

**April to June 2017**

**“Growth Pains in the Church –  
Lessons from 1 Corinthians  
(Part I)”**

*by*  
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**About the Author**



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SATURDAY, APRIL 1

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-3

ACTS 18:1-8

*"Unto the church of God  
which is at Corinth..."*

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## THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

Corinth was Greece's foremost commercial city. It was located in a strategic location: south of the narrow isthmus which connected Northern and Southern Greece. Ships sailing in the Adriatic Sea would often use Corinth as a land bridge. The crew would often choose to haul their ships through the land rather than sail around the treacherous Cape Malea. Corinth thus became a thriving and prosperous centre of business as much trade passed through the city.

Due to the mass gathering of traders at Corinth, the city soon became a breeding ground of gross immorality. The city became so infamous for her sexual exploits that the Greek word *korinthiazesthai* became a word referring to sexual wantonness and abandonment. One of the patron goddess of Corinth was Aphrodite. She was worshipped as the goddess of love (or rather, lust). Around one thousand temple prostitutes served at the temple of Aphrodite, where sexual sins were committed as worship to the goddess. Thus, Corinth became not only a byword for wealth and luxury, but also moral filth.

Nevertheless, God in His rich mercy raised up a gospel witness in this city of sin. The founding of the Corinthian church is described in Acts 18:1-8. Paul and his associates preached the gospel firstly to the Jews. Sadly, the majority of the Jews rejected the truth. Nevertheless, Crispus, the chief leader of the synagogue, believed on Christ with all his house. Using the house of Justus as his headquarters, Paul continued to preach the gospel unto the Gentiles. Through the diligent preaching of Paul, many of the Corinthians believed in the Word of God. How merciful and loving is our God that salvation should come to a sinful city like Corinth!

Similarly, God has lovingly delivered us who were once His enemies out of the darkness of sin and into His glorious light. How then should we respond?

**THOUGHT:** Christ came into this world to save sinners such as I.

**PRAYER:** Help me to be thankful for my salvation, O Lord!

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LORD'S DAY, APRIL 2

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-3

1 CORINTHIANS 9:1-2

*"Paul, called to be an apostle..."*

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## CALLED TO BE AN APOSTLE

The theme of the two Corinthian epistles is "Growth Pains of a Church." The Corinthian church might have grown in numbers since its founding, but they were still deficient in their spiritual growth. As a result, problems crept into the church. There were sin and division. Worldliness and immorality abounded. The church was in the world, but sadly, the world was also in the church. Moreover, the congregation had questions regarding certain spiritual and ecclesiastical issues (see especially 1 Corinthians 7 to 16). Hence, Paul found it necessary to write these passionate letters in order to address the spiritual immaturity of the Corinthian church.

Paul introduced himself as one who was "called to be an apostle" (1 Cor 1:1). An "apostle" is one who is sent out on a mission with full authority (re: Friberg). Paul did not appoint himself into the special office of an Apostle. He was personally commissioned by God into the office. As an Apostle of Christ, he was infallible in his writing and preaching (cf. 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 3:16). By invoking his Apostolic authority, Paul was reminding his readers that his message ought to be received and obeyed as that which comes from God. They were not to pursue after their vain understanding, but to follow whole-heartedly the teachings of Paul.

Alas, when Paul visited the Corinthian church after the writing of this epistle, he found that the members did not receive his teachings kindly. It was a painful and heart-breaking visit (2 Cor 2:1; 12:14, 21; 13:1-2), causing Paul to rebuke them with a severe letter (2 Cor 2:4, 9). Thankfully, the Corinthians repented with godly sorrow after receiving that severe letter (2 Cor 7:5-16). This is the right response to the admonishment of God's Word.

What about you, dear reader? Will you humbly receive and obey the authoritative Word of everlasting life?

**THOUGHT:** The Bible is our sole authority of faith and practice

**PRAYER:** Teach me Thy way, O Lord. May I keep it to the end!

MONDAY, APRIL 3

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-3

ACTS 20:28

*"Unto the church of God  
which is at Corinth..."*

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## THE LOCAL CHURCH WITNESS

The term "*church*" is used in two ways in the Bible. Firstly, it can refer to the universal church. The universal church refers to "the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head..." (WCF 25:1). The universal church thus has no address affixed to it and consists of only true believers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, in 1 Corinthians 1:2, the term "*church*" is used in reference to the local church. The local church "consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" (WCF 25:2). The local church thus has an address affixed to it, and consists of true and false believers. Consequently, it is also subjected "both to mixture and error" as can be seen in the case of the Corinthian church.

Paul reminded the Corinthian church that it is "*the church of God*" (1 Cor 1:2). As the church of God, she was purchased by the blood of Christ and belongs wholly unto Him (Acts 20:28). She was meant to be the visible witness of Christ, to bear the name of Christ in the locality of Corinth, and shine the gospel light to the rest of the world. Her leaders were also responsible for feeding and protecting the flock of God. Sadly, due to the spiritual immaturity of the Corinthian church, her witness of Christ was corrupted. The Corinthian church might have grown in numbers over the years, but her light for Christ still shone dim!

Churches today are no different. When a church forgets that she is supposed to be dedicated to God and His Word, she is following in the footsteps of the Corinthian church. May the Lord grant us churches that are faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ!

**THOUGHT:** Christ is the Head of the Church.

**PRAYER:** Lord, preserve the faithful witness of Thy church.

TUESDAY, APRIL 4

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-3

EPHESIANS 4:1-3

*“... to them that are sanctified in  
Christ Jesus, called to be saints...”*

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## CALLED TO BE SAINTS

A local church is not made of bricks and mortar, but of believers who are *“called to be saints”* (1 Cor 1:2). Unlike the Roman Catholic Church who reserves the privilege of sainthood to a selected few, the Bible teaches us that all who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are called saints of God.

The term *“saints”* (hagioi) literally means “holy ones.” When a man embraces Christ as his Lord and Saviour, he is cleansed of his sins by the blood of the Lamb and is clothed with the righteousness of Christ. He is positionally sanctified in Christ Jesus and declared holy before God the Father. When the Roman Catholic Church teaches that only some can become saints of God, it is in effect a denial of the efficacy of Christ’s work on the cross of Calvary.

When a man is designated the title of the “holy one” of God, he is expected to conduct himself in a manner that is worthy of his calling (Eph 4:1). He must show forth a life that is separated from worldliness and dedicated unto holiness. This opening description of Paul is thus a call to the Corinthian Christians to examine their lives to see if they had been walking in a manner that was consistent with their profession of Christ. If they were truly saints of God, why were they embracing sin rather than holiness?

In his commentary, Calvin noted that though a man professes Christ, he may not be part of the true church of God if he is not committed to holiness. “For if you do not by holiness of life show yourself to be a Christian, you may indeed be in the Church, and pass undetected, but of it you cannot be.” The danger of one who is consistently walking in sin is that he may not be born again in the first place and is deceiving himself. *“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother”* (1 John 3:10).

**THOUGHT:** Am I walking worthy of my calling as a saint of God?

**PRAYER:** Help me to walk in holiness, O Lord!

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5

1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9

1 THESSALONIANS 1

*“...for the grace of God which is  
given you by Christ Jesus.”*

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## GOD'S GRACE EXPERIENCED

1 Corinthians 1:4 reveals the pastoral heart of Paul: *“I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ.”* The problems of the Corinthian church caused Paul much heartache and grief. Nevertheless, he was still able to genuinely express his gratitude to God continually for the divine grace that was bestowed upon the Corinthian Christians.

In what way did the Corinthian Christians experience the unmerited favour of God?

Firstly, they experienced the salvation grace of God. God demonstrated His love towards mankind by sending His only begotten Son into this world to redeem man from sin. *“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”* (Rom 5:8). The Corinthian Christians deserved eternal condemnation. Instead, they received redemption and eternal life when they believed in the gospel of Christ.

However, the Corinthian Christians were not just recipients of salvific grace. They were also empowered by God to be His witnesses as they walked their pilgrim journey on earth. This grace for service experienced by the Corinthian Christians is described by Paul in verses 5 to 9:

- They were enriched with the understanding and utterance of spiritual things.
- The gospel of Christ was confirmed in their hearts.
- They were bestowed with spiritual gifts.
- They would be kept blameless till Christ returned.

Similarly, we who believe in God have also experienced His grace. Let us therefore be thankful for the grace that was bestowed upon us.

**THOUGHT:** Amazing grace, how sweet the sound!

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me not to take Thy grace for granted.

THURSDAY, APRIL 6

1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9

1 CORINTHIANS 3:21-23

“...ye are enriched by him...”

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## ENRICHED BY GOD

The city of Corinth was a thriving business centre. Many were made rich by trade. Materialism, greed and avarice were common in the city.

The Corinthian Christians were also rich. However, Paul was not referring to material possessions but to spiritual treasures of God. God Himself in Christ Jesus has made Christians spiritually rich far beyond all measure, for they are richly endowed in every aspect by the grace-gifts of the Holy Spirit!

Verse 5 mentions two ways in which God has enriched all Christians:

1. Enriched in spiritual understanding. God has given to us the Bible that we may know His will. Every Christian is also indwelt by the Holy Spirit which allows him to understand the spiritual words of God (John 16:13; 1 Cor 2:12-16). Indeed, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ Jesus (Col 2:3).
2. Enriched in speech. This refers to how the Lord by His Spirit will lead Christians to testify of the truth. Consider the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 12:11-12: *“And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.”*

From the corporate perspective, God has also blessed the Corinthian church with men who can faithfully preach and teach God’s Word. This is a means of grace from God for the Corinthian Christians to understand His will. We must be thankful to God when He has blessed us with biblically sound preaching in these perilous times!

**THOUGHT:** *“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want”* (Ps 23:1).

**PRAYER:** Help me to seek heavenly riches, O Lord!

FRIDAY, APRIL 7

1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9

ROMANS 8:12-17

*“Even as the testimony of Christ  
was confirmed in you...”*

## GOD’S TESTIMONY CONFIRMED

The “*testimony of Christ*” in verse 6 refers to the Corinthian Christians’ witness of Christ because of God’s work in their lives. God is the agent who “has sealed the truth of his gospel among the Corinthians, for the purpose of confirming it” (Calvin).

This confirmation of the testimony of God is done in two ways:

1. The Corinthian Christians have witnessed the saving power of Christ in their lives through the faithful preaching of Paul. The message of Paul was also authenticated by apostolic signs (cf. 2 Cor 12:12: *“Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.”*)
2. The Lord has given all believers the Holy Spirit to be the earnest (i.e. downpayment) and seal of their salvation. *“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory”* (Eph 1:13-14).

As a believer seeks to work out his salvation, the Holy Spirit who indwells him will testify that he is a genuine child of God. *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together”* (Rom 8:14-17).

May the Lord grant you a full assurance of your salvation in Christ.

**THOUGHT:** Am I assured of my salvation?

**PRAYER:** Lord, confirm the testimony of Christ in me.

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SEALING AND ANOINTING OF THE SPIRIT  
(from *Theology for Every Christian* by Tow and Khoo)

"Paul speaks of the actual presence of the Spirit in the life of God's people as a 'seal' or mark of identification. In 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, Paul refers to 'he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.' ... The actual presence of the Spirit is a pledge of future blessings.

Twice in the epistle to the Ephesians the actual presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian is referred to as the 'seal' of God (Eph 1:13, 4:30). Although the Holy Spirit is not directly mentioned in Revelation 7:2-4, this is doubtless the meaning of the 'seal of the living God' in the faces of God's people.

The sealing of the Spirit also means that we are eternally secure in Christ (Eph 4:30). When God's people are said to be 'sealed' by His Spirit, it means that they are His possession – they belong to Him. The word 'seal' denotes ownership. The Lord has bought us with a price. That price was Christ's shed blood on the cross (Eph 1:14, Acts 20:28). God owns us completely, and we are indebted to Him eternally...

There is an aspect of the anointing of the Spirit that concerns service and not salvation. The indwelling of the Spirit and salvific anointing (1 John 2:20, 27) that comes with it at the time of regeneration is permanent and can never be removed. But the anointing of the Spirit which pertains to service is temporary and can be taken away.... These two aspects (i.e., for salvation and for service) of the Spirit's anointing must be clearly distinguished. The anointing of the Spirit for salvation speaks of the Spirit's residence *within* the person (i.e. indwelling, sealing), while the anointing of the Spirit for service speaks of His ministry *upon* the person (i.e., enabling, empowering)."

**THOUGHT:** The Holy Spirit is the seal of my salvation.

**PRAYER:** Grant me a full assurance of my salvation, O Lord!

LORD'S DAY, APRIL 9

1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11

*"So that ye come behind in no gift..."*

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## NOT LACKING IN SPIRITUAL GIFTS!

God did not leave the Corinthian Christians destitute of resources as they served the Lord Jesus Christ. As a confirmation of the testimony of Christ in the Corinthian Christians, God also provided them with the necessary spiritual gifts to use in their labour for Christ. The term translated "gift" is the Greek word *charisma*. It comes from the root word *charis*, which means "grace." Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to know that the spiritual gifts that they had were graciously given by God. The Corinthian Christians ought to be thankful for this privilege, and were to use these spiritual gifts faithfully for the glory of God.

Sadly, the Corinthian Christians failed to comprehend that these gifts were "graciously" given to them by God. Instead, they boasted about their gifts and abused them in the church. Paul responded to this issue: the diversities of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:1-11); the purpose of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:12-31); the motive of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 13) and the proper use of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14).

Every Christian will be granted at least one spiritual gift. Our duty is to use these gifts for *"the edifying of the body of Christ"* (Eph 4:12). *"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness"* (Rom 12:3-8).

**THOUGHT:** What spiritual gifts has God given to me?

**PRAYER:** Help me to be a good steward of Thy gifts, O Lord!

MONDAY, APRIL 10

1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9

MATTHEW 25:14-30

*“...waiting for the coming  
of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

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## WAITING FOR CHRIST’S COMING

As Christians, we “wait” (*apekdekomai*) for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:7). This “waiting” has the idea of eager anticipation for something good to happen. This waiting is one which is anxious, persistent and assiduous, almost like a parent waiting for his son to return home from a long trip overseas. Similarly, Christians are to await Christ’s return with much eager anticipation. It will be a day of Christ’s revelation (*apokalupsis*) in His glory and splendour.

However, we must not understand this “waiting” to be a period of inactivity or passiveness, just like waiting for a bus or a train. Waiting for Christ involves much activity, service and labour. Some cults teach their believers to sell all they have and go to an appointed place to wait for Christ to appear. What a devilish and wicked teaching to deceive the masses!

Christ gave us the parable of the talents in the Olivet Discourse to dispel any wrong notion of what it means to wait for His coming. A Christian is one who is characterised by a life of faithful stewardship. He will make use of whatever resources the Lord has given to Him to magnify Christ and His Word. Is our life characterised by such diligence and faithfulness for the Lord Jesus Christ?

A Christian should also look forward to the day when he will be presented “*blameless*” before God. We will be given a glorified body just like that of our Saviour. How should we respond? *“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure”* (1 John 3:2-3). Waiting for Christ’s coming also requires us to be wholly committed to walk in holiness and purity. How is our walk before our God? Amen.

**THOUGHT:** I must redeem the time, for the days are evil.

**PRAYER:** Help me to be faithful till Christ’s coming, O Lord.

TUESDAY, APRIL 11

1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9

ROMANS 8:28-39

*"Who shall also confirm  
you unto the end..."*

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## THE PRESERVATION OF THE SAINTS

1 Corinthians 1:8 tells us that God Himself will *"confirm"* (i.e. secure) believers unto the end, keeping them *"blameless"* until the Jesus' return. The Greek term for *"blameless"* is a legal term, speaking of how a man is free from reproach before a judge. Christ's righteousness is imputed upon us, thus we are settled and secure in blamelessness for all eternity. This is known as the preservation of the saints. God is faithful to all His promises. Thus, we can be perfectly sure that God will keep our salvation unto the very end!

A restatement of this truth is found in Romans 8:28-30: *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."* This is often termed the "Golden Chain of Salvation." It classifies the verses into seven items: (1) Love towards God; (2) God's good providence; (3) God's foreknowledge; (4) His predestination of the elect to sonship; (5) His calling of them; (6) His justification of them; (7) His glorification of them. Buswell expounded on this further, "The seven items... form a closely woven fabric through which there are no apertures. Those who love God are those who have been called, predestinated, according to His [eternal] purpose; and they have been divinely appointed for all the benefits of grace, from justification through to glorification. There is no escape from this closely woven web. If one is within it, he is securely within it, for there is no break in its meshes from the eternal decrees to eternal glory." Herein lies a grand statement concerning the preservation of the saints. Not one child of God shall be lost. What a wonderful assurance and comfort to our souls especially in times of distress!

**THOUGHT:** God will preserve me till I reach the heavenly shores.

**PRAYER:** Lord, I thank Thee that Thou will keep me to the end.

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WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12

1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9

1 JOHN 1

*“...unto the fellowship of his Son  
Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

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## FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST

The term “*fellowship*” (*koinōnia*) in 1 Corinthians 1:9 refers to a close association, relationship or communion with someone. When man fell from his estate in the Garden of Eden, the communion and fellowship with God was broken. Yet God initiated the restoration of this fellowship by sending His only begotten Son to die for the sin of man. In the Garden of Eden, it was the LORD who initiated the restoration of fellowship with Adam. Adam hid from God, but it was God who sought him out (Gen 3:9). It was the LORD who announced in Genesis 3:15 that the seed of the woman would be the way of restoration. Similarly for us, our fellowship in Christ is made possible because God sent His only begotten Son to die for our sins. Now that we have been saved gloriously by the gospel of Christ, we can have communion with God and Christ. What a wonderful privilege!

What then does it mean to have fellowship with Christ?

1. It means we have fellowship in the gospel (Phil 1:5). Not only is our communion made possible in the gospel, we are also labourers together with God and the other saints in the work of the gospel (1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 6:1).
2. We have fellowship in the light (1 John 1:6-7). This means that we have no fellowship with the works of darkness (Eph 5:11; 2 Cor 6:14), but we walk in righteousness and holiness.
3. We will have fellowship with the saints as members of the heavenly family of God (1 John 1:3, 7; 2 Cor 8:4).
4. We will have fellowship in the sufferings of Christ (Phil 3:10). Just as Christ suffered on our behalf, so are we called to suffer for Him.

**THOUGHT:** Fellowship with Christ is so sweet.

**PRAYER:** Lord, what a privilege it is to have fellowship with Thee!

THURSDAY, APRIL 13

1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-17

JAMES 4:1-2

*“...and that there be no  
divisions among you...”*

### A DIVIDED CHURCH!

The people of God must be united, for they are a people of one Lord, one calling and one faith (Eph 4:1-5). Christ is not divided. He does not disagree with Himself!

Sadly, we often see strife and contentions in the church. Instead of unity, we see disharmony. The cause is sin and self-centredness! Read James 4:1-2.

The Corinthian church was one such church that was split by “contentions.” The word “contentions” is translated from the Greek term *eris*, referring to quarrels and debates. What were they arguing about? Answer: About which church leader should be the greatest! Personality cults were causing schisms in the church. There were at least four different parties in the Corinthian church:

1. The party of Paul. These hanged on to Paul because he was their founding pastor.
2. The party of Cephas. These followed Cephas, the leader of the Apostles.
3. The party of Apollos. Apollos was their current pastor and a man blessed with extraordinary oratorical skill.
4. The party of Christ. These claimed to follow only Christ, but had a “holier-than-thou” attitude.

The irony of the situation was that none of the leaders desired to be leaders of personality cults. Paul reminded the Corinthian church that Christ manifested a oneness of purpose throughout His earthly ministry. Their leaders were sinners too. Only Christ died on behalf of them for their sins. They must worship Christ only, not man!

**THOUGHT:** Do I look to man rather than to God?

**PRAYER:** Lord, grant us churches that are united in Thy truth!

FRIDAY, APRIL 14

1 CORINTHIANS 1:10

JAMES 3:1-12

“...that ye all speak the same thing...”

### UNITED IN SPEECH!

We have the duty to strive for peace in the church. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:3 that a believer should endeavour (Gr. *spoudazō*, i.e. spare no effort, be diligent) *“to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* The unity of the church is our responsibility!

How can we have a united church in Christ? Firstly, strive for unity in speech! In 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers to *“speak the same thing.”* Of course, this does not mean that they should be programmed like robots to speak the same words all the time. Rather, it directed the Christians to have sanctified speech that was seasoned with salt and girded in good theology.

The danger of the tongue is most vividly illustrated in the book of James. James lamented that men could tame the wildest animals and the sea. Yet he failed to control the little organ that was present in his mouth. *“Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!”* (James 3:5). A few careless words can cause brothers to quarrel and split the church. *“A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle”* (Prov 18:19).

The words that we speak are a reflection of our heart, *“for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh”* (Matt 12:34). If we are to control our tongue, let us first guard our thoughts. The only way to do this is to have a mind that is constantly renewed by God’s Word. Do we meditate upon His Word day and night?

To *“speak the same things”* also refers to how we ought to be in agreement in the things of the Lord. This speaks of doctrinal unity. If a church is full of teachers who advocate their own personal views and opinions rather than the teachings in the Bible, would that not cause the church to split? *“...be not many masters”* (James 3:1)!

**THOUGHT:** My words have consequences.

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, help me to guard my tongue.

SATURDAY, APRIL 15

1 CORINTHIANS 1:10

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

*“...that ye be perfectly joined together  
in the same mind...”*

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## UNITED IN MINDSET!

Paul also reminded the Corinthian Christians that they should be *“perfectly joined together in the same mind”* (1 Cor 1:10). The term *katartizō* is often used to describe the mending of broken nets, utensils or dislocated bones. The schisms in the Corinthian church could be mended if the believers had a united mindset and attitude. This united mindset is not that of the world but of Christ. *“If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves”* (Phil 2:1-3). Seek love, not hatred. Pursue construction, not destruction.

While it is true that *“a brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city”* (Prov 18:19), a man with the mind of Christ will be humble and ready to forgive and seek reconciliation with his brother. *“A natural brother when he quarrels with his brother cannot be reconciled. But a spiritual brother can and must make up with his brother under the conviction of the Word by the persevering working of the Holy Spirit”* (Timothy Tow). *“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you”* (Eph 4:32).

Once everyone in the church has the same mind of Christ, it will lead all to have *“the same judgment”* (1 Cor 1:10). The Bible will be the common yardstick to judge all things. God's Word will truly be the sole, supreme and final authority in faith and practice. However, if there are some whose thoughts are worldly, will it not lead to a clash? The world and the Word cannot mix. Let us therefore make sure our thoughts and hearts are fully focused on the Lord Jesus Christ.

**THOUGHT:** My thoughts must be controlled by God's Word.

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, control my thoughts.

LORD'S DAY, APRIL 16

1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-58

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

“...be ye stedfast, unmoveable...”

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## RESURRECTION SUNDAY

Today is Resurrection Sunday. It is appropriate that we should meditate upon 1 Corinthians 15, the grand charter of the resurrection of Christ. It reminds us that we serve a living Saviour. Christ lives, and so we live!

Today, we commemorate our Saviour's victory over the grave and corruption. Christ arose from the grave, so we too will arise from the dead with a glorified body that is suitable for the heavenly realm. It will be a body. Christ has saved not just our souls, but also our bodies. The Scriptures tell us that at the second coming of Christ, those who are the dead in Christ shall rise first, followed by the “catching up” of those who are alive. This event will occur in an “atomic” second (*atomoi*, 1 Cor 15:52), and we shall be forever with our Lord (1 Thess 4:17). What a comfort to our souls!

Resurrection Sunday is also a celebration of Christ's victory over sin and death. Christ knew no sin, and thus death has no power over Him. Christ arose for the justification of our sins. All our sins are washed away by the blood of the Lamb. Indeed, “*O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*” (1 Cor 15:55). We thus await with great expectation for the consummation of our resurrection hope. The new heavens and the new earth will be a place where sin and death can no longer molest. We will spend eternity in joyful worship of our glorious Lord.

In the meantime, there is still work to be done in this sin-sick world. The sure hope of the resurrection serves as our encouragement to faithfully serve the Lord in the midst of diverse trials and temptations. “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord*” (1 Cor 15:58). Let us press on with the work of Christ and be ready for His coming.

**THOUGHT:** Victory is complete in Christ.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to be ready for Christ's return.

MONDAY, APRIL 17

1 CORINTHIANS 1:17

1 CORINTHIANS 3:6

“...lest the cross of Christ should  
be made of none effect.”

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## NOT SELF BUT CHRIST

Paul was glad that he only baptised Crispus, Gaius and the household of Stephanas. Otherwise, the people would have compared the number of people he baptised with those of others. Paul abhorred such a game of numbers. He was very much aware that in the work of the Lord, it is God who gives the increase (1 Cor 3:6). He was just an instrument in God's hand. All glory must go to God, not to Paul.

This selfless attitude of Paul is also reflected in his preaching. It is a common temptation for preachers to demonstrate their oratorical skills and wit. The world often admires such “*wisdom of words*” (1 Cor 1:17). However, Paul was not interested in such praises of men. Neither did he want to attract attention to himself. Doing so would distract people from the gospel message. That would make Paul's preaching to be in vain. It is the gospel that saves, not Paul.

All preaching must be Christ-centred, not man-centred. The late Rev Timothy Tow would often draw a cross on the top right-hand corner of his sermon notes. (Read his book entitled *My Homiletic Swimming Pool*). This was to remind himself that when he preached, it must not be a demonstration of self, but rather a whole-hearted commitment to the Scriptures and the Lord Jesus Christ. The message of the cross of Christ must sound loud and clear!

Similarly, we must be careful not to draw attention to ourselves as we serve our Lord. Our motive for service must be solely the promotion of God's glory and His Word. Otherwise, we will end up striving for position and power, resulting in disunity within the body of Christ.

Moses spent forty years tending sheep before he learnt to say, “*Who am I?*” Thus our motto must be, “Not self but Christ.” *Soli Deo Gloria*.

**THOUGHT:** Let all my ways glorify my Saviour.

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, I surrender my all to Thee.

TUESDAY, APRIL 18

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-19

ROMANS 1:16-17

*"For the preaching of the cross...  
is the power of God."*

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## THE WORD OF THE CROSS

The term "*preaching*" in 1 Corinthians 1:18 comes from the Greek *logos*, meaning "word," "knowledge" or "message." This same word is used in verse 17 in the expression "*wisdom of words*." Paul was engaging in some wordplay here. He was contrasting the words (*logoi*) of men with the Word (*logos*) of God. Surely there is no comparison! The Word of God far exceeds the words of finite men.

Nevertheless, the unregenerate world views the cross very differently. In Roman times, only the worst of criminals were crucified on the cross, a symbol of humiliation. Nobody wanted to be associated with the cross. Therefore, the perishing man will reject the message of the cross. He will think: "How can the Saviour of the world be hanged on the shameful cross? It is utter foolishness." He would rather hang on to his own wisdom than acknowledge God's way of salvation!

On the other hand, the cross holds a very different meaning for us who are regenerated. Instead of being a symbol of shame, we embrace it as a symbol of salvation and glory. Romans 1:16-17 restates this truth beautifully: "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*" The Word of the cross is for both the Jew and the Greek (i.e. the Greek-speaking world, the Gentiles). Man may have power, but his power is nothing compared to the power of the omnipotent God. God's power can cause a dead man to be alive again. This is power that can deliver a man from his sins. No man or creature has the power to give life to the dead! All that is needed is for man to believe. The gospel is offered to all without exception. Sadly, the natural man would rather hang on to his wisdom and his pride than submit to the superior wisdom of God. Is that not foolishness?

**THOUGHT:** I love the old rugged cross.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to preach the Word of the cross.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-19

ROMANS 1:16-17

*“For the preaching of the cross is  
to them that perish foolishness...”*

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### ASHAMED OF THE CROSS?

Yesterday, we learnt that the world regards the Word of the cross as foolishness. The unregenerate despise the humble background of the Lord Jesus. They scorn the manner of His death, for crucifixion is reserved for the punishment of slaves and the worst criminals. They are not able to perceive the true nature and character of Christ, neither do they embrace His resurrection and ascension. They would rather trust in themselves and find their own way to heaven.

Nevertheless, we who are saints must embrace and love the message of the cross, for this gospel is the power of God that saves. The power of God also points us to the blessed work of the Holy Spirit. When the Word of God is preached, the Holy Spirit convicts men of their sin, and brings them into a wondrous salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, we present the Word of the cross with full assurance, knowing that it is not a myth but truth that saves.

Sadly, there are churches today that have become ashamed of the gospel. John MacArthur noted the downgrade of churches in America in his book *Ashamed of the Gospel*. He bemoaned how these churches have become “user-friendly” and “marketable,” substituting the “old-time” gospel for a “show-time” religion. Instead of the preaching of God’s Word, the Word of the cross is substituted with pop music, jokes and philosophical rhetoric. These were the things that Paul denounced here in 1 Corinthians. Instead of the Word of the cross, they had the wisdom of man’s words. By embracing worldly wisdom, these churches have forgotten that the message of the cross is *“the power of God unto salvation”* (Rom 1:16).

What about us? Do we shrink from sharing the Word of the cross because of our fear of men? Do we doubt the power of the message of the cross to save? Let us not shun any opportunity to declare the Word of the cross, even if it means rejection by the world.

**THOUGHT:** Am I ashamed of the Word of the cross?

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, help me to love the Word of the cross.

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## WHO DO YOU TRUST?

Paul proceeded to use the Old Testament to illustrate the superiority of God's wisdom over the world's wisdom. He quoted Isaiah 29:14, *"Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid."*

The LORD was directing His word towards the kingdom of Judah. At that time, Judah was besieged by the superpower Assyria. The LORD called for Judah to trust fully in Him for deliverance. Instead, rebellious Judah turned to Egypt for help, with disastrous consequences. Rabshakeh was able to tempt Israel with these words, *"Now, behold, thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt unto all that trust on him"* (2 Kings 18:21). The wisdom of wise men proved to be foolishness. Thankfully, the LORD was merciful towards Judah. Though Egypt abandoned Judah, the LORD delivered her by slaying 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night. The wisdom and power of God are indeed far superior to man's.

It is thus tragic that man would rather trust in the arm of flesh for salvation. The world's religions teach that man can work his way to heaven. However, the Bible declares that the way to heaven is only through the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is fully by the grace of God. All man needs to do is to trust in the Lord for deliverance, and not to trust in his own wisdom.

Dearly beloved, who do you trust? Christians must depend on God totally in all things. *"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths"* (Prov 3:5-6).

**THOUGHT:** Simply trusting Jesus every day.

**PRAYER:** Thou art my wisdom and guide, O Lord.

FRIDAY, APRIL 21

1 CORINTHIANS 1:20-25

MATTHEW 12:38-45

*"Where is the wise?..."*

### WORLDLY WISDOM DENOUNCED!

In 1 Corinthians 1:20-25, Paul mentioned three groups of people that were frequently regarded as wise in his time. The first group (*"the wise"*) were the Greek philosophers. The second group (*"the scribe"*) were the Jewish teachers of the law. The third group (*"the disputer"*) were the debaters who enjoyed contending regarding the issues of the day (cf. Acts 17:18; 28:29). Though such men might be highly regarded in the world, they were accounted foolish before the Lord.

The Jews had the oracles of God, yet they often sought a sign to excuse their unbelief. One such account of foolishness is seen in Matthew 12:38-45. Despite seeing the many miracles of Jesus, the religious teachers still demanded that He gives them a sign. Jesus replied, *"An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas"* (Matt 12:39). Jesus had declared the truth clearly to the Jews, yet they still refused to trust in His Word!

At the same time, the Greeks simply enjoyed contending on the fine points of philosophy and the issues of the day. One of their favourite pastimes was to gather in social squares (i.e. *agoras*) and engage in debates. This is seen in Acts 17:16-33 where the Athenians gathered to hear the *"new doctrine"* (Acts 17:19) which Paul was teaching. *"For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing"* (Acts 17:21). After attending to the words of Paul, many simply dismissed them as frivolous and nonsensical (Acts 17:32). How tragic!

The situation today in some churches is equally dire. Man would rather heed the words of modern-day gurus, political leaders or motivational speakers, than to embrace the preached Word of God. May you be a faithful receiver of God's Word, and not a rejecter.

**THOUGHT:** The humble shall go up, and the proud shall go down.

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, let me not be wise in my own conceit.

SATURDAY, APRIL 22

1 CORINTHIANS 1:20-25

ROMANS 10:14-17

“...by the foolishness of preaching  
to save them that believe.”

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## THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING

Preaching is the bold and faithful proclamation of God's Word by the power of the Holy Spirit. Many in the world regard this as foolishness because of its content. While the world regards preaching as foolishness, the LORD has determined it to be the way in which souls are saved (1 Cor 1:21). When Paul preached to the Athenians in Acts 17:16-33, many of them mocked at the doctrine of the resurrection (Acts 17:32). But there were also a few who believed unto salvation (Acts 17:34). This was also the experience of the Corinthian Christians, for many were saved by the preaching of Paul and his associates. Indeed, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the preached word (*rhēma*) of God (Rom 10:14-17).

Just like in time past, many today also reject the preaching of God's Word. Sadly, many churches today have also decried preaching. In his book *Preaching and Preachers*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones lamented the condition of churches forty years ago. He observed that churches rejected preaching and replaced it with social activities and “coffee talk.” In fact, there were some who regarded preaching as “something carnal lacking in spirituality.” Nothing can be further from the truth!

As a matter of testimony, this writer observed a church that shortened its worship service from one-and-a-half hours to a mere forty-five minutes. Considering that the singing of hymns would reasonably last about thirty minutes, that would leave only fifteen minutes for preaching. How then would the congregation be fed?

In the light of today's Scripture passage, let us leave ourselves in no doubt that “the primary task of the Church and of the Christian minister is the preaching of the Word of God” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones). No preaching, no life!

**THOUGHT:** How much do I value faithful preaching?

**PRAYER:** Help me to attend carefully to faithful preaching, O Lord.

LORD'S DAY, APRIL 23

1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-31

JAMES 2:5

*"And base things of the world...  
hath God chosen..."*

## GOD USES BASE THINGS

The Corinthian church consisted of many of humble background. There were not many among them who were (1) wise – those of high intellectual ability and accreditation. In today's context, they will be the professors of our tertiary institutions; (2) mighty – these would be the people in government positions or the military; and (3) noble – those with high social status, or perhaps of royal lineage. Considering that the city of Corinth was a prosperous commercial city (see devotion on 1 April), it is astounding that not many prominent men were found in the Corinthian church!

Why then did God choose to call the lowly and *"foolish"* (Gr. *mōra*) to salvation? Paul gave two reasons. First, this was to put to shame (*kataischunō*) the wisdom of the world. Those who thought themselves wise would in the end turn out to be foolish in their own pride for they would not be able to enter heaven. Second, God called the lowly so that no flesh could take pride and say they were saved by their own merit. We are saved by the grace of God and not by our own works (Eph 2:8-9). Hence, we have no right to boast. All glory belongs to God.

Does this mean that those who are rich, mighty and intelligent can never be saved? Not so, for we have the example of the Apostle Paul who was a Pharisee of Pharisees, and a foremost teacher of the law. An example of a rich man who was saved is Joseph of Arimathea who gave his tomb for Jesus to be buried in. What Paul was driving at was the importance of humility before God. No Christian should think himself as high and mighty. If only the Corinthian Christians would remember to give all glory unto the Lord, the partisan spirit in the church would then be eliminated. The Christian's motto must be *"He (Christ) must increase, but I must decrease"* (John 3:30). The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever (WSC Qn 1).

**THOUGHT:** Not greatness but lowliness. (Timothy Tow)

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, humble me before Thyself!

MONDAY, APRIL 24

1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-31

MATTHEW 20:17-28

*"He that glorieth, let him  
glory in the Lord."*

## NOT GREATNESS BUT LOWLINESS (I) (TIMOTHY TOW)

"The desire to dominate over others, to be great, is the way of the sinful world. It gives one more pay, power and prestige. This desire invades the Church, for though we are saved we still have the old sinful nature. We see this in Mrs. Zebedee the mother of James and John. The mother of James and John asked of Jesus that her two sons might sit one on the right and the other on the left in His Kingdom. When the rest of the apostles heard it they were filled with indignation.

This rivalry for leadership went on unabated. In Luke 22:24-27, it is recorded, *'And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.'*

Returning to our main text where the apostles were angry with James and John seeking dominance over them, Jesus answered them saying, *'Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with (i.e. to die with me)?'* They rashly said 'Yes.'

Jesus replied, *'Ye shall drink indeed of my cup and be baptized with the baptism.'* This prediction is first fulfilled by James in Acts 12:1-2.... This was the first martyrdom.... The last happened to John after his imprisonment on the Isle of Patmos. To sit one on the right and the other on the left for James and John was not for Christ to give, but to die for His sake was God's appointment..."

**THOUGHT:** I must prefer my brethren above myself.

**PRAYER:** Lord, grant me the mind of Christ.

TUESDAY, APRIL 25

1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-31

MATTHEW 20:17-28

*“...no flesh should glory  
in his presence...”*

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## NOT GREATNESS BUT LOWLINESS (II)

“For in Matthew 16:24-25 Jesus said, *‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.’* This statement does not apply to the apostles only but everyone, including me and you. To take up his cross, as Jesus carried the cross to Golgotha, means death. We must be prepared to die with Jesus and suffer martyrdom like the twelve apostles, *‘and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.’* It was appointed unto the apostles in their generation to die for Christ and if it is also appointed for you and me in our present day, are you willing?...

Do not forget there is a price to pay for our salvation. The everlasting life God gives has been achieved for us at a much higher price. Jesus our Saviour could not do less than dying on the cross to pay for the penalty for our sins. He requires no less from any who wants to be delivered from hell in order to go to heaven...

In actual fact God does not put us through death but only in our willingness or not to pay the price.” Read Matthew 19:27.

“Whether ordinary believer or Apostle, we will have more than sufficient for this life and inherit everlasting life! That is great gain for me. I am so happy I am secure in this life and the next. Observe members who come to church every Lord’s Day how different they are from people of the world. The people of the world are miserable looking, though they own big houses and cars but life’s problems not God’s peace, have overtaken them. Be they financial, marital, family, children, and every secret ambition and desire. *‘But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.’* Not Greatness, but Lowliness.”

**THOUGHT:** Jesus humbled Himself, so must I.

**PRAYER:** Lord, forgive my pride. Teach me humility.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 26

1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-5

2 CORINTHIANS 4:2

“...save Jesus Christ  
and him crucified.”

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## NO CHRIST, NO SERMON

Once again, Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians of how he preached among them in his founding visit (Acts 18:1-18). He was aware that he was a minister of the gospel and not a philosopher. He was not there to speak of his own opinions but to testify for Christ. Thus he sought not to embellish the gospel, but to preach it simply. There must be no addition to or subtraction from God's Word.

As a well-educated and intelligent man who was well versed in the Holy Scriptures, Paul could have easily wowed the “audience” with a great show of wit and “*excellency of speech*” (1 Cor 2:1). However, Paul was wary of anything that would detract from the message of the gospel. He was fixed on a singular purpose: at the end of the sermon, the people must know Jesus Christ. The people should not be talking about how intelligent or eloquent Paul was. If the hearer's focus was not on Christ, the sermon would have been preached in vain. Therefore, there must be no injection of self or any form of “pyrotechnics” at the pulpit. No Christ, no sermon!

In his book *Lectures to my Students*, Charles Spurgeon commented about a budding preacher who preached an emotional and verbose message. There was one problem though – the young man was trying too hard to impress Spurgeon and the hearers with his oratorical skill rather than to preach Christ. He drew attention to himself rather than to the Word of God. Spurgeon had to rebuke the preacher. In fact, Spurgeon himself confessed that he was often worried that in his own sermons he would end up preaching self rather than Christ. When there is self in the sermon without the cross, the sermon is lost.

We must also be careful that we serve God with the right motives. Are we attracting attention to ourselves, or are we pointing others to Christ? Do not be a show-off!

**THOUGHT:** “*He must increase, but I must decrease.*” (John 3:30)

**PRAYER:** Lord, may Christ be magnified in my life.

THURSDAY, APRIL 27

1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-5

2 CORINTHIANS 10:10

*“...your faith should not stand  
in the wisdom of men...”*

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## MAN'S WEAKNESS IS GOD'S OPPORTUNITY

People sometimes have the impression that Paul was a “superhuman.” However, a study of the Scriptures reveals that Paul was a man with many ailments. His health was failing due to the many tribulations and persecutions he suffered. Neither was he physically attractive and impressive. In fact, tradition has it that Paul was ugly, nearly bald, and of short stature. His speech was also not as impressive as the best orators in the world.

Paul also struggled emotionally. We may think of Paul as a courageous servant of God. However, he too had his fears. 1 Corinthians 2:3 reveals that Paul was *“in fear, and in much trembling.”* The fear of opposition and persecution were very real for the Apostle Paul.

Nevertheless, Paul's weakness proved to be the perfect platform for God's greatness to be manifested. The salvation of the Corinthian Christians was proof of the convicting and salvific power of the Holy Spirit. The glory of God shone through in the weakness of Paul. Paul was but a messenger. The salvation of the Corinthian Christians was due to God alone.

There are many examples of preachers whom God used mightily despite their bodily afflictions and weaknesses. Spurgeon often had to struggle with his aches and pains that caused him to be depressed. Robert Murray M'Cheyne was often bed-ridden with sickness. Yet, God used them to minister to the souls of many for His glory.

Then there is the example of Jonathan Edwards. He often preached from a manuscript with a monotonous voice. However, God used his preaching to bring salvation to multitudes. One such sermon was entitled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” This was a demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit. All praise be to God!

**THOUGHT:** The weakness of man cannot stop God.

**PRAYER:** Lord, show forth Thy glory through my weaknesses!

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FRIDAY, APRIL 28

1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-5

1 PETER 1:5

*"...my speech and my preaching was not  
with enticing words of man's wisdom..."*

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## RESTING IN GOD'S POWER

One major problem of the Corinthian Christians was looking towards man rather than God. They hanged on to personalities instead of following the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul had to remind them that their faith rested not on man's wisdom, but in the saving power of God!

Calvin's commentary on 1 Corinthians 2:5 is particularly insightful:

"If the Apostle's preaching had rested exclusively on the power of eloquence, it might have been overthrown by superior eloquence, and besides, no one would pronounce that to be solid truth which rests on mere elegance of speech. It may indeed be *helped by it*, but it ought not *to rest upon it*. On the other hand, that must have been most powerful which could stand of itself without any foreign aid. Hence it forms a choice commendation of Paul's preaching, that heavenly influence shone forth in it so clearly, that it surmounted so many hindrances, while deriving no assistance from the world. It follows, therefore, that they must not allow themselves to be moved away from his doctrine, which they acknowledge to rest on the authority of God.... Let it then be known by us that it is the property of faith to rest upon *God* alone, without depending on *men*; for it requires to have so much certainty to go upon, that it will not fail, even when assailed by all the machinations of hell, but will perseveringly endure and sustain every assault. This cannot be accomplished unless we are fully persuaded that God has spoken to us, and that what we have believed is no mere contrivance of men."

We must be careful that our faith rests not in the preacher but on the preached Word of God. We must obey that which is preached not because we admire the preacher, but simply because our faith rests fully in God's Word and His saving power. This will be our anchor and defence in this perilous world.

**THOUGHT:** My faith is built on Jesus' blood and righteousness.

**PRAYER:** Lord, it is so sweet to trust in Jesus.

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SATURDAY, APRIL 29

1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-10

EPHESIANS 2:1-3

“...speak the wisdom of God...”

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### THE MYSTERY HIDDEN!

The term “*mystery*” (1 Cor 2:7) refers to God’s wisdom and the salvific truth of the gospel. This mystery remains hidden and secret for the natural man (*psuchikos*). This can be seen in their conduct. Their ways are still in rebellion towards God, and they are totally given to the lusts of their flesh. They have no true spiritual insight and understanding of God’s Word because they are spiritually blind.

Some of these natural men may have great intellect. However, they remain ignorant of spiritual truth for they are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. They do not know God. One such person is the well-known physicist Stephen Hawking. He may have an IQ of about 160, but he denies the existence of God as per NBC News. He says, “When people ask me if a god created the universe, I tell them that the question itself makes no sense. Time didn’t exist before the big bang, so there is no time for god to make the universe in. It’s like asking directions to the edge of the earth; The Earth is a sphere; it doesn’t have an edge; so looking for it is a futile exercise. We are each free to believe what we want, and it’s my view that the simplest explanation is; there is no god. No one created our universe, and no one directs our fate. This leads me to a profound realization: There is probably no heaven, and no afterlife either. We have this one life to appreciate the grand design of the universe, and for that I am extremely grateful.” Such is the blindness and foolishness of the natural man!

Sadly in the church, there could be many who profess to be Christians but are actually natural men as seen in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:24-30). They may listen to sermons for years, and yet have no inkling of what is being preached. There was a young man who was in church since he was a child. When he attended university, he was exposed to ungodly philosophies. He soon cast doubts on the power of the Holy Scriptures and finally said he did not believe in Christ. The mystery remains hidden from him!

**THOUGHT:** I must make sure of my salvation.

**PRAYER:** Lord, hide not Thy truth from me.

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## THE MYSTERY REVEALED!

Yesterday, we saw how the mystery of the saving power of the gospel was hidden from those who are natural men. However, the mystery is revealed unto them who are spiritual (*pneumatikos*). The Corinthian Christians were spiritual men compared to those of the world. They could understand and discern the spiritual things of God's Word. This is because God had given to them the Holy Spirit to reveal to them the deep treasures of the Holy Scriptures (1 Cor 2:10).

Paul described the Corinthian Christians as “*perfect*” (*teleios*) in verse 6. This does not mean that the Corinthian Christians were sinlessly perfect. The term *teleios* here describes the maturity of the Corinthian saints in comparison with the rest of the world. They were mature in the sense that they knew the mystery of the gospel, which the rest of the world could not perceive. The world may view the saints as foolish, but the saints were the ones who were truly wise. This wisdom cometh not from themselves but from the Holy Spirit. It is not humanly discovered but divinely revealed (John MacArthur).

This truth of the blinding of the minds of the unregenerate, and the illumining of the saints is taught vividly by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 13 when He explained the use of parables in His teachings. *“And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given”* (Matt 13:10-11).

What a privilege it is to have God's truth revealed to us! *“But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear”* (Matt 13:16). This should cause us to be humble and grateful towards our eternal God. Since we are given this privilege to know God's Word, all the more we must labour to study His Word, and to understand His declared will.

**THOUGHT:** God opened my eyes to see His truth.

**PRAYER:** I thank Thee, Lord, for revealing Thy truth to me.

MONDAY, MAY 1

1 CORINTHIANS 2:11-16

JOHN 16:13

“...we have received,  
not the spirit of the world...”

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## THE HOLY SPIRIT, OUR DIVINE TEACHER

Not only is the Holy Spirit the seal and earnest of the Christian's salvation, He is also the believer's divine teacher who will lead the believer into a right understanding of spiritual truth (1 Cor 2:13). *“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come”* (John 16:13).

The Bible is not like any human book. It is given by divine inspiration. The words of the Holy Scripture are God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16), and are thus spiritual words. *“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life”* (John 6:63). Since the words of Holy Scripture are spiritual words, it is necessary therefore for man to have the Holy Spirit to understand the words. Paul explained it beautifully in 1 Corinthians 2:11. One cannot know what is going on in a man's mind except for the spirit of that man. Similarly, no one can know the mind of God except the Spirit of God. Without the illumination and guidance of the Holy Spirit, man cannot know the truth of God's Word. The Holy Spirit is the perfect Teacher of the truth! Many scribes spent their entire lifetime studying God's Word. However, if they are not born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, they will never come to a right understanding of the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:7 applies to such men: *“Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*

Whenever we read God's Word, we must pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help us to understand His Word. We must never read God's Word without depending upon God for illumination and comprehension. Neither must we be proud when we grow in our understanding of Scriptures. This understanding comes only from the Lord.

**THOUGHT:** Spiritual things are spiritually discerned.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to understand Thy Word, and keep me humble.

TUESDAY, MAY 2

1 CORINTHIANS 2:11-16

MARK 8:22-26

*“...But we have  
the mind of Christ.”*

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## CLEAR SPIRITUAL SIGHT

Even though the Holy Spirit is our Teacher and Guide, God has seen fit that we do not have perfect spiritual knowledge immediately. Every believer must go through a period of maturation. As he continues to grow, his understanding of spiritual things will increase more and more.

A believer's journey to clear spiritual sight is vividly illustrated in the miracle of the blind man who was healed in stages (Mark 8:22-26). The message of this miracle was intended for the disciples since it was done outside of the town with only the disciples as witnesses. Initially, the man had no sight. Then, his sight was fuzzy. He could see men walking like trees. In the end, Jesus restored his sight to full clarity and brilliance.

Jesus purposefully did the healing in two stages to drive home a point. Before this miracle, Jesus told His disciples to take heed, and to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the scribes, and of the leaven of Herod (Mark 8:15). The disciples thought that Jesus was referring to a lack of bread. Having witnessed the feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000, the disciples should know that the lack of physical food was never an issue. Jesus could easily provide bread whenever they needed. Was there not excess bread left after both miracles? Jesus was not referring to physical bread, but to the religious hypocrisy of the scribes and the Pharisees. The disciples might have seen the miracles. They might have touched the bread. They might even have heard Jesus talking and teaching with their own ears. And yet they did not understand! This was just like the blind man who saw men as trees walking. It was fuzzy spiritual sight.

Nevertheless, with the passage of time, the disciples grew in spiritual maturity. With spiritual growth comes clearer spiritual sight. It is important that we grow in spiritual maturity.

**THOUGHT:** Spiritual discernment is critical in this deceitful world.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to understand Thy Word.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 3

1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-4

HEBREWS 5:12-14

*"For ye are yet carnal..."*

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## ARE YOU A MATURE CHRISTIAN?

There is a saying that goes, "Ignorance is bliss." Some professing Christians have applied this thinking into their spiritual lives. They reason within themselves that it is alright to know little of the Bible, because the more they know, the more they have to be responsible to obey. As a result of this twisted logic, the lives of these professing Christians seem no different from that of non-Christians. They are living in carnality like the men of the world.

The Corinthian believers were prime examples of those who were deficient in their spiritual growth. The picture Paul used was that of an infant. In the first few months, the baby could only drink milk. As the child grew, he would slowly progress to solid food. Finally, when he developed teeth, he would be able to eat meat. The parents would be most worried if their child could not progress to eat solid food!

Alas, the Corinthian Christians were like babies that did not grow. They were still stuck in the milk-drinking stage. That ought not to be since they had received Christ a few years earlier. However, since the Corinthian Christians were so deficient in spiritual understanding, the Apostle Paul was not able to discuss the "meaty" doctrines of God's Word. They were still not ready to handle the deep things of the Holy Scriptures. Paul still had to teach them the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Should Paul not be concerned for them?

Dearly beloved, every Christian ought to mature in the faith, and bear much fruit for the Lord Jesus Christ. *"But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty"* (Matt 13:23).

How is your spiritual growth? Have you grown in understanding and practical wisdom of the Bible since you first believed in Christ?

**THOUGHT:** How well do I know God's Word?

**PRAYER:** Lord, lead me to higher ground.

THURSDAY, MAY 4

1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-4

1 PETER 2:2-3

*"And I, ... could not speak  
unto you as unto spiritual..."*

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## CHRISTIANS MUST GROW!

Ignorance is not bliss when it comes to a Christian's understanding of God's Word. The Apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:2-3, *"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious."* When babies are hungry, they will cry out loud till they receive their milk. Similarly, a believer's desire for the milk of God's Word must be intense. They cannot do without God's Word for *"man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"* (Matt 4:4).

It is thus a concern if a man does not have any desire for God's Word. One of the characteristics of a true Christian is a hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matt 5:6). He will say just like the Apostle Peter in John 6:68, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."* They will be like the two men on the road to Emmaus whose hearts burnt within them when God opened the Scriptures to them (Luke 24:32). On the other hand, those who were false believers were offended by the words of Christ and eventually walked away (John 6:66). If a man has no thirst for God's Word, it may be an indication that he is not born again!

Dear reader, ignorance of God's Word is no laughing matter. *"And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned"* (Heb 6:5-8). If there is never any growth in a person's life, then there is never ever any life!

**THOUGHT:** No growth, no life.

**PRAYER:** Lord, grant me spiritual growth day by day.

FRIDAY, MAY 5

1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-4

EPHESIANS 4:14-16

*“...there is among you envying...”*

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## THE CONSEQUENCES OF CARNALITY

Carnality in a professing believer's life must be treated with utmost seriousness. If a person does not make effort to seek spiritual growth in God's Word, he will soon have difficulties in his spiritual life. He will easily be tempted into sin, and be blown about by every wind of doctrine (Eph 4:14). He will suffer much grief because of his spiritual instability. The sweet fellowship with God will be affected because he is not walking in the Spirit but in the ways of carnality.

A disobedient Christian will affect not just himself but also the community of believers. Consider the example of Achan (Josh 6-7). Due to his sin of keeping the accursed thing of Jericho, he caused Israel to sin together with him. As a result, Israel was not able to conquer Ai till they dealt with that sin in the camp. Another example is that of Lot. His flirtation with worldliness led to the loss of his wife. His daughters also had no ounce of spirituality in them and committed the sin of incest with their father.

For the Corinthian church, carnality in their midst had resulted in a chaotic church. A carnal man is self-centred. Thus, there was much jealousy in the hearts of the members which resulted in strife and contentions. The church became divided. It is no surprise to see such behaviour in a secular workplace, for the natural man does not know the things of the Lord. However, it is a shame when such behaviour is found in the church. Should not the brethren love one another? All these problems are the result of carnality and spiritual immaturity, which the Corinthian Christians had refused to eradicate.

Dear reader, every Christian is responsible to live a holy life, and grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18). When everyone has a spiritual mind, there will be harmony in the church. The work of the Lord can thus be magnified.

**THOUGHT:** I must war against carnality and worldliness in my life.

**PRAYER:** Lord, I want to be a spiritually mature Christian.

SATURDAY, MAY 6

1 CORINTHIANS 3:5-9

MARK 4:26-29

“...God gave the increase.”

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### WE ARE MERE SERVANTS!

The partisan spirit in the church at Corinth reveals an erroneous understanding of leaders and Christian ministry. Paul therefore took great effort to emphasize that he and Apollos were but mere ministers or servants (*diakonoi*) of the Lord. They are just simply privileged to be serving as “...labourers together with God...” (1 Cor 3:9).

The first illustration Paul used comes from the field of agriculture. Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to know that they were but farmers serving in the Lord's vineyard. As some masters owned large fields and vineyards, it became necessary to diversify labour among the servants and to assign them specialised tasks. Some might be assigned to plough the fields, others to scatter the seeds. Yet another group may be instructed to water the crop. Each job assigned is critical in the agricultural process. Nevertheless, the growth of the plant is mysterious and is due wholly to God. Similarly, God had assigned Paul and Apollos different things to do for Him. Each one is responsible to labour faithfully for the Lord, but in the end the Lord will be the One who gives the increase. God must be given all the glory, not man.

John MacArthur makes an astute observation concerning this passage. “Paul here mentions only two types of ministry, represented by planting and watering. His principle, however, applies to every type of ministry. In our eyes, some Christian work is more glamorous, or seems more important or more significant than other work. But if God has called a person to a work, that is the most important ministry he can have.”

Indeed, wherever God leads us, that will be the best place for us. Our duty is to do what God wants us to do. The carnal mind will glorify one work above another, but the spiritual mind will understand that all labourers are equally important in the work of the Lord.

**THOUGHT:** I am but an unworthy servant of the Lord.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me not to be envious of my fellow labourers.

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## LABOURERS TOGETHER WITH GOD

The cure to personality cults in the church is to realise that everyone is a fellow labourer in the Lord's vineyard. We can learn three things from this passage:

1. Unity. The one who plants and the one who waters are one. Thus, there is no good reason for division or strife among the labourers. Paul was given the task of preaching the gospel and organising the church (cf. 1 Cor 3:10), while Apollos continued the work by indoctrinating the Corinthian believers in God's Word. Similarly, believers should use the diverse gifts (which God has given them) towards the same purpose of the extension of Christ's kingdom.
2. Privilege. What have we done to be deserving of serving the most High God in His harvest field? Absolutely nothing! Were we not once His enemies? We must not lose the perspective of what it means to be a fellow labourer (*sunergon*) alongside the Lord in His work. This should stir us to faithful service for Christ.
3. Labour. The fact that we are called labourers demands us to be diligent and not slothful. We will be rewarded according to our faithfulness (1 Cor 3:8, cf. Matt 25:14-30). The results are to be left to God.

*"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10).*

May the Lord keep us humble in our service for Him, preferring one another in the bonds of love.

**THOUGHT:** It is most blessed when brethren dwell in unity.

**PRAYER:** Lord, what a great privilege it is that I can serve Thee.

MONDAY, MAY 8

1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-15

EPHESIANS 2:20

“...as a wise masterbuilder,  
I have laid the foundation...”

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## CO-CONTRACTORS OF GOD’S BUILDING

Paul then used the illustration of a building. According to God’s gracious enabling and appointment, Paul served as the “*wise masterbuilder*” to lay the spiritual foundation of the church at Corinth. Thus we see the humility of the Apostle Paul, for he confessed that the wisdom and strength to be a “*masterbuilder*” came solely from God. Jesus said, “For without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

The Greek word translated “*masterbuilder*” (*architektōn*) is where we get the English word for architect. It refers to a contractor tasked with supervising other sub-contractors in executing the blueprint for the construction of the building.

By the grace of God, Paul had faithfully discharged the duty of the chief supervisor. Christ, the chief cornerstone, was the one who called Paul and gave him the blueprint of God’s spiritual building (i.e. the church). Paul thus laid the foundation of the building by giving the Corinthian Christians the inspired Word of everlasting life (cf. Eph 2:20). The Holy Scriptures are thus to be the all-sufficient authority for the church to abide by. The Written Word (the Bible) and the Living Word (Jesus Christ) were the foundation on which the Corinthian Christians were to build upon (1 Cor 3:11).

The expression “*and another buildeth thereon*” (1 Cor 3:10) must not be viewed as a disparaging remark. Rather it points to how others are equally important in doing their part in the work of God. Interestingly, the term “*another*” is *allos* (another of the same kind) and not *heteros* (another of a different kind). The emphasis here is thus on the unity of the group of labourers. All the co-labourers are members of the heavenly family of God, and must thus work in tandem and harmony towards the construction of the building.

**THOUGHT:** What is God’s role for me in the body of Christ?

**PRAYER:** Lord, direct me to do my part in serving Thy saints.

TUESDAY, MAY 9

1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-15

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

*"But let every man take heed  
how he buildeth thereupon."*

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## TAKE HEED HOW YOU BUILD!

Every contractor must be faithful in his duties when constructing a building. Otherwise, the building may fail. Similarly, in the constructing of Christ's spiritual building, every co-contractor must take heed how he builds!

Paul issued two admonitions to the co-contractors of God's spiritual building. Firstly, Paul warned that everyone must build on the right foundation. As stated in yesterday's devotion, this foundation is none other than the Written Word (the Bible) and the Living Word (Christ). No builder is to do any work that contradicts God's Work. No man is to preach any other gospel other than the true gospel of the Scriptures. Woe betide any who teaches false doctrines or preaches a false gospel. Neither is any to think of doing anything that is contrary to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. When churches stop teaching God's Word, and employ worldly techniques to draw in the crowds, they are building upon a false foundation!

Secondly, there will be a coming judgment. All the works of the contractors will one day be judged by God. Every construction project is subject to strict guidelines and building codes. Proper inspection is done before the building can be occupied. Similarly, God demands that the building must be built according to His standards. God will test the building materials using fire. This points to the rigour of God's testing.

Paul grouped the building materials into two categories. The first category consisted of good materials: gold, silver and precious stones. Under testing, these materials abided. The second category consisted of poor materials: wood, hay and stubble. Under severe testing, they would be burnt up. Which category do our works belong to? Will our works stand in the coming day of judgment at the Judgment Seat of Christ?

**THOUGHT:** What is God's role for me in the body of Christ?

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I faithfully do Thy bidding.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 10

1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-15

2 CORINTHIANS 5:10

*"For we must all appear before  
the judgment seat of Christ..."*

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## THE BEMA OF CHRIST

Every believer will one day be judged by God. 2 Corinthians 5:10 declared, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* This is also known as the judgment seat (or bema) of Christ. It is not a judgment of salvation but of service.

"In the New Testament times, the Bema is a judgement where rewards are given. Athletes who have won a race are crowned with a wreath at the Bema. Likewise, every Christian will one day stand before the judgement seat of Christ to receive 'the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.' Those who have served the Lord with pure motives will receive prizes for their faithful work. Those who have served the Lord with impure motives will receive no reward. Thus in heaven, there will be those who have and those who have not. Those who are not rewarded will still have their salvation for that cannot be lost, it is God's work won for them by Christ.

Although only some will be rewarded, yet the atmosphere will be a joyful one. It may be likened to a graduation ceremony. Those who have studied hard will graduate *summa cum laude* (with highest praise), or *magna cum laude* (with high praise), or *cum laude* (with praise), and there are those who simply graduate without *laude*, without praise. Those who are not rewarded will regret that they did not serve the Lord as well as they should, but nonetheless there will be no sorrowing for they are grateful to the Lord for saving them from their sins." (Tow and Khoo, *Theology for Every Christian*)

Dearly beloved, do you look forward to this judgment of reward? If it be so, set your affections on things above and not on things of the earth (Col 3:1-2).

**THOUGHT:** Have I done my best for the Master?

**PRAYER:** Lord, how I yearn to hear Thy commendation!

THURSDAY, MAY 11

1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-17

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-7:1

“...the Spirit of God  
dwelleth in you.”

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## YE ARE THE TEMPLE OF GOD

The expression “*ye are the temple of God*” (1 Cor 3:16) appears twice in the epistle of 1 Corinthians. The second appearance is found in 1 Corinthians 6:19, “*What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?*” In that context, the temple of God refers to the physical body of the Christian.

In 1 Corinthians 3:16, the temple of God refers to the spiritual building, which is the body of believers. The word used for “*temple*” is *naos* in contrast to *hieron*. While *hieron* is often used with respect to the entire temple complex, the focus of *naos* is on the actual temple, with emphasis on the sanctuary. Paul was thus reminding the Corinthian Christians that the church of God is the dwelling place of God. God is in the midst of the congregation when they gather to worship Him, because the Holy Spirit indwells the hearts of the worshippers. The temple of God is thus made holy before Him.

Note that the temple belongs to God and not to anyone else. It is not Paul’s temple. Neither does it belong to Apollos or Peter. Therefore, no man should form a personality cult because he is not the Head of the Church. Christ is the only Head and the chief cornerstone. He walks in the midst of the church and judges the thoughts and intentions of every man (see Rev 1). Dare any man conduct himself loosely before the Lord of the temple?

Alas, in the day of Christ, men turned the temple of God into a den of thieves (Matt 21:13). Today, many churches resemble the citadels of Satan rather than the temple of the living God. Herein is a warning: “*If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy*” (1 Cor 3:17a). No man can oppose the work of the Lord and stand. Therefore, the Corinthian Christians must stop their divisions and abhor all carnality. Nobody is to defile the temple of God!

**THOUGHT:** The Lord is in our midst as we worship Him.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me not to defile Thy temple.

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FRIDAY, MAY 12

1 CORINTHIANS 3:18-23

LUKE 20:19-25

*"Therefore let no  
man glory in man."*

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### BOAST NOT IN MAN!

When we experience success in ministry, it is easy to become puffed up in our minds. Preachers will boast about their ability to exegete and captivate the crowd. Sunday School teachers will take pride in their wonderfully crafted lessons and the attention afforded to them by their adoring Sunday School students. Musicians swoon in their talent to charm the hearers with their music. They soon begin to boast in self and worldly wisdom, rather than rely on the heavenly wisdom of the Holy Scriptures.

Paul then sought to put all pride away. He forcefully declared that any man who thought himself wise in the things of the world was deceiving himself. Worldly and heavenly wisdom do not mix! If you are wise in worldly things, you are a fool in things spiritual. Rather, become a fool in worldly things, than be a fool in the eyes of God!

Paul proceeded to quote Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11 to support his arguments. The LORD will put all who are wise in their own conceit into His pocket. Nobody can go into a battle of wits with God and win. Many sought to trap the Lord Jesus Christ in His earthly ministry, but none of them succeeded. Read Luke 20:19-25 for one such example. The religious teachers who sought to trap Jesus were totally outwitted!

The Corinthian church was full of such men who thought themselves to be wise and drew attention to themselves (see 2 Cor 10 and 11). Some of them accounted themselves to be super apostles who were even above Paul. Paul wanted such proud and conceited men to know that such boasting would turn out to be in vain. No man should boast about self, or in his own wisdom. Neither should they hero-worship any man. Their sole object of worship in life must be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom they must love with their entire being. Let our boast be in Christ, and not in man.

**THOUGHT:** How can I guard myself from self-deception?

**PRAYER:** Lord, may Christ be my focus each day.

SATURDAY, MAY 13

1 CORINTHIANS 3:18-23

ROMANS 8:17

*"For all things are yours."*

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### "FOR ALL THINGS ARE YOURS"

When Paul said *"for all things are yours"* (1 Cor 3:21) he meant that God will provide all that is necessary for the Christian to mature spiritually and to do God's will. Indeed, *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God..."* (Rom 8:28).

Some things given for the benefit of the Corinthian Christians were:

1. Godly leaders. Paul, Apollos, Cephas (i.e. Peter) and other faithful leaders were God's provision to the Corinthian church to serve the members by watching over their souls. They were not there to serve self but to minister unto the saints.
2. Life. In this context, it would refer to spiritual and eternal life in the Lord Jesus Christ. However, the physical life we have is also a privilege granted by God so that we can be witnesses for Christ in this world.
3. Death. The Lord Jesus Christ died to be our substitute. He then rose again from the dead for the justification of sins. Because Christ has conquered death, the death of the saints now becomes a door unto eternal life in heaven.
4. Things present. Our possessions are given to us so that we may glorify Christ. Our present things also encompass our present experiences, which God can use to help us be perfected in our faith.
5. Things future. This refers to the future and eternal blessings in heaven.

Since God had provided all things for their benefit, the Corinthian Christians must boast in God rather than in man. And so must we too.

**THOUGHT:** God's divine provision is the best.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to count my blessings each day.

LORD'S DAY, MAY 14

1 CORINTHIANS 3:18-23

ROMANS 14:8

*"And ye are Christ's,  
and Christ is God's."*

## WE BELONG TO CHRIST

*"And ye are Christ's"* (1 Cor 3:23a): This taught the Corinthian Christians that they belonged to Jesus Christ. Jesus took on the form of a servant and became a man to come into this world to die for our sins. Since He has given His all for us, it is only reasonable that we give our all to Him. *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service"* (Rom 12:1). We must not hold anything back from the Lord.

Observe, however, that the statement is addressed to the Corinthian Christians as a whole ("ye" is a second person plural pronoun as opposed to "thou"). While it is true that every Christian can say "I belong to Christ," it should not be said in exclusion of others. Since every true believer belongs to Christ, there is to be no reason for schism in the church.

*"...and Christ is God's"* (1 Cor 3:23b): This speaks of Christ's submission to the will of the Heavenly Father in all things. *"Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work"* (John 4:34). Just as Christ submits Himself to do all things which the Father has called Him to do, a Christian should also submit to Christ in all things. They must also submit to one another in the Lord (Eph 5:21).

"Christ is the Mediator between God and man. He came to do the will of God. He was and is still devoted to the service of his Father.... The argument here seems to be this, 'You belong to Christ; and he to God. You are bound therefore, not to devote yourselves to a man, whoever he may be, but to Christ, and to the service of that one true God, in whose service even Christ was employed. And as Christ sought to promote the glory of his Father, so should you in all things.'" (Barnes)

**THOUGHT:** I belong to Jesus, Jesus belongs to me.

**PRAYER:** Lord, I surrender all to Thee.

MONDAY, MAY 15

1 CORINTHIANS 4:1-2

PSALM 138:6

“...the ministers of Christ, and  
stewards of the mysteries of God.”

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## LOWLY SERVANTS

In order to remove the ungodly personality cults in the Corinthian church, Paul reminded the believers of his and his co-labourers' lowly status. The Corinthian Christians must never regard Paul and his associates to be higher than they ought!

Paul used two descriptions to illustrate his lowliness. The first description “ministers” is *huperetai* which literally means “an under-rower.” This term is used of slaves labouring on board a ship. They were usually placed at the lower deck with the task of rowing the ship through waters. The slaves were submissive to the commander, and were thus of lowly position.

The second description is the term “stewards” (*oikonomous*). These were house supervisors under the direction of the master. The steward was not allowed to make his own rules, but must ensure that the household was run according to his master's conditions.

If Paul and his associates were but lowly “under-rowers” and stewards of the Lord, how should the Corinthian Christians evaluate them? The key quality for consideration is “faithfulness” and not the intellect or charisma of the person.

Oftentimes, a minister is judged by others based on his eloquence, looks and charm. They listen to his sermon and exclaim, “What a wonderful message!” They do not evaluate the content to see if it was preached according to God's Word. Neither do they evaluate to see if the life of the preacher reflects a whole-hearted devotion to the Lord. Dearly beloved, judge righteous judgment!

On the other hand, this writer knows of an elderly pastor who was faithful to the end. His mantra was “call pastor anytime.” He was true to his motto. That is what it means to be a lowly servant of the Lord.

**THOUGHT:** Christ's humility demands my humility.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help Thy lowly servant to be faithful unto death.

TUESDAY, MAY 16

1 CORINTHIANS 4:3-5

2 TIMOTHY 2:15

“...but he that judgeth  
me is the Lord.”

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## THE JUDGMENT THAT MATTERS

1 Corinthians 4:3 must not be interpreted as arrogance or vain bravado but a principle by which every Christian is to abide by. The term “*judged*” (from *anakrinō*) is a legal term which describes how one is judged before a court or a committee of inquiry. As we do the Lord’s work, we will often be assessed intensely by others. How then should we respond to the praise or criticism of others?

Firstly, we must be aware that the judgment that matters is not man’s. Men often view things with tainted glasses. They may sometimes not mean what they say. Even if they are sincere with their words, their assessment of a man’s faithfulness may not be entirely accurate. Their understanding of each person’s situation and weaknesses may also not be perfect. Therefore, whenever we receive praise, we must not let those words puff us up. We must never labour simply to get the praise of man (Gal 1:10). At the same time, we must not be depressed when wrongly or harshly criticised. Was not our Master called “*Beelzebub*” during His earthly ministry (Matt 10:25)? The opinions of men ultimately do not matter.

Secondly, Paul was wary of trusting his own self-appraisal. He was aware of the sin principle that dwells in every man. Our heart is often deceitful, and we tend to excuse our own faults. We are often not objective in evaluating ourselves and thus must submit to the appraisal of an impartial judge.

Who then is this impartial judge? He is none other than God Himself. Since we are His lowly servants, it is His judgment that ultimately matters. He sees what others cannot see. Nothing is hid from Him. Thus, we must be careful to serve in a manner that is “*approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2 Tim 2:15).

**THOUGHT:** I must abase all pride and false modesty.

**PRAYER:** Lord, are my ways pleasing to Thee?

---

## BE NOT JUDGMENTAL

When Paul wrote that the Corinthian Christians should *"judge nothing before the time"* (1 Cor 4:5), he was not teaching them not to judge at all. A believer must exercise spiritual discernment and *"judge righteous judgment"* (John 7:24). He must reject that which is evil and embrace that which is good. He must not have any association with falsehood, nor fellowship with those who are enemies of Christ.

What Paul was concerned about was not spiritual discernment in judging, but a judgmental spirit and holier-than-thou attitude which was present in some of the Corinthian believers (recall the Christ party in 1 Corinthians 1:12). Such an attitude must be addressed, or it will stumble the brethren.

Jesus exposed the judgmental spirit as hypocrisy in the Sermon on the Mount. *"Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye"* (Matt 7:1-5).

A Christian must be wary of ungodly suspicion of the intentions of others. Let the Lord judge the thoughts and intentions of the hearts of men. Believers must aim to build one another up in the faith. *"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another"* (Rom 14:19). Instead of being critical of others, why not help them in their walk with God? Seek not to destroy but rather to build up.

**THOUGHT:** The LORD is the perfect Judge.

**PRAYER:** Lord, rid me of all hypocrisy in my life.

THURSDAY, MAY 18

1 CORINTHIANS 4:6-8

ROMANS 13:11-14

*“...ye have reigned as  
kings without us.”*

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### A COMPLACENT CHURCH!

It is most troubling when a church becomes so complacent that they cannot perceive their own desolate spiritual state. Paul described the complacency of the Corinthian believers in the first part of 1 Corinthians 4:8. Even though the church belonged to God, they regarded themselves as possessors of the church. Thus they reigned and lorded themselves over ecclesiastical affairs, thinking that all things were well. They regarded themselves as spiritually rich and full of spiritual gifts that they could do away with the instruction of the Apostle Paul and his fellow labourers!

One of the signs of spiritual immaturity and complacency is the way a church treats her faithful leaders. While faithful leaders are lowly “under-rowers” and “house servants” just like everyone else, the office to which they are called to is nevertheless a high one. The Bible instructs us in Hebrews 13:7, *“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.”* It adds in Hebrews 13:17, *“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”* When a church rejects her faithful teachers and leaders, she is actually rejecting the authority of God and His Word. She is telling the Lord, “Let us reign over our own lives! We are lords over the church!”

Nevertheless, Paul displayed much humility in his words towards the Corinthian Christians. He looked forward to the day when he and the Corinthian Christians would reign together with the Lord Jesus Christ. His words were also an expression of his desire that the Corinthian Christians should prosper richly in all spiritual things in this life, and that they would be partakers of the same joy in Christ Jesus. Herein is a man who is truly mature and humble in the Lord!

**THOUGHT:** Am I spiritually complacent?

**PRAYER:** Lord, wake me up from any spiritual slumber!

FRIDAY, MAY 19

1 CORINTHIANS 4:9-13

JOHN 13:12-17

*"We are fools  
for Christ's sake."*

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## A MODEL OF SERVANTHOOD

The high-minded and conceited attitude of the Corinthian Christians stood in stark contrast to the lowly spirit of the Apostle Paul and his co-workers who had to endure much hardship and humiliation. Nevertheless, they endured all for the spiritual strengthening of the saints. It was as though Paul was made specially to be the central entertainment piece for the world to enjoy!

So how did Paul suffer as a model example of servanthood to Christ?

- *"We are fools... ye are wise."* The Apostle was often regarded as foolish not only by the world but also by some in the congregation of the church. Nevertheless, he endured such ridicule so that the saints might advance in spiritual wisdom.
- *"We are weak... ye are strong."* Paul was physically weak through the many bodily afflictions he suffered for Christ's sake so that the Corinthian Christians might be spiritually strong.
- The Apostle often had to suffer thirst, hunger and nakedness.
- He had to endure much labour, sometimes toiling with his hands.
- He had to endure much persecution, and yet be magnanimous to bless those who persecuted him.
- He often had to endure much humiliation. He was regarded as filth (i.e. like the scum found on the floor of a dirty toilet) or the offscouring (i.e. the dirt that is washed off a person's body) of the world. He had no honour wherever he went!

Dearly beloved, to be a servant of Christ calls for much self-denial. Are you ready to suffer for Christ as His servant?

**THOUGHT:** Am I ready to suffer?

**PRAYER:** Lord, it is my privilege to suffer for Thee.

SATURDAY, MAY 20

1 CORINTHIANS 4:14-17

1 CORINTHIANS 11:1

“...as my beloved sons

I warn you.”

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## FOLLOW YOUR FAITHFUL PASTORS! (I)

In an earlier devotion, we saw how the Corinthian Christians were conceited and complacent in their spiritual walk with God. As their *paidagogos*, Paul had the moral duty to address their problem. A *paidagogos* is one who takes charge of a boy as he goes to school. He will watch the conduct of the boy to see that he displays good manners towards others, and carries himself with the appropriate dignity and courtesy. Similarly, Paul, the *paidagogos*, must watch over the conduct of the Corinthian Christians, to point them towards the pathway of holiness.

However, Paul was more than just a *paidagogos* to them, for a *paidagogos* may not be so passionately invested in their charges. To Paul, their founding pastor, the Corinthian believers were his spiritual children. He was their spiritual father. Just like an earthly father would warn his son when he goes astray, so Paul's admonishment was a sign of his love for them. His desire was not to shame them, but to lovingly help them out of their spiritual stupor.

Popular theology teaches, “Do not follow me. Follow Christ.” Not so for the Apostle Paul. He urged the Corinthian Christians to imitate (*mimetai*) his godly example. “*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Cor 11:1).

Sadly, instead of regarding their faithful pastors as spiritual fathers, many hold them in contempt. “... *a prophet hath no honour in his own country*” (John 4:44). Or as restated in an old Chinese proverb, “Local ginger is not hot.” Such an attitude is detrimental to our souls. Recall Hebrews 13:7, “*Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.*” Follow your faithful pastors!

**THOUGHT:** Do I submit to my faithful leaders?

**PRAYER:** Lord, grant us faithful pastors and teachers.

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FOLLOW YOUR FAITHFUL PASTORS! (II) — CALVIN

“I doubt not but that he speaks of pastors and other rulers of the Church, for there were then no Christian magistrates; and what follows, *for they watch for your souls*, properly belongs to spiritual government. He commands first obedience and then honor to be rendered to them. These two things are necessarily required, so that the people might have confidence in their pastors, and also reverence for them. But it ought at the same time to be noticed that the Apostle speaks only of those who faithfully performed their office; for they who have nothing but the title, nay, who use the title of pastors for the purpose of destroying the Church, deserve but little reverence and still less confidence. And this also is what the Apostle plainly sets forth when he says, that they *watched* for their souls, — a duty which is not performed but by those who are faithful rulers, and are really what they are called.... And such is the office of bishops, that it involves the greatest labor and the greatest danger; if, then, we wish to be grateful, we can hardly render to them that which is due; and especially, as they are to give an account of us to God, it would be disgraceful for us to make no account of them.

He further reminds us in what great a concern their labor may avail us, for, if the salvation of our souls be precious to us, they ought by no means to be deemed of no account who watch for it. He also bids us to be teachable and ready to obey, that what pastors do in consequence of what their office demands, they may also willingly and *joyfully* do; for, if they have their minds restrained by grief or weariness, though they may be sincere and faithful, they will yet become disheartened and careless, for vigor in acting will fail at the same time with their cheerfulness. Hence the Apostle declares, that it would be *unprofitable* to the people to cause sorrow and mourning to their pastors by their ingratitude; and he did this, that he might intimate to us that we cannot be troublesome or disobedient to our pastors without hazarding our own salvation.”

**THOUGHT:** Do I submit to faithful teachers?

**PRAYER:** Lord, I thank Thee for faithful teachers.

MONDAY, MAY 22

1 CORINTHIANS 4:18-21

1 CORINTHIANS 11:1

“...some are *puffed up*...”

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## A RIGHT RESPONSE TO REBUKE

In yesterday's reading, Paul explained that if he used strong language, it was because he loved the Corinthian Christians. Just like a loving father who would correct an erring son, Paul with tender care had to use strong language to rebuke the Corinthian Christians.

1 Corinthians 4:18-21 shows Paul using a firm tone to rebuke the Corinthian Christians. He confronted them directly: “You are proud, acting as if I am not around and will not come back to see you again.” Paul could easily use a soft tone of “love” or “a spirit of meekness.” But such a tone is not suitable in the current situation because the spiritual malaise of the Corinthian Christians was deep-seated. Paul therefore had to use a rod on them.

Herein was a choice for the Corinthian Christians. Would they continue to be “*puffed up*” or would they truly repent? True repentance is not just “in word” but is evidenced by “power” where there is genuine transformation. If they were truly born again in Christ, they would stop the current schism that was present in the church. They would not want to be used by Satan as his pawns in causing disunity in the church. A saving faith will be evidenced by genuine obedience of the preached Word of God. “*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. ... Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world*” (James 1:22, 27).

Thankfully, by the time of 2 Corinthians, some of the Corinthian Christians responded well in godly repentance (2 Cor 7). What about us? When the preached Word of God rebukes us, will we show contempt, or will we humble ourselves and let the Word transform our lives? Let it be the second response!

**THOUGHT:** Is my heart too hardened to be rebuked by God's Word?

**PRAYER:** Lord, forgive my hardened heart.

TUESDAY, MAY 23

1 CORINTHIANS 5:1

EXODUS 20:14

*"It is reported commonly that  
there is fornication among you..."*

## THE SCOURGE OF FORNICATION

The Corinthian church faced massive problems with fornication. The term for "*fornication*" (*porneia*) is where we get the English "pornography" and it covers all kinds of sexual sin and immorality. In the case of the Corinthian church, it involved the horrendous act of a man sleeping with his stepmother (see Lev 18:7-8; Deut 22:30). The Scripture informs us that even the unbelieving Gentiles would shun such a sin. This is an astounding statement considering that Corinth was famous for being a city of sex. In addition, the present tense of the verb *echein* indicates that the act was still ongoing. It was brazenness of the highest order.

Just like the city of Corinth, we live in a world that is extremely tolerant of sexual promiscuity. Sexual sins pervade all levels of society. They are committed by the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated. Just look at the increasing rates of divorce, pre-marital sex and teenage pregnancies! This is the scourge of fornication in our perilous times.

Christians must do their part to guard their hearts from fornication. Please do not think that we have to commit the act to fall into this sin. *"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart"* (Matt 5:27-28).

Let us also not try to excuse fornication by claiming that since pre-marital sex and adultery are permissible in the nation's laws, it is therefore alright to commit fornication. A believer's standard is God's Word and not the laws of man. It is clearly stated in the Seventh Commandment – *"Thou shalt not commit adultery"* (Exod 20:14). Just because adultery is not illegal in my country, it does not mean that we Christians can engage in this sexual sin.

**THOUGHT:** I must guard my heart against all sexual sins.

**PRAYER:** Lord, guard me against the sin of fornication.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 24

1 CORINTHIANS 5:1

1 TIMOTHY 5:2b

*"That ye abstain from...  
fornication..."*

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## CHASTE RELATIONSHIPS (I)

In a recent newspaper publication, there were reports of inappropriate games or activities conducted during a university's orientation programme. These involved men humiliating female undergraduates through actions that were sexually suggestive and inappropriate. While some were critical of these activities, many chose to defend these games, with some even suggesting that they were necessary elements and traditions of the university's orientation programme.

In these perilous times, Christians must all the more be careful to maintain chaste relationships with those of the opposite sex. Sadly, sexual sins continue to pervade the church. Even pastors have succumbed to sexual sins. How often we read of church leaders who have fallen because of such transgressions! They often start as "counselling" sessions, but the "counsellor" and the "counselee" ended up committing adultery. Beware!

The Apostle Paul warned young pastor Timothy of such dangers. With regard to younger women, Paul instructed Timothy to minister "*with all purity*" (*en pasēi hagneiāi*). The term "*hagneiāi*" carries the idea of moral purity and chastity. Thus, the expression is a warning not just against any act of immorality, but also any breach of propriety. Kent rightly noted that "even if immorality is not involved, thoughtlessness or indiscretion will ruin the ministry of any pastor, regardless of his eloquence." Tragically, the indiscretions of many men have caused them to lose their usefulness when they could have been fruitful in their service for the Lord Jesus Christ!

Every pastor and church leader must endeavour to protect the women in the church from falling into sexual transgression the way he would protect his own sister. He must spare no effort to ensure that there is no hint or suggestion of impropriety between him and any woman. *"Abstain from all appearance of evil"* (1 Thess 5:22).

**THOUGHT:** Maintain chaste relationships with the opposite sex.

**PRAYER:** Lord, keep me pure from sexual sin.

## CHASTE RELATIONSHIPS (II)

As church leaders strive to follow the biblical injunction to maintain chaste relationships, fellowship group leaders and congregational members are to do likewise. Firstly, let all men be careful in their conversations with ladies. Hands off the opposite sex! To the young men, flee youthful lusts. To the married men, your dedication must be to your own wife. Be a one-woman man. Guard your conversations over WhatsApp, email or any social media. You are not to tempt any woman into indiscretion. Do not fetch any woman alone in your car, unless she is your mother, wife or daughter. Have another person to accompany you so that there will be no temptation or accusation. If there is no choice, either help the lady to get a taxi or let her sit in the back seat. Be clean and transparent in everything.

Likewise, the ladies are to play their part in maintaining chaste relationships. You have the Christian duty not to lead the men into temptation. Dress modestly. Do not touch the men carelessly. Heed the following biblical injunctions: *"In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works"* (1 Tim 2:9-10).

Dear brethren, let us be careful to maintain chaste relationships. Men, be a true Christian gentleman and protect the chastity of the ladies. Ladies, do not tempt the men but let your life adorn the beauty of Christ. Do not treat the Seventh Commandment lightly. *"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"* (1 Cor 10:12). *"But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints"* (Eph 5:3).

**THOUGHT:** *"Abstain from all appearance of evil"* (1 Thess 5:22).

**PRAYER:** Lord, guard me from all sexual temptations!

FRIDAY, MAY 26

1 CORINTHIANS 5:2

PSALM 51

*"And ye are puffed up, and  
have not rather mourned..."*

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## INDIFFERENT TO SIN?

The incestuous sin committed was so heinous that even the unbelievers in Corinth found it abhorrent. Yet the Corinthian church did nothing to address the issue. They seemed totally indifferent to the problem as evidenced by the lack of mourning for sin in the camp.

Why were the Corinthian Christians so apathetic regarding the sin? Paul identified the issue as one of pride (from *phusio*, see also 1 Cor 4:6, 18, 19). The various factions were so busy arguing with one another that they had no time to address the issue of fornication. They were only interested in exalting themselves above their fellow brethren. They could not be bothered to address spiritual issues because of their carnality. One sin thus led to another in the manner of a classic "snowballing" effect.

On the other hand, a humble spirit will lead a man to address his sin. One example is the godly sorrow displayed by David when his sin of adultery was pointed out by the prophet Nathan. David did not remain indifferent to his sin, but mourned with godly sorrow. Psalm 51 is the record of his repentance. *"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin... Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest... Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me"* (Ps 51:1-2, 4, 9-10).

If the Corinthian church were to turn from their pride, they must demonstrate the fruit of repentance just like David. This would mean the necessary excommunication of the offender. True godly sorrow must be accompanied by necessary actions to rectify the problem.

**THOUGHT:** Am I insensitive to my own sins?

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to hate all sins and iniquities.

SATURDAY, MAY 27

1 CORINTHIANS 5:3-6

MATTHEW 18:15-20

*“...that the spirit may be saved  
in the day of the Lord Jesus.”*

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## WHY CHURCH DISCIPLINE? – (I)

Due to the urgency of the issue, Paul had to invoke his apostolic authority and present his judgment of the situation. Though Paul was not present with the Corinthian Christians, it did not mean that they could ignore the authority behind his words. Paul was present in the spirit in the sense that he was providing instruction and leadership to address the situation. Paul thus instructed that the man be excommunicated immediately.

Why was it necessary to exercise church discipline?

Firstly, church discipline is meant to bring about the necessary restoration of the sinner. This can be seen in the nature of the discipline and its consequences. The man was to be delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh. The expression *“deliver... unto Satan”* refers to how the offender is to be put outside of the church into the sphere of Satan’s dominion (i.e. the world). This is God’s way of permitting Satan to chastise the offender and afflict him bodily. This is done that the *“spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”* It does not mean that the man loses his salvation. Rather it points to the hope that the sinner may repent and be restored to a right fellowship with the Lord and the saints. One commentator rightly points out that this process grants the sinner “ample time to reflect on his condition and repent” (Kistemaker).

If the offender is truly saved, the chastisement of the Lord will lead him to repentance and drive him towards holiness. On the other hand, those who are not saved may end up rebelling against the disciplinary actions, just like Hymenaeus and Alexander who refused to repent though they were delivered to Satan.

Happily, 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 testifies that the man repented from his sin. This is the restorative effect of church discipline in action.

**THOUGHT:** The purpose of church discipline is restoration.

**PRAYER:** Lord, there is always forgiveness and restoration in Thee.

## WHY CHURCH DISCIPLINE? – (II)

The second reason for church discipline is to defend the purity of the church. Note that the sentence of excommunication was delivered in public when the congregation was gathered together (1 Cor 5:4). A public sin demands a public rebuke. When the congregation gathers together, it is done in the name and in the power of Christ. *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matt 18:20). Excommunication is thus "an ordinance of God, and not of men" (Calvin). The sentence of excommunication is thus a work of Christ and rests in the power of God.

Considering that excommunication is a sentence pronounced by God, it serves to strike the fear of the Lord in the congregation and steers them away from the pathway of sin. This effect can be seen in the account of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11. When it was determined that they lied to the Holy Ghost, the Lord struck them dead. The result is recorded for us in Acts 5:11: *"And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things."*

What will happen if the church fails to exercise the necessary church discipline and instead sweeps sin under the carpet? Paul answered with an illustration: *"Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?"* (1 Cor 5:6b). The leaven is used here as a symbol of sin. If one adds just a little leaven to a lump of unleavened dough, the effect of the leaven will soon pervade the entire lump. Another analogy would be to put a bad apple into a carton of good apples. That bad apple will soon cause the other apples to turn bad. Therefore, if a church fails to exercise church discipline, she is encouraging sin to pervade the congregation. There must be church discipline to ensure the purity and holiness of the congregation. Otherwise, our churches will be no different from the world.

**THOUGHT:** Sin is a grave matter and must be handled gravely.

**PRAYER:** Lord, keep me in Thy strait and narrow path.

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## BIBLICAL SEPARATION IN THE CHURCH

Biblical separation is a command, not an option. It is a biblical injunction, not a denominational distinctive. One of the clearest passages is found in today's reading. *"Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us"* (1 Cor 5:7).

As stated earlier, leaven here is used to denote sin, especially with regards to *"malice"* (i.e. an evil disposition) and *"wickedness"* (the manifestation of the evil disposition). In Galatians 5:9, leaven is used to denote false doctrines. Drawing imagery from the Passover where only unleavened bread may be eaten (Exod 13:3, 7), Paul commanded that all *"leaven"* must be *"purged"* from the system. The command *"purge"* (*ekkatarate*) has the sense of cleansing an object. In this case it would be the unleavened lump which must not experience the effect of leaven. To ensure purity, the church will have to purge itself of all malice, wickedness and false doctrine. Sin and iniquity cannot be tolerated in the church.

However, just cleansing ourselves from all filthiness is not enough. We must also cleave to that which is good. In this case, Paul used unleavened bread to denote sincerity and truth. A church must not only separate from all falsehood, but must also defend and promote the truth.

Why then do churches today refrain from teaching and practising Biblical Separation? Why do they call it a sour doctrine? Could it be that they are puffed up like the Corinthian Christians and refuse to acknowledge their spiritual maladies (1 Cor 5:6)? Or could it be that they allow family relationships and friends to be more important than the truth? May we all abide by this principle: *"For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth"* (2 Cor 13:8).

**THOUGHT:** The church is to be the pillar and ground of the truth.

**PRAYER:** Lord, uphold the purity of our churches.

MONDAY, MAY 29

1 CORINTHIANS 5:9-10

JOHN 17:14-15

*“...Christ our passover  
is sacrificed for us.”*

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## BIBLICAL SEPARATION IS NOT ISOLATION

Biblical separation is not isolation. In history, there were those who brought separation to the extreme. These men would hide in caves to isolate themselves from the rest of the world.

But God did not intend for us to go into isolation. Jesus taught in John 17:14-15, *“I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.”* Christians are in the world, but not of the world!

What Paul and Jesus were teaching us is the importance of bearing a good testimony to the unbelieving world, yet keeping oneself separate from the sinful activities of unbelievers. It is necessary for Christians to interact with unbelievers in order to be a witness for Christ and to preach the gospel to them. Otherwise, how would the unbelievers of the world find salvation in Christ? Now that Christ has ascended, we are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. *“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”* (Matt 5:13-16).

On the other hand, Christians must take care not to have company with fornicators (1 Cor 5:9). The word for “company” carries the idea of close cooperation or intimate fellowship. By partaking of the sinful activities of sinners, you are partaking of their sin! *“Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners”* (1 Cor 15:33).

**THOUGHT:** Christians are in the world, but not of the world.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to be a pure witness for Thee.

TUESDAY, MAY 30

1 CORINTHIANS 5:11-13

2 THESSALONIANS 3:6-15

*"But now I have written unto you  
not to keep company..."*

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## BIBLICAL SEPARATION FROM BELIEVERS

A different rule applies to professing believers who are wilfully disobedient and unrepentant. The command here is for the Corinthian Christians not to have any close fellowship with them. The extent of this separation goes to the extent of not even having a meal with them.

Who must the Corinthian Christians separate from? (1) Fornicators – those who are heavily involved in sexual indiscretions and immorality. (2) Those who have an inordinate love of money or the things of this world, and are thus greedy of gain. (3) Idolaters – those who worship idols, whether physical or of the heart. (4) Railer – one who abuses others using his speech, a quarrelsome man. (5) Drunkard – someone who is addicted to alcohol. (6) Extortioner – one who is a ravenous robber. 2 Thessalonians 3 adds another category consisting of those who are idle and busybodies and refuse to work for a living.

The purpose of this separation lies in the restoration of the erring brother. It is to the shame of the offending brother that not one of the believing community would have a meal with him (2 Thess 3:14). It is hoped that being shut out of sweet fellowship would cause him to reflect on his ways and repent. *"And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother"* (2 Thess 3:14-15). This is a disciplinary measure that is geared towards restoration rather than destruction.

The test will come, however, when the erring brother is a loved one or a family member. Can we set aside our emotions and passions to do what is best for the spiritual state of our loved ones? Always be on the side of truth!

**THOUGHT:** Faithful are the wounds of a friend.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to do what is best for my friends.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 31

1 CORINTHIANS 5:7-13

2 CHRONICLES 18

*“...Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.”*

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## FAILURE TO SEPARATE

The Scriptures are replete with many disastrous examples of those who failed to separate from sinners. One such example is that of King Jehoshaphat of Judah. The Scriptures' assessment of him is as follows: *“And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim; But sought to the LORD God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel”* (2 Chron 17:3-4). Nevertheless, Jehoshaphat had frequent relations and affinities with the wicked King Ahab of Israel. This included a disastrous joint military campaign against the king of Syria (1 Kings 22; 2 Chron 18). His son Jehoram married Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. After Jehoram died, his son Ahaziah succeeded the throne. However, within a year of succeeding the throne, Ahaziah was killed by Jehu (2 Kings 9:27). Athaliah took this opportunity to usurp the Davidic throne and to destroy all her grandchildren. Only Joash was saved by the intervention of his aunt Jehosheba (2 Kings 11:2; 2 Chron 22:11). If she had succeeded in destroying all of the royal seed of David, there would have been no Messiah! All of this began when Jehoshaphat joined affinity with Ahab. Athaliah and her subsequent actions were thus the deadly fruit of compromise!

The same can be said of Neo-Evangelicalism. It is essentially a spirit of compromise that sweeps through Christianity today. It seeks to please men by calling for love and unity at the expense of truth. They would often misapply Matthew 7:1-3 to prevent anyone from being exclusive on doctrine because “love unites, doctrine divides.” As a result, churches are continually weakened by a lack of knowledge of biblical doctrines and discernment. Eventually, these churches became citadels of Satan rather than the house of prayer. The evidence of many abandoned church buildings in countries which once had a rich Christian heritage serves as a warning to all of us.

**THOUGHT:** How can I identify a Neo-Evangelical spirit?

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me never to compromise on the truth.

THURSDAY, JUNE 1

1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-3

NEHEMIAH 5:1-13

*“...ought ye not to walk in  
the fear of our God...?”*

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## CHRISTIANS SUING ONE ANOTHER!

Modern history is replete with accounts of Christians bringing one another to the courts of law. This excessive fetish for litigation is nothing new. The Corinthian Christians were not only warring among themselves within the church, they were bringing their disputes into the public.

This fondness of public lawsuits was a spill-over of the partisan spirit of the Corinthian church. John Calvin astutely noted that lawsuits frequently occur when “their minds are immoderately inflamed with wrong dispositions, and are not prepared for equity and endurance of wrongs, according to the commandment of Christ.” When parties are only interested in proving themselves superior to the other, or to seek revenge for perceived hurt and damage, they will sue one another!

Alas, such a spirit to sell-out fellow brethren is not new in the believing community. When a man’s mind is focused only on carnal things, there is nothing too low he will not do to get a profit, even if it means hurting his fellow brothers and “loved” ones. In Nehemiah 5:1-13, we read of a huge outcry against some Jews who were selling their brethren as slaves to the foreign nations against the Mosaic law. They were also exploiting their poor brethren by extracting usury from them. Nehemiah rebuked them with pointed words that drive right to the heart of the issue – “... *It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?*” (Neh 5:9).

Similarly, this fondness for litigation in the Corinthian church revealed a heart that had no fear of God. They did not care that they were destroying their brethren by exposing them to unbelieving judges. Neither did they care that the testimony of Christ would be shamed in the midst of the ungodly. It was a situation that exposed the weak spiritual state of the church at Corinth.

**THOUGHT:** Why do brethren destroy one another?

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to love my fellow brethren.

FRIDAY, JUNE 2

1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-3

ACTS 25:1-12

*"Dare any of you... go to  
law before the unjust...?"*

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### APPEAL UNTO CAESAR!

The Apostle Paul was filled with righteous indignation against the Corinthian Christians. By going before unbelieving judges, the Corinthian Christians were bringing shame to the name of Christ. Is it not true that the ungodly will often seek chances to bring about calumnies against the Christian faith? Moreover, they were destroying their brothers by leaving them in the hands of the ungodly. It is a conduct that is most unbecoming of a saint of God.

It must be noted, however, that Paul did not forbid going before the civil courts per se. For example, a Christian must obey a court order if he is summoned to appear as a witness. On the other hand, a Christian who is appointed a steward of a property, may find it necessary to appeal to the government court on behalf of the property owner; or when the Christian's life or that of his family is unlawfully threatened. In cases of grave importance, the Christian is permitted to appeal to the high courts of the land. By doing so, he is appealing to the government of the land as a divine ordinance to maintain law and order, and to protect the rights of the people to life and living (cf. Rom 13:1-7). The government is God's appointed authority to bring the sword against all wicked and criminal activity.

It is the Christian's duty to be submissive to the authorities where it does not contradict the law of God. *"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king"* (1 Pet 2:13-17).

**THOUGHT:** My country's government is a divine ordinance.

**PRAYER:** "Lord, I will pray continually for my government."

SATURDAY, JUNE 3

1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-3

REVELATION 5:9-10

“...the saints shall  
judge the world?...”

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### THE SAINTS WILL JUDGE!

Yesterday, we saw how there may be times when it is valid for Christians to go to court. This involves cases where one is a steward of somebody's property, or situations where one's life or that of his family is threatened.

However, this was not the case with the Corinthian Christians. They were hauling their brethren to court over “*the smallest matters*” (*elachistōn*, 1 Cor 6:2) of “*things that pertain to this life*” (*biōtika*, 1 Cor 6:3). These were issues that involved material possessions that could be settled within the church. There was no need to go to the civil tribunal.

Paul then anticipated the next question from his readers: Are the saints qualified to judge? He answered with an astounding, “Yes!” The Scriptures declare emphatically that one day believers will reign with Christ (Rev 5:9-10). The saints will even be judges over the angels. If believers are going to preside over the prestigious and grave task of judging in the future, then there should be no reason to doubt their qualifications in judging over such matters in the church. They would be most qualified as they have the spiritual mind to resolve all things in a manner that pleases God.

Sadly, there are some who will not show respect for the courts of the church. Just like the Corinthian Christians, they will rather go to the civil courts of the land than resolve matters in a biblical way. They will contrive to be absent when they are called to give testimony before the ecclesiastical courts as they have no desire to solve things in a spiritual way. To their carnal minds, the carnal courts of man are better than the saints'. They fail to understand the implications of the saints' position in Christ Jesus.

**THOUGHT:** The church courts function to uphold the truth.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may justice and truth prevail in my church.

LORD'S DAY, JUNE 4

1 CORINTHIANS 6:4-6

ECCLESIASTES 9:13-18

*"Is it so, that there is not a  
wise man among you?"*

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### WISE MEN NEEDED!

Paul proceeded to expose the foolishness of the Corinthian Christians. The message of 1 Corinthians 6:4 can be restated thus: "All of you are going to live eternally and be judges over the earth. Why then are you looking to unbelievers to judge your earthly cases, whom you know are of no account in the church? These men will not live eternally, neither will they be judges over the earth in the future!" Therefore, when Christians have a dispute with one another, they must find a fellow brother, and not an unbeliever, to judge.

Who then would be a suitable brother to be a judge? Scripture demands that such a man must be "*wise*." This "*wisdom*" refers not to worldly but heavenly wisdom. He is one who knows the Holy Scriptures well, and is able to counsel and arbitrate. He is also one who lives by the Word, and is not a respector of persons (cf. 1 Tim 5:21; Deut 1:13-18).

Alas, by going to the unbelievers for judgment, the Corinthian Christians were effectively claiming that there was not a single wise man among the congregation who could judge "*the smallest matters*" effectively. How could that be? Even if it were true that there was no wise man in the congregation, would that not be a serious indictment of the spiritual state of the church? No matter how you look at the issue, it was a shame to the Corinthian church.

Similarly, many quarrels and conflicts in the church can easily be resolved if only the parties are willing to humble themselves and seek godly counsel. Nevertheless, wisdom is often rejected for carnality, as lamented by Solomon. They would rather embrace the friends of the world than receive the words of godly, wise men in the midst of the assembly. That is the sad truth in many a congregation in modern Christendom!

**THOUGHT:** What does it mean to be a wise man of the Scriptures?

**PRAYER:** Lord, may my ears be open to godly wisdom.

MONDAY, JUNE 5

1 CORINTHIANS 6:7-8

MATTHEW 5:39-41

*“...let him have  
thy cloak also...”*

---

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION (I)

In 1 Corinthians 6:7-8, Paul gave instructions as to how the wise men may go about resolving the conflicts among brethren. Rather than just give a verdict, he was to serve as an arbitrator who sought to bring about brotherly understanding and reconciliation.

The golden principle in resolving conflicts is non-retaliation. This principle is taught by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 5:39-41, *“But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.”* When a person slaps another, he would usually slap a person on the left cheek (assuming that he is right-handed). Therefore, when the slap is on the right cheek, it would be a most humiliating back-handed slap. Nevertheless, despite such a humiliation, the Lord Jesus Christ teaches us to turn the other cheek. Herein is a teaching that the humble would endure and suffer wrong for the sake of Christ. He would rather let God judge and vindicate him than to take matters into his own hands. He knows that God is not blind and will ultimately vindicate the innocent. The Christian must seek to do good even to those who have done him wrong.

Besides enduring the wrong, the Christian must also learn to forgive his brother. *“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you”* (Eph 4:32). *“Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness”* (Col 3:13-14). Jesus forgave us while we were yet His enemies, should we not therefore forgive our brother who is a fellow member of the heavenly family of God?

**THOUGHT:** Seek reconciliation, not destruction.

**PRAYER:** Lord, forgive me my debts, as I forgive my debtors.

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TUESDAY, JUNE 6

1 CORINTHIANS 6:7-8

MATTHEW 18:15-20

*“...we ought also to  
love one another.”*

---

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION (II)

There are some conflicts of such a scale that they cannot be resolved by informal personal counselling. In such cases, it would be necessary to convene a church court to arbitrate matters. The principle still stands that the involved parties must (1) be humble to accept any correction and restorative actions and (2) be ready to endure wrong for the sake of helping the other party (as taught in Matthew 5:39-41).

Matthew 18:15-20 gives some steps as to how matters are to proceed:

1. Resolve the issue personally with the wrongdoer. If the issue is still unresolved...
2. Bring one or two persons to confer with the wrongdoer to establish every word. If the issue is still unresolved...
3. Raise the issue to the church court for arbitration. If the wrongdoer neglects to hear good counsel, and his actions harm the body of Christ...
4. “...let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican” (Matt 18:17), i.e. excommunication.

The whole thrust of the issue in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 is this: as far as possible do not go to court, but resolve matters among the brethren. Seek reconciliation rather than destruction. The “*fault*” (1 Cor 6:7) with the Corinthian Christians was their failure to meet the biblical requirement of loving their brother, and thus they “(did) *wrong*” (1 Cor 6:8, *adikeō*, to cause damage or mistreat) to one another. The Corinthian Christians were “utterly blinded in making sacred brotherhood a matter of no moment” (Calvin). “*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*” (1 John 4:11).

**THOUGHT:** Am I willing to suffer wrong when required?

**PRAYER:** Lord, may the love of Christ be seen in my life.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11

REVELATION 21:8

*"Know ye not that the unrighteous  
shall not inherit the kingdom of God?"*

## THE GODLY AND THE UNGODLY CONTRASTED (I)

Paul contrasted the character of unbelievers with that of true believers. His purpose was to show how unsuitable it was to have unbelievers judge *"the smallest matters"* (1 Cor 6:2) between Christian brethren. One simple truth to consider, which should be known by all the Corinthian Christians, was that unbelievers will never inherit the kingdom of God.

Those who cannot enter heaven are grouped into the following two groups:

1. *"...fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind"* (1 Cor 6:9). These refer to those who are involved in sexual immorality. Idolaters are included in this list because many of the temples had temple priestesses who, as part of their worship of their false gods, would engage in all forms of sexual immorality with devotees.
2. *"...thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners..."* (1 Cor 6:10). These refer to those who abuse or harm others in order to get material gain.

We must understand, however, that Paul was not saying that those who committed such sins would be barred from salvation. Those who repent from their sins and believe in Christ as their Lord and Saviour will find salvation in Him. Those who do not repent, but persist in their sins, will surely not be able to enter into heaven.

By the mercies of God, the Corinthian Christians were delivered from such sins when they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. They had become new creatures in the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:17). If any were fit to judge the matters of the church, it would have to be the saints!

**THOUGHT:** I must not be characterised by the sins of the ungodly.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me not to be found in the way of the ungodly.

THURSDAY, JUNE 8

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

“...Be not deceived...”

## THE GODLY AND THE UNGODLY CONTRASTED (II)

The character of the godly stands in stark contrast to that of the unbelievers. Unlike the ungodly, they have been “...*washed... sanctified... justified...*” (1 Cor 6:11) in Christ Jesus. These verbs are all in the passive showing that God is the One responsible for these acts done on the believer.

1. “*washed*” (*apoluomai*): This refers to how the sins of a man are washed away by the blood of the Lamb. God has forgiven him of all his sins, and he is now cleansed of all his guilt.
2. “*sanctified*” (*hagiazō*): The Greek *hagiazō* has the meaning of “to make holy,” “to set apart for God,” “to consecrate” and “to purify.” When applied to the believer, it refers to the work of God that takes place in order to make the believer pure before Him.

Note that there are three aspects to sanctification: (1) Positional sanctification (Heb 10:10; Jude 1; Acts 20:32). This refers to the cleansing and redemption of the believer by the blood of Christ upon conversion. (2) Progressive sanctification (2 Pet 3:18; 2 Cor 3:18). This is the ongoing and experiential aspect of sanctification. It is the continual process of consecration and forsaking of sin, resulting in the believer becoming more and more like Christ. (3) Permanent or Ultimate Sanctification. This refers to our final perfection, whereby our glorified and sinless bodies will be received at the coming resurrection. We will be presented faultless and without blemish in the presence of God.

3. “*justified*” (*dikaioō*). This is a forensic term. It describes the state of a believer who is declared righteous in Christ. Thus the Corinthian Christians were fit for heaven, unlike the unbelieving Corinthians!

**THOUGHT:** I am a new creature in Christ Jesus.

**PRAYER:** Lord, I thank Thee for this new life in Christ.

FRIDAY, JUNE 9

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11

ROMANS 1:18-32

*"Be not deceived:...*

*(they)... shall (not)*

*inherit the kingdom of God."*

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## HEAVEN FOR HOMOSEXUALS?

There is much confusion over the issue of homosexuality due to the growing strength of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) movement. It is also strongly aided by the compromise and unbelief of Christian churches. Some of these churches argue that homosexuals should be accepted into church leadership. There are also churches who consist fully of homosexuals, from the leadership down to the ordinary member. "We are going to heaven in Jesus Christ!" So they proclaim.

The passage in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 could not be any clearer. Paul declared emphatically that the *"effeminate"* and *"the abusers of themselves with mankind"* shall not enter into the kingdom of God. The term *"effeminate"* (*malakoi*) has a connotation of softness and passivity. It refers to male prostitutes who are dressed like ladies allowing themselves to be abused by other men. On the other hand, the term *"abusers of themselves with mankind"* (*arsenokoitai*) refers to those who actively pursue a homosexual lifestyle. Those who persist in these sins and refuse to repent will have no place in heaven!

Romans 1:26-27 teaches that homosexuality is the outpouring of God's wrath against the unregenerate. *"For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet."* When men reject God, God in His divine wrath gives them up to their own lusts. Both men and women leave the natural use of their body and "exchange" it for unnatural relations with another of the same sex. Homosexuality is not due to DNA, as propounded by certain scientific journals today. It is rather the manifestation of the sinful nature of men. Homosexuality is humiliation and not pride!

**THOUGHT:** We are living in perilous times.

**PRAYER:** Lord, keep me on guard against the world's deception.

SATURDAY, JUNE 10

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12

ROMANS 6

*"...I will not be brought  
under the power of any."*

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## ARE YOU ADDICTED?

In 1 Corinthians 6:12, Paul began a new section dealing with how a Christian's body is not meant for sin. The Corinthian Christians had been redeemed by Jesus, and their bodies belonged to God. Thus, they must use their bodies to serve righteousness, not unrighteousness. This was the underlying principle that Paul used to address the issues of fornication (1 Cor 6:12-20), marriage and singlehood (1 Cor 7), and food offered to idols (1 Cor 8-10).

In our reading, Paul exhorted the Corinthian Christians that they must exercise self-control over their bodies. The phrase *"all things are lawful unto me"* seems to have been a popular theological slogan concerning Christian liberty. This liberty in Christ is misunderstood as a license to sin. Christians take this freedom to mean that they are lords over their bodies. Hence, they serve self rather than Christ, resulting in the gross carnality and schisms in the church.

Christian liberty is freedom from sin, not freedom to sin. Now there are certain things and activities that may be "lawful" and "permissible" according to Holy Scriptures. However, we must be careful not to be addicted or brought under the control of these things or they may become our idols and cause us to sin. For example, food is necessary for our body. But when we become so captivated by the food that we eat beyond the limits of our body to the damage of our health, we break the Sixth and Tenth Commandments. It is pure gluttony, and that dish has become our idol.

Similarly, the Lord has called us to be diligent workers in our places of work for the sake of the testimony of the Lord (Eph 6:5-8). Work is lawful. However, when we become addicted to work (i.e. a workaholic), it tears us away from the Lord and other lawful duties. We have lost control of our bodies. Control our bodies for Christ's sake, and not let our bodies control us!

**THOUGHT:** Am I allowing sin to reign in me?

**PRAYER:** Lord, I present my body as a living sacrifice unto Thee.

## ENSLAVED BY SMARTPHONES? (I)

The smartphone is a popular gadget today. It has become indispensable to many people. The popularity of the smartphone lies in the fact that it is a mobile phone and a mini computer rolled into one portable device. Its connectivity and many applications present users with a myriad of options for activity on the go. It is certainly a most powerful device for work and entertainment. However, just like any tool, an abuse of the smartphone can also lead to many dangers for the user.

This writer is especially concerned with how smartphones are used by Christians today. It is a worrying sight to see many glued to their phones, actively involved in gaming, messaging, watching videos, or other activities on social media platforms. Some of these activities are even conducted in the Lord's house. There are times when users are so engrossed with their phones that they become unaware of their surroundings. It is as if they have been translated into some alternate reality!

The Bible expressly warns us to do all things in moderation. *"All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any"* (1 Cor 6:12). A Christian must not be enslaved or addicted to any activity or tool. This includes the use of smartphones. 1 Corinthians 10:23 further states that while there are activities which are lawful, yet not all activities are edifying to the spiritual life of the Christian. If the activity causes you to walk far from God, then we must certainly cease from that activity. Moreover, some of the activities may not even be lawful in the eyes of God! If such activities distract us from God's calling in church, workplace or school, then we must stop these activities immediately.

**THOUGHT:** A tool abused makes man a fool.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to use all things properly for Thy glory.

MONDAY, JUNE 12

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12

ROMANS 6:12

“...yield yourselves unto God...”

## ENSLAVED BY SMARTPHONES? (II)

There is also a disturbing trend among youths to engage in cooperative phone activities in the name of “phone fellowship.” What exactly is fellowship? The Bible’s definition of fellowship describes a common sharing, care and relationship that is made possible only in Christ and in His truth. *“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ”* (1 John 1:3). *“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin”* (1 John 1:6-7). How many of such “phone fellowship” activities actually promote Christ and His Word? Do they involve gross violence or magic? Let us not deceive ourselves. Calling these activities “phone fellowship” is but a cover-up for addiction and sin.

Smartphones can also be a distraction during worship service. Today, Bibles are easily downloaded into smartphones. Many are thus reading the Bible from their phones during worship services. As a result, some may be distracted by incoming emails, messages or notifications on their phones. They may also distract others by the use of their smartphones. We are to worship God in the beauty of holiness (Ps 29:2) with undivided attention. When we are distracted by emails, websites and messages, we are certainly not worshipping God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Remove the smartphone, put it into a bag, and use a proper physical Bible.

Dear readers, how are you using your smartphone? It can be a bane or a boon. Do not be enslaved by your smartphone. Use it wisely for the glory of God. *“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any”* (1 Cor 6:12).

**THOUGHT:** I must worship God with undivided attention.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to be wholly consecrated unto Thee.

TUESDAY, JUNE 13

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-14

ROMANS 12:1-2

*"...the body... for the Lord..."*

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### LIVE PROPERLY!

Some of us are extremely careful in looking after our bodies. We make sure we eat the right foods, and engage in vigorous exercise to keep our bodies trim and fit. We tell ourselves, "This is what it means to live properly!"

There is nothing wrong in looking after the body so long as it is with the right motive of keeping it healthy for service unto the Lord. However, we must not be overly fixated on the body until it draws us away from the Lord.

The Bible demands that we understand the fleeting and transient nature of our earthly body. The people in Roman times exclaimed, "*Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats...*" (1 Cor 6:13). A modern equivalent would be, "I eat to live, and I live to eat." However, Paul reminded us that one day the body will die. God will destroy both the belly and the food in the belly! On the other hand, God has promised that He will one day raise all believers with glorified bodies, just like how Christ was raised from the dead. This glorified body will be permanent, free from all corruption and decay. Therefore, we ought not to be fixated on our present bodies, but live in the light of the future resurrection. We should use our bodies not to satisfy our gluttony or vanity, but to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in righteousness. Just as how the Lord came to save our body ("*the Lord for the body*" 1 Cor 6:13), so we too must use our body to glorify the Lord ("*the body ... for the Lord*" 1 Cor 6:13). To live properly means to dedicate our lives to glorify our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

On the other hand, we must be careful not to abuse our bodies. One way we can abuse our bodies is to subject it to all kinds of sexual sins (*porneia*). The implication and seriousness of the sin of fornication will be explained in the verses to come.

**THOUGHT:** What does it mean to live properly for the Lord?

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me not to abuse my body.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14

1 CORINTHIANS 6:15-17

HEBREWS 13:4

*"Marriage is honourable..."*

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## FORNICATION IS AN ABOMINATION

We live in an age when sexual promiscuity is being lauded rather than denounced. There are those who celebrate fornication, claiming that it is something natural for the body to do. As a result, pre-marital sex and adulterous affairs are becoming everyday affairs, so much so that it is no longer frowned upon. We see such acts being promoted on television and the internet. Tragically, some in the church have bitten the poisonous bait and followed in the world's footsteps.

Fornication was an exceptionally huge problem in the church of Corinth. The city itself was known for its sexual promiscuity. Paul therefore felt it was necessary to warn the Corinthian Christians that fornication was an abuse of the body.

Once again, Paul started the argument from first principle by asking a rhetorical question that demanded the "yes" answer. He had earlier stated that once a person was born again, his body must be yielded to the Lord Jesus Christ. If that was the case, why should the body be yielded as an instrument for a harlot's use? Paul answered with the strongest negative in the Greek language: *"mē genoito"*! Let this thought perish! May it never be!

Paul then explained that all sexual relations involved a union, that of a man and a woman becoming one flesh. This union is one that is reserved for the marriage covenant. *"Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled ..."* (Heb 13:4). When one has sexual relations with anyone outside of the marriage covenant, one is declaring sexual union with someone besides one's spouse. For one who is not married, it is an act of rebellion against God who has not put the two together. The sin is compounded for one who is married, for it means that one has broken the marriage covenant.

**THOUGHT:** Marital fidelity is so lacking today.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to maintain my chastity.

THURSDAY, JUNE 15  
1 CORINTHIANS 6:18  
GENESIS 39:7-20

*“...he that committeth fornication  
sinneth against his own body.”*

## FLY FORNICATION!

How are we to deal with the sin of fornication? The best way is to stay as far away from it as possible. The Scriptural command is emphatic: *“Fly fornication”*! The present tense of the command indicates that one must continue to fly throughout his life. Never stop flying from fornication! One slip and you may be caught.

Temptations abound in the world that lures us to commit sin. One way is through the lust of the eyes. Pornography is now readily available. The media is also full of videos and pictures of people wearing revealing clothing. Be careful little eyes what you see.

David is one example of a man who succumbed to the lust of the eyes (2 Sam 11). Bathsheba was washing herself (2 Sam 11:2). David was walking on the roof of his house. His house was situated at one of the highest points in Jerusalem. David could therefore survey the activities of Jerusalem easily from his vantage point. He turned his head, he looked, and his eyes were soon fixated upon Bathsheba. Instead of flying, he allowed the lust of his eyes to take control. This led him to commit the sin of adultery and murder. The refusal to fly from fornication led to the downfall of a faithful king.

On the other hand, we have the positive example of Joseph (Gen 39). When Potiphar’s wife asked him to lie with her, he did not entertain the thought for one second. *“...how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”* (Gen 39:9).

If there is anything that tempts you to commit fornication, remove it far from you. *“And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell”* (Matt 5:29).

**THOUGHT:** What are some things that can lead me to sin?

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to fly from anything that can cause me to sin.

FRIDAY, JUNE 16

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20

1 PETER 1:18-19

*“...know ye not that your body is  
the temple of the Holy Ghost...?”*

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## THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, the term “*temple*” (*naos*) is used with reference to the body of Christ. It refers to the church being the sanctuary where the presence of God dwells in the form of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the church of God must be pure in her ways, and separate from all evil and iniquity.

However, in 1 Corinthians 6:19, “*naos*” is used not with reference to the corporate body of Christ, but to the physical body of the Christian. When a man believes in Christ, he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The body of the Christian is thus the “*temple*” and sanctuary of the Holy Ghost.

There are some parallels in the teachings of this passage and 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. Firstly, just as how the church as the temple of God is owned by God, so the body of the Christian is also owned by Christ. As such, he is not lord over his own body, but must submit his body to the rule and direction of Christ. Secondly, the church as the temple of God is required to walk in holiness and righteousness. Similarly, the body of the Christian must also be yielded to do that which is right in the eyes of God. Every Christian must glorify God with his body.

Lastly, the Corinthian believers were reminded that they were bought with a price. This price is the life and precious blood of the Lamb of God. *“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”* (1 Pet 1:18-19). It is thus imperative that the believer yields his body to the Master who has redeemed him. He will desire to walk in the Spirit who indwells him, and bear fruit unto the glory of Christ.

**THOUGHT:** What does it mean to walk in the Spirit?

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, may Thy Spirit guide me in the path of godliness.

SATURDAY, JUNE 17

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20

GENESIS 23

*“...ye are not your own.”*

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### BURIAL OR CREMATION? (I)

The body of the Christian belongs wholly to God. This doctrine demands that we cannot dispose of the dead in any manner, but according to that which is stipulated in the Holy Scriptures. The traditional method of the Christian Church is to bury the dead. However, in recent years, cremation is becoming increasingly popular among Christians in Singapore. It is considered a “cost effective,” “hygienic” and “land-saving” method. Cremation is now so widely accepted that some consider burial to be a strange and deviant teaching of certain churches!

But what does the Bible say? In Genesis 23, the Bible records the extent to which Abraham went to purchase a piece of land from the sons of Heth to bury Sarah. Abraham initially wanted to purchase only the cave of Machpelah (Gen 23:9), but Ephron insisted that Abraham should purchase the whole land (field and cave included) for the burial (Gen 23:11). Abraham could have easily solved the problem by adopting the practice of cremation just like the surrounding cities and nations. But Abraham willingly fulfilled the legal obligations of buying both the field and the cave so that Sarah could be buried. The burial not only expressed Abraham’s and Sarah’s faith in the land promised in God’s covenant to Abraham, but also their faith that they would one day be resurrected and be found in the heavenly land above (cf. Heb 11:16).

Besides Sarah’s example, it is worth noting that all the Old Testament patriarchs were buried (Gen 25:8-10; 35:19-20, 29; 49:31-33; 50:1-13). Note Deuteronomy 21:23: *“His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day...”*

The New Testament saints also practised burial (Matt 14:10-12; John 11:17; Acts 8:2). In addition, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself was buried in the tomb of Joseph, and not cremated.

**THOUGHT:** God has saved both my soul and my body.

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, I wait for the hope of the resurrection.

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LORD'S DAY, JUNE 18

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20

1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-50

*"...ye are bought with a price..."*

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## BURIAL OR CREMATION? (II)

The act of burial is a wonderful testimony of the future bodily resurrection of Christians in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15:35-50, Paul likened burial to the imagery of a seed being planted in the ground. After some time, the seed will spring forth from the ground as a plant. Similarly, at the appointed season, God will raise the bodies of believers from the earth. Just as Christ rose up bodily from the dead, so Christians will also be resurrected bodily from the grave. What appears as "dead" to the eyes of the world is but "sleep" for the believers!

Burial upholds the doctrine of the body. The Bible tells us that the body of the Christian is not unimportant. It is the temple of God (1 Cor 6:19). When Christians are resurrected, they will be given a glorified body suited for eternity. God not only saves our souls, He also saves our bodies.

On the other hand, the various instances of cremation in the Bible are that of condemnation and judgment. Joshua 7 records how Achan was punished for taking the accursed thing from Jericho. Achan and his family were stoned and burnt (Josh 7:25). A further example is the burning of Saul's bones in 1 Samuel 31:12. It was an expression of judgment for Saul's sins, including his sin of visiting the witch of Endor (cf. 1 Sam 28; Deut 21:23). Consider also how the unbelievers will be punished eternally in the lake of fire. Surely, the act of cremation evokes the picture of judgment and punishment more than the picture of hope and peace!

What about believers who were cremated? All true believers, regardless of whether they were buried or cremated, will certainly be resurrected bodily. The issue is not about salvation but testimony.

**THOUGHT:** The doctrine of the body must not be neglected.

**PRAYER:** Lord, I await the consummation of my salvation.

MONDAY, JUNE 19

1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-2

GENESIS 2:18

*"It is good for a man not  
to touch a woman."*

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## SINGLEHOOD OR MARRIAGE?

As time goes by, there will be those in church who will get married. Those who remain single may be pressurised by friends and family to get married. Then there are those who get into marital troubles because they were not ready for married life. Such issues must have also occurred in the Corinthian church, prompting the Apostle Paul to address them in 1 Corinthians 7.

Paul began by saying that *"it is good for a man not to touch a woman."* To *"touch a woman"* is an idiomatic expression referring to marriage. This is also verified by the context where it stands in opposition to 1 Corinthians 7:2 which talks about marriage.

When Paul said that it was *"good"* for a man not to marry, he was not saying that it is bad to be married. God Himself instituted marriage. He declared in Genesis 2:18, *"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."* Thus, it is good to get married. However, singlehood affords certain advantages, for married life comes with its own sets of difficulties, challenges, vexations and anxieties. It is in that sense that singlehood is better than marriage. Further details were given by Paul later in the chapter.

Paul realised that Christians lived in a sexually immoral world. A man would be exposed to many temptations. In light of this, it was good for a person (who could not abide in singlehood) to be married to avoid fornication. Sex is only honourable between husband and wife. *"Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge"* (Heb 13:4). Thereafter, let every man rejoice in *"the wife of ... (his) youth"* (Prov 5:18). Note also that the words *"wife"* and *"husband"* are in the singular. The Bible teaches monogamy and not polygamy.

**THOUGHT:** Single? Or married? God's will for me is the best.

**PRAYER:** Lord, I thank Thee for Thy will for me.

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TUESDAY, JUNE 20

1 CORINTHIANS 7:3-5

EPHESIANS 5:22-33

*"Defraud ye not one the other..."*

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## MARRIAGE OBLIGATIONS

Married life comes with obligations to one's spouse. In line with Scriptural teaching, the bridegroom pledges the following during the exchange of the marriage vows: "I, (name of groom) ... take thee, (name of bride) ..., to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge thee my troth. Amen." The bride would then make the same pledge, with the additional pledge to obey the man. God is the witness of their vows and will take seriously the pledge they have made to each other. The husband must love his wife, and the wife must submit to her husband (Eph 5:22-25).

One obligation in marriage is to fulfil the sexual needs of the spouse. The husband owes it (*opheilo*) to the wife to perform his conjugal duties and vice versa. Did they not pledge to give their bodies to each other in their marriage vows? There will of course be occasions where there is a need to leave off such activity because of spiritual concerns of fasting and prayer. However, this must be by mutual consent. Even then, it must not be for a prolonged period, otherwise Satan will soon create problems for the marriage!

When husband and wife do not perform their conjugal duties, they are defrauding (i.e. depriving) their bodies from their spouse. This is a breaking of the Seventh (infidelity in marriage), Eighth (stealing of one's body from the other) and Ninth Commandments (breaking of the marriage vow).

Alas, there are married couples who do not heed these biblical teachings seriously. Some abandon their spouses to pursue worldly attainments of their own covetous hearts. When they return, they find their lonely spouses tempted into an adulterous fling. How sad!

**THOUGHT:** Am I ready to take the marriage vows?

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to be a godly spouse.

## SINGLEHOOD IS A GIFT

Paul made it clear that neither to remain single or to be married was a must (1 Cor 7:7). Not everyone is given the "grace gift" (*charisma*) of singleness by God. The one who is single will not be burdened by marital cares and can serve the Lord whole-heartedly. Thus, Paul wished that everyone could have the gift of singleness like him. However, not everyone is given this "grace gift." Jesus taught in Matthew 19:11-12, *"But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."*

On the other hand, those who do not have this gift should marry as they may not be able to contain themselves. Once a couple know that it is God's will for them to be married to each other, they should not delay their marriage unnecessarily, or they may be tempted, and fall into the snare of the devil. The Westminster Larger Catechism Question 139 teaches that the Seventh Commandment forbids "undue delay of marriage."

However, many couples fearing to take up the responsibilities of marriage, as well as being burdened by the cares of the world, purposefully delay their marriages contrary to God's good teaching. Alas, when they cannot contain and commit fornication, much grief and pain will be created.

How then does one know whether he or she has the gift of singleness? The key is to walk close to God and pray. If you are called into marriage, He will bring the spouse He has appointed for you into your life. On other hand, if His will for you is to remain single, He will also make the pathway clear.

**THOUGHT:** To be single or married is in the hands of God.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to abide in Thy will.

THURSDAY, JUNE 22

1 CORINTHIANS 7:10-11

MATTHEW 19:3-9

*"Let not the wife depart  
from her husband."*

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## CAN A CHRISTIAN DIVORCE? (I)

A woman once commented on a news channel that she was seeking marriage with her partner because it guarantees her monetary protection when they divorce. It was as if she was looking for divorce before she was married. Such is the thinking of the world.

Can a Christian seek to be divorced? The answer is an emphatic "NO." The teaching is clear in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11. To prevent any misunderstanding that this injunction is only by the Apostle Paul, he stated that this directive came directly from the Lord. Two commands were issued here:

(1) The wife must not depart from her husband (1 Cor 7:10).

(2) The husband must not put away the wife (1 Cor 7:11).

In Matthew 19:3, the Pharisees attempted to trap Jesus by asking Him whether it was lawful for a man to put away his wife for whatever cause. In those days, the common teaching allowed men to put away their wives for the slightest of reasons. If the wife was no longer attractive, put her away! If she failed to cook a dish to the husband's liking, seek divorce! Back then, the married women had a high risk of being bullied and abused by their husbands. The situation has not changed in today's society. How many, whether man or woman, have sought to separate from their spouse simply because of a lack of "spark" or passion? "We simply drifted apart and there's no more feeling between us," they say. Others stick together for the sake of the children. But once the children become adults, divorce is sought.

Jesus exposed the twisted thinking of the religious teachers by pointing out the creation account in Genesis 2:18-25. Was it not God who made for man a help who was meet for him, so that husband and wife together can fulfil God's will for their lives? Marriage is thus a divine institution. It involves a covenant relationship that is meant to be permanent. It must be honoured till God breaks it by death.

**THOUGHT:** Let all married couples honour their marriage vows.

**PRAYER:** "Lord, may Thou keep all married couples faithful to Thee."

FRIDAY, JUNE 23

1 CORINTHIANS 7:10-11

DEUTERONOMY 24:1-4

*“...and let not the husband  
put away his wife.”*

## CAN A CHRISTIAN DIVORCE? (II)

Matthew 19:4-6 says, *“And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”* Since God is the one who put husband and wife together, He is the only One who can put them apart. And this occurs at the point of death. Husband and wife must remain together in holy matrimony – till death do them part. Christians must never divorce!

The Pharisees, refusing to give up, proceeded to trap Jesus further. *“Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, to put her away?”* (Matt 19:7). If Christians are not to divorce, why then is there a law concerning the bill of divorcement in Deuteronomy 24:1? Does this not prove that divorce is permitted by God?

Jesus answered, *“...Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so”* (Matt 19:8). The reason for the bill of divorcement was man’s “hardness” of heart. God intended the marriage to be joyful and permanent till husband and wife are separated by death. Sadly, man’s rebellion and wickedness defile marriages, causing hurt and damage to one or both parties, thus spoiling God’s original intent for marriage. Divorce is the result of the sin of man. It is not a desire of God. Thus, divorcement causes much shame though God allowed it under His Permissive Will. Husband and wife were never meant to be divorced in the eyes of God. They must come together and seek reconciliation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**THOUGHT:** “Till death do us part.”

**PRAYER:** Lord, may husbands and wives learn to love each other as each loves Thee.

SATURDAY, JUNE 24

1 CORINTHIANS 7:10-11

MATTHEW 19:3-9

*"Have ye not read..."*

### CAN A CHRISTIAN DIVORCE? (III)

How then should one respond if one's spouse is involved in an adulterous affair?

Firstly, understand that adultery is a violation of the Seventh Commandment, and is a sin in the eyes of God. God will judge all adulterers (Heb 13:4). The injured party must therefore let God vindicate him in the entire situation. He must never seek revenge though he may feel betrayed.

Secondly, the injured party must forgive the offending party. Harboursing bitterness will negatively impact the decisions and emotions of the injured party, and result in disobedience. Heed the words of Scripture: *"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"* (Matt 6:14-15).

Thirdly, the injured party must also examine his life to see if he has contributed in any way to the entire situation. If he has, he must seek the Lord's forgiveness. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9).

For those who are single, do not enter into marriage lightly. Make sure that it is God's will for you to get married. For those who are married, value the marriage covenant. The best guard for a blissful marriage is for husband and wife to walk close to the Lord, for a marriage relationship is not just bilateral (i.e. between two parties), but trilateral (involving God, man and woman). Therefore, husbands, love your wives as yourselves. Wives, submit to your husbands as unto the Lord. This is the recipe for a happy and God-honouring marriage. With God in the centre, the marriage will be a blissful one.

**THOUGHT:** Seek reconciliation, not divorce.

**PRAYER:** Lord, preserve our marriages.

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## CONCERNING MIXED MARRIAGES

It is a sin for a Christian to marry an unbeliever. The Bible teaches that Christians must only marry those who are *"in the Lord"* (1 Cor 7:39; 2 Cor 6:14). There may be believers who were married to unbelievers before they were converted. How then must the believer respond? Should he seek to be divorced from the unbelieving spouse?

Paul taught that the believer was not to initiate a divorce, so long as the spouse was willing to continue in the marriage. The only time when a divorce is allowed is when the unbelieving spouse actively seeks to break the marriage bond. In such a situation, the believing spouse is then not bound (i.e. under no obligation) to keep the marriage. Till that happens, the believing spouse must try his utmost to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with the unbelieving spouse. "Divorce becomes a legitimate step when dissolution is the only solution" (Tow and Khoo).

Why should the believing spouse continue in the marriage as far as possible? The reason is that the believer's spouse and children will be *"sanctified"* (*bagiazō*). The word *"sanctified"* here has the idea of being set apart for God's holy purpose, just like how various items in the temple or the tithes and offerings of the saints are devoted to God's use. In this case, because of the believing spouse's relationship with God, God will also pour down His richest blessing upon the immediate family. The believer will then be a sanctifying influence at home because of his Christian conduct. The believing spouse will be used by God to minister to the immediate family members, though they are not yet part of the family of God. The privileges of God's protection will also be bestowed upon the immediate family of the believer.

**THOUGHT:** Our God is a most gracious Lord.

**PRAYER:** Lord, use me to testify of Thy goodness. Save my unbelieving loved ones.

MONDAY, JUNE 26

1 CORINTHIANS 7:17-24

EPHESIANS 4:1

*"Let every man abide in the same  
calling wherein he was called."*

---

## ABIDE IN GOD'S CALLING

The term "call" (*kaleō*) in its verb or noun forms occurs nine times in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24. The theme of this passage, therefore, has to do with a person's calling. Paul's command is for everyone to abide in what God has called us to do. This command is repeated three times for emphasis (1 Cor 7:17, 20, 24). Until God tells us to do something different, we must always abide in His calling for the glory of God's name.

In 1 Corinthians 7:17, Paul made it clear that everyone has been given a specific call by the Lord. To each vocation He calls us, He also gives the necessary gifts for us to fulfil our call. For example, if a person has been called unto singlehood, God will grant him the grace to abide in this calling to glorify His name. Similarly, a person who is called to be married will be granted the grace to handle his married life. What is critical is that a person does not seek to do something which the Lord has not called him to. Let him who is called to be single abide in singlehood. And let him who is called to be married get married and establish a godly family.

Paul then extended the principle to other general cases. A person who is a Jew does not need to live like a Gentile. And a Gentile should not be required to live like a Jew. This was a critical question that was settled by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. The conclusion was that the Gentiles were not to be troubled to live like a Jew, but they were bound to observe four things: abstain from pollution of idols, fornication, things strangled and from blood (Acts 15:20).

Once we understand that we must abide in whatever God's calling is for us, we must also serve with all our might wherever God places us. God has bought us with a price. Do we then not owe Him all that we have? Thus, let us seek not our own devices, but submit to Him with all that we have.

**THOUGHT:** What has God called me to do?

**PRAYER:** Lord, wherever Thou leadest, I will go.

TUESDAY, JUNE 27

1 CORINTHIANS 7:25-28

1 CORINTHIANS 7:17-24

“... God hath called us to peace.”

---

### SEEKING TO BE MARRIED?

One of the common stresses singles face is the pressure to get married. As they see their various friends getting married through the years, they may wonder when it will be their turn and may feel burdened also to find a life partner.

Paul addressed the singles (*“virgins”*) in his discussion in 1 Corinthians 7:25-28. In the earlier verses, Paul taught that a Christian must always seek to abide in the calling in which he was called. Those who are single must not be anxious to get married. While it is not a sin for a person to get married, he must make sure that it is indeed God’s call and timing for him to pursue marriage before proceeding (1 Cor 7:27-28).

As one who was given grace by God to remain single, and as one who had been faithful to his call of singlehood and apostleship, Paul urged those who are single to consider remaining in their state. Firstly, singlehood is reasonable in the light of the *“present distress.”* The term *“distress”* (*anagkē*) refers to a state of calamity with the idea of violence and pressure. Believers living in a world that hates Christ must expect much persecution and suffering. If a person is married, he would have to worry not only about his own safety but also that of his wife and children. The pressure upon him would be much greater compared to one who is single.

The second reason to remain single would be the *“trouble in the flesh”* (1 Cor 7:28) a married person would face. This would refer to the various difficulties and challenges that come with married life (1 Cor 7:33). Once a person is married, he will have additional obligations and responsibilities: to his spouse, to his children, and also to his parents-in-law. A person who seeks to get married must be spiritually prepared and mature to handle such issues. Otherwise, please remain single!

**THOUGHT:** God’s calling for me is always the best.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to abide in Thy call and timing.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 28

1 CORINTHIANS 7:29-35

ECCLESIASTES 9:4-10

*"But this I say, brethren,  
the time is short..."*

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### TIME IS SHORT!

What did Paul mean by *"the time is short"* (1 Cor 7:29)? The word *"time"* (*kairos*) here refers to a particular season or an opportune time. Paul was referring to the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Saviour is coming very soon! The time to be a witness for Christ is limited. We must grab every opportunity to shine for Him, for soon *"the night cometh, when no man can work"* (John 9:4).

The words of Paul are a stark warning to those who are married. When a believer becomes immersed in the cares of married life, it is very easy to just focus on the things of the world and lose focus of things above (1 Cor 7:33-34). How do I provide for my family? How do I pay for my residence? And for my children's education? Soon, the believer may live as though the world will never pass away. He becomes more interested in the accumulation of riches and possessions, than in striving for heavenly things. The reality though is that time is short. Christ is coming again very soon. The believer must lead his spouse and children to live in the light of eternity. He must point them to Christ, and provoke them unto faithful service for God.

The man who is single has an advantage over him who is married in that he can be more focused in serving the Lord (1 Cor 7:32-34). The single man must not be idle, or spend time in ungodly activities. He must use his advantage to further the kingdom of God.

Dearly beloved, if you are single, devote your energy unto the utmost service for Christ. If you are married, make sure you do not lose focus of things above. There is no time to waste, for when the Lord Jesus Christ returns, the opportunity to impact others for Christ is gone. Let us always have eternity's values in view!

**THOUGHT:** Work, for the night is coming.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me (whether single or married) to be wholly devoted to Thy work.

THURSDAY, JUNE 29

1 CORINTHIANS 7:36-38

EPHESIANS 6:1-4

*“...in the nurture and  
admonition of the Lord.”*

---

## A WORD TO THE FATHERS

Paul now turned his attention towards the fathers in the Corinthian church. In the Roman times, fathers served as guardians to their daughters. The authority to give their daughters in marriage rested in their hands. Paul had this advice for them: “If your daughter is of age, and has a desire to be married, do not stop her from marrying. You have not sinned against the Lord. On the other hand, if your daughter is able to remain single, do not rush to give her hand in marriage. Let her remain single so that she will not be distracted in the service of the Lord.” Paul was thus exhorting fathers to fulfil their responsibility in making sure that their daughters abide in the calling which God had called them to.

Why then is it better for the father not to give his daughter to marriage? Calvin explained: “The sum of the whole discussion amounts to this — that celibacy is better than marriage, because it has more liberty, so that persons can serve God with greater freedom; but at the same time, that no necessity ought to be imposed, so as to make it unlawful for individuals to marry, if they think proper; and farther, that marriage itself is a remedy appointed by God for our infirmity, which all ought to use that are not endowed with the gift of continency.”

On another note, it is wise for young men and women looking for a spouse to seek the advice of their parents. Not only do parents (having gone through various life experiences) have the duty to ensure the best for their children, they can often see things which their children cannot perceive. True love involves more than just emotions. It also involves a mind that is renewed and girded by the Holy Scriptures. Pray and think carefully before entering into marriage. Make sure it is God’s will before you proceed. Ask if you are prepared for the challenges of married life. Let not your marriage be founded on infatuation, but on true love that knows God’s will.

**THOUGHT:** Godly parents will know what is best for their children.

**PRAYER:** Lord, grant us godly families in our churches.

FRIDAY, JUNE 30

1 CORINTHIANS 7:39-40

ROMANS 7:2-3

*"But she is happier if  
she so abide..."*

---

## A WORD TO THE WIDOWS

Lastly, Paul addressed the issues involving the widows. Widows in those days in the Roman society were generally not well looked upon. Some might not be able to find work, and might experience loneliness and desolation. Moreover, the fact that they were widows implied that they had been married and might desire to have a life partner again. If that was the case, can the widow re-marry?

Paul explained that should the widow desire to be married again, she was permitted to do so as she was no longer bound to her deceased husband. With the death of her husband, the marriage covenant was broken. *"For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man."* (Rom 7:2-3). The only requirement was that she must not marry an unbeliever. This command was especially important for widows who might, out of desperation, turn to unbelievers who would then cause the widows to turn away from her faith. *"But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith. And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not"* (1 Tim 5:11-13).

Paul urged widows to consider remaining in the state of singlehood. A person who is not married will be less distracted, and is therefore "more exempt from earthly cares" (Calvin).

**THOUGHT:** The church must take care of her widows (1 Tim 5:3).

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to always walk in Thy will.

## *Notes*

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