

Shepherding Notes

1 Corinthians

By Caleb Bunch

History

The city of Corinth was one of the most commercially busy cities of that time. It was in a prime location where much trade between countries was able to take place. There was a lot of money flowing through the city. It was also known for much idol and pagan worship. Many temples were in the city where idolatry and sexual immorality were mixed together, to put it mildly. If you read Acts 18, you will see the historical account of when the church in Corinth was planted. First Corinthians is a letter that Paul is writing directed to the very church that he planted.

Greeting and Thanksgiving

If you have read through 1 Corinthians, then you most likely observed that this was the "Problem Church." There were many things Paul had to write about to correct their conduct. Though much of what is written is to correct their conduct, it is interesting to see how Paul begins this letter. You would think that Paul would rebuke them from the start; instead, he begins his letter with the hope of the gospel. Notice the ways that he does this.

Verse 2 says "to those sanctified in Christ Jesus." Thomas Schreiner observes that the word "sanctified" is used to describe their positional or definitive sanctification, meaning that they are sanctified by their union with Christ and not because they are holy in themselves. He reminds them from the beginning of their union with Christ. From verses 4-6, he acknowledges the grace of God and the gifts that were given to them. From verses 7-8, he talks about the power of the gospel that was at work in them. The testimony of Jesus led them to enter fellowship with Jesus. He gives them hope by reminding them that on the day of judgment, they will be presented as guiltless because of the work of Jesus. Even as a messed-up church as they were, Jesus will be the one who will sustain them to the end, proving that the work is done through the power of His gospel. The gospel takes broken people and changes them, even if the change occurs slowly.

Blueprints

The next section of this chapter is a blueprint for what will follow in the rest of the letter. Paul talks about two things that he will unpack in the rest of the letter. The first is that

there should be no contentions in the church, but they should be striving for unity. From verses 10–17, he mentions that reports have come to him about divisions and fights that have been happening in the church. Several of the chapters that follow will deal with these specific contentions and compromises that the church members had made.

Then Paul makes a shift, talking about wisdom and foolishness. Specifically, he talks about how the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but it is the power of God to those who are being saved. It seems like some of the Corinthians have fallen in love with the idea of human wisdom. Those who are brilliant and philosophically driven are viewed more highly by the people. Paul crushes that argument by bringing his audience back to the gospel. Wisdom is not just ideas that come from the human mind — wisdom is revealed in a person, and it is revealed in the person of Christ, and Christ has put all human wisdom to shame.

Ultimately, this is a blueprint for the letter because every issue discussed in every chapter is a gospel-centered issue. The Corinthians are not walking in a manner worthy of the gospel. It is only the wisdom found in the gospel that will be able to remedy the problems they are facing. We should also be humbled that there is nothing that we can boast about except our weaknesses. We can only boast in the Lord as He has provided us with the glorious gospel.

"Wisdom is not just ideas that come from the human mind. Wisdom is revealed in a person — and it is revealed in the person of Christ, who has put all human wisdom to shame."

Fancy Speeches

"Speechmaking was highly developed and prized among the Greeks. It was even a form of popular entertainment, with speakers using various verbal skills to win the applause of the crowds. Public speaking competitions were held throughout the Greek cities and were probably part of the local games held every two years at nearby Isthmia." — Paul Barnett

It seems like the cultural context of the Corinthians was seeping into the church via highly rhetorical and man-skilled preaching. Paul is combating some form of teachers and teaching that is focused more on impressing people through fancy speeches mixed with human wisdom. Instead, what it should be focused on is the gospel. The Corinthians are being wooed by preachers who seem to have man-made wisdom that is empty of true gospel power. Paul reminds them of what true biblical preaching should be: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (vs. 2)

In verse 1, Paul remembers the occasion when he first went to the Corinthians (Acts 18) and tells them that his goal was not to show off with fancy speeches but to deliver purely and fully the message of the gospel. Any message that is focused more on the skills of the preacher and lofty ideas than on the gospel will be absent of true, life-changing power. It is only when the message of the gospel is preached in its entirety that we can take a deep look at our own sin and repent of it, receiving eternal life. The message of the gospel is straightforward, and the depths of its truth can reach down to the deepest roots of our sin because it will never lose its power.

True Wisdom

Paul then makes a slight shift. He just talked about not using man's wisdom to preach, but he points to there being actual God-given wisdom for those who are in Christ. If I were to stand across from you, no matter how hard I looked at you or asked you deep questions, I would never be able to read your mind. The only person able to read your mind is God. In our natural condition, there is no way for us to know the mind of God. It is when we are born again and receive the Spirit of God that we can comprehend all spiritual aspects of what God has revealed to us.

The Spirit of God is the one who knows what God thinks about, what He desires, what He wants, and His plans. He has revealed it to us through the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit is the one who inspired the writers of the Scriptures to know what God wanted them to write. (2 Peter 1:21) It is only the Spirit of God dwelling in us that gives us the ability to understand the Scriptures, which are "spiritually discerned." Someone in their natural condition cannot understand the depth, breadth, and length of the mind of God in a salvific way.

"Any message that is focused more on the skills of the preacher than on the gospel will be absent of true, life-changing power. The gospel will never lose its power."

Main Gospel Issues

Human beings have a natural tendency to fall into cliques. It is much easier to be surrounded by people who share the same values, have the same mindset, and believe the same things, instead of being surrounded by people who are much different from us. Within the church, that tendency needs to be crushed and submitted to the Lord because Jesus' church is made of people from all tribes, languages, and nations, and the gospel should be the unifying factor in which we link arms with people who might be radically different from us.

In chapter 3, Paul is starting to deal with specific issues that are causing disunity in the church. One, people seem to be making cliques based on who their favorite leader is. Two, people seem to be relying more on human wisdom than on Jesus and Him crucified. According to Paul, this stems from a lack of maturity in the Corinthian church. He calls them "infants in Christ" (vs. 1). By calling them infants in Christ, he is still affirming that they are believers, but because of their lack of maturity, they are operating as unbelievers. They are baby Christians who need to be admonished, nourished, and guided. Paul also deals with the issue of regarding human wisdom above the gospel (vs. 18–22). A lack of maturity will always follow when we rely more on man's wisdom instead of the wisdom that comes through the gospel and God's Word.

Issues Addressed

- Vs. 5–9 — They should not create cliques by following anyone specifically because at the end of the day, God is the one that produces growth. All ministers of the gospel are working toward one end goal: to proclaim Christ and Him crucified. It is God who has sovereignly assigned these people the role they have in the church. God will be the one to cause His church to grow by the means He provides. It is only through the proclamation of the gospel that real fruit can be produced.

- Vs. 10 & 12-15 — God uses different people in different ways. Paul was the one who originally preached the gospel to them (Acts 18). He laid the gospel foundation in Corinth. Apollos watered and built upon the foundations that Paul had laid. Each minister of the gospel has been given different gifts and capabilities, and God will use them in different ways and seasons to build His church. But there is also a warning: the work of every minister will one day be tested. That is why there is a call to gospel faithfulness — to preach Christ and Him crucified.

- Vs. 11 — The foundation of every church should be Jesus Christ. The main problem in Corinth was not disunity; it was that they drifted from the foundation of the gospel. If the gospel was at the center of the life of their church, they would see that they are all the Bride of Christ and that God uses people in different ways. The gospel being centered means that Jesus Christ is the main character and not the people that He uses.

- Vs. 16-17 — Paul is referring to them as a whole, not as individuals. The church is the temple of God, where His presence dwells through the Holy Spirit. Anyone who causes strife in the church is damaging the temple of God. All disunity should be put away so that no damage will be caused to the temple.

- Vs. 23 — Paul is saying: why do you argue about who follows whom? Do not boast in man. Rather, recognize that all these people and things have been given to you for your growth. Paul, Apollos, and Peter belong to Christ; Christ belongs to God, and if you are in Christ, whatever belongs to God, He freely gives to you. Don't divide based on who your favorite preacher is — recognize they are all there for your spiritual growth.

"The gospel being centered means that Jesus Christ is the main character — not the people that He uses. Don't divide based on who your favorite preacher is."

The Pride of the Corinthians

"A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you." — C.S. Lewis

It seems like Paul is dealing with some of the pride that has overtaken some in the Corinthian church. Let us look at the different ways pride has made its way into the hearts of some.

- Judgment (vs. 3) — It seems like there are some people (teachers) who are judging Paul and his ministry to the church. This stems from pride, since the teachers taking the lead in Corinth were boasting of their lofty speech and the special wisdom they claimed to have.
- Puffed Up and Boasting (vs. 6–7) — Paul encourages them not to be puffed up against one another concerning who their favorite preacher, teacher, or leader is. Essentially, all things they have are received as something that was given to them.
- Exalting Themselves (vs. 8) — Thomas Schreiner notes that Paul uses sarcasm in these verses to point out the false level of heightened spirituality that the Corinthians think they have. Their sense of having much human wisdom and lofty speech has the Corinthians feeling themselves a little too much. They think they have made it, but Paul points out that this is just in their minds.
- Arrogance (vs. 18–19) — Twice Paul mentions people from Corinth who are acting out in arrogance and speaking arrogant things.

This goes back to the problem we spoke of from the beginning. As C.S. Lewis once said, proud people are always busy looking down and can't see what is up. The Corinthians are too busy looking down at others while not looking up to see Jesus and Him crucified. They miss the point that true wisdom, power, and humble service come from a heart that is rooted in the gospel.

The Humility of Paul

On the contrary, look at how Paul — who is rooted in the gospel — responds to them.

- Servant (vs. 1-2) — Paul immediately brings up that he is a servant of Christ. He is not some guide trying to make a name for himself but is aiming to serve others.
- Given by God (vs. 2-5) — Paul acknowledges that his position has been given to him by God and that he is merely trying to be a faithful steward. He also confesses that even though he does not know of anything he is guilty of, at the Day of Judgment the Lord will bring things into the light and reveal the heart motives of those who served Him.
- Weakness (vs. 10-13) — Paul acknowledges that those apostles who serve Christ will be regarded as the scum of the world. He tells them that the apostles truly suffered from many hardships, and they still needed to respond to those hardships in a Christ-like manner: "When reviled, we bless."
- Admonishing Humbly (vs. 14-17) — Paul still speaks gently to them by calling them his beloved children and expresses that he does not want to shame them. He tells them to be imitators of him — but in verse 17 he explains that his ways are in Christ. Ultimately, they should imitate Paul as far as he is imitating Christ.

Through all these things Paul expresses his deep love and concern for the Corinthian church while pointing out false ideologies and teachers. He does this with all humility. The difference between the Corinthians' pride and Paul's humility is that the Corinthians are self-dependent while Paul is focused on Christ and Him crucified. One is gospel-centered; the other is self-centered.

"The Corinthians are too busy looking down at others while not looking up to see Jesus and Him crucified. True wisdom and humble service come from a heart rooted in the gospel."

The Gospel Issue

The issue that Paul deals with in chapter 5 directly correlates with a gospel issue. In verse 7, Paul says, "Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." Paul is taking Old Testament references and using them to delineate clear gospel boundaries that the Corinthians seem to be breaking. He references Exodus 12:14–20 and 13:6–7, which give instructions for the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread. These instructions required that leaven was to be removed from the Israelites' homes as they celebrated these feasts. In short, Paul paints a picture for us that leaven symbolizes things that are evil and corrupt. Just a little bit of leaven left would affect the whole lump.

The Passover was celebrated because God promised to pass over the people of Israel who had slaughtered a lamb and put the blood on the doorpost. This Passover was merely pointing to the death of Jesus on the cross, as Jesus was the lamb substituted for His people who took on the wrath of God and washed us with His blood. Since Jesus was the Passover lamb that was sacrificed, His people are to live in light of that, which entails removing sin from their lives. Paul uses this picture of leaven to show the Corinthians that they have allowed leaven to infiltrate the church by allowing sin to continue without addressing it. The Corinthians are not living in light of the gospel. The gospel calls us to constantly remove sin from our lives — but even more, our sin will affect the rest of the body. A little leaven affects the whole lump.

The Sin

The sin that Paul is directly addressing is the fact that a man is sleeping with his father's wife. This is something that not even the pagans, with all their sexual perversions, would tolerate. This man in the church is in blatant, unrepentant sin — professing to be a believer while intentionally sinning in a way that is known to everyone. The Corinthians have not dealt with it accordingly, which is why Paul is admonishing them to take action.

Paul admonishes them to go through with the church discipline process and remove this person from the church. This might sound cruel, but the reality is that this is the most loving thing the church can do for this man. If they allow him to continue sinning as a professing Christian, they are letting him be deceived. There is a gospel call for the church to walk in purity. By disciplining this man out of the church, they are making him

aware that he is not acting as a true believer and is in danger of going to hell if he does not repent. Truly loving someone does not mean overlooking unrepentant sin that leads them away from God.

What will also happen if this sin goes unaddressed is that others will think it is acceptable to live in open sin, which will bring even more impurity into the church. The ripple effect will be that others will start to sin openly because they see no consequences. The church is to be free from the leaven of evil and corruption. If a little leaven leavens the whole, a little sin will corrupt the whole. God's people are to live in light of the gospel — which is to pursue purity through the grace given to us through Jesus.

"Truly loving someone does not mean overlooking unrepentant sin that leads them away from God. Truly loving someone means we take the necessary action to reason with them about the gospel."

Suing Each Other

Currently, we live in a society that is lawsuit-crazy. People are scared to get sued for any little thing, and people are looking to sue for any little thing. What Paul finds disturbing in chapter 6 is that there are believers who are suing each other over what are most likely petty matters. What is ironic is that in the first few chapters of this book, Paul makes it known that the Corinthians view themselves as people with much wisdom — but they can't find anyone among them wise enough to mediate between these petty issues.

This is a problem for a few reasons. First, this is causing much disunity in the church. In chapter 1, Paul calls them to be united. The power of the gospel should cause unity within the body of believers, knowing that we have all been shown immense grace and mercy. Second, this paints a bad picture of the church. Unbelievers must think to themselves that the religion these people follow must be false based on how they treat each other.

Paul then gives them a strong admonishment by reminding them that the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, revilers, homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, and swindlers — none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. But, with this admonition, he gives them hope. In verse 11, he reminds them of what Jesus Christ has done for them through the gospel: "And such were some of you," continuing to remind them of their status in Christ. They are no longer to walk in their former manner of life because they are justified and sanctified through the gospel.

Dominated by Passions

In verses 12–13, Paul seems to be quoting sayings from the Corinthians: "All things are lawful for me," or "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food." Even though most of this section (vs. 12–20) is about fleeing sexual immorality, there is a broader principle at hand. The Corinthians seem to be dominated by their passions. As Christians, we are not to be mastered or dominated by anything. The only one we are to be mastered by is Jesus Himself. When we let ourselves be mastered by our passions, sins like sexual immorality will start to gain much ground in our lives.

Our bodies are not meant to be used for our indulgence and pleasure — they are to be used for the Lord. Our body belongs to Him and is made for Him. The Corinthians have been swayed that there is no resurrection (see chapter 15); if there is no resurrection, our

bodies are just corpses that will stay in the ground. The resurrection gives the church hope that the bodies given to us will one day be raised – and therefore, they should be used for the Lord. Paul solidifies this by telling them that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. We should not let ourselves be dominated by our passions, especially by sexual immorality. The resurrection tells us that our bodies will be made new and eternal. Therefore, we should start now by bringing our bodies into submission to the Lord.

"Our bodies are not meant to be used for our indulgence and pleasure – they are to be used for the Lord. We are temples of the Holy Spirit."

Being Led by Principle

There are many things that we can dig up in this chapter. The best thing to do is establish the principle being taught and see how that principle should take root in the lives of the Corinthians. Verse 17 says, "Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches." Verse 24 says, "So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God."

Paul is establishing that there is no need to feel like we need to reach a certain circumstance to be faithful to God. We ought to be faithful to the Lord in the circumstance that we were saved in. For example, if when the Lord saved me, I was working as a mechanic, I did not need to go into ministry to please Him. I can please God and be faithful to Him while working as a mechanic — my circumstances don't need to change. What God wants from us is obedience to His commandments. (vs. 19) The reason this principle should lead us is because it is based on the gospel. He reminds those who are slaves in verse 23 that they were bought with a great price — the life and blood of Jesus for sinners.

Here is how this practically plays out through the chapter.

- Vs. 1-9 — It seems like some people think it is a good idea to practice abstinence from sex among those who are married, possibly from some form of asceticism. Sex was created by God as something good to be enjoyed in the context of a marriage between a man and a woman. Paul encourages them not to abstain from sex within marriage because that can tempt them toward sexual immorality. God wants them to be faithful to each other by satisfying each other's needs in the context of their marriage. Likewise, unmarried people have the freedom to marry if they burn with passion, to keep themselves from falling into sexual immorality. It is much better to marry than to be single while constantly being tempted.

- Vs. 10–16 — If someone who is married gets saved but their spouse does not, the saved spouse does not need to divorce the unsaved spouse to be faithful to God. If the unsaved spouse desires to remain married, this is permissible, and no divorce should be pursued. Paul says that the saved spouse can be used as a tool to bring the other spouse to faith. A saved person can be faithful to the Lord even if their spouse is not saved.
- Vs. 18–23 — Paul gives three examples: those who are circumcised and uncircumcised, and slaves. Neither category should pursue the opposite, thinking that they can be more faithful to God by doing so. What matters is following God's commandments and remaining in His call. If the opportunity for freedom comes for a slave, they can take it — but they can be faithful to God as a slave.

The point here is that what matters is faithfulness to God and the pursuit of purity and devotion toward Him. If the circumstance we find ourselves in is not sinful, then we can be faithful to the Lord in it — whether married or unmarried, circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free. We can glorify God through these because of the gospel.

"We ought to be faithful to the Lord in the circumstance that we were saved in. What God wants from us is obedience — our circumstances don't need to change."

Historical Context

The next few chapters are closely related as they discuss food, idolatry, and conscience issues. Corinth was home to many temples where sacrifices to idols were part of everyday life. In these temples, much sexual immorality took place. When a sacrifice was made, the people would come together to eat in the temple of that sacrifice. Whatever was left over was sold at the meat markets – a modern example would be halal food that was sacrificed to Allah in Muslim temples and then sold in a grocery store. Many of the church in Corinth most likely came out of this idolatrous background.

Therefore, Paul emphasizes to the church that there is only one God. Since these idols are dead, there is nothing mystical nor inherently sinful about the food itself. There seem to be two categories of people that Paul addresses: those who have the knowledge that idols are dead and have no power, and those who are still scarred by their past and struggle with eating food sacrificed to idols because, consciously, it leads them to sin.

Laying Down Your Rights

The key to the way Paul deals with both categories is found in verses 1–3. Some seem to be claiming knowledge, but that knowledge is not leading them to lovingly consider the conscience of their weaker brother. They are "puffed up" by their knowledge, and this pride does not let them see that they are harming the unity of the church and causing their weaker brothers to sin. This causes the weaker brother to sin because he does not eat the food in faith but thinks that he is sinning. Romans 14:23 says, "But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."

The brother whose conscience is not bound by eating food sacrificed to idols should love the weaker brother by not eating in front of him. Paul carefully encourages the Corinthians not to use their rights and freedoms in Christ in a way that causes their weaker brothers to stumble. Instead, they are to lay aside their rights and lovingly consider the well-being of their weaker brothers. The weaker brother, meanwhile, ought to strive to grow in his knowledge of truth and align his conscience with truth.

Tom Schreiner says, "Believers imitate the sacrificial love of Christ on the cross when they give up their desires for the sake of others, and thus abstain from eating idol food."

This principle can relate to many areas of life. If someone has a weak conscience about something — alcohol, celebrating certain holidays, or partaking in things that are not inherently sinful — we should examine whether we can love someone by abstaining if it would defile their conscience.

"Believers imitate the sacrificial love of Christ on the cross when they give up their desires for the sake of others." — Tom Schreiner

Surrendering Rights

Paul continues his writing on laying down our rights by using himself as an example. Back in Acts 18, the story is given of how the Corinthian church was planted. When Paul came to Corinth, he met Aquila and Priscilla, who most likely had a tent-making business where Paul worked with them to provide for himself. From verses 1–19, Paul states that as an apostle, he has a right to receive payment for the work he does proclaiming the gospel in the church. He even brings up the Old Testament to make his case that he has a right to receive wages for proclaiming the gospel and working to build up the church.

Nonetheless, Paul lays aside this right for the sake of others. Even though Paul has a right to receive wages, he refuses to receive anything from the Corinthians because he does not want there to be any hindrance in proclaiming the gospel. By not receiving payment, the Corinthians will not look at him as someone who works for them, telling him what to do. Instead, Paul waives his rights so that nothing holds him back from correcting any false ideologies they have and proclaiming freely Christ and Him crucified.

Using Freedom for the Gospel

By waiving his rights, Paul is free to minister in any way that seems fit. Part of what he explains in verses 19–23 is that he uses his freedom to immerse himself in the culture of the people he is ministering to — that would be like traveling to South America and embracing the culture to have a greater opportunity to share the gospel. Paul does not use his rights in a way that benefits himself; he uses his freedom in a way that will advance the gospel. One thing to keep in mind is that Paul never uses his freedom in a way that will negate gospel truth or lead him to sin — using freedom to become like the people we are ministering to does have boundaries. Gospel truth and purity should always be examined before fully immersing oneself in becoming like the people we are ministering to.

Persevering to the End

In the last few verses, Paul gives this analogy of an athlete who exercises self-control and disciplines his body so that he may not be disqualified. What Paul is NOT teaching is a works-based salvation — we cannot win our way to heaven. But there is something true about persevering to the end. The writer of Hebrews describes the Christian life as a race

that needs to be run with endurance. As Paul lays out the theology of laying aside our rights, fleeing idolatry, and sacrificing like Christ, that should lead to a deep-rooted heart devotion to run with perseverance by laying aside our desires for the sake of the gospel. We are not to run aimlessly. We are to run with the aim of living for Christ and laying aside anything that weighs us down or hinders the advancement of the gospel.

"Paul does not use his rights in a way that benefits himself – he uses his freedom in a way that will advance the gospel. That is the model for Christian liberty."

Our Example

Paul continues this section on food, idolatry, sexual immorality, and the conscience. From verses 1–13, Paul brings out some Old Testament examples and recounts things that happened to the Israelites. In short, no matter how much God provided for the Israelites, they let their desires and sinful indulgence rule over them. One of the major ways we see this is in how much they grumbled and complained against the Lord. Their idolatry led them away from God. The Corinthians are in a similar situation, surrounded by a culture of idolatry and sexual immorality. Bringing up the Israelites serves as a warning that they ought not to make the same mistake.

The reason Paul writes verse 13 is to remind the Corinthians that even though the temptations are very real and in their face, God will not let them be tempted beyond their ability to overcome sin. God is faithful, and He will give them the grace needed to overcome temptation.

Guilty by Association

From verses 14–22, Paul says that those who eat food sacrificed to idols in the temples are sinning. This might seem like it contradicts chapter 8, but there are differences in how Paul relates to this problem. In chapter 8, Paul states that the food itself has no mystical power or meaning, and believers should lay aside their rights for the sake of the weaker brother. In this chapter, Paul attacks the act of eating food sacrificed to idols in the temple — participating in the ceremony by being there and eating.

Paul uses the Lord's Supper to solidify his argument. Just as those who take the Lord's Supper benefit from it as it reminds us of our relationship to Christ, the same thing happens when people partake in the ceremonies of idols. Idols are dead, but within the confines of these temples are very real demonic forces and powers that Christians should not associate with. The problem is not the food — the problem is that participation in these practices opens doors for Christians to partake in what is demonic. That is exactly why Paul tells them in verse 14: "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry."

To the Glory of God

Paul gives one last statement about food sacrificed to idols. Overall, the Corinthians do not need to overthink it. If they go grocery shopping, they do not need to inquire where the food came from. If they go over to their neighbor's house for a meal, they don't need to ask if it was sacrificed to idols. The Corinthians have the freedom to eat if they are faithful to God and operating normally by providing food for themselves and their families. Everything belongs to the Lord, and they can eat and drink and do everything to the glory of God.

The Corinthians are free to eat and drink unless someone makes them aware that the food they are purchasing or eating was sacrificed to idols. That is when they should refrain from eating — the reason being for the conscience of the one who informed them. If they are not made aware, they have the freedom to eat to the glory of God. They ought to eat with thankfulness.

"God will not let you be tempted beyond your ability. He is faithful, and He will give you the grace needed to overcome temptation."

1 COR. 10:13

The Lord's Supper

Today, we will focus on verses 17–34, which speak about the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is an ordinance given to us by Jesus Christ. On the night before He was betrayed, He was sitting in the upper room with His disciples and broke bread and passed around wine. Jesus did this in a symbolic way that pointed to His death. His body was about to be broken, and His blood was going to be spilled. He commanded His disciples – and, by implication, all Christians – to do this in remembrance of Him. When the bread is broken, it represents His broken body, and the wine represents the blood He spilled. Taking the Lord's Supper is something beautiful that should help us to shift our eyes and keep them focused on the gospel. It is a proclamation of His death and our salvation until He returns.

But the Lord's Supper is supposed to be taken reverently – it is so serious that some have gotten sick and died by taking it in an unworthy manner. Here are the ways that the Corinthians took the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner.

- There are severe divisions in the church, apparently between the rich and the poor.
- These divisions cause people to partake in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. Instead of eating when everyone is together, some go ahead and eat and do not leave anything for others. The wealthy are fully satisfied with food while the poor are left hungry, discriminated against by not having their needs considered.
- By doing this, the church is not establishing unity – everyone is looking out for themselves. This is wrong because the Lord's Supper is a representation of Christ's self-sacrifice for sinners, and they are not emulating that in their lives.
- It seems that some are getting drunk at the Lord's table.
- There is no self-examination as they take the Lord's Supper.

Receiving Judgment

This unworthy manner of taking the Lord's Supper caused some to be weak and sick, and some even died. It is a very serious thing to take the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. Verse 27 tells us why: because it is sinning against the body and blood of Jesus. If

the Lord's Supper symbolizes His death, then taking it in an unworthy manner makes a mockery of that. That is why judgment came upon some of them.

There is one distinction to make. All believers who take the Lord's Supper are still sinners. This is not teaching that we need to be perfect to partake — that is not possible. What this does teach is that if there is continual, blatant, unrepentant sin in the life of someone, they should refrain from taking the Lord's Supper and examine their lifestyle. They should repent of their sins and then partake. And then they can be reminded, as they partake, that Jesus paid for their sins and took their place. Taking the Lord's Supper should bring us to a place of humility and deep worship, remembering that we are sinners saved by grace.

"Taking the Lord's Supper should bring us to a place of humility and deep worship, remembering that we are sinners saved by grace. We don't deserve it, but the Lord is so good to us."

Everyone Matters

If you were to buy a car and something was missing from it, it would matter. If you were missing a tire, you can't drive. If some of the spark plugs aren't working, the car will only go so far. If a mirror is missing, it makes it dangerous to drive. Having all the parts on the car working properly matters. Paul gives us a similar picture here in chapter 12.

There might be a tendency to get caught up with the first 11 verses by trying to discern what each gift is, how it works, and if they still operate today. That is probably the last thing being emphasized in this chapter. The main reason Paul brings this up is because some in the Corinthian church think some members are more important than others depending on the gifts they have. This has caused disunity within the church.

Just like every part of a car needs to work properly for it to drive safely, the body of Christ is made up of many parts where all are necessary for the body to function properly. There is not one part that is more important than another. Paul even argues that the parts that are the weakest are indispensable. Each part of the body is gifted differently — if there were only eyes, we would not be able to hear. Each gift that was given to everyone is supposed to be used to care for one another, not to have a competition about who is the greatest. There is to be unity in the diversity of the body of Christ.

Schreiner notes the wisdom of God as He has gifted everyone differently to care for each other. Therefore, it is not right for the church to minimize someone because their gift seems insignificant. Every gift that every person has in the church matters because we all form one body. We have been baptized into the body of Christ, and Christ is not divided. That should lead us to honor each person in the body equally. The unity should be so evident that if one member suffers, all feel like they are suffering; if one member is honored, all should rejoice equally.

Jesus Is Lord

There is one purpose and goal to which God has gifted each individual of the body of Christ — the glory of Jesus. Paul begins this chapter by stating that only someone who is filled by the Holy Spirit can proclaim that Jesus is Lord. All gifts are from Him and through Him and for Him. The reason the Spirit empowers people with different gifts is so that each person can use their gift to lift the name of Jesus and exalt Him. So, in a body made

up of several individuals gifted in different ways, when they work in unity, the name of Jesus will ultimately be magnified. Every believer should strive to use their gifts for the common good of the body.

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Making Noise

If I were to get on the church's drum set and try to play, what would come out would be annoying and irritating noise. But if someone who has been trained masterfully were to play, what would come out is a genius rhythm and tempo that is pleasing to the ear. This is like the way that Paul describes love and spiritual gifts. If someone just has spiritual gifts and is self-centered, then they will be like a noisy drummer who has no business playing the drums. But love gives the spiritual gifts meaning — like the rhythm and tempo of a master musician.

From verses 1–3, Paul emphasizes that without love, spiritual gifts mean nothing. What is the point of being able to speak in angelic tongues, get every prophecy right, and have so much faith to move mountains if there is no love? The emphasis here is not on having these gifts — the emphasis is on what is behind the gifts. Real spiritual maturity is not found in spiritual gifts but in the love behind the gifts. Spiritual maturity comes when I learn to love others through the gospel and self-sacrifice.

What Is Love?

According to Paul, love is not self-absorbed and looks toward the interest of others. Love is also the ability to long-suffer with people even though they might do things that cause us anger or hurt. The proof of this is found in verses 6–7. Love is not just a feeling, but an ability to long-suffer with people who might be hard to love, difficult to be around, and even cause harm to us. That is why it doesn't matter if people have great spiritual gifts but then throw tantrums whenever people say or do something they don't like.

Love is a mark of spiritual maturity. It is an ability that grows as someone has been sanctified and has learned to love their neighbor even through hard circumstances. That is why Paul emphasizes that having love is far better than any of these extravagant gifts. Love is also better because it will never end — it is one of those virtues that we will experience in heaven. We will have perfect love for God and perfect love toward our neighbor because there will be no more sin.

The greatest reason that love is better is because Jesus Christ portrayed it. Jesus Christ left His heavenly dwelling to come to this world, to live a perfect life, and to die on the cross, taking the place of sinners because He loved us sacrificially. The greatest picture of

love is given to us in the gospel. We should all strive to imitate Christ, and the number one way is in love.

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I Can't Understand You

One day, I was traveling somewhere and got lost. I saw a man who looked Hispanic, and I went up to him speaking Spanish, asking him for directions. He then told me, "I am not Hispanic, I don't speak Spanish." It was only when I switched back to English that both of us were able to understand each other. Paul is communicating something similar here in this chapter.

This chapter is not about how to learn to speak in tongues or to prophecy. This chapter is about reminding the Corinthians that they should operate in love by seeking to build each other up through their gifts. It seems like there is disorder in the church that comes from people misusing their gifts in a way that is not helpful to others. Some would get up and start speaking in tongues, and no one would know what they were saying — often doing this all at the same time. Just like that man did not understand me when I spoke Spanish to him, those in the church did not understand when different people would start speaking in tongues. This did not help build up the church because there was nothing they could process that would edify them.

The main gist is that if the Corinthians are to operate in love, they need to know what it means. Love is not self-absorbed. So too, operating in love with the gifts means they don't try to show off but instead seek to build others up. This is another mark of spiritual maturity — that the gifts are not used for self but instead for the edification and building up of others in the church. That is why Paul says that prophecy should be desired and used more because it is used in a language everyone knows, where they can receive information they understand and can process.

Orderly Worship

Another reason Paul writes this is to remind them that the church and its services should be orderly. Verse 40 says: "But all things should be done decently and in order." Order in the church is a good thing because it helps us to maintain our focus on the right things. The edification and building up of each other are facilitated through order. The proclamation of the gospel is given through order. The teaching of the Word is given through order.

In the next chapter, Paul will emphasize that the gospel is of first importance. The practices of the first-century church were permissible because they did not yet have the full canon of Scripture. These people in the first-century Corinthian church were saved in a unique time — not all the New Testament letters had been written yet. So it made sense that the Lord allowed for a season for these gifts to operate as He was building His church and inspiring the apostles and other authors to write Scripture. Now, the gifts aren't necessary for the building of the body of Christ because we have the full Biblical canon — the 66 books of the Bible.

"The gifts are not used for self but instead for the edification and building up of others in the church. This is a mark of spiritual maturity."

The Resurrection Matters

You most likely have heard at our church, "The Gospel is of first importance." That is true, and this is the chapter from which this phrase is taken. Paul explicitly states that the gospel is of first importance, solidifying the fact that all the issues he has dealt with are, in fact, gospel issues. But there is something we need to notice. The gospel is not just about the death of Jesus — the gospel very much includes the resurrection of Jesus.

Some people in the Corinthian church have been denying that there is a resurrection, which is very dangerous to believe. The gospel hinges on the resurrection of Jesus. They cannot say there is no such thing as a resurrection while proclaiming Jesus' resurrection. Paul goes so far as to say that if there is no resurrection, then we have no hope and our faith is in vain — we are people to be pitied. If there is no resurrection, we have no hope, so we might as well just live up our lives since there will only be one.

Paul spends the opening verses telling the Corinthians that the resurrection of Jesus cannot be denied. Five hundred people saw His physically resurrected body. He appeared to the apostles, and He also appeared to Paul. Paul argues that there is no way for them to deny the resurrection because when Jesus rose from the grave, some of those who saw Him were still alive and able to testify. And because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, believers will also be raised from the dead.

The Hope of the Resurrection

Without the resurrection, there is no gospel and there is no hope. Paul clearly states that if Jesus never rose from the grave, then we have no hope for the forgiveness of our sins. Since Jesus did rise from the grave, we not only have hope that our sins are forgiven but that our bodies will be raised up and made new on the Day of the Lord.

Paul begins drawing this theology by bringing up Adam. When Adam sinned, he introduced sin to the world and caused every person to be spiritually dead. But Jesus, who is the greater and last Adam, brings forth forgiveness and life. By Jesus rising from the grave and conquering death, He was the first of the many who died in Christ and will rise again.

The hope of the gospel that we have is that through the resurrection, we will die — but one day, we will be raised up. Our bodies will not remain in the grave, but we will be given

new bodies. Jesus was the first one who was raised, and that paved the way for all those who died in Him to also be raised with Him. Brothers and sisters, do you know what that means? It means that even if we were to die, death no longer has the final say. We might be put in the ground for hundreds or even thousands of years, but when the trumpet sounds, we will be raised with Christ. We will wake up from our slumber and reign in the New Jerusalem with Jesus, with our newly resurrected bodies. No more bad knees, no more back pain, no more cancer, no more physical ailments — none of that. Our bodies will be completely new, and sin will no longer decompose our bodies. That is great news! The gospel is of first importance.

"Death no longer has the final say. Our bodies will not remain in the grave — when the trumpet sounds, we will be raised with Christ, completely new."

The Collection

As Paul closes out this letter, there are a few things he reminds them of. The first is a collection. He instructs the Corinthians to give an offering every Sunday and to put it aside. This will be helpful so that when Paul comes to them, they wouldn't have to scramble around looking for money to put in the offering. When Paul mentions the collection, this is most likely related to Romans 15:26, where he mentions that the churches of Macedonia and Achaia are asked "to make a contribution" to send to those Christians who are poor in Jerusalem. This instruction to the Corinthians is likely for the same purpose. He also instructs them to pick out men of high character who would be trusted to take that offering to Jerusalem.

The Plans

Paul still has plans to visit the Corinthians — he may even spend the winter with them. From this section, we see that Paul was writing 1 Corinthians from Ephesus. There are also plans to send Timothy to the Corinthians. Notice how Paul instructs them not to despise Timothy. This is not because Timothy is some kind of difficult person, but probably because of the factions in the church. Those who follow Apollos or others rather than Paul might tend to despise Timothy and treat him poorly since he was Paul's representative. Timothy ought to be regarded with love and care.

The Final Instructions

- Apollos is going to come back to them eventually.
- Paul encourages them to be firm in their faith. Acting like men and being strong is not just an encouragement to the men — he encourages all of them to be strong, meaning that there should be a maturity about them that grounds them in the gospel.
- Stephanas and his household are respected and honored. First, because they were the first converts in Corinth who believed the gospel and were born again. As first converts, they worked tirelessly to serve the advancement of the gospel in Corinth. Second, they spiritually refreshed Paul, and they will do the same for the Corinthians.

- Greetings from other churches are given to them. It is so encouraging to see the connection between all the first-century churches — a camaraderie felt through the New Testament as the apostles and solid brothers were sent back and forth to promote and advance the gospel. Even financial gifts were going back and forth.
- The most important thing given in this chapter overarches the entire letter. Verse 14: "Let all that you do be done in love." Verse 22: "If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!" Everything that the Corinthians do — the Lord's Supper, working out problems, pursuing purity, using spiritual gifts — everything covered in this letter should be done in love. If these things are done in love, there will be gospel transformation. This love ought to be rooted in one's love for Christ. The love we have for Jesus should be a reflection of His sacrificial love for us shown through the gospel.

"Let all that you do be done in love." Everything covered in this letter — the Lord's Supper, pursuing purity, using spiritual gifts — should be done in love, reflecting the sacrificial love of Jesus.