All that I have, and am,
And all I know.
All that I have is now no longer mine
And I am not my own; Lord, I am thine.*

(Charles E. Mudie)

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful

Some of the Corinthians were misunderstanding their liberty in Christ (Paul had warned them, ‘*Do not be deceived*’, 9). Though a Christian is free from the power of sin, he is not free to sin. The words, *All things are lawful for me* (found twice in verse 12) do not mean that sin is lawful; it is not! *Sin is lawlessness* (1 John 3:4). *God gives us richly all things to enjoy* (1 Timothy 6:17) but we must be wise in our use of these lawful things. Sometimes they are not helpful to ourselves or others and we must restrict our liberty, especially if they become a stumbling block to a weaker Christian (cp. 8:9).

All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Our friends, our homes, our hobbies can become snares to us if we allow them to bring us under their power. Adelaide Proctor recognized this truth in her hymn, ‘My God, I thank thee, who has made the earth so bright.’

*For thou, who knowest, Lord, how soon,
Our weak heart clings,
Hast given us joys, tender and true,
Yet all with wings,
So that we see, gleaming on high,
Diviner things.*

The joys to which our weak hearts cling may soon fly away from us so that we get our spiritual priorities right. We must not allow lawful things such as bodily appetites to bring us under their power. If we cannot resist overeating, we are being sinful. Moreover, *the body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord*. Sex is a gift from God but when this gift is abused it brings havoc. Bodily appetites will perish when we die, but our bodies will be raised up when Jesus comes again (13–14). Are you giving way to sinful cravings? What does the Word of God have to say? – ‘*Sin shall not have dominion over you*’ (Romans 6:14). We are able to overcome sin with the help of Christ. God does give us grace when we are tempted. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is self-control (Galatians 5:23); let us exercise it!

Servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God

Paul wanted the Corinthians to regard him and his fellow-workers as *servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God* (1). The apostle does not use the Greek word ‘*diakonos*’ for *servant* (as in 3:5), but the word ‘*hupēretēs*’ which describes any subordinate or helper (eg. *synagogue attendant*, Luke 4:20; *assistant*, Acts 13:5). Paul was not too concerned about his self-image. He was a great man of God, but he considered himself to be just a helper or assistant to the Lord whom he loved. He describes himself elsewhere as *less than the least of all the saints* (Ephesians 3:8).

A steward was the overseer of his master’s household (eg. Genesis 24:2; 39:4; 43:19; 44:4; Luke 16:1). Paul was a steward ‘*of the mysteries of God*.’ He had an awesome responsibility to preach the gospel committed to his trust (1 Timothy 1:11). What is the special quality required in stewards? It is *that one be found faithful* (2). Paul described those who served God with him as ‘*faithful*’ (Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 1:7). Peter also took note of those who were faithful (1 Peter 5:12). A faithful person is trustworthy, loyal and dependable. **You are not an apostle and you may not be a preacher, but the Lord requires you to be faithful in your work for him.** Be faithful in your Sunday School or Bible class, in youth work, in visitation, or in those jobs which may pass unnoticed by others, but which are so essential. We shall all be judged when the Lord Jesus returns and all will be revealed in that day (3–5). Will you hear these words from the Lord Jesus, ‘*Well done, good and faithful servant ...*’ (Matthew 25:21)?

*Give me a faithful heart,
Likeness to thee,
That each departing day
Henceforth may see
Some work of love begun,
Some deed of kindness done,
Some wanderer sought and won,
Something for thee.* (Sylvanus O. Phelps)

That none of you may be puffed up

Paul urged the Corinthians not to think of Apollos and himself *beyond what is written* (6). We can take this to mean that we must not esteem men beyond what is seen in their character. By exalting one leader (eg. Paul) against another (eg. Apollos) they were pandering to the pride of their own hearts. There was no rivalry between these leaders. Paul had urged Apollos to come to Corinth but it had not been convenient for him to visit at that particular time (16:12). The apostle pricked the bubble of their self-esteem when he wrote, ‘*That none of you may be puffed up*’ (6; cp. verses 18 and 19). We must remember that we owe all of our gifts and abilities to God and we must not glory as if we were self-sufficient (7).

Paul contrasted the Corinthian’s pattern of life with his own. They boasted that they were already full and rich, reigning as kings. The apostle ironically commented that he could have wished that this were true (8). However, those who would reign with Christ must also suffer for him (2 Timothy 2:12). Paul was writing while he and his fellow-workers were suffering shame, reproach, poverty and persecution for Christ (9–13). He painted a vivid picture of the difference between themselves and the puffed up Corinthians. He wrote, ‘*We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ!*’ *We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonoured!* (10). The apostles were looked on as the filth and scum of the world (13).

Pride brought division to the Corinthian church and it has ruined many churches since the time of the apostles. *Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD* (Proverbs 16:5). The godly Christian is different. *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself* (Philippians 2:3). **Let us beware of spiritual pride, of being ‘puffed up.’** *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble* (James 4:6).

But you were washed... you were sanctified... you were justified

The Corinthians were foolish to seek help from the unrighteous in settling disputes among themselves (1–2). The same unrighteous people will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul gave examples of ten types of sinner who will be excluded from the kingdom of God (9–10). He reminded the Corinthians that some of them had been guilty of those sins but there had been a transformation in their lives and in their standing before God. *And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified* (11). The Lord had called them out of the darkness of their wicked city and had wonderfully saved them. How amazing the grace of God! No one is beyond the reach of saving grace! There are here three vital elements in conversion to Christ:

- Regeneration – *But you were washed* (cp. Titus 3:5). When we are born again, we are cleansed from the pollution of sin through the blood of Christ.
- Sanctification – *But you were sanctified*. We have been set apart from a sinful way of life to serve God. We have already seen that all Christians are *saints* or ‘sanctified ones’ (1–2; cp 1:2).
- Justification – *But you were justified*. Our sins are all forgiven and the guilt is removed. Some have found it helpful to understand the basic meaning of justification by saying ‘justified’ – ‘just-as-if-I’d never sinned.’ There is no more condemnation for those who are justified and they enjoy peace with God (Romans 5:1; 8:1).

We enjoy these marvellous blessings *in the name* (or ‘on the authority’) *of the Lord Jesus* and because the Holy Spirit has worked within us (11). Whenever we are tempted to sin or to despair, let us remember what Christ has done for us to save us. **Let us be determined to live as saints in this dark and sinful world!**

Do you not know that we shall judge angels?

The divisions and strife were such at Corinth that believers battled with each other in civil courts in disputes about money and property (*things that pertain to this life*, 3–4). Paul used the civil legal system only as a last resort and never to obtain judgment against a professing Christian (eg. Acts 16:37–39; 25:10–11). He rebuked this church which prided itself in its wisdom, for its ignorance. He asked them six times, ‘*Do you not know?*’ (2,3,9,15,16,19).

Paul was amazed that the Corinthians dared to parade their differences before the world. For Christians to do such a thing was a bad testimony. If unbelievers (*the unrighteous*, 1) see us at odds with each other, what do they think of our claim that Christ transforms our lives? Moreover, such behaviour is unworthy of us because one day we will judge the world. Do we have to ask the world to help us settle our petty disputes? If the thought of judging the world overwhelms us, the apostle goes on to remind us of a greater fact in his question, ‘*Do you not know that we shall judge angels?*’ (2–3). How foolish to look to sinful men to deal with problems between ourselves!

Disputes between Christians must be settled in the church (4–6; cp. Matthew 18:15–20). It is a poor reflection on us that most evangelical churches today are just as incompetent as the Corinthians were. Problems between believers are not dealt with in a biblical manner. There are also Christians who storm out of their church because of a grievance. They do not seek to resolve matters or to follow pastoral counsel and other churches receive them without asking questions. **Rather than dishonour God, it is better to suffer wrong (7–8). This involves self-denial, but isn’t that what following the Lord Jesus is about (Luke 9:23)?**

*To live above with saints we love,
That will be grace and glory!
To live below with saints we know,
Oh! That’s a different story!*

For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power

The love of Paul for the wayward Corinthians shines through these verses. He wrote to warn them as his *beloved children* whom he had *begotten through the gospel*. They might have had *ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet ... not many fathers* (14–15). Those who would teach God’s people must not only have the ability to teach, but also have the loving heart of a concerned father (cp. 1 Thessalonians 2:11). The apostle had taken the gospel to Corinth and he was their spiritual father (cp. Acts 18:1–18). He urged them to imitate him (16). It was for this reason that he was sending Timothy to them whom he describes as his ‘*beloved and faithful son in the Lord.*’ Timothy would remind them of his ‘*ways in Christ*’ as he taught *everywhere in every church* (17). Paul’s ‘ways in Christ’ were seen in his zeal for the gospel, his walk with the Lord in humility, gentleness and love (12,14,21). May we also be imitators of such ways!

Paul again charges some of the Corinthians of being ‘*puffed up*’ (18–19). This was their besetting sin. The expression ‘*puffed up*’ is used three times in this chapter and then on another three occasions (5:2; 8:1; 13:4). Paul wanted those who were puffed up to repent of their pride. He was himself planning to visit them if God so willed. He would then know the power of God rather than the words of the proud *for the kingdom of God is not in word but in power* (19–20). **Are you all ‘talk’ or do your fellow church members and non-Christian work colleagues see the power of Christ in your life?**

Paul warned the Corinthians that he would discipline them if necessary when he visited them. They had to decide whether his visit would be painful or not. If they remained defiant, he would not hesitate to use the rod. He was not a domineering tyrant but one who preferred to come to them not with a rod but *in love and a spirit of gentleness* (21).

That his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus

The Corinthian church had many problems but the apostle now reveals a shocking situation even by the standards of the world. One of their number has fallen into immorality, indulging in a sexual relationship with his father's wife (his step-mother, 1). Even the Gentiles would condemn the sin that they were condoning. The problem was not only with the sinning brother but also with the 'puffed up' Corinthians who should have been mourning over this wickedness in their midst (2). They needed to remove the offender from the church (13).

Church discipline is essential for the sake of offenders and the church itself. Paul instructed the Corinthians to take action just as if he were among them (3). They were to gather together *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* and the church meeting was to *deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus* (4–5). Excommunication is a very solemn and awesome sanction in the church but it must be used when a sinning member refuses to repent of his sin. The offender must be put out of the fellowship of the church and treated as a heathen (Matthew 18:15–17).

What does it mean 'to be delivered to Satan'? It means the removal of the protecting hand of God. This terrifying situation must always be with a view to the restoration of the offender (5; cp. 1 Timothy 1:20). The devil wants to destroy the sinning Christian and drag him down to hell, but God in grace designs his restoration. God uses Satan in his purposes and though the offender's flesh may be destroyed by sickness or death, his spirit will be saved. **If a church fails to enforce discipline when it is necessary, it is not a sign of love but of a callous disregard for the spiritual life of the sinning person, for the health of the church, and for the honour of God!**

Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

Paul rebuked the Corinthians asking them, '*Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*' (6). A little leaven (or yeast) will cause a whole lump of dough to rise. It is likened here to sin and is contrasted with *the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth* (8). The Jews were obliged to eat unleavened bread at the Feast of the Passover (Exodus 12:15). The Lord Jesus Christ is our Passover Lamb who was sacrificed to save us from our sin. We must therefore purge out all sin (*the old leaven*) from our lives and from our church (7). Scripture is quite clear – we must not socialize with those professing Christians who are leading a life of wickedness (9,11). This does not mean that we are to cut ourselves off from sinners who have made no Christian profession (10). The Lord Jesus ate with sinners, not to share in their sin, but in order to win them to himself (eg. Luke 19:7–10).

There have been instances when church discipline has been abused. Brothers and sisters have been put out of membership of their evangelical church for the most trivial reasons. They may not have agreed with some particular practice of a church which owes more to man-made tradition than to Scripture. They may have refused to be intimidated by a 'bully' who had obtained authority in the church. The apostle John wrote about such a man (3 John 9–11). Church discipline is a heart-rending and solemn matter, especially when the excommunication of the offender is involved; it must be exercised, but never abused.

We must support church discipline, especially where offenders refuse to repent of their sin (as in the case at Corinth) or where a person is spreading false doctrine. To do otherwise is to condone the sin of those who have been disciplined. **We neglect the teaching of Scripture at our own peril because a little leaven leavens the whole lump.**