

The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians

INTRODUCTION

The City of Corinth

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthian church is the second longest epistle, the longest being that to the church at Rome. As we will see at greater length, the Corinthian church lived in difficult a environment, especially from a moral point of view. Corinth was a city in the province of Achaia, and was a Roman colony. That is, those who were born in it were free citizens of the Roman Empire. It was situated on the Corinthian Isthmus at the junction of sea routes to the East and the West and of land routes to the North and the South, and so had always been an important city of Greece. Because it played a leading role in a revolt against Rome it was decimated by the leader of the Roman Army, L. Mummius Achaicus in 146 BC, and it was not until 100 years later that it was refounded by Julius Caesar who gave it the status of a colony. In 27 BC it was made the seat of administration of the Roman Province of Achaia.

Corinth as an ancient city had always had a bad name, and the new Corinth soon gained a name for its sexual laxity. It was the least Greek of all Greek cities and the least Roman of Roman colonies. In one sense it was a law unto itself, being made up of a polyglot population, composed of Greeks, Latins, Syrians, Asiatics, Egyptians and Jews. It has variously been called 'the moral cesspit of the East', a place of 'culture and courtesans', with pretensions to philosophy and letters, these being called pejoratively 'Corinthians words' by critics who had a poor view of Corinth's intellectuals. Even so, it was considered an important city because of the flow of trade through it, and the close proximity to the Isthmian games which it administered. Its population has been estimated as many thousands, perhaps a quarter of a million inhabitants. One wonders what Paul's thoughts were as he came to the city with the gospel. He tells us he was 'in weakness and in much fear and trembling', but this is a statement we need to examine closely. Some think it was because of his experience just previously at Athens, but this can be disproved.

Paul Comes to Corinth: His Time in Corinth

We have the account of Paul's journey that brought him to Corinth. Paul had picked up Timothy at Lystra, already having Silas with him. Silas was one of the prophets who conveyed to the churches the decision of the Jerusalem Council to churches outside of Palestine. The vision at Troas of a Macedonian at Philippi calling for Paul to come across and help them was heeded and ministry began in that new place. His remarkable ministry was opposed by fanatical Jews so that Paul and Silas were imprisoned, and after their release they went on to Thessalonica where a rich ministry resulted, but again there was strong opposition by some Jews. Going on to Beroea they found the same opposition stirred up against them, though in all places they had established churches. It seems Paul went on to Athens alone, Silas and Timothy remaining temporarily at Beroea. There was little immediate response and fruit at Athens, and Paul went on to Corinth where he met Aquila and Priscilla, and he lived with them, as they were, like himself, tentmakers. He began preaching in the synagogue and it was at this time Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia. It was about this point that Paul, who had 'persuaded both Jews and Greeks', finally 'shook out his garments' at the indifferent and opposing Jews, telling them, 'Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles'. Next door to the synagogue lived Titius Justus and Paul continued to teach in his house. The ruler of the synagogue, a man named Crispus, together

with his household, believed, as indeed did many other Corinthians who also underwent household baptism. Paul had a special vision in which the Lord spoke to him saying, ‘Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you; for I have many people in this city’.

Paul’s entire stay was some eighteen months,¹ in which he was ‘teaching the word of God among them’. During his time in Corinth and not merely at the end of it, the Jews made a concerted attack upon Paul, bringing him before the Roman tribunal, saying, ‘This man is persuading men to worship God contrary to the law’. The proconsul of Achaia was Gallio who thought the affair was not significant enough to demand his attention and said, ‘I refuse to be a judge of these things’. At this point the crowd took the ruler of the synagogue, Sosthenes and beat him in front of the tribunal, but Gallio did nothing except, perhaps, to emphasise his refusal to be troubled by such trivial Jewish matters. Whatever was the case, Paul stayed on for some time and continued his teaching.

Our point in covering all of this is so that we can see that Paul had some eighteen months with the new church and was able to teach it, undoubtedly laying before it ‘the whole counsel of God’, that is, the whole of the apostolic truth both for belief and practice. He both founded the church and pastored it, before leaving it. It is almost certain that the gospel was thus expounded out from the city also, by those who had heard and believed.

Paul After His First Stay in Corinth

Paul’s aim was to return to the church at Antioch in Syria but much was to happen before he reached the sending church, and much after, so that a return to Corinth was some way off. After Paul’s leaving Corinth the great preacher Apollos came to Corinth and taught the church. It has been observed that Apollos was an eloquent man, and that Paul was a plain preacher. We need to be wary when we make such comparisons. Some scholars think that members of the church compared the two men and some preferred Paul whilst others preferred Apollos. In I Corinthians 1:11–12 Paul reports that members of Chloe’s house told him there were groups forming under the names of Paul, Apollos, Cephas (Peter) and Christ. This was a terrible wrong in Paul’s understanding. In I Corinthians 7:1 Paul talks of a letter sent to him, and this seems to have been brought by Stephanus, Fortunatus and Achaicus, who were probably of the household of Chloe (I Cor. 16:17). Paul certainly wrote a letter before this one which we call ‘I Corinthians’. In I Corinthians 5:9 Paul says, ‘I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men’; this would mean Paul had dealt with one or more of the problems that were in the church at Corinth.

Now, however, the problems seemed to be piling up. So strong were they that he had sent Timothy ‘to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church’ (I Cor. 4:17). In this very letter he tells them he will come and settle matters—‘Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you’. Timothy’s visit did not end the problems, hence this second letter of Paul. In II Corinthians 12:14 and 13:2, he speaks of having visited them twice and we do not know when this happened. It is obvious ‘the severe letter’ would have been written after the second visit, for in II Corinthians (the third letter) he is waiting for the outcome of the severe letter. What we know of I Corinthians is that it set out to speak to the problems at Corinth. The problems were of the cliques, lack of true love, of sexual immorality (incest), marriage and celibacy, heresy (that the resurrection was already past), a high view of some for wisdom (*sophia*), law-court cases of Christian against Christian, the criticism against Paul, and perhaps excessive boasting about the spiritual gifts. Certainly these are the issues Paul takes up.

¹ It is thought that by fixing the date of Aquila and Priscilla’s coming to Corinth at the time when the Jews were expelled from Rome by the edict of Claudius in AD 49, and the stated time of Gallio’s coming to Corinth in AD 51, that Paul’s stay was from the autumn of AD 50 to the spring of AD 52.

The Value of the First Epistle to the Corinthians

The obvious value of the letter is that it deals with issues which keep cropping up today in the churches, and no less in new churches in what we call 'the third world'. Western churches also have lost many of the values which are Pauline—to say nothing of Petrine and Johannine. Christian behaviour or practice comes from its doctrine. Doctrine simply means 'teaching', but here we mean the great doctrines of the Cross and the Resurrection. This epistle had as its first two chapters the teaching of the Cross. No other epistle quite tells us how Paul sees it; in Christ crucified as 'the power and wisdom of God' and how that comes, bringing with it the fullness of wisdom in righteousness, sanctification and redemption. We would need to understand some of the aberrations in the thinking of some of the Corinthians, who, although they had heard Paul and responded to him, had gradually drifted from his basic teaching. The other problems we have mentioned above continue to dog the churches of today and Paul's value in pronouncing on them is most helpful. The heresy of saying the resurrection is past brought into being chapter 15, which is a brilliant exposition of the gospel of forgiveness and the meaning and significance of the resurrection. In a world which witnesses the tragedy of denominationalism, not only in Christianity but also in its cultures, the letter comes to show how cliques take away from the freedom of true sociality. Paul's pronouncement, 'All things are yours', is one to be deepened in order to understand true Christian freedom. The best exposition of the spiritual gifts—the 'charismata'—is found in chapters 12 – 14. In one sense the church is composed of gifts: even the ministries are gifts to the church. In these many ways we see the value of the letter for present-day Christian understanding and living.

Whilst II Corinthians has a certain relevance in regard to the first letter, yet its connection and teaching is beyond the scope of this Introduction. The summaries we will give of the different chapters should be helpful. Outlines of Contents are set out in most commentaries, but we will simply use the summaries. Even so, it would be good for those reading the letter to look at such outlines and, so to speak, memorise the 'geography' of the epistle. For this reason we append a short Bibliography of commentaries on the epistle.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Running Commentary on I Corinthians

CHAPTER ONE

In verses 1 to 9 Paul is making his greeting to the beloved Corinthian Church. Much is on his mind concerning the problems which exist there. He shows his love, care and trust in them as Christ's people.

1.1. Paul opens his letter with the salutation which is much the same in all his letters, but the opening greeting should not be taken as merely formal. **called by the will of God** tells the strong story of Christ's call to his servant, as he tells it in Galatians 1:11–16 and many autobiographical passages in the Book of the Acts. Here he not only emphasises the fact that calling is that work which God does in all his elect, but that the call is **to be an apostle**. He has so many things ahead of him to say **to the church of God which is at Corinth**, that he must firmly assert his apostolic authority. Rightly accepted it is irrefutable for all he will say. **Sosthenes** who was with Paul at Ephesus may have once been the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth. The point is that Paul always has fellow-workers with him.

1.2. In addressing the Corinthians Christians Paul calls them **the church of God**, the term mainly used for the church i.e. 9 times, for it consists of those called out by God from the world, and called into service and worship of Him. They are the ones **sanctified in Christ Jesus** meaning they are consecrated into the church, set apart, and hence are **called to be saints**, or 'holy ones' such as we see in Daniel 7, they who are given the Kingdom of God. They are one together with the saints of other localised churches **who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**, such calling in the Old Testament being upon Yahweh and in the New Testament has eschatological reference (cf. Acts 2:14–21). **both their Lord and ours** signifies the Lordship of Christ over and for the church.

1:3. **Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ** is the blessing Paul prays upon the church. Grace covers the kindly and strong action of God in His redemptive love and the actions of love as He keeps His people as their Father. Peace is the equivalent of the Hebrew *shalom*, which is security, assurance and right relationship with God in the midst of opposing forces.

1:4. **I give thanks to God** marks out the Apostle's constant attitude to God in creation and redemption. It is a theme spread through all his writings. In this case it is **because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus**, and grace is both the action and power of God for all things, and here **1:5, that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech** (word: *logos*) **and all knowledge** (*gnosis*; cf Phil. 3:8,10), that knowledge being of 'the mysteries of God', knowledge only believers could have. Paul has a deep love for the church at Corinth and here acknowledges what God has done in them.

1:6. **even as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you** is saying that the witness to Christ was confirmed by the fact that they were **not lacking in any spiritual gift**, for by these gifts the reality of the gospel and active faith were made obvious. **1:7.** In this state they were eagerly **wait(ing) for the revealing** (*apocalypsis: parousia*) **of our Lord Jesus Christ** (cf 3:13; 5:5; II Cor. 1:14), for that was the orientation of the Corinthian church. **1:8.** By his grace Christ **will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ**, a remarkable promise that

this church, all members included personally, with all its foibles will be blameless (guiltless) at the day of Jesus Christ, that day which will be so glorious as Christ's parousia (presence, appearing) will be to his waiting saints.

1:9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Paul has been talking about the effective power of the grace of God, and here says that it is God's faithfulness—not just their efforts—which will bring them blameless to that day (cf. Phil. 1:6; I Thess. 5:23). The faithfulness of God is known in the fact that they (you) were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ their (our) Lord. I John 1:3–4 comes to mind. Fellowship is palpably with Christ in his Sonship and Lordship under the Father, and in this fellowship their hope of being blameless in the day of Christ is secured. Verse 9 ends the salutatory pericope. It is very powerful, encouraging the Corinthians who will need the Apostle's disciplinary teaching.

In verses 10 to 17 Paul is taking up the problem of factions or cliques which threaten to grow and be part of the church's life. He is deeply disturbed, and his words take him immediately to the Cross, which he then expounds against factionalism in 1:18–2:5.

1:10. Paul's appeal is strong. **I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Having spoken of them being called into the fellowship of their Lord he asks **that you all agree and that there be no dissensions** (*schismata*; schisms, i.e. 'tears' or cracks') **among you.** He develops his word against schisms in chapter 3. Here he is showing his disapproval of this wrong state of things. It is the beginning of denominationalism, of opting for one approach as against another. Paul desires that **all of you agree and that you be united** (perfectly joined together) **in the same mind and the same judgement.** Unity is the essential nature of the church, and Paul wishes them to see this before he discusses their divisions.

1:11. For it is reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarrelling among you, my brethren. We do not know who Chloe was but obviously she disliked the matter of divisions and wanted Paul to know about them. The situation was not a mild one, but one which could lead to a scandal among the society at Corinth.

1:12. What I mean is that each one of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or I belong to Christ'. Having called them 'my brethren'—a warm title—he now opens up the deplorable state of the church—four parties or cliques or denominations. Recalling the day of Pentecost and following where all were 'of one heart, and one mind', and that they had all things in common, the state of the church is shocking. Too easily we can understand that they had opted for the leaders they liked for the reasons they had. Paul was the church's founder; Apollos, preaching after him, was eloquent, Cephas (Peter) was perhaps considered more 'Jewish' and some may have seen Christ as the centre, and perhaps his ministry in Palestine had gripped them, or they may simply have been this who held the apostolic truth, especially of his Lordship.

1:13. Is Christ divided. This first question probably refers to the fact there are four sections—**Christ divided?** An impossible situation. **Paul crucified?** The only leader could be Christ. **Or were you baptised in the name of Paul?** Obviously not: they were baptised in the name of Christ. **1:14. I am thankful I baptised none of you except Crispus and Gaius.** We know that Crispus was the converted ruler of the synagogue at Corinth, and Gaius may have been the Titius Justus in whose house Paul taught. In Romans 6:23 he is spoken of being Paul's host. **1:15.** Paul is glad he did not even baptise them lest it make them more his 'party' than ever—**lest anyone should say that you were baptised in my name** **1:16.** Paul remembers that there was at least another household he baptised. **(I did baptise also the house of Stephanas. Beyond that I do not know whether I**

baptised any one else.) Baptism as an important thing in itself was not Paul's idea: he would always have had the new local leaders or one of his apostolic team do that ritual.

1.17. For Christ did not send me to baptise. Important as baptism is, it was never the prime aim of his vocation. **but to preach the gospel.** What had grasped Paul—who had been baptised—was that he was to preach Christ to the nations. ‘The gospel’ was everything. He was to preach it **not with eloquent wisdom.** ‘Eloquent wisdom’ was not just a capacity to put things well to hearers, but it was a clever way of avoiding the central ‘scandal’ of the Cross. One could be persuasive without telling the truth! What Paul dreaded was **lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power,** as it would have been if not told clearly. Paul is stating that it is the Cross which has power (cf. 2:5). The apostolic truth had been brought to the apostles by the power and revelation of the Holy Spirit.

In Verses 1:18–25 Paul is showing the difference between divine and human wisdom. Human wisdom seems reasonable acceptable but it is foolishness when compared with God's wisdom. It is by God's wisdom and His power that human beings are saved, so Man has nothing in which to boast for he cannot effect his own salvation.

1:18. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. There are two states in which a human being can exist, either that of perishing—too shocking to be contemplated—or that of ‘being saved’. The power for salvation is ‘the word of the cross’. The word (*logos*) is really the gospel (cf. Rom. 1:16–17) but especially with the cross at its heart for it is ‘the power of God’. Paul is here comparing it with the human wisdom mentioned in verse 17. Paul does not yet say *how* the word of the cross is God's power but elsewhere e.g. Romans 1:18–3:26; Galatians 2:11–3:24; Ephesians 2: 1–10 and Colossians 2:8–15;

1:19. The quotation of Isaiah 29:14, ‘For it is written, **“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart,”**’ is to show that the so-called wisdom of verse 17 is rejected by God, in fact it is shown to be foolish. God does not just compare the two ‘wisdoms’ but destroys the human wisdom (cf. I Cor. 3:18–20 where Paul says God *catches* the foolish.).²

1:20. Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? God is asking basic and important questions. None is wise enough to effect salvation in the way the word of the cross effects it. No scholar-writer has done this. Those who debate the matter have not succeeded. In this way the wisdom of the world has been shown to be ineffective, and so foolish. Here we can observe that Paul knew the power of the cross in his own life, in his own theology of the cross—the apostolic truth—and the response to its being preached (cf. Rom. 1:16–17; I Cor. 2:5)

1:21. For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. The Corinthians know they have been saved: Paul does not have to prove this. They, themselves, were saved through the *kerugma*—the word preached. The preached word sounded wrong and foolish to Jew and Gentile, but it saved the ones who believed; that is the acid test of its power and validity.

1:22. For Jews demand signs, the Jews had lived by signs from their time of slavery in Egypt, and they wanted such signs from Christ to prove he was Messiah (Matt. 16:1–4; Mark 8:11; John 6:30; cf. John 2:22–23). Rightly speaking, signs were a proof that God was active in His people, but Christ had given signs which were left unread, unbelieved (cf. John 20:30–31). **and Greeks seek wisdom** for the Greeks prized their wisdom. In verse 23 Paul equates ‘Greek’ and ‘Gentile’. We can

² In Isaiah 29:14 Israel was using its wisdom in politicking for its own safety. It should have come to God for His wisdom.

say they had a wisdom which was not based on the wisdom Israel knew. Basically it was idolatry (cf. Paul at Athens; Acts 17:16–34).

1:23. but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews because human sacrifice was forbidden and unacceptable; because a human hanging on a tree was a cursed person (Deut. 21:23) and no Messiah could suffer in that way according to their interpretations of him. They had, of course, excluded ‘the Suffering Servant’ of Isaiah chapters 40–66. **and folly to Gentiles**, because a so-called ‘god’ wrought by God (Zeus) bringing forth a child (Jesus) could not and should be killed and by such a shocking method as crucifixion and thus be the Saviour of the world. This was unthinkable stupidity. How could such a crucified one be the Saviour of the world.

1:24 but to those who are called, Paul; is stating that **both Jews and Greeks** who have heard the word of the Cross and accepted it have seen that **Christ (is) the power of God and the wisdom of God**. Here Paul is saying that Christ crucified is God’s way of saving those who were perishing. The whole principle (*logos*) of the Cross—though a ‘scandal’ to the Jew and ‘folly’ to the Gentile—is in fact *the* power of God and *the* wisdom of God. This is a startling claim.

1:25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men, and the weakness of God is stronger than the power of men. This means there has to be a reversal of thinking for the Jew and Gentile. The fact still stands in history—as it did in Paul’s day—that Jewish and Gentile ‘wisdom’ and ‘power’ have not saved any of them from perishing.

Paul now reminds the Corinthian believers that need to remember who and what they were when the word of the cross came to them, and what it did to them.

1:26 For consider your call, brethren; Paul is asking them to cast their minds back to their *call*. When God calls His elect they come: more than this we cannot explain (see Rom.11:29; Ephes. 1:18). This call had happened definitively. **not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth**. *Wisdom* and *power* are what Paul has been speaking about and neither as Jew nor Gentiles had the Corinthian Christians ever been in the places and actions of human wisdom and human power, that is they had never been in high places. It is said that, in fact, most of them had been in the lower or slave classes. Paul, as we know, is thinking of the divisions which had come to be amongst them, since doubtless, being redeemed, it appeared as though they were now thinking their own wisdom and power were at stake in the parties to which they belonged. They had ‘upped’ themselves. They had forgotten how abject they had been before they had come to the cross, to Christ as the wisdom and power of God.

1:27. but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, 1:28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, And Paul is saying that this is how they—the Corinthians—once were. Thus to be foolish, weak, low and despised and as though non-existent in the eyes of the so-called wise, strong, high, and evidently ‘something’ is to show that all these latter human elements have been surpassed, out-paced and out-moded by those whom the gospel has transformed, and none of this could be put down to human effort or wisdom.

1:29. so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. Paul is not only showing how impotent are the Jew and Gentile, but also the Christian who—having been nothing—may now think something of himself, as though he had somehow effected changes in himself so that he could now think of himself as ‘something’.

1:30. He—God—is the source of your life which is a corporate life **in Christ Jesus**, for the life of God the Father is always in Christ with whom we have union and so we derive all from the Son

whom God made our wisdom, which is not the wisdom of the world of the Greek, but is known in what God has made to be **our corporate and personal righteousness**—Christ’s righteousness in which we partake and which is also our justification (cf. Phil. 1:11; 3:9)—**and sanctification**—belonging to God’s holy people, and living out Christ’s own holiness—**and redemption**—‘the being saved’ of which Paul has been speaking, salvation being in and by Christ. Christ has been made our wisdom, then, in righteousness, in sanctification and in redemption. These are ‘the inexhaustible riches of Christ’ about which Paul; speaks in Ephesians 3:8 and Colossians 2:3.

1:31 therefore, as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord." Gone is the basis of boasting not only of Jew and Gentile, but also of Christians. This quotation from Jeremiah 9:24 should be read with its preceding verse also. It is all about knowing God so that our whole boasting is *in* him and *of* him for none can boast in and of himself. It is God who works—not human wisdom and strength, for they can accomplish nothing. Paul always boasts in the cross and naught else. See Galatians 6:14. Is Paul still referring to their hiving off into parties, each thinking he is wise and powerful? Were they thinking that their teachers carried the wisdom and power, and that it was not of Christ? Whatever their thinking it was terribly wrong when it could drift into sectarianism.

CHAPTER TWO

In the pericope of 2:1–5 Paul, having risen to the heights of the previous two verses now speaks of his reliance on the Spirit of God to bring through to his hearers the ‘word of the cross’. He knows his inability to do so with his natural forces. He also shows his dread of ever relying on these.

2.1. When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. Paul is back on the ‘wisdom’ line. in 1:17 he used much the same language. ‘Lofty words’ (*hyperochen logou*) means ‘overpowering oratory’ and ‘wisdom’ (*sophia*) is the wisdom he berated in 1:20ff. His ministry was proclamation not human argument of persuasion. What he preached was ‘the testimony of God’ (cf. 1:7). Some translations have ‘the mystery of God’ (cf. 2:6) and others ‘the testimony of God’ (testimony=*marturion* and mystery=*mysterion*), and I am inclined to the latter, because of other associations of the word *mysterion*.³ See Romans 16:25; I Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 3:4; Colossians 2:2; I Timothy 3:16; Revelation 10:7.⁴ It means a secret to the uninitiated and an opened secret to the initiated. ‘The mystery of God’ in this case is Christ and with him, the gospel. To open this ‘secret’ to the Corinthians must have been a mammoth task. In chapter 1 we saw that Christ crucified is both the power and wisdom of God, something which no one could argue in human terms. Paul knew the responsibility of this and dared not rely on other than the Spirit.

2.2. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Paul always did this (cf. Gal. 3:1). Some think he had not done this at Athens and regretted it but a case can be made out that he did proclaim it in that city.⁵

2.3. And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling. This has been thought by some to be due to the various experiences of he had previously had of persecution when he preached the gospel. Surely he is saying that he was a weak vessel (cf. II Cor. 4:7–14) and trembled

³ The manuscript evidence is strongly for the word *mysterion*.

⁴ For an expansion of this theme see my *The Glory of the Mystery and the Mystery of the Glory* (NCPI, Blachwood SA, 1998).

⁵ He could scarcely have preached the resurrection (Acts 17:18) without having preached the cross. What appears to be missing in the sermon on the Areopagus would have been what he had already preached in the market place.

lest he in any way use human wisdom to proclaim a gospel which had to come to listeners as revelation.

2.4. and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. II Corinthians 4:7–14 explain that it is to preach the gospel, because of the ‘scandal’ and ‘foolishness’ of the cross. It is ‘death in us’ and ‘life in you’. Whilst Paul trembled with the responsibility of proclaiming ‘the mystery of God’—which was ‘Christ’ and was ‘the gospel’—the Spirit was enabled to speak through the humble apostle. The ‘power’ was in ‘the word of the Cross’ (1:18).

2.5. that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. In 1:19–25 the apostle has shown how impotent is human wisdom and how incompetent to convey the truth of the cross. He is also saying that when the gospel is preached purely and in simplicity its own power can make its effects, changing men and women.

By this time the readers might think the gospel a frail and unintelligent message. To the contrary. A power greater than human wisdom is working, namely the Holy Spirit. Jesus had said to his disciples that he—the Spirit—would (i) bring all things into remembrance which Christ had spoken to them, (ii) teach them all things, (iii) lead them into all the truth, (iv) glorify Christ, (v) tell them ‘things to come’. God, the mystery of the world can only be revealed by the word of the gospel by the power of the Spirit.

2:6 Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. The ‘yet’ is adversative, that is, it begins a contrast. The contrast is (i) of maturity and immaturity and (ii) of primary teaching and further wisdom. Chapter 3 gives us a clue as to whether the Corinthians were mature or not. They were not. In the early stages they had shown a propensity for spiritual growth and understanding but had not lived up to it. Here we should be careful not to understand ‘the mature’ as those who had intellectual depth and ability. Understanding is a matter of hearing and hearing a matter of willingness to believe and obey what one hears.⁶ If one is always hearing one will be mature to the point one has been taught. We have seen in 1:20f. ‘the wisdom of this age’. Romans 1:18–25 expounds it as futility and darkness, not at all reasonable intelligence. **the rulers of this age** are the principalities and powers Paul so often mentions. They are angelic authorities originally designated to do certain tasks but rebelled and now seek to use that power against God, instead of in His plan. Their defeat is sure (15:24; cf. Col. 2:14–15) and so their ‘wisdom’ is not to be heard or followed.⁷

2.7. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. We have seen that only the mature can hear properly. What they here hear is the news of their coming glorification—a most wonderful and powerful truth, needing the Spirit’s revelation (see verse 10). God’s mystery is generally linked with what is coming (cf. Rev. 10:7). In this case it called **a secret and hidden wisdom of God**, which it is (Eph. 3:2–11). God’s hidden decree which cannot be defeated or reversed assures believers of glorification. Romans 8:17–30 (cf. Rev. 21:10, 11, 22, 23) speaks of such glorification, and II Corinthians (cf. II Cor. 4:16–18) shows that glorification is process now. We note that Man was created in glory (cf. Gen. 1:26–27; I Cor. 11:7) but lost the glory (cf. Rom. 3:23).

⁶ For Christ’s own teaching regarding these elements see Luke 8:4–21 where Jesus expounds the points we have set down above. See also Revelation chapter 2 where the refrain is repeated seven times, ‘He who has an ear to hear let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.’

⁷ For an opening up of this subject see my *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 19). Also see *Princip[alities and Powers]* by John Warwick Montgomery, (Bethany Fellowship, Minneapolis, 1973).

2.8. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. That is the rulers of this age did not understand the wisdom of God and especially in planning the glorification of Man. They did not see him as **the Lord of glory**—a title derived from the Old Testament (cf. Psa. 24:7–10; Psalm 29:3; Acts 7:2). The cross was an enormous mistake in their calculations! Amongst them would be ‘the prince of this world’ and those other authorities who wanted the place of glory (authority) in the creation.

**2.9. But, as it is written,
"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him,"**

This is undoubtedly meant as a quotation, and it partly resembles Isaiah 64:4 in the LXX, to which Paul has added the ideas that meet us in Isaiah 65:17 of a glorious future or a future of glory. Its sense is plain, ‘Nothing ever seen or heard or imagined can equal or be likened to what God has in store for His faithful people’. The **But** in the beginning of the verse is another adversative meaning ‘As against the foolishness of the world rulers, the human believer can know the mysteries of God; can know God!

2.10. God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. Since such knowledge of the future glory is not accessible to Man through his research or normal use of his mind, it must be the Spirit who would reveal it. In this case **God has revealed to us through the Spirit.** In other words every [mature] believer has eschatological understanding imprinted upon him by the Spirit. We are reminded here of I John 2:22–27 where the ‘anointing’ of the Holy Spirit conveys all truth to the hearers (cf. John 16:13) There is nothing about God—not even His depths!—of which the Spirit has not given us intimations. Job 11:7 has ‘Can you find out the deep things of God?’, the thought being ‘No: you cannot.’ Jeremiah 9:23–24 speaks of Man’s greatest experience is knowing God.

2.11. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Paul is saying that there is ‘the spirit of a person’ and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. Only ‘the spirit of person’ knows the person, thus ‘the Spirit of God’ knows God. It has been said ‘only God knows God, and only God can tell God’.

2.12. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. The spirit of the world would be that spirit which would give us knowledge of the world, but this has not come to us. Instead God has given us His gift of the Holy Spirit (3:16; 6:19; 12:13). This Spirit is from God and so he brings to us God, the truths of God, the wisdom of God. When Paul says, **that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God**, other versions have ‘the things that are freely given to us by God’ (cf. Rom. 8:32, ‘will he not give us all things with him’) so that Paul is not just pointing to the *charismata*—‘the gifts of the Spirit’ which operate through the body of Christ, but everything the Spirit reveals out of ‘the depths of God’. The apostle is assuring us that when the Spirit brings revelation of God then we understand Him and therefore the ways of life that we are called to live.

2.13. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. The ‘us’ here seems to refer to Paul or the apostolic leaders such as the church members are exalting as leaders. He is saying that the truth he imparts is what the Spirit has brought to him, and only by the Spirit can he then impart these truths, wisdom, revelations, mysteries, divine elements of knowledge—and so on. That which

comes to them will be received properly by those who, like Paul, possess the Spirit. We must not understand anything mysterious, esoteric, gnostic or mystical in the words and ideas he uses. They are plain enough but then spiritually apprehended. He is saying, 'Spiritual things to spiritual people and comprehended by them, comprehended mutually.'

2.14. The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. By **unspiritual man** Paul means one who is 'soulish' (*psychikos*), one who has no spiritual mind or capacity. We must not work out some kind of biblical psychology here. The difference between the *soulish* and *spiritual* persons is the first does not possess the Holy Spirit and the second does. That is why **the gifts of the Spirit of God** are folly to the one who does not possess the Spirit. He still has the mind described in Romans 1:19–21. Soulish is simple 'self concerned', 'working from one's own ego'. There is no spiritual discernment.

2.15. The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. It is not that the spiritual man is the Oracle in himself, but because the Spirit dwells in him and gives him understanding that he is not concerned when the unspiritual person sees him a certain light, a light that is not truly spiritual.

2.16. "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. The first sentence is a quote from Isaiah 40:13 in the LXX. Paul also quotes it significantly in Romans 11:34. 'the mind (*nous*) of the Lord translates the Hebrew word *ruach* or 'spirit'. Paul; is saying that we have the mind of Christ, even though the cross is a scandal to the Jew and folly to the Greek and other Gentiles. He is saying that his—and our—spiritual discernment is correct, authentic. No matter what may be said of the scandal or folly of the gospel, it is the truth of God, and the very mind of God Himself.

CHAPTER THREE

In Chapter two Paul has spoken about spiritual discernment, meaning that when God's people are under the leading of the Spirit they will understand all things necessary to true Christian living. In Verses 1–4 he speaks of spiritual babyhood and then of a refusal to grow beyond it. This he calls 'carnal'. It is linked with their party spirit. In verses 5–9 he shows the functional place of the special teachers in the work of God, and points out the members as being a cultivation and a building.

3.1. But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. The matter is clear: at the beginning Paul could not address the Corinthian converts as mature (2:6), but as babes (*nepoi*). It was natural for them, as babes to drink milk. When now they ought to be growing. **men of the flesh** (*sarkinoi*)⁸ does not mean they were deliberately fleshly

3.2. I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready, Milk was right for them as *sarkinoi* but they should have grown, eating solid food (cf. Hebrews 5:11–14 for much the same idea). They show no readiness to move on into maturity.

3.3. for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men? Jealousy and strife are two of 'the works of the

⁸ *sarkinoi* in verse 1 is not the same as *sarkikoi* in verse 3. The first is Man in his natural state of helplessness and needing dependence upon God; the second is Man in his state of being deliberately fleshly, operating in the sphere of the flesh and bringing forth works of the flesh.

flesh' (cf. Gal. 5:19–21). Flesh here is *sarkikoi*—that is, deliberately fleshly, deliberately willing not to be 'spiritual' (*pneumatikoi*).

3.4. For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apol'los," are you not merely men? Party spirit is foreign to true Christianity unity and love. The Greeks had many schools of thought and magnified the one to which they belonged.

3.5. What then is Apol'los? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. 3.6. I planted, Apol'los watered, but God gave the growth. 3.7. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 3:8 He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor. The sense of this passage is clear: firstly, all these teachers are servants of God, secondly, each has a different function but all are equal, thirdly, God is the one Who causes the growth of the crop, fourthly, all these add up to the accomplishing of God's purpose, and for such they shall receive their wages according to what they have done.

3.9. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. Paul says that all the leaders they nominate are workers under God, and they, the members who are trying to band together in different parties constitute both the field and the building which the fellow-workers with God are trying to cultivate and build. How pointless, then are party-groupings! How different is that which God is about to the mind of the flesh by which these stunted Christians are working.

In verses 10–15 Paul speaks of the house which is being built. He does not say just what the house is but later, in verse 16 we discover it is the temple. Paul does not forbid any person to build upon the sure foundation, Jesus Christ himself. It was what those building put into the house which will determine the outcome of either losses or rewards.

3.10. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. In verse 5 Paul has spoken of his having sown the seed in the cultivated area, which Apollos then watered. Now he is speaking of laying a foundation for the building. Not by his own ability but by the grace of God Paul lays the foundation as would a skilled master builder.

3.11. For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. The foundation is most important. Paul's 'materials' for such a foundation are Jesus Christ himself! If the foundation is not Christ then there is no true building. In Romans 15:20 Paul says he will not build on another's foundation. He has the Apostolic truth and thus must be foundational. For Christ being the stone once rejected but now affirmed by God see Isaiah 28:16; Romans 9:33; I Peter 2:6.

3.12. Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw -- that is there are two types of materials, the one valuable and enduring, the other immediately consumable by fire. We cannot state what these materials are—materials enduring and unenduring, but we must look to what we build for it must be commensurate with the foundation.

3.13. each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 'the Day' must be 'the Day of the Lord' (I Thess. 5:4; Heb. 10:25). Malachi 4:1–3 speaks in similar terms. Fire burns up the dross, refines the metals to purity. See Matthew 3:11 and Mark 9:49 for purification, and Matthew 3:12; II Thess. 1:7, 8; Heb. 12:29) for its consuming work.

3:14 If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 'Survives' is linked with the worth of a work. If it is not done out of love then it will not survive (cf. I Cor. 13:1–5). The reward here is the equivalent of wages. The idea of rewards is strong in the New Testament, as is also the idea of 'losses'. For example see II John 8; Revelation 14:13.

3.15. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. 'saved as by fire' has become a proverbial saying. We need not be too literal about it. Fire will burn up the dross of a believer, but will not consume him. He is on the foundation which is Christ. He simply has added nothing to the house.

In verses 16 and 17 Paul now says the building is the temple, the sanctuary of God and how they must be sensitive to its holiness.

3.16. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? Paul is speaking of the temple being composed of the corporate people of God. In 6:19 he will speak of the body of a person being the temple of the Holy Spirit. The idea is found in Ephesians 2:19–22; I Peter 2: 4–10. What believers build in to this holy house must be fitting to its holiness and use as a sanctuary.

3.17. If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are. The idea of 'destroy' is to damage or defile. See Leviticus 15:31. This speaks of the whole matter of holiness. In Israel the temple was sacrosanct and its priests and Levites were called to be the same. Exodus 19:5–6 speaks of the holy people. Likewise I Peter 2:9–10. The judgement of God on a 'destroyer' or 'defiler' is a heavy one.

We come now to Paul's climax in addressing the 'party-people', the carnal ones, the undiscerning folk who limit themselves to one teacher and fail to perceive that 'all things are yours [theirs]'. They think they have wisdom, but how they have failed.⁹ They must not took to boasting in men but in God.

3.18. Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. Is Paul referring back to his argument of 1:18–31? It would seem so, and that he is referring to the desire of some Corinthian believers to be thought well of in the world. This seems to be that find themselves 'wise' by virtue of their particular teacher. They now need to go back to being 'fools' i.e. those who believe the 'foolishness' of the cross and accept its 'scandal'.

3.19. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," 3.20. and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." God does not let the so-called wise get away with anything. Quoting Job 5:12–13 and Psalm 94:11 (LXX) Paul says God catches them and shows their thinking to be empty. Let not the Corinthians be in this state of mind.

3:21 So let no one boast of men. For all things are yours, Paul makes the stunning statement that 'all things are yours'. He means that from men we cannot obtain anything but from God, everything. **3.22. whether Paul or Apol'los or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; 3.23. and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.** In these verses the wonderful truth is drawn of the things which belong to God's believers, those are not ashamed of Christ and his cross, who do not feel embarrassed by the scandal or foolishness of the

⁹ See my *All Things Are Yours*, NCPI, 1996, especially pages 194–211.

cross. The immensity of the believer's possession. To say the whole truth is with one teacher, and to confine oneself to that teacher is to miss out on the totality of the truth which all teachers, together, teach. The world—even the world opposing Christ—belongs to the Christian. He is over it; it is not over him. He has total life and he is over death: it cannot harm him. The present and future are his also, his in which to live and triumph. The believer is Christ's possession and Christ is the Father's possession so the believer has 'his life hid with Christ in God'. How futile are the part people, and how quickly they must come back into the wisdom of God in righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

CHAPTER FOUR

In the section of verses 1–5 Paul is stating the exact position and ministry of what we might call 'the apostolic band', that is Apollos, Cephas, those accredited as the teachers of 'the Christ party', and Paul himself. The Corinthians must get it clearly as to what they are. The matter of 'parties' must be settled.

4.1. This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Paul is referring specifically to the teachers whom the Corinthians have, in their minds, made to be their leaders. Paul is now asking the party-people to stand off and take a good look at what these apostolic teachers really are. Of course all people (*anthropos*) should see them as 'servants of Christ'. In 3:23 Paul as already said all believers are Christ's. Here 'servant' is not the term *diakonos* (servant) or *doulos* (slave) but *hyperatas*, an attendant, a person who is paid and yet is free. They are the free servants of Christ, but also are stewards (*oikonomos*) that is 'house stewards'. Here they have the high ministry of being 'stewards of the mysteries (secrets) of God. For 'mysteries' see Romans 16:25; I Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 3:4; Colossians 2:2; I Timothy 3:16; Revelation 10:7 and the comment on 2:1.

4.2. Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. It is a high calling and such stewards must be trustworthy. No hint of ambition or of using the mysteries should be found (cf. II Cor. 2:17; 4:2).

4.3. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. It seems that some Corinthians had judged him but he is not phased by this. He knows where he stands in Christ. 'I do not even judge myself' may sound like a case of hubris—overweening pride in oneself—but Paul has always sought to 'be void of offence before God and man' (Acts 23:1; 24:16). Even more, he knows his calling and his constant attention to that.

4.4. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. 'Aware' (*synoida*) is the word from which conscience (*syneidesis*) is derived. 'acquitted' is the word for 'justified'. Paul know he would be aware of wrong if it were there, but does not rest on self-awareness, for the Lord is the only impartial Judge, and that Lord is even now judging him for conviction or acquittal.

4.5. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God. There is the warning against pronouncing judgement. That judgement will certainly happen at the day of the Lord, the coming 'parousia' of Christ. No one knows what is hidden in the unseen part of human beings, but all purposes of the heart which even a person may not know, will be ultimately disclosed (cf. Pss. 17:3;

26:2; 139:23; Jer. 17:10).. Then the pronouncement of God will make all things clear (cf. II Cor. 1:14; 5:9f.; Phil. 2:16; I Thess. 2:19f.).

In 2:5–21 Paul now turns to the Christians at Corinth in regard to their assessments and judgements about various teachers. The way to go is not to work out by their own assessments but by what is written in God's word. Paul then exposes their false assessment of their selves as mature and complete.

4.6. I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brethren, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. Paul has taken the illustrations of himself and Apollos. They are teachers who are examples of what they are about, and they are about what is written, and not just some abstract teaching. If they keep to Scripture then they are to be heard, but if not then they—and the Corinthians—depart from Scripture for their own purposes. Paul knows that Apollos and he abide by the Scripture. Let the Corinthians also do this. Talking or teaching things beyond Scripture will puff them up into relying upon a teacher who they think transcends another. **puffed up** means a state of pride that is damaging.

4.7. For who sees anything different in you? What is so different about you (singular 'thee')? What have you that you did not receive? Everything you have has been given to you. It may be that Paul is thinking of the *charismata* by which some Christians assessed their self worth over others, but probably these think they have knowledge or understanding beyond others. You did not *make* something more: it was given—all things are of grace. **If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?** This is self apparent.

4.8. Already you are filled! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! This is full irony. They Corinthians are so sure of themselves. Humility is not in sight. They are so mature as to need nothing. Without apostolic aid they have accomplished kingship. This is triumphalism at its strongest. A Stoic catch-cry was, 'I alone am rich: I alone reign as king'. **And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!** 'If your reigning were authentic then we would gladly reign with you,' implies that by no means do they reign.

4.9. For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. The apostles are the last one to be so full and acknowledged as great—as the Corinthians exhibit themselves—for they are considered as condemned to death, fit only for the ignominy of the amphitheatre, a spectacle to be viewed by all in their despised state. What a contrast to the party-people following their favourite teacher!

4.10. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. 4:11 To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless, 4:12 and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; 4:13 when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things.

Paul has gathered all apostolic leaders and teaches and shown that by nature of the case—the scandal and foolishness of the cross, of Christ crucified—that they cut no great figure in society. In no sense is he exaggerating. II Corinthians 4:7–8 6:3–13 and 11:22–29 show how he suffered, and without complaint. The strong irony continues, but the contrasts are clear enough, needing no commentary. He shows there is no anger about being so positioned as 'the offscouring of all things'. In the place of being persecuted they seek conciliation; they endure what comes to them as is

consonant with love. The contrasts must bite into the supercilious triumphalists of the Corinthian church. This is the strongest argument he could presenter to them.

4.14. I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. It is clear that Paul has irony and not sarcasm. No matter what foolishness they have come into they are his beloved children. As their spiritual father he has a right and a duty to admonish them for triumphalism is destructive.

4.15. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Undoubtedly other good teachers could be guides, but yet not have the intimate father-child relationship which comes to the ones who bring hearers to Christ through the gospel.

4.16. I urge you, then, be imitators of me. We saw above that the apostolic leaders such as Paul and Apollos are examples of teachers who speak from within the Scriptures, not going off on to speculation or things not written. In 11:1 (cf. I Thess. 1:6; II Thess. 3:7ff.; Phil. 3:17; 4:9) Paul urges his readers to imitate him as he imitates Christ. It is right for a child to imitate the parent. We could think that many of the Corinthians had long ago abandoned Paul as their example or icon.

4.17. Therefore I sent to you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. Timothy has Paul as his paradigm, being a spiritual son of that apostolic father. We need not speculate as to why such spiritual sons—as at Corinth—would quickly lose the paradigm of their father. So Paul reminds them via Timothy. They would see the living example of a son. **my ways in Christ**, reminds us of Ephesians 4:21 ‘the truth as in Christ Jesus’. That they are proper is shown by the fact that he ‘teaches them everywhere in every church.’ When we think of the strong pagan influences at Corinth we can understand the need for Timothy’s being sent to the church there. Paul’s ‘ways in Christ’ would be the same as the ways of all the apostles. Teaching relates to practice and Paul set forth both, by speaking and practice.

4.18. Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. The *hubris* of triumphalism destroys all humility and makes obedience to authority difficult. If they felt other teachers surpassed Paul, then they would feel no obligation to him. They have become ‘arrogant’, a state which is opposite to humility. Paul, above others, had founded the church and was their apostle, with all that that word signifies.

4:19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. The Kingdom of God was first evidenced in power by Christ, not only in his signs and wonders but his teaching. These ‘talkers’ at Corinth are windy. **4:20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.** Their deeds do not match the words. Calvin said, ‘for how small an affair it is for anyone to have the skill to prate eloquently, while he has nothing but empty tinkling’. Power is self evident, and to meet Paul would prove this..

4.21. What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness? Paul was not out to catch them. He trusted his words would bring many to their senses. The choice is ever ‘the rod’ or ‘love in a spirit of gentleness. This needs no exposition.

CHAPTER FIVE

There is a regrettable lack of discipline in the church at Corinth. From 5:1–6:20 Paul speaks against the immorality that can be found in the church, either in action such as in 5:1–8, having table fellowship with immoral people as in 9–13, going to the law courts against brothers as in 6:1–7, and the loose attitude towards sexual immorality as in 6:9–20. The case of incest is before us in the first eight verses.

5.1. It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. Not even pagans would allow what amounted to them in this case to be a case of incest. It may have been in the mind of some Corinthian Christians that, as in 6:12, ‘All things are lawful for me.’ Some may have thought that old, onerous laws did not now have to be obeyed, that there was now moral freedom—antinomianism, in short. It is difficult to think how otherwise they could have allowed this case. Some commentators think that ‘living with’ meant ‘married to’, since a Rabbinic law appeared to permit this with a proselyte, one who had become a Jew. Whatever the case it was a public scandal, and Paul is disturbed at their pride or arrogance in the offence

5.2. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. They ought to be grieving at the sin and acting to be rid of the incestuous couple. Instead they ‘arrogant’, i.e. ‘inflated’, a sin of spiritual pride which would be bringing moral corruption into the church. ‘Removed’ is the word Paul uses and it fits with verse 7, ‘Cleanse out the old leaven.’

5.3. For though absent in body I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment 5.4. in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5.5. you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Paul begins what at first sight we would deem to be excommunication, but it seems to be that and more. Paul has already judged the case and **in the name of the Lord Jesus** has given his verdict as an apostle. It is for them as a church to carry out that judgement. Paul will be with them in spirit and the power (*dunamis*) of the Lord Jesus will effect the delivering of the man to Satan. It may have been that the woman was not a believer. Whatever the case, delivering the man to Satan was that his flesh might suffer, in order that the person, himself, might be saved in the day of the Lord. To be cast out of the Christian community would, anyway, bring him into the realm of Satan’s world. Comparison with the case of Job must keep in mind that Job was not delivered to Satan for punishment. Closer would be the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). II Corinthians 2:5ff. speaks of the rehabilitation of a flagrant sinner, but we cannot be sure it was this person. I Timothy 1:19–20 tells us two men whom Paul had delivered to Satan ‘that they may learn not to blaspheme’. Someone has called Satan ‘God’s shepherd dog’ for under the Shepherd’s control he can be useful!

5.6. Your boasting is not good. They had boasted—been arrogant in regard to the incestuous case. **in the name of the Lord Jesus.** Such an attitude could infect the whole church with immorality and that would be a grievous tragedy. **5.7. Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened.** For the new year’s crop all leaven was cleaned out of the house and bread without leaven or yeast was made to celebrate the Passover. **For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed.** Between the killing of the lamb and the making of the bread the cleansing from the old leaven had to be done if it had not already been done. In this case of the Corinthians

the dangerous ‘old leaven’ is present in the sin of the incestuous man. Let the church hurry to purge itself **5.8. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival**, for the Christian life is such a holy festival, a continuous holy way of life (Rom. 12:2; I Pet. 2:5), **not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth**. Sometimes leaven has a good connotation, but not in the matter of the Passover and not here where it is dangerous and infectious sin. It is **the leaven of malice and evil** and this tells us how evil a thing it is, whilst **the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth** tells us how pure and rich is festival kept with unleavened bread.

The matter of condoning evil and even boasting in it brings another matter to Paul’s mind which bears on Christian ‘table fellowship’. In the Gospels we gather that Jews did not eat with those designated as Gentiles or ‘sinners’. Paul, in wanting the incestuous man cast out, desires to speak of a misunderstanding in regard to the Christian’s association with unbelievers. He then returns to the discharging of the incestuous man from the congregation.

5.9. I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; 5.10. not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. Here ‘associate’ must mean ‘have relationships with’ much in the sense of II Corinthians 6:14, ‘Do not be mismatched with’, which Paul equates with ‘fellowshipping’. One cannot live in this world, Paul says, where shopkeepers, tradesmen and others are essential to our living. He may mean few of such people are not linked with immorality and crime. **5.11. But rather I wrote to you not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber -- not even to eat with such a one.** In I Corinthians 6:9–10 Paul points out that members of the church, that is, **any one who bears the name of brother** will not inherit the kingdom of God. Believers should not have associations with such and should not have table fellowship with them. **5.12. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 5:13 God judges those outside. "Drive out the wicked person from among you."** Paul as an apostle had a mandate to judge immoral people within the church, but not outside it. That is God’s business. Paul puts **"Drive out the wicked person from among you,"** in quotes because it is really a quotation from Deuteronomy 17:7b—‘You shall purge out the evil from the midst of you,’ a statement repeated in 22:24 (cf. Deut.13:5).

CHAPTER SIX

Paul is now working further on the problems, the wrong understandings and irregularities of the Corinthians. The one of their going to public law courts with their internal affairs horrifies him. He counsels the way of being defrauded rather than doing this. In his mind is still the matter of table-fellowship with notorious sinners, i.e. those who are deliberately following the line of evil.

6.1. When one of you has a grievance against a brother, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Grievances against a brother were dealt with by Jesus in Matthew 18:15–20. The matter belongs inside the assembly.

6.2. Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Daniel 9:13–22 needs to be read thoroughly. In this chapter the Kingdom is to be given over to the saints. They are to judge the world. Their leader, the Son of man, is to judge all the nations as well as rule them. The Christians are the associates of this One. That being the case are they not the best to carry out their own ‘law-work’? This was the custom in Jewish communities throughout the world. They would avoid Gentile judgements like the plague.

6.3. Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, matters pertaining to this life! In Jude 6 and II Peter 2:4 it is said that fallen angels, now inhibited in prison, are to be judged. Here Paul says it will be the saints who will do this.

6.4. If then you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who are least esteemed by the church? The church has a high calling and status when it comes to the nature of its ministry. The church does not highly esteem the world and its judgements, so why submit to it. Are there not those in the church who are more highly qualified to judge? The next two verses need no commentary. They are quite plain in their meaning. **6.5. I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no man among you wise enough to decide between members of the brotherhood, 6.6 but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?**

6.7. To have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? Christ's teaching in Matthew 5:39–42 and Luke 6:29f., should be sufficient. The way of love is to suffer being defrauded, not winning. In any case it is better to be defrauded than to go public with the row. **6.8. But you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that even your own brethren.** Someone is defrauding, whoever it is that institutes the public law case. This is unthinkable in the Christian fellowship. It is against the whole principle of love.

In the following section—verses 9–11—Paul takes up the possible indifference of the Corinthians to grace sins, in order to shake them out of any lethargy they may have towards immorality. They must observe the change they had at first and not recede to former lack of standards.

6.9. Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? No matter what may be the kindness of grace, it does not extend to those deliberately out of the bounds of righteous being and living. The Kingdom of God is 'righteousness, joy and peace' (Rom. 14:17) and has no place for deliberate sin. **Do not be deceived;** for the deceit of sin is subtle and powerful (Heb. 3:13). Note how often Paul warns against this deceit. **neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, 6.10. nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.**¹⁰ We have seen that the immorality in society threatened to become the way of that society, hence in Ephesians 4:17ff. Paul alerts his readers to any moral insensitivity they may have.

6.11. And such were some of you. This was part of the former life of some, but an immense change had taken place. **But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.** The Corinthians were now marvellously transformed, showing how the former states could be—and for us, can be—radically changed. For **washed** see baptism through the New testament, and in particular Acts 22:16; **sanctified**, see 1:2, 31; ; **justified**, see 1:31; Romans 3:24; 4:25; 5:1. So dynamic were these acts (cf. Acts 2:38; Romans 6:1–14) in union with Christ, and under the Spirit (II Corinthians 3:18; Titus 3:5–7) that they could leave no place for the old immorality.

Verses 12–20 set the readers on a positive path of thoughtful righteousness, goodness and holiness, but not a path of self-righteousness. True morality is linked with their holy union with Christ, and their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁰ All of these forms of sin and perversion can be traced human rebellion against the fixed, ontological order of the creation (cf. Psalms 148:5–6; Jeremiah 31:35–36), and can therefore be seen as rebellion against authority. There are many other forms of expressed rebellion, for there are many 'forms' of creation. Basically they are expressions of the one enmity towards God's authority, expressed generally in the act of the fall, and particularly in the addiction or sin of the person.

6.12. "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything. Here we meet with ideas which are never far from the so-called 'liberated' Christian. On the one hand it could be an antinomian view of Christian liberty, 'No law should hold us!' Or it could be gnostic, 'We have knowledge that **16.i3."Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"**, i.e. the body is the body and its function demand fulfilment and so 'all things are lawful'. Paul might even seem to agree, but he sees the danger. **And God will destroy both one and the other.** The body is not free to operate apart from true morality. One can become enslaved to the functions of the body. What if God will eventually destroy both body and food—does that mean their actions and functions do not have meaning, now? **The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.** Paul could see where there argument would logically lead by the person arguing for bodily functionality, i.e. 'It doesn't matter if we let the body have its sexual inclinations since it is only a bodily matter.' 'Only a bodily matter!. No! It is a matter of immorality—it is not the same as food and a body, though even here there could be gluttony!'

6.14. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. The body does signify for God raised Christ's body. It was not lost as though its past actions never counted. Yes, our bodies will be raised (Rom. 6:4; 8:23; cf. II Coir 4:14))and that makes them significant now, including all their actions.

6.15. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? In Romans 12:1 all members of the body are Christ's operative factors in this world. **Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!** What is more, at this very moment your members are significant (I) in their relationship with Christ, and (b) for that they do in that relationships (cf. Rom. 6:14–23). Look what can happen! **6.16. Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two shall become one flesh."** Paul refers back to Eden and the joining of two bodies. The high tragedy of this caricature of a true union is what makes the use of the *body* in the name of a false freedom is against the beauty of a *spiritual* union of the person with Christ for **6.17. But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.** This union with Christ never allows a license of the body: one cannot have a license of the body and at the same time a deep, spiritual union with the Lord!

6.18. Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. The passage is saying, 'Flee fornication,' strong terms, but it would include all bodily immorality, and be said in a horror and disgust of it all. If we look at verses 9 and 10 we see what sins can be against the body, and what more against the mind, but in this sexual area immorality is a grievous sin against the body, most harmful. The body is not treated with reverence as a creation of God. The union with a prostitute (or another such) is a travesty of the true, pure and holy union of man and wife.

6.19. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? In 3:16 the whole community is the temple of God, but here the body—really the whole person—is shown to be the temple of God Perhaps temples make the temple, but to think of the presence of God through the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit being there for worship is all too much for us to comprehend. Yet it is objectively true—whatever may be our feelings. **You are not your own; 6.20. you were bought with a price.** Who are you to think you can do what your body may seem to wish to do, since the body belongs to God. He bought it with a heavy price, reasoning it from its former bondage to evil. **So glorify God in your body.** This takes us again to Romans 12:1–2. People see a body, watch its actions, read its intentions, assess its motions, and all of these can—and should—bring glory to God.