

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE LESSONS 1&2CORINTHIANS



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Daniel Webster has been serving as a missionary in Ghana, West Africa since 2004. Previously Daniel worked as a Certified Interconnect Designer (CID) listed with IPC (Association of Connecting Electronics Industries). His electronics career spanned fifteen years working in Canada for the Department of National Defense, as well as spending five years designing advanced electronic communication equipment for the Avionics industry. Daniel is from British Columbia, Canada, and came to know the Lord at the age of twenty-five. He is married to Priscilla, and has a daughter living in Canada. Since 1994 Daniel has been involved with bible teaching and preaching to Christian audiences in both Canada and the USA, and also through various ministries in Ghana. Daniel developed this series of New Testament lessons during a five-year study of the New Testament. The Lessons were prepared as part of an on-going radio ministry in Ghana, where the lessons were broadcast on a national FM radio station in Kumasi from 2010 to 2015.

Cover: Designed by Daniel Webster – Photo is magnification of Acts 17:11

### Bible Quotations:

Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are from the New King James Version.

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## RADIO SERIES

DEVELOPED BY: DANIEL WEBSTER (2010)

Torah scroll - on sheepskin dating from 1155-1225



Courtesy of Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna

### KEY VERSE:

THESE WERE MORE NOBLE THAN THOSE IN THESSALONICA, IN THAT THEY RECEIVED THE WORD WITH ALL READINESS OF MIND, AND

**SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES**

DAILY, WHETHER THOSE THINGS WERE SO.

ACTS 17:11

### THEME:

AND YOU WILL SEEK ME AND FIND ME,  
WHEN YOU SEARCH FOR ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART.

JEREMIAH 29:13

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## **Preface**

The lessons from Matthew to Revelation have been prepared through personal study of the New Testament. As an on-going part of our radio ministry in Ghana, it was decided to broadcast a series of teachings that would provide one lesson for each of the two hundred and sixty chapters of the New Testament. This work was completed over a five-year period from 2010 to 2015. These lessons are not intended as a commentary, or as an in-depth exegesis of each chapter. The lessons were written to be a concise, and consecutive teaching of the chapters of the New Testament, while providing practical instructions in Christian living. There is a strong emphasis in these lessons on the gospel message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The author's intent is not simply to help people learn the teachings of the New Testament, but more importantly, he desires that all would come to know Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord. Each lesson contains a section entitled "Today's Bible Question". This section is designed to address a relevant question, pertaining to the chapter lesson, or with a view to the present spiritual climate. The lessons will serve many purposes for those interested in the teachings of the New Testament. I envision this work helping various bible teachers, Sunday school teachers, or youth leaders who wish to use a consecutive approach to presenting the scriptures to those whom they teach. Each lesson has been kept to a standard of two typed pages, or between 1500 to 2000 words. This will allow the lessons to be easily adapted into a regular teaching schedule. Each lesson, including the bible question section, can be read in less than 15 minutes, leaving time for group discussions, or further commenting, during a 30 to 45 minute bible teaching class.

It is my hope that this work will serve many in the Christian community with a greater appreciation of the teachings of the New Testament, and also be used by God to bring people to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

This work is dedicated to the glory of God, and the expansion of His kingdom both now and forevermore.

Daniel Webster  
Oct. 2015







# LESSONS IN 1CORINTHIANS



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“ FOR I RECEIVED FROM THE LORD THAT WHICH I ALSO DELIVERED TO YOU: THAT THE LORD JESUS ON THE SAME NIGHT IN WHICH HE WAS BETRAYED TOOK BREAD; AND WHEN HE HAD GIVEN THANKS, HE BROKE IT AND SAID, ‘TAKE, EAT; THIS IS MY BODY WHICH IS BROKEN FOR YOU; DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.’ IN THE SAME MANNER HE ALSO TOOK THE CUP AFTER SUPPER, SAYING, ‘THIS CUP IS THE NEW COVENANT IN MY BLOOD. THIS DO, AS OFTEN AS YOU DRINK IT, IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.’ ”

1CORINTHIANS 11:23-25

LESSON 134  
**Not Many Wise**  
1CORINTHIANS I

In our last lesson we completed our study of the book of Romans, and now we are beginning our study of the next book in the New Testament, the book of 1Corinthians. The book of Acts was an historical narrative of the early church spreading the gospel message around the Roman empire during the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Romans taught us the theology of the gospel, and how the gospel message produces holy living and dedication to the Lord. 1Corinthians will teach us about the New Testament church, while resolving several doctrinal and moral issues that concerned the Christians at Corinth. We shall find many important and practical lessons that we can apply to our own Christian lives.

In the first chapter Paul is going to tackle the problem of divisions among the Christians at Corinth, and this subject is given much attention in the first four chapters of this letter. Since so much attention is given to the subject of divisions among believers in this letter, we should be very interested to find out why this is such an important topic. Paul greets the believers in Corinth along with *'all who in every place call on the name of the Lord'*. From this we learn that the letter of 1Corinthians was not just addressed to the church at Corinth, but also to the universal church, made up of all believers, in all places, throughout the church age. Therefore the book is very relevant to every Christian. Paul begins by saying that he is thankful before God for the grace and gifts that have been given to them. He said that they did not fall short in any of the spiritual gifts, while they were waiting for their future hope in Jesus to be fulfilled. God, who is faithful, would confirm them as blameless, who had called them into fellowship with His Son.

Immediately following Paul's initial greeting, and word of encouragement, he begins to tackle the first of several major problems that had arise in the church at Corinth. This first problem he deals with is division among believers. He makes a plea for unity among them, since he had heard from Chloe's household about some divisions among them. They were dividing themselves into different groups, and had selected their favorite preacher or teacher as their group's leader. Some were saying they followed Paul, while others Peter, or Apollos, and some Christ. Paul asks them if Christ was divided, or whether they were baptized in the name of Paul? These questions come as a sharp rebuke of their immature behavior, and unscriptural divisions. Paul said he was thankful he had not baptized very many among them, for he was not sent to baptize, but to preach the gospel. He said that he did his preaching not with the wisdom of words, as that would make the preaching of the cross ineffectual. Preaching the cross was foolishness to the unbeliever. Paul quotes a scripture from Isaiah about God destroying the wisdom of the wise, to show that world's wisdom is foolishness before God. In the ancient Grecian world, of which the Corinthians were a part, wisdom was esteemed very highly. The Greeks sought after wisdom, and the gospel seemed to them as foolishness, but the gospel is the wisdom and power of God to save souls. Paul says that Jews seek after signs, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. The preaching of the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews, and it was foolishness to the Greeks. However, for those who that were called to salvation, whether Jew or Greek, the cross was the power and wisdom of God.

Many people think they are wiser than God, and they can make their own determination about reality, and about their religious beliefs and practices. But man's wisdom is not God's wisdom; and God will have the final say. If we want to have God's salvation, then we must put away all of our pride, and submit to his plan and his salvation. There are many today who are debating against the truth of the bible, and in their prideful arrogance they think they are so wise. They believe their puny brains created by Almighty God, has greater knowledge and understanding than their creator. They cast away faith in Jesus Christ, and would rather trust in their own understanding. These proud men will inevitably be lost, unless they humble themselves before God, and accept God's remedy for their sin problem.

The bible says that God has not called many wise, nor many mighty, nor many noble to His salvation. These proud men do not want God's salvation. For them it would mean submitting to a higher authority, and their pride does not allow them to show inferiority. Those who do accept God's salvation, and respond to his call, are not the high and mighty of this world, but the poor and humble. Thus the scriptures point out that God uses foolish things to put to shame the wise, and the weak things to put to shame the mighty. He chooses the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are. God does this so no flesh will glory in His presence. It may seem humbling for Christians to hear that God chooses the weak, foolish, and insignificant to be included in His family. However, when we consider the great honor of being invited into God's eternal dwelling, to enjoy his riches forever, then it should make us most grateful for the bountiful blessing God has bestowed upon us. Let us imagine a rich man invites all of his neighbors to his house for a special dinner. Some of the rich neighbors think to themselves, I don't need someone to feed me, I can manage for myself, and so they do go to the dinner party. The other poor neighbors are very pleased to go, and feel no shame in taking free food from their generous friend. Once at the dinner, they are treated to a rich assortment of foods, with plenty to take home and share with their families. Now who do you think was wise, and who do you think was foolish? This example illustrates how some men who are proud of their wisdom and knowledge, do not think they need anything from God, and so they miss out on His blessings, whereas the poor and humble are only to glad to receive the kindness and salvation of God. God has chosen to offer salvation to us in such a way as to exclude all pride, for God hates pride, and will not have men reach heaven thinking it was by their own clever wisdom, or righteous deeds. All who enter heaven's gates will do so through God's grace, and will humbly receive God's forgiveness and gift of eternal life. If you want salvation you must come God's way, and that is through Jesus

Christ. Jesus is to us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Jesus is not only God's remedy for our sin, He is God's power and wisdom to redeem and sanctify us. If you would be wise, then turn your life over to Jesus in faith, and call upon Him today to save your soul.

*"that, as it is written, "he who glories, let him glory in the LORD." 1Cor 1:31*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we started our study of 1Corinthians, and discovered some Christians who had a problem with pride, because they were following their favorite preachers, and causing divisions. Paul had to rebuke their prideful desire to be wiser than others. Someone might ask the question, "Is it okay for Christians to divide into denominations?"

In the first chapter of 1Corinthians Paul has to sharply rebuke the believers in Corinth because they were dividing themselves under different names, such as Paul, Apollos, Peter, and Christ. God hates division among His people. He did not send Christ to die for us, just so we could fight with each other, and divide ourselves into many factions. The Holy Spirit's work is to provide a unity among believers, so that we all have the same mind and the same heart. Now it is clear that Christians cannot all meet in the same location, so there will be various local churches, even in one city. If one church call's itself "London street chapel" because it is located on London street, and another church call's itself, "Main street chapel" because it is located on Main street, then we understand the name is simply to help people know their location, and is not intended to bring division between God's people. But when Christians divide themselves into groups according to their favorite teacher, such as Calvinists, Lutherans, or Wesleyans they fall into the same error as the Corinthians. It is also the same problem for those who divide according their favorite doctrines such as Baptists, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, or Methodists. Still others divide according to their location, such as Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, or Roman Catholic. All this separation due to favorite teachers, doctrines or locations is certainly not from God. We do not find any instruction in the New Testament about Christians separating themselves from fellow believers. Here in Corinthians Paul tells them to get along, and stop dividing themselves. When Paul asks the rhetorical question, "Is Christ divided"?, the clear expected answer is a resounding "No, Christ is not divided". Christ came to unite us into one body, both Jews and gentiles, and people from every tribe, tongue and nation. As Christians we ought to do our best to display the unity within the body of Christ, and not make unbiblical divisions.

We can conclude from this passage in 1Corinthians that it is not God's will to divide the church up into various denominations. It is true, however that sometimes Christians do find themselves with different views on the teachings of scripture. We learned in our studies of Romans, that we are not to refuse fellowship to those who differ from us on secondary issues, that is issues that are not fundamental truths of the Christian faith. If we find believers who hold to different understanding of scripture, and yet they believe the fundamentals of the faith, we should endeavor to be united by our common bond in Christ. We may feel more comfortable meeting with Christians who share our point of view on scripture, but that is no reason to draw lines of distinction, and separate ourselves into different groups like Baptist, Pentecostal, or Methodist. Generally what has happened as Christians have separated into groups, is that all fellowship is lost between believers in these various denominations. There can even be a critical spirit, and or rejection of other true believers, because of a sectarian spirit. People can become proud of their particular denomination, just as the Corinthian believers were becoming proud of their own group that had united under their favorite preacher. This is an immature Christianity, and does not demonstrate the love which our Lord commands from us, and which he has shown to us. If someone asks what denomination you belong to, you would be best to tell them you are a Christian, and belong to the same church as Paul and Peter belonged to, and which Jesus is the head. People always seem to judge a fellow Christian according to his denomination. Perhaps we make all kinds of conclusions as soon as we hear someone is a Baptist or a Pentecostal believer. We ought to learn first if a person knows and loves the Lord Jesus, and base our fellowship on that. If in other points we may differ, we can certainly try to work through the issues in a spirit of love and understanding. When we become proud of our church, doctrine or denomination, then we will have a tendency to build walls, rather than bridges between Christians. The Holy Spirit who teaches us humility, is also the oil that causes Christians to rub up against each other without unnecessary friction.

The only time a Christian should seek separation from someone who is called a Christian, is when that person is living immorally and refuses to repent; or someone who denies or teaches contrary to the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. When we meet people like this, we could either be dealing with a backslidden Christian, or someone who is not a believer at all. As Christians we are obligated to take our stand against immoral sinful behavior, and to uphold sound doctrine, thus we may have to separate from those who live contrary to this. But short of moral or doctrinal error, we ought to show much grace to all believers, and seek to show our common bond in Christ, by the names of our churches, and our willingness to unite and enjoy fellowship together.

*"there is one body and one spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one lord, one faith, one baptism; one god and father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." Eph. 4:4-6*

LESSON 135  
**Spiritual Discernment**  
ICORINTHIANS 2

In our last lesson we introduced the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of 1Corinthians, and saw how the believers in Corinth needed correction because of their dividing themselves into factions centered around a key leader. This subject of divisions among believers is of such grave concern that Paul will spend much time on it, so that the Corinthians will understand why God's church must avoid divisions. In chapter two Paul uses his own example of teaching, and discusses God's revelation given in the scriptures, taught by the Holy Spirit, and not through human wisdom.

Paul had to remind the Corinthians that when he was there preaching among them, he did not use excellent speech to try to impress them with human wisdom. His goal was simple, and that was to speak to them about Jesus Christ and Jesus being crucified. This would be a very good thing for all preachers to focus on, and never stray far away from this, for this is the simple means of salvation for all men. Only through Jesus and his death on the cross can we be saved. This is where all preaching must begin, and where God's power for salvation lies. Preachers might like to impress their audiences with their knowledge and education, and therefore preach on many different topics. But if the point is to inflate the preachers pride, then it misses out on God's purpose for preaching, which is to see people come to faith in Christ for salvation, and to help them learn about Jesus, so they can be changed into His likeness.

Paul describes his presence as weak and with trembling fear. It is rather amazing to hear the great apostle, who spoke before governors and kings, was fearful when preaching to the Corinthians. Naturally speaking we are all a bit nervous to face our audience, because we do not feel adequate or wise enough for the job. Paul certainly had confidence in God, and in the gospel message, but not in himself, for he was himself a weak and frail human preacher. But a person is not saved by the impressiveness of the preacher, and his wisdom, but salvation is from the Lord. God can speak through any person He wishes, and chooses humble men, for proud men will deflect attention to themselves and away from the gospel message itself.

Paul said that though his speech was simple among them, it was not that he could not speak with wisdom, but the wisdom he knew to speak was not the wisdom of the world, but it was a wisdom that came from God, and which he could speak with mature believers (that is those who are humble in spirit, and thirsty for God's revelation). God's wisdom here means the gospel, which was a message hidden with God from before time began, but now revealed through Jesus and his apostles. Had the Jewish rulers known this wisdom and plan of God, they would not have crucified Jesus, for they would have understood that he was the Lord of glory. Paul once again quotes from the book of Isaiah, to show how this gospel was something hidden from man, so that no ear heard, or eye seen, or it had not even enter the imagination of men. However, God had now revealed this truth through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who understands the deep things of God, gives men understanding, that is spiritual discernment. Through The Spirit's help, men may search diligently into God's mind. When a man wants to know things relating to his own mind, his plans and intentions, he discovers this by the spirit within him; but we cannot know another man's mind and plans, except we know the spirit that is within him. Since God has given us His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, we now have the means to search out the mind and plans of God, as the Holy Spirit teaches us. Now the Holy Spirit gives us freely the knowledge of God, so we can know Jesus as our Savior, and place our hope in Him. God does not tell us all things, but provides us with the information that we need to find salvation, and live a life that is pleasing to God.

The teachings of the Holy Spirit are given to those who have the Holy Spirit living within them, and they are in turn able to teach others these truths, and compare spiritual things with spiritual things. This means that the Holy Spirit gives men the ability to teach spiritual truths using spiritual words which the Spirit gives to them. This is the means by which the bible was given to us, for as the Holy Spirit revealed truth to the prophets of the Old or New testament, they wrote these words down, just as the Holy Spirit taught them. This is what theologians call verbal inspiration. It is very important for all Christians to understand that the bible was given to us, in it's exact words, through the Holy Spirit. Spiritual truth is received by spiritual people, that is those who have the Holy Spirit living within them. So every Christian therefore has the ability to understand what the bible is saying through the help of the Spirit of God within them. But the natural man, that is someone who is not a Christian, and does not have the Holy Spirit, can not receive the truths from God, for they are foolishness to him. In God's wisdom He has made His word accessible to whoever will humble themselves to receive God's salvation, and thereby the Holy Spirit to teach them. God, however, by this same means withholds illumination to ungodly men. While they may read God's revelation in the scriptures, they do not have the Holy Spirit to give them understanding. Some men of higher education can try to learn from the bible through their own knowledge and academic abilities, but it will not help to have all the education in the world, for apart from God's help through the Holy Spirit the bible is simply a sealed book. This should make every Christian appreciate the privilege given to them to have the Holy Spirit living within them to teach them God's word.

There is something very important that we can learn from this passage in the bible, and that is that God's mind is not known to men, nor can it be, unless God chooses to reveal His mind to us. God does reveal His mind to us through the Holy Spirit, and this is a remarkable thing for men to witness. As the unbeliever views the Christian, even with low education, explain the deep things of God, he will marvel at how he attained such knowledge. The spiritual man, that is the Christian, cannot be understood by the unbeliever, for the Christian knows the word, is transformed by it, and

behaves by its principles. The unbeliever witnesses some unknown influence which directs and teaches the Christian. This is the witness of the Holy Spirit, who is not known to the unbeliever. I wonder if you know the Holy Spirit's presence in your life? If you have never known the teaching or working of the Holy Spirit, then why not turn today to the Lord Jesus in faith, and ask Him to cleanse you, forgive you, save your soul, and give you the Holy Spirit.

*"now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit who is from god, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by god." 1Cor 2:12*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we learned that Paul's preaching was not presented in man's wisdom, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, and focused simply on the person of Jesus Christ and his being crucified for us. We also saw that it is only through the Holy Spirit that we can learn God's revelation in the scriptures. Someone might ask the question, "How can we be certain that the bible has been given to us by God?"

There have been many skeptics of the bible over the centuries, who have attempted to prove that the bible is not what Christians claim, the very word of God. The attack of the bible by its critics has only gone to show its reliability, and remarkable endurance. Today many scientists not only claim that the world is millions, yeah billions of years old, but present this as fact in science classes. When a Christian claims that he believes the bible, which when taken literally, only allows a young age of the earth of about 6000 years, he is laughed at by his teachers and fellow students for believing what science has proved to be false. This might cause some young believers to stumble in their faith, because it would appear that the bible might be wrong about the age of the earth, and then perhaps it is wrong about other things, and perhaps it is not a reliable document upon which to rest you eternal hopes. This is how the Devil is seeking to destroy the faith of poorly informed Christians.

There are several ways for believers to be assured that the bible comes from God, but the most important is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit lives within the believer, He will testify to its trustworthiness. The more we study God's word, and allow the Holy Spirit teach us, the greater will be our confidence that the word of God is sure. When men make claims which contradict the bible, they will often boldly assert their claims as factual. However, we all need to recognize that man is painfully ignorant about the world in which he lives, about himself, and certainly he is ignorant of our transcendent creator. Men can make claims, but they must humbly admit their ignorance, while searching earnestly for truth. Perhaps it is not the truth that some men are looking for, but rather an excuse to live and behave the way they like. This is the deceptiveness of sin, which tends to convince us that a little dishonesty is okay, when it works to our advantage. The bible certainly tell us truth, when it says the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.

But how can honest doubts be answered when it comes to determining if the bible is really God's word? There are several ways that help us to confidence in the reliability, and divine origin of the bible. One of the major proofs of divine origin is the prophetic nature of the bible. The bible is made up of about 30% prophecy, which predicts accurately future events, and in particular details concerning the life, ministry and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. By examining the remarkable prophetic accuracy of the bible we can see God's fingerprint upon the bible, since no man could have made up such prophecies, unless He had divine knowledge of future events. Then we could examine the internal consistency of the bible, which is remarkable feature of the bible. All the doctrines of the bible are taught with consistency throughout the pages of the bible, even though they were penned by about 40 men over the span of about 1600 years. It would take more than genius to come up with a document that is always true to itself in all aspect of that which it teaches. Though some might find fault with the bible, and see contradictions, these are generally easily answered by bible teachers. The bible also has a long history of power to convert souls from sin to righteousness. This could only be accounted for by divine power; for as one in the bible has said, "If this thing is of man, it will disappear in time, but if it be of God, you cannot withstand it". The bible also claims to be the very word of God. Of course we cannot believe simply because the bible makes a claim to be divine, for anyone could make false claims; but it is important to note that the bible does assert its origin as from God. Historical and Archeological evidence also confirm the accuracy and preservation of the bible as a book which gives authentic history of people, places and events. Even if we should add up the great stack of evidence to show that the bible is the word of God, it will always be left to the individual to decide for himself if he or she will believe its message. If a stranger came to your door and said you had just won a million dollars, you might find it difficult to believe, even if you wished it was true; but if they should produce evidence after evidence, that their message was authentic, then you would be foolish not to take the message seriously. The bible presents overwhelming evidence of its origin being from God, and that it has been delivered to us accurately. The Holy Spirit is the one who verifies to our hearts the truth of God's word, and you cannot have this witness until you receive Christ as your Savior. We sometimes want all the answers before we believe, but the bible would teach us to first trust in Jesus, and then God will open our eyes and understanding through the Holy Spirit to confirm the truth of God's word.

*"Jesus said to her, "did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of god?" Joh 11:40*

LESSON 136  
**Carnal Christians**  
ICORINTHIANS 3

We have been learning from 1 Corinthians about the serious matter of divisions caused in the church. Paul continues this discussion as we look into chapter 3. Here Paul uncovers the problem of carnality, and explains how Christians should think properly about God's servants, and God's work.

First, Paul uncovers the problem that brought about divisions, which was the carnality of the Corinthian believers. He says to them that they are carnal, and babes in Christ. What he means by carnal is that the Christians were not following the the leading of the Holy Spirit, but rather were following their old sinful nature. Their behavior made it appear as though they were not born of the Spirit of God. Paul has to also tell them that he had been teaching them only the basics of Christianity, what he calls milk, rather than more advanced teaching, what he calls meat. He had been teaching them basics because they were still young in the faith, but they should have matured, and now been ready for more advanced teaching. However, they were still babes, and still needed baby food. The proof of their carnal condition is seen by their making divisions, and making a following for their favorite preacher.

Since they had exalted views of men like Paul and Apollos, Paul now begins to show them how they should think properly about God's servants, and God's work. He asks "who is Paul?" or "Who is Apollos?", but ministers. These men were used by God to bring the Corinthians to faith. Paul was a planter, and Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. This allusion to gardening refers to Paul's ministry as a person who initially preached the gospel, through whom some came to saving faith. Apollos' ministry was to nurture the believers by teaching them the word of God. Although both men were involved in the salvation and nurturing of souls that did not mean that the spiritual life came from them. They were only God's agents, and it was God himself who gave the new life, and nourished that life through the Holy Spirit. Thus the one who plants, and the one who waters are really not important, but God who is the source of the spiritual life.

Having discussed God's workers, Paul moves on to explain how the Corinthians should be thinking about God's work. He says that though some plant, and others water, they really are united in purpose, and each shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. The work belongs to God, and God's work is similar to gardening or constructing a building. Paul says he is like a wise master-builder who laid a foundation, while someone else will build on top of that foundation. As Paul shared the gospel, and souls were saved through faith in Jesus Christ, this became the foundation for the local church testimony in Corinth. As Apollos taught those believers, it was similar to constructing a building upon the foundation which Paul had laid. Paul warns that everyone should be careful how he builds upon the foundation, for there can be no other foundation than Jesus Christ.

When men seek to build for God, if they build upon the gospel of Jesus Christ, and see true conversion, and real spiritual fruit, it will be similar to building something with gold, silver and precious stones, which have an enduring quality. This illustration is of those things which will be of eternal value in God's kingdom. If someone is building for God, but they are only seeing false professions, and no spiritual growth, then it is similar to building with wood, hay and stubble, which may last for a short time, but soon will decay and fade away. While speaking about the quality of the work done for God, Paul now tells the Corinthians about a future time, when the work will be tested to see of what quality it is. In that day of testing by fire, only those substances like gold, silver and precious stones will endure the flames, and all the wood, hay and stubble will burn up. The illustration shows us that some men's work will not follow them into heaven, but will come to nothing, because it was not God who was building, but only men. It is quite possible for men to build a church, and fill it with people, and have lots of programs and loud music, but the real question is whether God is at work, or not? If God is working, souls will be saved, and souls will grow and bear spiritual fruit. The day in which God's children shall have their work tested is called the judgment seat of Christ, and we shall learn more about that day of rewards when study 2 Corinthians. All we need to say today about this judgment is that it is a judgment of the Christian's work, and not judgment concerning sin, for that was already judged for the Christian at the cross where Jesus died.

Now Paul switches to the subject of holiness, as this also relates to the discussions about creating divisions in the church. He reminds the Corinthians that they are the temple of God, since the Spirit of God dwells in them. If God lives inside the believers, then Christians need to be warned not to do anything that defiles the temple of God. If anyone defiles God's temple, God will destroy them. In context it seems that Paul is warning about the Corinthians proudly thinking themselves wise, because they follow a particular preacher, such as Paul, Apollos, or Cephas. The Greeks were known for following wisdom, and men whom they considered to be prophets of wisdom. When the gospel preachers came to their town they heard them and adopted their teaching, and used their affiliation with their favorite preacher, like Paul, to appear more wise than others; but God's verdict of such wisdom is that it is vanity. Men need not glory in other men, since all things belong to them, including all the preachers, life, death, the present or future. Because they belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God, they need not contend and divide themselves. When we understand that God has blessed us so abundantly, there is no need for us to claim a personal stake for ourselves since God is prepared to share all of His bounty with us. Since God has given to us Jesus Christ, there is nothing else we need, or could want; and we ought to be very content. Have you found the contentment that comes

from resting your faith in Christ? Perhaps you have never trusted in Jesus as Lord and Savior, so why not do that right now, by asking Him to come into your life and cleanse you from sin, so you can receive the free gift of eternal life?

*"Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours" 1Cor 3:21*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we learned about the carnal Corinthians, who were exalting preachers. We learned that preachers who nourish spiritual life are not really very important in comparison with God, who gives spiritual life. We also talked about the importance of spiritual work that will last and be rewarded in heaven, as opposed to work that does not last, and will be burned up at the judgment seat of Christ. Someone might ask the question, "What spiritual works qualify as gold, silver and precious stones?"

While reading this chapter of Corinthians, and realizing that some spiritual work will merit reward, while other works will not endure, and be burned up when tested by fire, we may wonder whether our own works for the Lord would be considered of value, and will endure like gold, silver or precious stones. The comparison of gold, silver and precious stones with wood, hay and stubble will lead us to see two important distinctions. Firstly gold, silver and precious stones have an enduring quality. Even if tested with fire, they will last. However wood, hay and stubble are things which will easily burn up with fire, and we know they do not last long like gold and silver. This first distinction speaks of the importance of a spiritual work to have an enduring quality. If we think we are seeing many souls come to Christ, then we need to also ask the question are these converts going on well for years, and enduring to the end as confident believers. This is an important test that preachers, pastors and evangelists need to ask themselves as they seek to bring people to Christ for salvation, or make claims of many coming to Christ through their ministry. We must always remember that it is God who gives the increase. This means that salvation is of the Lord, and not through the manipulation of man. In some cases it is not difficult to get people to profess to be Christian, when they are assured of some prosperity, or special interest. A worker for God must be careful that his work is genuine, and he does his labors with a dependency on God for the spiritual results. When men think it is through their own wisdom and efforts that people are coming to saving faith, chances are the converts are man-made and not God-made, which means it will amount to wood, hay and stubble.

The other distinction between these two sets of building materials has to do with their value. Gold, silver and precious stones are very costly when compared with building with wood, hay and stubble. This speaks to us about the value and quality of the spiritual work, because of the investment made. Whereas it might be easy to get 10 converts to confess salvation in Christ, it is much more difficult to make one true disciple of Jesus, who listens to the word, and dedicates himself entirely to the Lord in obedience and service. This distinction that considers the value of work could also speak to us about the genuineness of our labors for Christ. For instance I might give money to the church out of habit, or for selfish reasons, or to look good before others. This would lose its' eternal value for it was not given out of genuine devotion to Christ, but for personal selfish reasons. The same could be said for teaching Sunday school, evangelism, preaching, or visiting the sick or needy. It is possible to do all these activities in the power of the flesh, and for the wrong motives, and therefore they will only amount to wood, hay and stubble. The danger is that any work we do for God might be done for the wrong reason, and with the wrong heart. It is not enough to give money to the poor, if my motive is get applause and appreciation, for that is not God's work, but man's vain-glory. When I do my work for God with a sincere desire to please the Lord, and reflect His goodness and love to others, then it will merit reward and be characterized as gold, silver and precious stones. Some principles that will help us determine if our work for God is gold, silver and precious stones, or just wood hay and stubble are as follows:

1. Does the work draw attention to the worker or to the Lord and His goodness?
2. Does the work bring financial reward for the worker through appeals for support?
3. Does the work bring financial support by trusting in God alone for support?
4. Does the work bring people to saving faith in Jesus?
5. Does the work produce Christian professions that last?
6. Does the work produce Christian professions that grow and bear fruit for God?
7. Does the work show faithfulness and fruitfulness?
8. Does the work reveal the love and kindness of God, or produce fame and fortune for man?

It is important for every Christian to consider carefully if the works they are doing will merit reward in heaven, or be burned up as useless man-made works. So much of what is done in the name of God, does not follow the principles that bring glory to God, and true and lasting salvation; but are designed for man's immediate comfort and honor. If we know that God will judge all of our works, then it is important for us to consider whether our works shall pass the test, and endure the fire of God's holiness.

*"For you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven." Hebrews 10:34*

LESSON 137  
**Fools for Christ**  
ICORINTHIANS 4

In our last lesson we were learning about carnal Christians. That is those who are obeying their sinful nature, rather than following the direction and teaching of the Holy Spirit. In today's lesson we shall learn about what it is like to be a servant of God, and considered by many to be a fool for Christ.

Paul is still addressing the subject of divisions among the Corinthians in this chapter. He is stressing how vital unity is to the testimony of the church, and how to live in a manner that pleases and honors the Lord. He says that men like himself, or Apollos, should be thought of as ministers (servants), and stewards of the mysteries of God. What Paul means here by mysteries, is those revelations that had been given to the apostles by God for the church. As a steward of God's revelations they would need to be faithful, for that is what is required of stewards. A steward is someone left responsible with someone else's property or affairs.

Paul now talks about men's opinions and judgments, and says that he is not concerned with the judgments of men, for he does not even judge himself. He says the day of judgment will come in the future, through the perfect judge, that is the Lord, when he comes to judge in righteousness. At that time all hidden things will be exposed, and all the counsels of the heart will be made known. At that time all Christians will have their praise from God according to their deeds. This has in mind the judgment seat of Christ, when Christians will receive rewards according to their works. In our last lesson we learned that some works will endure, while others will be burned up because they were not of eternal value in God's sight. This should remind every Christian to make sure that our work for God is not done with impure motives, or intended for our own glory, or to impress men. Our work ought to be for the glory of God, and to please Him. Only then shall our works receive their proper reward.

Paul refers to himself and Apollos as examples to teach the Corinthians not to think of men too highly, so that no one will be puffed up against another. He explains that everything God has given to Christian servants was received from the Lord, and therefore there is no need to boast, or feel proud, about what God bestows by His grace and wisdom.

Paul has to warn the Corinthians about having a proper attitude. He says while they were living like kings, the apostles were suffering for the cause of Christ. He tells them that to the world they looked like fools for Christ, while the Corinthians were seeking to look wise in the world. The world will often look at the faithful Christian and consider his life choices as foolish. This is because he gives up much in this world, and suffers and sacrifices for that which is unseen, and intangible to the unbeliever. But the believer knows and is assured that his present suffering is not worthy to be compared with the exceeding weight of glory that awaits him in heaven. Paul continues to describe the contrast between the lifestyle of the Corinthians with that of the apostles, saying that while the Corinthians were strong they were weak. They were honored and the apostles despised. He points out the many ways in which they suffered for the gospel, being hungry, thirsty, naked, beaten, homeless, reviled, persecuted, defamed, made like the filth and off-scouring of the world. This vivid picture of the Lord's servants makes the Lord's work seem rather uninviting as a career. Paul is certainly not advertising the glories of serving God, but pointing out to his high-living friends, that their pride in men, should be balanced with a proper understanding that their work involved much suffering and shame in this world. These words could easily bring a sense of shame to the proud Corinthians, as they learned of the difficulties that the apostles had to face in their service for God, and realized that it was for their sakes, so they could hear the gospel. Paul did not want to shame them, but he did want to warn them. They were listening to some proud boasters in the church, who made themselves teachers for Christ, but Paul says though they had 10,000 instructors in Christ, they had only one father, for it was Paul who had begotten them through the gospel. Here we see the jealous heart of Paul to protect God's people from the proud, false teachers that sought to usurp his authority and bring in divisions. Paul had invested so much of himself into these believers, and did not want to see others ruin all his work, by destroying the unity and love among the brethren in Corinth.

Paul says they should follow his own example, and that he would send Timothy to them to remind them of his doctrine and manner of life. It would almost seem a proud thing for Paul to ask the Corinthian believers to follow his own example, but when we consider all that he suffered for the sake of the gospel, as he has just told them, then he certainly has earned the moral right, and integrity, to call on others to follow in his footsteps for Christ. Certainly Paul had put his faith to the test, and proved in a very practical, and sacrificial, way that he was prepared to follow Christ in the path of suffering, more than others, especially the Corinthians. We can learn here from Paul to look to men who have given up much, and suffered much, for the gospel. These are the best examples to follow, and not the good looking, well dressed, or most eloquent preachers. The reality of the Christian message will not be discerned through the applause of the preacher, as much as through the sorrows and suffering of the preacher.

Paul says some of the Corinthians were puffed up, thinking that Paul would not come to them, but Paul said he was planning to come to them. He said that when he arrived he would not be concerned about their words, as much as the power by which they spoke. He asserts that God's kingdom is established by power, and not by mere words. Paul asks the Corinthians whether he should come to them with a rod of correction, or in a spirit of love and meekness? We can be thankful that the rod of correction, that should have been our judgment, was taken by Christ on the cross,



so that we can be forgiven and receive eternal life. If you have never acknowledged your sin before God, and asked God for salvation through Jesus Christ, then why not do that right now, and receive God's free gift of eternal life?

*"For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." 1Cor 4:20*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

Today we learned about how Paul, and the apostles suffered greatly for the kingdom of God, some thinking of them as fools for Christ. We learned that these men were to be considered as servants and stewards for God. We also learned that we should follow godly examples who are willing to suffer for the gospel. Someone might ask the question, "What does it mean to say 'the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power'?"

As Paul addressed the problems in Corinth, and realized that there were some men in Corinth seeking to promote their favorite preacher, he saw that the problem was their pride. He also understood that if this prideful behavior was allowed to continue in the church, it would bring about ungodly divisions, and destroy the church. As he narrows in on this problem, he becomes more direct and condemning of those men who had risen up among the Corinthians as supposed teachers for Christ, who were causing these problems and divisions. He warns that he will soon come and visit the church at Corinth with an aim to discover not the words of these men as much as the power by which they spoke. Paul gives us a very important motto, "For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power."

When Paul talks about power here, he is making reference to the Holy Spirit's power in ministry. Paul knew that it was the Holy Spirit who had directed him to Corinth to preach the gospel. Paul did not claim any great oratory skills, nor did he try to convince people through his intelligence, wisdom, or clever arguments. He simply presented God's message as directed by the Holy Spirit, and allowed God to bring about spiritual results. Many people were converted to the Christian faith through Paul's preaching in Corinth. The reason Paul's preaching was effecting in bringing about spiritual life, was not because of his skills as a preacher, but because God was speaking through the message to the heart of the people. As the people heard the gospel, and were convicted of their sin, they came to Christ humbly confessing their sins, and seeking forgiveness and acceptance with God. God in mercy saved many of the Corinthians by Paul, who was an instrument in His hands to bring salvation to this people. In fact everywhere Paul traveled he saw people come to faith in Christ, because the Spirit of God was working through him.

The men in Corinth were boasting, but Paul could tell their words were nothing, for the Spirit of God was not speaking through these men. He could discern this because of the result of their ministry. Rather than turn people to the Lord, and see genuine conversion, they were seeing divisions develop in the church. Paul knew this could not be from God, and so warns them sternly. Men may preach correct things, and yet not be directed by the Holy Spirit. People need a spiritual conversion, and not simply to agree to certain doctrines. There needs to be an inward change, a rebirth, which happens through the power of the Holy Spirit. That is why anyone seeking to share God's word with others, needs to also pray for God's help and guidance. Those who are believers have the Holy Spirit living within them, and therefore can be directed by the Holy Spirit when sharing God's word with others.

This should remind us that it is not necessarily someone who has graduated from seminary or bible school, who has the power to win souls for Christ. It is not the ordained minister, preacher or pastor who has this power to bring conversion. The work is from God, and any believer who is willing to be obedient to the Lord Jesus, and by faith and dependence upon God, shares the gospel, may have the privilege of seeing God at work saving souls through their efforts. In fact, God delights to use the simple things of this world to confound the wise. This means that God will often use the humble, and unlearned, to communicate his power in the gospel. By doing this, the glory goes to God and not to men, as we learned in chapter one of our study of 1Corinthians.

The kingdom of God is comprised of all those people who have accepted Jesus as their Savior, and acknowledged Him as Lord over their lives. He is their king, and they are His kingdom, and the sphere in which His reign is accepted and obeyed. In this sense, the kingdom of God is advanced through the conversion of souls to Christ. As the preacher shares God's word, and the spirit of God moves in the heart of men to bring about salvation, then we can say that the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power, that is the power of the Holy Spirit bringing men to salvation. 'Talk' alone will never save a soul, it must be the power of God added to the preaching of the gospel that brings souls to faith in Christ. I wonder if the Spirit of God has been striving with you to trust in Jesus as your Savior? Will you hear and respond to the gospel call today?

*"So he answered and said to me: "this is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'not by might nor by power, but by my spirit,' says the LORD of hosts." Zechariah 4:6*

LESSON 138  
Church Discipline  
ICORINTHIANS 5

In our last lesson we learned that we should not exalt men who serve God, or proudly boast about our favorite preachers. This was happening in the Corinthian church and causing divisions among them. Now Paul is going to tackle another problem that had arise in the Corinthian church, concerning the need for church discipline.

The report about a grievous sin in the church had been spreading, so that it became common knowledge. The sin was fornication, by a man who had taken his father's wife. This was a terrible sin, not just because of the fornication, but because it showed great dishonor to his father. The Corinthians should have been deeply saddened by this situation and tried to deal with it, but instead they were feeling a bit proud. Perhaps they thought themselves to be kind by showing love and tolerance of their erring brother. But Paul has to point out to them that they must not act this way, and that the Lord requires them to take disciplinary action against this sinning brother. He calls on the church to deliver the brother to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. When Paul says to deliver the brother to Satan, it appears that he is asking the church to cast the brother out of the fellowship, and not permit this individual to meet with them, or have fellowship with them. This becomes more evident as he continues to instruct them on how to treat the sinning brother.

Paul uses the analogy of leaven to describe the potential harm for sin contaminating the church. As leaven (or yeast) is added to bread dough, though just a small amount, it is quickly spread throughout the dough, so that all is affected. The same is true of sin that is not judged. The sin tends to grow and affect the whole church, and bring God's displeasure and judgment on the congregation. This is why it is necessary and important for the church to tackle sin when it occurs. Christians do sin, and will sin, and so the church needs to be ready to face this, and deal with it appropriately. The believers were called upon to purge out the old leaven, putting away the sinning brother from their midst, so that the church could be purified. There is an allusion here to the feast of unleaven bread that took place each year at Passover time. The Jews were required to remove all traces of leaven from their homes for this one week festival, and at the end of the week the Passover meal was celebrated, where the lamb was killed, as a memorial of God's deliverance from their bondage in Egypt. When calling on the Corinthians to purge out the old leaven, Paul adds that Christ 'our Passover' is sacrificed for us. This draws our attention to the fact that a lamb had to be killed, and its blood shed to bring about our deliverance from bondage. Our bondage was not in Egypt, but is to sin. It would be unthinkable to keep leaven in the house during the Passover feast, and it should be unthinkable for any Christian or church to allow sin to contaminate their lives, since Jesus came to deliver us from sin through His sacrifice for us. Paul said that we as Christians are to keep the feast not with old leaven, like malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. The church should be characterized by a love for righteousness, which is shown by a willingness to deal with sin and remove it, and demonstrate the sincerity of our faith in Christ, our sin-bearer. If we do not take care of sin, then we are not being true to our faith, or to our Lord Jesus. If we belong to Jesus, and He died to put away our sin, then we must walk in agreement with His judgment against sin.

Paul explains to the Corinthian believers what should be involved in their discipline. They needed to make sure they did not keep company with fornicators, or the sexually immoral. But this did not mean that they could not have contact with any sinful people in this world, such as the covetous, extortioners, and idolaters. We meet people every day who are sinners, and though we don't like their sin, we still have to deal with them, and hopefully we can show them the way of salvation through Jesus, and rescue their souls. However, if someone is called a brother, is in the fellowship of the church, and they commit such sins, then the believers must not keep company with them. Discipline is intended to make the sinner feel ashamed of their sins, and to bring about repentance and restoration, therefore it is important and necessary for everyone in the church to carry out this discipline. If a true Christian has been put out of the fellowship of the church, and all the Christians refuse to talk to them, or even sit and have a meal with them, then they should feel badly about their sin, and come confessing and forsaking their sin. This is the intention of discipline, but when Christians are sympathizing and enjoying company with believers under discipline, it will defeat the purpose of the discipline, and only aggravate the situation. It is similar to when a father disciplines his child, but the mother takes the side of the child and tries to shield from, or lessen, the father's discipline. The mother might think she is being kind and loving to her child, but she is actually making the child behave more wickedly, by not respecting the father's authority, and not fighting against rebellion in the child. Paul lists several types of sinners that call for this severe level of discipline, that would require the church to have them put out from the fellowship. These include fornicators, covetous people, idolaters, railers (someone who insults), drunkards, and extortioners. These are people who continually practice these sins, and therefore should not be permitted fellowship with believers. This does not mean that if a believer sins on just one occasion, that the church must remove them from the fellowship. If the behavior is continual and characteristic, then the church must act and deal with the person, by calling for repentance and putting them out of their fellowship. The aim of discipline is to bring about repentance. Paul further says that it is important for the church to take judgment within the church. The church does not need to be concerned with judging those in the world, for God will do that. Within the church we all have a responsibility to one another, and we must be prepared to take our stand against sin, if we are to be faithful to the Lord, and experience His blessing in the church. We do not live unto ourselves as Christians, but we are all accountable to our brothers and sisters. One of the

purposes of the church family is to help us cooperate with God in our mutual battle against sin. I hope you have confessed your sins before God, and sought for God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Today, why don't you agree with God about your sin, and ask Jesus to cleanse you and make you new.

*"your glorying is not good. do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" 1Cor 5:6*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we encountered the second problem that Paul addresses to the church at Corinth. The problem was concerning a brother who was a known fornicator among them. Paul insists that they put the man out of the fellowship as a measure of discipline, to bring him to repentance, and spare the church from the contamination of sin. Someone might ask the question, "When is it necessary for the church to discipline someone?"

We learned in our lesson that the church has a responsibility to judge sin in any Christian brother or sister belonging to the fellowship of the church. It is not the church's responsibility to discipline those outside of the church, for God will judge unbelievers. But when, and to what degree, should the church use discipline for a brother or sister in their church who is sinning?

What we must recognize is that not all sin requires the same degree of judgment. Some sin only affects us individually, but some sins hurt others. It was the sin of fornication that called for the church to put the sinner out of fellowship. This is called "excommunication", and was required because of this sin's serious nature. Paul lists several other types of sin that would call for the same judgment upon the sinner, and these include the covetous, idolaters, revilers, drunkards, and extortioners. We don't have time to describe each of these sins, but we should notice that they are all quite public in their nature, and would affect the whole church. Those outside the church would also learn about the sin, and it would bring shame to the church, and upon the name of the Lord. It appears that sin, when it has a larger sphere of impact, calls for a greater measure of action by the church to bring about repentance, and hopefully restoration.

Some churches are rather reluctant to use discipline on its members. This could be because the church does not want to seem to be too harsh, or judgmental, similar to the Corinthians. It might also be that it is hard to point a finger at one sinner in the group, without feeling some sense of guilt and shame about our own sin, for who among us can claim to be without sin? Though we may not feel worthy to cast judgment on others, we must recognize that the church does not belong to us, but it belongs to Christ, and we must therefore appreciate and administer judgment against sin. This is not because we are worthy to bring judgment, but we represent Jesus who is the perfect and righteous judge. The church is acting on Christ's behalf, when it takes a stand against sin. To avoid discipline, and allow sin in the church, will bring God's displeasure, and judgment on the church.

We also need to recognize that the New Testament offers several forms of church discipline, depending on the particular sin. Therefore we need to learn the various levels, or types, of discipline in order to properly apply the correct discipline at the right time. Here is a quick overview of various types of discipline found in the NT, with the reason for the church to administer these forms of discipline.

1. Warn or Admonish: This is used when someone is unruly, disorderly, or disobeying the word of God.
2. Refuse from Fellowship: This is done for those who are causing division, and are not teachable.
3. Shun or Avoid: This is for those who use profane or vain language, which brings confusion or division.
4. Exhort: This is for those who contradict sound doctrine.
5. Confrontation: This is for personal offenses, and only involves others when the believer is unrepentant.
6. Rebuke before all: A church leader who sins, and the sin is confirmed by more than one witness.
7. Put out of the church: The last resort against gross moral sin that leads to public scandal.

This is just a brief overview of various forms of discipline found in the New Testament, but will help us to understand that discipline does not always call for the same level of severe judgment, but can often be handled by a simple confrontation, or perhaps a word of exhortation. Discipline is not an easy thing for people to do, especially when we know that we ourselves are just sinners saved by God's grace. However, if we want to walk in fellowship with our Lord, we must be prepared to honor His holy name, and defend the cause of righteousness, by fighting against sin in the church. The church is not a collection of individuals that live in isolation to one another. Each person in the fellowship is accountable to the others to live in holiness. We are most definitely our brother's keeper, and therefore must be prepared to deal with sins not only in our own lives, but in the lives of those we are in fellowship with. Discipline by the church, should be prayerfully overseen by the elders of the church, but should involve all in the church fellowship, so that everyone cooperates with the discipline. If discipline is not a collective effort, then it will likely fail to bring about the desired repentance.

*"For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them." 1Samuel 3:13*

LESSON 139  
**Justice in the Church**  
ICORINTHIANS 6

In our last lesson we learned about the need to discipline a brother in the fellowship who was a fornicator. Today we shall deal with another problem in the church at Corinth, concerning one brother taking another brother to court to settle a legal dispute. The church is to handle its' affairs internally, and Christians should be willing to suffer wrong from a brother, to preserve peace, unity, and a godly testimony for the church.

Paul has been dealing with some problems that had arisen among the believers in Corinth, and now he tackles the third problem in the list, namely the going to secular court to decide a matter between two brothers. The Christians should have recognized the problem of their going before unbelievers, rather than settling the matter with Christians alone. Paul points out that Christians will judge the world. He asks them rhetorically that, if they will judge the world, should they not be able to make judgments about small matters in the church? He also points out to the Corinthians that they will one day judge angels, and so therefore how much more the things of this life. Paul even says the one who is least esteemed among them should be called upon to make judgment. For one brother to take another to law courts before unbelievers was a denial of their dignified position as God's children, and judges of the world. The Christian has been shown the justice of God in the gospel, and this knowledge alone should help the believer have discernment and understanding about judgments that honor and please the Lord. But more than just a knowledge of God's ways, the Christians also possessed the indwelling Spirit of God, from whom they could find spiritual wisdom and guidance about making righteous judgments. Going before the unbelievers to settle their legal matters reveals a fault among the believers. They should have made the appeals to the only judge worthy to offer true justice, and not the world, who were alienated to God's justice, and had not yielded themselves to God's authority. Why would they, why would we, appeal to those who refuse God's grace, mercy and justice to settle our problems of justice? This makes no sense. Paul further points out that it would have been better to suffer wrong from a brother than to take him before unbelievers and expose disunity among believers. Taking our problems before unbelievers, will not help them see the change that Christ has made in our lives. The believer should be ready to forgive, to share, show kindness, forbearance and love. Thus taking a brother to the courts of law shows that the love of Christ is not working in the heart of such a brother. Now having said this, that does not mean that we should just allow a brother to take advantage, and defraud his fellow believers. In our last lesson we learned that the covetous, and extortioners were to be disciplined. The point Paul is making in this chapter had to do with how and where we settle our matters of justice. Christians should not be pleased to see sin in a brother or sister in the church, and want to help them to put away sin. Thus they might confront them, or call for further discipline of a sinning brother. The Christian acts this way in order to help fight sin, and his heart's motive is not simply to win his personal case, but to see the Lord honored. When believers quarrel, become selfish, and think more about their own welfare than the welfare of their fellow believers, they are not acting with the mind of Christ, and prove themselves to be immature in faith. In the world we expect people to defend themselves, and to use courts and police to win their case, with no sense of love or compassion for their opponents. The Christian, however, is to be marked by love at all times, and this should especially be seen in their treatment of fellow believers.

Paul challenges the Corinthians sinful attitude by asking, "Don't you realize that those who practice evil will not inherit the kingdom of God?" He wants the Corinthians to understand that fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, or extortioners would not inherit God's kingdom. He explains that the Corinthians at one time were characterized by these sins, but Christ had washed them, sanctified them, and justified them through the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God. Since Christians have been justified by God, they have liberty, but not everything was helpful. The believer should not allow the passions of his flesh to control him. We are to master our desires, so that they serve our interests in godliness, and not sin. While meat is for the belly, and the belly for meat, both will eventually be destroyed. The body was not designed for fornication, but it was made for the Lord. The Lord was also given a body, and God raised up His body, as he will also do for us one day. We learn here that the body and its' desires can certainly lead us towards sin, and so we need to have control over these through the power of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies belong to Christ, and should not be joined with a harlot. When someone has sex with a harlot they have become one flesh with the harlot, and when someone belongs to Christ, he has become one spirit with Christ. There can be no mixing of sinful flesh with Christ's spirit. The believers are to flee from fornication, for this sin is against His body. Christ has purchased our bodies for Himself, and so we must use our bodies to glorify God. Paul here says that we are not our own. By this he means that we are not free to do with our bodies whatever we please. If someone loans me their car to use, they would expect me to care for their car, and not abuse it by driving too fast, or damaging the vehicle. The same should be understood by the believers body belonging to the Lord. Our bodies are on loan, and we should treat them with respect, and use them as God intended, and not according to man's perverse and sinful ways.

In this chapter we have learned that the Christian must be willing at times to endure wrong from a brother, to maintain peace and unity among brethren. Not that a Christian should not care about justice, but he is concerned about his brother's welfare as much as he is his own welfare. Then we learned that Christians must be guarded against letting the desires of the flesh take control over our bodies, and lead us into sinful behavior. So not only

should a Christian be willing to suffer damage or loss from a fellow Christian to maintain peace, but he also should be willing to deny the flesh, so that he honors God in His body. Have you been using your body to bring glory to God, or do you use your body to satisfy all your desires? Give your heart and life to Christ, so that He may rule over you, and exchange your sinful desires for His righteousness and holiness.

*"For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." 1Cor 6:20*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we saw that Christians should not take their legal battles before ungodly judges, because one day they will judge the world and angels. The Christian has liberties in Christ, but it is not always helpful to use those liberties; and since Christ has purchased us, we should glorify God, and not please our own desires. Someone might ask the question, "What is the sin of fornication"?

In today's lesson we found Paul speaking against the sin of fornication, and though we may have some ideas about what the bible means by fornication, let's take a closer look at this to discover what the bible means, and what it says also about other sins similar to this. We want to be careful to avoid these sins so that we may honor the Lord in our bodies.

Fornication is the sin we dealt with in our former lesson, and there we learned that it involved a man who was having sexual relations with his Father's wife. The word translated as fornication comes from the Greek word "Porneia", from which we get the word "pornography". The meaning of this word means illicit sexual intercourse outside of the covenant of marriage, and therefore would include adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, or bestiality. God intended sexual intercourse to be enjoyed between a husband and wife, and so all other intercourse that has not been sanctioned by the covenant of marriage is a perversion of God's plan.

Fornication is very common, and many accept it as just a normal way to live, but let's be clear that God says it is sin. In Hebrews 13:4 God says that adulterers and fornicators will be judged. The word is used over 20 times in the New Testament, and is frequently associated with idolatry. But fornication, though associated with idolatry, has other reasons why it is such a terrible sin in God's sight. In our chapter today we see why fornication is such a despicable sin which God hates. The reason that fornication is unacceptable for Christians, is because our bodies were given to us to bring glory to God. The body belongs to the Lord, and is not just for fulfilling our personal and private pleasures. It is very important to understand this, because so much in our culture is leading us in the opposite direction, and suggesting that we should maximize our pleasure, and seek anything that makes us feel good. This is a selfish way to live, and the results of this kind of approach to life, can be seen in the devastating impact it has on society. With a pleasuring seeking population, it is not surprising that fornication, adultery, divorce, loneliness and worship of entertainment have taken over our society. Our bodies should be holy and dedicated to the Lord for His purposes. This means we will not worship our personal pleasure and comfort, but will make sacrifices that cost us, and may bring pain, suffering into our lives, as we deny ourselves and take up our cross. It is so easy for the Christian to fall into the trap of the world's philosophy of living a life for pleasure. Though many Christians will not go to the extent of fornication, for that is obviously sinful, yet they will find nothing wrong with living in luxury, taking expensive holidays, pampering their flesh with every thing their heart desires, spending their hours feeding upon entertainment and recreation. All this seems harmless enough, but when it ignores the needs of others, and steals away our time from serving the body of Christ, or sharing the gospel, or learning the bible, then it is certainly taking us down the path of fruitless living, if not altogether sinful self-indulgence.

Let's define some biblical terms clearly, so we do not misapply them.

- A. Fornication: Is illicit sexual intercourse outside the bonds of marriage.
- B. Adultery: is sexual intercourse of a married person with someone other than their marriage partner.
- C. Effeminate: or 'Sodomites', refers to a person who offers themselves for homosexual perversion.
- D. Homosexual: Men who have sexual relations with men.
- E. Lesbianism: Women who have sexual relations with women.
- F. Revilers: A person who uses abusive speech to insult, malign or accuse.
- G. Extortioner: Someone who uses their power or position to steal from others.

All these sins are characteristic of ungodly people who do not know the Lord, and should not be found among Christians. When they do occur in the church, the church is obligated to judge these sins. We should take notice of the fact that the sins mentioned in this chapter are associated with the lust for sexual satisfaction, the lust for pleasure, and the lust for money. As Christians therefore it is so important for us to have a correct biblical view of sex, pleasure and money. All of these are gifts of God to help us and bless us when used as God intended, but due to our fallen sinful nature, we so often destroy and pervert what God intended for our good.

*"but fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints."*  
Ephesians 5:3

LESSON 140  
**Marriage Issues**  
ICORINTHIANS 7

In our last lesson we dealt with a problem in the church where Christian brothers were seeking justice from outside of the church, and Christ's authority, by going to courts of law. In today's lesson Paul now tackles some questions that had come to him from the Corinthians concerning marriage issues.

In this chapter Paul is not dealing with particular problems in the church, but addressing questions the Corinthians sent to him in a letter. The questions center around Christians and marriage. Paul deals with a number of scenarios, to provide the Christians with God's commands and concessions regarding the covenant of marriage.

We should begin this study by stating that God is for marriage, and it was God who instituted marriage in the garden of Eden. The bible tells us that marriage is honorable, and the marriage bed undefiled. Since God has instituted and sanctioned marriage as a holy covenant between a man and a woman, then we should also have the highest respect and appreciation for this provision of God for man's well-being, and portrait of His divine love.

Though marriage is a gift from God, sin has come into the world and perverted God's design, causing all sorts of problems for people, and this is very evident when it comes to marriage, divorce, and remarriage. As Paul will talk to several issues, we shall go through and summarize what the Apostle teaches here. He addresses several different groups of people, including all Christians, the unmarried or widows, wives, husbands, those married to an unbeliever, those who have entered into an agreement to marry, and those who have not. He addresses both virgins and widows. To each of these groups Paul has instruction for how Christians must behave to honor marriage, and make choices about marriage that will honor the Lord.

1. To all Christians he says that it is good for the men not to touch a woman, meaning men must avoid having sexual relations with women outside of marriage. He says every man and every woman should have their own spouse, to prevent fornication, that is sex outside of the marriage covenant. He also says that Christian men and women are to provide affection and love to their marriage partners, and only abstain from having sex if they agree for a time of dedication to prayer or spiritual devotion, but only for a short time to prevent temptation.
2. To those who are unmarried or widowed they should try to remain single to devote themselves to the Lord, but if they find the desire for marriage overpowering then they should marry rather than burn with passion.
3. Christian wives are not to leave their husbands, and if for some reason she feels she has to leave him, she is to remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. Perhaps she is being abused and thus cannot stay with the man.
4. Christian husbands are not permitted to divorce their wives.
5. If a Christian happens to be married to an unbeliever, they should honor their marriage, and try to make it work. Only if the unbeliever decides to end the marriage are they freed from the bonds of their marriage.
6. When a person becomes a Christian, whether free or a slave, single or married, they should not seek to change their status in life, and accept their lot, and serve God as best they can. This does not mean that the new believer cannot seek a change if that change helps to serve and glorify God. The thought here is to be content with what God has provided us in life, rather than show discontent by running after what we think is better for us.
7. The person who is bound in a covenant or engagement should not seek to get out of their engagement, and those who are not engaged need not seek after a wife, but if they do find a wife and marry they have not sinned.
8. To virgins Paul advises that they remain unmarried, but if they find it too difficult to control their natural passions, then they should go ahead and get married.
9. Lastly widows are granted permission to remarry if they desire to, but only to a Christian. However, Paul advises against marriage for widows because of the difficulties they will experience if they marry.

We cannot speak about every possible scenario that people find themselves in, but if we look carefully at the overriding principles here, we shall gain wisdom and understanding, and know what to do to please the Lord. When dealing with marriage we must all remember that it is a sacred covenant before God, and is not to be treated lightly. Some Christians can be overly harsh on people who have been hurt by a failed marriage, and put them under a yoke that God never intended. Let's remember that some people have experienced deep pain in their lives through broken relationships, marriages, and families, and so we should show compassion, understanding and acceptance.

In studying this important passage in our New Testament we should take notice that when it comes to marriage issues God sets down his commandments, but he also provides concessions. This means that we have liberty and latitude when it comes to choices we may make as Christians about marriage, divorce, or remarriage. There is a preferred path set before us, but due to our own physical or spiritual condition we are also given alternative choices that will help us to honor the Lord morally, and with fidelity in our relationship to the Lord and others. We can remain unmarried, but to prevent fornication we have liberty to marry. Sexual intimacy is a right of marriage, but abstinence is permitted to spend time in prayer or fasting. A Christian may choose the path of singlehood, but should marry if they find it too difficult to control their passions. A Christian must adhere to their marriage covenant, but if their non-Christian partner chooses to leave, they are freed from the marriage, giving allowance for remarriage. Singles may choose to dedicate their love and time to the Lord, but if they decide to marry they are not sinning. And widows should try to live contently, but if they want to marry in the Lord they are free to do so. We see that the Lord is very

gracious to His children, helping them to live the best they can in whatever circumstances they are in, but also offering acceptable alternatives to accommodate their physical and spiritual condition. God designed marriage for procreation, pleasure, provision, partnership and purity. Let us thank Him for His wonderful care and kindness.

*"But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches." 1Cor 7:17*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

Today we studied what the bible teaches about various issues related to Christian marriage, divorce and remarriage. We learned that while God has a better plan for each of our lives, He will graciously make concessions according our physical and spiritual conditions as His children. Someone might ask the question, "How can I know if God wants me to be single or get married"?

So many Christians struggle with decisions about remaining single or getting married. I think most people would like to marry, if they could find a suitable partner, but often fears, or unrealistic expectations prevent people from marriage. Certainly God has designed us all in such a way that we are geared towards marriage. Marriage offers an intimacy, partnership, and companionship that uniquely answers to the needs of both men and women. Remember when God created Adam in the garden of Eden, God said, "It is not good for man to be alone". That is God's estimate of the incompleteness of man without a helpmate. So God created Eve and brought her to the man. The woman's creation is to accommodate a need in humanity for companionship, and so it not surprising that God has placed within her a strong instinctive desire for marriage and motherhood. So with all this in mind, it would seem that marriage should be the natural choice for all Christians. In the Jewish culture it was expected that everyone would marry by a certain age; and if they did not they were treated poorly, and not respected. The Jewish mindset was that everyone needed to find a marriage partner in order to fulfill God's command to be fruitful and multiply. This does seem to fit well with God's design, and certainly seems better then the conditions in the world today. Today we see that marriage is often dishonored, and society is decaying because of the widespread sin of fornication. People have multiple sex partners, and some live together with a partner with no commitment or covenant of marriage. It appears in our sin-sick world that people selfishly want the personal pleasures of sex, but not the sacrifices and commitment that come with marriage. We can be certain that God does not approve of this wholesale life of self-indulgence and idolatry. So, again, we must conclude that marriage is the answer that leads us to follow the will of God, while keeping us from sin. However, it is interesting to notice in the chapter we have studied today, that the merits of being single as a Christian are brought forward. The bible teaches us that Christians who are single when they become a Christian are not required to marry, and are in fact encouraged to remain single, if that singleness can make them more effective and devoted to serve God. It is important to understand that the choice for remaining single is for the kingdom of God, and not just a personal preference, to avoid the pitfalls and sacrifices that marriage would require. A person can choose to be single for very selfish reasons, and that certainly does not bring glory to God. Being single for God should always be a decision based on the higher and greater calling to devote oneself to the service of God. Singleness offers some advantage in serving God in a dedicated way, for it frees from the distractions and responsibilities that go along with marriage. This certainly does not mean that people are less able or effective to serve God when they marry, but they service will have some limitations due to their care for their marriage and family. In fact marriage for many Christians affords them unique and special ways to serve, and be an example, that singles could not.

What we have learned from our chapter today, is that God gives each of His children liberty and latitude to make decisions about marriage and singleness that fits best with their physical and spiritual makeup. A person with strong physical needs for intimacy should look for a marriage partner that is well suited to themselves. A person with great desires to serve the Lord, and finds themselves able to live content without a marriage partner, and can manage their passions without falling prey to fornication, may choose the single life to help advance God's kingdom. For those Christians who would like to marry, and are searching for their life partner, there are some important things to consider when choosing whom they will marry.

1. A Christian is only permitted to marry a Christian.
2. Physical attraction should not be the main interest, for beauty fades in time.
3. Looking at spiritual maturity is far more important then looking at financial status.
4. Spiritual compatibility should be more important then academic or intellectual compatibility.
5. Marriage involves sharing, giving, sacrifice, refining character, and much compromise. Expect personal change and growth, and do not hold unrealistic expectations from your marriage partner.

One reason that some people do not get married is because their expectations are so high that no one could possible reach them. We should ask ourselves, 'do I offer more to my married partner, then they offer to me?' Love and marriage are a tremendous gift from God, but remember you are marrying just another sinner like yourself.

*"He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD." Proverbs 18:22*

LESSON 141  
**Liberty with Limitation**  
ICORINTHIANS 8

In our last lesson we talked about marriage issues, and that God sets forth biblical commands to honor and fulfill the covenant of marriage, and also provides concessions to accommodate the physical and spiritual condition of His children. Today we are moving onto a new topic, that of 'Christian liberty'. We shall learn that while Christians have liberty in Christ, our liberty should be exercised with care and limitations so as not to stumble a weak brother.

Paul now speaks to the Corinthians about the particular issue of eating things offered to idols, and the impact this might have on a weaker brother. In the time Paul was writing, it was common for food to be offered to pagan gods in temples as part of their worship. This food was then often sold in the market place. Some Christians who realized this food had been offered to idols understood that the idol was nothing, and therefore felt at liberty to buy and eat this food. This believer was not seeking to show any agreement with idolatry, but simply understood that the food was normal food like any other. This was indeed a Christian liberty, for idols were nothing but the inventions of men. These idols became a tool for Satan to deceive and control men, but the Christian was directed by the Holy Spirit, and the food offered to an idol was just regular food to be eaten and enjoyed. The problem is that for some Christians this appeared to be an association with idolatry. The Christian with a conscience about eating food offered to idols is called a weak brother. He is weak because he has not yet grasped his liberty in Christ, and that idols are nothing, and therefore the food offered to the idol is not any better or worse than food that had not been offered to idols. Now we might suppose the weak brother should just be expected to learn, and accept the liberties of mature Christians, but that is not what the scripture here indicates. It is not the weak brother's responsibility to give way and understanding to the Christian with liberty, but it is the other way around. The Christian who knows his liberty, is to be careful and sensitive not to offend the conscience of a weak brother. Paul says in this chapter that knowledge tends towards pride, but love builds up. The point is that a mature Christian who knows their liberty, should be guided by Christ's love in the choices he makes, considering how it might impact other believers. Paul recognizes that the problem with using liberties without regard to others, is due to pride. When a Christian does not care if his actions might stumble a brother, then he is not acting in love, and therefore not pleasing to Christ. It is very important that Christians take into account the lack of knowledge in fellow believers. When we witness Christians arguing, it seems that this could often be avoided, if Christians follow this principle of understanding. We should recognize that not all Christians will see and understand the same thing, because not all have had the time, or training, to come to the same conclusions about all that the bible teaches. In grace we need to leave room for people to learn the word, and we must also be humble enough to admit that perhaps our understanding, and convictions, may need some correction. Surely we have not advanced so far in our faith that we no longer need to be taught. If we haven't got all the answers yet, then we should be willing to allow others to have more time to discover the answers to things that have become well settled in our own minds. It takes patience and grace, but these characteristics should mark every follower of Jesus.

While we think about Christian liberty as it relates to food, we should notice and learn that dietary practices have no spiritual significance, for whether we eat certain foods or not, we are no better or worse spiritually speaking. The Jews were given many dietary restrictions under the Law, but the Christian has not been placed under these same dietary restrictions, because what we eat does not contribute to our spirituality or detract from it. A Christian should be wise though to eat healthy, and avoid excesses.

Another principle we need to learn from this chapter is that, 'what is allowable for one brother, may not be allowable to another brother'. This might not seem to make sense, but God judges us according to our knowledge and conscience. For instance if a man becomes a Christian who formerly enjoyed drinking alcohol and getting drunk, he will likely associate alcohol with a sinful life. If he chooses now as a Christian to drink alcohol he would be going against his conscience, which tells him this is sinful choice for him. On the other hand another Christian has not had any problem with using alcohol, and feels a liberty to enjoy a glass of wine with dinner on occasion. Now the one brother cannot take alcohol because for him his conscience tells him that it is sinful, but the other brother knows that a little wine is permissible, and will not harm him. His conscience is free of any guilt. In this case each man must follow his conscience, for there is no law written down in the bible that forbids a man to have a drink of alcohol, but the bible certainly does warn against the misuse of alcohol, and drunkenness is sinful. What we learned today though, teaches us that if the brother who has liberty to take alcohol should stumble his brother who cannot take alcohol, then he is wrong, and should give up his liberty to prevent offending the weak brother.

There are many ways we could apply this chapter to the choices that we as Christians make, including our choices about the music we listen to, the movies we watch, the clothes we wear, and how we spend money. In all of these areas Christians will make various choices, and although scripture does provide us with some principles and guidelines, it may not address these matters in a direct way. Some Christians will set some standards about the types of movies they will watch, or allow their children to view, while others might have a different set of standards based on their experience and how and what they perceive is pleasing to the Lord. Some Christians may decide to not watch movies at all, because they feel that it is not honoring to the Lord. While being guided by principles of holiness taught in the bible, Christians also need to be careful and sensitive to not expect all other believers to see and share the same convictions on things that are not clearly taught in scripture, and so should give grace and understanding. What



everyone of us should know, and be convicted about is our sin, and need for salvation through Jesus Christ. Why not trust in Jesus as your Savior today, and find the freedom that comes through Him.

*"But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ." 1Cor 8:12*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we learned about our Christian liberty that needs to be constrained and limited so as not to offend a weak brother. We are responsible to make sure that our Christian conduct does not harm the conscience of our fellow believers. Someone might ask the question, "When should I be concerned about another believers conscience"?

While we recognize that we all need to be sensitive to not allow our own liberty to cause offense to other believers, we might just be wondering when and how the conscience of others is bothered by our conduct. We might go about doing something, that we feel very comfortable doing, and feel liberty, and we cannot even imagine someone taking offense by what we allow. On the other hand we might partake in some activity that we know will cause some believers to stumble.

Clearly it is impossible to answer to everyone's conscience. Sometimes we must first encounter the offense before we are even aware that others are bothered by our actions. Now if someone tells us that our behavior is offensive and we are aware that a brother or sister might be hurt, then we need to sort out if the matter is clear in scripture, or it is a matter of Christian conscience. If the matter is clear in scripture, then we can follow scripture, and kindly point out to those offended that scripture is clear, and no offense need be taken.

I had someone stay with me some years ago, while he was moving from one home to another, and needed a place to sleep during the transition for about one month. I was glad to offer the help, but when he invited his girlfriend to stay for the weekend, I had to inform him that she would not be welcome to also stay because they were not married. He was greatly offended by my actions. He was engaged to the girl, and saw nothing at all wrong with having sexual relations to her prior to their marriage. He challenged me that the bible did not make such restrictions. I showed him the plain teaching of scripture, and said that it was sin, and that I could not allow it in my home. He was offended alright, but I was not prepared to give way, for I knew that scripture plainly taught that fornication was wrong. In a case like this a believer is not obligated to answer the conscience of someone who willfully defies God's word. However if a brother or sister in Christ has a sensitive conscience about issues that might be debatable, then we should be careful not to offend the conscience of others.

Lets think of some issues that Christians might be sensitive about, and take offense at, when others feel greater liberty. When choosing to watch TV, or a movie, many people would have little conscience about watching shows that feature violence, hatred, murder, immorality, rudeness, or disrespect. They think it is just a show, and therefore it is quite harmless. Other Christians maybe very sensitive about what they participate in for entertainment, and would not watch shows that feature sin. This might not be so much a matter of debatable concerns, for scripture does call us to holy living. It might just be a matter of immaturity in Christ, that allows a Christian to think all their sinful entertainment is harmless. Some believers might think it is acceptable to use tobacco, or drink alcohol in moderation, while others would think this is not good for a Christian. Some Christians might feel it okay to engage in the military and fight for their country, killing others in war if necessary, but some other Christians would stay away from the military altogether to avoid the potential of having to go into battle and shoot someone. These areas that I am talking about are matters of individual conscience, for they are not clearly spelled out for us in the bible. We can certainly use principles from the bible to help guide us in these, and other areas of conscience, to make wise choices and avoid giving offense. Perhaps we should ask the question before we choose to do something, 'will this potentially cause offense?' or 'would the Lord be happy with me, and would this be the best choice I could make?' Sometimes we choose what we think is okay, and stretch our liberties to the fullest measure, rather than ask ourselves will this help others, and please the Lord?

There are many things that can offend, and it varies greatly from culture to culture. In one culture it would be very offensive, for instance, to shake with the left hand, whereas in another culture it makes no difference which hand you shake with. In one culture it might be very normal for people to take wine with their meal, but in another culture the Christians associate alcohol use with sin. We do not need to be governed by cultural traditions, as much as by what God has said in His word, but we should always be aware of anything that could potentially offend someone, or harm them spiritually by what we allow, or how we behave. When Paul is writing to the Galatians and list the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control, he adds that against these there is no law. This teaches us that good behavior is something that everyone can appreciate and approve of, so let's let these things govern our conduct, and not things which would be considered questionable, and then we shall avoid hurting others through offense.

*"be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another." Rom 12:10*

LESSON 142  
**Denying Liberty**  
ICORINTHIANS 9

In our last lesson we learned that Christian liberty should be limited when another Christian could be offended due to a weak conscience. Today we are tackling the same subject of Christian liberty, where Paul will use his own example of denying himself certain liberties for the sake of the gospel.

Paul uses his own example as an apostle of Jesus Christ, having denied himself certain liberties he could have enjoyed, but choose not to so that he would not hinder the gospel of Christ. Paul will mention some of the liberties he had as an apostle, but before mentioning these liberties, he first asserts his credentials as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Here we get our first glimpse into another problem that Paul is dealing with in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians. It seems some in the church were calling into question Paul's apostleship, but Paul goes on the defense, and says that the Corinthians themselves were the seal of his apostleship, for they had come to faith in Christ through his ministry.

After asserting his apostleship Paul moves on to talk about the liberties he had as an apostle. He asks rhetorically, "Have we not power to eat and drink? He is asking whether it was right for him to have his basic need for food and drink supplied to him from his gospel work? Clearly this was a liberty that he and all servants of God are permitted. Everyone who labors should receive his wages, or at least something to maintain his basic need for food and drink. While this was a liberty that Paul could take advantage of, we shall see that Paul chooses not to exercise this liberty, at least with the Corinthians, because he feared that some would accuse him of using religion for his own financial profit.

Paul next speaks of his liberty to lead about a wife like the other apostles. This statement makes it rather clear that Paul was a bachelor, and choose to be for the sake of the gospel. He knew that it would not be easy for him to carry out his gospel mission if he had to be concerned about caring for a wife. It would also put her at risk of persecutions and hardships, and so perhaps he thought it best to give up this liberty. This was his personal choice, and not imposed upon him. He also explains that he and Barnabas as workers for God, could have given up their secular work, and lived completely from the money sent to support the gospel. Again this was a liberty that Paul and Barnabas denied for themselves, and choose rather to work with their own hands to support themselves. To emphasize that their financial support was indeed a Christian liberty, Paul will use several illustrations, and biblical examples, to prove his point, that Christian workers have every right to receive financial reward for their service. He illustrates using warfare, agriculture, and shepherding. Those who go to war do not pay their own expenses. Those who plant a vineyard, enjoy the fruit of it, and those who tend sheep or cattle drink of their milk. This simple logic is employed to show how any particular occupation comes with it's natural rewards from the work rendered. As a Christian labors and brings God's rich blessing upon others, the people who gain the blessings are often more than willing to contribute to the welfare of those whom God used to bless them. Paul also uses scripture to back up his point, making reference to a command from Deuteronomy about not muzzling the ox as it treads grain. This provision for the ox to eat while working, was not just written because God cares about oxen, but it was to teach us a principle that those who work ought to be allowed to enjoy the fruit of their labors. He applies this to Christian workers who had a right to be supported through their gospel work. Others Christian workers had been supported by the Corinthians, so Paul says that they too should have had the same right. However Paul then states that they did not exercise this liberty, and in fact refused this liberty, because he was aware that some in Corinth were opposing him and his apostleship. He did not want to give any reason for his opponents to accuse him of using the Lord's work for his own gain, and therefore would not take, or ask, anything from the Christians he ministered to at Corinth. He was glad to preach the gospel without charge, for he wanted to be free to preach the gospel to all, and save as many as possible. He said he had become all things to all men, in order to save some. Paul made himself as adaptable as possible without sinning or violating conscience, in order to fit in with either gentiles, Jews, those who did not live by the Law, or those with a weak conscience.

Now Paul uses further illustrations to explain his Christian attitude in serving the Lord. He says he was like a runner in a race, and that every Christian should run to win the prize. He says in order to win the race the athlete has to be temperate in all things, and they do this to win a corruptible crown. Athletes train their bodies, but they must also be careful about their eating habits, and all their activities that could affect their ability to run. The Christian is aiming at an eternal reward, and must also be careful in everything they do, so that they can finish the race and gain the prize. He also uses the illustration of fighting. A boxer does not waste his punches by swinging in the air. The Christian should want all of his efforts to be as effective as possible, not wasting his effort or time. Thus the Christian will be careful not do anything that hinders his gospel witness before others, lest he unintentionally turn people away from the gospel. Just as an athlete must train his body diligently, so Paul says he also trains himself to keep his body in subjection. While we as Christians have liberties to feed our bodies, and answer to the desires of the body, we must be careful that our indulgences, and liberties are not a stumbling block to others. Our main goal in life should be to show how the gospel transformed us. We therefore should be willing to give up liberties; if in doing so, it helps the advance the gospel. Paul was very careful to discipline himself, for he said he did not want to end up being a castaway. What he means by this, is that if he was not careful to control his own desires, taking advantage of his liberties, he may fail to be an effective servant for Christ, with a weak testimony, and diminished reward. There is

great danger in Christian service of becoming disqualified by allowing too much of self, and not enough of Christ to be promoted. Are your choices in life promoting yourself, or are they promoting Jesus and His glory?

*"For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more." 1Cor 9:19*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we have learned about Paul giving up some of his liberties in order to advance the gospel. While he was free to enjoy a wife, or the wages of his work, he did not want to appear to be taking advantage of the gospel for his own financial benefit. Someone might ask the question, "Is it okay to pay wages to a Christian worker?"

In today's chapter we heard Paul argue for the right of Christian workers to enjoy the benefits of their labor, by receiving compensation from the Christians they serve. He said that those who labor for the gospel should live by the gospel. The example is given from the old testament priesthood where the priest would eat from the offerings that were brought to the temple. From this passage it appears that many churches have adopted a policy of paying their staff members. The "Pastor" of the church is paid an agreed upon salary from the offerings that are collected. In order to pay the wages of the pastor the congregation has to be large enough so that the collected offerings will sustain his salary. The Pastor can become preoccupied with attracting as many people as possible to church. If he is not careful, he might lose sight of spiritual goals, while trying to establish his career and ministry. This tendency in the modern church is a far stretch from what Paul was talking about in this chapter of Corinthians. He says that he would rather not receive any financial help from the Corinthians, because that potentially could call into question his motives, and effectiveness, in the gospel. How often have you heard pastors, or church leaders, refusing financial rewards? Unfortunately today's practice in the church, has made pastoral care a job, rather than a calling from God, preaching has become a business rather than a ministry, healing and prosperity are products to be sold, and the preacher is worshipped rather than God. This is what happens when men make religion into a money making racket.

When Peter wrote to church leadership in 1Peter 5, he said that they should do their work willingly and not for any financial reward they might receive. The motivation of the Christian worker, should always be to answer God's call, and be faithful in the ministry to which God has called him. He should have no expectation of wages, knowing that God can supply him through the gifts of the Lord's people, as the Holy Spirit moves them to share in his ministry. Workers do not need to solicit help to support their work, for if God calls them to work He will supply all their needs. Scripture does not teach that a wage should be offered to anyone serving in the church. We do not find this anywhere in the new testament; although we do find that those laboring for the gospel did receive gifts from the Lord's people to assist them in their work. The church should be aware of those who are willingly labor among them, and share with their needs as the Holy Spirit directs them. If the church did this, and the workers lived by faith, trusting in the Lord alone for their support, then we would avoid the greed and corruption that plagues the church. Men love money, and the bible says the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. When someone serves God from a sincere heart, and without expectation of financial reward, they demonstrate a genuine call to serve. Whether they receive financial help or not, is not important to them. What matters is just doing whatever the Lord has called them to do. The church is to recognize, and honor, those who labor sincerely and faithfully. When writing to Timothy, Paul said that elders who rule well and labor in word and doctrine were worthy of double honor. This means that it is the church's responsibility to give assistance to those who labor in the church for the spiritual benefit of the church. You might argue though, that since this is the case, why not just agree on a salary, and pay the man for his religious service. This is precisely what most churches have done, but without scriptural support, and it has wreaked havoc in the church. This has attracted greedy men, whose heart is only seeking after money, and not the spiritual care of souls. The church must be guarded against men who are greedy for gain. One of the qualification for a church leader is that they are not to be greedy for money. So we see that the servant of God works for God, and trusts in God for his support, asking nothing from the church, or anyone else. If his call is from God then he needs will be supplied, for God will direct his people to share with the needs of His servants. No contracts, no salary, no manipulating or soliciting for support, just trust in the living God. This is how God's work is to be supported. Christians may fail to be responsible to those who labor, but God will never fail those who faithful serve Him. Those who serve God for money have received their full reward already, since their heart was not in it for the glory of God, but for personal gain. Those who pay salaries for spiritual work, are making a grave error, for they change God's work into a job, and attract men who are looking for money. Those who receive a salary for their service for God also make a grave error, for even if they are sincere, others will call into question their motives, because they are working for a stipulated salary. If they completely cast themselves in faith upon the Lord, then they will know if the Lord has indeed called them, and is pleased with their work, through the support they receive.

*"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve." 1Peter 5:2*

LESSON 143  
**Fleeing From Idolatry**  
1 CORINTHIANS 10

In our last lesson we saw the example of Paul denying his Christian liberty to receive financial support for his gospel work. He did this to prevent any accusations against him. He did not want anything in his own life to be a hindrance to the gospel. In today's lesson Paul will warn the Corinthians of the dangers of becoming self-indulgent, and testing the Lord through association with idolatry.

Our last lesson ended with Paul speaking about how carefully he disciplined himself in his own Christian life, so that he did not take advantage of legitimate liberties. Such liberties may have given opportunity to fleshly lusts, that would not only lead to sin, but would rob him of a godly testimony, and future reward at the judgment seat of Christ. He called this being rejected, or disqualified. In this chapter he will use the illustration of the Israelites when they came out of Egypt. Though the Israelites were abundantly blessed by God, they suffered God's judgments because of their ungodly lusts and idolatry.

Paul informs the Corinthians about the ancient Jews, in case they were not aware. He said God had provided them guidance and protection by His presence, a miraculous deliverance from their enemies, leadership through Moses, and the miraculous provision of food and drink to sustain life. Christ is identified here as their source of water and life. Though God had provided for, guided, protected, and lead the Jews, they lusted for evil things, were idolaters, committed fornication, challenged God's appointed leader, and complained and murmured against Moses and God. For their rebellion God judged them, and many of them perished in the wilderness. Israel's privileges, and their sins were written down to warn and admonish future generations, including all Christians. As we consider how frequently Israel proved unfaithful and rebellious, it serves to remind us that we should not become proud of our position in Christ, lest we also fall into similar temptations and sins. We all face various temptations to sin, but God knows all about the temptations we face, and provides a way of escape from the temptation. God does this because he loves us, and does not wish to judge us. Therefore Paul warns the Corinthians, as well as every Christian to flee away from idolatry. Here we should understand idolatry includes more than just worshipping a golden calf, as the Israelites did in the wilderness. Idolatry is also associated with the lusts of the flesh that lead them to lust for food, drink, and sex. They were not satisfied with what God had provided for them. God has been gracious to forgive our sins, when we trusted in Jesus as our Savior, and therefore He will not look lightly upon blatant indulgences of the flesh, which suggest that our sins are more precious to us than God's Son, who gave his life to cleanse us from sin. Such behavior suggests that our gratification is more important to us than God is, and that is what makes it idolatry.

Having warned Christians to flee from idolatry, Paul now shows the horrible inconsistency of participating in idolatry, while also seeking to participate in Christian fellowship. Paul expects the Corinthians to make wise judgments about this. He asks them rhetorically about the communion enjoyed by Christians, when taking bread and wine at the Lord's Supper. Both the bread and wine speak of the common relationship, and blessings, that believers find in Christ. In the Old Testament the priest, and sometimes the person making an offering, would also eat of the offering, thus showing their fellowship (communion) with God. We can think of this partaking of the sacrifice, as being in agreement with God about our need for a sacrifice to remove sin. Eating the offering was not simply to gratify a person's need for food, but to associate with God's judgment against what is evil. Idols were nothing, just images created by men, and any food offered to idols was also nothing. Therefore it might seem harmless for a Christian to eat food offered to idols. However Paul is now going to point out that if we eat things offered to idols, it may appear to others that we are having fellowship with those idols. We know in our own conscience that the idol is nothing, but others may actually think we are approving and associating with idols at the same time as fellowshiping with Christ and His followers. Paul points out, that though idols are nothing, there are demons associated with idols. An offerings made to an idol is the same as making an offering to a demon. Clearly, a Christian should have nothing whatsoever to do with the worship of demons, and therefore must keep himself away from idolatry.

Paul deals with some problems that the Corinthians would have to face when encountering idolatry, which was very common in Corinth. If they bought meat from the market, they could not tell if it had been offered to idols. They did not have to concern themselves about whether the meat had been offered to an idol or not, for in the Psalms it says, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof". This means that a Christian is free to eat any food which the Lord has provided. The next concern was if an unbeliever invited a believer to eat at his home. The Christian was free to eat the food put before him, and need not ask questions about whether it had been offered to an idol. However, if someone should point out to the Christian that the food had been offered to an idol, then the Christian should abstain from eating it, to answer the sensitive conscience of the believer who made it known. This was showing a love and concern for the conscience of his brother in Christ. We are responsible to not only answer our own conscience before God, but also to be mindful and careful that we do not needlessly offend the conscience of our fellow believers. The over-riding principle that should govern a Christian's attitude is: whatever he does should be done for the glory of God. The Christian should also be sensitive to different groups, and different beliefs and customs, whether gentile, Jew or the church, and be careful to act in a manner that will be for their spiritual benefit and salvation. The Christian should learn to not please himself, but do all he can to help others to know and follow the Lord Jesus. So as we finish today's lesson, I ask you, are you a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you forsaken all your idols, and fully

identified yourself with Jesus as Lord of your Life? Today would be an excellent time for you to make that choice, so why not confess to him your sin, and ask Him to forgive and cleanse you today.

*"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." 1Cor 10:31*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we learned that Christians are in danger of falling into idolatry, just as the children of Israel did when they were in the wilderness. We also heard that association with idols is inconsistent with being a Christian, and that Christians should guard their behavior to ensure it does not offend, but rather brings glory to God. Someone might ask the question, "How can a Christian overcome temptation?"

We all live in a world that is full of sin, and temptations to sin. The Christian is not free from temptation, because he still has a sin nature that is attracted by sin. The Christian is in a battle to overcome temptation, and that battle is an ongoing everyday experience. Perhaps some Christians listening to this message are feeling discouraged and overwhelmed by the sin that constantly weighs them down and steals away their joy. While a Christian should never excuse sin, or make light of sin, he should also be aware that temptation is the common experience of all men. We read in today's chapter how that "no temptation has overtaken you, except that which is common to man". This means that you are not alone in your battle against sin. Others are also battling just as you are, trying to fight against temptation. For some it might be alcohol, for another it could be a problem with anger, or yet another with perpetual lying, or another with lust. We may try to conquer our particular foe, but feel we are in a losing battle, and so just give way to the temptation, falling back into the same sin time after time. Recognize that Christians are the target of the Devil, for he wants to discourage and defeat Christians, and rob God of the glory that is due to Him. Satan can never steal us away from Christ, but he can certainly have an influence on our service, joy and future reward. God allows Satan to test us, for in the testing our faith is strengthened, and our loyalties and love are proven. The battle is not easy, and many Christians are struggling to overcome temptation. What can a Christian do? Is their hope? I believe there is hope, if not removing the temptation, at least giving us strength to deny the flesh and not yield when the temptation comes our way. The scriptures provide us with teachings that will assist us to face, and overcome, temptations.

1. Jesus said that when we pray, we should ask God "to lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil". Through prayer we can find strength, and God will be pleased to help our circumstances so that temptation is not in our pathway. Prayer is important and powerful, and when we are faithful to pray the Devil will flee away.
2. Jesus also said that if your hand or your eye offends, then remove it. What Jesus means is that when we are tempted to sin, we need to take serious and drastic measures to remove whatever might be leading us to be tempted. If we are always tempted to eat the wrong foods, then we should be careful to keep away from that kind of food, so we are not tempted by it. If the internet is a temptation for lust, then stay away from the internet, or only visit the internet when you are with a friend who will keep you away from sin. If someone is tempted by the way a woman is dressed, then do not look, or get away from her, so you are not tempted. If watching TV programs promotes ungodly desires, or bad emotions like anger, then we should turn off the TV or get rid of it. Whatever is causing us to stumble should be removed, this will help us overcome temptation.
3. Another important and effective way to fight temptation is to fill our minds with God's word. When our Lord was tempted by Satan, he combated against the Devil by quoting scripture. The more the word of God becomes part of our lives through study, meditation, and memorization the better equipped we are to resist the devil whenever he comes to trouble us.
4. Finally, it may be necessary to ask for spiritual help from a mature brother or sister in Christ, who can help to keep us accountable. This is one important reason why God gathers together His children, not only to preach at one another, but to help one another in our battles against sin. Perhaps one mature brother is not tempted to drink alcohol, but he knows another brother who is struggling. The strong brother can offer encouragement and help to keep the weaker brother accountable. Even spending time with the brother when he is feeling very tempted, in order to prevent him from giving way to his temptation. This demonstrates Christian love, and will help overcome the temptation. When one part of the body is hurting the whole body is hurting, so each one has a responsibility to assist and heal the wounded parts.

Remember that if you are struggling with sin, that God does not cast you away. God loves you and is ready to forgive you for your sin. He is sympathetic when you feel sorry for your sin, and want to live clean and holy before him. All Christians struggle in the battle against sin, and so we should be ready to forgive, and to offer help to fellow believers with whatever sin they might be struggling against. Our attitude about sin is important in the sight of God. If we are happy in our sin, God will bring judgment upon us, but when we grieve over our sin, and seek to remove sin from our lives, the Lord is tenderhearted and ready to offer us the help we need.

*"and do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." Matt 6:13*

LESSON 144  
Order in the Church  
1 CORINTHIANS II

In our last lesson Christians were warned to flee from idolatry, and learn from the failures of Israel in their wilderness journeys. Though God had blessed Israel, they still lusted for more, not satisfied with God's provision for them. Today we are going to deal with more problems concerning proper order in the church. Sisters are to show God's headship by wearing a head covering, and the Lord's Supper is to be conducted with reverence.

In this chapter Paul teaches the doctrine of Divine headship. This means that God has set an authority structure in place, where God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of the woman. When the church is aligned with God's will, the church will recognize and practice this divine order. This order is seen in the unique roles given to men and women in the church. Since man is head over the women, the sisters in the church remain silent, do not preach, teach or pray out loud in the meetings of the church. Women are to be in submission to the men, and they are to wear a covering on their head to symbolize their submission to divine order.

An explanation of why women are to wear a head covering in church meetings is explained in detail. Paul anticipates that there might be some resistance to this teaching, as has often been the case since these words were penned. Paul points out that man is the glory and image of God, and for this reason he is not to cover his head. To cover his head, would be to symbolically hide the image and glory of God. On the other hand the woman is the glory of man, and her hair is given to her for her beauty. She is therefore to symbolically veil the glory of man in the gatherings of the church, so that the glory of Christ might be seen. When we learn that the woman's head covering relates to the glory of God, then we should be very careful to obey. Some want to disregard this passage, or explain it away, since many in our modern culture do not like to see a difference made between men and women. This ungodly attitude also creeps into churches. Divine order requires it, and so we should be very careful to practice woman wearing a veil over their heads in church gatherings. We should recognize that Paul was dealing with a problem with the women in Corinth who apparently were not only publicly participating in prayers and prophecy, but were also doing so with no covering on their heads. Some have taken this passage to teach that women can pray and prophesy in the church, but that is not what this passage is seeking to teach. It is rather correcting a wrong behavior. We learn from other passages in the New Testament that women were not permitted to speak in the public gatherings of the church, and to interpret consistently, we should not think this passage is teaching something that contradicts other clear teaching in the bible. Women are not permitted to speak out in the church, whether by praying or prophesying, and they must wear a head covering during the meeting time. Paul says if a woman refuses to cover her head, let her hair be cut off, but if this be a shame to her, then let her be covered. What he is trying to say here is not that woman should think they have options of having either a bald head, or wearing a head covering. He is trying to show that it is shameful for a woman to not wear a head covering in the church, similar to a woman who has her hair shaved off. The hair is given for her glory, and to shave it off takes away her glory. While some woman may rebel against this clear teaching of scripture, and bring shame on themselves, and on the church, there are women, who might be new to the church and do not yet understand this doctrine. The church should be patient and gentle to teach the new believer this practice, and allow the Spirit of God to show them the truth of it. It is always better to allow each person to learn from the Holy Spirit and the word of God, without being forced to conform to things which they do not understand. This will only backfire and could cause bitterness, resentment or outright rebellion. We must trust that the Holy Spirit is capable of bringing conviction, when we point a person to the scriptures for their learning and instructions.

After dealing with headship in the church, Paul moves on to teach about the Lord's supper. It was evident that the Corinthians were not conducting themselves correctly at the Lord's Supper. Paul reminds them of the revelation he had received concerning the Lord's supper, that the Lord on the night he was betrayed took bread and broke it and said "take eat, this is my body which is broken for you, this do in remembrance of me". Then he took the cup and said "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, this do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." Paul then adds that as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes. The breaking of bread, or Lord's Supper, is an important institution given to us by our Lord. He commanded his disciples to remember Him in this simple way. In Corinth they were meeting to take the Lord's Supper alright, but they had also added an additional meal time, which was known as the love feast. However Paul learned that some were coming with plenty of food to eat, and others were left hungry. This showed a spirit of division among them, and not a spirit of Christian brotherhood. He tells them their actions could not be counted as the Lord's supper, and was shameful. He also instructs them to examine themselves before they take the bread and wine, for if someone drinks in an unworthy manner, they could invite God's judgment on them. Because of their misconduct at the Lord's Supper, some of the Corinthians had fallen sick, and some had even died. This reminds us that the Lord's Supper is a solemn time. There is no room for selfishness, or prideful displays as we remember the one who laid down His life for us. Humble obedience, and a thankful heart, should accompany our attendance at the Lord's supper. Believers should be considerate towards one another, waiting for each other, so that a sense of Christian unity and love will be maintained. This simple remembrance meal was not intended to be a full meal, but a simple means for Christians to remember the Lord's death. Paul reminds the Christians that they should have their meals at home, and not make the Lord's Supper an occasion for God's displeasure and judgment. God expects order in the church. We can demonstrate

order by our obedience, and by the symbolic use of head coverings for women, and bread and wine taken in memorial of our Lord's sacrifice for us. Our first step of obedience must be to trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and I hope you will take that step today, if you have not yet trusted in Him for salvation?

*"but I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." 1Cor 11:3*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we learned about two important aspects of divine order required by the local assembly, namely the doctrine of divine headship, and the proper handling of the Lord's Supper. The use of symbols, including the head covering worn by sisters, and the bread and wine used at the Lord's Supper are important means to demonstrate the church's submission to Christ as Lord, and appreciation of His sacrificial death on the cross for us. Someone might ask the question, "Should someone take the bread and wine at the Lord's supper if their conscience is troubling them?"

It is very important to have a proper frame of mind when taking the bread and wine at the Lord's supper. In the chapter we studied today, we are told about some in the church that were sick, and some even died, because of their misconduct at the Lord's Supper. They were not discerning the Lord's body. They were not sensitive to the Holy Spirit, and their brothers and sisters, and acted in an irreverent way by thinking of themselves, and putting themselves before others. They should have been thinking about the Lord, and his great sacrifice for us, rather than stuffing their faces with food. This brought upon them God's displeasure and judgment. When it comes to the Lord's Supper, we must remember this is a time set aside to honor our Lord Jesus, by remembering him in his death. It is a time to bring our thanks, praise and adoration before Him. This is not a time to cater to our flesh, pride or lusts. We must recognize the solemn privilege given to us to participate at the Lord's Supper, and conduct ourselves properly before the Lord, so that we do not bring the Lord's judgment upon us.

Now having considered the importance of showing due reverence at the Lord's Supper, we are not excused from participating at the Lord's Supper. There are many believers who have a wholesome fear of displeasing the Lord, and their conscience is troubled by their own sin. Someone in this condition might not think they are worthy to eat the bread, or drink of the cup. The scripture says we are not to eat or drink in an unworthy manner, but it never says that we are unworthy to participate. If we are believers, then we have been cleansed from the penalty of sin. As God's beloved children, and washed by the blood of Christ, we have every right to participate at the Lord's Supper. What we must be careful about is the manner in which we participate, for that could be considered unworthy. If we are not showing due respect to the Lord, or His love and sacrifice for us, then we are in danger of invoking his judgment.

Every Christians should participate at the Lord's Supper. The only reason a Christian would not participate at the Lord's Supper is because the church has put them under discipline. In this case they cannot partake of the bread and wine, because the church has refused to fellowship with them, due to their unrepentant sin. As Christians we all know that we are battling against sin in our lives, but that does not mean that we are to stay away from the Lord's Supper, or refuse to take the bread and wine when at the Lord's Supper. We are called upon to examine ourselves before we come to participate at the Lord's Supper. What this means is that we should examine our hearts, and if we have any sins to confess to the Lord, we ought to confess, and in all good conscience seek cleansing from all known sin. To entertain sin while taking the bread and wine, would be the same as eating in an unworthy manner, and could bring judgment. There is nothing mystical about the bread and wine, so we need not be superstitious about eating the bread, or drinking the cup. Our concern should be to have a clean heart before God, and no unconfessed sin. When a believer absents themselves from the Lord's Supper, or refuses to take the bread and wine, it is an indication of a loss of fellowship with the Lord, and is an act of disobedience. The Lord said "Do this in remembrance of me". He did not say, "If you feel spiritual, or if you think you are worthy, you can, if you like, take the bread and wine". Believe me, you and I are not worthy in ourselves to take the bread and wine, for we are just sinners saved by God's grace. Our worthiness only comes from the righteousness of God that has been imputed to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. If Jesus says "Do", and I "Don't", then Jesus is not my Lord! So this means that all of God's children are expected to obey their Lord, and do what He has commanded us to do. And if our conscience is troubling us about our sin, then we are called upon to examine ourselves, and that means confessing our sins before the Lord. But once we examine ourselves, then we are to eat and drink at the Lord's Supper. The scripture says, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat". It is the Lord's desire that we partake of his sacrifice, and acknowledge that we are the sinner for whom He died. After all this is what the Lord's Supper is all about. It is about remembering that Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins, and by that sacrifice we are pardoned through God's grace. We eat the Lord's Supper by God's grace, and if we always keep this in mind it should provide us with a clear conscience to obey our Master's words "Do this in remembrance of Me".

*"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." 1Cor 11:28*

## Distribution of Spiritual Gifts

1 CORINTHIANS 12

In our last lesson we learned about the doctrine of divine headship, symbolically represented by women wearing head coverings in church meetings. We also learned about the importance of participating at the Lord's Supper in a respectful manner to display unity in the church. Now Paul will provide a lengthy discussion about spiritual gifts. The Corinthians were misunderstanding the purpose, and proper use, of spiritual gifts, and so Paul aims to correct them.

Chapter 12 to 14 is all centered around the subject of spiritual gifts. Paul first teaches about the distribution of spiritual gifts in chapter 12, then in chapter 13 he will show the necessity of love when using spiritual gifts, and in chapter 14 he will correct the improper use of spiritual gifts.

Paul begins talking about spiritual gifts by first pointing out that gentiles are preoccupied with dumb idols, and the Corinthians used to follow along with this nonsense. Paul further states that the Spirit of God would never lead someone to say that Jesus is accursed, and likewise no one can truly acknowledge Jesus as Lord apart from the revelation given through the Holy Spirit. It is important here to understand that the Spirit will honor Jesus as Lord, for this will help the Corinthians and all Christians to discern whether someone is speaking by the Holy Spirit or not.

Now Paul points out that though there is but one Holy Spirit, there are many spiritual gifts given to God's children from the same Holy Spirit. There are also various administrations, but the same Lord. This means that gifts can operate in various ministries whether teaching, evangelism, pastoral, leading, etc; and the Lord Jesus is over all these works as the leader and head of the church. Paul teaches us that the Christians are all given different gifts from the Holy Spirit, with the intention that this will help the whole church. Paul now lists several gifts of the Holy Spirit including; word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. All these gifts were given to the church, but not every one had the same gift. The Lord is the one who determines, by His will, how he distributes these gifts to his people. We should not expect Christians to have or display certain gifts, if the Lord has not given that gift to them. Paul uses the analogy of the human body to explain the various gifts and how they work together to benefit the whole. Just as a body has various parts, like hands, feet, eyes, ears, heart, lungs, and each part has a unique and important role to play, so the church has been outfitted with a variety of gifts. Each one in the church is equipped to fulfill what the Lord has gifted them to do, so that the whole church will be strengthened and blessed. It makes no difference which national background, or social status the believer comes from, each one receives from the same Holy Spirit. Paul adds that though we are many members in the church, we are one body. This means the body cooperates for the same goal of promoting the health and growth of the body. The foot should not complain that he is not the hand, and think that he has no role in body, neither should the ear complain that he is not the eye. Paul uses this illustration to teach us that the church, just like the human body, has to have various parts to do various tasks. Not all will be an administrator, or an overseer, but some will run errands for the church, and some will serve the needs of the poor. The Lord distributes gifts so that all the different functions of the church can be accomplished. Some functions might appear to be less important or significant, but the Lord wants every believer to discover his or her gift, and find a ministry where they can use that gift. It is clear the whole church cannot be the preacher, just a body is not made up of an eye alone. If everyone was gifted to preach, and all the church did was preach, then other important ministries would be missing, and the body would not be able to fulfill all that is necessary for a healthy growing church. For instance someone needs to visit the sick or discouraged, so that the compassion and care of the church is known. Someone must go out into the highways and byways to preach the gospel, so that sinners can find their way to Christ. Someone has to teach the children the way of the Lord, Someone has to maintain the meeting place for the church, Someone has to keep the financial records, and others need to distribute the funds of the church for the needs and expenses determined by the church. Someone has to confront error, or rebuke sin. Someone has to provide hospitality to visitors, and someone has to counsel people with marital problems. There is so much variety in the work of the Lord, that God has provided a host of different gifts, and shares these gifts among all His children, so that we can function in many ways for the spiritual benefit of all. Paul also points out that some gifts are more attractive to the eyes, and therefore will get more attention and applause, such as preaching. Some gifts like mercy are more hidden, and thus get less attention and appreciation. Just as with our human body some parts are not as beautiful, but are given honor, so the Lord has also given honor to those gifts which are not so readily appreciated. We can all admire the strength, agility, and usefulness of hands. Our hands, therefore, tend to get much of the work, and are given little if any care. But our feet are less admired, for they do not seem to perform with as much agility or have the same skills as the hands do. However we know that without our feet the hands would soon become rather limited in what they could accomplish. We tend to care for our feet better than our hands, by protecting them with socks and shoes, and even go to great lengths to make them comfortable and fashionable. The Lord has also determined that those gifts which seem less significant, will be given greater honor. Since the church is likened to the body, it is also true that when one part is suffering the whole body suffers, and when one part does well, all rejoice. Paul provides us with another list of gifts in their order: apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healings, helps, governments, tongues, and then said we should earnestly seek the best gifts. While desiring spiritual gifts, Paul will also show that what is even more excellent than spiritual gifts is the love which must accompany the use of gifts. We shall see this in chapter 13 in our next lesson. What we



can learn from today's lesson is that each Christian has been given a unique gift, and we should appreciate our own unique role within the body of Christ, using our God-given gift to help the whole body enjoy growth and health.

*"There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same lord." 1Cor 12:4,5*

**Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we learned about the diversities of gifts given to the church. We learned that not every Christian receives the same gift, but that God distributes gifts to His children according to His will so that the church can function in a variety of ways, with each member doing it's unique part. Someone might ask the question, "What are the various spiritual gifts given to the church?"

Here in 1Corinthians 12 we have the most comprehensive list of spiritual gifts in the New Testament, but not all the gifts are listed here. Also in Romans 12 some gifts are listed, as well as in Ephesians chapter 4, and 1Peter chapter 4. If we look at each of these passages we will discover that there are 21 spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament. I will quickly identify these gifts, and give a brief explanation of each of them

Gift	Definition
Teaching	Ability to communicate an understanding of scripture
Speaking	Ability to preach or teach the word of God publicly
Exhortation	Ability to motivate others to respond to scripture
* Prophecy	Ability to declare God's message
Ministry	Ability to discern needs and meet them
Giving	Ability to liberally share resources to meet the needs of others
Helps	Ability to meet practical needs of the church
Mercy	Ability to come along side to provide the help otherwise unavailable
Faith	Ability to accomplish mighty things by responding to God's word
Ruling	Ability to guide others into a growing and productive Christian life
Administration	Ability to guide and direct affairs of the church
Word of knowledge	Ability to share divinely given biblical knowledge
Word of wisdom	Ability to give biblical counsel and defend the faith
Discerning spirits	Ability to discern the leading of the Spirit of God or otherwise
* Apostle	One who is sent forth to do the work of the Lord
Evangelist	One who can to effectively communicate the gospel
Pastor	One who cares for, and spiritually nurtures other believers
* Tongues	Ability to speak in a foreign language without training
* Interpret tongues	Ability to translate a foreign tongue into the language of listeners
* Healing	Ability to miraculously heal diseases in the name of the Lord
* Miracles	Ability to see supernatural intervention to overrule laws of nature
Gift Types :	Speaking      Serving      Ruling      Servants      Sign
* These gifts are no longer in use, since the New Testament was completed.	

These gifts can be separated into five sub-categories, namely: speaking, serving, ruling, servants, and sign gifts. It is important to make this distinction, for as we study the subject of gifts carefully we shall discover that some gifts, such as sign gifts, were temporal, foundational, and are not operative in the church today. We shall look at this in our next lesson, and discover why some gifts were only intended to serve the church in its' infancy.

A spiritual gift is, "An ability given by God, working by the Spirit of God, for the people of God". The study of spiritual gifts should be important for every Christian, so that we may discover what our spiritual gift is, and use it to its' maximum potential, and for the glory of God. In many churches today the emphasis on spiritual work and ability usually centers around one individual, often called the "Pastor". The "Pastor" is expected to preach, teach, evangelize, counsel, visit, and do a host of other responsibilities, while the rest of the congregation are sitting on their hands. We seem to have adopted the attitude of paying for our spiritual work to be done for us, leaving it all to the officially paid worker. However, as we study our bibles and learn about spiritual gifts, what we discover is that God has something very different in mind. God planned every Christian to be actively serving in various ministries, with preaching just being one aspect of the work. The bible never emphasizes one person, or one gift, in the church, for that would hinder God's purpose. God wants a team of people all working together to fulfill the many aspects of His work. Remember, if you are a believer, you have been given a gift, and a unique role to play in the church, so learn your gift, and use it as God intended!

*"As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of god." 1Pet 4:10*

LESSON 146  
Necessity of Love  
1 CORINTHIANS 13

In our last lesson we introduced the subject of spiritual gifts, and learned how God has distributed various gifts to His children so that they can each fulfill their unique roles and ministry for the church. Today we shall continue learning about spiritual gifts, and the necessity of love when using our spiritual gift.

In our last lesson Paul ended by saying that, he wanted to show a more excellent way! What he was trying to help the Corinthians to understand, is that while spiritual gifts were wonderful blessings from God, they were never intended for our own selfish or prideful use. Gifts are intended to bring God's blessing to others, and therefore must operate in an atmosphere of love. Paul therefore stretches our imagination to consider if he could speak in all the languages of men, or in the language of angels. Paul of course did not speak in all known languages of men, nor did he speak in a heavenly language of angels. Paul uses hyperbole (that is exaggeration) to make greater emphasis to his point, which is, that even having the greatest ability to use language whether of men or angels, it would be meaningless, if it was not accompanied by Christian love. He uses similar exaggeration to image himself with gifts of prophecy, understanding all mysteries and all knowledge, or having all faith so that he could move mountains. Without love all this ability would be meaningless. It is important for us to see that Paul is using exaggeration here, and was certainly not making the claim to have all knowledge, or all faith, or speak all languages. If we fail to see how Paul uses exaggeration, then we might be convinced that men could actually speak in the tongue of angels, or know all mysteries, which is not what this passage intends to teach. Paul continues his point, by saying if he gave all of his possessions to feed the poor, or gave his body to the flames, it would not be of any profit, if not done in love. Paul then takes us through a description of love, which we could define as the character of divine love. He lists 16 aspects of this love. We would do well to study and meditate much on these verses, learning the character of love that should motivate us, and be displayed in all Christians. Paul says love is patient and kind, does not envy or parade itself, is not puffed up. Love also does not behave rudely – that is something we can remember when we are tempted to shout in anger at others. Love does not seek its' own, and is not provoked, and does not think evil. Love finds no pleasure or joy in sin, but always rejoices in truth. Love is willing to bear, believe, hope and endure all things. This makes love much more powerful and effective than all the spiritual gifts, and so Paul is now going to teach us that while gifts have their place and purpose, it is love that will last.

In this passage Paul is comparing the merits of Christian love, over against some spiritual gifts that were to soon disappear. He names specifically prophecy, tongues and knowledge. We learned of these three gifts in our last chapter, and they were all associated with communicating God's word, and new revelations from God, prior to the bible being completed. This is why Paul tells us that at that time they prophesied in part, and knew in part. When someone prophesied they only gave a part of the whole masterpiece of God's revelation. In this context Paul states quite plainly that tongues will cease, that is stop, and prophecy and knowledge shall vanish away. The question arises as to when these particular gifts shall cease or vanish, and the remainder of the chapter will help us to answer that question. Paul states that when the perfect has come, that which is in part shall be done away. He has already explained that the partial refers to the gifts which only provided the church with part of God's revelation, and so it is quite reasonable in this context to understand "the perfect" has come, as referring to the completed bible. Grammatically we know that this is not referring to a person, but a thing, because it is in the neuter tense, and so it fits best to interpret "the perfect" as the bible. When the bible was completed and available to all the church, then there would no longer be a need for this former and inadequate mode of communication. I say inadequate, because when someone prophesied, it would only be helpful to those immediately present, but not to the rest of the church, unless that prophesy was written, and shared to all other local churches. As the church would grow in size, and spread, it would be far better and more effective to have a written revelation that could be widely distributed to all Christians and churches. To further his point about the transitory nature of these gifts, Paul uses two illustrations. He uses the illustration of the changing communication methods and skills of a child in comparison to a full grown man. Clearly when a man matures he can think, speak, and understand at a much greater level than when he was a small child. It is not that something was wrong with the child, but he simply did not have the same faculties, or abilities that an adult would have. So the communications of the early church by prophesy, tongues, or a word of knowledge were not wrong, but simply inadequate, when something far more superior became available, namely the word of God.

Paul also uses the illustration of perception, comparing the difference between looking into a mirror, or seeing face to face. To see something or someone directly is better than seeing a dim reflection of the image. Ancient mirrors were not great reflectors, and the image would not be as clear as seeing something directly with one's eyes. This illustration also helps us to understand the difference between the use of tongues, and why the finished bible gives us a clearer picture of God's revelation. Prophecy could only provide a part of the full picture of God's plans. The gift of knowledge, or someone speaking in a foreign tongue, could only give us a part of God's revelation. These gifts would fade when their usefulness was superseded by a better and fuller picture of God's revelation in the scriptures. Thus it was important for the Corinthians to understand that some gifts were a temporary method for God to communicate with the church, but later when the bible was completed, these gifts would no longer be necessary, and therefore vanished away. Now many of the gifts are still operating today, because these gifts are for the building up of the

church, and not like sign gifts that communicated God's revelation to man. Paul ends this section, by speaking of the Christian virtues that will endure; specifically faith, hope and love, with love being the greatest of all.

*"but when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away." 1Cor 13:10*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we learned that no matter how gifted a person is, it would be meaningless, if those gifts were not ministered with Christian love. We also saw how some gifts were only meant to serve the church until the full canon of scripture was complete. Someone might ask the question, "If God is finished with tongues and prophesy, then why are these gifts still being used today?"

If we are to judge by the modern practice in many churches, we would conclude that the gifts of prophecy and tongues are still in operation. There are many people claiming to be a prophet for God, and many who are claiming to be speaking in tongues. These claims are being made everywhere in the church all over the world today. So can we discount the validity of these claims? The test for something being true is not our own experience, but whether it matches up with God's revelation in the scriptures. Throughout biblical history there were many who claimed to be prophets for God, but the bible exposes them as false prophets. In the New Testament, we have plenty of warnings about false prophets. Jesus said that a mark of the final days, before he returns, would be an increase in false prophets. In fact Jesus said that these false prophets would show great signs and wonders. This is what we see today, and some of these false prophets have been exposed. Even the unbelievers of our generation can see the rank hypocrisy of these false prophets. They are using their supposed anointing to deceive the masses, and collect as much cash as they can get. It is comical to the cynics, and heart-breaking to those who sincerely love the Lord. False prophets abound in our day, and it is not too difficult to recognize them, when we compare their actions and words against what the bible says. Today we have many of these false prophets preaching prosperity. They say that God wants you to be rich and live comfortably in this world. They pick a few verses and misquote them to promote their false doctrine, so they can line their pockets with money, and convince everyone that they are doing God's will. However, Jesus says that we are not to store up treasures on earth. Jesus even told a rich man to sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor. Paul wrote to Timothy and said he should teach the rich to give liberally, and warn men to not seek after money, for the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils. Over and over again the bible warns against the accumulation of riches and loving money. Jesus stated plainly that you cannot serve God and money. And yet we see these prophets preaching prosperity, and people are convinced they are men of God, and are willing to send their money to them. Someone might argue, that while there are some false prophets around, that does not mean that everyone who is called a prophet is false. It is certainly true that some men are sincere in their desire to serve God, and teach the Lord's people. Perhaps they have misunderstood, or they have been misled to believe that the prophetic gift is still in operation today, so they attempt to prophesy to their congregations. But listen carefully to the prophecy they speak, and ask if, in fact, everything they say comes to pass. For if they are not 100% accurate in all their prophecies, the bible would condemn them as false. It can be demonstrated from scripture, as we saw in today's lesson, that prophecies will vanish away. God has provided, in the bible, all that we need to live godly. Jude refers to 'the faith which was once delivered to the saints'. By this he means the body of Christian doctrine contained in the holy scriptures has been already delivered to us, and so there is no need for further revelations. In fact God warns us in the book of revelation, that we are not to take anything from, or add anything to God's revelation. Therefore when men make claims of receiving further revelations from God, they contradict the bible. Today we learned that tongues was going to cease when the New Testament had been completed. When we study tongues, and discover how God used this sign gift as witness to the Jews, we will understand that its' purpose has been fulfilled, and that God is no longer using this gift today. God provided the Jews with the sign of supernatural tongues to authenticate the words of the apostles as coming from God, and to convince them that God had accepted the gentiles, Samaritans, and disciples of John into the one body of Christ. This was to ensure that the unity of the Spirit in the early church was preserved. It is interesting for us to notice that tongues is only mentioned in the book of Acts with respect to this witness for the Jews, or Jewish Christians, and then besides here in 1Corinthians, speaking in tongues is no where else mentioned in the New Testament. This is not surprising if we understand that God would soon be done with this gift, as we learned in today's study, and certainly relegates tongues to a place of insignificance in the early church. Perhaps why tongues has become so popular today, is for the same reason that false prophets attract so much attention and great followings. People love to see something they believe to be supernatural, and seeing someone jabber away, and thinking this must be the power of God, will attract many of the unsuspecting masses. Here are several ways to discern that modern tongues is not the authentic spiritual gift spoken of in the bible: **A. modern tongues are unintelligible; B. modern tongues use vain repetition; C. modern tongues do not use an interpreter D. modern tongues are not orderly; E. modern tongues are centered on self-display, and not edification; F. modern tongues are not used in love; G. modern tongues are often learned or coerced by others.** We all need to be on our guard against what is false, lest we also fall into the deception, and are lead astray.

*"And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many." Matthew 24:11*

LESSON 147  
Order in the Church  
1CORINTHIANS 14

In our last lesson we learned about the necessity of love when using spiritual gifts. We also saw how tongues and other sign gifts would vanish after the bible was completed. Today we tackle the final section on spiritual gifts, which is a lengthy discussion on the proper use of spiritual gifts, particular the gift of tongues.

From the context of 1Corinthians 14 we might discern that there was a problem with the public use of gifts, and in particular the gift of tongues. This conclusion is due to Paul's argument against the improper use of tongues, which he deals with at length. Clearly Paul, who is lead by the Holy Spirit to write these words, was concerned that spiritual gifts must be used in a manner that edifies the church, and not for selfish or prideful reasons. While we cannot go into Paul's argument in detail, we can provide an overview, seeking to show his main emphasis. Paul is seeking to prove that prophecy is a more profitable gift to the church then tongues, and will go onto to show how the use of tongues in church gatherings would be more harmful then good, if not accompanied by interpretation.

While Paul has already shown in chapter 13 that very soon God would be finished with the supernatural gift of tongues, the gift was still present in the church at Corinth. Due to their unloving and unedifying use of tongues, Paul must correct them. He does this by using a negative argument, showing the Corinthians what was wrong with speaking in tongues, when no interpretation was available. Here is his argument in point form:

1. When someone speaks in tongues and no one in the church understands, it misses the purpose of the gift, which is to bring edification to the church. When Paul says someone speaking in a tongue speaks to God and edifies himself, he is not condoning this behavior, but pointing out that is precisely what is wrong with it. Gifts are intended not for selfish use, but to build up the church.
2. Speaking in tongues without interpretation is not only meaningless, but can bring confusion and division. If the church can not understand what was spoken, then it does them no good, only wastes their time, and creates a division, for the church cannot fellowship with what it cannot understand.
3. Ability to speak in tongues does not require its' use in the church, for it is far better to communicate with an understanding that others will benefit from, then to put on display spiritual ability that no one benefits from.
4. Tongues were intended as a sign to unbelievers. Drawing from a scripture in Isaiah, Paul teaches that God used the foreign language of Israel's captors as a sign to them of His judgment on their nation. This demonstrates that tongues were God's way of sending a message to unbelieving Jews to verify his word.
5. Tongues can be a poor testimony when people visit the church. If someone sees the Christians talking in an unknown language, without any explanation, they will be lead to believe the church is suffering from mental illness. But if they see them speaking by the Holy Spirit in a language they understand, they conclude that God is with them.

Having laid out his argument against the public use of tongues, it is rather alarming to see how many people have taken this passage and misinterpreted it to mean precisely the opposite of what it is teaching. This should not be the place to go to in order to defend the use of tongues in the church, for Paul goes to great lengths to explain why it is not profitable, leading to confusion, division, and a poor testimony. Though tongues will cease, Paul does not forbid the use of the God given gift, but does provide regulations of how they are to be used in any public gathering of the church, so that everything will be done for edifying. He says that the Spirit may lead different individuals in the assembly to participate in various ways, but everything must be done for edification. He says if someone speaks in a tongue it should not involve more then three people speaking, one after the other, and there must be interpretation. If this practice were followed, it would eliminate almost all modern tongues, for it is rare that this scripture is followed, and interpretation is provided. If no interpreter is available then the one who wishes to speak in tongues must remain silent.

While providing regulations on public participation, Paul also adds more regulations that concern prophecy and also women in the church. When a man prophesies, teaching the word of God, others are to judge. If there is further revelation from someone else, the first speaker should be careful to give place to others to also speak. Opportunity should be given for each one who is moved by the Holy Spirit to speak up and share the word of God, so that all may be blessed by the word. This means no one should try to take over and think that only their words or participation are of value. Christians are required to show love and courtesy when speaking in the church, for this is not the place for pride or selfishness to be on display. One more important point is made here, and that is the spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet. This means that when a man is speaking by the Holy Spirit he is in control of his own conduct, and not out of control, as is often seen in those claiming to be moved by the Holy Spirit.

Paul states that God is not the author of confusion, and this is a good way to measure whether something is from God, or it is the confusion of men. Just ask if the behavior, or words bring confusion to the church, or God's blessing. Paul now also comments about public participation by women in the church, which he strictly forbids. Women are to remain silent, and therefore cannot lead in prayer, preaching, or teaching for the church. If they want to ask questions they can ask someone at home, but not publicly in the church. Paul seems to anticipate some challenge to his teaching here, and therefore warns that if any thinks themselves spiritual, they should acknowledge that Paul is speaking according to the commands of the Lord. He finishes this chapter with the command that all things be done

decently and in order. The church is not the place where we should see confusion and disharmony, but the Holy Spirit's work should bring unity and edification among God's children.

*"For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.." 1Cor 14:33*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we heard Paul argue at great length as to why using tongues in the church was unprofitable, and that it was much better to prophecy, that is teach the word of God, so that others could understand and benefit. We learned that God requires order in the church and that he is not the author of confusion. Someone might ask the question, "Why are woman not permitted to speak in church?"

While dealing with the abuse of spiritual gifts, namely tongues, in Corinth, Paul also takes up the subject of how women are to remain silent in church gatherings. He makes this point very clear, and even insists that if a woman wants to ask a question, she should do so at home, and not in the public gatherings of the church. This doctrine is upsetting to many people, for it seems to push women down, and give them an inferior and insignificant role in the church. Paul anticipates the argument that will arise from this teaching, and therefore calls on all that would contend with him to acknowledge that what he has written in Corinthians, including his instruction about women being silent, are the commands of the Lord. Arguments against this are not arguments against Paul, or his opinion, but an argument against the Lord. It is interesting that Paul also anticipated some resistance to the doctrine of women wearing a head covering. When it comes to the role of men and women in the church, it has been a cause for much controversy throughout the church age. Spiritual teaching is foolishness to the unbeliever, and can stir up rebellion in carnal believers. This is especially true when the spiritual teaching runs directly across cultural practice. This should not surprise us, since the culture of the ungodly are directed by their sinful flesh, and not by the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit of God lives inside a believer, they humbly accept spiritual truth as revealed in scripture and delight to follow it, even when it runs contrary to the world's way of thinking. This in itself is a witness to the world, of the power of the gospel to transform the sinner into a saint. When a sister wears a head covering in the church gathering, and remains silent, she sends forth a very powerful message about how the gospel has changed her. One of the most difficult things for any person to do is to humble themselves before God, admit their sin, guilt and shame, and plead for God's mercy and salvation. Once saved the believer lives in an atmosphere of humble gratitude for the grace of God bestowed on their soul, and is ever ready to do whatever the Lord may require of them.

Having said this, it is also important to understand that the sisters remain silent in the church for important spiritual reasons. Understanding these reasons, will help skeptics to see God's divine wisdom and plan for His people. Here in Corinthians the instruction for women to keep silent is given without any particular theological explanation, other than this one statement, "as the Law also says". There is no particular reference in the Old Testament law about women remaining silent, and so what this phrase refers to is likely her submissive role to male leadership. This can certainly be found in the account of the creation of man in Genesis. After Eve initiated the sin of disobeying God, she was judged by pain in child bearing, and Adam by hard work to provide for his needs. The role of the man and the woman were different from the beginning, with man being in leadership over the woman, having been created first, he was given authority to rule, and be head of the family unit. The woman was made for the man to be his suitable helper, and was to be under his authority, and be submissive to him. God's original design for these unique roles for men and women has been greatly distorted by sin and rebellion. The gospel not only offers salvation to our souls, but brings us back into alignment with God's authority, and His order in creation. Therefore the women who know the Lord, are expected to understand their God given role, even if that runs contrary to their culture, or personal convictions. The woman's role is to be a helper to her husband, to guide the home, and serve the church through good works. The role of the husband is to be a leader in his home, by setting a godly example, teaching the word to his family, and representing the Lord as he leads in the church publicly through prayer, and teaching the word. There is no suggestion in this teaching that women are inferior to men either spiritually or intellectually. The teaching has to do with the specific roles that God has assigned to the men and women in His church. The theological support for women remaining silent is provided in 1Timothy 2:11-14. This is where Paul explains the reason women are to keep silent in the church. He provides two reasons, the first is that she was created after Adam. Adam has been given the place of authority and leadership because he was created in the image of God, and was to represent God and his authority on earth. The woman was made after the man to help the man, not to rule over him. The second reason is that Eve was first in transgression. That is Eve instigated the sin, which both she and Adam participated in, and therefore because she lead her husband into sin, she is to take the subordinate role, and allow her husband to take the leadership role that God intended for him. When a women speaks in church, Paul says it brings shame. Those who fight against this teaching demonstrate their rebellion against God. If Jesus is our Lord, then we shall be glad to obey His commands, even when they are not popular.

*"And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." 1Cor 14:35*

LESSON 148  
**Resurrection is Real**  
1 CORINTHIANS 15

In our last three lessons we learned about spiritual gifts. We learned about the distribution of gifts, the necessity of love when using spiritual gifts, and we heard Paul correct the Corinthians about the abuse of spiritual gifts, particularly the gift of tongues. Now Paul is going to deal with one more doctrinal problem that had also arisen among the believers in Corinth, namely the reality of the future resurrection of the saints.

Paul sets about to carefully and thoroughly defend the doctrine of resurrection from the dead. It appears that some in Corinth had been teaching that the resurrection had already past, and there was no further hope for resurrection. Paul will attack this false teaching head on, for our salvation is dependent on the truth of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. The following reasons summarize Paul's defense of the resurrection doctrine:

1. The proof of Jesus rising from the dead is found both in the scriptures, and through eye-witness testimony.
2. The proof of why it is wrong to not believe in the resurrection has several points. If Christ is not raised from the dead, preaching the gospel is meaningless, the apostles would be false witnesses and wicked. This would also mean that the Corinthians faith was empty, and they were still guilty sinners. Further to this, all those who had died believing in Christ would be lost, and all living believers would be in the worst misery due to their faith, hope and sacrifices being meaningless. Paul also says that those who were baptized as Christians, would prove also to be a big waste of time, if there was no hope for resurrection. It would also mean that all the sufferings, and persecutions of the apostles had been useless and unnecessary.

While Paul enumerates his points of defense, he also will affirm the truth, that Christ is risen indeed. There was no doubt about this, not just for the many reasons he had cited, but he could provide his own eyewitness testimony of seeing the risen Christ. He also uses a theological explanation to support the resurrection of man. Adam brought in death by sin, and so Christ also brought life through paying sin's penalty. This is God's redemption plan. Paul further explains the progression of resurrection, with Christ being the first to be raised, but then later at His coming all those who belong to Christ will also be raised up. Then Christ will reign and subdue all rule and authority, and at last defeat the enemy of death.

The doctrine of resurrection is not easy to understand, and Paul wants to answer any questions or objections the Corinthians may have had about the resurrection. The resurrection body is something we cannot fully grasp now, but Paul uses several illustrations to help give us some understanding of the nature of our future glorified bodies. He uses several earthly analogies to help us comprehend heavenly things. He uses the illustration of the seed, in contrast with the plant which the seed produces. The tree or plant is very much different and much grander than the seed, but all the information about the tree or plant was hidden within that little seed. So we are to understand that what we shall be will be much different than our present body, and much greater, but all the information about that future body has been provided in the seed of our present bodies. Now He compares several things to help us gain more insight. He compares the various types of living creatures, man, beast, fish and birds. Each is unique and adapted to its own environment. This should help us to realize that whatever the climate and conditions of heaven are, we shall be given a body suited to that environment. He also compares the glory between earthly and heavenly things, and between the sun, moon, and stars. Everything has its own unique glory, some greater, and some lesser, and some reflecting the glory of others. This seems to suggest that the resurrection bodies will all be unique as they bear glory in varying measures, and reflect the glory of the Son of God. Paul now describes the resurrection body as that which will be incorruptible, glorious, powerful, spiritual, and made into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this all happens in an instant in time. This is a remarkable revelation in our bibles about our future resurrection bodies, and though we can only touch on this in our lesson today, it would be interesting to look further into this subject, and try to learn all we can. Great men and prophets in the Old Testament period had almost no knowledge about the resurrection body, though the Spirit of God did reveal, to a select few (such as Job, and David), that there would be a resurrection of the body. We are so much more privileged to have this revelation given to us, and it should thrill our souls to know that one day we shall be given a glorified body, like the body of our Lord Jesus, and that body shall never see decay or destruction. When we look at our frail and failing bodies, it gives us all the more reason to rejoice in the promise of God to raise us up with Christ, and fashion us into His likeness.

As Paul closes off this section about the great mystery of the resurrection body, he provides us with words of victory and encouragement for all believers. As though speaking to death and the grave as his enemy, He asks, "Oh death where is your sting? Oh death where is your victory?" Death no longer has power over the believer, and death will not swallow us up, and carry us to eternal suffering. Yes, believers will experience physical death, which involves departing from our present bodies, and our souls ushered into the presence of our Lord. However thereafter we shall be given a new resurrected and eternal body fitted for heaven and glory. This is the great hope of the believer to be with Christ, and made like Christ. You can only have this hope if you have received Jesus by faith. The great promise of the resurrection belongs to those who are in Christ.

Paul leaves one last word of encouragement to the believers, after telling them about the glorious resurrection that awaits all believers. He says they should be steadfast, unmovable, and always abound in God's work, because our labor in the Lord is not in vain. In view of the future hope of resurrection, we have every reason to apply ourselves

diligently to God's work, because the day of reward for faithful service is soon coming. You can only look forward to this day of God's eternal reward, if Christ is your Lord and Savior, so why not place your trust in Him today.

*"but thanks be to god, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1Cor 15:57*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we learned about the importance, and assurance, of the future resurrection of God's children. We also considered the nature of the resurrection body, and the joy and victory that this remarkable revelation provides to believers. Someone might ask the question, "Why is our hope of resurrection important?"

When the bible teaches us how a person becomes a believer, we are told that "if you confess with your mouth, and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead you shall be saved." This verse explains that our belief in resurrection is actual necessary to be saved. If we do not believe that Jesus was raised up from the grave, then how can we call out to Him in prayer. How can a dead man save anyone. Our salvation is based on the fact that our Savior is alive. We can trust that He who overcame death himself, will be able to also bring us to heaven, and resurrect our bodies. So we see that the resurrection is important for our salvation, in fact it is absolutely essential to believe in the resurrection in order to be a true Christian.

Not only is our faith in the resurrection essential to our salvation, the doctrine of resurrection is important in the life of the believer to help motivate towards godly living. It is because Christians are aware that the Lord will bring them to heaven someday, that they want to live for God, and prepare for the day when we shall meet our Lord. As Christians remind their hearts that soon Jesus will come, and we shall be taken to heaven, they will be more concerned with eternal realities, and therefore apply themselves more diligently to the devoted life which God calls Christians into. When we realize that souls are perishing, and will end up in Hell, unless they hear the gospel and trust in Jesus as their Savior, then we will do whatever we can to preach to those who are lost. Also since the believer knows that he must face judgment for his works, he will want to be sure that all of his service for God is done with zeal, and not tainted by impure motives, or contaminated by the sins of the flesh. It is the hope of resurrection that will help us to keep sin out of our lives, and good works in our lives.

Believing in the resurrection is an important doctrine because it helps us to understand God's redemptive plan through the ages. If we have no hope of resurrection, then as Paul said we are of all men most miserable. The Christian life is not simply a message about how to live a good moral life, until we die and all is forgotten. No, the Christian message is one of future hope in heaven, apart from sin, and that requires our resurrection from the dead. If all we had to look forward to was a few short years of life, and then death and decay, with no hope of eternal life, it would make life pointless and empty. I am amazed to hear atheists talk about their hopes in this life, for it is a very sad and pathetic picture. The best they hope for is some contribution to this world, and to live a few years in this world with some sense of pleasure or happiness. But if all we are living for is the few years we have in this world, then life is not only short, uncertain, filled with troubles and sadness, it is also meaningless. This is why in countries where atheism is on the rise, so is violence, suicide, break down of families, and every kind of moral depravity. It is our hope of resurrection and eternal life, that directs us to live with a respect for human dignity, with a sense of right and wrong, and a sense of accountability before God.

It is important to believe the resurrection of Christ, because it is foundational to Christianity, and the basis for preaching the gospel to others. If others are also to be saved, and go to heaven, they need to hear a gospel that offers them hope, and not just dead religion. Christianity is all about having a relationship with a living Savior. It is not about following a code of ethics, admiring the historical teachings of Jesus, or about performing rituals. Christianity, to be real, requires knowing Christ, who is alive today, and interacts with His people through the work of the Holy Spirit. If you do not have this relationship with Jesus Christ, or you are uncertain about it, then you must seek after it, because without it you will never enter into heaven. The bible says, "this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." This verse teaches us that eternal life is granted to those who know God. Let's be careful here though, for the bible does not say if we know about God, but if we know God, and there is a big difference. One is just a general knowledge that I have, like knowing that moon is visible in the sky. I know it to be so, but I have no personal experience, for I am but an observer watching from a distance. This is how some people relate to Jesus, they know of him, and He is to them, a distant figure, whom they watch with vague interest, but never draw near to learn of Him, and sincerely commit their lives to Him in faith. Jesus is alive, and He wants you to know Him, to talk with Him, trust him with your soul, and live your life as His obedient follower. Would you like to know Jesus as your best and closest friend, as your Lord and Savior? You may, if you call out to Him today, for He is listening and waiting for you to just reach out to Him in faith. The bible says, "whoever calls on the name of the Lord, shall be saved". Call Him!

*"blessed be the god and father of our lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." 1Peter 1:3*

LESSON 149  
**Family Ties**  
1 CORINTHIANS 16

In our last three lessons we heard Paul defend the doctrine of resurrection, and provide teaching about the resurrection body which believers will be given at the Lord's coming. Today we finish our study of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians with some personal notes from Paul about his travels, and greetings that tie together the larger Christian family.

Before Paul closes with various greetings and personal instructions, He gives the Corinthians instructions about the weekly collection of the church. Paul says that all the Christians are put something aside during the week from what the Lord provides them, and place this into the common collection when they gather as a church each Lord's Day. There are some important practical lessons for every Christian here. The collection was voluntary, and no amount specified. This is different from the Jews of the OT who gave 10% to the Lord. The collection was also something that every Christian was expected to give into, whether rich or poor, for it was according to what the Lord had given to them, and not what they did not have. Every Christian is expected to show their faith and obedience, no matter how small the amount. What counts is willingness to make a sacrifice, remembering the Lord can take our little and make in much, as He did with the loaves and fishes. The giving was intended to alleviate some poor Christians in Judea, and this would also help bond together the Christian family made up of gentiles in Corinth, and Jews in Judea.

Paul provides instructions, details, and greetings for some of the Christian's known to, or residing at, Corinth. Paul says that when he comes to them, he was willing to help bring their offering to Jerusalem along with any others that the church approves. This shows that the handling of money for the church was important, and had to be done by responsible men, with accountability to one another. Speaking of his future traveling plans through Macedonia, he hoped to possibly stay in Corinth for the winter, and spend some time with the church, if the Lord permitted. Presently he wanted to stay at Ephesus longer, because of the great opportunities to advance the gospel, and due to those who were trying to suppress the gospel. Paul anticipated that Timothy might come to Corinth, and so he asks the believers to treat Timothy well, because he (like Paul), always applied himself faithfully to God's work. The believers were to show Timothy Christian kindness, warmth, and supply his needs, so that he could travel to see Paul. Paul had hoped that Apollos would travel to Corinth, but Apollos was not convinced to go. It is not every circumstance that the Lord reveals which direction we should go, sometimes he leaves the choices up to us. Paul calls upon the Corinthians to be watchful, faithful, brave and strong, always acting in love. He takes special notice of the house of Stephanus, who was one of the first converts in Corinth, and had devoted himself to serving the Christians. For men like the Stephanus the Christians were expected to show respect, and follow his leadership, as well as others who also labored for the Lord. Paul must have had a recent visit from Stephanus, Fortunatus and Achaicus, for he speaks about how these brothers from Corinth had supplied him, and refreshed his spirit. Those who support the servants of the Lord, are to be acknowledged, for it is through their faith and obedience the work of God continues through servants like Paul and other missionaries. Perhaps you can think of some missionary that would benefit from your prayers or supply. Paul speaks on behalf of all the churches of Asia, to send greetings to the Corinthians, and especially Aquila and Priscilla, and the Christians who met in their home. This couple had spent time with Paul in Corinth, so would have been familiar with the church, and built up the bonds of love and fellowship. Such is the beauty of the family of God, for the family grows and expands, but the love only grows sweeter and sweeter, until we shall all be together in heaven.

Paul signs the letter with his own salutation, and then adds very solemn words of warning, saying - "that if anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed, Maranatha". Maranatha means Lord come! The gospel brings with it the greatest of all blessings. Along with the hope of eternal life, is the promise of being raised up with Christ, to be glorified and made like Him, and the promise of His love and care throughout life. To reject the immeasurable grace of God, is to invoke the wrath of God and His severe judgment. Thus to those who do not love the Lord Jesus Christ, are these very solemn words given "let him be accursed". We must not trifle with God's offer of salvation. We cannot afford to turn our backs on God's Son. We must look to Jesus, trust in Him as our Savior, and learn to love Him more and more. It is those who love Jesus, and know Him by faith, whom God will bless as His dear children, but those who reject the Son, also reject the Father, and condemn their souls to eternal destruction.

As we finish off our studies in 1Corinthians let again take care to notice that the letter ends on a personal note, with Paul mentioning many Christian names. Those who belong to God's family are spoken of by Paul with great interest and love. He desires to see his Christian friends. He desires their blessing, and that those who serve the church would be cared for and blessed through those whom they served. He also wants to help tie the bonds of fellowship between the Jewish Christians in Judea, and the gentile Christians in Achaia and Macedonia through the practical financial sharing of brothers and sisters in Christ. This chapter certainly resounds with the truth of God's family being joined together as one. It is quite a remarkable work of God to see believers from different religious, ethnic, social and economic backgrounds all joined into one loving family. It is sad that so many divisions have infested God's church today, so that Christians divide into all kinds of splinter groups, and those who call themselves Christians are quarrelling and splitting over trivial matters. How nice it would be to see the church restored to the 1<sup>st</sup> century, where in spite of all the problems in the church, there was still a fellowship and love that bonded believers together throughout the world, wherever they happened to be. Corinth had its' own share of moral and doctrinal problems, but



notice that Paul did not tell the Christians to leave, split, or divide. He dealt with the problems and promoted the love and unity of God's people at Corinth, and with all believers. Let us also learn from this study to love God's people more than the issues that could divide us. Though Christians and the church are far from perfect, they are God's beloved, and destined for eternal glory. Would you also like to join God's family? Jesus invites you to come.

*"the grace of our lord Jesus Christ be with you." 1Cor 16:23*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we heard about the ties which bind the family of God to each other, even over great distances, and diverse cultures and backgrounds. We also learned about the Christian obligation to weekly give to the Lord through the collection of the saints. Someone might ask the question, "How should a person decide how much to put into the church collection?"

The simple answer to this question is provided to us in the scriptures, which says, "according as the Lord has prospered". While this does provide us some ideas, it still may leave us uncertain about how much to give. What does the scripture mean by, "as the Lord has prospered". Would this require, for instance 10%? Or 15%? No amount or percentage is given, and so it is left to the individual to decide for himself what the Lord has in mind when referring to "as the Lord has prospered". For some Christians this could mean 5%, and to another 50%. The bible tells of a poor widow who gave 100%. We know that the poor widow got special attention from the Lord when she put all her coins into the treasury. It was just two coins, but it was all she had. So perhaps the question we should ask, is not how much do I give, but rather how much do I keep?

Giving is not to be thought of as an obligation, or something we do hesitantly, or grudgingly. The Lord loves a cheerful giver, and that means we must have our heart and joyful will involved when we give. It should be the delight of our hearts to show Jesus that we love Him, and want to help His cause by sharing with the needs of others. We should also remember that giving is a spiritual exercise, and therefore it is important to also be sensitive to how the Holy Spirit maybe leading. The Spirit of God can impress God's children at times to give substantially, for a known need, or even for needs unknown to the giver. To give to the Lord should be a reflection of God's heart in giving to us. God gave the best of heaven to suffer and die for our sins, and therefore if we give tiny amounts that are not a genuine sacrifice, we are not representing His grace in our lives. When the Spirit of God fills a believer, one of the things that happens is that they feel compelled to share with the needs of others. The love of God is shed abroad in their heart, and they cannot help but give to the needs of others around them. Giving fits perfectly with God's character, for God is love and abounds in grace towards us. To be God's child means that we learn God's character, and grow increasingly into His likeness. Therefore as Christians mature, it should be expected to see them making even greater sacrifices for the Lord. Someone who professes to be a Christian, and yet has no heart for giving, and is characterized by being cheap, is showing their lack of knowledge, and likeness to, the Lord. They could be admitting that they really do not have a relationship with God. It always amazes me to watch how people give, or fail to give, into the collection. There are those people who seem to perpetually lack the faith, and willingness to contribute, as the collection passes by them week after week, without the slightest effort to add to the collection. Either their faith is small, or they have a very small appreciation for the love of God shown to them. Even older Christians who have been in the Lord for many years, sometimes lack the heart to give regularly, and substantially, to the Lord. Then there are those believers who always give, and give generously. These are usually the same people whom God uses in some leadership, who are the busy people in the church, working and serving the Lord. It is not surprising that the same ones who have a heart to give into the collection, also share in Christ's heart for His people, making themselves available to serve the needs of the church. There is an interesting correlation in scripture between making sacrifice for the Lord, and being used in a significant way by the Lord. It seems the Lord delights to use those believers, who are most willing to make sacrifices for His kingdom, and this certainly makes good sense. For God is pleased when His children are able to reflect His kind and good nature to others, and will increase their sphere of influence. We see this with Barnabas, who first came and gave a large gift to the church, and later we find the Lord sending him to serve as a missionary.

Perhaps a good practical way to decide what you can give to the Lord, is by calculating what God has supplied to you through your work, and then calculating the essentials that you will have to purchase, like food, and then seeing how much is left, and taking a percentage that will both be a sacrifice on your part, but also provide you for your other daily expenses. We should consider all that we have as belonging to the Lord, and have a mindset to use whatever we have to help the Lord's people. We should not grasp onto money as though it were mine, and for my own selfish desires. Remember the Lord loves a cheerful giver, and the problem with us is not how much we give, but rather how much we keep for ourselves.

*"I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. and remember the words of the lord Jesus, that he said, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Acts 20:35*

# LESSONS IN 2CORINTHIANS

Statue of Saint Paul, Salzburg, Austria

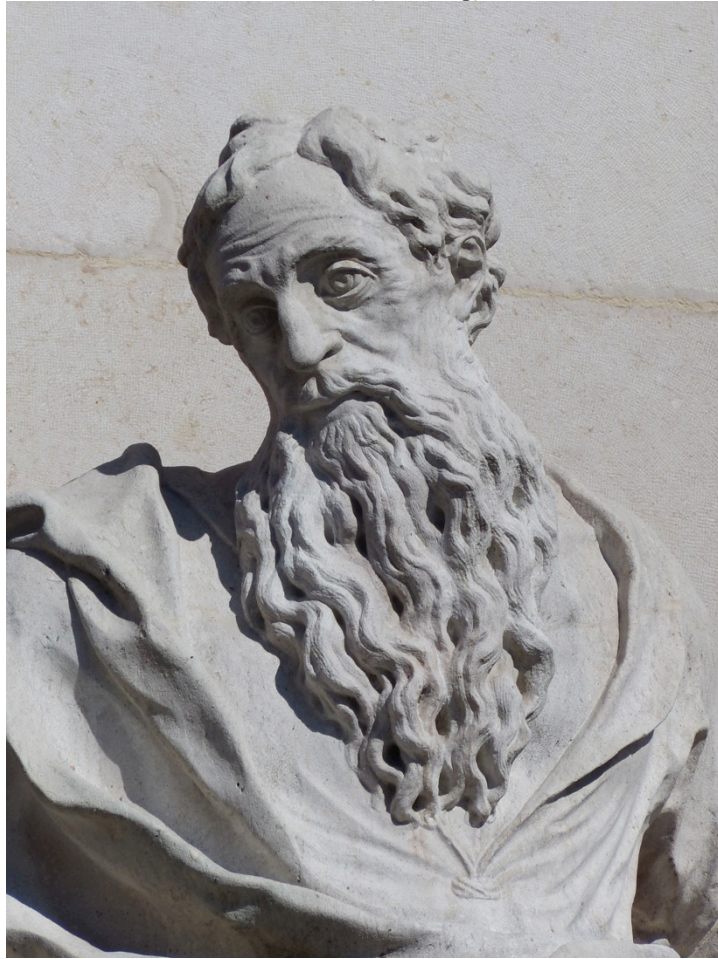


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“FOR YOU KNOW THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THAT  
THOUGH HE WAS RICH, YET FOR YOUR SAKES HE BECAME POOR,  
THAT YOU THROUGH HIS POVERTY MIGHT BECOME RICH.”

2CORINTHIANS 8:9

LESSON 150  
**Sincere Words**  
2CORINTHIANS I

In our last lesson we completed our study in 1Corinthians, and today we start a study of 2Corinthians. While 1Corinthians was concerned with many problems in the Corinthian church, including the need to discipline a man for sexual immorality, now in 2Corinthians Paul will again readdress this issue seeking to have the man restored into the fellowship. He will also deal with his own calling as an apostle which some were calling into question.

Paul opens this letter with the assertion of his apostleship by the will of God, and we shall see how this proves to be an important issue which Paul must defend in this book. He also includes Timothy in his greetings to the Corinthians, since Timothy was likely with Paul at the time of writing, and would be well known to the Corinthian believers. Paul wishes grace and peace to the saints, and then begins a wonderful expression of praise to God. He describes God as the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and father of mercies and God of all comfort. Paul was going through some difficult trials of his own in the province of Asia, and relates to the Corinthians his comfort found in God through Christ. He points out that the purpose of suffering is God's way of showing us how to show comfort to others who are also in need of comforting. This is a good thing to remember when we go through difficult times, for God may use our trials, to help others in their own struggles. Paul said his trial was so severe that he thought he was as good as dead, but God spared him, and he gives credit to the prayers of his Christian friends for his deliverance, and mutual gratitude to God for His mercy.

While talking about sufferings it is important for us to understand that sometimes God allows us to suffer to fulfill a greater purpose. It is common for Christians to fall into the false idea that as Christians, God does not want us to suffer, but to prosper and live a healthy and happy life. If we adopt this view, then when troubles enter into our experience, we will begin to doubt our faith, or worse, doubt God's love and care for us. But let us learn from the scriptures here in 2Corinthians that God allows suffering in our lives, so that we can experience his comfort, and then also be an agent of comfort to others. There is a whole lot of sin and suffering in this world, and as Christians we should recognize our role as messengers of God's salvation and mercy, and this will also include showing others the comfort God can bring into their lives, when they are hurting and struggling. However we could not effectively comfort and bless others, unless we first know the comfort of God through our own trials and suffering. So let us recognize that our trials are often God's messengers of love, to reveal to us His goodness and mercy.

Paul had planned to make a trip to Corinth for the benefit of the Corinthians, but unfortunately those plans had to be altered. This was causing some to question Paul's sincerity, and so Paul defends himself, saying that he always speaks and acts with Christian sincerity. In fact they had good reason to boast in Paul, and he in them, when they would meet together before the Lord Jesus in heaven some day. Paul said his travel plans were not done light heartedly as though his yes might mean no. His preaching, along with Timothy and Silas was always sincere when they were among them, so that no one need think he was failing to keep his promises. In Christ all of God's promises are yes, and Amen, meaning that God will ensure that his promises are always kept. Paul is making an important point to defend his actions, for if the Corinthians thought that Paul's words were not sincere when he spoke of his travel plans, then perhaps they would also doubt his preaching about the gospel and think him insincere. While defending himself and his sincerity, Paul speaks of the work of God in both the Corinthians, and in himself. He says they were both established by God, sealed and anointed with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was God's guarantee of His word to His children to keep them secure in Christ until they reach heaven. As God is trustworthy to his promises through the sealing of the Holy Spirit, so Paul calls upon God as a reliable witness against his own soul in the matter of his travel plans.

Paul explains that he did intend on visiting them, and to bring God's blessing to them. He wanted to pass through Corinth on his way to Macedonia, which was immediately to the north of Corinth, and then after visiting in Macedonia to return to Corinth again, before making his way back to Judea. However he bypassed Corinth and went straight into Macedonia, because he said he wanted to spare the Corinthians. It appears that the Corinthians had received instructions from Paul in a previous letter, which had harshly confronted them about some issues that needed to be dealt with. This was likely the situation concerning the man who was a known fornicator in their fellowship, and their reluctance to put the man under discipline. Since the Corinthians were not as yet responding as Paul had hoped they would, his heart is torn, for he did not want to come in a spirit of correction to chastise them for their lack of obedience. He thought if he could provide them more time and space to do what was right before the Lord, then he would not have to come to them in such a harsh and condemning way. Paul is quick to point out to the Corinthians, that while he wanted to spare them an unpleasant visit, that did not imply that he had dominion over their faith. He considered the Corinthians as fellow workers. His intentions in his work was to provide spiritual joy to them, and establish them in faith.

Paul will speak more about his intended travels to Corinth in the next chapter, so we shall leave that discussion for our next lesson, but let us learn from today's lesson that in the work of the Lord integrity and sincerity are extremely important for they establish God's servants as reliable and trustworthy. The character of a man of God will have a direct influence on how well people receive or reject his ministry. Let's be sure that God always keeps his word to us,

and He promises us eternal life if we place our trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. His word is sure, so why not put your trust in Christ today.

*"For all the promises of God in Him are yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us." 2Cor 1:20*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we learned about the God of all comfort, who comforts us, so we can also comfort others. We also learned the importance of sincerity when we speak, as Paul defended his own words to the Corinthians about traveling to their city. Someone might ask the question, "If God is so loving, why is there so much suffering in the world?"

While we speak of the God of all comfort, someone might object and say, "wait a minute, there is a whole lot of people suffering in this world, so where is this God of all comfort, does He not care?". There are many people who automatically equate the existence of evil and suffering in the world as being utterly inconsistent with the existence of a loving, benevolent God. After all, they will say, "why does God not end the suffering, if He has the power to do so?" These are serious accusations to make, but nonetheless are real issues that thoughtful people need to face. We know that the world indeed has experienced a great deal of suffering, and we know that God is good, kind and all-powerful, but this does not mean that God is responsible to take away all suffering. Suffering, we must all learn, is due to the sin that man has brought into the world. The consequence of sin is death, decay, and all forms of suffering. Sometimes people suffer as a direct result of sin in their life, and sometimes it is the indirect results of living in a world that has been put under a curse by God. We live in a broken world, and God wants us to come to terms with this fact. He needs us to understand that something has gone terribly wrong, because man rebelled against His creator. God is not obligated to remove the consequences of our rebellion, especially when we do not show repentance from our sin and rebellion. So to answer any who would try to fault God for allowing suffering, I would answer, that God certainly did not intend all this misery for man, and He has power to rescue people from suffering, and He often does, but that does not mean He is obligated to remove the consequences of our rebellion against Himself.

Now let us think a bit more deeply about the nature of suffering, so we might understand God's purposes more clearly. We generally think that suffering is bad, and we would all agree that it is better not to suffer, then it is to suffer. Which person lying in a hospital bed with cancer does not wish the cancer would be taken away, and their health restored? Of course we all hate to suffer, and no one enjoys being sick, hungry, or poor. However we also need to realize that when we are going through some time of suffering, it can have positive spiritual effects in our life. When we are sick it makes us appreciate how frail we are, and how dependent upon God for our lives. This can produce more gratitude and praise for God when we regain our health, and help us to sympathize with others who are going through some sickness themselves. When we are hungry, we learn the importance and value of work, as a means to supply our needs, and are humbled by the goodness and grace of others who are willing to help feed us. When we are poor, we recognize that we need God daily to supply our needs, and we call upon Him to help us. So we can see in just these few examples how suffering can bring about very positive spiritual results. God is much more interested in our spiritual condition, then he is in our physical well-being, and so sometimes He will use physical suffering to affect a great spiritual good. This is what we learn from 2Corinthians 1, when we heard God speak about why He allowed Paul to go through his own experience of suffering and despair, and that was so that Paul could also know the comfort of God, and then share that comfort to others who would also need comfort in their own trials. Some have said that with every cloud there is a silver lining, and if we apply this to suffering, we might say that God never wastes our suffering without using it to bring some good into our lives, or the lives of others. When we look at our problems and trials in this light, it will give us greater hope and encouragement that God is not necessarily angry or upset with us when we suffer. God might be expressing His great love and care for us, as we draw near to Him and receive the spiritual blessings of faith, hope, compassion, gratitude, humility, endurance, patience and love.

The world is indeed full of suffering, perhaps today you are also going through your own trials, and it would seem that God has allowed this day of affliction, so that we will call out to Him for mercy and compassion. He longs and waits for us to call upon His name, so that He may express to us just how much He loves us. He wants to heal us. He wants to give our hearts full joy. He wants us to walk in His presence forever, and know the full blessing of His goodness. But He also knows that the way to His heart and His blessing, is the way of the cross, the way of suffering. We would like to avoid that, and just take hold of the crown, but we can never have the crown unless we first experience the cross. Christ died for your sin, to make you right before God. He knows about suffering. He knows about pain, because He loves you so much. Trust in Him, and He will give you peace.

*"And he said to me, "my grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." 2Cor 12:9*

LESSON 151  
**Time to Forgive**  
2CORINTHIANS 2

In our last lesson we talked about God as the God of all comfort, who uses our trials to teach us how to minister to others in their trials. And we heard Paul defend himself about his intentions to visit Corinth, but was able to. In today's lesson Paul will further explain why he felt he could not come sooner to visit the Corinthians lest it bring him much sorrow. Also we are going to see that it was now time for the Corinthians to extend forgiveness to a repentant brother.

Paul certainly wanted to travel to see the Corinthians, but when he learned of the problem of the sinful condition that was not being properly dealt with, he determined that he must delay his visit. He appears to have sent another letter to the Corinthians pleading with them to correct the situation with the erring brother. When he wrote this letter it was with great anguish and sorrow for the situation in Corinth, and he wrote it with many tears. As he wrote, it was difficult, but he knew they needed a strong word of correction, so that they would do the right thing. Paul was worried that if he came to them, and they had not acted as they should have, he would feel great sorrow over their lack of obedience. Paul wanted to rejoice with the Corinthians, many of whom he had seen come to faith in Christ, and were thus his spiritual children. Like any parent, a true shepherd of God's flock, loves his children, and desires the best for them. Sometimes the need to discipline an erring child is very difficult for a parent, or for a loving pastor. Here Paul wants to provide some time to respond to his letter, to see if his spiritual children will heed his words, and carry out the needed discipline on the erring brother.

Now in the midst of explaining his heart to the Corinthians, and why he had delayed his coming to them, he also brings in the matter of discipline, which apparently the Corinthians had finally acted upon as Paul had instructed. Paul says that if the man in question had caused any grief, it was not to him personally, but to the Corinthians, since his offense was to them, and his conduct affected their testimony as a church. Now Paul is saying that the man had suffered under the punishment of the church sufficiently. The man clearly was repentant for his sin, and Paul does not want the man to be overcome by grief because over his sin. He asks the church to receive him again, and forgive him, reaffirming their love for him. It is important that we learn that church discipline is always to be administered in love, with the intention of seeking restoration of the erring one. Paul says that when he had earlier written to them about this matter, it was to test the Corinthians to see if they would be obedient. Fortunately they did what Paul instructed them to do, and the results were the restoration into fellowship of the brother who had fallen into sin. Some churches are very reluctant to administer church discipline for their members. I suppose there are reasons for this, including favoritism, or perhaps some feel guilty themselves, and would feel like a hypocrite to punish others. However the church has a responsibility to ensure, that when someone is openly sinning against Christ, they act in opposition to the sin, for the sake of the sinning brother or sister. It is the same reason why we must discipline our own children when they misbehave. If we neglect to do so, we can expect our children to become even more rebellious. The best we can do for our brothers and sisters, is to offer correction and discipline when needed, to help them walk right before the Lord. It will hurt, and may bring much sorrow, but this is necessary for the best spiritual results. We see how this whole situation was very difficult on Paul, as he was deeply concerned about the Corinthian church, and their handling of the discipline required. Paul adds, that as the Corinthians forgive the brother, he too would add his full forgiveness also, so that Satan would not be given any advantage. If the Corinthians were reluctant to carry out the discipline, Satan could use this to destroy the testimony of the church, and shipwreck a man's faith. If the church was too harsh, and not ready to forgive when the man had repented, then Satan could use this also to breed a spirit of superiority and self-righteousness in the church, while a repentant brother is overcome by sorrow. Satan looks for any opportunity to do us harm, so we need to be wise, and on our guard against his devices.

When Paul was at Troas, he was preaching, and the Lord had opened an effectual door for the gospel, but Paul spirit was unsettled as he waited to hear from Titus about the situation at Corinth. When he could not find Titus, he decided he should travel into Macedonia, hoping there he might learn more about the situation with the Corinthians. This shows us that, while the Corinthians may have thought Paul was not sincere in his desire to see them, Paul, in fact, was very concerned about the Corinthians, and made special travel plans hoping to learn more about them, and how they had responded to his letter.

Right in the middle of explaining himself, and his movements, Paul breaks into a word of praise to God, whom he said always leads him in triumph in Christ, and uses him to diffuse the fragrance of Christ in all places. He speaks about how the Christian servant is a fragrance of Christ both to those who are being saved, and among those who are perishing. To the one he is a fragrance of life, as he learns of the Savior and places his hope in him, but to the other he is the fragrance of death, for the gospel speaks of judgment upon the ungodly and unrepentant. Paul adds that he was not like others who peddle the word of God, but preached from sincerity, a message given by God, speaking in the sight of God. Paul wanted those in Corinth, who doubted His sincerity, to know that wherever he preached he did so sincerely, and God showed His blessing and approval, by the effects the gospel had on those who heard him. The vindication of Paul was the victory he experienced, as he witnessed the work of Christ through his preaching to others. Wherever he traveled people learned of Christ through him, and some believed, and others did not, but he knew in his heart that the knowledge of Christ was spreading effectively through him. I wonder if the gospel message

is to you a message of life, or a message of death. If you accept Jesus as Lord and follow Him, then you enter will into eternal life, which the gospel promises all to those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord.

*"Now thanks be to god who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of his knowledge in every place." 2Cor 2:14*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we learned Paul's reluctance to visit Corinth lest he be filled with sorrow because of their mishandling of a case of church discipline. When Paul learns of the man's repentance he calls on the church to forgive, and restore the man to the fellowship. Someone might ask the question, "What does it mean to be the fragrance of Christ?"

In today's lesson Paul used the metaphor that Christians are the fragrance of Christ. How is it that Christians carry with them something from Christ that others can notice, and enjoy. The expression is a beautiful figure of speech, for it helps us to understand the nature of a godly Christian testimony. Our lives emanate something about the person of Christ to others we come in contact with, just as a flower sends forth it's sweet aroma. Notice how some flowers have a very beautiful order, and there smell is quite noticeable as soon as you come near to the flower. This is what our Christian lives are to be like. As people come near us, they should immediately be able to detect our Christian witness. If they realize the goodness and love of God in us they will be attracted to Christ, and the fragrance will speak of the hope of eternal life. However if they would rather rebel against God, and enjoy their sinful practices, then the smell of Christ is only going to aggravate them. This is why some Christians who make their testimony very clear, are persecuted and hated by others in the world, especially those who openly practice rebellion against God's standards. Some Christians do not have a strong and clear testimony in the world, for they are afraid to allow others to see Christ in them, lest they be treated badly. This is like a flower that sends forth little or no fragrance. The only way you can smell something is if you place your nose right up against the flower and take a deep sniff of the flower, and then the scent is still quite faint. To live our Christian lives this way, would indicate that we are ashamed to be identified as followers of Jesus, and Jesus said if we are ashamed of Him, He would also be ashamed of us when He comes again.

When the Christian is living right, and others can see Christ, and discern the gospel message in the life of a believer, the world has opportunity to turn to the Lord in faith. This is how God spreads the gospel message, therefore it is very important for every believer to understand his responsibility to live properly, and share the gospel message as often as possible with family and friends. When a Christian lives in a dishonorable way, then the message of the gospel is greatly hindered, for people will see the hypocrisy, and turn away from Christ.

Not only can the Christian be a savor of life, to those who believe, He is also a savor of death to those who reject God's salvation. It should not surprise a faithful believer if he meets hatred and scorn from those who hate Christianity. I recall working with a man who seemed determined to challenge my faith at every opportunity. He always argued against the bible, and tried to trip me up with his arguments from science. For a long time I did my best to defend my confidence in the bible, and my faith in Christ. Finally one day I asked him directly why he as so determined to upset my faith? He said he just did not want me to waste my life believing in something false. So I told him he could think that way if he wished, but that I was quite happy, and so he did not need to continue his campaign to fight against my beliefs. As I thought about that man and his constant attacks on my faith, it occurred to me that behind all the arguments was a man living a sinful life, who had to prove me wrong, for fear of God's judgment on his lifestyle. His conscience was troubled every time He saw me, because he could see how happy I was in Christ, and he had to face the real and certain consequence of his rebellion against God. My life was to him a savor of death. It took me sometime to figure this out spiritually, but when I did, it made good biblical sense to me. I am glad my life is used by the Lord to trouble the conscience of others, so that they might fear and turn to Christ for salvation. Is God using your Christian testimony to put sinners in fear of judgment? If our Christian testimony is not making any impact on the lives of those around us, then we have to ask ourselves, what good is my testimony? Why can't God use my life to win more souls? Perhaps one problem is that we do not show genuine faith by our own actions, and behave just the same as any person in the world. Or perhaps we do not care that others are on their way to the fires of Hell. If we did care we would speak to them, and try to show them the answer for their sin problem can be dealt with by Christ. If we are willing to share the gospel with others, then people will recognize our faith, and its' importance to us. We can then be a fragrance of Christ to others. Even more than our words, our actions are a greater way for people to know and believe in Christ. There is nothing more convincing than a life that has been changed from wickedness to righteousness. A foul tongue that has been made clean, a greedy man made generous, an immoral person made pure, a lazy man made industrious, a blasphemer made into a preacher, the shameful made into an evangelist. Can people smell the fragrance of Christ in you?

*"for whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the son of man also will be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his father with the holy angels." Mark 8:38*

LESSON 152  
**A Greater Glory**  
2CORINTHIANS 3

In our last lesson Paul continued to defend himself, and explain why he delayed his visit to Corinth. He called the Corinthians to also forgive a brother who had repented, lest he be overcome by sorrow. In today's lesson Paul will show why he did not require a commending letter, and then teaches about the greater glory of the new covenant.

Since the Corinthians had been questioning Paul's sincerity, and apparently his apostleship, Paul asks rhetorically if he also needed a letter of commendation? When Christians, and in particular preachers, traveled in the 1<sup>st</sup> century they carried a letter from their home assembly, which approved them as a fellow Christian. This gave other believers confidence to receive them into their fellowship, or permit them opportunity to teach the word of God. Paul argues here with the Corinthians, that he would not need such a letter, because he was not only well known to them, but many of them had come to Christ through his gospel ministry. Paul describes his ministry as being authenticated by the conversion of many of the Corinthians, and therefore the converts themselves were his letter of commendation. Writing letters of commendation even today is a good practice, showing courtesy between one assembly of Christians and another. The greatest commendation, however, is the manner in which a Christian demonstrates his faith and service for the Lord. Paul had firm confidence in his ministry, not because of anything notable in himself, but because he, and others, could testify to how the Lord had used him to bring souls into God's kingdom.

In the remaining part of this chapter Paul gives a lengthy discussion about the fading glory of the old covenant, and the much greater glory of the new covenant. This spiritual exposition is not easy to follow, for there is much that is symbolic, and it does require some knowledge about the old testament, and how Moses received the Law from God. Let us try, however, to see if we can learn what Paul is trying to teach the Corinthians. To understand what Paul's main point is, it is helpful to remember that those who were likely criticizing his ministry were Jewish preachers, who were trying to impose teachings from the old testament law upon the Christians at Corinth. Therefore Paul will carefully explain why the old covenant must give way to the new covenant whose glory outshines the old.

A comparison is made between the old and new covenants, Paul explaining that the Old Testament Law was a ministry unto death, but the new covenant was a ministry unto life. There was a glory associated with the old testament law, because it did reveal to man his sinful condition, and this was necessary if he was ever to turn to the Lord and seek forgiveness. However the new covenant, not only reveals man's sinfulness, it provides the answer to the sin, by offering an acceptable sacrifice for sin, in our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the old Testament condemned sinners to death, but the new testament provided escape from judgment, and eternal life.

He also compares the glories of these two covenants. When Moses received the Law from mount Sinai his face shone brightly, so that the people were even afraid to come near him. Moses had to veil his face, not because he did not want the Israelites to see the glory on his face, but because he did not want them to notice that the glory was fading away. Paul uses this illustration of fading glory to describe how the old testament law also had a fading glory. It was only meant to provide a temporary glory, until a greater glory would come through Jesus the Savior. The new covenant does not have a fading glory, but it's truth of salvation is an eternal glory, for everyone to behold and partake in. If the Israelites had seen the fading glory of Moses face, it might have occurred to them that the glory associated with the Law would also fade away in time. However because of the veil on Moses face, the Israelites were blinded to this important truth, and continue to be blinded up to the time Paul was writing, and even to this day. When Christ came as the fulfillment of the Law, and a Jew, or any other gentile, saw the answer God provided for our forgiveness through Jesus Christ, the veil is removed, and the glory shines through. The bible is veiled to many people, because they cannot humble themselves to see their need of a Savior, or accept God's provision of a Savior in Jesus Christ. As soon as a person does believe in Jesus as his personal Savior a light begins to shine in them, showing the truth of the bible. The Holy Spirit is able to illuminate the believers understanding, so that the law and it's message is clearly understood, and the gospel is embraced as God's remedy to man's sin.

If you have never turned to the Lord in faith, then the bible says you are blinded, and have this veil over your heart. You cannot properly understand God's message, until you receive God's Son as the answer to your sin. May the Spirit of God open your heart to receive Him today by faith. When you do, you will also experience the glorious liberty that belongs to the children of God. As a person sees the Lord in the scriptures, and receives Him by faith, he is freed from the bondage of the law, which enslaves men to their own efforts for self-righteousness. But in Christ we find the liberty that comes from faith, for we no longer must try to keep the law, or prove ourselves worthy of eternal life. God wants to freely give to us eternal life as a gift, if only we believe in Jesus, whom the Spirit reveals to us in the bible.

It all may seem hard to grasp, but by the Holy Spirit we can understand and know who Jesus is, and embrace Him personally as our Savior. This chapter ends with a wonderful verse that explains how God changes his children to be more and more like the Lord Jesus, and share in His glory. Using the illustration of Moses and his veiled face, Paul now says that Christians behold God's glory with an unveiled face, when they look into the mirror. The mirror is the word of God. As we behold Jesus in the bible, and study Him, the Christian is slowly being changed from one degree of glory to another degree, so increasingly he shines with the same glory of Jesus. This is opposite to Moses fading glory, because the Christian's glory continues to increase as He spends more time viewing Jesus in God's word. This

transformation takes place by the work of the Holy Spirit, who not only reveals Jesus in the word, but inclines our hearts to emulate Him in what we say and do, showing His glory to others. Today we have beheld the greater glory that is found through the New Covenant, and I hope you have put your trust in Jesus as your Savior, so that you may also behold His glory, and be changed into His image.

*"but we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the spirit of the lord."* 2Cor 3:18

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we learned how the new covenant shines with a much greater glory than the old covenant. This is because the old testament law only revealed man's sin and need of a Savior, whereas the new covenant offers life through our Savior Jesus Christ. We also learned about letters of commendation for traveling Christians. Someone might ask the question, "Should the church use letters of commendation today?"

Paul argued his case to the Corinthians, that he did not need a letter of commendation, because they knew him very well, and they were his letter of commendation. Since the Corinthian church was founded by the ministry of Paul, and many souls were converted to Christ through him, the Corinthians believers did not need a formal letter to introduce or validate his Christian ministry. While Paul says that he did not need a letter of commendation for the Corinthians, that does not mean that the practice of sending letters was a bad idea.

It becomes clear that many in Paul's time used these letters of commendation to introduce a traveling Christian or preacher. The letter was presented to any church gathering they desired to fellowship with while traveling. The Christian family is spread all over the world, and it is very nice to be welcomed to a church when visiting in a foreign city, to enjoy fellowship together in Christ. However the receiving church is put in an awkward position, if a Christian should just suddenly appear at their doorstep asking for fellowship with them. The reason it can prove awkward, is because the receiving church does not know the person who has come to visit them. Are they a Christian, or are they a false teacher? Are they living right before the Lord, or living in some sinful practice? These questions were important to have answered before someone could be invited into church fellowship, even if they were only visiting for a short time. The reason for this is because the assembly gave freedom to all believers to enjoy participation in worship, teaching, and the ministries of the church. It maybe that the visitor is a gifted teacher, and could share some teaching to help the congregation, but without some knowledge of this, the church would not feel comfortable to invite the visitor to preach. In most churches today an unknown visitor would never be given opportunity to preach or teach, because modern churches do not resemble the biblical assemblies of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. If we follow the pattern in the new testament, we would feel it is only proper to extend the privilege of fellowship to a visiting brother or sister in Christ. We would also want to give them any and every opportunity to minister to the saints, as the Holy Spirit directs. So if we follow the biblical pattern, then the letter of commendation becomes an important means of introduction and validation. When one Christian wants to travel to another location, where he or she is not known, they might ask the elders of the church to prepare a letter of commendation for them. The elders would explain who they are, and how long they have been in fellowship, and how they have served in the church, and ask other Christians to receive them in the Lord. By doing this, the assembly that receives the visitor with a letter, is able to joyfully and confidently invite them into their fellowship. After all, fellowship means to share things in common, but how can we invite a visitor to share with us, if we do not allow them to share as the Holy Spirit directs them. This is especially true for traveling preachers. Often God has used men to travel from place to place to teach the word of God to his people. In order for the churches to protect themselves from false teachers, they used letters of commendation to ensure that only men of good reputation, and good standing in other assemblies would be permitted the opportunity for fellowship, and ministry when visiting.

It may not seem necessary today to have letters of commendation. This is because a visitor to most churches would be shown where he may sit, but never be expected to participate by leading in prayer, teaching the word, or helping in any ministry of the church. What we have today in many churches is simply meetings that do not reflect God's design for the new testament church. Certainly for those Christians who desire to follow God's pattern as taught in the new testament, letters of commendation are not only a good biblical practice, they are an important safeguard against false teachers, or divisive brethren. They also provide a means to extend true fellowship within the body of Christ. How sad that in our modern church practice we have effectively diminished, if not all-together cancelled, the beauty and rich spiritual benefits of fellowship that ought to bridge together Christian assemblies around the world. Instead we have isolated groups of Christians who are deprived of real spiritual fellowship with each other, and any who visit among them. Sadly, most congregations today are made up of a large group of people who are strangers to one another, and so the concept of commending a brother or sister is foreign. May the Lord direct all of His people into true biblical fellowship.

*"beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church; if you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of god, you will do well."* 3Jn5-6



LESSON 153  
**A Shining Glory**  
2CORINTHIANS 4

In our last lesson Paul explained why he did not require a letter of commendation for the Corinthian church, and began a defense of himself and his ministry. This, as we shall see, is one of the major themes of 2Corinthians. In today's chapter we also find Paul defending his gospel ministry, by showing the Corinthians many of the hardships that he endured for the sake of the gospel, and how God's glory was shining in and through him.

Paul begins this chapter by first asserting his integrity as a minister of the gospel. He was not using any devious means, dishonesty, or mishandling of God's word. He spoke the truth clearly, seeking to demonstrate to everyone his honesty and sincerity in the sight of God. Paul knew he had received his ministry from God, and therefore even though his work would be filled with dangers and hardships, he would not lose heart.

Paul explains that those who cannot receive the gospel are blinded with a veil by Satan, who here is called the god of this age. Satan does not want anyone to see the truth of salvation through Jesus Christ, and all he needs is some pride in the hearts of men to veil their hearts from hearing the truth. Paul said he was not preaching about himself, but he was preaching Jesus Christ the Lord, and he and his fellow-workers were slaves for Jesus' sake. Then Paul uses an interesting metaphor to describe how the gospel enlightens the hearts of believers. Paul compares this to the creation of light at the beginning, when God commanded light to shine out of darkness. Whereas, in God's physical creation, light shone forth from darkness, in the spiritual realm, when someone accepts Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, the light of the glory of God shines *in* their hearts. This light shining in the heart of believers shines out to the world to give others the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Paul uses an allusion to Gideon's earthen vessels that hid the light of their torches, when preparing to battle the Midianites (Judges 7:16). He says that he and fellow Christians also have this hidden light inside jars of clay, but what he means is that Christians have the light (or knowledge) of the gospel message within their bodies (which are vessels of clay). When we think back to the story of Gideon defeating the vast army of the Midianites with only 300 men, we realize that their strength was not in themselves, but the Lord who fought for them. So it is with the gospel message that Christian's share with the world, the power to win a soul for Christ has nothing to do with the greatness of the vessel, but with the light that the vessel is carrying, which is Jesus Christ. Paul is trying to show that the greatness of his ministry, and its power to convert souls, has precious little to do with him or his abilities, in fact only when he is broken, just as Gideon's vessels were broken, can the hidden light be seen. Paul will now go on to show how his vessel had been broken, to allow God's glory to shine through.

Paul describes the various hardships of his work as a gospel minister, but also the limitations to these hardships, and the glorious consolations that result from enduring much for the sake of the gospel. He says he was pressed but not crushed, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed. He says he was experiencing the dying of the Lord Jesus, so that Jesus life would be manifested in his body. The paradox of the gospel is that Christ's death brings life to those who believe, and Paul says he too is dying, and his death is also bringing life to others, as they hear the gospel and believe. Paul was willing to experience this daily dying for the sake of the gospel, because of his faith. True faith must act upon what it sincerely believes. Far too often people who say they believe in Jesus are only prepared to follow Him when it is convenient, and not when it hurts or cost them something. What kind of Christian are you?

Paul's ministry in the gospel, was one of much suffering and hardship, but he always kept the hope of future reward glowing in his heart. Just as Jesus was raised up from the dead, so Paul knew he and his fellow believers would be raised up to be in the presence of Christ. All that Paul gave of himself for the gospel, was given to the Corinthians for their spiritual blessing, and so that thanksgiving would abound to God, and bring glory to God. Paul found courage in the face of all his hardships because of the great hope of being raised up to be with Jesus forever, and that God was being glorified through the thanks of many grateful souls.

Paul refers to the outward man perishing, but the inward man being renewed day by day. This helps us to see the joyful perspective that believers have as they face the ultimate reality of a weakening body and eventual death. A Christian can face death with hope and joyful anticipation of departing to a better place. We all recognize that our bodies are only temporary dwellings, and little by little our bodies begin to wear out, wear down, until we must finally give way to death. For the unbeliever this prospect can only bring dreadful fear, and therefore they try to avoid the subject and hide from it as long as they possible can. But eventually death will catch up with each one of us. The Christian knows that his life in Christ, the new creation, is a life that is not decaying, but is being refreshed and renewed each day, as we learn more of Christ, and experience His goodness and blessings. Since our eternal perspective is so great, it makes our trials seem like a light affliction. In fact when Paul compares present sufferings with future glory, he calls this future hope an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. To enjoy this hope, we must see through the eyes of faith; for our natural eyes cannot apprehend the great eternal reward promised to those who have their trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. If you want to be saved and be assured of a place in heaven, then you too will have to look through the eyes of faith. As the Holy Spirit reveals to you the truth of the gospel, and Jesus

Christ as Lord, then call upon the Lord Jesus to save your soul. He is calling on you to trust in Him, so make today the day of your salvation by responding in faith to His call.

*"for it is the god who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of god in the face of Jesus Christ." 2Cor 4:6*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we heard Paul defending his ministry, for which he was willing to suffer in order that Christ's glory might be seen in him, and souls saved. He also spoke of his future hope of eternal glory as his motivation to press on in his labors in spite of the many hardships he had to face. Someone might ask the question, "What does it mean for God to shine in our hearts?"

While Paul spoke about how the gospel was implanted into the heart of believers, he uses a very interesting analogy to God's creation of light. When God created light, he caused the light to shine out of darkness. When God opens a heart to the gospel, he does not only shine the gospel *into* the heart, but amazingly the light of the glory of the gospel shines *in* our hearts. In other words the light that comes into the heart, now also radiates from the heart. The light enters the heart, and takes its residence there so that it can shine out from the heart. Let us think of it this way, when the sun comes up and shines upon the earth, the light will soon fade into darkness again, because the light does not change the earth, it only shines upon it. When the glory of God shone upon Moses' face, his face was changed, and the light began to shine also from his face. This was only a temporary glory though, as we learned in our previous lesson. The glory of God that shines *in* our hearts, is a glory that enters, and then takes up permanent residence. When others encounter a Christian, they can also encounter this glory, for it is hidden inside the believer's heart. As a person places their trust in Jesus as their Savior, the believer is changed from within, he is regenerated, and the Holy Spirit comes and lives inside of him. This change within the believer through faith, means that the gospel is now part of him, and will be forever. The light of the message can shine forth to others, so they too can learn of Christ and be saved. Let us notice though that the light within believers is said to be hidden in earthen vessels. This reminds us of the battle of Gideon against the Midianites, as mentioned in our lesson today. Unless Gideon and his soldiers broken the earthen vessels that hid the torches, the light hiding within would not be seen. When they broke the vessels and the light shone out upon the Midianites, God used their faith to overcome their enemies and win a great victory. The spiritual lesson we can learn from this, and which Paul seems to allude to in his writing is that the Christian must be a broken vessel if the light of the gospel hidden within is to be made visible. It may not be adequate to just tell people about Jesus and his sacrifice for our sins. People need to see our faith, our willingness, like Paul, to die for the sake of the gospel. This means we must be willing to look foolish before our friends or family, so that we can tell them the gospel. This means we may have to face ridicule or persecution for the sake of the gospel. This means taking risks, and stepping outside of our comfort, and doing all we can to share the message of life with others. The Lord knows our faith, and our weakness, and will not push us into places and situations we are not ready to face; however, the Lord will not be pleased if we accept the light of the gospel, and want to keep it hidden inside. He wants us to get the message out to others, and so we must be willing to make sacrifices. Perhaps it will cost you some friends, perhaps your family will reject you, perhaps the world will think you have gone a bit crazy, or perhaps your life will be put in danger. Are you willing to let the light of the gospel shine from you to others? Remember it is not how clever we can argue with others, or how many bible verses we can quote; but it is our changed lives, and what we willingly sacrifice and suffer for the gospel, that will make others take notice, and cause them to consider the Christian message more seriously. If being a Christian does not cost you anything, then that is how much value people will see in your gospel witness. If it costs you everything to be faithful to the Lord, then people will be able to see the reality of your faith, and though many may not be convinced, surely the Lord will use your testimony to help others also find their way to the cross, and to life in Christ.

God wants to shine His light into our lives, but more importantly, God wants His glory to shine out from His children, demonstrating their faith to the world. This is how we bring glory to God, as the world takes notice that we are changed, and that Christ is not just a Sunday morning ritual, but He is our life, our everything. To live this way, will be costly and painful, as we saw with Paul's example in today's reading of 2Cor 4. If we are not willing to suffer for Christ, then we are not worthy to bear His name. If we suffer for His name sake, then He will be glorified, and our investments into eternity become all the more real to us, and our testimony will have an impact on people around us. Do you want the glory of God to shine upon you, or from you? Perhaps many are pleased to bask in the glory of God's grace while listening to the preacher on Sunday. However, they have never allowed that glory to change them from within, so that the light is not just shining on them, but shining out from their heart. If you want God's light to abide in your heart, then accept Jesus by faith, and then tell the world about Him.

*"let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven." Matt 5:16*

LESSON 154  
**The Judgment Seat**  
2CORINTHIANS 5

In our last lesson we heard Paul defend his ministry to the Corinthians, explaining that he was a slave of Christ, a broken vessel, allowing the light which God had placed in his heart to shine out for others to see Christ. While describing the various hardships he had to face as a minister of the gospel, he spoke about the outward man perishing, and the inward man being renewed day by day. Now Paul speaks in this chapter about his confidence in a future resurrection body in heaven, which gave him motivation to serve, along with the love of Christ, and his knowledge of a future judgment upon his Christian life and service.

In the first few verses of chapter 5 Paul speaks about our present bodies as a tent, which will one day be taken down and destroyed. Just as a tent is only a temporary dwelling, so our bodies are only temporary. The Christian will be given a permanent body, which Paul refers to as a building. Paul also uses the metaphor of clothing to help us understand the nature of the resurrection body, which will adorn our souls in a coming day. Paul's understanding of the nature of our future resurrection body, and his hope in Christ, made him groan and long for that new incorruptible body. When a Christian dies, his soul and spirit are ushered into Christ's presence, but they still lack the resurrection body, and therefore are awaiting that final stage of salvation that where God will give them their eternal and glorified body. Until that time, they can enjoy fellowship with Christ, but still are lacking something important that God wants to provide them. Paul refers to this condition of a soul without the body as being naked. He will argue that to be absent from the body and present with Christ is better, though still unclothed, but his real desire is to be clothed, having the body God will give to each believer in Christ, at the time when Christ returns for His people. All this conversation about the future body is most interesting for us to learn and understand, but Paul talks of this primarily so that the Corinthians would understand his motivation to be pleasing to the Lord, in view of his future hope.

Now Paul will also open our understanding further regarding our future time in heaven, where we shall meet with judgment. Again Paul uses this teaching to explain his own motivation in serving the Lord with godly fear, but it will certainly benefit all of us to learn and apply this teaching. Paul speaks of the Judgment seat of Christ. This takes place in heaven, when all the believers are gathered into the presence of our Lord, and he judges our works, and gives rewards according to His grace, and our faithful service. The Christian should not dread this judgment as though his sins will be judged, and he will be cast out of heaven. The judgment seat of Christ is a time of reward for serving the Lord. The judgment against sin was at the cross, and we who have trusted in Jesus as our Savior will not have to meet with any judgment for our sins ever again. The believer, who is anxious to please the Lord, will have a wholesome dread for that day, since he will want to be sure that his conduct and service were always acceptable and pleasing to the Lord. If we were lazy, lacking diligence, or we tainted our ministry with lusts of the flesh, or corrupted the work through selfish indulgence or greed, then our works will be burned up as unworthy. It is only the sincere works, directed by the Holy Spirit, that yielded fruit that was pleasing to the Lord, that will bring the smile of approval, and reward from our Lord. Thus Paul was deeply motivated by this fact to serve the Lord as best he could at all times. He sought with a godly fear of that future judgment to show all men their accountability before God.

Once again Paul will emphasize that he was not commending himself, but wanted to provide opportunity to those sincere brothers and sisters at Corinth to provide answers to his critics, who took pride in their present outward appearance, rather than seeking the unseen rewards of heaven. Some may have thought Paul was a bit crazy, since they did not see these future rewards, that Paul saw so clearly. This made Paul's sufferings seem an unreasonable cost for his religious zeal. Others may have seen Paul as making perfect sense, for they understood the reward that was coming. For those who thought him crazy, Paul said his service was for God, for while men may laugh, ridicule and reject him, he knew God accepted his zeal and sacrifices. But for the others who understood Paul and supported him, all this zeal and sacrifice was for their benefit, and he could rejoice in what God was doing on their behalf.

While Paul was motivated by the hope of his future glorified body, and his rewards for faithful service, his greatest motivation to serve the Lord, was the love of Christ. The love that reached him and saved his soul, and which he now preached boldly to others, was not just an idea or theory in his mind, but was a force that moved his heart, and compelled his feet into action. As thirst needs quenching, and hunger needs food, so Christ's love demands death to selfish living. Paul maybe explaining his own mindset, but it is good for all of us to listen in, for if we be Christians the same holds true for us. We also need to recognize that Christ's death for us rightly demands that we should die to our ambitions of living for ourselves, but now in Christ we are to dedicate our lives to the service of the Lord. The death in Paul's life to his own ambitions, gave him a whole new outlook on life and people, so that now he looked at people from a spiritual viewpoint, to see them as either belonging to the Lord, or not. This whole new life Paul describes as a new creation, with the old now gone, and everything becoming new. Now he and those born of the Spirit know that this new life and perspective comes from God, who reconciled believers to himself through Jesus Christ, and has given the believers the wondrous ministry of reconciliation. The Christian can preach that God came in the person of Jesus Christ to reconcile the world to Himself, taking away their sins by the cross. This makes every Christian an ambassador for Christ, and God pleads with lost souls through our gospel preaching, to be reconciled. The great message that Christians are to share is that God made Jesus, who was sinless, to bear the judgment of sin for us, so that we could become the righteousness in God through Jesus. This is a remarkable transaction that God offers to any

who will hear God's call, and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ as their hope for eternal salvation. Paul was willing to suffer for this message and die for this message, but what does this message mean to you? If you are not yet saved, then hear God pleading with your soul today, and be reconciled by calling on Jesus Christ to save you.

*"now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." 2Cor 5:20*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson Paul spoke of his joyful anticipation to be with the Lord clothed in his resurrection body, which motivated him in his ministry. He also saw the future judgment of believers, and the love of Christ as compelling motives to be always seeking to please the Lord in all that he did. Someone might ask the question, "What does it mean to be an ambassador for Christ?"

When Paul mentioned that he and his fellow Christian workers were ambassadors for Christ, he exalts his position as a gospel minister to the highest possible office of any job in the world. An ambassador is a representative of a nation, and it's leadership to another country. If negotiations are required between two countries, often the ambassadors are sent to meet and discuss the issues, to see if they can come to a mutual agreement. An ambassador therefore must be someone who can be trusted, and has a good understanding of his countries policies, and methods of diplomacy. He also has to be someone completely committed to his nation, and proved to be a trustworthy representative. Not just anyone could hold this most important office. It would be a very high honor indeed to represent your country, and be recognized as it's official representative in a foreign land. This is the idea Paul had in mind when he spoke of his office as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. God had called, and chosen him, to represent His interests in a foreign land. The foreign land is this world, that has rebelled against God's authority. God did not send Paul and other ambassadors to declare war against His enemies, but he sent them to bring a message of peace and reconciliation. Normally the one who causes the offense needs to seek out reconciliation, but here we have God, who has been offended, coming to seek peace with His enemies, pleading for terms of peace. He even goes so far as to provide the means to remove the offense, by paying for the offense Himself. He did this by sending His beloved son to die for our sins. This is a remarkable story of generosity and kindness on God's part. Men deserve the very opposite. We deserve judgment and wrath, but instead God reaches out to us in love seeking to make peace, and win our hearts by his great love. What a wondrous story this is, and to be an ambassador for Him is the greatest privilege. Who would not want to share this great message of love and reconciliation to offer free pardon and eternal life, to all those who will accept the terms of peace that God is offering.

While Paul and other ministers of the gospel are most certainly ambassadors for Christ, that does not limit this role to just a select few. Every Christian has the privilege to also be God's representative in sharing the gospel message with others. So we may all be ambassadors for Christ. I may never be the ambassador for my own country, for that position is reserved for very few, but imagine I am invited to be an ambassador sent from heaven. God desires that everyone hear about his message of love and salvation, and so he charges all His children with the commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel. Sadly many believers do not recognize their role, and privilege, to represent God to the world through gospel witnessing. But lets be sure that everyone listening today understands that every believer may be God's ambassador for Christ.

As an ambassador our responsibility is to properly represent our Lord Jesus Christ. This means we must behave in a manner that matches his character and purposes. We must show ourselves to be kind to all people, and help others in need, especially pointing them to Jesus Christ so that they can be saved and go to heaven. Being an ambassador for Christ has more to do with how we live, then the message we preach, but neither should be neglected if we are to be faithful to our Lord. An ambassador does not represent himself, and therefore personal desires, and personal opinions must be forsaken as much as they conflict with the desires and commandments of the Lord. Therefore an ambassador must be willing to deny himself, in order that he properly represent another. To be an ambassador for Christ is such a lofty privilege, and every Christian should be so honored to bear the name of Jesus, and speak for Him to others. Every time you share a gospel message and witness to another person, or handout a gospel tract you are acting as an ambassador for Christ. Every time you show others that Christ rules in your life, by the way you treat others, and the priorities you set, you are acting as an ambassador for Jesus. Every time you pray for people that are lost, or serve the needs of the poor, you are showing that you represent the king of glory. Every time you visit the sick to encourage them, or visit a wayward Christian to steer them back to Christ, you are representing the great shepherd of our souls. Being an ambassador for an important nation would be a great honor, but being an ambassador for the king of glory is the highest honor that can be bestowed upon God's children. If you are one of God's children recognize this great honor, and so don't be shy to honor your king, by representing him, and his gospel, to the world.

*"to me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Eph. 3:8*

LESSON 155  
**United by Separation**  
2CORINTHIANS 6

In our last lesson we learned that Paul was motivated to serve the Lord due to his hope in a future glorified body, facing Christ at the judgment seat, and by the love of Christ. Today Paul continues a defense of his gospel ministry, and calls on his Christian friends in Corinth to unite their hearts to him, and separate from all that God hates.

Today's title 'United by separation' may seem like a self-contradictory statement, what we call in English: an oxymoron. We shall find plenty of these oxymoron type of statements in today's chapter, teaching us that there are many paradoxes associated with working for the Lord, in a world that rejects Him. It is through our union with Christ that we must separate ourselves from all that is contrary to him. So indeed unity is promoted by separation.

Paul continues his defense to the Corinthians, sharing how he would declare the gospel faithfully, pleading for people to turn to the Lord. When preaching Paul would make use of a quotation from Isaiah that called people to respond to God's salvation today. The gospel message is not to be treated lightly, as though it is something we can put off, while we think about it. As we hear the Spirit pleading with our souls to come to Christ for salvation, we must immediately respond, and accept the invitation, for **now** is the day of salvation. Today is the time when salvation has been offered. Isaiah was prophesying about the Messianic age when God would send forth his salvation to all. Since you and I live in that age of which Isaiah spoke, we must believe in Christ and receive this salvation today.

Having shown the Corinthians how he was faithful, and urgent, in his gospel preaching, none among them should find any offense, for Paul's gospel ministry was without blame. Paul had shown to everyone that he was a minister for God, not by great achievements, but what he had suffered for the sake of the gospel, which he enumerates, speaking of his patience, tribulations, needs, distresses, stripes, imprisonments, tumults, sleeplessness, and fasting. He also defends his divine mission by the manner of his conduct, and his godly character, speaking of his purity, knowledge, longsuffering, kindness, obedience to the Holy Spirit, sincere love, words of truth, divine enablement, and righteousness which protected him on every side. Paul will now list many paradoxes he faced in his ministry for the Lord. We shall briefly explain these paradoxes.

1. He was honored by believers, but dishonored by those who hated Christianity.
2. Some spoke evil of Paul, and yet others reported well about his work for Christ.
3. Some thought he was a deceiver of the people, and others knew him to be a man of the truth.
4. Paul was not known to those who did not care about the gospel, but was well known wherever the gospel spread.
5. He faced death constantly in his ministry, but was still very much alive.
6. He also faced many persecutions wherever he traveled, but no one had managed to take his life.
7. There were many things to bring him sorrow, but so much more to cause him to rejoice always.
8. He lived poorly, yet shared the greatest riches by preaching the hope of eternal life.
9. Paul had almost no earthly wealth or possessions, yet in Christ he possessed all things.

While reviewing his list of credentials as a faithful minister for God, he now cannot help crying out from the depth of his heart to his Corinthian friends, saying he had opened his heart wide to them. Indeed he had exposed his heart and shown all that he suffered for the gospel, and for them. He said that their love for Him was not as overflowing as his love for them, and so he calls on them to open their hearts wide to him. Often men who work for God share their hearts affections liberally with others, only to find that those who receive of the bounty of God's love, are reluctant to respond with the same love. We might wonder if God's heart is saddened after all that He has given to man, and yet men still reject His love, and turns away from him. Paul felt this sting in his heart, as he longed to see the Corinthians respond to God's love through himself.

In the final few verses of this chapter Paul will talk about separation from all that is ungodly, and we might wonder how this relates to this defense of his ministry. It would appear that some in Corinth had also tried to win over the Corinthians affections, and lead them to question Paul, his apostleship, and gospel ministry. Paul recognized these false teachers as the work of the enemy, seeking to corrupt and destroy God's work among the Corinthians. So Paul writes with an appeal from his affections, but also with a stern warning to separate themselves from these evil associations. The false teachers are identified by Paul as unbelievers, and lawless men, who follow Satan, and practice idolatry. Therefore Paul calls for separation from these false teachers, showing that Christians cannot have fellowship with unbelievers, lawlessness, Satan or idols. It is important for Christians to understand the need for separation from everything that does not agree with our Lord Jesus Christ. To give our hearts to anything that denies, or defames our Lord is to compromise our fellowship with Christ. This principle can be applied to any human relationship or partnership, such as marriage, of a business partnership. When Christians join with unbelievers, they will end up sinning against the Lord, and dishonoring His name. It can be very costly to forsake relationships and partnerships to be faithful to Christ, but God understands this, and says He will be a Father to us, and we shall be his sons and daughters. In a special way, God will honor those who sacrifice to be loyal to Him. God calls upon us to cleanse ourselves from every filthiness of the flesh and spirit. This means we must not be joined with anyone, any company, or association that rejects or resists the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. Holiness will grow stronger and stronger in a believer, as he walks in the fear of God, rejecting all that is opposed to God and His righteousness. God

wants us to be his dear and beloved children, without the smell of the world, and its' idolatry upon us. He has much greater plans for us, and He is jealous for our affection. Will you open your heart to God today, by placing your trust in Jesus as your Savior?

*"For he says: in an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you. behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."* 2Cor 6:2

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we heard Paul defending his gospel ministry, by which he pleaded with men to respond to the gospel without delay, according the prophecy of Isaiah. He also spoke of the integrity of his ministry by those things he suffered for the sake of the gospel, calling on the Corinthians to open their hearts to him, as he had done for them. Someone might ask the question, "What is an unequal yoke?"

When Paul passionately appeals to his brothers and sisters at Corinth to open their hearts to him, he urges them to separate from evil associations. Though not plainly stated, it does seem to imply that there were those at Corinth, that were seducing the Corinthian believers to follow their false teachings, and reject Paul and his ministry as an apostle. These false teachers were a great danger to the Corinthians because Paul could discern that these were unbelievers, and their schemes were from Satan, and involved idolatry. Paul is zealous to protect his spiritual children from the wolves in sheep's clothing. He feels compelled not only to defend his ministry as being from the Lord, but also calls on the Corinthians to separate themselves from these evil men.

A yoke is a wooden frame that ties together farm animals such as cattle, to pull a plow, or perform some other job. The Old Testament Law forbade the Jews from placing two different kinds of animals together into one yoke, such as a donkey and an ox (Deut 22:10). Although each animal has it's own strength, and can perform some helpful tasks, they cannot be yoked together. The yoke would not be even, and the animals would both get injuries. Their shoulders are at different heights, their strength is not the same, and their walking is also different. It would be very uncomfortable for the animals, and would likely not accomplish much at all. This putting together of different animals under the same yoke is called "an unequal yoke". Paul mentions this to the Corinthians so that they would get a picture of what it would be like if they joined themselves together with unbelievers. They would only get hurt, and not accomplish anything. Besides there is no real fellowship between a believer and an unbeliever. This is especially important for young Christian men and women to consider, as they think about choosing their marriage partner. The scripture here would not permit a Christian to enter into a marriage with an unbeliever. Some people may already be married before they became a Christian, and so they find themselves married to an unbeliever. The bible says in such cases the believer should not try to leave the marriage, but do their best to maintain the marriage peacefully for the spiritual benefit of their children. If the unbeliever wants to leave the marriage, then the Christian can let them go without dishonoring the Lord. If two men want to start a business together, then it is important that they have the same values and goals, and so a Christian man would not want to join in business with an unbeliever, since this will likely bring conflict of values and purpose. The Christian needs to be careful and wise about whom he chooses to partner with, so that he does not find himself working with, or for, the devil, rather than for the Lord. The Lord is jealous for our love and devotion, and we must be careful to make sure we are yoked together with Christ, and not with ungodly people, who are enemies of Christ.

The unequal yoke also includes our associations with sinners, our knowledge and view of the world and it's entertainment, our respect and allegiance to worldly men and authorities. To honor Christ will often require a Christian to take a clear stand in opposition to ungodly people and their practices. This will create some offense, and make the Christian stand out as different, and perhaps even the target of ridicule and persecution. This is a necessary price to pay to be loyal to Christ. A Christian should never, by his actions or words, show that he is in agreement with those who are at war with God.

When Paul could see the infiltration of these ungodly people among the Corinthian believers, he calls on the believers to come out from among them. This calling out, is something every Christian must do. We must remove ourselves from certain activities, places, and people who do not honor God. For instance a young man who has become a Christian, may have once gone to the beer bar with his friends, but now he knows he must restrict himself, and not enter that place, for he knows that in the bar Christ is not honored, but blasphemed, and men practice sin. This is no place for a believer to join, as though he were just one of the drinking boys. A person may have been involved with idol worship, but after they become a believer, they are to forsake all their false religion and superstitions. Some Christians when they get into trouble, think they need to go to a fetish priest, or witch doctor to help solve their problems, but this would be consulting with Satan. Should a Christian consult Satan to solve his problems? Certainly this is dishonoring to the Lord, and so Christians are commanded to come out from among them. Do not associate with anything, or anyone, who practices what is evil.

*"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."* Matt 11:29

LESSON 156  
**Comforted in Tribulation**  
2CORINTHIANS 7

In our last lesson we learned that Christians can be united by their common separation from unbelievers and idolatry. In today's lesson we will learn of another paradox, as suggested by our title, that comfort may be found in tribulation. We shall see how Paul found much comfort by the news which Titus brought to him concerning the improved situation in the Corinthian church. In the midst of tribulations Paul found comfort.

In our last lesson we heard Paul calling on the Corinthians to separate from unbelievers and any association with idolatry. God promises that those who suffer for being faithful to the Lord, will have a special blessing from God. This promise for the Corinthians meant that they would enjoy a sweet and intimate fellowship as sons and daughters of the Lord. With such promises in view, Paul calls upon the Corinthians to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit. This would include sins of the flesh, but also the inward motivations and lust that lead to sin.

Paul explains why the Corinthians had no reason to deny their affection for him, for he had done no wrong to them, nor cheated anyone. Though some were criticizing Paul, and calling into question his authority and apostleship, no one could lay a charge against him, as though he was seeking after financial rewards, or doing injury to anyone. By defending his integrity, he does not want to condemn the Corinthians. He speaks with great boldness, because he knew the Corinthians as dear friends in Christ, and was confident that they would appreciate his words as coming from a trusted and wise friend. Paul had boasted to others about the Corinthians, and this was likely because of the gift they had prepared to send with Paul and others to the needy saints in Jerusalem.

After being anxious for sometime about meeting Titus, and traveling to Macedonia, at last Paul did have a visit from Titus. This was a very joyful meeting, as Paul learned about how the Corinthians had received Paul instructions gladly. Paul had written a rather harsh letter to the Corinthians to correct some issues, likely this was concerning the need to put a certain sinning member under discipline. The letter had caused Paul some anxious moments as he wondered whether the Corinthians would receive the letter with humble and obedient hearts, or turn their hearts away from Paul. Paul said he felt bad if the letter made the Corinthians feel sorry, but in another sense he was still glad to have sent the letter, for he knew it was necessary to inflict some pain to accomplish the necessary results. The Corinthians themselves felt sad that they had caused such concern to Paul, but their sorrow was only for a time, and after they did as instructed, they knew they would enjoy Paul's love and fellowship. We learn from this intimate correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians that sometimes Christian love requires some painful times of correction, but when true repentance results, it brings great joy, and deeper sense of fellowship and love between the corrector and those corrected. Proverbs 27:6 says, "faithful are the wounds of a friend". We also learn from this passage the nature of true repentance, which is explained as not simply an outward change in behavior, but change of heart, brought about by deep sorrow over sin. This deep sorrow that leads to repentance is a godly sorrow. Someone might feel sorrow because they were caught in their sin, and feel ashamed. This might well be an ungodly sorrow of self-pity, without regret about the others that were hurt by the sin. Godly sorrow involves a deep sense of shame and regret over the hurt caused to others because of our own sinful behavior. Paul explains how this repentance worked in them good spiritual results, for it showed them careful, it vindicated them, it revealed their displeasure with sin, their godly fear, their passionate heart of obedience, and desire to provide necessary judgment against sin. The Corinthians had proven themselves to have a clear conscience, having done all that was necessary to discipline the one who had been sinning. When Paul had written his letter to the Corinthians, his primary concern was not the man who was sinning, but the church, and how they would respond to his instructions. Since Titus was encouraged and refreshed by what he had witnessed among the Corinthians, by their obedience to Paul's instructions, it brought such great joy to Paul's heart when he heard this news from Titus. Paul had boasted about the Corinthians to Titus, prior to his traveling to meet them, and now that Titus had returned with such a good report, Paul had no need to regret his boasts about the Corinthians. It is a joy to have Christian fellowship with those whom you can delight in, and whom you find true and honorable in the faith. You know you can count on them to do what is right, because you see in them a commitment and loyalty in following Christ. Do you enjoy this kind of fellowship with your fellow believers? Can you depend on them to always act in a manner that pleases the Lord? What about you, are you also consistent and faithful to the Lord, so that others can find joy and encouragement through your obedience and submission to Christ?

Titus had now grown in his affection for the Corinthians because he witnessed their hearts desire to please the Lord, and humbly follow the godly instructions of Paul. They also had received Titus with the greatest respect and godly fear. This also won Titus' heart, as he saw their kindness towards himself. Paul now tells the Corinthians that he has confidence in them in all things, since they had done what was right. Even though it was difficult for them, it proved that they could be trusted to act wisely and properly in all matters. We learn from today's passage that when our Christian fellowship with others is put to the test, that our humble spirit, and obedience to Christ, will be used by the Spirit of God to maintain the fellowship we enjoy, and also strengthen that fellowship with a greater joy and love. We cannot help but notice, as we read this this chapter, the great love Paul had for his Christian friends at Corinth. Sometimes we come and go from church, and hardly know the people sitting next to us in the pew. Clearly it is not God's intention to gather together a group of strangers once a week to pretend like we are brothers and sisters, when we really do not care or have interest in one another. True spiritual fellowship is when we shed tears with, and for,

one another, and work through the trials and tribulations of life together. If it does not cost me anything to call someone brother, then it is not true spiritual unity, but a weak form of Christianity. If I want to enjoy authentic Christian fellowship, then my relationships to brothers and sisters will cost me my time, affection and tears.

*"Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation."* 2Cor 7:4

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we learned of Paul's joy in the Corinthians who had responded well to his letter of correction, building the bonds of fellowship and joy between the apostle and the Corinthians. In all of Paul trials and tribulations he found comfort from Christians who obeyed the Lord. Someone might ask the question, "How can we tell when someone has truly repented?"

In today's lesson we heard about the Corinthians, and how they felt sorry that they had not acted properly in the matter of disciplining one among them who was fornicating. Once Paul had confronted them in a letter, calling on them to do what was right before the Lord, they came under conviction and handled the discipline as Paul had instructed them to do. They were filled with sorrow about their conduct, and knew that their actions were not pleasing to the Lord, and could be spiritually damaging to others. Since they felt deeply sorry about their conduct, they changed their ways, and did what was right, and were very careful to carry out the discipline that Paul had instructed them to do. Their change, and diligence to do the right thing, demonstrated to Paul and Titus that they had truly repented.

For a person to truly repent, they must not only confess their sin to God, and to those whom they have offended, but they must understand the damaging consequences of their sin. When a person can understand how their sin has brought hurt and shame to themselves, and also to others, then they should feel deeply grieved that Satan has been able to seduce them into such hurtful behavior. This grief is a mark of true repentance. In our chapter today, Paul made reference to godly sorrow. There is a sorrow which is not godly. This would be sorrow for getting caught, and the personal shame and loss that comes when a person is caught in sin. For instance if someone works at a store, but the manager caught them stealing, and then fires them. Perhaps the person would feel a sense of sorrow because they lost their job, and not necessarily because of the shame brought to their family, or because of the losses of others. This kind of sorrow is not godly sorrow, but simply selfish sorrow, that is only concerned with how things affect themselves. Godly sorrow, however, is a sorrow over the damage that our sin causes to others. It is sorrow for the sense of disappointment that we have caused others to feel about us. It is sorrow, that some people have been hurt or discouraged, or suffered some loss because of our sin. It is sorrow for causing shame, and compromising the godly testimony of the church. It is when we witness a person with godly sorrow that we can conclude that they have truly repented.

The Corinthian brother who had been sinning, and was put under discipline, appears to have repented. Paul spoke in chapter two about restoring him to the fellowship, lest he be overcome with sorrow. This indicates that Paul was aware of the man's grief over his sin, and his awareness of the harm it was causing to himself, and to the testimony of the whole church. Because Paul could see the man was deeply sorrowful over his sin, he discerned that it was now time to restore him into the fellowship, and that he had endured enough time of sorrow and suffering over his sin. When a person is put under discipline by the church, but they seem unconcerned about their sin, as though it was no big deal, then we can see that they have not yet repented. We must also be careful when a person says they are sorry, and changes their outward behavior. We may not want to move too quickly to forgive and forget the sin. Of course God would have us forgive, and move on, put in the interest of the person's spiritual well-being, we need to be fully convinced that they have truly repented, and the Lord has received them. To end discipline too soon, could have the opposite effect from what we desire. If the sinner, says a few words that seem to suggest that they are sorry, but we cannot see any clear evidence of the genuine fruits of repentance, then we have every right to question their sincerity. We do this, not to be harsh or unloving, but because we want to be sure we are not taking sin lightly, or displeasing the Lord, by ignoring the need for true repentance. Someone who has sinned, and knows the shame of their actions, should be so humble, so willing to accept the discipline of the church, and express their deep sorrow for sinning. All of us are capable of falling into sin. We can be thankful, therefore, that God is merciful and willing to forgive us for our sins. Sometimes the process of discipline and restoration, as painful as it may be, can bring a spiritual healing that builds greater love for the Lord, and spiritual character to affect a greater good. The Lord is in the business of restoring sinners, and exchanging beauty for ashes. Let's not allow the Devil to steal away the blessing of Christianity at work, through godly repentance, restoration to fellowship, and deepening Christian love.

*"therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance."* Matt 3:8



LESSON 157  
**Riches of the Poor**  
2CORINTHIANS 8

In our last lesson we saw how Paul was rejoicing at the news he heard from Titus about the Corinthians who had repented, and handled church discipline properly before the Lord. As we study 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians we are finding many paradoxes, such as unity that is found through separation, and comfort found in tribulation. Today we have another paradox, 'the riches of the poor'. Paul will show us how poor Christians can rich through their generosity.

Paul will appeal to the Corinthians to gather together a financial gift that they had promised to prepare a year earlier. This gift was intended to help the poor Christians in Judea. Paul's appeal begins with the example of other believers who had given very generously to this cause, and explains the why the Corinthians should carry out their giving as they had planned. Finally he will commend certain brothers who were to handle the gift, to ensure it's safe transport to the Christians in Judea.

The Macedonians are mentioned as those who gave very generously. These Christians were from Thessalonica, Philippi, and perhaps Berea. These churches had heard the need of the Jewish brethren, and took great pains to give as much as they could. In fact Paul says they gave beyond their means. They must have made great personal sacrifices, which won the admiration of Paul, as he witnessed their great love for others in need. Paul tells us that these Macedonia believers gave themselves to the Lord, and to Paul, from whom they heard the gospel. This dedication of themselves to the Lord, meant that they did not grasp onto their money and possessions as though they would be impoverished by giving it away. They understood the principle that to give to the Lord, is never a losing proposition, for the Lord delights when God's children reflect His own generous heart. This is why Paul can say, 'out of their poverty they abounded with the riches of their liberality'. They were rich through giving their money to others in need. It is very important that all Christians learn the truth of this spiritual principle. Our wealth is not determined by the money we have in an earthly bank, but by the spiritual good we have been able to accomplish with the resources the Lord puts into our care.

Paul goes on to make his appeal to the Corinthians to fulfill the promise they had made a year earlier, when they assured Paul that they would contribute generously to the needs of the saints in Jerusalem. Paul recognizes how important it is for the Corinthians to carry through with their promise, so they might abound in this Christian grace. He took notice of their spiritual growth in the areas of faith, speech, knowledge, diligence, and love, and so he also wants to see the Corinthians excel in the area of giving also. He says this was not by commandment, for each must give to the Lord from their heart. What Paul is doing is teaching and shepherding his spiritual children. He is shown them the excellent Christian character of giving to the needs of others. We must be careful when reading this passage, to not make it a justification for preachers pleading for financial support. Please notice that Paul's pleading with his Christian friends was not for his own financial gain, but for others. Notice also that Paul was only asking these brothers and sisters to give according to a promise they had already made. He also was careful to tell them that this giving was not by commandment, but was a testing of the sincerity of their Christian love. Paul uses the example of our Lord Jesus Christ to invoke a proper attitude in giving. He reminds them, that Christ was rich, but became poor, so that we could become rich through his poverty. This great principle shows us what it means to be a follower of Jesus. To give and sacrifice for the sake of others will prove that the gospel has reached and saved our souls. This powerful witness to the reality of a person's faith, is in stark contrast to those of the world who find it most difficult to give sacrificially to help others. Paul adds that a willingness to give is accepted by the Lord, according to what a person is able to give, and not what they do not have to give. If I want to help someone, but I can only afford to give them a small gift, then God will accept the gift based on what I am able to give, and reward me accordingly. Some who could offer much more than they do, are reluctant to give more because they lack faith. The amount given is not as important as the willingness of heart to give, and rewards will reflect this. The one who gives a smaller amount, but has a greater willingness to help, will prove their greater generosity, and thus receive greater spiritual reward.

Another principle we learn from this chapter, is the principle of equality. The Christians who have more are encouraged and expected to share with those who have less, so that there is equality. Paul taught this principle to the Corinthians, many of whom were rich, and could afford to give more for the sake of the poor. Paul is not suggesting that the rich support the poor, but that those who are blessed with abundance should recognize their responsibility to help those who are less fortunate. Paul also takes this principle from the example of the Israelites gathering manna in the wilderness, where no matter how much was collected, no one lacked or had too much.

Paul now speaks of the men who were to handle the gift from the Corinthians. He commends them as godly and trustworthy servants of the Lord. The money collected would be entrusted to these men, since they could be counted on to ensure the money was used as intended to help the needy. Paul wanted to be transparent in how he and his fellow workers handled financial matters, showing themselves honorable before God and men. As these men prepare to visit Corinth and collect their gift, Paul calls upon the Corinthians to prove their love in the sight of all the churches. Paul longed for others to see the proof of his boasting in the believers at Corinth. He wanted others to see that they were sincere and godly believers who were willing to sacrifice for the welfare of others. I wonder how many brothers and sisters would feel glad to boast in your Christian life and example? Do others see the grace of God at work in

your life, such that they speak well of you to others? The work of grace must start with our accepting the free gift of God, when we place our trust in Jesus Christ to save our souls. When we receive this grace, then the Holy Spirit empowers us to show this grace in our lives, by also willingly suffering and sacrificing for the benefit of others.

*"For you know the grace of our lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich." 2Cor 8:9*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we heard Paul appeal to his Christian brothers and sisters to give generously according to their promise, for the needs of fellow Christians. Giving is an important Christian grace that demonstrates how the God's grace has come into our lives, and changed our hearts and behavior. Someone might ask the question, "Should Christian leaders make appeals for financial support?"

In the chapter we studied today, we heard Paul appealing to the Corinthians to give generously to help some poor brothers and sisters. Although they had promised a year earlier to contribute to this cause, they still had not delivered a gift, and so Paul desires that they fulfill their promise. When we read this passage, it is clear that Paul is concerned for the spiritual condition of the Corinthians, far more than he is concerned with their money and giving. He listed how they excelled in several areas of their spiritual life, and in the area of giving they should also excel. Therefore we must understand that Paul's appeal to them to give, was for their spiritual good, and not due to necessity, or by coercion. It is also important to recognize that Paul was not only thinking of the spiritual welfare of the Corinthians, he was also interested in the love and care of his fellow believers in Judea who were in financial need. Paul's motive to appeal for Christians to give was entirely for the benefit of others, and not himself.

The bible certainly teaches that Christians should give, not because they have to obey some law of tithing, but because it reflects the grace of God. It allows us to be God's hands of love and kindness to others, and reveals the goodness of God through His children. A good bible teacher will not omit this precept when teaching God's word, but that it is much different from asking others to give to his ministry. Appeals for supporting a ministry are not found in the New Testament, and are a disgrace to the church. To appeal to man to support God's work, makes it seem as though God is poor, and cannot manage to support His own work. God is well able to supply the needs of those who work for Him, and to finance any ministry that He directs. The problem is we have a whole bunch of people who claim to work for God, and then appeal to men to support them. People are easily swayed into believing that anyone who carries a bible and microphone, must be God's man, and therefore is worthy of our support. But be very careful when giving to every street corner preacher who appeals to you for money. Perhaps they are just peddling the word of God, because they know people will be inclined to give them a bit of money. Ask yourself if those who beg for money are really interested in the spiritual welfare of others, or are they interested in building a name, or a ministry, or some wealth for themselves. These goals are contradictory to the gospel message, which is offered free of charge. Today churches everywhere have adopted the practice of begging people to support their ministry. Some churches and organizations make huge sums of money through their advanced marketing techniques on radio and TV.

While Christians should give to reflect the grace of God in their lives; and bible teachers should teach the principles of Christian giving; making appeals to support God's work is scandalous and reveals a lack of faith. Certainly Christian leaders can trust in the living God to supply their needs according to the will of God. If God is in the work, then God will make sure the needs are met. But let us also remember, that sometimes God will also test our faith, and stretch us, by having us go without, or wait patiently for His answer and supply. Just because we want something, or think something is good, does not mean God is obligated to support it, or to respond immediately to our request. If someone says in their heart, I will build an orphanage to help needed children, and I need so much money to do, so I will go and make appeals to everyone to support this good cause. What kind of response should they expect? Well perhaps people will agree, and give generously until the project can be completed; but perhaps God will not answer immediately, and give time for thinking carefully, not just about building an orphanage, but how to manage, operate, and continue to finance it. Sometimes we have big ideas, and they may be good ideas, but God has much to teach us about patience, good planning, and putting His will before our own. It is essential when planning any work for God, that we first ask God about His plan, and then wait patiently for His answer. Appealing to men, might produce money, and often does, but in the end it is the work of men, and not the work of God. If we are to do God's work, we must do His work in His way, and He will gladly supply all that is needed. Appealing to others for money is disgraceful to the Lord and His church, not only because it tarnishes the character of God, but it also removes the power from our gospel preaching. People who hear the preachers pleading for money, are left wondering if money is what is motivating their hearts, or is it the love of God? I am rather suspicious of any who are constantly appealing to others to support them and their ministry. Trust God, and see what He will do, and if He does not answer your request, consider it carefully.

*"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Phil 4:19*

LESSON 158  
**Preparations for Giving**  
2CORINTHIANS 9

In our last lesson we learned that poor Christians can show themselves very rich, when they reflect the sacrificial giving of our Lord Jesus. Paul continues to talk to the Corinthians in this chapter about making the necessary preparations for their giving. Paul wanted to be sure that a visit to Corinth, would not find his Christian friends unprepared to give according to their promise, and therefore sends his brothers ahead of time to prepare the gift.

Paul knew their willingness to give, and thought it even a bit unnecessary to send this reminder to them. Paul had even boasted to other churches about the generosity of the Corinthians. Some other churches had been stirred up to also give because of the example of the Corinthians. However this giving by the Corinthians was still only a promise, and not yet fulfilled. Paul, therefore sends some brethren to Corinth ahead of himself. He imagines what might happen if he should arrive there with some Macedonian brethren, who had heard Paul's boast about the Corinthian's generous heart for giving. If they found the Corinthians scrambling to put together their gift, Paul's boasting would prove false, since the Corinthians failed to organize themselves. It is often the case that Christians, or churches have wanted to contribute to a good cause, and even agreed to send money, but because of a lack of due diligence, no one actually organizes the giving. The work of the Lord, and our giving to support God's work, should be handled with the greatest of care, for this is the means the Lord uses to bring mutual blessings among His people. We could miss out on His desired blessing for us, by being slothful, or negligent to carry out what He directed our hearts to do. Sometimes in the excitement of the moment we sense the Lord directing us to support someone, or something, but because of our spiritual dullness, we quickly forget our spiritual commitments, and leave them unattended.

Paul was careful in handling this matter of giving, for he understands the potential for spiritual good, and he also sees the potential for the Corinthians to be ashamed, if they are not prepared. In writing to them ahead of time, he desires that their giving was from their sincere generosity and not because of a grudging obligation. God does not need or want our money, when we give it reluctantly. God loves cheerful giving, that is giving that brings joy to the giver and receiver alike. Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive. This means that the one who gives will be happier than the one who receives. Paul also feels compelled to teach his friends at Corinth another important principle of giving. He speaks about farming, and says that if a man sows sparingly, he will also reap sparingly, but if he sows bountifully, he will also reap bountifully. Clearly the more seed that the farmer plants, the greater his crop potentially will be. The more generous a Christian is with his giving, the more he will reap spiritual rewards. Some might fear that when they give away their money and wealth, they may not have enough left for themselves. However, we should know that God, who loves a cheerful giver, is also able to supply all our needs, and provide an abundance for every good work. If we really believed that God loved us, and that He has power to provide all our needs, then we would not be worried about sharing with the needs of others. God will not let us down, or leave us empty, when we share His bounty and love with the needs of those around us. Another thing Paul says here, is that each one should give as he purposes in his heart. This means that giving is an individual exercise, and that everyone should pray about what they feel is an amount they can and are willing to give. No coercion or extraction should be used to force some to give what is beyond their ability, or willingness to give. This is why it is so wrong for preachers to make public appeals for Christians to give. It must be the Lord directing hearts to give, and not men. I have found that when the Lord directs hearts to give, the amount given is much greater, than if appeals had been made. I think most people would rather give from their heart, than to be made to feel some sense of obligation when giving. Having a collection box at the front and center of the church, where it makes a person feel obligated to go up and put something into the collection box, because everyone else is, is a shameful way to coerce people to give. At one church I visited, I was preparing to put something into a collection, but was surprised when no collection bag or plate was passed around. When I asked later about this, they said they preferred to have a box at the back of the church for anyone to contribute as they felt lead, so they did not pass around any plate lest people felt obliged to give. I appreciated their godly and biblical approach, by giving people a chance to give if it was in their heart to do so, but also not making anyone feel any obligation to give.

To add to his point, Paul quotes from the scripture about how God disperses and gives to the poor. Recognizing that all that we have comes from the gracious hand of God, causes Paul to pray that God would supply and multiply what the Corinthians had sown, and increase the fruits of their righteousness. God will bless those who bless others, but we must be careful not to see this as an opportunity for cashing in. Some might think that if they give \$100 to God, He will return \$1000 to them, as though God were a banker providing 1000% interest to His customers. We should never give to get, or our hearts reveal our greed and love of money. The point we need to understand is that when we give, with a sincere desire to help others in need, God will be sure to abundantly supply our own needs. By focusing on filling up the pockets of the poor, God is also pouring more into our pockets. However, the minute we lose our focus, and start counting the money in our pockets, is when the blessing will stop. Paul sees several benefits resulting from the Corinthians liberality, namely that thanks and glory would ascend to God, and the prayers and fellowship between those giving and those receiving would increase their love for each other. At this point Paul cannot help but think of the greatest giver and gift of all, and bursts into praise saying 'thanks be to God for his indescribable gift'. It is when we see the immeasurable grace of God in giving us His Son, that we learn the riches of God's

goodness and generosity. This inspires and compels us, through that grace, to also share liberally. In fact, it would be rather selfish to receive so much from God, and then not show gratitude by also sharing with the needs of others. I wonder if you have received God's indescribable gift, by trusting in Jesus as your Savior? You will never have a greater gift offered to you than Jesus Christ, so why not reach out in faith and receive God's gift of eternal life today?

*"Thanks be to god for his indescribable gift!" 2Cor 9:15*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we considered again the subject of Christian giving, as Paul appealed to his Corinthian brothers and sisters to prepare their promised generosity, so that when he came to see them, they would not look careless or unprepared. Someone might ask the question, "How should the church collect and handle money?"

Today we learned about a collection of money that the Corinthians had promised to give for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Paul sent some trusted brothers ahead of him to Corinth to ensure that the gift would be ready when he came, and the Corinthians would not be caught off guard, should Paul suddenly arrive and find them unprepared. Imagine if someone invited you for dinner along with a friend, and you were telling your friend what a wonderful cook and host he was going to meet at dinner, only to arrive and find that the meal had not been prepared. That would be embarrassing both for the host, and for you, especially after you were praising the virtues of this host to your friend. This is what Paul was hoping to avoid with the Corinthians. He knew their willingness, but must have also been aware of their lack of organization.

How then should a church be careful in gathering together money and handling it for the Lord's purposes. At the end of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, Paul had given instruction to the church just how they could go about collections, so that everything would be done with proper care. Each Lord's day, that is Sunday, the believers were to add something to the collection, which they had put aside. Each one was to give according to how the Lord had prospered them. If they had plenty they should give plenty, and if they had little they should give little. We are not told exactly how the collection was carried out, but using some common sense and the directing of the Holy Spirit should lead us to avoid anything that dishonors the Lord. For instance appealing to people to give by coercion is clearly not pleasing to the Lord. Methods that make people feel guilty or obligated to put into the collection are not honoring to the Lord. In some congregations a bag is passed around, and those who wish to put into the bag can do so. I suppose even this method might make some feel pressure to give. As I mentioned in today's lesson, there was a church I once attended where there was no attempt at all to make a collection, but simply a box at the back for any that felt they wanted to give. This is perhaps the best biblical way to handle the offerings of the saints, for it provides a place where people can give without any sense of obligation.

We should also consider how the church handles the funds that are collected. Each church should have trusted men, perhaps deacons or elders, who are responsible to count the offering, and keep financial records. It is important for the church to know that godly men are not mishandling the money, or stealing from the offerings. A regular financial report should be provided to the church members, so they are aware of how collected money is being used. Although the leadership may make decisions about the use of offerings, the congregation should not be excluded from having some say in where and how church funds are used. This why reports are important, for each one who contributes to the Lord's work needs to be aware, and have confidence, that the leadership is directing funds as directed by the Holy Spirit. This will give everyone confidence that they are engaged in God's work, and not simply filling the pockets of greedy men. It might also be wise for the church to meet from time to time to discuss the finances and determine what areas of ministry should be supported, and to what degree. Transparency in handling funds is not only important for the church membership, but also for those looking in from outside. The church has so often had a tarnished testimony through the misappropriation of money, and when such scandals reach the ears of the world, Satan will use this to bring great shame upon the church. Many people have been turned away from Christianity because of what they see happening in the church, and all the scandals associated with churches, ministries, and preachers, who rob people for their own luxurious living. Christians will want to be sure that they maintain a good testimony. Money is a temptation, and easily corrupts the heart. We must overcome this temptation, and recognize that so much harm can be done through mishandling of money. Much good is done when Christians give, and the money handled wisely for God's glory. A good question to ask ourselves when we prepare to put money into the collection is, "How will this money be used?", and, "Is the church using money to bring glory to God, or for the comfort and fame of men?" Some church buildings are very expensive, as well as the preacher's suit, and the sophisticated sound and video system. These seem perhaps nice additions for the glory and comfort of men, but ask yourself how many more souls come into the kingdom of God by such extravagance. Investment into bibles, gospel tracts, or feeding the poor, are ways to use money that bring glory to God. Handling money takes much spiritual wisdom, and should be entrusted to men who prove themselves faithful to the Lord, and careful in their responsibilities.

*"Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the holy spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." Acts 6:3*

LESSON 159  
**Confronting Critics**  
2CORINTHIANS 10

In our last lesson we heard Paul appealing to the Corinthians to organize themselves, and give as they had promised. He reminded them that giving reflects the Lord Jesus, and they could expect to reap according to what they sow. In today's lesson, Paul will tackle another issue he was facing, which was the false teachers who were criticizing him.

When the Lord is at work through His servants, we can be sure that Satan is not happy, and will send his own agents to undermine and oppose the Lord's work. The young church at Corinth was easy prey for the false teachers, who had come in after Paul had established the church, only to bring their false doctrine, and put doubts into the minds of the Christians about Paul. So Paul comes to his defense in order to protect and preserve the church at Corinth.

Paul does not want to come on strong and boldly when he comes to visit Corinth, but would rather come to them in the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Some were criticizing Paul's character as two-faced. They claimed that when he was present among them, he was weak and lowly, but when writing letters from a distance became very bold towards them. When Paul hears what his critics are saying, he approaches the situation, not in a fleshly carnal manner, as his critics accused him of, but with a godly response. By showing his desire to act in a gentle and meek spirit, he revealed that He was a true follower of Jesus, who set the example of meekness and gentleness. Paul explains that he does not act from the flesh, but his weapons for pulling down strongholds were spiritual weapons, such as prayer, the word of God, and preaching with simplicity. The false teachers who had infiltrated into the Corinthian church were men who loved to look good in the sight of men, who had clever arguments, and eloquent speech. It is easy for those who are immature in their faith to be impressed by a fleshly show of knowledge, intelligence, or eloquence. Thus some of the Corinthians were susceptible to hear and believe these false teachers, who were undercutting Paul and his work for the Lord. Today we see men of great intellect, and wit arguing against the knowledge of God. They prefer to believe in atheism, and push their views aggressively in public forums, and therefore undermine the gospel of Jesus Christ. These men will exalt themselves as someone great, or their intelligence as something more reliable than the bible. Paul said it was his aim to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. By this Paul means he would not, and could not, accept any view that did not acknowledge the Lordship of Christ. He would tenaciously teach all people to surrender to Christ's authority. He recognized that Christ's authority was the only true authority, and any that set themselves up against Christ, were doomed to judgment and destruction.

So in thinking of these false teachers, who had a strong and influential presence in Corinth, he instructs the Christians not to look at outward appearances only. Then speaking to the false teachers themselves, he challenges them that if they think they belong to Christ, they should also consider that Paul also belonged to Christ. This should help everyone to see that if they were true men of God, they would not be criticizing Paul, who was indeed God's servant. Paul, as an apostle commissioned by the Lord Jesus, had authority given to him, and he did not use this authority for destruction, but for edification. Paul's job in Christ was to build up the church; but the false teachers aim was to tear down Paul and his work. Paul says he will boast in his authority not to put fear into the Corinthian believers, but to challenge those who are questioning him. They said that Paul's letters were powerful, but his presence weak. Paul wants these critics to consider, that the same Paul who wrote powerful words, can come to them in power also. Paul now takes on a cheeky or satirical tone, when he said he would not dare compare himself with his critics who were commending themselves; as if to say he was not really up to their spiritual status. He says this in mockery of their blatant boasting of their own perceived greatness and authority. Paul goes on to say that those who boast, and compare themselves with their own company are not wise. Paul's boasting would be limited to only what the Lord had accomplished through him, and that included bringing the gospel as far as Corinth, and seeing the church established. He would not dare to boast in work which he had not done. Paul hoped that as the Corinthians faith grew, that he could move onto other areas and expand the work of the gospel. Unfortunately some of the struggles in Corinth were keeping him from his desire to travel further abroad with the gospel. He felt he had to first help the Corinthians to follow the Lord faithfully. There is an expected growth with Christians, such that the evangelist should be able to pass the torch onto teachers, and elders who are able to nurture and care for the new Christians. Corinth was not yet at such a level of maturity that Paul could hand over responsibilities to men who could effectively teach and care for the church. As Christians we should recognize that the spread of the gospel is very much affected by our own spiritual development. We should go from being spiritually dependency, to giving spiritual help and instruction to others. This is the means by which the gospel can spread and the church grow. Far too often though, Christians fail to advance as they should, and therefore God's servants are left to spoon feed babies, rather than send out new workers.

As Paul considers these false teachers at Corinth, and how they were commending themselves as God's servants, he must make clear to the Corinthians that commendation means nothing, unless the Lord is the one who is doing the commending. The Lord's approval is not found in the titles that men like to take to themselves, such as apostle, prophet, or reverend, but it is found in the fruitfulness of one's ministry. Paul had planted the church at Corinth, and had seen many people come to Christ. Others thought they could move in on Paul's work, and claim it for themselves, and then discredit Paul. Paul defends himself against these usurpers, and exposes them for their false ways. Paul should not have to defend himself to the Corinthian church, for they should have had the discernment and love to

know that these false teachers were not sent by God. They should have not tolerated such imposters. There is so many who pretend to be something they are not, but God will show who are his true children and servants in a coming day. If you realize that you have pretending to be a Christian, then repent and believe in Christ today.

*"but, he who glories, let him glory in the LORD." 2Cor 10:17*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we saw how Paul had to defend himself against his critics who thought he was mighty in written words, but weak in personal presence. Paul shows the Corinthians that God does not approve men who commend themselves. Someone might ask the question, "Why are false teachers tolerated by the church?"

In Corinth it was evident that these false teachers had come among the Corinthians to criticize Paul, and push their own authority and doctrine. It is surprising that the Corinthians were so easily swayed to hear these men, and give them a place in the assembly to teach and influence the church. One job of the elders is to protect the flock from false teachers. Paul never mentions any elders that served the church in Corinth, perhaps because none had been appointed yet. Paul spoke of different people who were serving the Lord at Corinth, but no mention of elders is made. This might help us understand why false teachers could so easily creep in among them with their evil doctrine. Paul had to warn the elders at Ephesus about grievous wolves who would come in among them, not sparing the flock. He therefore exhorts the elders to feed the flock. As Christians grow in the word, they become more discerning, and will recognize quickly false doctrine and false teachers. It appears the Corinthians were still immature in their faith. As we read through 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians we see the evidence of their spiritual immaturity, when we hear about the divisions among them, the immorality that had been tolerated, the confusion and disorder in the church, and need for asserting the doctrine of resurrection, and the ordinances of the church. Once a church has elders raised up by the Lord, and the people are being faithfully instructed in the word of God, then the church will grow stronger, and be equipped to resist false doctrine and teachers.

Today in the church there has been an increasing number of these false teachers, and false doctrine. Some teach a prosperity gospel, not found in the bible, but being accepted by the masses of professing Christians. Then there are the faith healers making claims of healings and miracles, and many are flocking to these people only to discover that underneath the guise of spiritual work, is a ministry growing financially rich from the profits of their supposed miracles. Careful investigation would reveal that these are spiritual charlatans masquerading as men of God, but serving themselves, and are held in bondage by Satan.

How do these false teachers get into the church, and why are Christians so vulnerable to these people? The reason is because of a lack of spiritual discernment. People are not reading and learning their bibles, and the preachers are not teaching God's word. The churches are too busy with shouting, music, and miracles services so that the bible is hardly ever opened. Ask yourself how often you hear someone give solid bible teaching in your church. Do you have a teacher who opens the word of God with you every week; not to spoon feed you, but to engage your mind, and help you to see and understand the scriptures? Many preachers are using the word to promote their ideas, or their personal views of the scriptures, and not actually teaching the word carefully and accurately. It is the responsibility of every believer to search the scriptures to see if what the preacher is saying is actually the true teaching of scripture. The Holy Spirit can guide and direct us to understand, when we are willing to read and study God's word. Too often Christians become far too dependent upon their pastors and teachers, and rely upon them to feed them the word. This is why churches are filled with spiritual babies, and the gospel message is not advancing more rapidly. This is also why the false teachers can so easily take advantage of those poorly trained in the word of God. Each one who belongs to the Lord must make a personal commitment to their own spiritual development. We all need to be careful to discern the truth when listening to anyone claiming to teach God's word. God expects us not only to question the preacher's words, but to challenge them if we believe they are deviating from God's truth. Far too often we accept everything the preacher has to say, as though he could never be wrong. Let's not be deceived into thinking that all men who hold a bible and preach are good men, working for God, and have noble hearts. Clearly in scripture we see several examples of men who appear to be religious and holy men of God, but in fact were not what they appeared. Jesus uses his harshest words against the Pharisees, and other religious leaders of his day. We can be so convinced that men who hold the bible high and shout with conviction, are men of God, but listen carefully to their words, and judge by their actions, if they are indeed following Christ, or using religion for their own selfish purposes. There is a great need for discernment in the church today, for just as with the Corinthians, the false teachers have infiltrated the church and are all around us. If you are not careful they will lead you astray, and teach you doctrines of demons, leading you to the pit of destruction. You must take care to ensure that the preachers you listen to are teaching you the word correctly, so study the word each day for yourself, and do not fear to challenge false teaching and teachers when you encounter them.

*"beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." Jude 3*

LESSON 160  
**Foolish Boasting**  
2CORINTHIANS II

In our last lesson Paul was defending himself against his critics, who had moved into Corinth and were influencing the church with their false teaching. The remaining chapters of this book are a continuation of Paul's defense against these false teachers, and in today's chapter we find Paul resorting to foolish boasting to shame those who were giving respect to the boasting false teachers.

Paul continues to confront the Corinthians about their tolerance of false teachers among them, and will take on the undesirable role of a proud boaster, to shame his opponents, and chide the Corinthians for their lack of discernment. Paul was jealous for the Corinthians for they were his spiritual children. He likens his role as a father presenting his virgin daughter to her bridegroom, when he speaks of presenting the Corinthians to Christ. He wants them to be pure before the Lord, and not corrupted by the deceptions of Satan, as happened to Eve in the garden. The false teachers were presenting a false Jesus and a false gospel, and the Corinthians, who should have known better, accepted them.

Paul will put himself in the place of those proud and boasting false teachers, by boasting himself. He did this not because he agreed that boasting was the right thing to do, but to show himself a fool, just as the false teachers. He thought, 'if you will put up with these men, and their boasts, then I will do the same, and show you that I have much more to boast in, but you will know that my methods don't stoop to foolish boasting. He also wanted to be sure to win over the hearts of the Corinthians, so the false teachers would not draw them away from him. He was willing to foolishly boast if that would capture them, for it seemed that they were listening to the boasts of these other false teachers. He will go on to say that He is not inferior to the most eminent apostles, and though not trained in speech, his knowledge was not lacking. Paul said he humbled himself by preaching to them without any charge, when he might have taken money from them to support his gospel work. He was supplied by the Macedonian brethren, and did not in any way become a burden to the Corinthians. Paul continues his boast by saying no one in Achaia (where Corinth was located) would hinder his boasting of his relationship to Christ, or his love for the Christians.

Paul takes time to describe the nature of these false prophets, who are really servants of Satan. They pretended to be the apostles of Christ, and that was not surprising since Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. There is a good warning to us here, for we need to be aware that although Satan may come in some evil form which is easily identified, when he comes masquerading as a messenger for God, he can easily deceive the undiscerning.

Now Paul continues with his boast, and says they should not think him a fool, but if they must receive him as a fool, then he too would make his boasts. This he admits is not the Lord's words, but he is playing the fool, since others were making their boasts in the flesh, and they were glad to put up with these boasters. In fact, Paul says they would tolerate these men even if they enslaved them, took their money, exalted themselves, or strike them on the face. Paul says he was too weak to do that, but if any thought they were so bold, Paul would claim greater boldness. If these false teachers considered themselves Hebrews, Israelites, children of Abraham, Paul could also make that claim. If they are ministers of Christ, Paul asserts in this folly, that he is more, and had more labors, more beatings, more imprisonments, and was constantly exposed to death. He says he was beaten with stripes 5 times, each time receiving 39 lashes. He speaks also of being beaten with rods, being shipwrecked three times, stoned, spending one night and a day in the sea. Often in journeys, and perils of water, of robbers, by his countrymen, by gentiles, in the city, wilderness and sea, and among false brethren. He experienced weariness, toil, sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, fasting's, cold, nakedness. Besides all this that he endured, he also felt the burden for all the churches in his daily prayers. Paul confesses his weakness, and indignation against those who cause believers to stumble. Paul's boasting he said would be in his infirmity. This may have seemed extraordinary, but Paul claims, in the sight of God the father and the Lord Jesus Christ, to be speaking the truth. To abase himself, he speaks of the time he was in Damascus, and others were seeking his life, and so he escaped by being lowered in a basket over the city wall.

It may seem difficult to understand the mind of Paul as he speaks to the Corinthians, and plays the part of a fool by boasting of all his accomplishments, and all that he suffered for the gospel. In fact we can admire him for what he willingly endured for the sake of the gospel. In his list of boasts, he does not mention how many souls were saved through his efforts, or how many churches were established, or how well known his name was. He does not speak of things men glory in, namely their personal successes, but we find Paul glorying in all that the gospel was costing him in the way of suffering and losses. This seems an odd way to boast, but if we understand his point, I think we shall see that he is trying to shame the false teachers who wanted the Corinthians to admire them as great men of God. Their boasts were empty, for they had not endured nearly the things that Paul had endured. The sincerity of his labors and work could be attested to by all that he willingly suffered. We cannot help but wonder as we hear Paul's resume of pain and toil for the sake of the gospel. Which one of us could claim such sacrifices for our Lord. We see the depth of Paul's faith and love for the Lord Jesus in this chapter, albeit that was not Paul's design in writing to the Corinthians. His heart burned with love for his brothers and sisters, and it was more than he could bear to see these false teachers stealing away their hearts by their proud boasting. Thus Paul will do his own boasting, but in so doing put to shame all those who boast in the flesh, and help the Corinthians understand something of Paul's heart towards them, and how he had earned the right to win their affections and trust. I wonder how genuine our faith would prove

to be, if we were called to go through some of those hardships that Paul went through. Paul gladly and willingly went forth with the gospel message, knowing full well that it would cost him dearly, perhaps even his own life. If you put your faith to the test, would it stand up, or collapse under pressure. I hope all that are listening to this message will place their trust in Jesus, and prove to be His faithful follower.

*"If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity."* 2Cor 11:30

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we heard Paul continue his defense to the Corinthians by playing the fool and boasting. His boasts however are not what one would expect from a proud individual, but rather are centered around his sacrifices and sufferings for the sake of the gospel. Someone might ask the question, "Why does God permit His servants to suffer?"

In today's lesson we heard Paul's long list of trials and tribulations he had to endure in His service for Christ. In spreading the gospel to the gentile world, he often faced fierce persecution, and was often one step away from death. We might wonder why a man who dedicates himself so fully to the Lord, would have to endure such difficulties, for surely God could protect him from all such suffering. Our mindset would lead us to think that life should be comfortable and happy for those who serve the Lord faithfully. However the scripture teaches us the very opposite, both in word and example. For it is written, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2Tim 3:12). Certainly Paul serving as an apostle suffered from much persecution. When things go bad in ministry we might be inclined to think the Lord is unhappy with us, and has brought troubles upon us. Although there maybe some cases where the Lord does let us suffer for the sake of correction, more often the trials are God's way to perfect us into the image He desires. Peter wrote, "that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1Peter 1:7). So scripture teaches that Christians can, and should, expect to suffer in their Christian lives, especially when they are serving the Lord faithfully.

Perhaps our difficulty with suffering is that we find it so unpleasant, that we have a hard time imagining what good could possibly come from it. However we can see that, "tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Rom 5:4). The trials that God allows or sends into our path are for our spiritual good, and development of character and hope. If we could see and understand that beyond the present suffering was a great purpose, and the work of God, we might find it easier to accept the trials, as coming from the loving hands of our Father. In fact, the bible also says, "for to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Phil 1:29). Suffering brings about a blessing, and this is another strange paradox of the Christian life. Peter and John understood this, and so they rejoiced because the Lord counted them worthy to suffer for His name (Acts 5:41). These men considered it a great honor to have been beaten for preaching the gospel, and obeying God rather than men. This is likely because they knew that God would be glorified by their faith and obedience to Him, and that the Christians would be more bold and encouraged to share the gospel also. Wherever persecution has come against the church, it has caused a increased interest in the Christian gospel, with more souls being saved. Satan may attack, but God will use Satan's strategies to actually further the gospel.

The Lord may even call some of His servants to endure martyrdom. As difficult as that may be, the Lord will never allow someone to suffer for the gospel, without using it to inspire many others. It might be hard for us to accept and understand this from a natural point of view, but when we see the spiritual outcome we will perceive the wisdom of God is allowing His servants to suffer, or even die while promoting the gospel. It was in 1956 that five American missionaries were killed by the Auca Indians in the jungles of Ecuador. These men were all young, with young families, and their death would seem to be quite tragic, and sad loss to their families. We know there were certainly many tears over their deaths, but through the work of those missionaries, their families were later able to meet with these savage Indians and present the gospel, and see so many of them converted to Christ. Not only were many souls saved, but many have been inspired by the faith and courage of these young missionaries to give their lives to mission work, and the spread of the gospel. There is no telling how many souls have been affected and brought into the kingdom because of the obedience and sacrifices of these five young men. Undoubtedly God has used their deaths for the joy and eternal glory of thousands of souls.

When we see the purpose behind the sufferings of God's servants then it helps us to accept and bear patiently with the trials. When faith is tested, it may feel painful, and the flames of God's testing will remove the dross of human sufficiency, and prideful ambitions. In the end God's servants will look much more like Jesus, and bring pleasure and joy to the heart of God. Like clay in the potters hands, we are to allow our Master to shape our lives into all that He has purposed, and even endure the refiners fire, so that we may be something beautiful and useful in God's eternal kingdom. It is not only those who are called to serve God, but every Christian is called to endure trials, for God intends to make us all shine with the glories of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake."* Phil 1:29



LESSON 161  
**Sufficiency of Grace**  
2CORINTHIANS 12

In our last two lessons we heard Paul defending himself against some false teachers in Corinth who had been criticizing Paul, and undermining his apostleship. Paul had to resort to foolish boasting to shame these critics, and seek to regain the affection and loyalty of the believers at Corinth. In today's lesson we will hear more of Paul's defense as he shows the nature of his love and ministry to the Corinthians.

Paul felt it was shameful for a servant of the Lord to resort to boasting, but because the Corinthians had been tolerating the boasts of false teachers, he feels compelled to play the fool and boast also. He does not speak of how great he was, or how educated, but rather the extent to which he was called to suffer for the Lord. This should have made the false teachers feel ashamed, and the Corinthians to recognize these false teachers for who they really were, agents of Satan. Paul continues his boast by speaking of his visions and revelations, saying that such boasting was unprofitable to himself. He speaks indirectly of man who had been caught up into heaven and heard things not lawful to utter. Clearly this was an unspeakable honor, and it is clear that Paul is the one who was caught up to heaven, but he wisely speaks of himself indirectly. This shows Paul's desire, even in boasting, to show the need for humility, and thus subtly expresses this point to the Corinthians and the false teachers. Though Paul had such lofty experiences, he would rather boast in his infirmities, for he does not want to look as a fool by making himself seem to be something he was not. The bible says it is better to allow others to praise us, then praising ourselves (Pr 27:2). Boasting find's its' source from pride, and every man is inclined towards it. God allowed Satan to buffet Paul with a thorn in the flesh, to help keep him humble. This was necessary because of the great revelations he received, which would easily be cause for boasting. Paul wanted this thorn in his flesh removed, and prayed three times for God to take it away, but God said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness". This is an important verse for us to understand, because it shows us that God will often allow difficulties in our life, so that we lean upon God, trusting in His grace to help us. He will not always take away our pain or trouble, but will give us His grace to help us manage through the trial. When Paul understood that God used his weakness to display God's strength, he was all the more eager to glory in his tribulations. They became to him the confirmation of God's love and power working in Him, and therefore he would even take pleasure in them.

Paul says that he has become a fool to boast, but the Corinthians had compelled him to act this way. They should have loved Paul, and been ready to speak well of Him as God's servant, since Paul did not lag behind the greatest of the apostles. They had witnessed many miracles that authenticated his apostleship. The Corinthian church was not inferior to any other church, as far as Paul's work, miracles, and care was concerned, except for this one thing, which was Paul's refusal to be a burden to them financially. This statement by Paul seems designed as a mild reproof, since Paul's denial of funds from their church, showed that he did not have confidence in the Christian maturity. He was restrained because they tolerated false teachers, who were critical of Paul. He did not feel free to receive any support from them, lest some accuse him of greedy motives. He points out that normally parents pay for the needs of the children, and not children for the parents. Since he was like a father to them, he did not think it right to receive money from his children in the faith. Paul admitted that he was glad to serve them without any payment or reward, because he loved them so dearly. He noticed that as his love for them increased, their love for him was less. The last thing he wanted to do was to be a burden to them. Some of these false teachers, who were accusing Paul, must have said that though he was not taking money personally from the Corinthians, he had sent men like Titus and others to take their money in a sneaky or crafty way. Paul recognizing this false rumor, asks the Corinthians if he, or any that he had sent to them, had taken advantage of them? He is trying to clear his name from any hint of wrong doing. He does not want anyone to entertain the idea that he was trying to take money from the Corinthians, or that his work was motivated by greed. He testifies that Titus and the other brothers he sent to Corinth behaved just the same as he did, with honesty and integrity, and not expecting or receiving any financial support from the believers in Corinth. Paul said that he did everything for the edification of the Corinthians.

As we finish off today's chapter we hear Paul speaking about his plans to come and visit Corinth. He is concerned that that he may find them acting badly with contentions, jealousy, anger, selfishness, backbiting, whispers, conceits or tumults. He did not want to deal harshly with them, or come to them with a heavy hand, and a sad heart. It would humble him to see his dear Christian children acting wickedly. By now they should be growing up spiritually and acting kindly, gently and with godly wisdom. Perhaps Paul heard reports from Titus about some at Corinth that we behaving badly, and why he mentions these concerns. There seems to be some indication that some at Corinth were committing fornication, lewdness and uncleanness, since Paul mentions these particular sins that required repentance. It is sad that these problems exist in Christian churches, and that Christians can still fall into sin. They may be saved from the penalty of sin, but often the power of sin has not yet been conquered by obedience to the Holy Spirit.

Corinth was known to be a city of immorality, and some of the church members were once involved in lives of sin, but since Christ saved them they had turned away from their evil ways. However, some could not escape that world of sin, and therefore Paul warns them of the need for repentance.

As we read through this chapter we can certainly feel the passion of Paul's heart not just to defend his good name, as God's servant, but more importantly to show the Corinthians his heart of love for them, and the sincerity with which he had served God on their behalf. It must have weighed so heavy upon Paul's heart to see the Corinthians being

influenced by false teachers. Do we recognize that some elders or shepherds maybe agonizing over our Christian lives, and do we give them joy and peace of mind, as they see us walk faithfully before the Lord?

*"and he said to me, "my grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." 2Cor 12:9*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

In today's lesson we heard Paul speak about his visions and revelations, but said he would not glory in his divine experiences, but in his infirmities, for when he was weak, the power of God was seen in Him. Though he suffered a thorn in the flesh he learned that God's grace was sufficient for him. Someone might ask the question, "What did Paul mean by a thorn in the flesh?"

We are not told specifically what Paul's thorn in the flesh was, but we can discern perhaps the nature of this thorn, and what relevance it might have to our own Christian lives. Paul describes this thorn in his flesh, as a messenger of Satan to buffet him. From this we gather that Satan was permitted to attack Paul in some way. If we take this to mean that Paul suffered from some physical problem, then this must have been an on-going illness or disease of some kind, because he asked the Lord three times to remove it from him. Some have thought Paul might have had some eye or vision problems. This is because they recall that Paul suffered blindness on the road to Damascus, and although he recovered his sight, perhaps there was other lingering effects that diminished his sight over time. Also in the book of Galatians Paul was speaking of his visit to the churches in Galatia, and remarked that in his trials, the Galatians were willing to give them their own eyes. This seems to strongly suggest that Paul had some problems with his eyes. It might be that Paul had his eyes injured severely when he was stoned at Iconium, but this is only speculation, with no proof. We know that when Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia, and of his experience among them, this was close to the time when Paul had been stoned. Although commentators feel Paul might had some eye troubles, and that this could be his thorn in the flesh, it does not quite seem to fit in with the context of this chapter. Perhaps we could think of Paul referring metaphorically to a spiritual attack of Satan rather than a physical attack. In the last chapter Paul said that Satan often came masquerading as an angel (or messenger) of light, and by this he meant the false teachers, who presented themselves as apostles of Christ, but had an evil agenda to criticize Paul and his apostleship. Perhaps what Paul was trying to say to us, was these false teachers that Satan had sent among the Corinthians gave him great pain. Paul wished this problem would go away, and prayed to the Lord to remove these men who were proving a thorn in his side, but the Lord clearly allowed this testing to come. As painful as it was for Paul to see the damage these false teachers were causing, he had to endure it, while God was testing and proving the reality of their faith and obedience. To support this view, we also find other occasions in the bible where men were referred to as thorns, because of their persecution of God's people (Num 33:55).

We cannot be certain of whether Paul's thorn in the flesh was some physical suffering he had to endure, or a spiritual battle with the false teachers. We know the false teachers were relentless in their attacks on Paul and his work in Corinth and other places. It does seem that Paul's battle with these false teachers fits well into the context, and might well be the thorn he was speaking of. Every time he saw a church established, Satan was right there trying to destroy the work, and frustrate all that Paul was trying to accomplish. This is not surprising, since Satan certainly hates the gospel, which brings glory to God, and men to salvation. Why would God allow this thorn in the flesh? We are told that it was in order that Paul would not be exalted above measure because of the multitude of his revelations. Having received from God these revelations for the New Testament church, it would have been easy for Paul to begin to feel somewhat special and superior, and therefore be lifted up with pride. This would be devastating to God's purpose through Paul to reach and save sinners, because the mission was not about exalting the gospel worker, but exalting Christ so that more souls could be saved. It was imperative that Paul learn humility in his lofty position of being God's messenger. The attacks of Satan were certainly an effective way to teach humility. If we understand the thorn to be the false teachers who were doing doctrinal and moral damage to the church at Corinth, this would indeed cause much pain to Paul, but it would also remind him that the work is the Lord's, and not His. It is often the case that men who work for God, begin to see success, and suddenly begin to think that they are someone of significance, and that they have built this ministry, church, or brought souls into the kingdom. Every man is prone to this pride, especially when they see great things happening through their efforts. Thus the Lord will send some opposition and trials, hardships and sorrows, so that His servants will always remember their humble place. This is relevant for all of us, since we also should recognize that success in the Christian life, will usually mean some thorn in the flesh, some opposition, or some discouragement. When this happens we do need not lose heart, but simply recognize God's grace helping to remind us that success belongs to God, and is not meant to feed our own pride.

*"therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of god" 2Tim 1:8*

LESSON 162  
**Examine Yourselves**  
2CORINTHIANS 13

As we finish off our studies today in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, we are reminded of the many paradoxes in this book and in our Christian lives. We remember Paul's passionate defense against the false teachers as he pleads for and with his spiritual children in Corinth to not give place to these proud and evil men. Paul finishes his letter to the Corinthians with a very strong word of exhortation for the believers to Examine themselves.

It is clear that Paul was planning a visit to Corinth. He had been delayed as he waited for Titus to bring him word about the obedience of the Corinthians regarding a discipline case. Now that Titus had come and given a good report about their obedience, he wants to make his way to Corinth. He said this would be his third visit to them. We know earlier in his mission work he had been in Corinth for about 18 months while he saw the Lord establish a church there. The second visit seems unclear, but he may have gone to Corinth on another occasion, which scripture does not mention. Or perhaps Paul is not referring to actual visits to Corinth, but his intended plan to travel to Corinth in the recent past. Now he is once again planning his visit, and this time he says he will not spare them from the power of Christ in judgment. He is aware that there are some problems brewing in Corinth, and this undoubtedly had to do with these false teachers and their influence upon the church. Paul is warning that when he comes, it will not just be idle talk and accusations, but every word will be established by two or three witnesses. Paul's stern warning of judgment on those who are causing troubles tells us that Paul seriously questions the genuineness of their faith. They were doubting that Christ was speaking through the apostle Paul, and were demanding proof, that he was God's spokesman. He reminds them that Christ was not weak towards them, but mighty in them. Christ may have been crucified in weakness, but he lives by the power of God. These men who so boldly spoke against Paul, were overly confident in their assertions, and not really carefully considering that if Christ was indeed speaking through Paul, and they were challenging Paul, then they were challenging Christ. They needed to understand that even though Christ was a man living among men, and was crucified as a common criminal, that did not mean that they should think of, or see, him in that way. Christ rose from the dead by the power of God, and carries all authority and power. Before they think they can start to criticize a servant of Christ, they had better watch themselves, lest they be fighting with God, and bring upon themselves some severe judgment. At this point Paul would challenge them to examine themselves to see if they were in the faith. As Paul had considered their ungodly conduct, he fears that some of these men are false believers, and workers for Satan.

When a person puts their trust in Jesus as their Savior, we know it is not their good works that will save them. It is faith in Jesus Christ that saves a soul. While we consider that good works do not contribute to salvation, we certainly don't want people to think that good works are not important in the Christian life. In fact, it is a person's good works that reveal the change that has been made in them, and the genuineness of their faith. So while works can not save a soul, they are evidence that a soul has been saved. So examine yourself by asking if you have some good works that the Holy Spirit has directed you to do for the glory of God. Good works are just one of the many evidences that testify to the reality of one's saving faith. As Paul exhorts those false brethren in Corinth to examine themselves, he fears some might prove to be disqualified, which means their faith was never genuine, and though professing to be a Christian, they never put their entire confidence in Jesus, as seen by a changed life. It is good for each of us to examine ourselves, and the genuineness of our faith, because the truth is the truth. We cannot change truth by believing in something false, though many people live in this kind of delusion. So many people believe they are a Christian, but have never take time to carefully consider what makes them a believer, and what makes them sure they are going to heaven. Paul also points out that it was his weakness that allowed Christ's power to be revealed in him, and therefore adds that when he is weak in himself, he is strong in Christ. It is the evidence of Christ working in Paul that should have spoken clearly to the Corinthians, and in particular his critics, that Paul, unlike some of them was not disqualified, but God's true servant. This challenge against Paul reminds us of the wilderness journeys of Israel, and how some of them challenged the leadership of Moses. As we think about the way God judged those wicked men for not submitting under God's chosen servant, it will sober us to God's wrath against rebellion, and serve to warn us against such folly.

Paul warns and advises the Corinthians so that they will act wisely, honestly, and righteously in his absence. When he comes to them, he does not wish to be harsh, and have to deal with problems, they should have dealt with themselves. If he had to come and assert his apostolic authority, it would prove that he was God's servant. However Paul would rather come in a weak and gentle spirit, even if that should mean that he appeared to some as though he did not possess the power and authority of an apostle. He could come to them in weakness, if they would act honorably, and confront any sin among them, and the false teachers.

Paul said that they could do nothing against the truth, but only for it. What he seems to be saying is that his role as an apostle did not afford him any room to think of himself, or his reputation, but only about the truth of God. Paul found his joy in the Corinthians when they were strong in Christ, and behaving honorably, for that meant he did not have to assert his apostolic authority. He wanted to see the Corinthians complete in Christ, so he boldly wrote this exhortation, so he would not need to use his authority when he came to them. His aim was edification not destruction. He ends with a word of farewell, seeking their comfort, unity of mind, peace, & fellowship with God. He

adds that they should greet one another with a holy kiss. A very stern letter at times, but also a letter that breathes out the love of God for believers, with the desire that all walk in obedience to Christ.

*"for we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth."* 2Cor 13:8

### **Today's Bible Question:**

Today was our final lesson from the book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, and we heard Paul giving the Corinthians a stern exhortation, calling on them to examine themselves as to whether they were in the faith. He did not want to come to them with harsh apostolic authority, but in gentleness. Someone might ask the question, "Should we still greet Christians today with a holy kiss?"

The custom of greeting with a holy kiss was common to the Greek and Roman world of New Testament times. Jewish men would also greet one another with a kiss, as well as women greeting women in a similar fashion. The practice of a kiss on the cheek, or both cheeks, is still practiced by many middle eastern cultures, and some European as well. Of course in the context of a culture where greeting with a kiss is a normal way of greeting, there is no stigma attached to it, and no one would consider it inappropriate. We should recognize that in some cultures a public kiss may seem quite improper. A man kissing a man in public could be interpreted as being homosexual in nature, or lesbianism in the case of women. Given that in some cultures kissing in public might be considered inappropriate a Christian should think twice before greeting his brother or sister with a kiss. Paul said that the kiss should be a holy kiss, and therefore there should be no hint of anything dishonoring to the Lord. Human affection is beautiful and appropriate in the sight of God, when the heart and motives are guided by the Holy Spirit, and directed by divine love. Unfortunately not every one has purity in his heart. Given opportunity for physical contact with the opposite sex, might lead some to go beyond what is decent, by making contact that is questionable and uncomfortable. I have seen young people, who lack discernment, and show a lack of discretion and wisdom in how they handle appropriate contact with the opposite sex. Kissing being just one aspect of interaction between people. Hugging might seem innocent enough, and in most cases is, but there can also be hugging which is sensual and arousing, and thus should be avoided by Christians.

While we speak about this subject of holy kissing, it would be good to challenge all Christians about proper behavior when it comes to how to treat the opposite sex. Christian boys and men, ought always to respect a woman, and never degrade her to the level of a mere sexual object in his thoughts. Looking at a woman the wrong way is sinful if it insights lust. What some might deem as innocent contact by hugging, or embracing might actually be inflaming lust in one, or both, of the individuals. Perhaps nothing is meant by the embrace, and it all seems innocent enough, but others looking on do not understand, and think there is more than just a friendly embrace. A Christian must not only guard against his own sinful lusts, by careful discrete conduct, but he must also consider his testimony before the world, as others interpret his actions as either godly or fleshly. Women also need to consider how they dress, so as not to entice men to lust. Women who dress as though church were a fashion show, need to be reminded that the focus of worship must be the Lord Jesus Christ, and they can best cooperate with this focus when their dress does not draw undue attention to themselves.

As we consider the holy kiss among believers, we should recognize the need for careful discernment within the context of the culture in which we live. Someone has said about this instruction: *"It is not a command of perpetual obligation, as the spirit of the command is that Christians should express their mutual love in the way sanctioned by the age and community in which they live"* (Hodge). In many cultures a friendly handshake is a very appropriate replacement for the holy kiss, and certainly should not offend anyone. The spirit of this command would allow for a variety of greetings which carry the warmth and acceptance of true Christian fellowship. Christians need to see the spirit of the instruction, and therefore decide what is best for the culture in which they find themselves.

What is truly sad, and not according to the mind of Christ, and spirit of the New Testament, is when Christians offer no greeting, or provide a rude greeting. How often have we encountered two believers who are at odds with each other, refusing to talk with each other, or perhaps answering sharply when addressed. The bible says we are to live peaceable with all men, but not all men will allow us to keep peace, because of their contentious spirit. This very command to greet one another with a holy kiss is a good test for our Christian attitude towards all believers. If I cannot honestly and sincerely provide a loving and respectful greeting to every child of God, then I am not living in a manner that reflects Jesus to others. It can only grieve the Holy Spirit if I should harbor any ill-will towards a fellow believer. My duty as a follower of Christ is to show love and a respectful greeting to every fellow believer. It is good Christian behavior to show a respectful and courteous attitude towards all people, regardless of their circumstances, age, religion, or social standing. May the Lord help us to fulfill the spirit of this instruction of greeting one another with a holy kiss, by our friendly, humble, and respectful manner.

*"And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? do not even the tax collectors do so?"*  
Matt 5:47