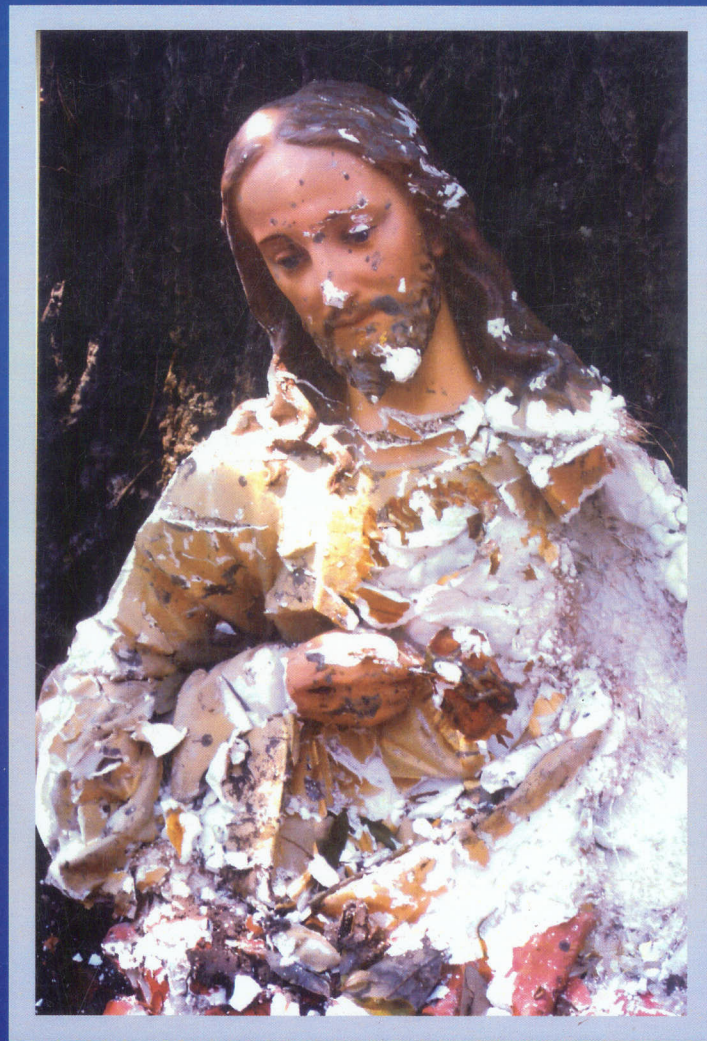


INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

# THE FRAGMENTED CHRIST



ST. PAUL'S LETTERS TO  
THE CORINTHIANS

TEACHER'S MANUAL



## **THE FRAGMENTED CHRIST**

**The picture on the front of this book is a photo taken by Eileen Schwartz in St. Joseph Parish, Pearlinton, Mississippi, following Hurricane Katrina August 29, 2005. Camille Lichtenstein, a long-time parishioner and Parish secretary and her son, Edward, found the statue of the Sacred Heart, which had been inside St. Joseph Church, lying in the middle of the road in front of the demolished church. The statue had been shattered by the force of the hurricane, but was held together by internal wiring. They moved it under a tree on the church property for safety. The statue remained there for several weeks, and was revered by all who saw it. It has finally moved to a safer location because rain was slowly destroying the paint and plaster. Our statue is truly the Fragmented Christ, and represents the physical, emotional and spiritual injuries suffered by all of us who have lived through Hurricane Katrina, but it also represents the boundless and eternal love that our Savior has for all His children.**

# INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

A Seven Year Catholic Bible Study Series



## ST. PAUL'S FIRST AND SECOND LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS

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Commentary by

JAMES P. O'BRYAN, S.T.

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Published by St. Joseph Society for the Propagation of the Word  
24 Boulder View  
Irvine, CA 92603

[www.invitetodiscipleship.org](http://www.invitetodiscipleship.org)

**NIHIL OBSTAT: Rev. Raymond Skonezny, S.S.L.  
Censores Deputati**

**IMPRIMATUR : +William R. Johnson  
Bishop of Orange in California**

**March 19, 1984**

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## FOREWORD

Father James P. O'Bryan, S.T., is a native of Mississippi and a member of the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity. Father Jim has studied at Holy Trinity Mission Seminary, Washington, D.C.; the Catholic University of America at Ponce, Puerto Rico; California State University Long Beach; and Chapman College in Orange, California, where he received his M.A. in Psychology.

After his ordination in 1956, Father served in the southern part of the United States and Puerto Rico. For several years he was engaged in giving retreats to priests, sisters and the laity. In 1966 he was sent to California where he served for five years as Guidance Counselor at Mater Dei High School and as Chaplain for the Juvenile Hall of Orange County.

In 1971 he established Holy Spirit Cenacle House in Orange, California, for the spiritual formation of the laity, and he served as Spiritual Director of the Holy Spirit Missionary Cenacle Apostolate. In 1976 he started writing the Seven Year Catholic Bible Study: INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP. In addition he wrote ROCK FOUNDATION REVISITED, CHRISTIAN with a CAPITAL "C," and he refined his book on prayer, THE INNER JOURNEY.

On a Sabbatical in 1983, while residing in Holy Trinity, Alabama, Father researched the material for his book, AWAKE THE GIANT, a history of the first twenty-five years of the Missionary Cenacle Apostolate; it was published by the Cenacle Press in 1986, at which time he was National Spiritual Guide of all Missionary Cenacles.

Father Jim was assigned Pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Pass Christian, Mississippi, in February 1990, where he stayed for almost seven years. Here he wrote RETURN TO EDEN, a book on marriage. In November 1996 he was sent to New Orleans, Louisiana, to reopen the Trinitarian House, a center for spiritual growth and development for the young adult Catholic laity. In August 2003, he became Pastor of St. Joseph Church, Pearlinton, Mississippi. He helped rebuild the St. Joseph Community Center after Katrina destroyed the church, and left little but rubble. Father's latest assignment finds him in Magee, Mississippi ministering to the St. Stephen's Catholic Community.

**In a book entitled WE NEED NO WINGS, Father Jim has compiled and arranged the spiritual doctrines of Therese of Lisieux, Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich, and Catherine of Siena. His latest endeavor is in revising the summaries and worksheets of his entire 7 year scripture study for presentation in workbook style for students (Matthew, Mark, Luke , John, Acts, Romans, Revelations, Hebrews, 1&2 Thessalonians and Galatians). Most of these are available now.**

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# ST. PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS

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# LETTERS OF ST. PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

## CHAPTER 1

### PROLOGUE TO FIRST CORINTHIANS

If perchance one visited the beautiful city of Athens, Greece, and drove south along the sparkling blue Aegean Sea one would soon come to the Corinthian Canal. The canal, located about forty miles south of Athens, connects the Adriatic and Aegean Seas. It cuts a channel about four miles across the narrow isthmus separating the mainland of Greece from the southern Peloponnesus. The ancient dreams of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar were realized in the 19th century, when the canal was built. Nero had attempted its construction in 67 A.D. The construction of the canal eliminated the necessity of ships that were sailing the trade routes of the Mediterranean, from sailing around the southern tip of the Peloponnesus, called Cape Malea by sailors in ancient times. There was an old saying among the sailors that one should not sail around Cape Malea unless one had made one's will.

Along the canal today, only a passing car, or a ship slowly moving through the canal, disturbs the tranquil stillness of the now rural scene. What a different scene in 50 A.D.! The activity in this area then resembled an overturned ant bed. Two cities lay at the ends of the canal: Lechaeum on the western side, facing the Adriatic Sea welcoming the merchant ships from Italy; and Cenchreae on the eastern side facing the Aegean Sea, hosting the commercial fleets of the Mediterranean world. Across the narrow isthmus, merchants chose to have their supplies carried to ships on the other side rather than risk the hazardous journey around Cape Malea. Ships were even placed on rollers and hauled from one sea to the other. Thousands of slaves and stevedores were necessary to handle the traffic between Lechaeum and Cenchreae.

In 50 A.D., this same area housed the site of the Isthmian Games--second in fame only to the Olympic Games. The Greeks held the games in honor of Poseidon, god of the sea, and the boy-god Palaimon. Athletes came from all over the Empire to compete in track and field events, boxing and wrestling events and to race their chariots. Standing today on the bridge that crosses

over the canal, and looking northward, one can see a grove of citrus trees--where the Stadium once stood. On the northern slopes above the Stadium rested the Temple of Poseidon, and the Sanctuary that housed the statues of the victorious athletes of the Isthmian Games. In the Olympic Games, they crowned the victors with crowns made of wild olive and laurel, but here, the victors were crowned with withered wild celery. It was this crown that Paul made reference to as that "perishable wreath" won by the athletes of this world (see 1Cor.9:24).

If one continues south along the road for about ten more miles, one will come to the site of the ancient city of Corinth. Dominating the entire area is the Acrocorinth--a sheer cliff towering 1,800 feet above the blue<sup>+</sup> sea. One can still see atop the cliff the ruins of the famous Temple of Aphrodite that had once held a thousand prostitutes as slaves of the temple, who nightly came into the city seeking worshippers of the goddess. Strabo of Amasia, who visited the city in the century before the birth of Christ wrote:

*And so by reason of them, the city was thronged and enriched for the sailors spent their money easily, and on that account the proverb says: "Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth."*

As one moves meditatively today through the impressive ruins of ancient Corinth, with relics of gods, goddesses, and temples lavishly strewn over the acres beneath the Acrocorinth, noting a lone shepherd herding his sheep among the ruins of once proud marble walls and colonnades, one has the sense of having visited the grave of an ancient, infamous beauty. You cannot but wonder: What was she like in her day? Saint Paul knew.

Rome destroyed Corinth in 146 B.C. under the command of Lucius Mummius, and rebuilt her in 44 B.C. under the command of Julius Caesar. Rome populated the city with Italians, but it soon became the melting pot of the Mediterranean world. The chatter of Greek in the marketplaces soon drowned out the sounds of Latin, the official language. It was known as the city of two ports; it had great commercial importance. Corinth grew rich. The Orientals of Asia Minor and Egypt swarmed into her. Jews from the East, those expelled from Rome by Tiberius in 14-37 A.D., and by Claudius in 49-50 A.C., thronged into Corinth. Corinth had factories that made bronze, earthenware, and tiles; it possessed a ship-building industry. The famous "gate beautiful" of the Jerusalem temple was made of Corinthian bronze. Corinth housed great wealth and poverty side-by-side.

Over half the population was made up of slaves. One ancient writer, Alcephron, left this report: *“Never yet had I been to Corinth, for I know pretty well the kind of life the rich enjoy there and the wretchedness of the poor.”* Corinth utilized its stadium for the popular gladiator bouts that could seat over 20,000 people. It had a roofed theater with a seating capacity of three thousand. The south side of the agora was lined with taverns. Apparently, they were well frequented; to call someone a Corinthian was equivalent to calling him a drunk. Some believe that Paul was looking at the general population of Corinth when he wrote:

*They are filled with every kind of wickedness: maliciousness, greed, ill will, envy, murder, bickering, deceit, craftiness. They are gossips and slanderers, they hate God, are insolent, haughty, boastful, ingenious in their wrong-doing and rebellious toward their parents. One sees in them men without conscience, without loyalty, without affection, without pity. They know God’s just decree that all who do such things deserve death; yet they not only do them but approve them in others (Rom.1:29-32).*

The foundation of the Church at Corinth dramatically demonstrated to Paul the power of the gospel and the providence of God in his own personal life. From an account in Acts, we know that Paul arrived in Corinth after having been hounded out of Macedonia by the maliciousness of the Jews, and after suffering a humiliating rejection by the intelligentsia of Athens. He himself testified to the Corinthians that he came *“in weakness and fear, and with much trepidation.”* These are the symptoms of a man physically exhausted and emotionally upset. So he arrived in Corinth sick, alone, and friendless. In that dark night, naked faith alone led Paul onward. Here in Corinth Paul personally experienced what he later wrote the Romans:

*I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God leading everyone who believes in it to salvation, the Jew first, then the Greek. For in the gospel is revealed the justice of God (Rom.1:16-17a).*

On arriving in Corinth the first blessing received was Paul’s meeting a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who were apparently Christians, and recently driven out of Rome. They were to become two of his dearest friends. As we read in Romans 16:4, *“(They) even risked their lives for the sake of mine.”* The couple was employed in the making of tents from a goat hair known as



*cilicium*. Paul had been trained in this same profession. With Aquila and Priscilla, Paul found work, lodging, and lasting friendship. From this foundation he began to preach in the synagogue, and the Church in Corinth came into being.

Paul arrived in Corinth around 50 A.D. Luke states two facts in Acts that help us to pinpoint Paul's dates in Corinth. Paul met Aquila and Priscilla only "*recently arrived from Italy. An edict of Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome*" (Acts 18:2); and, "*During Gallio's proconsulship in Achaia, the Jews rose in a body against Paul and brought him before the bench*" (Acts 18:12). We know from secular historical records that Claudius expelled the Jews in the ninth year of his reign, which extended from January 25th, 49 A.D., to January 24th, 50 A.D. We know that Gallio was proconsular of the province of Achaia, with Corinth as the provincial capital in the 12th year of Claudius' "tribunal power," which extended from January 25th, 52 A.D., to January 24th, 53 A.D. Achaia was under Senate jurisdiction that appointed its proconsuls for one year terms, beginning and ending with the spring of the year. Paul labored in Corinth some 18 months. Towards the end of his stay he appeared before Gallio for judgment sometime between the spring of 52 and 53 A.D.

During his first stay in Corinth, Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians. He testified to the Jewish opposition in Corinth: "*Displeasing to God and hostile to all mankind, they try to keep us from preaching salvation to the Gentiles*" (1Thes.2:15-16). However, the Christian Community was established in Corinth, and was composed of Jews and Greeks; many were poor and ignorant, a few were rich and learned.

We have the good fortune of knowing the names of many of the members of this Christian Community. We know that Timothy and Silas (Silvanus) were with Paul as his co-workers; Prisca and Aquila, his "*fellow workers in the service of Christ Jesus*" were there; Crispus, who had been the leader of the synagogue, had joined the Church with his whole family along with Lucius, Jason and Sosipater who were Jews also; among the Italian converts were Quartus, Fortunatus and Tertius. Titus Justus, a Roman convert offered his house next to the synagogue as the first Christian Church in Corinth. There was Gaius, with whom Paul later lived and whose home later housed the Church. Paul wrote in Romans 16:23, "*Greeting also from Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole Church.*" Titus Justus and Gaius, having homes large enough at that time to house the Church, would have been men of wealth.

Stephanas and Chloe were wealthy converts who likewise brought their slaves into the Church. Probably the wealthiest and most outstanding citizen of Corinth who became a member of the Church was Erastus, the city treasurer.

One of the relics remaining today among the ruins of Ancient Corinth is a marble slab found in the pavement of the agora which reads: "*Erastus, the commissioner of public works, laid this pavement at his own expense.*" This dates back to the time of Paul's visit to Corinth. So we see that the Christian Community of Corinth was composed of Jews and Greeks, male and female, rich and poor, wise and foolish, slave and free. Some had come from pious Jewish families, some from aristocratic pagan backgrounds, and some had been rescued from the social cesspools of Corinth. The foundation of such a community was miraculous--a testimony to the power of the gospel. The problems later to arise within the community were not surprising--a testimony to the weakness of humanity.

After about eighteen months in Corinth, Paul departed with Prisca and Aquila for Asia Minor. After returning to Antioch and visiting the churches in the Galatian country, Paul returned to Ephesus where he had left Prisca and Aquila. Here he would work for about three years. From Ephesus he wrote the letter we now call his First Letter to the Corinthians.

There is certainly an interesting history behind this letter. In order to understand the contents, we need to understand what motivated the letter. The intent of the letter was not to formulate general principles of conduct, but to deal with concrete problems that were destroying the Christian Community in Corinth. It is the personal letter of a spiritual father responding to the dangerous situations in which his spiritual children have involved themselves.

Paul left a unified Church at peace with him and itself. After his departure other teachers came to Corinth. We know one was Apollos, a man of eloquence, full of spiritual fervor, who expressed himself fearlessly in the synagogue. From all reports he personally did the job well. We read in Acts:

*When he arrived he greatly strengthened those who through God's favor had become believers. He was vigorous in his public refutation of the Jewish party as he went about establishing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 18:27b-28).*

Later some Jewish teachers arrived on the scene with letters of authority and sought to discredit Paul's teachings.

About two years passed, and Paul began to receive disturbing reports about the Church at Corinth. A delegation of three members of the Corinth Church crossed the sea to Ephesus, about a two day journey, to consult with Paul. Some of Chloe's people brought word of trouble in Corinth. The Congregation was splitting into rival groups centering on their favorite teachers. Some centered on Apollos; others now held Paul to be inferior to Peter, who had personally been with Jesus. More serious problems than divisiveness were reported. There were cases of immorality in the Church--one man had even married his step-mother.

Paul wrote a letter around the spring of 55, in which he warned the community not to associate with immoral people. Part of this letter may be preserved in Second Corinthians (6:14-7:1). From what we read in First Corinthians 5:9, they misinterpreted his letter. Shortly afterwards Paul received a letter from the Corinthians in which they put a series of questions to him. Paul makes reference to this in First Corinthians 7:1. From all the sources, Paul gathered a rather accurate picture of the spiritual state of the Christian Community in Corinth. The picture was not good: there was divisiveness among the members and a laxity in administering discipline; they tolerated gross immorality and carried their disputes into secular courts; they were disorderly in their observance of the Lord's Supper; some were denying the resurrection of the dead. They indicated in their letter that they desired information concerning marriage, eating meat sacrificed to idols, and the proper use of spiritual gifts.

The attitude of the Church of Corinth toward Paul appeared to be that of children who feel they have outgrown their father. In the mind of Paul, they had become "puffed-up" in their knowledge and "putting on airs" because of their personal importance. Perhaps we have in the Christian Community of Corinth, the crisis of adolescence when a father or mother is seen only in a negative light. There was no open rebellion against the authority of Paul, but under the surface, there appeared to be a great deal of antagonism and resentment towards him. Perhaps their listing of themselves under the leadership of another man was their subtle denial of Paul's authority.

Paul's own attitude toward them appears to be ambivalent--suggestive of the love-hate relationship often characterized in the parent's reaction to



adolescent rebellion. It has been suggested that he subtly expressed his own opinion of them by holding before their eyes the exquisite portrait of charity in Chapter Thirteen as an exact opposite of themselves: they are impatient and unkind; they are jealous and boastful; they are arrogant and rude. They insist on their own way; they are irritable and resentful; they rejoice in doing wrong rather than doing right. There is perhaps another thinly disguised reference to the Corinthians when Paul writes: *“When I was a child, I used to talk like a child, think like a child, reason like a child. When I became a man I put childish ways aside” (1Cor.13:11).*

It appears at the writing of First Corinthians, no open hostility had broken out between Paul and the Corinthians. However, hostility shortly followed, after he paid a brief “painful” visit to Corinth that found expression in chapters ten through thirteen in Second Corinthians. Paul probably detected that the Corinthians were not being perfectly frank with him in the questions they directed to him in their letter. As we would say, “They weren't playing with a full deck.” They did not seek information on questions of which they were ignorant, but on ones over which they were in dispute. Behind these polite questions, Paul detected resentment toward himself. He got the feeling of being subjected to an examination in which he must defend himself.

Many people never distinguish between the essence and the accidents of life--between what is vital and what is expendable. Everything is put on the same level, which often results in nothing being valued. Youth often receive the same response from their parents, whether they grew their hair long or took drugs. Paul does not make this mistake. When he judges a thing to be detrimental to the spiritual welfare of his spiritual children, he comes on like “gang-busters.” He reacts with a strong emotional response characterized by anger, anxiety and exhortation. He becomes very authoritative and not conciliatory. The wrong is condemned, and no compassionate understanding is urged for the wrongdoer.

However, when Paul deals with matters such as the questions addressed to him by the Corinthians, even though he knows they express resentment and rebellion against himself, he calmly answers as a patient father. He doesn't arbitrarily hand down a decision. He addresses himself to each problem; he states the principles involved and draws a solution based upon the principles. Paul's answers have a lasting value to the Christian Community. Our problems today are often similar, and Paul has left us principles of lasting moral value, applicable to our problems today. We need also to bear in mind

that Paul's solutions to some of these problems were based upon his personal belief that the end of the world was imminent.

Paul deals with the varied subjects presented to him in a discernible, logical order. They are commonly listed as ten in number: church divisions, scandal, trials before secular judges, impurity, marriage, eating meat sacrificed to gods, behavior of women in public worship, behavior at the Lord's Supper, use of spiritual gifts, and resurrection of the dead. As we characterize the problems, we see that the first question is an ecclesiastical one; the next three are moral questions; the next two are social questions, which are followed by three liturgical questions; finally the last question deals with a dogmatic matter. The problems in the Christian Community at Corinth run through the entire life of the Church. It is a Community seriously troubled in every dimension of being.

As one reflects upon the organization of the letter, one must admire the wisdom of Paul. The first nine verses of the letter set the theme: union with Christ. Paul dwells on the relationship of a Christian with Jesus Christ. Union with Jesus Christ is the heart of Christian spirituality. This vital relationship gives unity to the entire letter.

In the first four chapters, Paul demonstrates that this union is discredited by factions and divisions. In chapters five and six, he teaches that sexual immorality destroys union with Christ. In chapter seven, he shows how marriage is a symbol of the holiness of this union. Chapters eight through Ten demonstrate how this union is desecrated through idolatry. Chapter eleven teaches how this union is actualized by the reception of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Chapters twelve through Fourteen teach that this union is disgraced by the disorder in community worship. Chapter fifteen teaches that our union with Jesus Christ is completed and consummated by our resurrection from the dead. Chapter sixteen deals with a practical application of this union--a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

The opening of his letter, like the overture to an orchestral work, sounds the themes to be expounded in the letter. Following the accepted protocol of letter writing, Paul identifies himself, greets the recipients of the letter, and offers thanksgiving. Paul loads the introduction formula. He is not only Paul the apostle, but "*Paul, called by God's will to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.*" He writes with God-given apostolic authority. This appointment he owes to no man. Man did not call him; man cannot deprive him of his role and its

authority. In his role as apostle, he is not inferior to Cephas, and by his call he is superior to Apollos. With his co-worker Sosthenes he sends:

*Greetings to the Church of God which is in Corinth; to you who have been consecrated in Christ Jesus and called to be a holy people, as to all those who, wherever they may be, call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours. Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor.1:2-3).*

In a few words Paul describes the Christian vocation. There are no individual greetings. The spirit of individuality is already too strong in Corinth. Paul greets a Community. The Community is one Body and it should not be separated. He ardently desires that they will come to a conscious awareness of themselves as Community. They are the Assembly of God--the *ecclesia* of God. This community is no ordinary gathering of people assembled because of mutual interests. This Assembly, or this Church, is a work of God--a divine creation. As *"the Lord God (once) formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being"* (Gn.2:7), so from the human clay of Corinth God fashioned a church, and into this church He breathed His Spirit. The Church of God was entirely God's creation. Paul would later warn the Corinthians: *"If anyone destroys God's Temple, God will destroy him, for the Temple of God is holy"* (1Cor.3:16b).

With his very first notes, Paul sounds the unworldliness of the Church. He proceeds to speak of the members composing the Community as people consecrated. He reminds them they have been dedicated and offered to God through their union with Christ Jesus, which occurred in their baptism. As Jesus did not belong to this world, so those in Christ Jesus do not belong to this world. Paul does not call them saints, but reminds them, as consecrated people, they are *"called to be holy people."* He emphasizes again their individual responsibility to be a holy community when he recalls their vocation to be a holy people.

Paul underlines "holy" because it signifies separation from this profane world, and purification of its contamination, in order that the people of God will truly be an honorable and worthy consecration to God. Paul endeavors to remind them that they are not alone in these great blessings. Others have received the same gifts as the Corinthians. Together they all make up the Church of God. We possess the same Lord. If we all recognize the Lordship of Jesus Christ over our lives, there will be little cause for disunity in the



Community. The life of the Community should be *“grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* Paul makes the Lord Jesus Christ an equal source of divine life within the Church with God our Father. The unity of the Father and Son are placed before the eyes of the Church as its model of unity on earth.

One of the major sources of division in Corinth resulted from pride in the spiritual gifts received. Gifts given by the Holy Spirit for building up the entire Church were being perverted into instruments for self-glorification and divisiveness. In Paul’s prayer of thanksgiving for the Corinthians, he acknowledges the abundance of gifts received; this would greatly please them. However, he seeks to torpedo their pride by acknowledging these gifts come from God, to whom all the glory belongs. The Corinthians possessed these gifts, not because of their personal holiness, but because the gifts bear witness in their lives of the power of the gospel. With one eye on God and the other on the Corinthians, Paul thanks God for what they have received, but subtly informs them that they still have a long way to go *“as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* And although they are weak, the Lord will strengthen them and truly bring them into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord.

Those words would have struck a sour note in their hearts. They believed they had it made; they were saved. They were so turned in upon themselves that they were losing sight of the Lord. Paul seeks to raise their eyes and behold this God to whom one day they too must give an accounting for their membership in the Church, as they stand before the seat of eternal judgment.

Paul’s prayer of thanksgiving is an excellent example of praying and preaching at the same time. It is difficult to do both, because it demands having one’s eyes in two places at the same time. We would never wish to underestimate the power of Paul. Let us listen to this prayer:

*I continually thank my God for you because of the favor he has bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, in whom you have been richly endowed with every gift of speech and knowledge. Likewise, the witness I bore to Christ has been so confirmed among you that you lack no spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, and it was he who called you to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our*

*Lord (1Cor.1:4-9).*

The thoughts expressed offer us great consolation. We, too, are reminded that we have been called into fellowship with God's own Son, who is our Lord. We can have the utmost confidence as we struggle to be holy people and worthy of that fellowship, that the Lord Jesus will not abandon us, and He will achieve the victory for us in the end, so that we can stand blameless before the eternal judgment seat.

In the first nine verses, the name of Jesus appears eight times, and that of Christ nine times. The notes are played, sharp and crystal clear: Jesus Christ is the heart and the essence of the Christian Life. All Christian holiness depends on one being united in heart and soul with Jesus Christ.

Paul uses the formal part of his letter to present what should be in the Church. Now he turns to deal with what *is*. He will struggle to bring the reality into some degree of harmony with the ideal. As the body of the letter begins, Paul comes immediately to the point--disunity within the Community. He appeals to the Church in the name of Jesus Christ--who is its acknowledged Lord--to cease this divisiveness and come to the unity of spirit that brothers in the Lord ought to possess:

*I beg you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to agree in what you say. Let there be no factions; rather, be united in mind and judgment. I have been informed, my brothers, by certain members of Chloe's household that you are quarreling among yourselves (1Cor.1:10-11).*

The word used to express quarreling is *eris*. *Eris* is a work of "the flesh." *Eris* is as closely connected to *echtra* as a child is to its mother--as the fruit is to its tree. *Echtra* expresses the feeling and attitude of hatred towards another. *Eris* is the external expression of internal hatred--*echtra*. First there is *echtra* in the heart; a spirit of hatred possesses one's spirit. This spirit must express itself in concrete manifestations. It strives to be incarnated. It incarnates itself in quarrels, brawls, factions, divisiveness. Wherever there is *eris* there must be *echtra*. Paul immediately puts his finger on the problem. The Spirit of agape-love has been destroyed. The Corinthians pride themselves on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, while they destroy the very life of the Holy Spirit within the Church.

*Eris* within the Christian Community found expression in personal cults.

These cults centered on great personalities, such as Christ, Cephas, Paul, Apollos. However, there was no true imitation of the cultic leaders. Cultists support their own egos by assuming identification with their leaders. This is purely a mental exercise that may produce some superficial external manifestations. Cultists become no more like their leaders than do Dodger or Ram fans become like one of the players on the athletic field. The cultists remain the same while making the leader an extension of their own personalities. They pride themselves in the virtues, powers, and talents of the leader, as if they themselves personally possessed them. We have much the same thing today in our intense athletic fans. Why should anyone other than a Dodger or Ram player be depressed over the loss of a game? (Unless one has money bet on them.) Yet the fans are often depressed over their losses. Why? Because of their identification with the ball club. They personally suffer loss with their ball club. Since it is all so common, it must be all so human. But the Christian Community is not a ball club. Such earthly things should not be present in the Church of God. Paul writes:

*This is what I mean: One of you will say, "I belong to Paul," another, "I belong to Apollos," still another, "Cephas has my allegiance," and the fourth, "I belong to Christ" (1Cor.1:12).*

If these were ball clubs, you know which fans would be the proudest of all. As best as we can determine, the party of Paul consisted of the charter members of the Church. They took pride in their priority in the community, and their conversion at the hands of the great apostle to the Gentiles. They, no doubt, maintained a degree of loyalty to Paul's teachings.

The party of Apollos was composed of personal devotees of the powerful Alexandrian preacher. They would have considered themselves to be the intelligentsia of the Christian Community--men and women possessing wisdom. Acts 18:24 tells us that Apollos was "*an eloquent man, well versed in Scriptures.*" Some scholars believe Apollos is the author of the Letter to the Hebrews. His preaching eloquence attracted those not impressed by the style of Paul. The philosophy of the Stoics was very prevalent in Alexandria where Apollos had lived. He probably integrated their philosophy into his sermons. This would have popularized him with the Greeks.

*Cephas* is Aramaic for Peter. The party of Cephas probably was composed of Jewish-Christian converts who moved to Corinth from Palestine. They would have advocated the superiority of the Jerusalem leadership and a faith more

in keeping with the Jewish heritage.

The Party of Christ was probably the most destructive one of all. Members of this party are believed to have been Paul's most bitter foes. All three of the other groups acknowledged some human authority in the Christian Community. The Party of Christ did not. They were the freedom faction. The members advocated complete religious and ethical freedom. They opposed apostolic authority in any form. They claimed special revelations from the Holy Spirit. We would probably find in this cult the roots of the Gnostic heresy that would plague the Church in the next century.

Paul writes to the Philippians:

*It is true, some preach Christ from motives of envy and rivalry, but others do so out of good will. ...others promote Christ, not from pure motives but as an intrigue against me (Phil.1:15,17a).*

Paul does not direct his argument against any one faction but against the fact of division: "*I beg you brothers ... to agree in what you say ... be united in mind and judgment*" (1Cor.1:10). There is no pre-occupation with the beliefs and practices of any one party. He is concerned with the sinful, divisive spirit pervading the Church, threatening the unity of the Body of Christ. When Paul asks the question, "*Has Christ, then, been divided into parts?*" (1Cor.1:13), he pinpoints the problem. Of course the answer should be in the negative. If Christ has not been divided, but the Community in Corinth has been, the deduction is clear: none of them are of Christ. It is not a matter of who is theologically in the right, all are wrong, because the seamless garment of Christ, which the pagans did not divide, the disciples do divide.

Paul not only rebukes the party spirit, but he makes it clear that he never cultivated a cult by proposing himself as a cultic leader. He is an apostle of Jesus Christ. He had represented Jesus; he had not presented Paul. He had refused a ministry of baptism lest people mistakenly believe they were forming some special relationship with Paul, rather than entering a vital union with Jesus Christ. Paul writes:

*Was it Paul who was crucified for you? Was it in Paul's name you were baptized? Thank God, I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so there are none who can say that you were baptized in my name. Oh, and I baptized the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I am not aware of having baptized anyone else. For Christ did*



*not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel (1Cor.1:13a-17a).*

God called Paul to preach the gospel. Preach, Paul did--Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified. Paul proclaimed Christ sent him *“to preach the gospel--not with worldly ‘wisdom,’ however, lest the cross of Christ be rendered void of its meaning!” (1Cor.1:17b).* Paul goes on to say:

*As for myself, brothers, when I came to you I did not come proclaiming God’s testimony with any particular eloquence or “wisdom.” No, I determined that while I was with you I would speak of nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified... My message and my preaching had none of the persuasive force of “wise” argumentation, but the convincing power of the Spirit. As a consequence, your faith rests not on the wisdom of men but on the power of God (1Cor.2:1-5).*

Was his preaching now a point for his condemnation? He certainly had not ever preached Paul, nor had he put so much of Paul in the preaching of Jesus that Paul overshadowed Jesus. There have been ministers of the Word who could stand in the pulpit and read the phone book and move the congregation to tears and laughter. Many preachers have never stood in the shadows of the greatest Shakespearean actors. They have grand voices, a delightful delivery, a power with words. There always remains the temptation to preach self rather than Christ. It may please the people, and make the preacher popular, but it lacks the power of God, and gives no glory to God, nor does it afford spiritual edification for the people.

Great oratory was an art among the Greeks. They had a weakness for it. The Greeks loved wisdom. When a speaker combined oratory and knowledge, he attracted many fans. The Greeks believed--with Socrates--that salvation is laid in knowledge, evil being a matter of ignorance. Men of great minds became the intellectual heroes of the time. At this time there was a great revival of old religions among the Greeks and Romans that promised, to the initiated, salvation through secret knowledge.

It would be understandable that the Greeks within the Christian Community would have been attracted to Apollos. They preferred him to Paul, but for the wrong reasons. Paul recognized in this attraction a love for the wisdom of this world, and an implied rejection of the “wisdom of the cross”--a turning from the Lord Jesus. On the scale of human wisdom, Jesus Christ was found wanting. How could a man save his followers when he had been unable to save himself? Paul preached the answer to this question and called it the “Wisdom

of God.” Paul understood that the Wisdom of God had been expressed in Christ Crucified. The worldly mind saw in Christ only tragedy or retribution. As long as man examines God’s deeds with his own logical standards, the Wisdom of God escapes man. (God and man are not in the same ball park when it comes to understanding the mysteries of God in this world!) Man must see things from God’s point of view, which he cannot do unless he sacrifices his own point of view. For man to understand God’s workings in this world and in his life, the mind of man must be transformed and renewed. Paul expressed it well in Romans:

*Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may judge what is God’s will, what is good, pleasing and perfect (Rom.12:2).*

When Paul preached in Athens he got a good taste of the world’s reaction to the Wisdom of God: *“When they heard about the raising of the dead, some sneered, while others said, ‘We must hear you on this topic some other time’” (Acts 17:32).* Christ Crucified was an absurdity to them. It took Athens five hundred years to come to faith in Jesus Christ. Paul himself had once shared the Jewish reaction to Christ Jesus: *“How could Jesus be the Messiah when he died upon a cross, cursed of God? For Scriptures testify: Cursed be he that hangs upon a tree!”* Christ Crucified was a stumbling block for Jews in accepting Jesus to be the Messiah of Israel.

In order to believe in Jesus Christ Crucified, one must receive the grace to believe. When men heard Jesus preached, and refused to believe what Paul taught, they had hardened their hearts and rejected God’s plan of salvation; they were headed for eternal ruin. So Paul writes:

*The message of the cross is complete absurdity to those who are headed for ruin ... Scripture says, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and thwart the cleverness of the clever” (1Cor.1:18-19).*

But to those who believe:

*... to us who are experiencing salvation it is the power of God ...to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s folly is wiser than men, and his weakness more powerful than men (1Cor.1:18,24-25).*

The Corinthians prided themselves upon their salvation and the spiritual gifts lavished upon them. This Paul acknowledged in the prayer of thanksgiving: *“You have been richly endowed with every gift of speech and knowledge. (1Cor.1:5).* He had reminded them that Christ was the source. However, now the Corinthians are enamored with “the wisdom” of this world. Paul seeks to force them to contrast their lives of faith in Jesus Christ with the lives of the intelligentsia of this world, whose worldly “wisdom” they so admire. The wisdom of the world had not led its possessors to salvation; they were perishing through lack of true wisdom. Paul attributes their being lost to their own perversity:

*In fact, whatever can be known about God is clear to them; he himself made it so. Since the creation of the world, invisible realities, God’s eternal power and divinity, have become visible, recognized through the things he has made. Therefore these men are have no excuse. They certainly had knowledge of God, yet they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks (Rom.1:19-21).*

Paul asks the Corinthians:

*Where is the wise man to be found? Where the scribe? Where is the master of worldly argument? Has not God turned the wisdom of this world into folly? Since in God’s wisdom the world did not come to know him through “wisdom,” it pleased God to save those who believe through the absurdity of the preaching of the gospel. Yes, Jews demand “signs” and Greeks look for “wisdom,” but we preach Christ crucified--a stumbling block to Jews, and an absurdity to Gentiles (1Cor.1:20-23).*

Paul implies salvation does not flow from seeing miracles or from hearing logical presentations but through proclaiming the Word of God.

Paul attacks the pride of the Corinthians in verse 25. He told them that “*God’s folly*” is wiser than men. The Corinthians viewed themselves as wise men; they scorned those not as wise as themselves. Paul takes delight in reminding them that each one of them is truly part of God’s folly. When a logical person desires to start a movement in this world, he seeks powerful personalities and men of learning and those who have status in the Community. Such men cause society to move. These are the leaders; the remainder are followers.

Paraphrasing Paul: “Look what God did! He picked you people for the church of God. How foolish in the eyes of the world!” (see 1Cor.1:26-27). Paul writes:

*Brothers, you are among those called. Consider your situation. Not many of you are wise, as men account wisdom; not many are influential; and surely not many are well-born. God chose those whom the world considers absurd to shame the wise; he singled out the weak of this world to shame the strong. He chose the world's lowborn and despised, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who were something (1Cor.1:26-28).*

Paul maintains that God uses the membership within the Church at Corinth to destroy the pride of the proud, and to confound the strength of the strong—“so that mankind can do no boasting before God.” But now these same Christians are like fine peacocks, strutting around Corinth with a big tail spread and making shrill noises. They have forgotten that once they were no more than poor field hands, and if it hadn't been for the grace of God, they would never have been anything more. Can they not see they were never anything in this world by themselves, and of themselves they never will be? Everything they have is from God. If God's gifts were withdrawn, what would be of their own? What good would they find to boast of? Paul says it all:

*God it is who has given you life in Christ Jesus. He has made him our wisdom and also our justice, our sanctification, and our redemption. This is just as you find it written, “Let him who would boast, boast in the Lord” (1Cor.1:30-31).*

In a sentence, Paul reveals the true richness of the Christian Life--we have been given eternal life in Jesus Christ. We have been richly endowed with the eternal jewels of redemption, righteousness, holiness, and wisdom. Jesus redeemed us and shares with us His own state of righteousness before God; he gave to us the Source of His own holiness with the gift of the Holy Spirit; the Wisdom God imparted to Jesus, He shares with us, “for lovers tell secrets to one another.” As the bride is adorned for her wedding, so Jesus has adorned us in preparation for the eternal banquet. All else is secondary and expendable: our position in the Christian Community, and all other charismatic gifts--all are expendable!

St. Angela of Foligno once wrote,

*Dignities that puff up the soul are vanities that are accursed. Flee them, for they are dangerous; but listen, listen. They are less dangerous than spiritual vanities. To make a show that one knows how to speak about God, to understand the Scriptures, to accomplish miracles, to make a parade of one's heart in the Divine--that is the vanity of vanities; and worldly vanities are, after that supreme vanity, small faults quickly corrected.*

Father Thomas Judge wrote to the pioneer Cenacle members:

*What is humility? It is nothing but a realization of truth, acknowledging our relations with God, recognizing this--that of ourselves and by ourselves we have nothing. It is true inventory. When humility is true, it finds nothing in its coffers--all belongs to God. We have nothing but our sins and evil inclinations; those God did not give us, but everything else belongs to Him. Life, grace of manners, health, talent, strength, success--not one of these things is ours. All belongs to God.*

St. Marie of Jesus Crucified once wrote,

*The proud man is like a grain of wheat thrown into water: it swells up, it gets big. Expose the grain to the sun: it dries out, it is burnt up. The humble man is like a grain buried in the earth: it goes down, it is hidden, it disappears, it dies but in order to live again.*

## CHAPTER 2

### RELIGION PURE AND UNDEFILED

The religious life of Saul of Tarsus was radically changed by his dramatic encounter with Jesus of Nazareth on the Road to Damascus. The revelations he received completely altered his religious life. In his retreat within the Arabian desert, he quietly meditated for some months on the mysteries revealed. He came to the realization that Jesus, through his birth, death and resurrection, had radically altered man's relationship with God. Man's relationship with God would never again be the same. Nothing would be left unmoved by what had occurred. The destiny of the world would be shaped by it. A full revelation of the Divine Plan had not only been revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, but inaugurated and brought to completion--in the sense that the Divine Work of Salvation had been consummated, finished. However, it yet remained to be applied in the unfolding and evolving of man's existence on this earth. The power of the salvation wrought in Jesus had yet to be experienced in the lives of men and women, just as it had failed to be experienced in Saul's life prior to that divine encounter on the Road to Damascus.

Paul realized that the religious relationship with God as expressed formerly in his Jewish faith had ended. It had been a preparatory stage; it revealed what was to come, but in a mysterious way, just as the images of a dream confusingly manifest the unconscious truths of the dreamer's life. That which had occurred in and through Jesus Christ was not a new addition to the Jewish Religion, it was a New Creation. The Old must pass away. As the friend of the bridegroom, the best man, must make way and step aside for the bridegroom, so must the Old make way for the New. In the case with Israel--the friend of the bridegroom--this did not come to be. Jesus, the Bridegroom, had been destroyed because the religious leaders of Jewry recognized the potential threat Jesus was to the established religion. However, the very death of Jesus achieved and inaugurated what they had so violently sought to curtail--it ushered in the New Creation. Man's wiles will not frustrate the Divine Will. God even uses these wiles to accomplish His Will.



Early members of the Christian Community sought to adopt Christian Revelation to the Jewish Religion. Paul was one of the first to understand these words of our Lord: *“You do not put a new patch on an old garment. You do not put new wine in old wine skins”* (see Mt.9:16-17). The first battle to preserve the purity of the Christian Religion had to be waged against the Judaizers within the Community. We have seen in Acts, Galatians, and Romans that certain Jewish Christians sought to tie salvation to the observance of the Mosaic Law. Through the energetic efforts of Paul, the umbilical cord was severed at the Council of Jerusalem when *Peter* declared: *“Our belief is rather that we are saved by the favor of the Lord Jesus and so are they”* (Acts 15:11).

The war had been won, however many battles remained yet to be fought, and Paul would be in the thick of them. For this old warrior of God, there would be little external peace in this world. To the very end he would be contending with the enemies of Jesus of Nazareth and the Christian Revelation, and then these enemies would silence his tongue by beheading him along the Appian Way.

Paul had to engage in a new war in Corinth. He won the first battle, but apparently this war would continue, in one degree or another, until the End. The Christian Religion confronted the world in Corinth. This *aión* lies under the power of Satan and the wicked spirits, and it resists the redemptive power of Christ. It will do so until the hour of its submission, which will occur at the Parousia of the Lord. Certain Corinthian Christians sought to adapt Christian Revelation to the world by bringing Christianity in line with the acceptable norms of human reason and ethics: in other words, to integrate the Christian Religion into humanity. They rightly reasoned that mankind would be better for the integration. On the surface this may not appear to be wrong; however, Paul is not a surface man—he possessed in-depth insight. He knew the Corinthians were trying to reduce the Christian Religion to a philosophical system. This truly, subtly, perverted Christianity to support the heresies of Hellenism that dominated the intellectual world of the Roman Empire, namely: that the Divine did not interfere in the affairs of human beings, salvation was achieved through knowledge, and all evil was due to ignorance. Such philosophers certainly would support such teachings of Jesus as: *“The truth will set you free”* (Jn.8:32), and *“Authentic worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and Truth”* (Jn.4:23). Those passages, no doubt, became the battle cry of the Gnostic heretics.

In Israel, the Christian Jews sought to adapt Christianity to Judaism. In Corinth, the Christian Gentiles sought to adapt Christianity to the philosophies of this world or, better still, to subject it to human reason. The Christian Religion was being made into another philosophical religion that promised salvation to those who possessed its secret, esoteric knowledge. As history would unfold, all this would come to be in some degree. Christianity would be grafted onto religions such as Islam, and it would be assumed into many philosophical and psychic systems that would pervert it, dilute it, render it impotent--rendering the Cross of Christ void of meaning.

The purpose of Christ and His revelation, as rightly conceived by Paul, was to transform, renew and recreate the lives of men and the very face of the earth. It is not something that adapts itself to the religions of men--to their philosophies and cultures. It stands beyond all that is of this world. It exists in this world, not to become part of this world, but in order to be the divine leaven that transforms this world. The Christian Religion stands in this world as the power that transforms the lives of people through its power to remove sins and bestow life-giving grace; it possesses power to renew nations and cultures. As such it must be preserved, for it is the world's one hope for salvation. We must not, as Paul knew, seek to conform Christ to ourselves, our cultures, our world. Paul would be apt to say, "Do not conform Christ to this age--but let this age become transformed by its renewal in Christ." It is not so much that Christ is in us, in our culture, in our philosophies, in our religion, but rather that we, our cultures, philosophies, and religion are in Christ. Herein alone lies salvation!

This does not imply a total spiritualization of self, culture, religion, etc. in the manner some have taught and maintained. God became Man in a historical moment of time. He expressed Himself through the human nature, and lived within a given religious and social culture. He was immersed in the world, but not part of it. This immersion did not contaminate Him, but purified all in which He immersed Himself. He came not to destroy, but to save and perfect. Christian Spirituality is pneumatic, but it is not angelicism or spiritualism. It is Incarnational. By that is meant, God became flesh in order to make all things holy. The Christian Religion is not anti-material, anti-earth. When we say our spirituality is "pneumatic," it means all things must be sanctified through the power of the Holy Spirit, and properly oriented toward God. All people, all ages, all cultures must submit in faith to Jesus Christ in order to be saved--in order to receive the Holy Spirit. Human beings are saved as human beings. Christianity finds proper expression in the world where there is

submission to Jesus Christ, not where Christ is used to “gild” human existence. The question needs always to be asked: Is Christ being glorified in this human situation, or is Christ being used to glorify man and his world?

There is a vital distinction here. Paul, better than anyone else, understood this truth. For this reason he developed, expounded, and defended the theology of the Cross. He argued that wise men did not come to salvation through their human intellects. He maintained that the human intellect had the capability of knowing God, and recognizing man’s moral obligations to God. But, rather than do so, it perversely turned away to seek glorification of self. Therefore, God rejected human reason as a means to salvation. The Jews demanded God prove Himself to them through signs and wonders that would wondrously exalt them above the Roman Empire. They refused to recognize Him in the signs and wonders He offered them. God rejected signs and wonders as a means leading to salvation. God chose the Cross of Christ as the means of world-salvation, thereby scandalizing the faith of the Jews and confounding the “wisdom” of the Greeks.

Nothing could be more antithetical (contrary) to Greek wisdom and Jewish messianic expectations than the Cross of Christ. In the days when Jesus walked this earth there was no worse juridical sentence than *Ibis ad Crucem!* (You will go to the Cross!) The Romans considered it too disgraceful for the death of a Roman citizen, and reserved it only for slaves and foreigners. The Jews considered it a divine confirmation of criminal guilt in the light of the Scripture, “*Cursed is he who hangs upon the tree.*” Those condemned to the Cross were crucified naked along public roads, for all to see their shame. The crucified often hung there several days before death mercifully arrived. No end to a life could be more ignominious--more inglorious. Nothing testified more than crucifixion to the defeat of a person--to their total failure--to their complete weakness and impotence.

God chose the cross as the means of His supreme and ultimate revelation. God willed by this means to destroy the pride of the proud and confound the cleverness of the clever. God willed that men would be saved through faith and through no other means. Furthermore, He subjected that faith to a belief in Jesus Christ and Him Crucified. It was a faith that left no room for human pride. It demanded complete submission of the human spirit--mind and heart--to the revealed Will of God. Humanity must acknowledge the radical insufficiency of human reason and human efforts. This it does by accepting faith in Jesus Christ Crucified as the sole means of salvation.

Paul knew from the point of view of human reasoning that faith in Jesus Christ Crucified for salvation was an absurdity (*moria*): “*The message of the cross is complete [moria] absurdity to those who are headed for ruin...a stumbling block to Jews, and an absurdity to Gentiles*” (1Cor.1:18,23). Men reject salvation through Christ Crucified, and God rejects all those seeking salvation in wisdom. It pleased God to save those who believe through the absurdity of the preaching of the gospel. It is the Power of God to us who are experiencing salvation “*through our faith in Jesus Christ Crucified.*” Paul holds before the eyes of the world Jesus Christ Crucified, and he loudly proclaims: “*Ecce Homo--Behold the Power of God and the Wisdom of God!*” “*Behold the Folly of God--it is wiser than the wisdom of man!*” “*If you believe in it--you will be saved!*” (See 1Cor.1:18-25)

The Cross, as the instrument of Jesus’ death, became a symbol of all that the death of Jesus effected toward the salvation of the world: redemption, expiation, righteousness, sanctification and salvation. All graces of the redemption flow from the Cross. Christ Crucified is the root of Christian wisdom. Paul rests his preaching upon it. The preaching of the gospel proclaims all that the Cross symbolizes. Paul implies this when he said:

*I determined that while I was with you, I would speak of nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified... As a consequence, your faith rests not on the wisdom of men but on the power of God (1Cor.2:2,5).*

*As a result of this faith, God it is who has given you life in Christ Jesus. He has made him our wisdom and also our justice, our sanctification, and our redemption (1Cor.1:30).*

The first three chapters of Corinthians war with *Sophia* (wisdom), *Gnosis* (knowledge) and *Logos* (rational argumentation). It does not hold, as some have maintained, that *Sophia*, *Gnosis*, and *Logos* are three arms of the flesh but, rather, they are three human powers, neutral in themselves, that cannot save mankind. In fact, they cannot even convert mankind to the true religion. They have become impotent to produce divine grace. This does not imply they have no Christian value. We do not have anti-intellectualism here, but the condemnation of the exaltation of the intellect as a direct channel of salvific grace. *Sophia*, *Gnosis*, and *Logos* certainly have their proper place in the Christian Religion. That is precisely Paul’s point: put them in their proper place. Paul was certainly well endowed with all three of these natural blessings

and powers. God made excellent use of them in the cause of Christianity, even to such a degree that certain Jewish enemies of Christianity have insisted that Paul was the true founder of Christianity.

Let us try to keep Paul's presentation in its proper context. Certain members of the Christian Community were seeking to Hellenize Christianity, rather than Christianize Hellenism. They were striving to make Christianity an esoteric philosophical system. Paul attacks the ideas of Sophia (Wisdom), Gnosis (Knowledge) and Logos (Rational Argumentation), not because they are three evil sisters with no place in Christianity, but rather because they are neutral powers, and cannot bring men either to conversion or salvation. To rely on such negates the power of the Gospel. Faith built upon such ideas places its foundation in sand and cannot endure. In addition, being natural powers they are conducive to being perverted by the "flesh" and the Evil One.

Certain members of the Church were enchanted with Sophia. (The Greeks loved Wisdom.) This implies they were turning towards natural philosophy and knowledge, and magical sciences. They were giving the impression to others that their spiritual insights and powers were due to their "secret wisdom" rather than to the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the situation Paul had to contend with. Paul informs the Corinthians that there is Christian Wisdom, and he strongly suggests that they do not possess it. To a degree they do possess wisdom; all the baptized possess knowledge of Christian Wisdom through faith. But Paul distinguishes between two types of human beings, and two classes of Christians. People of the world he calls *psychikoi* (unspiritual people). These are the children of Adam who are animated and motivated by the *psyche* (soul) inherited from Adam. They possess a natural life, and depend upon the senses, and the natural powers of reason and mundane knowledge. In contrast with the *psychikoi* are the *pneumatikoi*. These are men and women in whom the Spirit of Jesus dwells. The Holy Spirit dwells within them, and inspires and empowers their actions. However, Paul makes an interesting distinction among the *pneumatikoi* within the Church. Some he calls the *teleios*. These are the *pneumatikoi* who are fully developed: men and women who are mature in the Spirit--perfected. But also, the Christian Community houses the *nepioi*--the infants in the Spirit. In their thinking and behavior they still, evidently, walk according to the flesh. They are enslaved to the elements of this world. Because of this they do not possess the spiritual insight to properly discern the things of God. The *teleios* cannot speak to the *nepioi* of the deeper things of God, because they are still too deeply immersed in this world and cannot comprehend the deeper religious mysteries. The

*nepioi* are not far removed from the *psychikoi*. Paul considers the Corinthians as *nepioi*; they, however, consider themselves to be *teleios* because of the many charismatic gifts they possess.

Paul writes: *“There is to be sure, a certain wisdom which we express among the spiritually mature.”* This would certainly be a reference to “those strong in the faith.” The spiritually mature were those Christians advanced in faith, hope and charity. Paul goes on to confirm that it is not knowledge to be grasped through the human intellect but one received through divine revelation. It is not the wisdom of this age nor the rulers of this age, who are men headed for destruction. No, what we utter is God’s wisdom: a mysterious, hidden wisdom. God planned it before all ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age know the mystery: if they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory. Of this wisdom it is written: *“Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it so much as dawned on man what God has prepared for those who love him” (1Cor.2:6-9).*

Some years later, John the Evangelist was no doubt expressing the essence of this mysterious wisdom when he wrote:

*In the beginning was the Word: the Word was in God and the Word was God ... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we have seen his glory: The glory of an only Son coming from the Father filled with enduring love ... He was in the world, and through him the world was made, yet the world did not know who he was. To his own he came, yet his own did not accept him. Any who did accept him he empowered to become children of God. These are they who believe in his name--who were begotten not by blood, nor by carnal desire, nor by man’s willing it, but by God ... For while the law was given through Moses, this enduring love came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, ever at the Father’s side, who has revealed him (Jn.1:1,14,10,17-18).*

What knowledge could be more noble, more mysterious--further removed from the mind of man--than that divine revelation? When one understands this revelation in light of the fact that Jesus Christ died crucified on a cross, one possesses the key that opens understanding to see why Jesus Christ is *“the Power of God and the Wisdom of God.”* Herein is encased the mystery of the Incarnation and the mystery of the Redemption in its fullness.



These mysteries Paul does not teach the Corinthians. However, they are known to the “spiritually mature.” Paul tells them, “*Yet God has revealed this wisdom to us [the teleios] through the Spirit*” (1Cor.2:10). Paul confirms that such knowledge is not accessible to human reason, but comes only through revelation. The “wise” Corinthians preach wisdom, but it is of the world, not of the Spirit.

In the Gospel according to John, Jesus promised His disciples:

*“This much have I told you while I was still with you” (Jn.14:25).*

*“I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now” (16:12).*

*“I will ask the Father and he will give you another Paraclete--to be with you always: the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot accept, since it neither sees him nor recognizes him ~ but you can recognize him because he remains with you and will be within you” (14:16-17).*

*“The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will instruct you in everything, and remind you of all that I told you” (14:26).*

*“When the Paraclete comes, the Spirit of Truth...he will bear witness on my behalf” (15:26).*

*“When he comes, however, being the Spirit of Truth he will guide you to all truth” (16:13).*

*“You must bear witness as well, for you have been with me from the beginning” (15:27).*

Paul explains why this wisdom can only be a product of the Holy Spirit: “*The Spirit scrutinizes all matters, even the deep things of God*” (1Cor.2:10b). No human mind can penetrate into the mystery of God’s Mind. For that matter, even the secrets of the human heart are not available to the minds of others. They can make shrewd guesses; can even believe they are 90% certain as to what the secret chambers of another’s mind holds, but they will never possess complete certainty unless the other reveals it to them. As an old radio serial used to say: “*Who knows what evil lurks within the hearts of men? The Shadow*

*knows!*” If by shadow is meant man’s own spirit, Paul would agree. He writes, “*Who, for example knows a man’s innermost self but the man’s own spirit within him?*” (1Cor.2:11a). Spirit, or *pneuma*, here is equivalent to *nous*--the human mind. So it is with God--only the Spirit of God knows the Mind of God, and Only the Spirit may reveal it to man. “*Similarly, no one knows what lies at the depths of God but the Spirit of God*” (1Cor.2:11b).

Paul implies that the Corinthians do not possess this knowledge because of their spiritual immaturity: “*The Spirit we have received is not the world’s spirit but God’s Spirit, helping us to recognize the gifts he has given us*” (1Cor.2:12). “*The spirit of the world*” would be a reference to the mental attitude that evaluates everything according to human reason and worldly standards. The Spirit of the Lord dwells and acts in the “spiritually mature”--the *pneumatikoi* who are *teleios*. They are able to think with Christ, and judge things from the divine point of view: to “*judge what is God’s will, what is good, pleasing, and perfect.*” All the baptized may possess the Holy Spirit, but they do not all possess the Holy Spirit of Wisdom. That is a gift from the Holy Spirit to the *teleios*.

Paul believes that the Holy Spirit not only inspires insight into divine realities, but also inspires the very language in which these truths are expressed. There is a vocabulary of the Holy Spirit. This vocabulary will not be understood by those not of the Spirit. Even those “in the Spirit” must receive the Gift of Understanding in order to comprehend. Therefore the *teleios* not only understand truths imperceptible to earthly minded people, but they express them in words incomprehensible to the *psychikoi*. To them it all sounds like nonsense. It is considered ridiculous. It has been said that what is foolish to one person is that which goes beyond their powers to understand. Paul makes it clear that the *sermo sapientiae* (words of wisdom) expressed by the *teleios* will be misunderstood and misinterpreted by two classes of people: the *psychikoi* and the *nepioi*. They will not only misunderstand words of spiritual nature, but they will rashly and harshly misjudge the behavior of the *telios*. The *teleios* within the Christian Community are constantly being criticized by the men and women of the world, and by the spiritually immature within the Christian Community.

In order to understand Christian truths, and the behavior motivated by those truths, the human mind must be elevated by grace. To understand these truths and the response they demand, the mind of the Christian must be illuminated by the Holy Spirit. As long as the spirit of a Christian resembles

that of a chicken always clucking, scratching, and picking in earthly things, it will never be elevated to comprehend the mysteries of the Christian Religion and saintly behavior. Trying to bring such people to understand and appreciate the spiritual truths that the spiritually mature live by has been compared in Scripture to throwing pearls before swine. They are too sensible to the things of this earth to comprehend, and they are too insensible to the dimension of the spirit to perceive. All this Paul tells the Corinthians when he writes to them:

*We speak of these, not in words of human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, thus interpreting spiritual things in spiritual terms. The natural man does not accept what is taught by the Spirit of God. For him, that is absurdity. He cannot come to know such teaching because it must be appraised in a spiritual way. The spiritual man, on the other hand, can appraise everything, though he himself can be appraised by no one. For, "Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ (1Cor.2:13-16).*

To have "the mind of Christ" is equivalent to having "the spirit of Christ." This would be a reference to possessing that same Spirit that "scrutinizes all matters, even the deep things of God." One author has wisely pointed out, "*The Spirit does not supply information for study, industry, or science, but he does enable the 'spiritual man' to judge everything in the universe according to the divine plan for man's destiny.*"

Paul makes it very clear that although the Corinthians have been richly endowed with every gift of speech and knowledge, they have not received the gift of wisdom because they have remained spiritual infants. They are retarded spiritually despite the reception of the charismatic gifts. Paul makes it clear that God's love for the Christians does not equal the Christians' love for God. People often receive "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" and accompanying charismatic gifts, and mistakenly confuse the love of God for them with their love for God. Perhaps, for the first time in their lives they consciously experience God's love for them. The corresponding feelings that accompany this experience are often mistakenly believed to be genuine love of God. In reality they are the effects of being loved. The experience is certainly an invitation and call to love God in return. At this point, such souls do not love God or if so, only meagerly. They must be taught what it means to love God. Later, Paul clearly describes what it truly means to love, but for the time

being, he proves to the Corinthians that the sinfulness of their lives demonstrates that they are still men and women of the flesh. Although they have received the Holy Spirit *“as the first fruits, groan inwardly while [they] await the redemption of [their] bodies”* (Rom.8:23). They are not yet submissive to the Holy Spirit. And so he writes:

*Brothers, the trouble was that I could not talk to you as spiritual men but only as men of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, and did not give you solid food because you were not ready for it. You are not ready for it even now, being still very much in a natural condition. For as long as there are jealousy and quarrels among you, are you not of the flesh? And is not your behavior that of ordinary men? When someone says, “I belong to Paul,” and someone else, “I belong to Apollos,” is it not clear that you are still at the human level? (1Cor.3:1-4).*

Paul endeavors to place the Christian Community, with its membership and working body in proper focus. The Corinthians, with their attention upon their Christian teachers and upon themselves, were losing the general picture of the nature of the Church. The Church is not man’s creation; it is the Assembly of God’s People on earth. In reality the Church is the Tabernacle of God--the dwelling place of His Holy Spirit on earth. It is very sacred. Both workers and members have a serious responsibility to love and carefully preserve it. On the Day of Judgment each must give an account to God for the privilege and honor of being a “living stone” in God’s Temple. Each must account for his/her efforts to build up God’s Temple on this earth. One’s eternal reward is to be measured, in some degree, by one’s work within the Kingdom of God on earth. Paul says to the Corinthians:

*After all, who is Apollos? And who is Paul? Simply ministers through whom you became believers, each of them doing only what the Lord assigned him. I planted the seed and Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. This means that neither he who plants nor he who waters is of any special account, only God, who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters work to the same end. Each will receive his wages in proportion to his toil. We are God’s co-workers, while you are his cultivation, his building (1Cor.3:5-9).*

Reflecting upon his own work, Paul’s conscience could reproach him. It was his work to lay the foundations of the Church at Corinth. He had laid this

foundation with his preaching Jesus Christ and Him Crucified. The faith of the Church in Corinth had been well founded: *“Your faith rests not on the wisdom of men but on the power of God” (1Cor.2:5)*. Other Christian teachers and preachers had arrived in Corinth, and they were building upon the foundation laid by Paul. He cautions them, and he warns them, that they will be held responsible for how they build upon that foundation. He acknowledges and then warns:

*Thanks to the favor God showed me I laid a foundation as a wise master-builder might do, and now someone else is building upon it. Everyone, however, must be careful how he builds (1Cor.3:10).*

*No one can lay a foundation other than the one that has been laid, namely Jesus Christ. If different ones build on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay or straw, the work of each will be made clear (1Cor.3:12-13).*

Paul compares the material one teaches or preaches to the building materials of this earth. Teachers and preachers who are truly channels of the Holy Spirit will properly build up the individual lives of the Christian Community, and Paul speaks of these men as building in gold, silver, and precious stones. But teachers and preachers who are enamored with philosophies, psychologies, and theological fads; those who teach whims for doctrine and expound theological nonsense and religious superstitions; and those who preach “sugar and spice and everything nice” are those who build the lives of Christians in “wood, hay or straw.” One day tests of fire will come--trials and temptations will come to every Christian. Amidst these “fires,” will the Christian lives endure in faith, hope, and charity? Or will they crumble under the force and fire of trial and temptation? The Day of Judgment will manifest all this. At this point it appears that Paul ties the reward and the punishment of the teachers with their students. It seems to suggest that both share in the responsibility for what has been constructed and endures, or what has been constructed and crumbles. Paul confirms:

*The work of each will be made clear. The Day will disclose it. That day will make its appearance with fire, and fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If the building a man has raised on this foundation still stands, he will receive his recompense~ if a man’s building burns, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as one fleeing through fire (1Cor.3:13-15).*

It was with this day in mind that Paul told the elders of Ephesus: *“I solemnly declare this day that I take the blame for no man’s conscience, for I have never shrunk from announcing to you God’s design in its entirety”* (Acts 20:26). The symbolic gesture of shaking dust off one’s clothing expressed this same concept.

At this point, Paul appears to address himself to the Christians who live their Christian lives imprudently, and to those teachers and preachers who, because of spiritual sloth, human respect, selfishness, profit and gain, or lack of faith, hope, and charity, do not announce God’s design in its entirety, or dilute it, or teach the sciences of this world in place of the Wisdom of God, or preach themselves rather than Christ. In other words, preachers and teachers who have remained in the flesh. All these, Paul maintains, build in vain. *“Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it”* (Ps.127:1a). The lives and works of these Christians are but vanities. There will be no reward for the lives they lived or for their life’s work. However, they will not lose their souls. Because of their foundation in Jesus Christ, they will be saved. The end of their lives will resemble those burned out victims who are pulled out of their burning homes, scorched but alive, and who later poke through the smoldering ruins, seeking to see if anything of value was spared by the fire. Only their lives survive--their life’s work went up in smoke. Paul’s words seem to imply some kind of punishment. As it is so closely connected with the Judgment it seems to imply a punishment after death. This is one of the texts used to support the teaching of a time and place of purgation after physical death.

There are foolish teachers and foolish disciples within the Christian Community, but there are also false teachers and prophets who come to pervert the truth--not to build but to destroy the foundation in Jesus Christ. These men and women are not the same as the above. Their judgment and final end will not be the same. To these Paul addresses this warning:

*Are you not aware that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, and you are that temple* (1Cor.3:16-17).

Paul beautifully describes Christian Community as the holy temple of God wherein dwells the Holy Spirit. This is his concept of the Christian Community. It is not a picture of individual Christians, but Christians as a



Community. As for the individual Christian: *“You too are living stones, built as an edifice of the spirit” (1Pt.2:5).*

Placing this picture before their eyes, Paul makes another appeal for unity, urging the Christians to turn aside from their vain philosophies and frivolous arguing that succeeds only in dividing the Community, and fostering vanity and intellectual pride--a pride God will ultimately resist and destroy:

*Let no one delude himself. If anyone of you thinks he is wise in a worldly way, he had better become a fool. In that way he will really be wise, for the wisdom of this world is absurdity with God. Scripture says, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,” and again, “The Lord knows how empty are the thoughts of the wise” (1Cor.3:18-20).*

Paul seeks to make the point that as a Holy Community we are all part of the One Body with the One Holy Spirit as Source of life. Each individual is part of the whole, and the whole belongs to each individual. Paul, Apollos, and Cephas belong to all. To sum it all up: we all belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

*Let there be no boasting about men. All things are yours, whether it be Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or the present, or the future: all these are yours, and you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s (1Cor.3:21-23).*

Up to this point Paul’s criticism of the Corinthians has been somewhat general. He has demonstrated emotional control and a certain sense of personal detachment from the problems being discussed. This facade quickly melts away as he becomes more defensive of his own role in the Corinthian Community, and more critical of the Community itself. Within a few verses he goes from defensiveness to bitter sarcasm and severity, then to sweetness, and ends with threats.

In chapter three, verse five, Paul describes himself and Apollos as “simply ministers.” Here he uses the term *diakonoi*, implying they are servants in the employ of Christ the Lord. Jesus Christ used them to call the Corinthians to the Christian Faith. Each had been assigned a distinct mission by Christ. Paul now writes: *“Men should regard us as servants of Christ and administrators of the mysteries of God” (1Cor.4:1)*, He tells the Christian Community how the

apostles are to be looked upon within the Community. Paul knows the position assigned to him in the Church. Christ has assigned this role to him. Here the word for servant is not *diakonoi*--Paul refers to himself as *hyperetes* and *oikonomos*. Both terms convey the idea of a person who views self as a servant of another. However, the first term (*hyperetes*) had assumed the juridical meaning of one who is an "official witness" in court. Paul implies he is a servant, but one with an official duty of witnessing to the truth in the Christian Community.

The second term (*oikonomos*) designates the servant entrusted with the administration of the household. Paul sees himself as one entrusted with the managing of the Lord's household. He has been entrusted with a grave responsibility within the Church at Corinth. He cannot stand by as some disinterested party, or as one who is free to get involved or not. He is a vital part of the Community, and his position gives him a unique role within the Community. He is not on the same level as the general faithful, or even other teachers. He has the obligation to guard, protect, nourish, and administer to the household of the Lord. In the political world the term *oikonomos* carried the concept of one who would be a prime minister in government. He maintains that in this position he is not subject to the judgment of the members of the household. Only the Lord of the house can adequately judge whether he has proven faithful and trustworthy in his assigned task. Paul, no doubt, has in mind the personal criticisms directed against him by certain members of the Community when he writes:

*Men should regard us as servants of Christ and administrators of the mysteries of God. The first requirement of an administrator is that he prove trustworthy. It matters little to me whether you or any human court pass judgment on me. I do not even pass judgment on myself. Mind you, I have nothing on my conscience. But that does not mean that I am declaring myself innocent. The Lord is the one to judge me (1Cor.4:1-4).*

Here, Paul maintains that even though his conscience is clear of any wrong doing that in itself is no proof he is free of guilt. Conscience is not the ultimate judge, God is. However, conscience will play a vital part in that judgment. It has been said that all judgment before the Judgment of the Lord is prejudgment. A decision given before all facts are in is the meaning of prejudice. Paul goes on to say:

*The Lord is the one to judge me, so stop passing judgment before the time of his return. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and manifest the intentions of hearts. At that time, everyone will receive his praise from God (1Cor.4:4b-5).*

Paul places himself and Apollos as examples before the Community. This certainly verifies that, in the mind of Paul, Apollos in no way shared in the guilt for what had occurred in Corinth. Neither of them had planned acts to stimulate personal veneration nor to cause rivalry between themselves. They both preached solid doctrine. What Paul and Apollos had preached ought to have provided the guidelines of faith and behavior in Corinth. The faithful should not go beyond those teachings. That would only lead to vanity and serious error. Paul says:

*Brothers, I have applied all this to myself and Apollos by way of example for your benefit. May you learn from us not to go beyond what is set down, so that none of you will grow self-important by reason of his association with one person rather than another. Who confers any distinction on you? Name something you have that you have not received. If, then, you have received it, why are you boasting as if it were your own? (1Cor.4:6-7).*

The source of the problems in Corinth lay in pride. The people have forgotten their own personal spiritual poverty. They live in a fantasy world concerning the Christian life; they have lost contact with Christian reality. The life of Paul and the lives of other true apostles and teachers were the realities of Christian existence in this world. When Paul looked at this reality and compared it to the “puffed-up” lives being lived by the Christians in Corinth, it evoked bitter sarcasm from him. They behaved as if they had reached the summit of perfection, and they were seating themselves at the eternal banquet. Paul tries a little shock treatment: before their eyes, he contrasts true Christian reality as lived by the apostles with the fantasy world of Christianity created by the Corinthians. Paul says to them:

*At the moment you are completely satisfied. [You've got it made!] You have grown rich! You have launched upon your reign with no help from us. Would that you had really begun to reign, that we might be reigning with you! As I see it, God has put us apostles at the end of the line, like men doomed to die in the arena. We have become a spectacle to the universe, to angels and men alike. We are*

*fools on Christ's account. Ah, but in Christ you are wise! We are the weak ones, you the strong! They honor you, while they sneer at us! Up to this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, poorly clad, roughly treated, wandering about homeless. We work hard at manual labor. When we are insulted we respond with a blessing. Persecution comes our way—we bear it patiently. We are slandered, and we try conciliation. We have become the world's refuse, the scum of all; that is the present state of affairs (1Cor.4:8-13).*

Paul paints a realistic picture for the Corinthians of what it truly means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ Crucified. Their own life-style suggests that they have abandoned the Crucified Christ as a Christian model. Paul seeks to bring the Corinthians back into the real Christian world. He knows he may have pushed too hard and he now abruptly changes his approach to one of gentleness. Within this fantasy world of theirs they have failed to recognize Paul's true relationship with them. He is not just their Rabbi or guru who teaches them the mysteries of God. No! He is their "father" in Christ. He has a special relationship with them that no other can possess. From the responsibility of this relationship he writes to them. He writes not to hurt them but, as a loving father, to correct them. Even the Lord "chastises those he loves." He writes:

*I am writing you in this way not to shame you but to admonish you as my beloved children. Granted you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you have only one father. It was I who begot you in Christ Jesus through my preaching of the gospel. I beg you, then, be imitators of me. This is why I have sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful son in the Lord. He will remind you of my ways in Christ, just as I teach them in all the churches (1Cor.4:14-17).*

Paul maintains that he has been constant in his teachings in all the churches. These teachings have been inculcated into his own life, and are expressed in the deeds of his life. He does not hesitate to propose himself as the model for their behavior. He preaches Christ not only in words but in deeds. His life has become an incarnation of God's Holy Spirit. He offers himself as a model, for he has truly become an Ikon of the Holy Spirit. (The night before Blessed Maragareth Clitherow died a martyr for the faith in England, she sent her stockings to her daughter with the reminder that "she should always walk in the footsteps of her mother.")

Apparently Paul has asked Timothy to go to Corinth. He had asked Apollos, who had refused, stating that he would go “*when circumstances are more favorable*” (1Cor.16:12). As Paul reflects upon his “beloved disciple” and son going into all this, he once again becomes anxious. We see him writing at the end of the letter:

*If Timothy should come, be sure to put him at ease among you. He does the Lord’s work just as I do, so let no one treat him disdainfully. Rather, help him come to me by sending him on his way in peace (1Cor.16:10-11).*

Once again Paul becomes the stern threatening father:

*Some have grown full of self-importance, thinking that I will not come to you. But I shall come to you soon, the Lord willing, and find out, not what they say, but what they can do... Which do you prefer, that I come to you with a rod, or with love and a gentle spirit? (1Cor.4:18-21).*

Paul threatens that he will return and demand a personal account of their behavior. He intends to demand accountability. He will measure their puffed-up speech against the deeds of their lives, which he intends to closely scrutinize in the light of Christ Crucified. In the meantime, he reminds them again what is the true heart of Christian existence: “*The kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power*” (1Cor.4:20). It consists in lives that truly manifest the Holy Spirit of God! “*For what they are, cries out so loud that no one can hear what they are saying!*”

## CHAPTER 3

### CHRISTIAN MORALITY

Morality is defined as human deeds judged to be in keeping with right and fitting behavior. Immorality is human deeds judged not to be in keeping with right and fitting behavior. Morality is good behavior; immorality is evil behavior. Generally speaking mankind in all ages have accepted the existence of a Natural Law that objectively dictates morality.

The Natural Law manifests itself through the consciences of people; it manifests itself through right reason. It is manifested, not in what only a few hold to be right or wrong, but in what mankind in general holds to be right or wrong. Generally speaking all societies hold murder, theft, and lying to be immoral. Such moral norms would be based upon the Natural Law. This would be natural morality. However, some people do deny a Natural Law, and hold there is no absolute right or wrong; right and wrong is relative; it depends upon the circumstances involved. Such a theory would hold that what is right today may be wrong tomorrow and vice-versa.

The Catholic Church accepts belief in the Natural Law. Confirmation of this is found both in Romans and Wisdom. The Church teaches that the tenets of the Natural Law are the natural foundations of Christian morality. However, Christian morality exceeds the tenets of the Natural Law. Christian morality is based upon Divine Revelation (which is never contrary to natural revelation). Divine Revelation confirms and exceeds the tenets of the Natural Law. Christian morality has its foundation in the revelations that come through Jesus Christ. The world cannot receive this revelation nor comprehend it:

*The natural man does not accept what is taught by the Spirit of God. For him, that is absurdity. He cannot come to know such teaching because it must be appraised in a spiritual way (1Cor.2:14) .*

Therefore Christian morality, of necessity, surpasses the morality of this world. It is a real scandal in the world when the behavior of non-Christians surpasses that of Christians. Because of it, Mahatma Ghandi was led to say: “I

*love Christ but I hate Christians.*” Christians cannot conform their conduct merely to the moral standards of this world and remain moral people. In the eyes of Christianity, one would be immoral if one fails to conform one’s behavior to the Christian standard. As Christians, we can demand that the people of the world live by the standards of the Natural Law that the God of creation inscribed in the hearts of all men. However, do we have the right to demand that non-Christians live according to the standards of Christian morality when they have not, as non-Christians, received the grace by which to do so?

St. Paul urged the Roman Christians, *“Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind”* in Christ (Rom.12:2). Christians must not follow the moral fashions of the day but be imitators of Jesus Christ. He encourages them *“to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, your spiritual worship”* (Rom.12:1). Paul desires Christians not to become contaminated by the immoral lives around them. God has rescued Christians from their former sinful and futile ways of life. Now they must refuse to let sin rule over their mortal bodies making them obey its lusts:

*No more shall you offer the members of your body to sin as weapons for evil. Rather, offer yourselves to God as men who have come back from the dead to life, and your bodies to God as weapons for justice (Rom.6:13).*

Paul teaches the human body ought to be a servant of righteousness producing sanctification (Rom.6:19), and the Christian ought to behold himself as God’s slave whose service causes sanctification and ends in eternal life (Rom.6:22).



The life of a Christian ought to be under the Law of the Spirit. Paul identifies that spirit as the “*spirit of life in Jesus Christ*” (Rom.8:2). A true Christian life lives under submission to the Holy Spirit and manifests, in word and deed, the Holy Spirit. There is a Christian ideal. Paul will hold nothing less before the eyes of Christians. In order to encourage this ideal he contrasts it with its opposite, life in the flesh, a life lived contrary to the Law of Christ. Paul sees life in the spirit and life in the flesh as mutually exclusive of one to the other. He writes:

*Those who live according to the flesh are intent on the things of the flesh ...The flesh in its tendency is at enmity with God; it is not subject to God's law. ...those who are in the flesh cannot please God... The tendency of the flesh is toward death. ... If you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the spirit you put to death evil deeds of the body, you will live (Rom.8:5-8).*

Through our study of Romans, we have come to understand that the person of the flesh is essentially a human being, living life independently of God's supernatural power and grace. It is a person alienated in will from God. The Scriptures suggest that man does not live in a vacuum, but rather he lives in a divine or a diabolic milieu. Man lives a life within the grace of God, or man lives a life within the power of Satan. Paul speaks of the latter person as powerless to please God, and living as an enslaved person; a person enslaved to human passions and lust. Lust is not synonymous with sex. It is the excessive and unlawful expression of any human passion. Sin rules over the person of the flesh and dominates the human personality enslaved to impurity and licentiousness for their degradation (See Rom.6:12ff). They have, as slaves, become powerless to free themselves from these sins. Such slaves of sin have a sad ending: “*The wages of sin is death*” (Rom.6:23a).

The range of sins committed by men and women in the flesh is quite extensive. They run from murder, greed, idolatry, homosexuality, fornication, and adultery to bickering, deceitfulness, gossiping, insolence, disobedience, haughtiness--and to a general ill-will toward others. Many of these sins are considered “body” sins, but many others are “soul” sins. They are quite spiritual in source and expression. Satan's own personal evil is totally spiritual in source and expression. The most evil human beings are highly spiritual people. By spiritual, we mean the non-material, the non-physical. Such, in their evil, rise above the sins of the body; essentially the powers of

their souls become perverted and evil. Many men and women of the flesh are persons at times considered quite socially acceptable. According to the standards of the world they are often considered good people. They live at what Paul would call “the human level.”

Paul sees the Corinthians as being somewhere in between men and women of the spirit and men and women of the flesh. He refers to such as the *nepioi*--spiritual babies, infants in Christ. Even though they have received the Holy Spirit and have been freed from the enslavement to sin, they still produce works of the flesh. They still permit sin to have power over them. Their personal sins debilitate their spiritual life. They suffer from spiritual anemia. They have failed to grow strong in the spirit because they have failed to use their human faculties as powers of righteousness--they are failing in their spiritual exercises. In actual fact, they surrender their natural faculties to sin, letting them become once again instruments of injustice. Paul describes them as “brothers:”

*...I could not talk to you as spiritual men but only as men of flesh, as infants in Christ... For as long as there are jealousy and quarrels among you, are you not of the flesh? ...is it not clear that you are still at the human level? (1Cor.3:1-4).*

Paul knows there is a danger they will lose their spiritual life and its inheritance.

The Corinthians consciously considered themselves to be spiritually mature Christians because of the spiritual gifts operative in their Community. They experienced themselves as spiritualized men and women. Because they personally lacked spiritual development, they lacked in-depth spiritual insight. Pride opened their lives to being deceived by the noon-day devil--Satan appearing as the Angel of Light. It is possible they were being seduced by the errors of Gnosticism. Gnosticism plagued the Christian Community in the first century of its existence. The behavior of the Corinthians suggests that they were tainted by Gnostic beliefs. This heresy was characterized by the belief in dual forces of good and evil in the universe. The spiritual was the good and the material was the evil. It was believed that knowledge--a secret, esoteric knowledge--could free the human spirit from the enslavement of materiality which was evil. Essentially the body, or the flesh, was evil and could do no good. Only what was of the spirit was good and had eternal value.

This belief led to a very subtle deception: it taught that nothing that occurred in the body could have a moral value or goodness, nor could it affect the spirit of a “saved” person. Therefore, it made no difference what a man did in the flesh--good or evil was of no consequence. All that mattered was that a person had become spiritualized, freed from enslavement to matter. Christian Gnostics believed this had been accomplished through their knowledge of Jesus Christ (The Truth had set them free!) and their reception of the Holy Spirit. Once this had been achieved, whatever occurred in the body was of no consequence. This principle led to indifference to sexual conduct and ultimately, to gross sexual immorality within the Christian Community; it led to a denial of the Incarnation of the Word, the physical death of Jesus upon the Cross, the Resurrection of the body from the dead. Within the Christian Community it led to a childish display of spiritual gifts, and an exaggerated emphasis on their importance within the Christian Community.

The Christian ideal is the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth. His words and deeds became the standard for Christian morality. Paul demanded of himself and others nothing less than that their behavior be Christ-like. Jesus called His disciples to “*be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.*” This command He followed with a description of God’s love. Christian perfection consisted in perfected love. Perfected love is perfection for the Christian. Therefore Christian morality must always express, in some degree, agape-love. Christian immorality will always be, in some degree, destructive of Christian love.

Paul knew there was no injustice in demanding such perfection and morality from Christians because “*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old order has passed away; now all is new!*” (2Cor.5:17). With the reception of the Holy Spirit, all power necessary to live the Christian life has been received. The life of the Christian Community and the lives of individual Christians remain forever the pilgrimage to perfection--not perfection in knowledge or understanding, not even in faith--but the perfection of love. When love is expressed in meekness and humility it possesses the refreshment of the spring rain and the serenity of the setting sun. St. Peter called it putting on “*the apron of humility*” in order to serve others (1Pt.5:5). Peter confirms that God’s divine power “*has freely bestowed on us everything necessary for a life of genuine piety*” (2Pt.1:3). He encourages Christians to grow in perfection and make secure the salvation received through Jesus Christ:

*Make every effort to undergird your virtue with faith, your discernment with virtue, and your self-control with discernment;*

*this self-control, in turn, should lead to perseverance, and perseverance to piety, and piety to care for your brother, and care for your brother, to love. Qualities like these, made increasingly your own, are by no means ineffectual; they bear fruit in true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ ... Be solicitous to make your call and election permanent, brothers; surely those who do so will never be lost (2Pt.1:5-10).*

There is a danger that when we speak of perfection, people will confuse perfection with salvation. Christian perfection flows in no small measure from human cooperation with the Holy Spirit and actual and sanctifying grace. Salvation flows from the merits of Jesus Christ and through our faith in Jesus. It cannot be merited. Many people will die saved--few will die perfected. However, it always remains a duty within the Christian Community to hold before the eyes of the Christian Community the absolute norms of Christian perfection. This duty ordinarily falls upon the presbyters of the Church who have been entrusted by the Holy Spirit to guard and shepherd the Church (Acts 20:28), and extraordinarily it falls upon the prophets the Lord raises up within the Christian Community. The Church can never settle for less without betraying its own potential grace, power, and destiny in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is never "too much" for any Christian; through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the "unreachable star," has come within our reach, and Paul certainly urges us on to run in order to grasp the prize. Between the Christian Ideal--Jesus Christ and these "New Creations" in Christ--and Christian people here on earth, there is usually a vast difference. Perhaps we are new creations in the Spirit, and much of the old has passed away. Nevertheless, some of the old still clings to the soul and the body. We enter the Body of Christ with certain inherited obstacles to grace. As Christians we grow up in an environment hostile to His life, which often blinds and hardens us to His Way, Truth, and Life. Our own activities cultivate powers and spirits essentially hostile to Jesus. Below the surface of our conscious awareness lurks an inveterate and hostile pride that bristles its quills when frustrated and corrected. Pride will not be convicted of sin. It prefers guilt to repentance. Until the resurrection of the body in Christ, all Christians, even the best of us, only achieve a relative perfection.

As prudent Christians, we will need to keep relative goals to be achieved on the road to perfection without losing sight of Jesus--the Absolute Ideal. Therese of Lisieux picturesquely presented sanctity as a bird stuck in the mud

who yet desired to fly into the sun...as a child putting one foot upon the staircase leading to the Father, but always falling back to the floor. In other words, our relative goals to perfection may consist in trying to be freed of the mud, on keeping our eyes upon the "Son" rather than on the mud. Looking upon the Son can bring hope; looking upon the mud, only despair. On the road to perfection one must learn to keep hope alive in the heart; learn to live with the humiliating awareness of one's own weakness; never denying the sinfulness of one's own personal life; persevering in mastering one step at a time without forgetting the goal of one's journey--union with the Divine Will through Jesus Christ. One of the best ways to achieve an ideal is to keep the ideal constantly within our conscious awareness. Seek even to create an environment that constantly speaks of the ideal to the subconscious, and slowly and imperceptibly the ideal will begin to take flesh--to incarnate itself within our behavior.

One of the most difficult aspects of agape-love is fraternal correction. It is especially difficult because the instruments God chooses to make the correction, the authorities placed over us, are never perfect themselves. Those making the correction may have faulty vision due to the beam in their own eye or be motivated by an improper spirit that may make a justifiable correction but for the wrong motives and with the wrong spirit. When the common good is not involved, or when the proper spirit is absent, it is better not to correct.

The only reason for Christian correction is medicinal: to help the individual being corrected, or, if this is not possible, to safeguard the Community's well-being. Sincere love for the individual or the community ought to motivate fraternal correction, and it should be made in private. If the issue is public, the correction may have to be made in public because of the common good involved. We have an example of this when Paul corrected Peter in Antioch:

*When Cephas came to Antioch I directly withstood him, because he was clearly in the wrong ... The rest of the Jews joined in his dissembling, till even Barnabas was swept away by their pretense. As soon as I observed that they were not being straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I had this to say to Cephas in the presence of all: "If you who are a Jew are living according to Gentile ways rather than Jewish, by what logic do you force the Gentiles to adopt Jewish ways?" (Gal.2:11-14).*

In Paul's mind certain behavior must not be tolerated within the Christian Community. He sees it as completely incompatible with life in Christ. Apparently, he considered certain moral conditions to be mortally sinful--to be sin "unto death." He writes the Corinthians:

*Can you not realize that the unholy will not fall heir to the kingdom of God? Do not deceive yourselves: no fornicators, idolaters, or adulterers, no sodomites, thieves, misers, or drunkards, no slanderers or robbers will inherit God's kingdom (1Cor.6:9-10).*

Here Paul is not describing individual sins, but immoral life styles. He is expressing habitual sins that are incompatible with life in the spirit. He suggests that the present congregation at Corinth had once lived such immoral lives: "*And such were some of you: but you have been washed, consecrated, justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God*" (1Cor.6:11).

These sins had been washed away in baptism, and power had been received to live a life in the spirit, but nevertheless some mud remained--the tendencies toward these sins could still remain in the human soul and in the natural appetites. Christians must be on guard against these sins that are regaining mastery over them and visibly cropping up within the Christian Community. Already Paul sees how pride and haughtiness have manifested themselves within the Community.

Paul gave a general admonition to the Corinthians to refrain from judging one another. He likewise wrote the same exhortation to the Romans. This was stimulated by Paul's sensitivity to the evil done to his own reputation and authority by others rashly judging him. Paul was aware that certain behavior was intrinsically evil within itself. Such behavior caused harm to the soul of a person even when the person acted in good faith or with a good conscience. A good intention is not enough--good deeds are likewise demanded. To murder an unborn child has an evil effect upon the person, the child, and society, regardless of whether or not there is a conscious awareness of moral evil.

One famous psychiatrist maintains that people are sick because they do sick things. They do not do sick things because they are sick. If you want them to be healthy again, you must stop them from doing the sick thing; you must get them to do the healthy thing if you want them to be healthy. If a person

mistakenly takes arsenic thinking it is sugar, the good intention does not save him from the evil physical effects.

God has placed certain persons in the Community to guard and shepherd the flock. They are required at times to pass judgment on other members within the Church. If God gives them the office to judge, He imparts the grace to do so justly. Such power was given to the Apostles by Jesus when The Risen Savior said to them: *“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive men’s sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound” (Jn.20:23).*

The proper use of such power demands making a judgment. As we can see from Acts, Peter used this power when he judged the behavior of Ananias and Sapphira to be lies to the Holy Spirit. Paul used this power when he condemned Elymas “the Magician.” Paul now exercises this power in the Corinthian Church, but he calls upon the leaders of the Community, not only to second his judgment, but to carry it out. Paul writes:

*It is actually reported that there is lewd conduct among you of a kind not even found among the pagans--a man living with his father’s wife. Still you continue to be self-satisfied, instead of grieving, and getting rid of the offender (1Cor.5:1-2).*

He insinuates they have lost all sense of moral judgment. They walk around like proud peacocks when in reality their tail feathers ought to be drooping in shame and sorrow, for one of their members is guilty of the sin of incest--a sin of which even pagans have shame. The woman is probably a stepmother and a non-Christian since Paul makes no reference to her. Paul considers this a case of gross immorality; it is a deadly sin. The Old Testament condemns such in Leviticus 18:18: *“You shall not have intercourse with any wife of your father.”*

The pagan orator and politician, Cicero, supports Paul’s argument when he condemns a Roman matron’s passion for her son-in-law *“as an unbelievable crime, unheard of except for this case” (Pro Cluentio,VI).* Roman law forbade such marriages, and held them to be incest. It is known that certain Jewish rabbis did permit a convert to Judaism to marry his father's widow as they maintained that all former family ties had been destroyed by entrance into the community of Israel. It is possible that the Corinthian Community used this Jewish custom as an excuse for tolerating this union within the Community.



Paul places the blame for the situation within the Community upon the man and the Christian Community. When he tells the Community it ought to be in mourning, he uses the word *penthea* that describes the state of suffering when one has lost a dear one in death. By the use of this word he emphasizes the serious spiritual condition of this man. He demands that the Christian Community assume a responsible attitude toward this irresponsible Christian. He commands that they act. He teaches that the Church leaders certainly have a responsibility for the activities of its members. They have an obligation to correct the members and protect the Community. The Church must hold before the Community the absolute ideal of Christian perfection. When needed, it must convict members of their sins, and bring to their conscious awareness their need for repentance and the mercy of God. Paul's command is, "Expel the wicked man from your midst!" (1Cor.S:13). He writes:

*As for me, though absent in body I am present in spirit, and have already passed sentence in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. United in spirit with you and empowered by our Lord Jesus, I hand him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord (1Cor.5:3-5).*

He implies that he acts with the power of Jesus Christ.

Paul judges the man's behavior to be scandalous. To some of us today, his action may seem extreme. He certainly would be motivated by his own rabbinical training. In the light of the demands of the Old Testament, it is a mitigation. We read in Deuteronomy that if anyone within the community would make one turn aside from the path marked out by Yahweh:

*Thus shall you purge the evil from your midst. If your own full brother, or your son or daughter, or your beloved wife, or your intimate friend .. you shall stone him [or her ] to death, because he sought to lead you astray from the Lord, your God (Dt.13:6d-11a).*

Paul excommunicates the man from the Christian Community and he wants the Community to enforce this excommunication. He believes his action will aid both the man and the Community. By excommunication he that implies the man is placed once again under the dominion of Satan. Paul implicitly implies that communion with the Church-membership within the Body of Christ removes a person from being under Satan's direct power. The Scriptures teach that Satan is the Prince of the world, and the world is under

his power. Satan inflicts his subjects with suffering and death. Jesus insinuated Satan always seeks to destroy life. The Book of Job illustrates how Satan can play a disciplinary role in the life of a person with God's permission. Paul even teaches that God permitted Satan *"to give him a thorn of the flesh" to keep him humble (2Cor.12:7)*. Perhaps Paul hopes that being cut off from the Community will bring the sinful person to repentance.

However, a more realistic interpretation would be that Paul believed that now the man was once again under Satan, his physical health that sustains this sin would be destroyed by the affliction of Satan, and this continuous state of sinning would cease. It has been suggested that Paul believed that exclusion from the Holy Eucharist would produce sickness and death. The man's mortal body would be destroyed, but because of his baptism in Christ, *"his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord."* As we can see by a later reference to the practice of the *"baptism for the dead" (1Cor.15:29)*, there was the belief in the early Church that baptism in and of itself produced salvation.

Paul believes that this excommunication is beneficial for the Community as a whole. To emphasize this point he uses an analogy from the Jewish Feast of Passover. This Feast was a time to put all impurity out of the household of the faithful (Ex.12:15,19;13:7); it was a time to start anew. Leaven was a symbol of evil. At the Feast of Passover, all leaven was thrown out of the house and a new dough of unleavened bread was made. It probably was around the Feast of Passover that brought the analogy to Paul's mind. He beheld an evil leaven within the Community. He wanted it purged out and a new beginning made as a purified Christian Community. He implies that the Christian Community on earth is a continuous process of celebrating the Christian Passover. He writes:

*This boasting of yours is an ugly thing. Do you not know that a little yeast has its effect all through the dough? Get rid of the old yeast to make of yourselves fresh dough, unleavened loaves, as it were; Christ our Passover has been sacrificed. Let us celebrate the feast not with the old yeast, that of corruption and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth... "Expel the wicked man from your midst" (1Cor.5:6-8,13b) .*

Paul implies two important lessons in this analogy. First, sin is contagious; it spreads like yeast. The sinful member must be cut off before the contagion spreads through the entire Christian Community. The second implication is that the Church is a corporate body, *"If one member suffers, all the members*

*suffer with it” (1Cor.12:26). The sin of one member is sin within the body itself. Since “the wages of sin is death” (Rom.6:23), the life of the Community may depend upon the eradication of the sin. Since the Church is One Body, the sin of one affects the entire Body. This makes the sin of one the responsibility of the entire body. Perhaps it is for this reason that the Virgin Mary, in private revelation, has encouraged the Church to do penance for sin and pray for sinners.*

**Why excommunication from the Christian Community? Paul not only insisted that the incestuous man be excommunicated from the Church, but he also encouraged the Christian Community to excommunicate fornicators, idolaters, slanderers, drunkards, thieves, and people given to greed. For many today this attitude seems extreme and harsh. It certainly is not a practice today in the Church. To understand Paul’s attitude one has to possess his concept of the Christian Community. He did not consider the Church to be a half-way house between Hell and Heaven, filled with spiritual derelicts. Perhaps it could be said he viewed it as a divine recycling center that turned the spiritual garbage of this world into saints. He admitted the Church’s membership was composed of people who had once been fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, sodomites, thieves, misers, drunkards, slanderers and robbers, but he maintained: “*You have been washed, consecrated, justified in the name [power] of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1Cor.6:11).***

**Paul considered the Church to be the Assembly of God’s People on this earth. God’s people have been consecrated and called to be a holy people (see 1Cor.1:2-3). That implies they must be removed from the contamination and the impurity of this world. He asked the Corinthians:**

*Are you not aware that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? ... The temple of God is holy, and you are that temple (1Cor.3:16-17). You, then, are the body of Christ. Everyone of you is a member of it (1Cor.12:27).*

**Paul conceived the Church on earth to be the very Body of Jesus Christ. In the letter to the Ephesians, Christ is described as the “*head of the Church which is his body: the fullness of him who fills the universe in all its parts” (Eph.1:23). Paul described his own background as his being a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee. He was reared in the strictest religious sect among the Jews. We know the name implied the “separated one.” The Pharisees***

considered themselves to be the holy people of God, and therefore they must remain uncontaminated from this defiled world--they particularly avoided contact with pagans. Paul's own concept of what the membership of the Church must be was certainly influenced by his previous religious background. However it was Paul who personally reached out to the pagans--who personally went to them offering them membership within the Christian Community. He was not against the grossly immoral being converted to Christ, but he certainly was against gross immorality within the Christian Community.

Paul did not look upon Christians as being "*the untouchables.*" When a previous letter on this point had been misunderstood, he quickly corrected the misinterpretation. It appears that Paul had tried to deal with this problem in a more general way in a previous letter to the Corinthians, in which he urged them not to mix with sinners. Some had interpreted this to mean that the Church must become an incommunicable island in a sea of paganism. Christians must become the "separated ones" like the Pharisees. What Paul desired to say was that the Christian Community itself should not be a mixture of saints and immoral men and women. A good family may have to live in a bad neighborhood with thieves, prostitutes, drunkards: the family must survive there and treat those spiritual derelicts with love, but they do not bring them into their family and make them part of their household. Just as the derelicts have destroyed themselves, they will destroy the family. If one of those derelicts sincerely seeks reformation, help can be given. One may even receive them into the family, but they must conform to the standards of the family household. When it is discovered that they are not truly sincere in changing their lives, they have to be excluded from the household for the good of the entire family.

On this point Paul writes to the Corinthians:

*I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral persons. [The word translated "to associate with" literally means "to be mixed up together with."] I was not speaking of association with immoral people in this world, or the covetous or thieves or idolators. To avoid them, you would have to leave the world! What I really wrote about was your not associating with anyone who bears the title "brother" if he is immoral, covetous, an idolater, an abusive person, a drunkard, or a thief. It is clear that you must not eat with such a man. What business is it of mine to judge outsiders? Is it not those*

*inside the community you must judge? God will judge the others (1Cor. 5:9-13).*

When Paul writes, “*You must not eat with such a man*” this probably has reference to the agape meal and to the Holy Eucharist. Paul extends the grounds of excommunication to cover other people in the Church. Members of the Church are not to commune with grossly immoral Christians. On the other hand, the Christian is allowed to have dealings with such people in the world. The implication is that the association is not on the same level at all. In his association in the world, a Christian ought to stand out as a light in the darkness. He is to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Paul encourages the excommunication of some members from the Church, but tolerates others who fall short of the glory of God. The real issue with Paul is that the Church must maintain a vital distinction between itself and the world. He does not want the Church out of the world, but he wants the world out of the Church. If the darkness of this world and its corruption are mixed into the very body of the Church, then this can destroy the very mission of the Church in the world. It truly destroys the very nature of the Church. For the glory of Jesus Christ on earth and the good of the Christian Community, Paul urges, “*Expel the wicked man from your midst*” (1Cor.5:13).

Reflecting upon what ought to be the image the Church presents in the world, Paul is reminded of another scandalous practice among the Corinthian Christians. He writes asking them:

*How can anyone with a case against another dare bring it for judgment to the wicked and not to God’s holy people? Do you not know that the believers will judge the world? If the judgment of the world is to be yours, are you to be thought unworthy of judging in minor matters? Do you not know that you are to judge angels? Surely, then, we are up to deciding everyday affairs. If you have such matters to decide, do you accept as judges those who have no standing in the Church? I say this in an attempt to shame you. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a case between one member of the church and another? Must brother drag brother into court, and before unbelievers at that? Why, the very fact that you have lawsuits against one another is disastrous for you. Why not put up with injustice, and let yourselves be cheated? Instead, you yourselves injure and cheat your very own brothers.*

*Can you not realize that the unholy will not fall heir to the kingdom of God? (1Cor.6:1-9a).*

Once again we see how far removed Paul's concept of the Christian Community is from that of the Corinthians. The evils present within the Community testify to its spiritual deterioration. Lawsuits among the members testify to the extent of the divisiveness; matters are made worse by dragging the problems out into civil courts--airing their dirty laundry for the world to view--and requesting that pagans judge the "saints." This really exasperated Paul. In Paul's view the saints share in Christ's royal power. They will one day participate in the judgment of the world itself. The Book of Enoch teaches that the Son of Man will pass judgment on men and angels, and the elect will come with the Son of Man to participate in this judgment (En.7:17-18).

Paul maintains that members of the Church are qualified to make judgments on these matters. If necessary, Church courts must be erected to settle disputes among Christians. We know that Roman Law left it to the Jews to have their own courts for settling disputes among themselves. In the mind of Paul the very existence of these disputes manifested the triumph of the world and the flesh within the Community, and the defeat of the Spirit of Christ. Motivated by Jesus' teachings on the Sermon on the Mount (see Mt.5:38-42), Paul maintained that it was better for a Christian to suffer financial loss than to go into court with one's brother. What exasperated him the most was the fact that Christians were actually robbing and cheating one another: "*You yourselves injure and cheat your very own brothers.*" Paul knows that such people may consider themselves to be brothers within the Christian Community, but they fool themselves. Paul warns them, "*Can you not realize that the unholy [within or out of the Church] will not fall heir to the kingdom of God? Do not deceive yourselves!*" (1Cor.6:8-9).

Paul had taught a doctrine of Christian Liberty: Christ has freed us from the power of Satan and the enslavement of sin. Likewise, Christians have been delivered from the obligation of observing the Mosaic Law. Christians have been freed in order to be able to freely follow the Law of Christ and to walk in the Spirit of Jesus. In other words, they possess the power to conform their lives to the Holy Spirit. Certain Corinthian Christians misinterpreted Paul's principle of Christian liberty: "Everything is lawful for me." They perverted it into a license for sexual immorality.

Paul does not deny the principle, *“Everything is lawful for me,”* but he denies the interpretation given to it by some. Paul points out that the life of a Christian is not directed by what is lawful, but rather by what is good. Christian morality rises above the lawful to embrace the good; it even reaches to embrace the highest good. Often-times what may be lawful may not be good. (It is lawful in this country to kill an unborn child. Does that make it a good?) The gift of freedom has its end and goal: to be able to choose the good. The gift of freedom carries with it the responsibility to preserve freedom. Freedom can be lost.

Paul emphasizes the responsibility for a Christian to remain free. He writes: *“Everything is lawful for me”*--but that does not mean that everything is good for me. *“Everything is lawful for me”*--but I will not let myself be enslaved by anything (1Cor.6:12).

Paul emphasizes personal responsibility to preserve freedom when he writes, *“I will not let myself be enslaved by anything.”* He knows you may have the freedom to do certain things, but you may lose your freedom by exercising it. Certain lawful things cause addiction. An addiction is enslavement. Addiction dominates the life of its victims. The will, under the power of an addiction, loses the power to follow the good dictated by the Holy Spirit. A Christian has a moral responsibility to remain free in order to be able to live a moral Christian life; and that does not mean only *not doing evil*, but means *doing good*.

Paul well knew the power of enslavement that occurred through the inordinate satisfactions of the sexual appetite. He lived in a society enslaved to sexual desires. He witnessed, in many lives around him, the total corruption of the human personality through the perversion of the sexual appetite. He described this in Romans:

*They engaged in mutual degradation of their bodies ... Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and the men gave up natural intercourse with women and burned with lust for one another. Men did shameful things with men, and thus received in their own persons the penalty for their perversity (Rom.1:24,26-27).*

Paul was too much a Jew not to have had a holistic approach to the human personality. There was a close correlation between the spirit, the thoughts, the

emotions, and the physical body of a person. Within a person there are many cross currents flowing back and forth forming or deforming the human personality. Whatever was in the mind was soon in the emotions. Whatever was in the emotions soon found expression within the body. Whatever the body expressed soon touched the soul and the very mind of man. Paul would have been in perfect agreement with the scientific findings of our day that suggest that the mind (not the same as the brain) touches and controls every human expression. Paul instinctively knew that what touched the body, touched the soul; and what touched the soul, touched Jesus Christ. Paul knew that there was no such thing as a casual sexual relationship. All such relationships had their repercussions within the soul, affecting one's relationship with Jesus Christ. By reading between the lines, it appears that in sexual matters the pendulum was swinging in two extremes: sexual promiscuity on the one hand, and sexual asceticism on the other. (Heresy always lies in the extremes!) This would suggest a spirit of Gnosticism in the Church at Corinth.

Certain Corinthian Christians were given to sexual promiscuity. *Porneia* is the Greek expression used, and it is translated as fornication, sexual vice, sexual immorality. *Porneia* is used here as a general word for all unlawful and immoral sexual relationships. Apparently the argument for sexual promiscuity ran something like this: food was for the belly and the belly for food, and both would one day cease to be--the appetite for food and the need for food. It therefore had nothing to do with the spirituality of a person and was of itself of no importance. The same, therefore, was true of the sexual appetite and its satisfactions. Paul counteracted with the argument that although he could agree about the food, sexual expression was a different case. Such expression flows from the person and expresses the very spirit of the person. The body is an instrument for expression--personal union. The body will share in the redemption; it will not cease to be forever. It has been redeemed by the blood of Christ. The body belongs to Christ. Paul writes:

*“Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will do away with them both in the end”--but the body is not for immortality; it is for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. God, who raised up the Lord, will raise us also by his power (1Cor.6:13-14).*



In Paul's mind the sin of *porneia* is more than the misuse of the sexual faculties--it is a sacrilege:

*Do you not see that your bodies are members of Christ? Would you have me take Christ's members and make them the members of a prostitute? God forbid! Can you not see that the man who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? Scripture says, "The two shall become one flesh." But whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun lewd conduct. Every other sin a man commits is outside his body, but the fornicator sins against his own body (1Cor.6:15-18).*

Paul has used the analogy of leaven to express the overall corruption of the individual and the Community that can result from sin unchecked. Sin is viewed as an evil leaven that, in time, permeates and corrupts the entire human personality. This was especially evident in the sin of *porneia*. The Scriptures suggest personal corruption begins with immoral sexual expression, *porneia* (sin in a particular area of one's life). *Porneia* leads to *akatharsia*, which implies a corruption of the mind--the person becomes dirty-minded and mentally obsessed with sex. *Akatharsia* leads to *aselgeia*, which implies a total loss of all social shame for one's immorality. It is published, paraded, and proclaimed as a good, not an evil. It is sin without social shame. This is considered as total personal corruption.

Paul is set against immorality in sexual matters. Later he writes the Corinthians and also the Thessalonians:

*I fear that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may have to mourn over the many who sinned earlier and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and sensuality they practiced (2Cor.12: 21).*

*It is God's will that you grow in holiness: that you abstain from immorality, each of you guarding his member in sanctity and honor, not in passionate desire as do the Gentiles who know not God ... God has not called us to immorality but to holiness; hence, whoever*

*rejects these instructions rejects not man, but God who sends his Holy Spirit upon you (1Thes.4:3-8).*

Paul sought to counteract *porneia* by teaching the positive religious value of the human body. The human body is important. What is done in the body is important. Paul seeks to bring Christians to the understanding of the sacredness of the human body. He emphasizes the intimate relationship of the Human body with Jesus Christ:

*Are you not aware that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? ... For the temple of God is holy, and you are that temple (1Cor.3:16-17).*

Jesus suffered in the human body in order to redeem the human body. The human body is destined to share eternally in the glory or in the shame of the soul. Paul concludes:

*You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within--the Spirit you have received from God. You are not your own. You have been purchased, and at a price. So glorify God in your body (1Cor.6:19-20).*

## CHAPTER 4

### MARRIAGE AND CELIBACY

Paul taught that “the Lord is for the body” and “the body is for the Lord.” He expressed not only the Lord's personal concern for the entire person but also the intimate relationship that existed between the whole person and Jesus Christ. Jesus died to redeem the human person and that includes the physical dimension of the human personality. Paul prayed for the Christians in Thessalonica: *May he preserve you whole and entire, spirit [pneuma], soul [psyche], and body [soma], irreproachable at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1Thes.5:23)*. There are more references to the “body” in First Corinthians than in all the other epistles combined. Paul viewed the body to be the handmaid of the spirit.

The body not only housed the spirit but incarnated the spirit. Through the powers of the spirit the body lived. The human body expressed the personality of the spirit. The two are so closely wedded that the actions of the body are but echoes of the spirit. This is true to such a degree that a sad spirit makes the body a human shroud. What is done freely within the body flows from the will of the person. It expresses the heart of the human personality.

For a Jew the most sacred place on earth would have been the temple of Yahweh at Jerusalem. It housed the Holy of Holies wherein dwelled the Spirit of Yahweh. Even today the remaining foundation wall of that temple is considered by Jews their most sacred relic; it is their most sacred place for prayer. Paul transferred all this to the Christian Body. He declared the body to be the New Temple of God--one not made by human hands. The Holy Spirit of God dwells within the Body of the Church. The human bodies of the faithful house the Holy Spirit, which unites them into a Body--the Church. Therefore, Paul rightly maintains the body to be holy and sacred.

The Scriptures present the Church as the corporate Body of Christ on earth in which the Spirit of God dwells. For this reason, the Church teaches its members that they must be united with the whole body in order to be in communion with the Holy Spirit. St. Augustine taught that “*the Holy Spirit does not pursue the separated member.*” The Scriptures confirm each member

to be a unique stone within the structure of the temple. These stones, however, are not dead and cold as those of the Jerusalem temple. These are living stones. As living stones each member personally has the power and responsibility to contribute to the unique magnificence and exquisite beauty of God's dwelling among men. If the Temple of God fails to be glorious in this world, it is due to the individual stones that have lost their luster and beauty, because they no longer transmit the inner beauty of the Church. The gold has turned to lead. Musical artists agree that Carnegie Hall in New York is acoustically the finest place in which to perform. One famous singer romantically explained the mystery of the Hall as due to the fact that the world's greatest artists have expressed within those walls their greatest love in music, the building has captured the vibrations of the love, becoming alive with the sound of music, and as a result the very stones sing back this love to the artist.

Paul knew the Christian Community possessed the Holy Spirit. However, God made human beings free; Christians must freely open their spirits to the presence of the Holy Spirit. By a docile submission to the Holy Spirit they become His channels. As such, the human spirit glorifies God--the spirit magnifies the Lord. In such spirit-filled persons the presence of the spirit will be manifested in the human body. Elizabeth said to Mary: *"The moment your greeting sounded in my ears, the baby leapt in my womb for joy"* (Lk.1:44). As the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Eternal Truth and Love, human lives under the power of the Holy Spirit will manifest truth and love.

As human beings we possess many human faculties. These faculties should be instruments of the Holy Spirit. Paul spoke of these faculties as becoming slaves to produce justice and righteousness in the world. They ought to be channels that express and transmit the power of the redemption into human existence. In some way, all that a Christian does or does not do must include the Holy Spirit *"as the wine must taste of its own grape."* Through this Christian Community, Jesus lives again on earth. For this reason Paul strongly argued for the sacredness of the human body, and earnestly fought against immorality within the Christian Body.

Only that which truly expresses the human spirit expresses the person. That which expresses a person finds expression in the flesh. The invisible spirit becomes visible in bodily expression. Paul once wrote of God: *"Since the creation of the world, invisible realities, God's eternal power and divinity, have become visible, recognized through the things he has made (Rom.1:20).*

And so it can be said of human beings: from the beginning of their lives the “invisible realities” of their spiritual beings have been manifested through their visible lives. When the conquerors of Rome violated the Christian virgins of the city, Saint Augustine wrote to remind the women that their virginity and chastity was primarily and essentially of their spirit and secondarily expressed within their body. The violation of their bodies by the physical act of rape could not destroy their virginity or chastity since such an act could not touch their spirits. Augustine emphasized the close harmony existing between the spirit and the body.

*As spiritual beings empowered by the Holy Spirit, Paul believed the Christian life ought to express truth and love: Let us celebrate the feast not with the old yeast, that of corruption and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1Cor.5:8).*

Paul calls for Christians to be sincere. Being sincere implies one should not project a false image--should not play the hypocrite. The hypocritical person lies with his entire behavior. Hypocrisy masks a person's internal spiritual poverty or perversion. The word sincere in Latin means to be “without wax.” Crafty sculptors who made costly mistakes in their work had the devious practice of hiding their mistakes by mixing marble dust with wax to patch the error. On appearance, the statue appeared perfect, but in time the wax would darken, and the flaws and mistakes became visible. Only then did the buyer realize that he or she had been taken. Ancient markets often had signs, “Let the buyer beware!” Reputable places advertised their works as *sine curae* (without wax). They are essentially as they appear--they are sincere works. Paul wanted Christians to be reputable people who could advertise themselves to be *sine curae*. A person is sincere when the outer and the inner person are one.

The work of the Holy Spirit within the spirit is first of all a work of truth. It has been maintained that humility is the foundation of the Christian life. Humility is but truth incarnated. Humility is lived truth. The first work of a Christian is to be truthful--with self and in self-expression. Hypocritical Christians pretend to be better than they are. It is one thing not to be a saint; it is a worse thing to pretend to be one. Those who falsely pretend to be pious only succeed in making a caricature of sanctity, as they have no true understanding of sanctity. One example of false sanctity is the belief that saints are always sweet, smiling, pleasant and nice. Sanctity is presented to be like a spiritual creation of Mrs. Sees Candies. Well, we know John the Baptist,

Paul of Tarsus, and Peter of Galilee were saints, but they did not fit the above description. Nor is it a realistic portrait of Jesus as presented in the Scriptures. However, it does reflect a lot of our present day saccharine-sweet representatives of Jesus.

Any good parent knows that a good parent is not always sweet, smiling and nice. However, a good parent always strives to be loving. When they fail to be so, they repent. Always-nice parents are not good parents. They may be well-liked, but they will never be deeply loved. Being “nice” can be a clever cover for selfishness and indifference. Love is a many-dimensional labor, and it is that before it ever becomes truly “a many-splendored thing.”

Being sincere does not mean that a person expresses every thought, feeling, or emotion that crosses the threshold of one’s heart or conscious awareness. However, it does mean that what is expressed honestly conveys what is in one’s spirit. Mature Christians are not guided or dominated in behavior by their feelings towards others. They are not controlled by their likes, but by their love. A loving Christian must often act completely contrary to how he feels. Feelings, emotions, likes, and dislikes are powers within natural man. Paul teaches that Christians must not let one’s faculties obey one’s lusts, but rather, make them instruments and slaves of goodness. A Christian must wisely distinguish between what is of the flesh and what is of the spirit. Christians who dislike others but truly love them in spirit are not being hypocritical when they reject their anti-social feelings, and project friendliness toward those they dislike. They are truly sincere persons. The friendship projected has the highest motivation: agape-love. However, when Christians despise others in their hearts, and cover it over by a pretentious friendship, they are hypocrites of the first degree. This they often do to truly hide how intrinsically unchristian they really are. People who live such a lifestyle rarely grow spiritually. On the road to perfection we must first seek to grow in love. The path to holiness is always along the road of humility and love. The road runs through the deepest, darkest ravines, and over arduous and steep mountains. Paul seeks to lead the Corinthians through these ravines and over these mountains to holiness.

The Corinthians had addressed a series of problematic questions to Paul. He now responds to these questions, apparently in the order asked. The first question deals with marriage and the proper expression of sexual relations within the Christian Community. To keep these teachings of Paul in proper perspective, especially his teachings on marriage, we need to bear in mind

several factors. First of all, Paul is responding to questions asked, and he is probably seeking to curtail certain abuses and even heretical tendencies within the Community. His teaching here on marriage does not express the complete Pauline doctrine on marriage. We need also to take in consideration what he wrote to the Ephesians. Equally important is to bear in mind Paul's own personal belief that the end of the world was imminent. Paul expected the Parousia within his own lifetime. This deeply colored the advice given. The current in the early Church was that the return of Jesus was imminent. Previous to that return, great tribulations would come upon the world.

There was urgency within the Church to spread the gospel--to bring the "elected" number of Gentiles into the Church in order to hasten the Parousia of the Lord Jesus. In the light of this, Paul did not deem it prudent to spend time and energy upon things that were not that important in the light of a world approaching a quick and sudden end. If Paul had realized the mission of the Church would be spread over many centuries to come, he would have shaped the advice given. However, considering his own preoccupation with the End Times, he still remained a very prudent moral counselor. There are certain principles underlining the advice given in these particular circumstances. These underlining principles rest upon abiding truths having lasting value for the Christian Community.

As previously mentioned there appeared to be Gnostic influences taking root in the Corinthian Church which taught a disdain for the physical life. This could result in a rejection of all sexual expression as being unworthy of "spiritual" people and on the other hand, as has been seen, an indifference to sexual immorality. Paul himself had no sympathy with asceticism that regarded the human body as an absolute hindrance to union with God. Such doctrines were alive in Corinth--fostered by the pagan mystics of the Orphic cult. Those who preached sexual asceticism in the Corinthian Church believed all sexual expression to be unworthy of men and women of the "Spirit." They found support for their doctrine in the Lord's teaching to the Sadducees:

*The children of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those judged worthy of a place in the age to come and of resurrection from the dead do not. They become like angels and are no longer liable to death. Sons of the resurrection, they are sons of God (Lk.20:34-36).*

*When people rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage but live like angels in heaven (Mt.22:30).*

Those who erroneously believed they had already entered into the kingdom of God would have advocated living as the angels in Heaven. They would have even forbidden marriage. They probably felt they had a good supporter in Paul, who had remained unmarried and who personally encouraged celibacy. Paul obviously encouraged Christians to remain unmarried, but not for the same reasons the Corinthians advocated. We see in the case of widows not remarrying, Paul had a change of attitude. In Corinthians he granted their right to remarry but encouraged them not to do so. Some years later we see him writing to Timothy: *"I should like to see the younger ones [widows] marry, have children, keep house, and in general give our enemies no occasion to speak ill of us" (1Tim.5:14).*

Paul begins his response with a possible quote from the Corinthian letter: *"A man is better off having no relations with a woman" (1Cor.7:1b)*. Perhaps Paul had taught this idea earlier and it was now being used to support a doctrine he did not condone. Paul had no illusions about the "angelic" status of the Christians. He knew such illusions stemmed from a failure of self-acceptance that was motivated by pride. On the other hand, Paul would not go along with the "naturalists" within the Community that insisted everyone must be married. Paul knew God granted extraordinary gifts to members within the Community. All such gifts were for the building up of the Community. He knew one of these gifts to be the gift of celibacy which he himself had received. On one occasion when the disciples remarked, *"it is better not to marry,"* Jesus responded:

*Not everyone can accept this teaching, only those to whom it is given to do so ... some there are who have freely renounced sex for the sake of God's reign. Let him accept this teaching who can (Mt.19:11-12).*

Some may argue that Paul's own attitude was not perfectly balanced, but one must admit his doctrine on marriage is well balanced.

It seems that certain Corinthians advocated that those married must separate and no longer have sexual relationships. Some probably used this as an excuse to separate from each other. Paul sees this as a potential temptation to sexual immorality--particularly among those called to the married state rather than



to celibacy. He upholds marriage as the Christian norm, and he maintains that those marriages must be monogamous--one husband and one wife: *“But to avoid immorality every man should have his own wife and every woman her own husband” (1Cor.7:2)*. He maintains that neither the husband nor the wife have the right, arbitrarily, to separate one from the other--to insist that one abstain from sexual relationships because the other feels called to live a more “angelic” existence. Couples, upon mutual agreement, could separate for a time for sufficient reason. It must not be because abstinence is more meritorious, but because they wish to devote themselves more completely to such spiritual exercises as prolonged prayer. In our day such a spiritual exercise would be a spiritual retreat or some Christian workshop or seminar.

Paul makes no distinctions between the sexual needs or rights of men and women:

*The husband should fulfill his conjugal obligations toward his wife, the wife hers toward her husband. A wife does not belong to herself but to her husband; equally, a husband does not belong to himself but to his wife. Do not deprive one another, unless perhaps by mutual consent, in order to devote yourselves to prayer. Then return to one another, that Satan may not tempt you through lack of self-control (1Cor. 7:3-5).*

What Paul gives here is the practical advice that, in his opinion, it is necessary for couples to live together in peace and harmony. In order for them not to unnecessarily expose one another to needless temptations, He writes, *“I say this by way of concession, not as a command” (1Cor.7:6)*. Paul would not have agreed with the policy of the United States Navy of sending married men away on sea duty for nine months at a time.

Paul is able to distinguish between his own personal preference and the needs of others in regard to sexual relationships, based on the commands of God. He seeks to make the distinction clear: *“Given my preference, I should like you to be as I am. Still, each one has his own gift from God, one this and another that” (1Cor.7:7)*. Paul confirms that to live a life of celibacy is a gift from God. It must not be universal or insisted upon for all Christians. It would naturally flow that those advocating sexual asceticism would urge those not married to remain unmarried.

Paul has stated that he has a preference for the single state. He tells those not

married, the widows and the virgins in the Community, that it is his personal preference that they do not marry. But he insists that they be realistic about this matter. If they are going to be preoccupied with sexual desires, it is much better they be married. He writes:

*To those not married and to widows I have this to say: It would be well if they remain as they are, even as I do myself; but if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. It is better to marry than to be on fire (Cor.7:9).*

“To be on fire” has often been translated “to burn.” Some have interpreted this to mean that it is better to marry than to later burn in Hell fire. However, in the present context it seems to carry the figurative meaning of burning with physical passion. Later Paul gives his reason for preferring the celibate life. For now he is content to say that Christians who are married should live together in the married state; those not married may marry. In some cases, it is expedient to get married. But there is no command to marry. There should be no Christian pressure to get married. Some Christians, like himself, will be happier and more fulfilled in life by remaining in the single state. A Christian is free to marry or not to marry. If God calls a person to the priesthood within the Latin rite of the Catholic Church, it is presumed God gives to him the gift of celibacy as it is presently a precondition for ordination.

Paul does not wish celibacy to be exalted at the price of discrediting marriage. He maintains that in his opinion celibacy is a better state (considering the times); Paul does not maintain that it is a higher state for a Christian. Paul knows that God ordained marriage in the Genesis account; he knows that Jesus sanctified marriage at Cana. He later teaches in Ephesians the sanctity of married love when he compares it to Christ’s love for the Church. There he wrote: *“This is a great foreshadowing; I mean that it refers to Christ and the Church” (Eph.5:32).*

Paul turns to the problem of divorce within the Christian Community. Now it is not a matter of concession or personal preference, but the explicit teachings of Jesus Christ. Divorce was a serious social problem at the time of Paul. Divorce and remarriage were readily available in Greco-Roman society as well as in the Jewish world. In the case of the Greco-Roman society, women had equal rights before the law. They could readily divorce their husbands and many availed themselves of the opportunity. One Roman author spoke of a certain Roman matron who had taken ten husbands. He added that he had a

greater admiration for women who did not legalize their prostitution. There was a difference in the Jewish society: only the man could divorce. The Jewish wife had certain recourse under the law but she could not initiate or impede a divorce. Even the concept of adultery was one-sided. It was adultery for a married woman to have sexual relations with another man. However, it was only adultery for a married man if he had sexual relationships with a married woman. For a man to have sexual relationships with widows or single women was not considered adultery. At the time of Christ, Jewish men were permitted to divorce their wives for minor reasons, and any children remained with the father. The foundation for divorce was based upon Deuteronomy 24:1, which granted a husband the right to divorce his wife if he discovered in her “*some unseemly things.*” There were two schools of thought on the interpretation of this clause from Deuteronomy. The school of Shammai interpreted that divorce could be granted for sexual immorality only. The school of Hillel maintained that a husband could put away his wife for any reason for which she displeased him. This was the prevailing view in Paul’s time.

When the Pharisees confronted Jesus with the question of divorce it was in the context of the dispute between these two schools. Jesus appears to decide with the school of Shammai, but in actual fact He rises above the entire issue. He appeals to a higher court than that of Moses. Jesus bases His decision on the universal Will of God. He states a principle that binds not only Jews and Christians, but all men. We read in the Gospel of Mark:

*Then some Pharisees came up and as a test began to ask him whether it was permissible for a husband to divorce his wife. In reply he said, “What command did Moses give you?” They answered, “Moses permitted divorce and the writing of a decree of divorce.” But Jesus told them: “He wrote that commandment for you because of your stubbornness. At the beginning of creation God made them male and female; for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall become as one. They are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore let no man separate what God has joined.” ...He told them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and the woman who divorces her husband and marries another commits adultery” (Mk.10:2-12).*

In Matthew's account we find this addition: *"I now say to you, whoever divorces his wife (lewd conduct is a separate case) and marries another commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery"* (Mt.19:9).

Neither Mark or Luke mention this exception; in those texts divorce is absolutely prohibited. Here there is no question of remarriage. In actual fact, if the Mosaic Law were enforced, remarriage would be no problem because those committing adultery were stoned to death.

From the gospel accounts, we see that the Jewish dispensation to divorce one's wife was abrogated by Jesus Christ--done away with. Divorce was permitted only on the grounds of immorality. Remarriage was not permitted. Jesus states the absolute norm. His disciples were so impressed with this teaching that their response to it was: *"If that is the case between man and wife, it is better not to marry"* (Mt.19:10). Jesus did not deny their conclusion, but responded that marriage would have to be the normal state of affairs because to live a celibate life was a gift from God.

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul upholds the Lord's teaching on divorce, but with a certain moderation. He appears to tolerate separation if there is no remarriage. He says:

*To those now married, however, I give this command (though it is not mine: it is the Lord's): a wife must not separate from her husband. If she does separate, she must either remain single or become reconciled to him again. Similarly, a husband must not divorce his wife (1Cor. 7:10-11).*

It is suggested that Paul had a particular case in mind, in which a certain Christian lady had separated from her husband.

At this time Paul turns his attention to the problem of mixed marriages within the Christian Community. From what can be discerned, it appears that certain Christians interpreted their rebirth into Christ through baptism to imply a complete washing away of their old lives--old family ties, old social ties, and old marriages. Most certainly, if a Christian had formerly been married to a non-Christian, they should divorce their non-Christian spouse.

This problem gives us insight into Paul's concept on marriage. Paul had written at another time:

*Do not yoke yourselves in a mismatch with unbelievers. After all, what do righteousness and lawlessness have in common, or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What accord is there between Christ and Belial, what common lot between believer and unbeliever? Tell me what agreement there is between the temple of God and idols. You are the temple of the living God ...beloved, let us purify ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, and in the fear of God strive to fulfill our consecration perfectly" (2Cor.6:14-16:7:l).*

In the light of this teaching it could certainly be presumed that Paul would agree that a Christian should separate and divorce a pagan. However, this is what Paul teaches:

*As for the other matters, although I know of nothing the Lord has said, I say: If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever but is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her (1Cor.7:12-13).*

We saw in Chapter Six that Paul condemned *porneia* with the argument:

*Do you not see that your bodies are members of Christ? Would you have me take Christ's members and make them the members of a prostitute? God forbid! Can you not see that the man who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? Scripture says, "The two shall become one flesh" (1Cor.6:15-16) .*

Paul now logically presents the reverse side of the coin. A Christian man or woman is joined to Christ Jesus. The sexual relationship within their marriage does not destroy this union. Therefore, the non-Christian, in their union with the Christian, becomes one body with them: through this union, Paul maintains, they share in the holiness of Christ and that of the Christian. He writes, "*The unbelieving husband is consecrated by his believing wife; the unbelieving wife is consecrated by her believing husband.*" Paul goes on to conclude that the offspring of such a union must likewise be holy: "*If it were otherwise, your children should be unclean; but as it is, they are holy*" (1Cor.7:14).

We have here a very literal interpretation of marriage, making a couple one in the flesh. Obviously, Paul sees through such a union, the possibility to convert the non-Christian. Does he even imply that the faith of one supplies for the other? That would be a very interesting concept! Paul asks: *"Wife, how do you know that you will not save your husband; or you, husband, that you will not save your wife?" (1Cor.7:16)*. We now come to a very unique statement in the New Testament. Paul definitely grants permission for divorce: *"If the unbeliever wishes to separate, however, let him separate. The brother or sister is not bound in such cases; God has called you to live in peace (1Cor.7:15)* .

Paul teaches that where the non-Christian does not desire to live with his or her Christian partner, the Christian must not try to hold on to the non-Christian; it would only destroy the peace to which God has called them. Christians are, in such a case, free to divorce. Does Paul grant more? *"The believing husband or wife is not bound in such cases."*

Do his words grant the divorced person the right to remarry? If so, it is the only exception to the rule found in the New Testament. Some scholars hold that from the explicit meaning of the words, and in the light of the context in which they rest, Paul only grants a separation, and a dispensation from the general principle stated in verse seventeen. However, from at least the fourth century, the Christian Community has interpreted this text in Corinthians as permission to remarry. In Church legislation it is referred to as the Pauline Privilege.

In Pauline Privilege cases, you have a marriage before Christian conversion. In a perfect case, both parties would be unbaptized at the time of marriage. One party in the marriage converts to the Christian Faith, and as a consequence, the non-Christian refuses to live in peace with the Christian. The Church can grant the Christian party permission to divorce and remarry in the Church provided the new marriage is to one in the Church.

Paul does apparently accept the fact of divorce, but he does not permit remarriage, with possibly the one exception mentioned. He stands with the teachings of Christ, and upholds as an absolute principle the permanence of marriage. However, he grants exceptions to the absolute rule, and permits divorce and, in certain unique cases--it has been interpreted--he has permitted remarriage after divorce.

Paul formulates a general principle to guide those entering the Christian Community. He states the rule four times within ten verses. If followed, it could forestall a great deal of personal distress and social unrest. Paul desires to emphasize and give priority to the internal effects of Christian conversion, rather than focus on its secondary effects upon the social order. He certainly knows that if true conversion has occurred, it will in time affect all else. We need to bear in mind that the principle was stimulated by Paul's belief that the Parousia was imminent. Paul writes:

*The general rule is that each one should lead the life the Lord has assigned him, continuing as he was when the Lord called him. [Paul formulates the rule because of the present time of stress, and because he believed the time was short.] This is the rule I give in all the churches. Was someone called after he had been circumcised? He should not try to hide his circumcision. Did the call come to another who had never been circumcised? He is not to be circumcised. Circumcision counts for nothing, and its lack makes no difference either. What matters is keeping God's commandments ... Were you a slave when your call came? Give it no thought. Even supposing you could go free, you would be better off making the most of your slavery (1Cor. 7:17-21).*

This statement comes from where Paul was in his own culture and awareness. (From where we are today in our understanding of freedom and human dignity, slavery appears as an intrinsic evil not to be tolerated.) In fairness to Paul, we must remember he expected the present entire social order to abruptly end. The economy of Rome rested upon slavery, and Paul knew Rome's fear of slave-uprising and its brutal reaction to it and to anyone advocating it. The Christian population was small, consisting mainly of people from lower classes of society. It could have little hope of effecting any social change at this time. If Paul advocated the emancipation of slaves, it could have resulted in evil consequences on the slaves and the Church. Paul avoids the social issue, and emphasizes the spiritual, internal condition of Christian existence. He writes:

*The slave called in the Lord is a freedman of the Lord, just as the freeman who has been called is a slave of Christ. [Paul makes reference to the custom of a slave whose freedom has been purchased but who had to retain the family name of the previous Lord--instead of being slaves of their lord, they were freemen of*

*their lord.] You have been bought at a price! [To all the slaves of Jesus:] Do not enslave yourselves to men. Brothers, each of you should continue before God in the condition of life that was his when he was called... Are you bound to a wife? Then do not seek your freedom. Are you free of a wife? If so, do not go in search of one. Should you marry, however, you will not be committing sin (1Cor.7:22-24;27-28a).*

How should Paul's rule be applied to virgins within the Christian Community? Paul responds that he has no revelation from the Lord on this matter, but he will give his personal opinion, which he believes to be sound advice: *"With respect to virgins, I have not received any commandment from the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who is trustworthy, thanks to the Lord's mercy" (1Cor.7:25).*

Paul explicitly states that his opinion is motivated by *"the present time of stress"* and because *"the time is short."* He again reiterates his guiding principle: *"In the present time of stress it seems good to me for a person to continue as he is."* However, Paul is at pains to emphasize this is counsel, not a commandment. He does not deny the right to marry. The fact he is so insistent upon this right suggests that the opposite was being taught in Corinth. It appears many virgins had remained unmarried in anticipation of the Lord's imminent return. The Lord delayed, and the virgins grew older--the marriage age was passing by. A community of old maids was growing in Corinth. Apparently, certain fathers were anxious about their aging daughters. They sought Paul's advice on the matter:

*If anyone thinks he is behaving dishonorably toward his virgin because a critical moment has come and it seems that something should be done, let him do as he wishes. He commits no sin if there is a marriage. The man, however, who stands firm in his resolve, who while without constraint and free to carry out his will makes up his mind to keep his virgin, also acts rightly (1Cor.7:36-37).*

Certain scholars maintain that this situation applies to Christians who had entered a *"spiritual marriage."* They had entered marriage with the expressed public intention to remain virginal. The marriages would remain sexually unconsummated. After living together for awhile, some were having second thoughts on the advisability of this form of marriage, and sought Paul's advice. Whether it was a problem of a father with his daughter, or a husband



with his virginal wife, Paul answered: *“To sum up: the man who marries his virgin acts fittingly; the one who does not, will do better” (1Cor.7:38).*

Concerning the widows in the Community Paul writes, *“A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives, if her husband dies she is free to marry but on one condition, that it be in the Lord” (1Cor.7:39).* As we have seen from Paul’s quote in 2Cor.6:14-16, he did not sanction marriages between Christians and non-Christians. Paul grants widows the permission to remarry, but once again returns to his theme: it would be better if they did not marry. *“She will be happier, though, in my opinion, if she stays unmarried. I am persuaded that in this I have the Spirit of God” (1Cor.7:40).*

Paul explains his preference for a life of virginity and celibacy. He writes that those who get married:

*...will have trials in this life, and these I should like to spare you. I tell you, brothers, the time is short... I should like you to be free of all worries. The unmarried man is busy with the Lord’s affairs, concerned with pleasing the Lord: but the married man is busy with this world’s demands and occupied with pleasing his wife. This means he is divided. The virgin--indeed, any unmarried woman--is concerned with things of the Lord, in pursuit of holiness in body and spirit. The married woman, on the other hand, has the cares of this world to absorb her and is concerned with pleasing her husband (1Cor.7:28-29a:32-34).*

We have here a mixture of realism and idealism, with idealism winning the day. Paul definitely has a preference for the state of virginity and celibacy in *“this present time of stress”* because *“the time is short.”* Freedom from the obligations of marriage results in a greater opportunity for a life of prayer and sharing more fully in the missionary and charitable mission of the Church. It is only for a fuller dedication to the Body of Christ that Paul gives virginity and celibacy a preference. He had some second thoughts about matters, of which he has said, *“I am persuaded that in this I have the Spirit of God.”* Realism tempered his idealism. He later writes to Timothy that it is better for young widows to be married:

*Refuse to enroll the younger widows, for when their passions estrange them from Christ they will want to marry. This will bring them condemnation for breaking their first pledge. Besides, they*

*learn to be ladies of leisure, who go about from house to house-- becoming not only time-wasters but gossips and busybodies as well, talking about things they ought not. That is why I should like to see the younger ones marry, have children, keep house, and in general give our enemies no occasion to speak ill of us. Already, some have turned away to follow Satan (1Tim.5:11-15).*

The unmarried state can of itself be an occasion for selfish living. In a life of virginity or celibacy a Christian grows in Christian love, or the Christian grows in problems--emotional and spiritual. Paul later saw what could come to be. What he writes of selfish widows applies to all who use their single state to live irresponsible lives: *“A widow who gives herself to selfish indulgence, however, leads a life of living death” (1Tim.5:6).* He maintains such are Christian Zombies!

Although Paul gives the advice: *“Everyone ought to continue as he was when he was called,”* he does not wish to imply that no changes were necessary within one’s state in life. He desires all Christian lives to be motivated by the needs of the time and the mission of the Church. He implies that certain things take preference in the lives of all Christians, regardless of the state in which called. He expresses this message in these words:

*I tell you brothers, the time is short. From now on those with wives should live as though they had none; those who weep should live as though they were not weeping, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing; buyers should conduct themselves as though they owned nothing, and those who make use of the world as though they were not using it, for the world as we know it is passing away... I am going into this with you for your own good. I have no desire to place restrictions on you, but I do want to promote what is good, what will help you to devote yourselves entirely to the Lord. (1Cor.7:29-31;35).*

Regardless of one’s state in life, it is Paul’s hope and dream that every Christian, married and single, will devote him- or herself entirely to the Lord. *“I am persuaded that in this I have the Spirit of God” (1Cor. 7:40).* Paul desires that the Christian live in this “new creation” a life that glorifies God in body, soul, and spirit. God’s grace leads a person into a new relationship with God, society, and individual persons. Being a Christian is a serious responsibility, as one is a member of the Body of Christ. Since sex and its expression is a vital

part of human nature, its function must be in harmony with one's new relationship with God and the Church. There is little doubt about Paul's stand on premarital and extra-marital sex:

*As for lewd conduct or promiscuousness or lust of any sort, let them not even be mentioned among you; your holiness forbids this... Make no mistake about this: no fornicator, no unclean or lustful person--in effect an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with worthless arguments. These are sins that bring God's wrath down on the disobedient; therefore have nothing to do with them (Eph.5:3-7).*

The motives for the practice of such behavior may be lustful self-expression, egoism, a love called *eros* or *philia*. We cannot judge. But we can judge that, regardless of the motive, it is in defiance of the revealed Will of God--an act of disobedience affecting the entire Body of Christ. Such sins lead to Divine Abandonment. As always, the Church's mission is to save sinners, not to condemn them. Condemn the sin--Yes! The Church is in the world to save sinners, and the members of the Church must bring the merciful and compassionate love of Jesus to sinners. The Church has not been commissioned to cast stones at sinners, but to pour a divine healing oil and wine into their wounds.

One of the most pressing pastoral problems plaguing the Church today is Christian Marriage. Many apparent marriages have been annulled by the Church in recent years. An annulment implies a marriage never occurred. The number of annulments has greatly increased, and even the Pope has expressed alarm. The Church has the divine obligation to uphold the sanctity and permanency of Christian marriage. The unusual number of annulments in our day is due to a shift in the understanding of the marriage contract. Both the Church and State recognize marriage to be a contractual agreement between two persons. Marriage has never been left to the sole wishes of the individuals involved. Marriage has too many social repercussions. Both Church and State agree that the state of marriage is vital to society. Both seek to protect the institution of marriage by making laws governing both the validity and legality of the marriage contract. If civil and church laws are not fulfilled, the marriage contract can be declared null and void, which means no marriage had occurred, regardless of the appearance of a marriage, and regardless of how long the parties lived in marital union. If a marriage contract is illegal from the moment of the marriage, twenty-five years and ten

children later it is still an invalid marriage.

In past years, much of the marriage legislation governing the Sacrament of Marriage stemmed from viewing marriage solely as a contractual agreement. Marriage was viewed more from the standpoint of a natural and social contract. This was reflected in the Canon Law of the Church. These are some of the conditions demanded by the Church for a valid marriage: both parties must enter the marriage of their own free will; both must have the intention to fulfill the ends of marriage--a permanent union that does not totally exclude children; both parties must be free to enter marriage; marriage occurs between two baptized persons unless a dispensation is granted; marriage must be before a legally appointed representative of the Church and two witnesses; the marriage must be sexually consummated. For any one of these reasons, a marriage could be declared invalid in the past and present. In the case of marriage between a Christian and a non-baptized person, such marriages were considered lawful, but non-sacramental. They have sometimes been treated as were the Pauline privilege cases--the marriages have been dissolved and remarriage permitted. These marriages are believed to come under the Church's power to bind and loose. They are referred to as Petrine cases.

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Sacrament of Marriage has been viewed more as a spiritual covenant than a natural contract. A covenant is certainly a contractual relationship, but of the highest order. Therefore, the conditions of the contract are as special as the parties involved. The Sacrament of Marriage is a covenant between a Christian man and woman, and Jesus Christ. The end and goal of such marriages is a fuller participation of the couple in the life of Jesus Christ. It is a renewed dedication and consecration of self as a couple to Jesus Christ. The couple mutually agrees to aid and assist one another to fulfill their lives in Christ. More and more, moral theologians believe that where this covenant relationship is obviously absent--not present in any degree--you have no Sacrament of Marriage. It is within this context that annulments are being sought and obtained within the Church today. Many annulments have been granted within this sacramental concept of marriage, and validly so. If the Church sins today through its laxity toward annulments, it would imply that it previously sinned in the other extreme.

Chapter Seven of Corinthians teaches the important lesson that all aspects of Christian life come under the dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ. The image of Jesus Christ Crucified can never be removed from before the eyes of Christians in this world. Of necessity the Christian life will be lived in tension.

**All Christians must live before the call to perfection and the experimental awareness of their own failure. Christian tension ceases only at death, or by denial of Christ.**

## CHAPTER 5

### THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

The Scriptures reveal that God so loved the world He sent His Son into the world to save the world. Jesus appears in the Gospel of John as *“the Savior of the world”* and *“the light of the world”* (Jn.4:42:9:5). *“...God, in Christ, was reconciling the world to himself”* (2Cor.5:19). Jesus commissioned His Church to go into the world:

*Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation (Mk.16:15).*

*...go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt.28:19).*

Although Jesus is the Savior and the Light of the world, He confessed: *“My kingdom does not belong to this world”* (Jn.18:36).

And so he tells His disciples: *“...you do not belong to the world. But I chose you out of the world”* (Jn.15:19).

The night before His death He prayed thus to the Father for the disciples:

*I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but to guard them from the evil one. They are not of the world, any more than I belonged to the world. Consecrate them by means of truth--Your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world (Jn.17:15-18).*

St. John writes, *“For our relation to this world is just like his”* (1Jn.4:17). The disciples of Jesus must be in the world, but their situation is a precarious one. The Scriptures warn:

*Have no love for the world, nor the things that the world affords. If anyone loves the world, the Father’s love has no place in him, for*

*nothing that the world affords comes from the Father. Carnal allurements, enticements for the eye, the life of empty show--all these are from the world. And the world with its seductions is passing away but the man who does God's will endures forever. (1Jn.2:15-17).*

*Are you not aware that love of the world is enmity to God? A man is marked out as God's enemy if he chooses to be the world's friend (Jas.4:4).*

The Scriptures confirm that “*the whole world is under the evil one*” (1Jn.5:19). Jesus acknowledged that Satan was “*Prince of the world*” (Jn.14:30).

Paul understood the Christian Community could not be an island in a sea of paganism. As he said to the Corinthians:

*I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral persons. I was not speaking of association with immoral people in this world... To avoid them, you would have to leave the world! (1Cor.5:9-10).*

Christians could not leave this world except through death. However, they must not become part of this world:

*Do not conform yourselves to this age (Rom.12:2).*

*Those who make use of the world [must do so] as though they were not using it, for the world as we know it is passing away (1Cor.7:31).*

St. James wrote that Christians must keep themselves unspotted from this world. The Scriptures confirm that it is possible for the Church to remain in the world and still triumph over the world: “*For there is One greater in you than there is in the world*” (1Jn.4:4b). Jesus sends His disciples into the world, but He tells them not to be afraid because He has overcome the world. This implies He has conquered the Prince of this world. Jesus proclaimed the Prince of this world was coming, but he had no power over Him. He told His disciples: “*And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world*” (Mt.28:20). Through its union with Jesus Christ, the Christian Community is able to be in the world, yet not of the world. Paul wrote to Titus:

*The grace of God has appeared, offering salvation to all men. It*

*trains us to reject godless ways and worldly desires, and live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age as we await our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of the great God and of our Savior Christ Jesus (Titus 2:11-13).*

A belief in the imminent return of Jesus Christ was certainly an encouragement to live in the world and not be of the world.

In the Scriptures the term “world” appears as both good and evil. When John speaks of God’s love for the world, he means God’s love for human beings on this earth. When he speaks of the world as being at enmity with God, he means human existence that is under the power of Satan. The Scriptures picture Satan as the Prince of this world, and Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. Jesus comes to deliver human beings from the power of Satan. The commission of the Church in the world is expressed in Jesus’ words to Paul:

*To open the eyes of those to whom I am sending you, to turn them from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God; that through their faith in me they may obtain the forgiveness of their sins and a portion among God’s people (Acts 26:18).*

St. John teaches that the world is overcome through faith in Jesus. Where this faith is lacking or weakened, it can be expected that the world will make inroads into the Church.

It has been said that the major problem of Christianity today is the secularism of the Christian people. The word secular comes from the Latin *saeculum*, meaning “age.” Secular has become synonymous for worldly and temporal. Secularism in the Christian Community implies that the lives of Christians are basically oriented toward the goods and goals of earthly living rather than toward those of the eternal life. The lives of many Christians reveal almost no loyalty to the faith they profess; they give lip service to a religious creed, while the standards and principles of this world guide their lives. Recent religious surveys reveal that an extremely large percentage of Catholics disagrees with the traditional moral and theological secularism in the Church. Secularism has been said to be “the failure to let God be God in our lives.”

Secularism neither denies nor affirms religious faith, it is merely indifferent to it. In a certain sense, the Church must be secular as it must remain a visible society in every age. As such a society, it must have concern for temporal



things that have only transitory value and goodness. It has to make use of worldly goods as a means to achieve its own goals within society. The ever present problem remains: how to be a secular institution, yet keep free from the contamination of secularism, which implies succumbing to the temptations of conforming the Church (Christians) to the standards of thought and behavior of this world. Paul constantly fought to maintain a sharp distinction between the world and the Church. He maintained the lives of Christians must be distinguished from the lives of non-Christians. The lives of Christians have the vocation to reflect Jesus Christ in this world and not to conform to this age. This is accomplished through a life of faith in Jesus that expresses itself in this world through agape-love.

Paul dealt with secularism in the Christian Community at Corinth. Since the Christian Community was but a wee boat in a vast sea of paganism, it was constantly subjected to the powerful environmental forces of paganism. There was always the danger of the Christian Community being submerged into the environment of the world. The Church was surviving in an idolatrous society. Its members had to confront the principles and practices of paganism, and associate with men and women who incarnated those principles in daily living. It would never be an easy task to keep oneself “unspotted by this world;” it would only be possible through a living faith in Jesus Christ.

Idolatry was a very subtle and deep spiritual perversion. When one looks past beautifully designed temples and artistically fashioned images of pagan deities, one can behold the true evil of idolatry. Idolatry is human revolt against God. Idolatry cuts God down to man-size. Man deifies himself through idolatry. The gods and goddesses appear with all the strengths and weaknesses of human beings. Idolatry gives man a subtle control over the Divine. In idolatrous worship, man always knows where he stands with the deities--not so in the worship of the One true God. An author once wrote that God made man to his own image and likeness, and man returned the compliment. Man made God into his own image and likeness. To the Romans Paul wrote:

*They certainly had knowledge of God, yet they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks; they stultified themselves through speculating to no purpose, and their senseless hearts were darkened. They claimed to be wise, but turned into fools instead; they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images representing mortal man, birds, beasts, and snakes. ...these men who exchanged*

*the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator (Rom.1:21-23,25).*

That is the essence of idolatry. The creature replaces the Creator.

Men instinctively feel a need to escape the powerlessness of self through submission and worship of something external and greater than self, and into some identification with this greater power. Man perverts this instinctive need when he fails to recognize it as one's true need for God, who transcends all that is human, and instead surrenders himself to false gods of his own creation. In reality they are external projections of man's internal pride and egoism. Idolatry begins in an unconscious desire to deify self; it ends in the corruption of self, the worship of that which is lower than self, and an enslavement to that which is other than self. Only in true worship does man transcend self. True worship never fits God into man's little world; the reality of God constantly challenges man to escape the narrowness of his world.

Man creates the images, and devils and demons embody them, giving supernatural reality to their existence. Wonders and signs occurred in pagan shrines before images of gods and goddesses because evil spirits embodied these mental and physical creations of man. Satan uses man's own perversion to further enslave and corrupt him.

Paul believed that idolatry ultimately brought people into union with evil spirits. Scripture acknowledges the existence of pure spiritual entities called "powers" and "principalities, referring to them as *"the principalities and powers of heaven"* (Eph.3:10). Paul writes, *"Our battle is not against human forces but against the principalities and powers, the rulers of this world of darkness, the evil spirits in regions above"* (Eph.6:12). Scripture confirms that Christ is the true Lord and Creator of all such spiritual entities:

*In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations, principalities or powers; all were created through him, and for him (Col.1:16).*

These spiritual beings perverted their natures by rebellion against God and became, as one author described them, "autonomous self-centeredness." They offer themselves as objects of human worship in place of God and His Christ: *"See to it that no one deceives you through any empty, seductive philosophy that follows mere human traditions, a philosophy based on cosmic powers rather*

*than on Christ” (Col.2:8).*

However, Christ, by His death on the Cross, has defeated and overcome these spiritual beings: *“Thus did God disarm the principalities and powers. He made a public show of them and, leading them off captive, triumphed in the person of Christ” (Col.2:15).*

Pagan people were not as simple and naive as some believe. Most did not worship statues as such. Adoration of an image always implied a reverence of the deity represented in the image--the powerful spirit the image was believed to represent. We know that to desecrate the image of the emperor would bring serious repercussions upon the city wherein the desecration occurred. What was done to the statue was considered done to the person represented by the statue.

One of the secular problems facing the Christians in Corinth was the very mundane business of grocery shopping and the problem of dining out. They became problems because the unique cultural situation that tied these normally innocent things to the deadly problem of idolatry. It was nearly impossible to purchase meat in the market place that had not previously been sacrificed to some god--slaughtered on some pagan altar. In pagan worship the uneatable parts were sacrificed to the gods and the more choice portions were eaten by the priests in the temple and the worshippers. Many temples maintained butcher shops adjacent to the temple in order to sell the surplus meat to the general public. It also appears that certain temples possessed banquet halls and catered parties and banquets. Some, apparently, had restaurants wherein people could dine. The problem of eating meat in Corinth had become a real conscience problem within the Church, and a cause of division. Certain Christians felt they had a right to eat this meat and even attend banquets being held in a temple area. Other Christians, however, believed these things were immoral and idolatrous. From some of the menus that have come down to us in pagan literature, these banquets were quite the affairs to attend. In case someone is looking for some suggestions for their next banquet, we will pass on a menu described by Petronius, a friend of Nero.

*Let’s see, first we had some roast pork garnished with loops of sausage and flanked with more sausages and some giblets done to a turn. And there were pickled beets and some whole wheat bread made without bleach. Then came a course of cold tarts with a mixture of some wonderful Spanish wine and hot honey. Then there*

*were chickpeas and lupins, no end of filberts, and an apple apiece. The main course was a roast of bear meat. It reminded me of roast boar, so I put down about a pound of it. Besides, I'd like to know, if bears eat men, why shouldn't men eat bears? To wind up, we had some soft cheese in fresh wine, a snail apiece, some tripe hash, liver in pastry boats and eggs topped with more pastry and turnips and mustard and beans boiled in the pod and... but enough's enough (The Satyricon, pp.64ff).*

Needless to say, invitations to pagan banquets were tempting to Corinthian Christians. Apparently they formulated a pragmatic but superficial solution to their problem. They defended their decision in a letter to Paul in which they implied, *"We see nothing scandalous about eating idol meat."* Paul replies:

*So about the eating of meat sacrificed to idols: we know that "there is no idol in the world," and that "there is no God but one." Also, whoever eats, eats for the Lord, since he gives thanks to God...(1Cor.14:6b).*

We know the Jerusalem decree said that Christians must *"abstain from anything contaminated by idols"* (Acts 15:20). Paul makes no mention of this decree. The decree probably had not been promulgated in Corinth because of the large Gentile population in the Church. The Corinthians were neatly rationalizing away any problem.

More and more the Corinthian converts appear to be in a state of spiritual adolescence. Paul's constant reference, not without irony, to their "knowledge" echoes the old adage: "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." But, the Corinthians failed to integrate their knowledge with charity. An adolescent often seeks knowledge for knowledge's sake--merely to exercise their newly discovered intellectual powers. Often they use knowledge to lord it over others, exalt self, or to put down another with no real concern for truth or charity. Often knowledge and a quick mind are used to rationalize and defend undesirable behavior--a mental habit many keep long after adolescence has passed. Smart people can always come up with smart reasons to do the wrong thing! Paul turns his attention to this problem. He does not deny their arguments but he qualifies and distinguishes: by so doing he hopes to bring them to a more mature judgment and to a way of behavior more Christian.

Paul feels some Corinthian Christians are still very superstitious about idols. Although converted to Christ, they still maintain a respect and fear of the pagan gods. Paul does not deny this fear has a basis in reality: idol worship for the sincere believer involves a real communication with demons. Like Rachel of the Old Testament, it is difficult for some people to leave their household gods behind them (See Gen.31:34). Apparently some of the weaker Christians still flirted with idolatry. Some may have been like the old Irish lady who, when asked by the priest on her deathbed to renounce Satan, refused to do so with the words: "At this point in my life I cannot afford to make any unnecessary enemies!"

Obviously for many Corinthians, idols had no hold on their belief. They faced no problem of conscience when eating meat sacrificed to idols. The scrupulosity of others would not curtail the freedom they had in the Lord. In chapter eight Paul recognizes the correctness of their reason but points out how spiritually shortsighted they are. Paul acknowledges that eating and drinking of itself is an indifferent matter, but if it becomes an occasion of sin for another, then it is not an indifferent matter. It can become a callous disregard for the Body of Christ. Christians should be motivated in all things by love of Christ and love of neighbor. Out of this problem, Paul formulates an enduring Christian principle: Liberty must be regulated by love! Paul acknowledges that Christian revelation destroys belief in gods and lords. He clearly states the Christian Creed which may have been part of the baptismal profession of Faith:

*For us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things come and for whom we live; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom everything was made and through whom we live (1Cor.8:6).*

His reference to Jesus Christ as *Kyrios* (Lord) is not without theological significance. In the Old Testament *Kyrios* is used as a synonym for God. For Christians there is but One God--whose relationship is so intimate it could only be described as a filial relationship: the relationship of a loving Father with a beloved child. Christians acknowledge only one Lord in this universe--Jesus Christ. He is the supreme Lord before whom all will one day kneel in humble submission.

These were known theological facts, believed and understood by the Christians. They were part of the content of Christian Faith. Christian Faith works through Christian Charity--the definition of "living faith" that saves.

To divorce theological knowledge from love can be disastrous for all concerned. Knowledge without love puffs up (*phusioo*) its possessor. *Phusioo* carries the connotation of one filled with hot air. The ego becomes falsely inflated. Paul will agree that knowledge is useful, but he argues that love is more important than knowledge. Only when one loves can one build a secure personal foundation.

A knowledgeable person without love can become anything from a wind bag to a callously cruel person. True personal knowledge of God or man comes through union with God or man. If one's union with the other is not loving, the knowledge of the other remains superficial. The other remains truly unknown. Love is the only union that brings true understanding of another. The lover is always understanding of the loved one, who is never truly understood (even by God). Paul writes: *"If a man thinks he knows something, that means he has never really known it as he ought. But if anyone loves God, that man is known by him"* (1Cor.8:2-3).

Corinthians: Of course we all know about that "meat offered to idols."

Paul: Yes, but whereas "knowledge" inflates, love builds up (1Cor.8:1).

Corinthians: We know that an idol is really nothing, and that there is no God but one.

Paul: Even though there are so-called gods in the heavens and on the earth--there are, to be sure, many such "gods" and "lords"--for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things come and for whom we live; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom everything was made and through whom we live (1Cor.8:5-6).

Corinthians: Now food does not bring us close to God. We suffer no loss through failing to eat, and we gain no favor by eating.

Paul: Take care, however, lest in exercising your right you become an occasion of sin to the weak. ... Not all, of course, possess this "knowledge." Because some were so recently devoted to idols, they eat meat, fully aware that it has been sacrificed, and because their conscience is weak, it is defiled by the eating. If someone sees you, with your "knowledge" reclining at table in the temple of an idol, may not his conscience in its weak state be influenced to the point that he eats the idol offering? (1Cor.8:9; 7:10).

Here Paul suggests what he explicitly states in Chapter Ten: people who in faith eat idol offerings communicate with demons. As already mentioned, certain weak Christians had not given up their beliefs in the false gods--for them, to eat such meat would be a religious act, whereas it would not be so for one who had no faith in such things. Therefore Paul writes: *“Because of your ‘knowledge’ the weak one perishes, that brother for whom Christ died. When you sin thus against your brothers and wound their weak consciences, you are sinning against Christ (1Cor.8:11-12).*

Paul maintains that we do have a moral responsibility towards our brothers and sisters in the Lord; we will have to account for the effect of our behavior upon them. Paul concludes: *“Therefore, if food causes my brother to sin I will never eat meat again, so that I may not be an occasion of sin to him” (1Cor.8:13).* When one reads Chapters Nine and Ten in conjunction with Eight, one has the feeling the band fell out of step in Nine and got back on in Ten. In chapter Nine, Paul goes immediately into a defense of self. He returns to the previous subject in Chapter Ten. There is a logical connection between Chapters Eight and Ten. What has been said in Eight sparked the defense in Chapter Nine. In Chapter Nine, Paul not only defends himself against the accusations made against him, but he offers himself as a living example of being free but responsible. Apparently, Paul was accused of inconsistency in his own moral behavior. He taught one thing, but he did another. These accusations were probably part of a general campaign on the part of Paul’s enemies to discredit his authority in Corinth.

Paul defends his position by defending his apostolic authority. He was a witness to the resurrection of Jesus; he had been commissioned by him; the work he accomplished in Corinth affirmed the divinity of his apostolic appointment. He writes:

*Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? And are you not my work in the Lord? Although I may not be an apostle for others, I certainly am one for you. You are the very seal of my apostolate in the Lord (1Cor.9:1-2).*

Once his position as an apostle has been affirmed, Paul argues from this point that as an apostle he possesses the same rights and privileges of the other apostles. However, he goes on to demonstrate that he had refused to exercise these rights and privileges for the good of others. He presents himself as a living example of the principle that liberty must be demonstrated in love. He

acknowledges the freedom to do many things but, in regard to this freedom, it has been responsibly exercised in his case. He begins his defense with these words: *“My defense against those who criticize me is this.”* He continues with a barrage of questions--fifteen in all. He enumerates all the rights and privileges renounced in order not to be a burden to the Corinthians. He mentions the rights of the other apostles, and implies he has foregone them. *“Do we not have the right to marry a believing woman of the Lord and Cephas? Do we not have the right to eat and drink like the rest of the apostles and the brothers?”* (1Cor.9:4-5).

This text seems to imply that, generally speaking, the apostles were married,--at least those with whom Paul was acquainted. It seems to suggest that James, Bishop of Jerusalem (brother of the Lord) was married. Most certainly Paul argues he was due financial support from the community. This was clear from the Scriptures, the practice of the Church, and from the general practice within society:

*Is it only myself and Barnabas who are forced to work for a living? What soldier in the field pays for his rations? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its yield? What shepherd does not nourish himself with the milk of his flock? You may think that the reasons I am giving are merely human ones, but does not the law itself speak of these things? It is written in the law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out grain.” Is God concerned here for oxen, or does he not rather say this for our sakes? You can be sure it was written for us, for the plowman should plow in hope and the harvester expect a share in the grain. [At times Paul does get carried away in his examples. Certainly the Lord had concern for oxen. Jesus himself taught God’s concern for the creatures of this earth and that a sparrow does not fall from the sky unnoticed by God.] If we have sown for you in the spirit, is it too much to expect a material harvest from you? If others have this right over you, is not our right even greater? But we have not used this right. On the contrary, we put up with all sorts of hardships so as not to place any obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. Do you not realize that those who work in the temple are supported by the temple, and those who minister at the altar share the offerings of the altar? Likewise the Lord himself ordered that those who preach the gospel should live by the gospel (1Cor.9:6-14).*



Recall when Jesus sent out the seventy-two he told them: *“Stay in the one house eating and drinking what they have, for the laborer is worth his wage” (Lk.10:7).*

Paul really emphasizes this point because he knows it touches every one of them. There was no one in Corinth who could say that Paul ever took any money from them even though he had a well substantiated right to do so. This was a point of great pride in Paul’s life. For fear the Corinthians would get lost in the lengthy example and miss the point, thinking that now he sought a little retroactive remuneration for his labors, Paul makes it crystal clear that he would rather die than take a coin from any of them: *“As for me, I have not used any of these rights, nor do I write this now to see to it that anything should be done for me. I would rather die than let anyone rob me of my boast” (1Cor.9:15).*

Paul wishes to make clear that he is not boasting about preaching the gospel to the Corinthians. He maintains that he is not free in this regard. His own salvation is tied with his preaching of the gospel. Concerning the preaching of the gospel, he is not free. In regard to receiving or not receiving remuneration for preaching the gospel he is free:

*Yet preaching the gospel is not the subject of a boast, I am under compulsion and have no choice. I am ruined if I do not preach it! If I do it willingly, I have my recompense; if unwillingly, I am nonetheless entrusted with a charge. And this recompense of mine? It is simply this, that when preaching I offer the gospel free of charge and do not make full use of the authority the gospel gives me (1Cor.9:16-18).*

How firm Paul is in this position we read in Second Corinthians:

*Could I have done wrong when I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge, humbling myself with a view to exalting you? I robbed other churches, I accepted support from them in order to minister to you. When I was with you and in want I was a burden to none of you, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my needs. In every way possible I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and I shall continue to do so. I swear by the Christ who is in me that this boast of mine will not cease in the regions of Achaia! (2Cor.11:7-10).*

No doubt Paul's objective behavior did seem to be inconsistent with the principles he taught. Especially to those who judged only by surface appearances. Some lacked the charity and/or the intelligence to be able to look into the spirit of the man. If they had been able to do so they would have seen the true consistency of his spirit. Paul's life was motivated by a heroic principle of self-denial. Love caused him to be many things to many people in hopes he could bring some of them to salvation. His personal defense reaches its climax in verses 19-24:

*Although I am not bound to anyone, I made myself the slave of all so as to win over as many as possible. I became like a Jew to the Jews in order to win the Jews. To those bound by the law I became like one who is bound (although in fact I am not bound by it), that I might win those bound by the law. To those not subject to the law I became like one not subject to it (not that I am free from the law of God, for I am subject to the law of Christ), that I might win those not subject to the law. To the weak I became a weak person with a view to winning the weak. I have made myself all things to all men in order to save at least some of them. In fact, I do all that I do for the sake of the gospel in the hope of having a share in its blessings (1Cor.9:19-23).*

Paul seeks to exhort the Christians in Corinth to practice self-denial for the spiritual good of their brothers and sisters. He humbly uses himself as an example for them. He turns their eyes to a worldly example of self-denial in their own front yard. He uses the example of the athletes in the Isthmian games to encourage their self-denial. The games were held every two years, and possibly they were in progress at the time of his writing this letter. Everyone in the city knew the rules governing the training of the athletes who participated in the games. No slave could participate, only free men. All must furnish proof of ten months of intensive training. They must arrive in Corinth thirty days before the games, and participate in required exercises in the gymnasiums. Only when these conditions were fulfilled could they participate in the games. As we know, the winners were crowned with parsley. To win was a great honor to one's family. On returning home to one's native city, an opening was made in the city wall symbolizing that a city of such a citizen did not need the protection of walls.

Paul asked them to reflect upon all the sacrifices demanded to win a perishable crown and a fleeting glory. How much more eager should

Christian athletes be to practice self-denial in order to win the crown that never fades. Our Lord himself said: *“The worldly take more initiative than the other-worldly when it comes to dealing with their own kind” (Lk.16:8b)*. In other words, the children of this world are more prudent than the children of light in achieving their worldly ambitions.

Paul maintains that he has not lost sight of his goal. He does not run in the wrong direction. He knows the price to be paid for victory and he is willing to pay that price:

*I do not run like a man who loses sight of the finish line. I do not fight as if I were shadow-boxing. What I do is discipline my body and master it, for fear that after having preached to others I myself should be rejected (1Cor.9:26-27).*

Paul teaches Christians the necessity of mastering their passions and desires. This they achieve through self-discipline. If the faculties of the human personality are truly to become instruments of righteousness, they must be subjected to the power of the spirit. A person normally achieves this through the mortification of the appetites. This process begins through fasting, for if the person lacks the power to say, “No,” to food and drink--the most basic of human needs--they scarcely will be able to say, “No,” to little else, this being true for both physical and spiritual athletes. Paul says this of himself when he would have been well over fifty years of age. This would be the practical application of what he later writes to the Romans: *“If you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the spirit you put to death the evil deeds of the body, you will live” (Rom.8:13)*. This certainly implies mortification of the body.

Paul has realistically assessed the Corinthians to be infants in the spirit--to be *nepioi*. Their naive attitude towards the spiritual dangers of idolatry, and their callous indifference to the effect of their behavior on others in the community substantiated Paul’s judgment. Paul patiently seeks to raise the level of their spiritual maturity, but their own spiritual complacency blocked his efforts. This complacency was largely due to their reception of the charismatic gifts. Paul seeks to destroy this complacency. He brings before their eyes the example of Israel. He contrasts the spiritual gifts received by Israel with those received by the members of the Church--the New Israel.

*Brothers, I want you to remember this: our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; by the cloud and the sea*

*all of them were baptized into Moses. All ate the same spiritual food. All drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that was following them, and the rock was the Christ (1Cor.10:1 -4).*

Paul sees the gifts to Israel as comparable to those received in the Christian Community. Israel's following Moses through the Red Sea, passing from the slavery of Egypt to freedom in the desert, is seen as baptism. They are directed through the desert by a pillar of cloud, a symbol of God's abiding presence, comparable to the presence of the Holy Spirit within the Christian Community. God miraculously sustains their lives with "living water" and life-giving manna called "bread from Heaven" by the psalmists. These gifts strongly symbolize the gift of the Holy Eucharist--a gift to which Paul attributes the preservation of Christian life. Paul even sees the presence of Christ as continually being with Israel in the "rock" that followed Israel through the desert (Paul makes reference to a Jewish tradition that a rock giving forth living-water followed Israel through the desert). This suggests the pre-existence of Christ, and confirms the early Church's belief in the abiding presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist. However, despite all these spiritual blessings, the Israelites came to spiritual disaster through their imprudent and willful confrontation with paganism: "*Yet we know that God was not pleased with most of them, for 'they were struck down in the desert'*" (1Cor.10:5). This may be a reference to the 3000 struck down by the Levites in the incident when the golden calf was worshiped by Israel (see Ex.32:28).

With this example before their eyes, Paul exhorts the Corinthians not to become idolaters, not to indulge in lewdness, not to test the Lord, not to grumble. The inference being that they are presently guilty of these things. For this reason he brings to their awareness God's dealings with such sinners. He writes:

*These things happened as an example to keep us from wicked desires such as theirs. Do not become idolaters, as some of them did. Scripture says, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and arose to take their pleasure" (1Cor.10:6-7).*

This would be a reference from Ex.36:6 in which Israel worshiped the golden calf.

*“Let us not indulge in lewdness as some of them did, so that in one day twenty-three thousand perished (1Cor.10:8)* This would be a reference to the incident recorded in Numbers 25, wherein the Israelites consorted with the Moabite women, which led to sexual immorality and idolatry. Actually the accounts give the number of slain as 24,000.

*“Let us not test the Lord as some of them did, only to be destroyed by snakes” (1Cor.10:9).* In Numbers 21:6ff, we see that Israel tested the Lord by demanding further miraculous deeds: He punished them by sending the deadly fiery serpents into their camp.

*“Nor are you to grumble as some of them did, to be killed by the destroying angel” (1Cor.10:10).* Here we probably have a reference to the personal rebellion against Paul. The Old Testament reference may be the incident recorded in Numbers 16, when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled against the authority of Moses with the words:

*“Enough from you! The whole community, all of them, are holy: the Lord is in their midst. Why then should you set yourselves over the Lord’s congregation?” The earth opened beneath their feet and swallowed up all of them including their families and possessions (Nm.16:3b,32).*

What appeared in the Old Testament serves as a warning to the Church today: *“The things that happened to them served as an example. They have been written as a warning to us, upon whom the end of the ages has come” (1Cor 10:11).* Paul suggests the Corinthians could come to the same ending for the same sins: *“We know that God was not pleased with most of them for ‘they were stuck down in the desert.’”* There may be a reference to physical death within the Community before the Second Coming. With an eye on their spiritual complacency Paul warns: *“For all these reasons, let anyone who thinks he is standing upright watch out lest he fall!” (1Cor.10:12).*

Idolatry only sums up the temptations the Christian Community ever face within this world: to worship the things of this world rather than the one true God. *“I am telling you,”* writes Paul, *“whom I love, to shun the worship of idols, and I address you as one addresses sensible people” (1Cor.10:14-15).* Regardless of what may be the personal problems faced by individual Christians, there is never an excuse to turn from the lordship of Christ and from the worship of the one true God. All Christians have the power to remain faithful to their

commitment. Paul says: *“No test has been sent you that does not come to all men. ... He will not let you be tested beyond your strength. Along with the test he will give you a way out of it so that you may be able to endure it” (1Cor.10:13).* The Holy Eucharist becomes the greatest deterrent to idolatry for Paul.

There was an ancient belief, which Paul confirms, that worshippers actually communicated with the gods by participating in a banquet of sacrificial food. In the case of pagan worship, Paul confirms it to be a real communion with evil spirits. Paul compares this to the Eucharist, and the comparison leaves no doubt in the mind of the reader of the primitive belief the early Church held concerning the Real Presence and the consequence of receiving that Presence at *“the table of the Lord.”* Paul writes:

*You may judge for yourselves what I am saying. Is not the cup of blessing we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, many though we are, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf (1Cor.10:16-17).*

The expression *“the cup of blessing”* has a clear Semitic ring to it--it reflects a liturgical celebration. The cup in mind is probably the third cup of the Passover meal. The word for loaf is *artos*--this word expresses not only the substance of the bread, but also describes the shape in which it was baked. The particular shape here is rather flat and round like a thick pancake. At the feast of Passover the host broke the bread and passed a piece to each person. This signified the meal had begun. In the Christian celebration, the bread is referred to as the Body of Christ. The breaking and eating of this bread implies that communion and fellowship with Christ has begun. However, more is implied: *“Because the loaf of bread is one, we, many though we are, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.”* A participation in this meal creates what has been called *koinonia* signifying communion. Through this communion, the physical Presence of Christ becomes a reality in the world. It creates the Christian Community. Through their union with Christ, the individual members are united one with the other, and support and strengthen each other.

To understand fully what is being implied, we need to call to mind the semitic belief about dining together. People sitting down to share a meal together was a sacred symbolic act. It implied a union of spirits between the parties involved. It was a concrete gesture to cement friendship with those

participating in the meal.

When ancient people shared in a sacrificial banquet they believed the sharing of such a meal brought them into communion with God. The Jews believed they had sat down at “the table of Yahweh.” An early Hellenistic inscription has been found that referred to a temple table as the “table of the gods,” on which sacrificial meats were placed for distribution to the believers. Sacrificial banquets were believed to effect a union between God and all who shared in the banquet meal. Paul writes:

*Look at Israel according to the flesh and see if those who eat the sacrifices do not share in the altar! What am I saying--that meat offered to an idol is really offered to that idol, or that an idol is a reality? No, I mean that the Gentiles sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to become sharers with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and also the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and likewise the table of demons. Do we mean to provoke the Lord to jealous anger? Surely we are not stronger than he! (1Cor.10:18-22).*

Certain Corinthian Christians rationalized their right to participate in banquets held in pagan temples. Since false gods did not exist, such sacrifices were made to no-gods. Therefore, we have here a worship of nothing. There is no question of idolatry. Paul attacks their behavior on two different dimensions. First, he argues that their behavior demonstrates a callous disregard for weaker members of the community who still do believe in pagan gods to a degree. The behavior of the so called “knowledgeable” Christians is leading others into the subjective sin of idolatry because they participate in these banquets from an entirely different spiritual point of view. They participate because of the scandal given by the more “enlightened” ones within the Community. However, Paul takes on the very argument of the enlightened ones. He sees through the superficiality of their defense and he discerns the real evil involved in their behavior.

Presenting his personal belief, Paul maintains that when a Christian sits at a banquet in a pagan temple he becomes one in spirit with those with whom he dines. These pagans are idolaters, and the Christian’s physical presence there equates them with the idolaters. Furthermore, Paul knows idolatry opens one to union with demons and devils--anti-God forces in the world--who seek to destroy all true union and communion with God. Regardless of what

Christians intend, they are actually entering into union with devils. They become their partners in crime. Through their action the Christian Community is being injured and possibly destroyed. Instead of being a support for their weaker brothers, their behavior has led the weaker ones to estrange themselves from Christ: *“Because of your ‘knowledge’ the weak one perishes, that brother for whom Christ died. When you sin thus against your brother and wound their weak consciences, you are sinning against Christ” (1Cor.8:11-12).* To guide a Christian’s conduct within the Community, Paul teaches that liberty must answer to love--responsible liberty will be expressed in agape. He writes:

*“All things are lawful,” but not all are advantageous. “All things are lawful”--which does not mean that everything is constructive. No man should seek his own interest but rather that of his neighbor. Eat whatever is sold in the market without raising any question of conscience. “The earth and it fullness are the Lord’s.” If an unbeliever invites you to his table and you want to go, eat whatever is placed before you, without raising any question of conscience. But if someone should say to you, “This was offered in idol worship,” do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who called attention to it and on account of the conscience issue--not your own conscience but your neighbor’s. You may ask, why should my liberty be restricted by another man’s conscience? And why is it, if I partake thankfully, that I should be blamed for the food over which I gave thanks? (1Cor.10:23-30).*

The answer to those questions would be: *“Because you are your brother’s keeper!” “Because of the Body of Christ.”*

In summary we may say that Paul gives this advice to guide the Christian Community in its secular environment. A Christian must always be aware that he or she belongs to Christ. Therefore: shun idolatry! Do not provoke the Lord to jealous anger. No man should seek his own interests but rather that of his neighbor.

*The fact is that whether you eat or drink--whatever you do--you should do all for the glory of God. Give no offense to Jew or Greek or to the church of God, just as I try to please all in any way I can by seeking, not my own advantage, but that of the many, that they may be saved. Imitate me as I imitate Christ (1Cor.10:31-33;11:1).*



## CHAPTER 6

### THE BODY OF CHRIST

The Christian Community in Corinth was created of people from a diversity of cultures. It would not be surprising that disunity occurred and reflected itself in the worship of the Community. The nucleus of the Church was composed of converted Jewish and God-fearing Gentiles who had attended the synagogue. The larger portion of Church membership came from among the pagans in the city; many of them had been anything but the cream of the society, as we learn from Paul's recital of the undesirable citizens and his comment, "*and such were some of you*" (1Cor.6:11). In another place he wrote: "*You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, as impulse drove you*" (1Cor.12:2). Therefore, two great cross-currents, Judaism and paganism, met and sought to blend into the Christian Community at Corinth.

The diversity between these two religious cultures manifested itself in their worship. Many pagans had been drawn to Judaism because of the sacredness and solemnity of the services in the synagogue. In these services formal prayers and psalms were recited, and prescribed Scripture was read, followed with a commentary by one versed in the Scriptures. The service was concluded with additional prayers and psalms. Philo gives this description: "*People sit in order, keeping silence and listening with the utmost attention out of a thirst for refreshing discourse.*" On the other hand, pagan cultic worship could consist of feasts, wherein food and drink were consumed in great quantities, where sexual intercourse occurred, and where the worshipers were stimulated to frenzied behavior and ecstatic utterances. In the cult of Mithras--so popular with the Roman soldiers--a convert to be initiated was placed in a pit over which a bull was slaughtered, and the convert was immersed in the blood of the bull. Converts coming from such a background would have found a Jewish format for religious worship somewhat lacking in stimulation, and would have been tempted to liven-up Christian worship.

Another important cultural difference in the Corinthian Community would have been the western and the eastern attitude towards women. In the Greco-Roman world women possessed an emancipation perhaps even superior to

that of women today--but even then it was not without male resistance. The poet Juvenal complained of women who talked of literature and philosophy at dinner and, *"no one can get in a word edgewise, not even a lawyer."* He writes of one woman who, apparently, particularly irked him as being *"bold as a man, attending the meetings of men with her husband--one of the throng--while she holds forth, hard-faced and dry-breasted, talking with all the High Brass"* (*Satires, p.80*). Apparently these were newly won freedoms for women, and they were being forcefully exercised. Some see evidence of a feminist party in the Christian Community at Corinth.

The Semitic attitude of the east was entirely different and most oppressive. It can still strongly be seen in the Moslem's attitude toward women today. Women were considered more as property than as persons. They were considered to be essentially sexually immoral, and needed to be constantly guarded. This is the principle underlying most of the double standard for the sexes within a culture. It became a vicious circle. We know that continual cultural deprivations often result in serious psychological and emotional retardation, equivalent in results to mental retardation. Likewise, physical enslavement often leads to moral degradation, forcing people to seek satisfaction on the most basic levels. Even economic enslavement at certain poverty levels can be conducive to moral degradation. Religion is often the only personality-saving power for the poor. It offers the stimuli to rise above the poverty of the environment. It is for this reason that the exploiters of the poor fear the Church and seek to control or destroy it.

The Jewish attitude toward women completely echoed the Semitic mentality. Even in the Ten Commandments, a woman finds herself listed as part of a man's property along with his house, land, slave, ox and ass: *"you shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not desire your neighbor's house or field, nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass, nor anything that belongs to him"* (*Dt.5:21*). St. Ignatius once said an interesting thing about a revelation from God: *"you must distinguish between the moment of revelation and the moment that follows it. The moment of inspiration is godly--the moment following it is human. There is always the question: 'How does the human spirit interpret the divine revelation?'"*

In Jerusalem, with the force of law, custom forbade a woman from appearing in public without a veil. Her face had to be hidden by an arrangement of two head veils. If she dared appear unveiled in public, her husband had the duty to divorce her, and there was no necessity to pay the money agreed to in the

marriage contract. Up to the time she was twelve years of age, a man had the right to sell his daughter into slavery. The betrothal ceremony commenced the transfer of a woman from the authority of the father to the husband. By virtue of Deuteronomy 31:12, a woman could participate in the religious service, but custom all but denied her this right. She attended services behind a lattice barrier. In some synagogues she entered by a separate door and sat in a gallery. A woman was forbidden to teach, and she received no formal education--not even in the Torah. She could not even pronounce a blessing at the meals. Paul and all the apostles were reared and educated in this cultural environment. No one is completely immune to one's environment; in some degree it forms or deforms a person. In light of this, it is amazing that Paul later wrote: "*There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus*" (Gal.3:28). Such a teaching could only have been inspired by Christ Himself. Some maintain that Paul later failed to implement this Christian principle into practice. It has been rightly pointed out that *oneness* does not imply *sameness*, nor does it imply equality. There are many members in one body, but they are not the same or equal. However, there is usually a lag between intellectual awareness and emotional acceptance. Emotional reactions are preconditioned by previous experience. They automatically respond to certain stimuli. It takes time and effort, association and retraining, for one's emotional responses to be in keeping with new spiritual insight or intellectual break-through. In all probability, certain behavior of Greco-Roman women in the Church would have brought an automatic negative response from Paul the Jew.

Certain Christian women in Corinth, in keeping with the social trend, had cast aside their veils and attended worship without a veil. In a synagogue this would have been unheard of, and even certain Greek sanctuaries demanded that women appear veiled. To the Jewish Christians this behavior would be considered bold and immodest. In some Jewish minds, it would have been synonymous with being a prostitute. Apparently some women had shortened their hair and this, too, some considered disgraceful. Some women in the Church had simply become fashion plates, and they had no intention of letting men dictate their appearance in worship. An appeal is made to Paul, and he sides with the conservatives.

In keeping with his rabbinical background, Paul appeals to the Scriptures. He interprets from Genesis that woman is under the authority of man. From the Scriptures, Paul establishes a hierarchy of order: God, Christ, man and woman. This was given a very interesting misinterpretation in the Middle

Ages. They used this passage from Scripture to prove that women belong in a category of creation between men and animals. It was agreed they possessed a soul, but not higher powers of reason. They were incapable of grasping scientific and theological knowledge, and therefore should not be educated. In the hands of some, the Scriptures are like Tarot Cards--you can make them say anything you desire.

Paul maintained that being veiled was a sign of woman's submission to man, and that her long hair was her natural veil. It can be pointed out that Paul builds his argument upon the text that states God made *man* to his image and likeness. From this principle he goes on to deduce that *woman* reflects the glory of man, not of God. However, the word Paul translates as *man* can equally be translated as *mankind*. In addition, two creation accounts exist in Genesis. The other account refers to the equal creation of man and woman. In rabbinical fashion, Paul has been very selective in his use of Scripture: adopting those that strengthen his point, and ignoring those that weaken it. When he comes toward the end of his argument, you have a feeling he senses the weakness of it and that the ladies are not buying it. He instinctively knows things have been altered in Christ, and he seemingly grants some equalization to women: "*Yet, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man, nor man independent of woman. In the same way that woman was made from man, so man is born of woman*" (1Cor.11:1-12). In the end he abandons reason and appeals to authority (his) and social custom: "*If anyone wants to argue about this, remember that neither we nor the churches of God recognize any other usage*" (1Cor.11:16).

Some have suggested that the wearing of veils is not the real issue in this passage of Scripture. They see here a hidden agenda, and it is the unisex factor. Women are cutting their hair short and men are wearing their hair long. The distinction between the sexes is being erased. Paul, they believe, attacks, not the equality of the sexes, but the sameness of the sexes. Underlying this could be Paul's undefined fear of the homosexuality and lesbianism manifested within the Church. As we can see from 1Cor.6:9-11, some Christians had practiced these vices before their conversion.

Paul begins by extolling their holding fast to tradition before he launches into his defense of tradition:

*I praise you because you always remember me and are holding fast to the traditions just as I handed them on to you. I want you to know*

*that the head of every man is Christ; the head of a woman is her husband; and the head of Christ is the Father. Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered brings shame upon his head. Similarly, any woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered brings shame upon her head. It is as if she had had her head shaved. [This implies that women did take a vocal part in the liturgy.] Indeed, if a woman will not wear a veil, she ought to cut off her hair. If it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, it is clear that she ought to wear a veil. A man, on the other hand, ought not to cover his head, because he is the image of God and the reflection of his glory. Woman, in turn, is the reflection of man's glory. Man was not made from woman but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman but woman for man. For this reason a woman ought to have a sign of submission on her head, because of the angels. [The reference to the angels reflects rabbinical tradition that angelic spirits attend synagogue service. Paul argues that out of respect and submission to the angels, women ought to wear veils.] Yet in the Lord, woman is not independent of man nor man independent of woman. In the same way that woman was made from man, so man is born of woman; and all is from God. I will let you judge for yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God unveiled? Does not nature itself teach you that it is dishonorable for a man to wear his hair long, while the long hair of a woman is her glory? Her hair has been given her for a covering. [It could be expected that some men have interpreted that statement to mean that is all she should be covered with!] If anyone wants to argue about this, remember that neither we nor the churches of God recognize any other usage (1Cor.11:2-16).*

*Paul believed the Christian Community had neither the time nor the need to inaugurate a new social order in an age to quickly pass away. Its need was to renew the lives of men and prepare them for the return of Jesus. In the meantime, temporary matters that guided Christian life and worship were best modeled, not on pagan rituals and customs, but on the Jewish religion wherein God was worshiped in simple solemnity. Here the Church would find a proper model for worship.*

The Church certainly adopted this model. The liturgical celebration today is a

combination of the synagogue service and the “Lord’s Supper.” However, in such a model, women played a subordinate and silent role. How much this influenced Paul, we later see when Paul demands women to be silent during Community worship. This was contrary to the present in Corinth, as women both publicly prayed and prophesied in the Church. Prophecies normally implied that inspired messages had been given. Apparently this practice was only in the Corinthian Church by way of an exception. Such a practice certainly would not have been in keeping with Paul’s own religious environment. Emotionally he would have found it unacceptable. Perhaps he first permitted it on an experimental basis, in light of his own doctrine, “*All are one in Christ.*” However, when the practice became divisive--probably because of certain abuses that stirred the anger of some men in the Community--Paul reverted back to the traditional patterns of religious worship that left no room for verbal participation by women. It has been suggested these abuses may have been emotional outbursts in prophecies and tongues by certain women in the congregation. Whatever the stimulus may have been, Paul writes:

*According to the rule observed in all the assemblies of believers, women should keep silent in such gatherings. They may not speak. Rather, as the law states, submissiveness is indicated for them. If they want to learn anything, they should ask their husbands at home. It is a disgrace when a woman speaks in the assembly. Did the preaching of God’s word originate with you? Are you the only ones to whom it has come? (1Cor.14:33-36).*

Paul seems to imply that the women dominated the service. Perhaps we have an echo of Juvenal’s (the poet) complaint that even a lawyer couldn’t get a word in edgewise. Paul’s attitude seems to be in keeping with the old philosophy: If you cannot control it--suppress it! This would appear to be an expedient directive to establish peaceful worship in a contemporary situation. In light of the context in which the order was given, it does not appear to be a directive intended to be enforced *per omnia saecula saeculorum*, or as we may roughly translate: “until hell freezes over.” One thing is obvious with Paul--Paul never spares the rod and spoils the child. This becomes very clear in the subsequent passages dealing with liturgical worship.

If perchance one had worked for the Roman Secret Service in 58 A.D., with the assignment to investigate the rites of religious sects in the Empire, what would an investigation be able to discover about the Christian rite from the

available documents? There would scarcely be any documents to investigate. Apparently no gospels had been written. Possibly a work called, *The Sayings of Jesus* existed, but it would have been closely guarded by a few possessors. If perchance Paul's letter to the Corinthians came into one's hands, what could be discerned about the Christian rite from such a document? An astute investigator could discern a great deal. Interestingly enough, within a few years the Church would impose what has been called the "discipline of the secret" upon its members. Information about the rites and sacraments of the Christian Faith were not to be revealed to outsiders. This was a safeguard against having the rituals imitated and profaned in pagan rituals.

We discover in Corinthians a mere intimation of a Christian liturgical celebration related to the Jewish feast of Passover when Paul writes:

*Christ our Passover has been sacrificed. Let us celebrate the feast not with the old yeast, that of corruption and wickedness, but the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1Cor.5:7-8).*

We know that here, Paul is primarily appealing to the Christians to live a holy life, but the text also suggests that a concept was alive in the Community recognizing the sacrificial aspects of Jesus' death, and symbolically beholding Him as the Paschal Lamb. The Passover was a memorial feast for the Jews. Every year at Passover, lambs were slain in the temple area and were eaten by Jewish families during the Passover meal. The feast was a remembrance. It commemorated the night Jewish families were saved from death by the blood of the lamb that marked the doorways of their homes when the destroying angel of death passed through Egypt, killing the first born in every home. The feast proclaimed the saving love of Yahweh for His people. There is considerable doubt whether the lambs slain in the temple area were considered sacrificial victims. However, there is little doubt that the Christian Community looked upon Jesus, the Paschal Lamb, as a sacrificial victim: "*Christ our Passover has been sacrificed.*"

Next we see that Paul turns to the history of Israel to discourage idolatry among the Corinthian Christians. He compared the spiritual gifts received by Israel to those received by the Christian Community, the implication being that both of them possessed supernatural gifts from God. He pointed out that although Israel received a baptism and, while in the desert, received spiritual food and drink, many died in the desert due to idolatry. He implies it is not enough to receive supernatural gifts; one must properly worship God. He

surprisingly relates the spiritual drink to Christ. He writes: *“They drank from the spiritual rock that was following them, and the rock was Christ” (1Cor.10:4)*. This daily food and drink was actually manna and water. However, Paul speaks of it as spiritual food and drink. This would indicate that Christians have a spiritual food and drink. What would this spiritual food and drink of Christians be? Somehow it is related to Christ. Reading further we discover the answer. As a deterrent to idolatry Paul asks: *“Is not the cup of blessing we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread we break a sharing in the body of Christ? (1Cor.10:16)*. The expected answer would be, *“Yes!”* This text implies that Christians are sharing, through some manner or means, in the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

This is our first obvious reference to a Christian liturgical service and it answers the question, “What is the Christian food and drink?” Odd as it may seem, the only answer can be, “The body of Christ and the blood of Christ.” This would have to be a reference to a Christian ritual through which this could occur. The bread broken is identified as the body of Christ. There is a strong implication in the text that those who participate in the ritual know they commune with the Body and Blood of Christ, and through such a communion, they become one person in Christ. *“Because the loaf of bread is one [Christ], we [the Christian Community], many though we are, are one body [Community], for we all partake of the one loaf (which is Christ)” (1Cor.10:1)*.

Several other bits of information again suggest the Jewish Passover celebration. The shape of the loaf of bread (*artos*), the breaking of the bread, the cup of blessing, all could be references to a Passover celebration. At the Passover meal the host broke the bread and passed a piece to each person at the table. This signified the meal had begun. The cup of blessing could be a reference to the cup that rested upon the table during the meal; it was sometimes referred to as the cup of Elijah--probably a symbolic reference to his return.

Paul makes another reference to Israel’s ritual celebration. This is not a reference to the Passover, but definitely to a sacrificial ritual. He writes: *“Look at Israel according to the flesh and see if those who eat the sacrifices do not share in the altar!” (1Cor.10:18)*. To share in the altar implied union with the God of the altar. This seems to suggest that the Christ received has become a sacrificial victim. It could be deduced from this evidence that the Christians offered a sacrifice called “Christ,” whose Body and Blood they received. Christ becomes the victim and the sacrificial food received at “the



table of the Lord.” The document leaves no doubt that a real union occurs in these communions: “...(Gentiles) sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to become sharers with demons” (1Cor.10:20). It is interesting to recall that demonology teaches that possession by an evil spirit occurs through some external material object by which the demon enters into a person. We find Paul writing:

*You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and also the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and likewise the table of demons. Do we mean to provoke the Lord to jealous anger? (1Cor.10:21-22a).*

Up to this point our document implied that the Christian Community possessed supernatural means of salvation. It intimated there existed a sacrificial meal comparable to similar rites of the Jews and pagans. In this Christian rite, a real sharing in the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ occurred that effects a bond of union, not only with Christ, but between members of the Church. Now we discover in our document that this Christian rite is called the Lord’s Supper. This revelation comes as a result of certain abuses in the Corinthian Community affecting the celebration of the ritual known as the Lord’s Supper. Paul writes:

*What I now have to say is not said in praise, because your meetings are not profitable but harmful. First of all, I hear that when you gather for a meeting there are divisions among you, and I am inclined to believe it. There may even have to be factions among you for the tried and true to stand out clearly. When you assemble it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper, for everyone is in haste to eat his own supper. One person goes hungry while another gets drunk. Do you not have homes where you can eat and drink? Would you show contempt for the church of God, and embarrass those who have nothing? What can I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter! (1Cor.11:17-22).*

It was customary among the Jewish Christians in Palestine to observe the Sabbath. The Sabbath ended at sundown and it was followed by a Sabbath banquet. Christians would meet together in the evening for the Sabbath meal which they shared together--somewhat in the manner of our potluck meals today. This became known as the *agape-meal*, or the love feast, in which Christians mutually expressed their love for one another. Following this meal

the Christian Community celebrated the Lord's Supper, commonly referred to as the "breaking of the bread." In the Palestinian environment, no cultural problems would have arisen, as the participants were essentially from the same background, adhering to the same religious customs. Not so in the Corinthian Church; there you had Christian Jews and converted pagans. Among the pagans you had the rich, the poor, and the slaves. The Christian meeting would have traditionally been held on the Sabbath evening. The Christian Jews and the rich would not have worked, whereas the poor and the slaves had probably put in a full day's work. People therefore arrived at different times for the Christian celebration. The earlier arrivals, because of their selfishness, went ahead with the agape meal while awaiting the arrival of the others for the Lord's Supper; these would have been the poor and the slaves. By the time they arrived, the food would have been devoured, and too much wine drunk. Rivalry existed among some of the earlier arrivals, so they refused to share food with each other. Each ate his own. The situation was a childish mess to say the least. However, it was much more; this behavior fractured the Body of Christ--the Christian Community.

The behavior was sinful. When they finally gathered to celebrate the Lord's Supper, part of the congregation were over-satiated with wine and belched from over-stuffed bellies, while others were tired and thirsty and their bellies growled from emptiness and hunger. The whole scene devastated and disgusted Paul. As we have said, he was not one to spoil the child by sparing the rod. He came out swinging:

*One person goes hungry while another gets drunk! Do you not have homes where you can eat and drink? would you show contempt for the Church of God [the Body of Christ], and those who have nothing? What can I say to you? (1Cor.11:21b-22c).*

The significance of the Lord's Supper highlights the real evil of the situation. The Lord's Supper has created the Community, a Community that flows from the unselfish death of Jesus--from the complete giving up of Himself for others. What Jesus had accomplished, and perpetuates through the Lord's Supper, they are destroying by their selfish behavior. They are not only destroying the Community, they are destroying their own lives.

Paul confesses that the revelation now shared comes from the Lord. It comes down through the Christian Community from Jesus Himself. He carries one's mind back to the night Jesus died, and he speaks of that night as "*the same*

*night that he was betrayed.*” He no doubt emphasizes these words for he believes the present conduct is in itself a betrayal of Christ. He writes:

*I received from the Lord what I handed on to you, namely, that the Lord Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed took bread, and after he had given thanks, broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after the supper, he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me” (1Cor.11: 23-25).*

Some years later when Luke writes his gospel account, it closely parallels the words of Paul. In Mark’s account we read these words:

*During the meal he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. “Take this,” he said, “this is my body.” He likewise took a cup, gave thanks and passed it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them: “This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out on behalf of many” (Mk.14:22-24).*

We find that Matthew’s account of the Lord’s Supper closely parallels that of Mark. It is believed that the accounts of Paul and Luke express the liturgy of Antioch, and the accounts of Mark and Matthew express the liturgy of Jerusalem. Obviously these words and actions of Jesus had been carefully preserved in the Christian Community. All four accounts begin with thanksgiving and the breaking of the bread. Both of these expressions became terms symbolizing the ritual of the Lord’s Supper. The Greek word for thanks was *eucharistein*. It is a very rich word because it expresses the proper conduct of one who is the recipient of a gift. It expresses not only a thankful attitude, but one that gives an outward expression of gratitude. Today the Lord’s Supper is usually referred to as the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharist has been said to be *“the actualizing of the salvific reality ‘Jesus’ through the words of thanksgiving uttered over the bread and wine.”*

All four accounts of the Lord’s Supper teach us that this Christian rite was inaugurated by Jesus the night before his death; it is a ritual memorial of his death. It is to be re-enacted within the Christian Community because Jesus commanded it to be so. Therefore, when Paul adds: *“Every time, then, you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes!” (1Cor.11:26)*, this rite proclaims the act of redemption. How is this

done? It does so in a most realistic way: those who participate in this ritual actually experience the saving event. They proclaim it through their experience of salvation: their sins are removed, and they are brought into union with God through their communion with the Risen Jesus Christ under the appearance of bread and wine.

A Christian is only united to God through Jesus Christ. Union with God is through the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ. In this religious rite the Body of Jesus is really present. None of the four accounts leave room for a merely symbolic interpretation. The manner in which the bread and wine are the Body of Jesus Christ is indeed a mystery of faith. It is the subject of much theological speculation. Paul's belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in this Christian rite is dramatically substantiated when he writes:

*This means that whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily sins against the body and blood of the Lord ... He who eats and drinks without recognizing the body eats and drinks a judgment on himself (1Cor.11:27,29).*

The Greek word *diakrino* translates to “without recognizing.” This word signifies: to make a distinction or to differentiate in order to judge correctly or to recognize. Obviously to eat and drink without discerning the body implies ignoring the true character of the body; it means to fail to distinguish it from what it is not. This could not be a reference to the community, as some have insisted. As Paul teaches, this has serious repercussions spiritually and physically upon the individual communicant.

What he now says leaves no room for a symbolically present Jesus Christ: “*That is why many among you are sick and infirm, and why so many are dying*” (1Cor.11:30). This implies Paul attributes dramatic effects to the reception of Holy Communion--it affects the very physical life of the recipient. This could hardly be stated about a rite of only a symbolic nature. Paul goes on to add:

*If we were to examine ourselves, we would not be falling under judgment in this way; [he views this as a medicinal correction] but since it is the Lord who judges us, he chastens us to keep us from being condemned with the rest of the world (1Cor.11:31-32).*

To correct the abuses leading to unworthy reception of the Eucharist, some believe Paul sought to suppress the agape-meal because it had completely lost

its meaning in Corinth, others maintain he sought to control the abuses by encouraging hungry people to eat before going to Church.

*Therefore, my brothers, when you assemble for the meal, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry let him eat at home, so that your assembly may not deserve condemnation. As for other matters, I shall give instructions when I come (1Cor.11:33-34).*

When it comes to analysis of these particular scriptural passages by Scripture scholars, some of the explanations could be surpassed in complexity only by a scientific analysis of the Theory of Relativity. Elaborate theories are developed in order to deny the simple truth conveyed in the written words. Paul was not writing to astute theologians; he was not even writing to Jews trained in the rabbinical schools of speculation; he was not writing to mature Christian men and women, but as he himself said, he was writing to infants in Christ. He was teaching spiritual infants. He said, *“My message and my preaching had none of the persuasive force of 'wise' argumentation” (1Cor.2:4)*. As his own words reveal, Paul plainly and simply spoke to the Corinthians. There was no need to search out hidden meanings or make speculative interpretations. Reflecting upon this very letter, Paul wrote, *“There are no hidden meanings in our letters besides what you can read for yourselves and understand” (2Cor.1:13)*.

Not many scholars have been as intellectually honest as the renowned Protestant biblical scholar, Rudolf Bultmann, who readily admitted that Paul and the early Church attributed marvelous powers to the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. However, Bultmann judges from the foundation of his own theological sophistication that these “primitive” beliefs smack of the “magical” and are not tenable today. We Catholics are not so sophisticated, and we still cling to the primitive beliefs. Men go to extremes in order not to accept the realism expressed in Christ’s words over the bread and wine. Why? There are many answers to that “why,” and many a lie. However, those words challenge a man’s faith to believe that God would deal so simplistically with human beings; that the Lord would insist that man put that quality of faith in the Word. Can the Word, who made a universe from nothing, insist that man believe the same Word now makes bread and wine the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ? The answer one gives to that question measures one’s belief in the Word! The Christian Community, through the rite of the Eucharist, truly becomes the Body of Christ on earth. It has received, not the dead Jesus, but the Risen Christ. It shares in the life of the Risen Lord, and His power

accomplishes His Will on earth. The Body of the Church lives by the Spirit of God.

Paul now focuses the attention of his readers on the life-giving Spirit within the Church. The Presence of the Holy Spirit is manifested through spiritual gifts (*ton pneumatikon*). The Greek expression describes more the operation of the Holy Spirit; it implies that the gifts are expressions of the Holy Spirit; they are spiritual products proceeding from a spiritual source.

The question of spiritual gifts has arisen in the Community. There was a problem in attitude toward the gifts, and in the exercise of them. The Corinthians considered themselves to be “spiritual men.” As often happens with spiritual people not well grounded in theology, they become self-authenticating. They discern their own spirits, and they are often very foolish. Any strong spiritual thought, desire, or feeling is immediately interpreted as an inspiration from the Holy Spirit, if it is not obviously evil. Paul first warns the Community concerning enthusiasm--those strong emotional feelings experienced in religious celebration and prayer meetings. He makes the point that these same strong emotional feelings once led them to worship idols:

*Now, brothers, I do not want to leave you in ignorance about spiritual gifts. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, as impulse [enthusiasm] drove you (1Cor.12:1-2).*

Human impulses must be distinguished from the operations of the Holy Spirit. The distinction is not always easy to discern. For this reason it has been said: “*The person who directs self in spiritual matters has a fool for a disciple.*” The work of the Holy Spirit is primarily to reveal the true nature of Jesus. He has been sent to the disciples to make Jesus known. Paul writes: “*That is why I tell you that nobody who speaks in the Spirit of God ever says, ‘Cursed be Jesus.’ And no one can say: ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except in the Holy Spirit*” (1Cor.12:3).

This seems to indicate there was some far-out spirituality in Corinth that claimed a distinction between Jesus in the flesh and the Risen Christ. They disdained Jesus as cursed by His death on the Cross, but Christ was honored as the now risen spiritual Being. The use of the name of Jesus emphasizes His humanity rather than the divine dimension of His personality. Paul maintains that no one curses or damns Jesus under the Holy Spirit, and no one ever acknowledges Jesus as Lord unless through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps we have something of this same problem hinted at in John's epistle when he writes:

*This is how you can recognize God's Spirit: every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh belongs to God, while every spirit that fails to acknowledge him does not belong to God (1Jn.4:2-3).*

Apparently, the presence of spiritual gifts within the Community had given rise to jealousy and competition among "the infants in Christ." Because of the gifts received, some paraded around in an air of superiority, while others were dejected and discontented over the manifestations of the spirit in their lives. They were like the little six year old boy who, when his brother received a ball and he didn't, asked, "How come you gave me nothing and you gave him something?" Paul acknowledges that there are different gifts, ministries, and works within the Church, but they all flow from the One Spirit who is both Lord and God:

*There are different gifts but the same Spirit; there are different ministries but the same Lord; there are different works but the same God who accomplished all of them in everyone (1Cor.12:4-6).*

*There is one Lord ... one God and Father of all, who is over all, and works through all, and is in all (Eph.4:5-6).*

*Gifts, ministries and works within the Church are manifestations of the Holy Spirit through particular individuals of the Church. The Holy Spirit apportions these gifts as He wills. They are not so much honors as they are responsibilities. They have been given to build up the Body of Christ. This cannot be done unless they are rightly exercised: "To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" (1Cor.12:7).*

Paul enumerates many gifts of the Spirit:

*To one the Spirit gives wisdom in discourse, to another the power to express knowledge. Through the Spirit one receives faith; by the same Spirit another is given the gift of healing, and still another miraculous powers. Prophecy is given to one; to another power to*

*distinguish one spirit from another. One receives the gift of tongues, another that of interpreting the tongues (1Cor.12:8-10).*

The gifts appear as so many jewels adorning the Body of Christ. But in reality they are divine powers incarnating themselves through the human faculties of the disciples of Jesus. The Church is tremendously enriched by the Holy Spirit. She is indeed a Bride being adorned for her Bridegroom--Christ. Paul strongly emphasizes that all is the work of the one and same spirit: "*But it is one and the same Spirit who produces all these gifts, distributing them to each as He wills*" (1Cor.12:11).

Paul teaches that the disciples of Jesus form One Body on this earth--and that Body is Christ:

*The body is one and has many members, but all the members, many though they are, are one body; and so it is with Christ. It was in one Spirit that all of us, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, were baptized into one body. All of us have been given to drink of the one Spirit (1Cor.12:12-13).*

This does not mean that there are no distinctions within this oneness. In this union there is no loss of identity--no loss of conscious awareness by absorption into a greater conscious Mind. Paul uses the analogy of the human body to express this truth:

*Now the body is not one member, it is many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," would it then no longer belong to the body? If the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body," would it then no longer belong to the body? If the body were all eye, what would happen to our hearing? If it were all ear, what would happen to our smelling? (1Cor.12:14-17).*

Truly, in the Body of Christ the personal identity of each is discovered and becomes true. Personalities are enhanced and brought to perfection within the Community. That is, the person must die to self, permitting the Holy Spirit, the Divine Artist, the freedom a sculptor must have over His clay. Within the hands of the Holy Spirit one is sculptured by Love. A person can only become a creation of Love. God fashions the Body of Christ. There are no accidents. Each member has been placed where God has willed it to be:



*As it is, God has set each member of the body in the place he wanted it to be. If all the members were alike, where would the body be? There are, indeed, many different members, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," any more than the head can say to the feet, "I do not need you." Even those members of the body which seem less important are in fact indispensable (1Cor.12:18-22).*

**It is human beings, not the Lord, who want sameness in this world and in the Church, who insist that equal means same. If someone has what we lack, we say, "It isn't fair!" By whose standards? Man's, not God's! God loves variety. Never did He duplicate His creations. Be godly--love the different! God equally loves humility. He desires that we acknowledge our dependency upon the Body. The proud demand it all: they desire to be sufficient islands unto themselves. They go it alone and do it their way. Their theme song: "I did it my way!" This is why St. Augustine teaches that the Holy Spirit does not pursue the separated member. Separation is a way of pride, and the Scriptures teach that God resists the proud. The song of humility is, "I did it His Way!" Humility's triumphant end is, "He beheld the humility of His servant. He who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is His name" (Lk.1:48a,49). It is the humble who accept that which Paul wrote:**

*God has set up in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracle workers, healers, assistants, administrators, and those who speak in tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles or have the gift of healing? Do all speak in tongues, all have the gift of interpretation of tongues? Set your hearts on the greater gifts (1Cor.12:28-31).*

*Each of us has received God's favor in the measure in which Christ bestows it... It is he who gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in roles of service for the faithful to build up the body of Christ, till we become one in faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, and form that perfect man who is Christ come to full stature (Eph.4:7,11-13).*

**A Christian becomes a "son of God" through union with Jesus and the reception of the Holy Spirit. Christ shares His life with the disciple to such a degree that the life of the disciple becomes an extension of Christ's own life on earth. Jesus lives again on earth. However, there are many disciples, and this**

is true of all. There is only One Christ and He cannot be divided. There is one Bread and even though it is divided among many, it remains One Bread--all become one loaf. Paul teaches that all the disciples of Jesus form one Body on this earth--and that Body is Christ: *“You, then, are the body of Christ. Everyone of you is a member of it” (1Cor.12:27)*. He implied this when he wrote:

*All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with him. There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus (Gal.3:27-28).*

Paul clearly emphasizes that no one possesses it all. In Christ it is truly *“All for one and one for all!”* As Paul earlier expressed:

*All things are yours, whether it be Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or the present, or the future: all these are yours, and you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s (1Cor.3:21b-23).*

In order that all enrich the Body and all share in the richness of the Body, Paul ardently sought *“that there may be no dissension in the body, but that all the members may be concerned for one another. If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members share its joy” (1Cor.12:25-26).*

For this dream to become a reality, he tells Christians: *“Set your hearts on the greater gifts” (1Cor.12:31)*. He will teach: *“The greatest of these is love!” (1Cor.13:13).*



## CHAPTER 7

### REDEMPTION OF THE HEART

The Church perceives itself to be the Community of God on earth. The Scriptures reveal this Community to be the Body of Christ. It teaches the Holy Spirit to be the principle of life for the Church. The life of the Holy Spirit reveals itself through spiritual gifts manifested in the lives of individual members of the Church, such as the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, discernment of spirits, faith through which healing and miracles occur. *“As it is, God has set each member of the body in the place he wanted it to be” (1Cor.12:18)*. The Holy Spirit gives particular persons within the Church certain spiritual talents, works, and ministries. *“But it is the one and the same Spirit who produces all these gifts, distributing them to each as he wills” (1Cor.12:11)*. All are bestowed for the purpose of enriching and building up the Body of Christ on earth. They are not gifts to individuals but gifts to the Community through individuals. *“To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1Cor.12:7)*.

The greatest gift of all has been given to all. The Holy Spirit is the greatest Gift. Each Christian receives a call to union with the Holy Spirit within the Christian soul. There is a call to personal and unique holiness through such an intimate communion of spirits, that spirits become one. As iron takes on the quality of fire--yet remaining iron--the human spirit absorbs the divine quality--yet remains human. Through this union Christians find themselves united one with the other, forming the Body of Christ on earth.

When a Christian fails in a personal union with the Holy Spirit, his or her spirit becomes a disruptive and disturbing power within the Body of Christ. The spiritual talents and ministries given to such spirits become avenues of selfish expressions fracturing the Body of Christ. When the spirit of a Christian divorces itself from personal union with the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Holy Spirit may remain, but they lose their power to produce good fruit within the Community, for they are disassociated from the source of goodness.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit must be kept consciously distinct from the life of the Holy Spirit. One may possess the gifts without the life. The end result will

be of no profit to the Church or to self. There are divine gifts, and there is the Divine Life! Given a choice of one or the other which would you choose? Our conscious response would be "The Divine Life!" However, unconsciously, many Christians have chosen the gifts rather than the Giver. In actual practice, they get lost in the gifts, works, and ministries and forget about union with the Holy Spirit. Such lives fail to express the life and spirit of the Holy Spirit. The life of a person may be characterized by certain qualities that seem to emanate naturally and constantly from the inner spirit. We say of one that he lived a kind life, and we say of another that he lived a selfish life. One could say light and heat are the life of the sun. What could one say of the Person of God? Truly, little, without the aid of divine revelation. Creation itself is a natural revelation, and so Paul could say: "*Since the creation of the world, invisible realities, God's eternal power and divinity, have become visible, recognized through the things he has made*" (Rom.1:20).

However, even with natural revelation the life of God remains an incomprehensible mystery, without supernatural revelation. The Sacred Scriptures reveal these manifestations. But nothing revealed more clearly the personality of God in this world than Jesus Christ--the Person of the Word made flesh:

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we have seen his glory: The glory of an only Son coming from the Father, filled with enduring love (Jn.1:14).*

From the contemplation of the Word made Flesh, John the Evangelist could securely state: "*God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him*" (1Jn.4:16b). Therefore, love characterizes the life of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Love. All human lives united with the Holy Spirit abide in love. Since love expresses the very nature of God, love itself is a divine mystery. In the same degree the Christian spirit unites with the Holy Spirit, the human spirit comprehends and expresses the mystery of love. Here too, we need the light of revelation to comprehend the mystery of love. We must know the nature of love in order to discern the measure of love manifested in the lives of Christian people.

For centuries the subject of love has been the dominion of poets, philosophers, and saints. Today, love is the subject of scientific study. We have seen that the Greeks had four terms to express love: *eros*, *philia*, *storge*, and *agape*. *Eros* expresses love that is predominantly physical, and always involves sexual

attraction. *Philia* is used to express the highest quality of natural love; it describes human friendship. The Greek philosopher Plato beheld love as an ideal to be divorced from any biological manifestation. His idea germinated a spiritual type of love called *platonic* love. This quality of love would best fall under the general title of *philia*-love. *Storge* expresses the very limited concept of family love. *Agape* hardly occurs in secular Greek literature. Some see it as a word coined by Christians to express a new quality of love and attitude toward others that was born in the Christian Community, and flows from the Presence of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament never uses *eros* to describe love; it will use *philia* to express brotherly love; it uses *agape* to express divine love.

It has been often said that the supernatural builds upon the natural. One of the best expositions of human love has been given by Eric Fromm in his work, *The Art of Loving*. Fromm looks at love from the view point of psychoanalysis, but his concepts are not free from those expressed in divine revelation. He professes to be an agnostic; however, his early background was Jewish, and this earlier religious background still influenced his thoughts in his adulthood. Fromm sees love as a power within a person, a power that can be developed into the highest human art--the art of loving. Thomas Aquinas calls love a power for good; Fromm describes love more concretely as a power for life. Love is not only a power for life, but it is a personal desire for life. Love is both power and passion, which means that a person possesses the capability to give and receive love. For Fromm, the word "give" expresses the primary characteristic of love. One gives in proportion to one's power to love. Material gifts are but symbols of the gift of self. A loving person gives of one's life to the beloved--that which is alive within oneself:

*He gives of his joy, of his interest, of his understanding, of his knowledge, of his humor, of his sadness of all expressions and manifestations of that which is alive in him. In thus giving of his life, he enriches the other person, he enhances the other's sense of aliveness. He does not give in order to receive: giving is in itself exquisite joy (Fromm).*

Developing his concept of love, Fromm goes on to include care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge as basic elements and characteristics common to all forms of true love. He believes that love is the active care and concern for the life and growth of the person one loves. To be careless and unconcerned about a thing is to have no love for that thing.

*The essence of love is to labor for something and to make something grow; love and labor are inseparable. One loves that for which one labors, and one labors for that which one loves. (Fromm)*

Explaining the element of responsibility, he declares that it is not meant to denote duty, which is something imposed from the outside, but something that flows from within--a readiness and an ability to respond to the needs, expressed or unexpressed, of another person. Fromm writes that care and responsibility could develop into possessiveness without the third component of love, respect:

*Respect is not fear and awe; it denotes, in accordance with the root of the word (respicere--to look at), the ability to see a person as he is, to be aware of his unique individuality. Respect means the concern that the other person should grow and unfold as he is. Respect, thus, implies the absence of exploitation (Fromm).*

For Fromm, knowledge is the final component of love, for it gives the light of direction to the other aspects of love. A person cannot truly respect another person without knowing that person. Without knowledge our concern and responsibility would be hit-and-miss, trial-and-error. Fromm writes:

*There are many layers of knowledge; the knowledge which is an aspect of love is one which does not stay at the periphery, but penetrates to the core. It is possible only when I can transcend the concern for myself and see the other person in his own terms. (Fromm)*

According to Fromm we may say in summary that human love, as an active power, is a laboring power, guided by knowledge that cares for and responds to, with respect, the life of another individual.

Fromm has conceived a beautiful concept of love--a blending of human and divine revelation. However, despite its idealism, it falls short of that quality of love expressed by the concept of *agape*.

Agape came to be on earth in Jesus Christ. Jesus brings a quality to love that distinguishes His love from all human loves. It is essentially and intentionally sacrificial. It becomes a paradox to the human heart. It points to self-death as

the road to self-life. It speaks of self-destruction as the means for self-preservation. Proposing the way of agape as the way of life leaves human reason perplexed and uncooperative. Agape remains an enigma--a riddle. It is the Christian Koran. The Scriptures expressed the divine origin of agape when it revealed: *"Yes, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son [for the life of the world] ...that the world might be saved through him"* (Jn.3:16-17). Agape found its incarnation in the life lived by Jesus of Nazareth, who *"emptied himself and took the form of a slave...and...humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross!"* (Phil.2:7-8). It found expression in the teachings of Jesus:

*There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends...(Jn.15:13-14).*

*I solemnly assure you, unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it dies, it produces much fruit. The man who loves his life loses it, while the man who hates his life in this world preserves it to life eternal (Jn.12:24-25).*

Jesus spells out agape concretely when he teaches:

*Offer no resistance to injury. When a person strikes you on the right cheek, turn and offer him the other... My command to you is: love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. This will prove that you are sons of your heavenly Father, for his sun rises on the bad and the good, he rains on the just and the unjust... In a word, you must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mt.5:39,44-45,48).*

*I give you a new commandment: Love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other. This is how all will know you for my disciples: your love for one another (Jn.13:34-35).*

The test of agape came on Calvary when the dying Jesus prayed for his murderers from the cross: *"Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing"* (Lk.23:34). And when he prayed to the God who permitted it all: *"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"* (Lk.23:46).

So Jesus died and the grain of wheat fell to the earth and was buried. Only those who believe God's son died on a cross, and understand its significance



can know the degree to which a Christian must love. The triumph of agape came when the dead Jesus arose gloriously and immortally from the grave, and re-entered communion with mankind. The Resurrection validated and confirmed the Way of Agape: a death in love led to eternal life. In Jesus, agape bore fruit abundantly. It made possible the continual existence of agape in the world by the descent of the Holy Spirit--the Spirit of Agape--upon the disciples of Jesus. Only because the disciples of Jesus received the Holy Spirit, did it become possible for human beings to love one another with the same quality and intensity of love with which Jesus loved people. The Scriptures confirm that *"the love [agape] of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us"* (Rom.5:5).

Agape emerges within the Community and the heart of a Christian as unconquerable goodwill that will never seek anything but the good of its fellow man. It is a spirit that is not conditioned or curtailed by what other people do in word and deed or whom they may be. One of the distinguishing qualities of agape lies precisely in its ability to love the unlovely and the unlovable. It is love lavished upon others without a thought of whether they are worthy to receive it or not. Agape gives the Christian heart the power and determination to love those disliked and those recognized as "enemy." Agape is the redemption of the weakened and fallen human heart. Agape is love's salvation! Scriptures urge Christians: *"Follow the way of love [agape], even as Christ loved you. He gave himself for us as an offering to God, a gift of pleasing fragrance"* (Eph.5:2).

Like golden threads, the theme of agape runs through the letters of Paul. He knew that in Christ, only faith that expresses itself through agape counts for anything (see Gal.5:6). Paul knew that this quality of love cemented together the Body of Christ, and empowered the growth and development of the Church. To the Ephesians he wrote:

*If we live by the truth and in love, we shall grow in all ways into Christ who is the head by whom the whole body is fitted and joined together--every joint adding its own strength, for each separate part to work according to its function. So the body grows until it has built itself up, in love (Eph.4:15-16).*

Paul tells the Corinthians: *"Seek eagerly after love"* (1Cor.14:1). *"Love builds up"* (1Cor.8:1). *"Do everything with love"* (1Cor.16:14), *"...show these men the proof of your love"* (2Cor.8:24).

Paul told the Philippians:

*My prayer is that your love may more and more abound, both in understanding and wealth of experience, so that with a clear conscience and blameless conduct you may learn to value the things that really matter, up to the very day of Christ (Phil.1:9-10).*

He told the Colossians that agape binds together all other virtues and brings them to full flowering (see Col.3:14). The Scriptures tell us that agape covers a multitude of sins (1Pt.4:8). When Christians lose this quality of love, true Christian life has gone out of their lives. The Scriptures describe such people as Christian zombies--the living dead. We read in John: "*who does not love is among the living dead*" (1Jn.3:14b). Paul feared that many Christians of Corinth were not far removed from this spiritual condition. Their lives expressed little love. The gifts of the Holy Spirit were treated and treasured like children's toys--selfishly possessed, irresponsibly used, jealously guarded, and enviously eyed. They were remaining infants in Christ--nepeoi. They rejected spiritual maturity, and blocked any conscious awareness of their immaturity. They blocked their maturity by their refusal to love one another. The gifts received were not being exercised for the good of others; their energy was self-centered.

It is characteristic of the immature to anxiously desire to be loved, but are never ready to love. Those who rarely love others constantly complain of others' lack of love for them. They fail to see that even if the whole world loved them, they would be nothing unless they could return the love. Odd as it may seem, selfish people fail to love themselves—their selfishness is an attempt to compensate for this lack of love, so that even a world full of love leaves their spirits disquieted, with a sense of inner emptiness, despair, and lifelessness. John put it well—"the living dead." There is only one solution for those who experience these symptoms: Forget self! Be a friend. Work at loving others. Love is of the will (divine grace is present, human will is lacking). Most human beings have a greater need to love than to be loved--and to persevere in love.

Scripture urges:

*Above all, let your love for one another be constant... As generous distributors of God's manifold grace, put your gifts at the service of one another, each in the measure he has received (1Pt.4:8-10).*

There is the temptation to stop loving others when there is no return or when there is rejection. This is a fatal mistake. Why? Because to love is to live; to stop loving is to die. By loving, one gives to oneself what no one can give to another: growth, perfection, joy in one's being!

Paul presents his finest portrait of love--called by some a "hymn to love." Some less poetical and more practical persons have called it a "first class behavioral definition of love." As mentioned earlier, Paul appears to paint a portrait that is in drastic contrast with the picture we have seen of the Corinthian Community. The Corinthians prided themselves upon their spiritual gifts, but they expressed them without love, one for the other.

Paul extols love. Other gifts are placed alongside it, and they pale in comparison. Nothing has any value unless infused with love. Paul writes:

*Now I will show you the way which surpasses all the others. If I speak with human tongues and angelic as well, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and, with full knowledge, comprehend all mysteries, if I have faith great enough to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give everything I have to feed the poor and hand over my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1Cor.13:1-3).*

What Paul has said is plain enough. When all the analysis of words and expressions are said and done, the bottom line remains: What has not been done in and for love is regrettable--now and forever!

Our Lord said, "*He who hears you, hears me*" (Lk.10:16). Yet how often have Christians opened their mouths to speak to kin, friend, and stranger--many ears that have been attentive to hear--but nothing was heard. The words of Jesus are as living wheat springing up in the hearts of hearers, bearing abundance of fruit. Many Christians, in the name of Jesus, have sowed the seed, ploughed the field, and reaped a barren harvest. "*Only by this will all men know that you are my spokesmen, that you have love for one another*" (Jn.13:35).

We can educate the mind; we can train the tongue. We can speak with the eloquence of a Demosthenes or a Cicero, in a style as catching and as fluid as a Shakespeare or a Dante, and have no more effect than a Stradivarius in a master's hand--pleasing to the ears for a moment--yet quickly carried away

on the waves of sound.

From many a pulpit on Sunday rings the sound of brass. From many a classroom and personal colloquy sound the tinkle of a cymbal. No matter how well constructed in style and substance a sermon may be, if it is not vibrant with the personal love of the preacher, it is a dead thing—with no lasting effect. The teacher without love for subject or pupil has no more effect than a long-playing record. The Christian without love has no more to bestow on others than a necklace of pious platitudes, which are about as effective as the conju-bag of a witch doctor.

We can go to schools and colleges, and our minds can be filled with factual knowledge. We can be an Einstein. We can delve deep into physiology and psychology, and come up with such knowledge of man's body and mind that we could dissect a person like a frog. We could become the novices of spiritual giants like Augustine of Hippo, Thomas of Aquinas, Theresa of Avila, or John of the Cross, and absorb the mysteries of religion. We could graduate as Doctors of Theology and Masters of the Spiritual life. Yes, our minds could be reservoirs of great knowledge, and we could be penetrators of deep mysteries, but if our hearts are like sieves, unable to hold love, we would be no more than the "living dead."

Paul does not leave agape-love in the realm of Platonic idealism. Agape expresses the very Spirit of God, and that Spirit incarnated itself in the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth, who truly became the Ikon of the Holy Spirit--the true authentic Person. Paul personalizes agape. He presents agape as personal attitudes rather than action. Agape is a portrait of Jesus as conceived by Paul. It is also a self-portrait of a man who considers his own life to be an imitation of Christ: "*Imitate me as I imitate Christ*" (1Cor.11:1). Paul's portrait of Christ hangs forever in the Christian gallery of time. It is the picture of Christian Maturity, before which all Christians must sit and contemplate and repent, while measuring the authenticity of their own Christian personalities in the light of the portrait of the Authentic Person. Paul writes:

*Love is patient; love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, it is not snobbish. Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth. There is no*

*limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure.  
Love never fails (1Cor.13:4-8a).*

Let us study at closer range some of the distinctive elements in the portrait of agape. Paul begins with two positive attributes: *“Love is patient; love is kind.”* Patience is an inner power of the spirit that enables its possessor to endure in serenity all physical and moral sufferings for the love of God. The patient person has the ability to absorb the negative behavior of others over a long period of time without complaint and without negative reactions to it. It has a great capacity for endurance of evil. It stands up under all the strain of human relationships. The patient person remains at peace while the storms of others rage around them. The word Paul uses expresses patience more with persons than with circumstances. Patience is love's restraint.

There are three degrees of patience, and they correspond to three stages of spiritual development: 1) Suffering is accepted as being permitted by God. 2) Suffering is willingly embraced in order to be more like Christ. 3) Suffering is loved as a benefactress of the soul.

The Scriptures suggest that kindness is a divine quality (see Rom.2:4-5; Lk.6:35-36). The kind person reflects, through the human personality, a particular attribute of divine love. The kind person responds positively toward the unlovingness of others, and seeks to contribute, in a positive manner, to their happiness. Kindness has the ear to hear the cry of pain, the eye to see the hurt, the touch to heal the wound. It is gentle active desire to ease and eliminate the hurts of others, and to increase their joys. It fails to become discouraged and embittered over the failures, ingratitude, and insensitivity of others. A kind person is sensitive to the sensitivities of others, and responds positively to them.

*“Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, it is not snobbish.”* Love is not jealous and envious and upset over the success and prosperity of another because it truly possesses a genuine concern for the well-being and happiness of others. It rejoices in their successes. The envious are small-souled people. The happiness of others makes them unhappy. They would not wish to have the happiness of another so much as they would wish to deprive the other of the happiness. Paul again uses that picturesque word “puffed-up,” and implies that loving people are not “windbags.” It does not brag about its powers and accomplishments. Love avoids pride in all its forms. It seeks more to serve than be recognized. Self-importance and self-absorption do not

command the conscious awareness of the loving person--therefore, they are not snobbish toward others. Being puffed-up leads one to despise and disdain others as being inferior to oneself. The "puffed-up" person usually flaunts before others that which one is puffed-up over. Even when snobs condescend to help the more unfortunate, they do so in such a patronizing way that their charity only reinforces their pride, and humiliates the recipients of their charity.

*"Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger: neither does it brood over injuries."* Being rude carries the idea of doing that which is unseemly, disgraceful, unmannerly, dishonorable. The rude violate good manners. They ignore the proper order and the feelings of others. They push forward to achieve their desired ends. They are indifferent to the sensitivities of others. They push and manipulate people into uncomfortable situations and distasteful positions. On the other hand, love does not seek self-advantage in its relationships with others. It refrains from being self assertive if others would be injured. Self-seeking implies selfishness; it conveys a hostile attitude toward those who stand in one's way. The source of one's anger is often the frustration suffered in self-seeking.

Anger is a hostile, destructive energy toward those who impede our self-willing. Anger can be hot or cold. Hot anger expresses itself overtly in some destructive way: a burst of temper, hurling verbal hand grenades at others, physically and/or verbally abusing others. Anger often expresses itself in unhealthy compensation for its frustrations: drugs, alcohol, and sexual promiscuity. Cold anger turns inward, and takes the form of depression. Many depressed people are angry people. They turn their destructive energy inward upon themselves, and usually succeed in destroying their health to some degree.

Unloving people brood over past injuries, mentally plotting revenge in their hearts. They bury the hatchet and mark the spot. Unloving people are touchy. Dealing with such people is often like having to walk through a mine field--a careless action can bring a deadly explosion. Love does not keep a black book in which to record all wrongs suffered. It does not harbor resentment. Bad thoughts are like chickens come home to roost.

William Jennings Bryan once said: *"I've been so busy trying to keep up with all my friends that I have had no time for my enemies."* One northern lady complained of Lincoln's kindness to southerners, and added, *"One should kill*

*one's enemies.*" Lincoln replied, *"When I make my enemies my friends I have destroyed my enemies!"* This does not imply that love ignores evil and fails to confront it. The complacent acceptance of evil is itself a cause of increased evil. Love gives one the power to courageously deal with evil and sin and yet not reject the sinner. Love always has the power to forgive and forget offenses.

Love does not live in the past--neither with good nor ill. Love is projected toward life, and that always implies an orientation toward the here and now. The present is the only moment in which to live, and to love. As for the past mistakes of others, love draws over them "the charity of silence." We read in Proverbs: *"Hatred stirs up disputes, but love covers all offenses"* (Prv.10:12).

*"Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth."* It is all too characteristic of human beings to take pleasure in the misfortunes of others. For this reason, newspapers and radios give human misfortunes wide coverage. It has been said that misery loves company, however, love never finds consolation in evil of any kind. Love rejoices with the truth. When truth is extolled, love rejoices. There is no rejoicing when truth is denied. Love is not to be thought of as indifferent to moral considerations. In Chapter 15:34, Paul insists on correct doctrine, because doctrine affects conduct. Unsound teachings can, in the end, lead to sinful behavior. Paul sees an essential relationship between the failure to think rightly and failure to live rightly. Truth is close to the very heart of Christianity. Jesus said, *"I Am the Truth."* And Paul speaks of *"the truth that is in Jesus"* (Eph.4:21). Love rejoices to see truth victorious. It is implied that love rejoices in the truth of God, in the truth of the gospel.

Paul turns to some of the glorious aspects of love: *"There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure. Love never fails."* Love can endure and suffer many hardships and not crumble under them. Love is open to belief and trust in others. It believes the best, and makes allowances for circumstances. Pretense and hypocrisy do not deceive it; it is ready to believe the best. Love is forward-looking with much hope for the future. It refuses to take personal failure as final. It places its confidence in the ultimate triumph of God's grace that will bring good out of evil; good will overcome evil. Love possesses a fortitude expressed in an active, positive manner. It has the endurance of a soldier in battle, which fights on bravely despite the opposition. Life's difficulties do not overwhelm love. The permanence of love is stressed. There is permanence in the structure of love so that *"love never fails."* The verb used here for "fail" implies "to fall, collapse, suffer ruin."

Love never suffers such a fate. *“Many waters cannot quench love.”* The supreme example of the unfailing quality of agape-love is Jesus’ death on the cross.

Love, for Paul, is the indispensable spiritual gift. Prophecy, tongues, and knowledge--spiritual gifts given to the Corinthians--are theirs only temporarily; they will cease to be one day because they belong to a time of spiritual imperfection. They will pass, as the things of childhood must pass, with the coming of maturity. When Christ, comes God will be seen and known, not as one sees an image in polished metal, but as one knows the face that stands before one’s eyes. It is love alone that ensures this vision and union with Christ and God. Paul wrote:

*Prophecies will cease, tongues will be silent, knowledge will pass away. Our knowledge is imperfect and our prophesying is imperfect. When the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child I used to talk like a child... When I became a man I put childish ways aside. Now we see indistinctly, as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. My knowledge is imperfect now; then I shall know even as I am known (1Cor.13:8-12).*

The last word in chapter thirteen is, fittingly, “agape.” It occupies the supreme position. The Corinthians held in high regard the spectacular gifts such as speaking in tongues, but Paul maintains that the really important gifts are faith, hope and agape; they are the spiritual foundation of eternal life, and the greatest of all is agape-love. *“There are in the end three things that last: faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love” (1Cor.13:13).*

Once again we are confronted with law. As with the law of the New Testament, law confirms our sinfulness. We have but to look into the perfect law of liberty, which is the law of Agape, and the human spirit falls once again into awareness of its own sinfulness, and its need of salvation. The picture of the Authentic Person is a constant source of humiliation, and it produces in the soul of a Christian the awareness of its need for the mercy of God that comes through the heart of Christ--from agape. In the Heart of Jesus Christ the human heart finds salvation.

From the content of Chapters 12 through 14, we are able to deduce that a conflict existed between Paul’s ideas about charismatic gifts, and the Corinthians’ ideas. The Corinthians prized the more spectacular gifts and



ignored the more useful. Certain scholars maintain that the Corinthians insisted that glossolalia--speaking in tongues--was the main evidence for the possession of the Spirit. If a man spoke in tongues, he was known to be spiritual. The gift of tongues appears to be a special form of speech given by the Holy Spirit for prayer and praise; the speech is not understood by the person exercising the gift. Another gift called interpretation of tongues is needed in order to understand the inspired utterance. Paul appears to be discouraging the use of this gift in public worship.

In order to correct the abuse of spiritual gifts, Paul teaches in Chapter 12 the importance of all the gifts; he maintains that glossolalia is the least of all the gifts. All gifts are for the building up of the Christian Community. He teaches in Chapter 13 that only when these gifts are maturely used in love are their ends and purposes fulfilled--to encourage the growth of individuals and the community. He demonstrates that love is the highest and greatest of all gifts. Paul demonstrates in Chapter 14 that charismatic gifts must be valued and measured by their ability to build up the Community; in a worshiping community wherein love prevails, there will be diminished use of tongues in public worship.

Chapter 12 ended with "*Set your hearts on the greater gifts.*" Chapter 14 picks up on that beat and begins with, "*Seek eagerly after love. Set your hearts on spiritual gifts--above all, the gift of prophecy*" (1Cor.14:1). Paul prudently contrasts prophecy with tongues. Prophecy would have been an inspired message delivered in the language of the people. The speaker of the prophecy could be God's human microphone, an instrument through which God would speak. From what appears to be implied in chapter 14, it seems that the religious services were quite chaotic. Speaking in tongues dominated the service; speaking in prophecy appeared to have been less esteemed by the Corinthians. Corinth itself was filled with soothsayers and priests who claimed divine inspiration and supernatural powers. Their utterances were often expressed in wild frenzy. They gloried in their absolute madness--a divine madness as Plato called it. Many believed the more one was deprived of reason and consciousness, the more one was truly under the power and influence of the Spirit of God. Of course Paul does not accept this and seeks to establish some order and decorum within the Christian services. Paul attempts to do this by greatly curtailing the use of tongues, and encouraging an increased use of prophecy. He writes:

*A man who speaks in a tongue is talking not to men but to God. No*

*one understands him, because he utters mysteries in the Spirit. The prophet, on the other hand, speaks to men for their building up, their encouragement, their consolation. He who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but he who prophesies builds up the church (1Cor.14:2-4).*

Paul subtly implies there is a great deal of egoism and selfishness manifested here, and a callous disregard for the common good. He seeks to make the Corinthians aware of their responsibility to build up the Body of Christ. Prophecy is a means by which the Community can be built up:

*I should like it if all of you spoke in tongues, but I must prefer that you prophesy. The prophet is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless the speaker can also interpret for the building up of the church (1Cor.14:5).*

Paul recognizes that tongues is a gift, but a gift with very limited value for public worship--value only when accompanied by interpretation, which then makes it a prophecy to the Community. The person possessing the gift of interpreting tongues does not translate the tongue into the language of the people, but rather he receives an inspired message that expresses the concepts expressed in the tongues.

Paul primarily sees tongues as a spiritual gift to build up a person's own prayer life. Its exercise in private develops faith and increases openness to the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. This end is often defeated in public worship because it becomes a means for showing off in public, which focuses one's eyes upon self, and closes the door to spiritual awareness. Paul's first argument against tongues in public worship is that it is unintelligible to even the speaker, and leaves the mind and heart of the faithful unmoved:

*Just suppose, brothers, that I should come to you speaking in tongues. What good will I do you if my speech does not have some revelation, or knowledge, or prophecy, or instruction for you? Even in case of lifeless things which produce a sound, such as a flute or a harp, how will anyone know what is being played if there is no distinction among the notes? If the bugle's sound is uncertain, who will get ready for battle? Similarly, if you do not utter intelligible speech because you are speaking in a tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will be talking to the air. There are many*

*different languages in the world and all are marked by sound; but if I do not know the meaning, I shall be a foreigner to the speaker and he a foreigner to me. Since you have set your hearts on spiritual gifts, try to be rich in those that build up the church (1Cor.14:6-12).*

Paul teaches that the entire being of a person should enter into prayer. Prayer can be of the spirit, but it ought not to be mindless. Prayer is the lifting up of the mind and heart to God. Paul encourages prayers in public worship that intelligibly express the sentiment of human beings in order that all present may add their “Amen!” He goes on to explain:

*This means that the man who speaks in a tongue should pray for the gift of interpretation. If I pray in a tongue my spirit is at prayer but my mind contributes nothing. What is my point here? I want to pray with my spirit, and also to pray with my mind. I want to sing with my spirit and with my mind as well. If your praise of God is solely with the spirit, how will the one who does not comprehend be able to say “Amen” to your thanksgiving? He will not know what you are saying. You will be uttering praise very well indeed, but the other man will not be helped. Thank God, I speak in tongues more than any of you, but in the church I would rather say five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue (1Cor.14:13-19).*

Gifts should be judged by their quality not their quantity. Since “ten thousand” is the largest number for the Greek system of numeration, Paul was saying that he would rather speak five intelligible words than an infinite number in a tongue.

Although he said, “*I should like it if all of you spoke in tongues,*” and “*thank God, I speak in tongues more than any of you,*” Paul, by faint praise, appears to damn speaking in tongues. He develops his second line of argument against the practice from Scripture, and from the fact it has a bad effect upon non-Christians. It is just not seemly. He appealed to the concern that the congregation must have to edify the Church and impress visitors. He teaches that tongues spoken in the Church were a negative sign to unbelievers, and increased their disbelief. He implies that tongues could be interpreted as a sign for unbelievers that they should be kept in the dark; they could believe that tongues were intended to hide religious truths from non-believers. The use of tongues would not convert people to the Church because it leaves the

impression that the members of the Church are mad, which implied they were demon possessed. Paul continues:

*Brothers, do not be childish in your outlook. Be like children as far as evil is concerned, but in mind be mature. It is written in the law, "in strange tongues and in alien speech I will speak to this people, and even so they will not heed me, says the Lord." The gift of tongues is a sign, not for those who believe but for those who do not believe, while prophecy is not for those who are without faith but for those who have faith. If the uninitiated or unbelievers should come in when the whole church is assembled and everyone is speaking in tongues, would they not say that you are out of your minds? But if an unbeliever or an uninitiate enters while all are uttering prophecy, he will be taken to task by all and called to account by all, and the secret of his heart will be laid bare. Falling prostrate, he will worship God, crying out, "God is truly among you" (1Cor.14:20-25).*

Once Paul has established the priority of prophecy over tongues he hopefully has removed the Tower of Babel out of the Christian service. He seeks to put some order into the use of gifts, particularly prophecy, in the Christian service. He does not seek to extinguish the Spirit, but urges that all be *"done properly and in order."* He knows that the one Spirit who inspires all is also a God of order and design. He implies that all gifts are under the control of those who have received them, and there is no excuse for unseemly display and chaotic behavior. He writes:

*What do we propose, brothers? When you assemble, one has a psalm, another some instruction to give, still another a revelation to share; one speaks in a tongue, another interprets. All well and good, as long as everything is done with constructive purpose. If any are going to talk in tongues, let it be at most two or three, each in turn, with another to interpret what they are saying. But if there is no one to interpret, there should be silence in the assembly, each one speaking only to himself and God. Let no more than two or three prophets speak, and let the rest judge the worth of what they say. [Here Paul implies that the Community should use discernment to test the prophecy.] If another, sitting by, should happen to receive a revelation, the first ones should then keep quiet. You can all speak your prophecies, but one by one, so that all may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of the prophets are under their prophet's*

*control, since God is a God, not of confusion, but of peace  
(1Cor.14:26-33).*

Part of Paul's effort to establish order and harmony in worship was to silence women in the Christian Community. This seems to suggest that perhaps certain women in the congregation had a large share in the chaotic goings-on in the Church. Women are generally considered to have a greater internal freedom in expressing emotional feelings, whereas men are generally considered more emotionally bound-up and less capable of emotional expression. Praying in tongues is certainly not essentially tied up with ecstatic utterances or emotional display, but if it had been in the Corinthian Church, women probably would have been more ostentatious in expressing the gifts. Paul's effort to re-veil the Corinthian ladies probably was part of his campaign to quiet them, as veils covered their faces as well as their heads. Paul viewed it to be unseemly for women to speak in Church, *"It is a disgrace when a woman speaks in the assembly"* (1Cor.14:35b).

Paul seeks to put order in Christian worship. He establishes rules and regulations with the force of law. He does so with the conscious awareness that he exercises God's authority in the Community. Members of the Community, who consider themselves to be prophets and spiritual persons but ignore these commands, are not operating under the Spirit of God. Paul insists:

*If anyone thinks he is a prophet or a man of the Spirit, he should know that what I have written you is the Lord's commandment. If anyone ignores it, he in turn should be ignored. Set your hearts on prophecy, my brothers, and do not forbid those who speak in tongues, but make sure that everything is done properly and in order (1Cor.14:37-40).*

Paul strives to reach a harmonious balance between freedom and order in Christian Worship. Worship is not a matter to be undertaken carelessly. There is a need for formality. Patterns of worship help people to participate in mind and spirit. However, the Spirit must not be quenched; it is not wrong to allow informed expressions within the liturgy, if they do not descend into egocentric displays or are expressed through emotional excess. Order, good taste, and edification do not preclude warmth and vitality.

One author observed, *"Although it is bad when an outsider comes in and says you are mad, it is worse when a visitor comes in and says you are dead!"* In the

end, all problems of worship find their solution in agape. True worship is response to God's love. That love ought to be expressed in the common worship of the believers. Love is the criterion by which all modes of worship ought to be tested. When faith fails to be expressed through love, it extinguishes the Spirit and breeds schism. Jesus once said:

*An hour is coming, and is already here, when authentic worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth. Indeed, it is just such worshippers the Father seeks. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth (Jn.4:23-24).*

Perhaps Paul gave the finest interpretation of this passage when he wrote the Ephesians:

*If we live by the truth and in love, we shall grow in all ways into Christ who is the head by whom the whole body is fitted and joined together, every joint adding its own strength, for each separate part to work according to its function. So the body grows until it has built itself up, in love (Eph.4:15-16).*

## CHAPTER 8

### THE FULLNESS OF REDEMPTION

Following the mind of Aristotle, St. Thomas of Aquinas taught that whatever resides in the conscious awareness of a person first resided in the senses of the person. One may be able to picture a flying horse, but only because one first beheld a horse and a bird. Thoughts are formed from the material presented to the mind through the avenues of the five senses. They are like five trains carrying the raw material to the brain, out of which thoughts are produced. We call such information empirical data: it is based upon sense perceptions. Such knowledge is the object of our human sciences. Since the accumulation of human knowledge is so vast--accelerating at a fabulous speed--we accept most things we know on the authority of others. Therefore, we accept most known things on faith. Most of our knowledge is based upon the testimony of people we accept as trustworthy. Humanly speaking, without faith we could not survive. No child could survive without some faith in the words of parents. Spiritually speaking, it is even more impossible to live without faith.

Most people must accept on faith, the reality of their spiritual existence. Each person possesses a spiritual dimension of their personalities. However, this dimension is often not consciously perceived by a person. The conscious awareness that dominates one's life overflows with sense perceptions. People are very much aware of the material, biological, and even psychological dimensions of their beings, while they remain largely unaware of the spiritual aspect of their personality. If this dimension assumes any importance in daily living, it is due to faith: faith in truths and facts that ought to be grounded in supernatural revelation. If the truths of such faith occupy one's conscious awareness, they can greatly influence the living of one's life. The objects of Christian Faith are the spiritual truths taught through the Church and the Scriptures. Underlining this faith is a faith in the Person of God, who is the subject of these truths revealed by the Church and the Scriptures.

Eastern mysticism bases its foundation on the belief that spirituality is the true reality of every person. Its principles and practices of asceticism are natural means used to bring about a breakthrough of the spiritual reality of one's being into one's conscious awareness. Its goal being that the spiritual

reality of one's being will dominate the living out of the human existence. In the average human being, the mind is dominated by the external world, and manifestations from the internal world are blocked. One can describe human conscious awareness as the seashore, constantly pounded by waves of thoughts formed by external stimuli. As one wave breaks upon the shore of conscious awareness, another has already formed and moves to follow it. Through such a process the external world controls the life of a person, and impedes his or her spiritual development. Eastern asceticism seeks to impede these thought patterns--to temporarily stop them so that something from the spiritual dimension of one's being can break into conscious awareness.

The ordinary means given to all Christians to come to the knowledge of the spiritual is the supernatural virtue of faith. Faith gives one the power (not the compulsion) to accept divine revelation as true. Within the deposit of divine revelation, we find a treasury of truths concerning spirituality, particularly those mysteries that constantly haunt the conscious awareness of all peoples—death, and life after death. All human beings are confronted with the inescapable reality of physical death; a fact empirically verified. Human life as experienced here on earth ends in death. Its end is so ignominious it must be quickly hidden from the senses. Death is a fact so distasteful to human beings that certain societies connive to protect our conscious awareness from its awful reality. When Francis Borgia had to identify the remains of a once beautiful and beloved queen, the experience was so traumatic it altered the entire course of his life.

The thought, “Does conscious awareness survive physical death?” constantly haunts the human heart. The thought can cause emotional responses alternating between hope and despair. In Paul's time, certain pagan people looked upon death as the inevitable evil, destroying all human good; physical death ended man's life. “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die!” expressed their philosophy of life. However, the general public seemed to have possessed a belief that the human person continued after death in some ghostly fashion. Many believed in the transmigration of souls. In one age one could be Caesar, in another--the slave of Caesar, and in still another--the dog of Caesar. The most renowned of Greek philosophers seemed to believe in a spiritual existence after death superior to life prior to death. They conceived physical life as evil, and death as a release from this evil. The body is a tomb--*soma sema*--ran the Orphic jingle. The body, maintained Philolaus, was a house of detention in which the soul remained a prisoner, expiating for its sins. Epictetus saw himself as “*a poor soul shackled to a corpse.*” Plato teaches



in the *Phaedo* that only by death, which rids a man of the body, can a philosopher truly enter into knowledge and reality.

Philosophy is the study of dying, and the philosopher seeks to separate the soul from communion with the body. Only when the soul separates from the body, avoids all possible association and contact with the body, and strives to be alone with itself, can it reach out to reality. As long as one is in the body, it will be deceived by the body. The soul is constantly contaminated by the body. A true philosopher seeks always to escape this hateful companion. The Jewish philosopher Philo taught that the body is the foundation of ignorance and stupidity on which all evils are built. Because of the body, souls are burdened and weighed down and oppressed until they cannot look up to the heavens; their heads are as those of cattle, dragged down and rooted to the earth. Philo taught, *“It is not easy to believe in God because of the mortal companion (the body) with which we are yoked.”*

Against such a background we can understand the Athenian philosophers’ reaction to Paul’s preaching about the resurrection from the dead: *“When they heard about the raising of the dead, some sneered” (Acts 17:32)*. To the pagan mind, the idea of the resurrection of the body from the dead was ridiculous and grotesque. Among Paul’s Jewish contemporaries, the belief in resurrection did exist. It was one of the divisive beliefs between the parties of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Perhaps the words of Martha of Bethany best expressed the current belief among the Jews when she spoke of her dead brother Lazarus: *“I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day” (Jn.11:24)*. Many people believed in some form of life after death; few believed in the resurrection of the body. The Jewish rabbis who did so, taught that at the resurrection of the dead people would rise as they were when they died. For many people this would be a grotesque belief!

Divine revelation does deal with the mystery of death, life after death, and the resurrection of the body from the dead. We learn that God is not the author of death. We read in Ezekiel, and then in the Book of Wisdom:

*For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, says the Lord God (Ez.18:32).*

*As I live, says the Lord God, I swear I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man (Ez.33:11).*

*Because, God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living. For he fashioned all things that they might have being (Wis.1:13-14).*

*For God formed man to be imperishable: the image of his own nature he made him (Wis.2:23).*

**If this is so, why death in the world? Wisdom responds: “But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it” (Wis.2:24).**

**Jesus of Nazareth confirmed that Satan “brought death to man from the beginning” (Jn.8:44). Paul teaches that it was through sin that Satan brought death into the world: “The wages of sin is death” (Rom.6:23). “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world and with sin death, death thus coming to all men inasmuch as all sinned” (Rom.5:12). “The sting of death is sin” (1Cor.15:56).**

**It was after the sin of Adam that we read in Genesis: “My spirit shall not remain in man forever, since he is but flesh. His days shall comprise one hundred and twenty years” (Gen.6:3).**

**The Epistle to the Hebrews teaches that Jesus: “...by his death he might rob the devil, the prince of death, of his power, and free those who through fear of death had been slaves their whole life long” (Heb.2:14-15).**

**The teachings of Jesus confirm life after death: “I solemnly assure you, if a man is true to my word he shall never see death” (Jn.8:51). Jesus assured His disciples that part of their reward would be “life everlasting in the age to come” (Lk.18:30). When the Jews spoke of Abraham as being dead, Jesus’ words denied that he was dead: “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he might see my day. He saw it and was glad” (Jn.8:56).**

**We know the party of the Sadducees did not believe in life after death. They maintained the Scriptures did not teach such a doctrine. They believed only in the first five books of the Bible. Jesus told them:**

*You are badly misled because you fail to understand the Scriptures and the power of God (Mt.22:29).*

*Moses, in the passage about the bush, showed that the dead rise again, when he called “Lord” the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead but of the living. All are alive for him (Lk.20:37).*

Again, life after death is indicated in the Transfiguration, when Moses and Elijah appeared and conversed with Jesus. As we see, Jesus confirms not only life after death but the resurrection from the dead. To those same Sadducees Jesus said:

*The children of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those judged worthy of a place in the age to come and of resurrection from the dead do not. They become like angels and are no longer liable to death. Sons of the resurrection, they are sons of God (Lk.20:34-36).*

This teaching of Jesus implies there is a substantial change that occurs in the bodies of the resurrected. The teachings on the Last Judgment confirm life after death, and suggest the resurrection from the dead: *“These will go off to eternal punishment and the just to eternal life” (Mt.25:46).*

The Book of Revelation explicitly teaches the resurrection of the dead: *“The sea gave up its dead; then death and the nether world gave up their dead. Each person was judged according to his conduct (Rv.20:13).*

Isaiah foretells the resurrection of the dead: *“But your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise; awake and sing, you who lie in the dust. For you dew is a dew of light, and the land of shades gives birth” (Is.26:19).*

Finally Jesus Christ confirmed and prophesied that He would be killed, and He would rise from the dead on the third day after his death (Lk.18:33). This proclamation was not unknown to his enemies. We read in Matthew:

*The next day, the one following the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees called at Pilate’s residence. “Sir,” they said, “we have recalled that the impostor while he was still alive made the claim, ‘After three days I will rise.’ You should issue an*

*order having the tomb kept under surveillance until the third day. Otherwise his disciples may go and steal him and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead!' This final imposture would be worse than the first." Pilate told them, "You have a guard. Go and secure the tomb as best you can." So they went and kept it under surveillance of the guard, after fixing a seal to the stone (Mt.27:62-66).*

**We read in First Peter:**

*The reason why Christ died for sins once for all, the just man for the sake of the unjust, was that he might lead you to God. He was put to death insofar as fleshly existence goes, but was given life in the realm of the spirit. It was in the spirit also that he went to preach to the spirits in prison... He went to heaven and is at God's right hand, with angelic rulers and powers subjected to him (1Pt.3:18-19,22).*

**Paul presents in Chapter 15 of Corinthians, the most developed doctrine we have on the resurrection in the Scriptures. The denial of the doctrine by certain members of the Corinthian Community stimulated his teaching the doctrine. They may not have denied the resurrection of Jesus, but they did apparently deny the resurrection of the bodies of the faithful. Remember, the New Testament Scriptures did not exist at this time. Their mistaken belief is an indication of the Gnostic teachings influencing the Christian Faith in Corinth. As previously mentioned, such teachings looked upon the human body as intrinsically evil, and discredited any belief that the body shares in the redemption.**

**This problem in the Corinthian Church resulted in the enrichment of the entire Church. These teachings would not be in the New Testament if the Corinthian problem had not stimulated them. These teachings certainly existed in the oral teachings of the Church, but not as part of the written Scriptures.**

**One of the distinguishing qualities between the Catholic Faith and that of non-Catholic Christians is our belief in the teaching authority of the Church. We maintain that the Church, with its authority to teach and its right to demand obedience of faith to its teachings, existed prior to the writing of the New Testament. The subsequent writing of the New Testament could not negate**

the prior teaching authority of the Church. In fact, it is only the teaching authority of the Church that verifies the New Testament to be the inspired Word of God. The Church produced and conserved these documents. Nowhere do these documents confirm themselves to be the full expression of God's will to the Christian Community. They imply that Jesus is the full expression of the Divine Will to mankind, and the Church confirms this. The Scriptures confirm that the written word has not fully expressed Jesus:

*But these have been recorded to help you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, so that through this faith you may have life in his name... There are still many other things that Jesus did, yet if they were written about in detail, I doubt there would be room enough in the entire world to hold the books to record them (Jn.20:31;21:25).*

However, they were recorded by the Holy Spirit. It is His role to recall them to the Church:

*This much have I told you while I was still with you: The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will instruct you in everything, and remind you of all that I told you (Jn.14:25-26).*

Therefore, Jesus Himself confirmed that the Holy Spirit had been given to teach the Church the fullness of revelation. The written Scriptures are one of the means used by the Holy Spirit to teach the Church; another of these means is the living teaching ministry of the Church, through which the Holy Spirit, through successive ages, continually recalls the teachings of Jesus: those written in the Scriptures, and those surviving in the oral traditions of the Church. Through the operations of the Holy Spirit, the Christian Church continually grows in deeper and richer understanding of the deposit of truth given in and through Jesus Christ. In other words, Christian truth is not static. It is living, and the living Church continues to grow and develop in this truth. Here in Chapter 15 we have a great example of this living tradition entering into the written Scriptures. Since these words would have been written before the gospels, they represent some of our earliest written records concerning the resurrection of Jesus. Paul uses two very technical terms, *paradidomi* (passed-on) and *paralambano* (receive), that express the transmitting of traditional doctrine.

Paul's words also express the importance of correct doctrines of belief. Paul ties right beliefs with salvation itself. Belief directs behavior. He would not agree with many modern Christians who maintain that correct doctrine is not important as long as a person is pointed in the right direction, i.e. God oriented, then all will be well. As has been wisely observed, all boats leaving the same harbor do not necessarily arrive in the same port. Some get lost at sea.

Paul begins by teaching:

*Brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and in which you stand firm. You are being saved by it at this very moment if you hold fast to it as I preached it to you. Otherwise you have believed in vain. I handed on to you first of all what I myself received... (1Cor.15:1-3).*

In an earlier letter Paul gave quite a dramatic presentation of the Second Coming that seemingly precludes the development of a doctrine of the resurrection of the faithful from the dead, the presumption being that the majority of Christians would remain alive until the time of the Second Coming. He probably had preached this doctrine so fervently in Thessalonica that the Christians there were seriously shaken when certain Christians died. The general belief appeared to be that the regular reception of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ prevented their deaths before the Second Coming. In a letter to the Thessalonians, he indicates these deaths were the exceptions. He had probably preached this same doctrine in Corinth. He writes the Thessalonians:

*We would have you be clear about those who sleep in death, brothers, otherwise you might yield to grief, like those who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, God will bring forth with him from the dead those also who have fallen asleep believing in him. We say to you, as if the Lord himself had said it, that we who live, who survive until his coming will in no way have an advantage over those who have fallen asleep. No, the Lord himself will come down from heaven at the word of command, at the sound of the archangel's voice and God's trumpet; and those who have died in Christ will rise first. Then we, the living, the survivors, will be*

*caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thenceforth we shall be with the Lord unceasingly. Console one another with this message (Thes.4:13-18).*

By the time of the writing of the Corinthian letter, Paul realized that the survivors would be the exceptions--most would die before the Second Coming. This initiated the growth of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. The doctrine Paul begins to teach concerns, not life after death, but the resurrection of the body after death. Will the spirit of a human being be incarnated anew? Paul teaches only about the resurrection of the Just at the Second Coming. There is no mention of life between death and the resurrection. However, Paul has taught that to be absent from the body means to be at home with the Lord, and he deemed departing this world to be a far better thing because then, one would be with the Lord. It can be implied that at death a person does not enter into the fullness of the redemption. This occurs at the return of Christ, when one will be clothed as Jesus Christ with an immortal body.

In his treatment of the doctrine, Paul first deals with the fact of the resurrection of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:3-34; he deals with the nature of the resurrection in verses 35 through 58. Paul begins by establishing the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead:

*I handed on to you first of all what I myself received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures; that he was buried and, in accordance with the Scriptures, rose on the third day; that he was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve. After that he was seen by five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still alive, although some have fallen asleep. Next he was seen by James; then by all the apostles. Last of all he was seen by me, as one born out of the normal course (1Cor.15:3-8).*

Paul lists six distinct manifestations of the Risen Jesus. At least five hundred people saw the Risen Christ. At the time of the writing of this letter most of the witnesses were alive. The fact of His resurrection is firmly verified. No Christian doctrine is so validated and none more reasonably believed. But the witness par excellence to Jesus' resurrection is Paul himself. He had not been among the disciples of Jesus. He had been a persecutor, and the arch-enemy of the Christian Church. Only his encounter with the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth can account for the dramatic conversion of his life, and for the

subsequent ardent and zealous defender of Jesus Christ he came to be. Paul had seen the Risen Christ and his life verified it. As he said he was “*as one born out of the normal course.*” He went on to write:

*I am the least of the apostles: in fact, because I persecuted the church of God, I do not even deserve the name. But by God’s favor I am what I am. This favor of his to me has not proved fruitless. Indeed, I have worked harder than all the others, not on my own but through the favor of God (1Cor.15:9-10).*

It was the post Easter-faith--faith in the Resurrected Jesus--that altered the tide of human history. The Easter-faith is a historical event not to be denied. It testified to the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Paul proclaims the Christian Community to be one in this belief: “*In any case, whether it be I or they, this is what we preach and this is what you believed*” (1Cor.15:11).

Paul had proclaimed in Corinth the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. He presumed all believe this. However, some Christians illogically began to deny the resurrection of the dead for Christians. Paul saw in this a subtle denial of the resurrection of Christ. If the *anastasis nekron* (resurrection of the dead) is denied, the entire structure of Christian Faith falls. *Anastasis nekron* is the foundation upon which Christian Hope rests. Paul asks the question: “*Tell me, if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how is it that some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?*” (1Cor.15:12). Paul logically demonstrates what flows from such a denial: “*If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ himself has not been raised*” (1Cor.15:13).

What are the consequences for the Christian Religion if Christ has not been raised? The preaching of the gospel is void. It is empty of its content, for the fact of the resurrection, along with the death of Jesus on the Cross, are fundamental truths from which all else flows. It cuts the heart out of the gospel and renders it empty of significance: “*And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is void of content and your faith is empty too*” (1Cor.15:14). It follows that a faith built upon such a delusion would be an illusion. Furthermore, it brands the apostles to be treacherous liars who seduce people. Theirs is a most evil lie, for it is a lie about God. Paul writes:

*Indeed, we should then be exposed as false witnesses of God, for we have borne witness before him that he raised up Christ: but he*



*certainly did not raise him up if the dead are not raised. Why? Because if the dead are not raised, then Christ was not raised (1Cor.15:15-16).*

If this is so, it has very serious spiritual consequences for all Christians. Faith in Christ would be powerless to effect the forgiveness of sins, and ultimately to produce salvation. If Christ did not rise from the dead, there is no divine validation of the righteousness of Jesus; He remains under the curse of the Scriptures. He had not been saved by God and could not therefore be the Savior of the world. Therefore, all who have believed in His name and have died have perished. If they have lived and died in Christ, they share in the same fate as Christ. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, there is no foundation for the Christian Hope for eternal life and blessedness. Paul maintains: *“And if Christ was not raised, your faith is worthless. You are still in your sins, and those who have fallen asleep in Christ are the deadest of the dead” (1Cor.15:17-18).*

Not only do Christians face a hopeless eternity, but they presently live a foolish life. Christianity advocates self-sacrifice in this world, and if it is not with a view for eternal life, Christians are short-changed in this life and are a pitiable lot. As Paul puts it, *“If our hopes in Christ are limited to this life only, we are the most pitiable of men” (1Cor.15:19).* Without the resurrection Paul insists that Christianity isn't worth the price. *No vale la pena!*

However, *anastasis nekron* (resurrection of the dead) is a historical fact. By carrying the Corinthians through this mental process Paul emphasized the vital importance of this doctrine. It is the keystone of the Christian Faith. If it falls, the Christian House collapses. For this reason, the celebration of Easter is the greatest liturgical celebration within the Christian Church.

Out of the triumphant fact of Christ's own resurrection, Paul constructs the doctrine of the Just. He makes an analogy that would be plain to the Jews. When the first ears of wheat began to ripen in the fields, they were offered to God as “the first fruits” of harvest. The offering signified that the coming harvest belonged to God. Paul sees the resurrection of Jesus as this first fruit. The emphasis is upon “first,” implying that the resurrection of Jesus was not a one and only incident; it was the first to be followed by many. Paul explains, *“But as it is, Christ is now raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1Cor.15:20).* Paul pictures a great harvest of souls one day rising from the dead. He speaks of the dead as those *“who have fallen asleep.”*

Christians adopted this expression for death because as sleep is but a temporary time of inactivity for the body, so is death a temporary time of inactivity for the body. However, this does not imply the spirit sleeps. We know that even when the body sleeps, the activities of the spirit continue within our dream-world. The body sleeps in death, but the Christian spirit resides in conscious communion with Christ. Paul later wrote to the Philippians:

*For, to me, "life" means Christ; hence dying is so much gain. If, on the other hand, I am to go on living in the flesh, that means productive toil for me--and I do not know which to prefer. I am strongly attracted by both: I long to be freed from this life and to be with Christ, for that is the far better thing; yet it is more urgent that I remain alive for your sakes (Phil.1:21-24).*

These are not the words of a man who believed death resulted in the "sleep of the spirit" until the day of resurrection.

Paul teaches that the resurrection of the Just flows from their union in faith with Jesus Christ and from the power of Christ's own resurrection. Paul introduces the doctrine of the two Adams, which he develops in his later letter to the Romans. He attributes man's death in this world to man's union with the first Adam who sinned. He attributes man's resurrection from the dead to man's union with the second Adam, who knew not sin and who became the source of eternal life.

He states:

*Death came through a man, hence the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. Just as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will come to life again, but each one in proper order (1Cor.15:21-23a).*

Paul uses a military term to express the idea that there is a God-given order and design in the unfolding of the redemptive plan. Jesus Christ leads the procession as the victorious military commander and division after division of His glorious companions will follow Him. All will rise from the dead, but there will be a sequence in rising from the dead. The Unjust will only rise at the time of the Final Judgment.

Paul unfolds the order and the mystery of the divine sequence to come:

*Christ the first fruits, and then, at his coming, all those who belong to him. After that will come the end, when, after having destroyed every sovereignty, authority, and power, he will hand over the kingdom to God the Father. Christ must reign until God has put all enemies under his feet, and the last enemy to be destroyed is death. Scripture reads that God “has placed all things under his feet.” But when it says that everything has been made subject, it is clear that he who has made everything subject to Christ is excluded (1Cor.15:23-27).*

Paul’s teaching clearly indicates that the work of Jesus Christ remains incomplete. How can Christians think of rest when the work of Christ has not been completed. This certainly suggests that the Church carries on Christ’s mission on this earth--a mission that Christ Himself will one day bring to completion. Paul only indicates what that work must be; he is very explicit in Ephesians: “*Our battle is not against human forces but against the principalities and powers, the rulers of this world of darkness, the evil spirits in regions above*” (Eph.6:12).

Paul seems to imply there will be an interval between the Second Coming of Jesus and the Final End. It will be during this interval that all powers hostile to God will be overcome by Christ. Christ’s reign will begin with the resurrection of the Just; it will not cease to exist, rather, it will reach its perfection when the enemies of God are subdued and made submissive to Christ. Through submission to Christ all sin will come to an end. Then death will come to an end; death will cease to exist for its cause will be crushed.

Paul reveals the triumph of humanity in and through the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ. The order established by God at the beginning of creation will be re-established through the absolute obedient love of Jesus Christ—God’s Son Incarnated. God’s creation will be restored and crowned when all

creation, led by the Word made Flesh, gives loving and filial submission to God the Father. In this act, the divinity of Jesus will not be in question. It is as the New Adam--as man—that Jesus Christ submits to God. It will be the external expression of the loving union of the Son with the Father, and the Father with the Son. As Paul beautifully expresses: *“When, finally, all has been subjected to the Son, he will then subject himself to the One who made all things subject to him, so that God may be all in all”* (1Cor.15:28).

Paul has taken his readers upon a mysterious excursion into the glorious future, but he quickly returns them to the practical problem at hand--denial of the resurrection. He reminds the Corinthians that the present practice of being baptized for the dead is an implied belief in the resurrection of the Just from the dead. If there is no resurrection, what would be the purpose of such a practice? If the dead are not raised, what is the purpose of those who have themselves baptized on behalf of the dead? If the raising of the dead is not a reality, why be baptized on their behalf (see 1Cor.15:29)?

Apparently Christians in Corinth believed they could vicariously receive baptism for a dead person. It is presumed this would have been a person with faith who died before baptism. Apparently, they believed a baptism received in a deceased person's name would benefit them in eternity and assure them a resurrection with the Just. It certainly implies a belief that the living faithful on earth can give spiritual help to those who have died. Paul makes no comment about the practice other than it was a custom. There is no evidence that the custom persisted in the Christian Community.

Once again Paul emphasizes that it is only the belief in the resurrection from the dead that makes Christianity worthwhile. Why would he be taking all these risks of his own physical life if he did not know there was a greater life to be had, one that was well worth the sacrifice of one's physical life. Paul teaches that being a Christian may demand more than a placid and patient endurance of evil in this world, while one awaits “the pie in the sky.” It may demand more than simply waiting out the Second Coming of Jesus that will set things aright in this evil world. Paul even implies that being a Christian may require a real confrontation with the evil in the world, as it had in his own life, a head-on clash with evil at the risk of one's own physical safety and life itself. Paul implies there are Christians worth fighting and dying for in this world, because this world does not have the final say about human life. So he asks:

*And why are we continually putting ourselves in danger? I swear to*

*you, brothers, by the very pride you take in me, which I cherish in Christ Jesus our Lord, that I face death every day. If I fought those beasts at Ephesus for purely human motives, what profit was there for me? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" (1Cor.15:30-33).*

When Paul speaks of fighting with beasts in Ephesus, the reference is no doubt his contending with evil men. Even though men were put in arenas to actually fight beasts, this did not happen with a Roman citizen unless he was deprived of his citizenship first. Christians associating with pagans have taken a spiritual toll among the Corinthians. No one is immune to one's environment. The prevalent philosophical ideas had corrupted the faith of some Christians. Paul points out that if they have lost their faith in the resurrection, then they ought to live like the Epicurians who believe the soul returns to atoms at death, thus: *"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"*

Belief affects behavior. Associations affect beliefs. *"Bad company corrupts good morals."* By their imprudent association with unbelievers, some Corinthians have had their faith corrupted, and this has led them to sinful behavior. They are really missing the mark. Paul says to them:

*Do not be led astray any longer. "Bad company corrupts good morals." Return to reason, as you ought, and stop sinning. Some of you are quite ignorant of God; I say it to your shame (1Cor.15:33-34).*

Paul's words echo those Jesus once spoke to the Sadducees: *"You are badly misled because you fail to understand the Scriptures and the power of God" (Mt.22:29).*

Faith determines conduct, and if we desire to stand before God with a clear conscience, we need to know and live in accord with right doctrine. Paul turns from the fact of the resurrection of the dead, to the manner in which the dead would rise.

Paul knew the questions and the spurious arguments related to the subject. For many people, the idea of the resurrection of the body was a grotesque concept. It conjured up a mental image of an eternal Halloween. Even the Jews who defended the doctrine maintained that the body would come forth

from the grave as it went into the grave. The classical subject for their discussions was the body of Cleopatra. (She must have been some character, that Cleopatra, if, without the medium of modern advertisement and promotional publicity agents, she managed to leave such a lasting effect upon the Mediterranean world.) Even among the Jewish rabbis, Cleopatra's resurrection from the dead was a popular subject for contemplation, the general opinion being that she would arise unclothed. Many an old rabbi looked forward with anticipation to the resurrection of the dead. Nevertheless, such an idea left most people anything but convinced that the resurrection would be a blessed event for them. The discussions went on and on. How will the dead come forth from the grave? What will the body look like? Paul considered all such questions and discussions to be stupid. As he said, *"Perhaps someone will say, 'How are the dead to be raised up? What kind of body will they have?' A nonsensical question!" (1Cor.15:35-36a).*

Such minds were looking at a supernatural event from a natural point of view. From that point of view all the answers will be wrong. Paul tries to give some direction to the discussion, and to offer an answer to the problem. Paul uses the analogy of a seed, comparing it to the dead body. As the seed comes forth completely transformed, so will the human body:

*The seed you sow does not germinate unless it dies. When you sow, you do not sow the full-blown plant, but a kernel of wheat or some other grain. God gives body to it as he pleases--to each seed its own fruition (1Cor.15:36-38).*

Paul indicated the uniqueness and individuality of the risen bodies. He enlarges on the concept by pointing out that in nature we discover many different kinds of bodies, and we distinguish between them:

*Not all bodily nature is the same. Men have one kind of body, animals another. Birds are of their kind, fish are of theirs. There are heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies. The splendor of the heavenly bodies is one thing, that of the earthly another. The sun has a splendor of its own, so has the moon, and the stars have theirs. Even among the stars one differs from another in brightness. So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown in the earth is subject to decay, what rises is incorruptible. What is sown is ignoble, what rises is glorious. Weakness is sown, strength rises up. A natural body is put down and a spiritual body comes up*

*(1Cor.15:39-44).*

Paul suggests there is no comparison between earthly bodies and heavenly bodies. Bodies on earth reflect light; heavenly bodies possess light. Therefore, there is no comparison between the body that goes into the grave and the resurrected body. The resurrected body will be adapted to its new state of existence. The very best Paul could come up with in order to describe the essential change that will occur is to say that what is buried is *psychikon* and what comes forth is *pneumatikon*.

Paul teaches that the resurrection of the dead will be a divine operation. The pattern for that operation we already have in the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus Christ, the source of spiritual life (pneumatic-life), was essentially different from Adam, the source of earthly life (psychic-life), so will the resurrected body be different from the body buried. Paul writes:

*If there is a natural body, be sure there is also a spiritual body. Scripture has it that Adam, the first man, became a living soul; the last Adam has become a life-giving spirit. Take note, the spiritual was not first; first came the natural and after that the spiritual. The first man was of earth, formed from dust, the second is from heaven. Earthly men are like the man of earth, heavenly men are like the man of heaven. Just as we resemble the man from earth, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven (1Cor.14:44-49).*

Paul is saying to his readers: Don't worry, no one will be disappointed. Everyone will be glorious. Star will differ from star but all will "star." But now the question arises: What about those who are alive at the Second Coming? Will they die? Or will they remain as they are? Paul maintains they will not die but they will be completely changed:

*This is what I mean, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; no more can corruption inherit incorruption. Now I am going to tell you a mystery. Not all of us shall fall asleep, but all of us are to be changed--in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, at the sound of the last trumpet. The trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. This corruptible body must be clothed with incorruptibility, this mortal body with immortality (1Cor.15:50-53).*

Paul maintains that the living will immediately be pneumatized--a metamorphosis will suddenly occur in which the perishable will become imperishable, and the mortal will become immortal. Even as the spiritual dimension of a person differs from the physical dimension of the person, so will the resurrected body differ from the earthly body. Perhaps we can say that if we do not know a person in this life in the spirit, we will not recognize them at the Second Coming. We may be completely dazzled by some "star" in eternity, only to be surprised when we discover we rubbed shoulders with them in life and never really knew them. Jesus has indicated that there will be a lot of reversals on the other side.

Paul reveals that at that time, sin and death will end. Until that day, tears will still fall, hurts will be sustained, loved ones will leave us, loneliness will find us, fear will seize us, trials and temptations will assail us; it is all part of the scene. But, if we are in Jesus, we must not be overcome. He has been victorious, and we will surely share in that victory. Even today, the victory is ours with a hope that enables us to endure all in peaceful patience as we eagerly await the day we will sing:

*Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting? ... But thanks be to God who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor.15:54-55,57).*

Life in Christ ends gloriously in a freedom from the guilt of sin, and with the removal of the lethal sting of sin. Immortal life is assured. All this becomes the object of Christian Hope.

If this is the content of faith's revelation, what ought to be its effect upon our lives? Paul leaves no doubt: *"Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, and act like men. In a word, be strong. Do everything with love" (1Cor.16:13-14)*. One's time on earth must be lived so as not to jeopardize one's eternity in heaven. We have made commitments as Christians, and Paul urges us to remain steadfast and persevere in our union with Jesus Christ, with the permanency and perseverance demanded in the marriage vows--in good times and bad, in sickness and health, in richness and in poverty--but without the "until." In Christ there is neither death nor departure!

In the interim, between the Ascension and Second Coming of Jesus, Paul knows that work must be done. It will not be accomplished by standing and gazing heavenward. Paul echoes the words spoken by the angels to the



disciples on Ascension Day: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up at the skies? This Jesus who has been taken from you will return just as you saw him go up into the heavens” (Acts 1:11).

It is the duty of the Church to go forth and evangelize--prepare men for the Second Coming. Many teachings of Jesus confirm the fact that He expects His disciples to be caught in the act of their ministry at the Second Coming. He wants to catch them with their boots on. What would you like to be caught doing when Jesus comes again? Begin doing it now and make it a constant practice; it may become a reality rather than a dream.

As Paul’s letter draws to a close, he hastily covers a wide range of concerns. His words clearly describe what it means to be actively engaged for the Lord. Unconsciously, he presents himself as the perfect example of what it means for a Christian to labor and toil for the Lord, and to do everything with love. His personal concern reaches many aspects of Christian life, and is never divorced from a personal concern for others. He writes to the Corinthians:

*I shall come to you after I have passed through Macedonia. If it is at all possible, I should like to remain with you for some time--even to spend the winter with you--that you may provide me with what I need for the rest of my journey. I do not want to see you just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. I intend to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost. A door has been opened wide for my work, but at the same time there are many opposed. If Timothy should come, be sure to put him at ease among you. He does the Lord’s work just as I do, so let no one treat him disdainfully. Rather, help him come to me by sending him on his way in peace. I am expecting him with the brothers (1Cor.16:5-11).*

It is obvious that Paul pushes Timothy into a leadership role within the Christian Community. We see hints in 1Tim.5:2-3 and 2Tim.1:4-7 that this was not accomplished without some difficulty. Timothy was formed by Paul to take a trusted position within the Church, but he lacked Paul’s strength of character. The Corinthians wanted to know why their popular preacher, Apollos, had not returned to them. Paul explained,

*As for our brother Apollos, I urged him strongly to go to you with the brothers, but he did not wish to go at this time. He will go when circumstances are more favorable (1Cor.16:12).*

Apparently, Apollos had not only a strong mind but a strong will besides.

Paul has carried the minds of his readers to the sublime, then brings them back to earth, and incarnates his teachings in a very sobering way. He tells the Corinthians, “*Now we will take up a collection for the poor in Israel.*” He writes:

*About the collection for the saints, follow the instructions I gave the churches of Galatia. On the first day of each week everyone should put aside whatever he has been able to save, so that the collection will not have to be taken up after I arrive. When I come I shall give letters of introduction to those whom you have chosen to take your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems fitting that I should go myself, they will accompany me (1Cor.16:1-4).*

Paul sends his customary greetings and urges all, “*Greet one another with a holy kiss.*” He gently urges recognition and respect of authority within the Church: “*You know that the household of Stephanas is the first fruits of Achaia and is devoted to the service of the saints. I urge you to serve under such men and under everyone who cooperates and toils with them*” (1Cor.16:14-16).

Paul could close his letter with no better advice than: “*Be steadfast and persevering, my beloved brothers, fully engaged in the work of the Lord. You know that your toil is not in vain when it is done in the Lord*” (1Cor.15:58).

Nothing could better express the ardor of his own spirit than his closing words--it is the only letter in which Paul personally expresses his love for his readers:

*It is I, Paul, who send you this greeting in my own hand. If anyone does not love the Lord, let a curse be upon him. Maranatha! The favor of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus (1Cor.16:21-24).*

These words could be spoken this very day from the kingdom of Heaven where Paul still awaits the blessed Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ!

# SECOND LETTER OF ST. PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

## CHAPTER 1

### LETTER OF TEARS

#### INTRODUCTION

The Scriptures of the New Testament list two letters written to the Christian Community at Corinth. The letters are distinguished by referring to them as First and Second Corinthians. However, Paul wrote more than two letters to the Corinthians. We find a reference to “his letters” in Second Corinthians: “*His letters, they say, are severe and forceful*” (2Cor.10:10). A written correspondence transpired for some time between Paul and the Church at Corinth. In the letter called First Corinthians, we have a reference to a previously written and misunderstood letter:

*I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral persons. I was not speaking of association with immoral people in this world... To avoid them, you would have to leave the world (1Cor.5:-10).*

Paul wrote this letter because he heard reports of internal problems within the Christian Community. Apparently they misunderstood his letter, and it caused more harm than good.

At about this time, Paul had decided on a trip to Jerusalem with a collection of money for the poor. His plan was to return first to Achaia and Macedonia and then go to Jerusalem. In preparation for the journey, and to take the collection, he sent Timothy and Erastus on ahead of him to Macedonia. Paul’s stay in Ephesus was longer than expected. Some believe he was imprisoned there for a short while, and during that time he wrote the Letter to the Philippians, in which he mentions his intention of sending Timothy:

*I hope, in the Lord Jesus, to send Timothy to you very soon, that I may derive courage from learning how things go with you... In fact, I am confident in the Lord that I myself will be coming soon (Phil.2:19,24).*

Apparently, Timothy was to return to Ephesus through Corinth. In the meantime, all the news from Corinth reported by Chloe's people, and from Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus was bad news. The Corinthians sent a letter to Paul in which they overtly sought information, while subtly testing him. Paul responded with the letter now known as First Corinthians. The letter ended on a confident and hopeful note:

*I shall come to you after I have passed through Macedonia. If it is at all possible, I should like to remain with you for some time--even to spend the winter with you... I do not want to see you just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits (1Cor.16:5-7).*

Paul also mentions in this letter that Timothy will probably be arriving in Corinth. He instructed the Corinthians to receive him well, and send him happily on his way to Ephesus. Timothy returned to Ephesus with bad news. Paul's letter had not been received well. Things had worsened. Paul's authority and influence within the Community were seriously threatened. This news stimulated Paul to make a hurried and unscheduled trip to Corinth.

The visit resulted in a bitter experience for Paul. Some individual publicly insulted Paul, and called his apostolic authority into question. No one came to his defense. The Corinthians appeared to be wavering in their loyalty to Paul. Angry and shaken, Paul returned to Ephesus. He fired off a threatening letter to the Corinthians, in which he promised a display of power in Christ not to be to their liking, and not soon forgotten if they continued to reject his authority.

Paul sent Titus to Corinth with the letter and instructed him to meet him with their reply in Troas. When Paul arrived in Troas, Titus was not there. Paul then crossed the sea over to Macedonia. He finally contacted Titus in Phillipi. Titus brought glad tidings. The Corinthians had repented, and punished the person who had injured Paul. From Macedonia Paul now writes a letter of reconciliation to the Corinthians. The letter would have been written no earlier than the fall of 55 A.D. The contents of this letter we find in Second Corinthians.

Second Corinthians presents a problem to scholars. Many believe it to be a compilation of several letters rather than one letter. They believe some ancient

editor compiled portions of letters, written to the Church by Paul, into the text we now call Second Corinthians. The work did not have the wide circulation given to First Corinthians. When Clement of Rome wrote of the Corinthians in 96 A.D., he knew of First but not of Second Corinthians. The same was true of Ignatius of Antioch. Some scholars find portions of as many as six different letters in Second Corinthians. Some find a section of Paul's first letter in chapter six, verse fourteen through chapter seven, verse one. This section appears to be an insertion between the thought expressed in verse thirteen of chapter six and continued in verse two of chapter seven. *"In fair exchange, then (I speak as a father to his children), open wide your hearts!" ... "Make room for us in your hearts!"* Now, in between those two thoughts, we find these imposed:

*Do not yoke yourselves in a mismatch with unbelievers. After all, what do righteousness and lawlessness have in common, or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What accord is there between Christ and Belial, what common lot between believer and unbeliever? Tell me what agreement there is between the temple of God and idols. You are the temple of the living God, just as God has said: "I will dwell with them and walk among them. I will be their God and they shall be my people." Therefore, "Come out from among them and separate yourselves from them," says the Lord, "and touch nothing unclean. I will welcome you and be a father to you and you will be my sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty. Since we have these promises, beloved, let us purify ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, and in the fear of God strive to fulfill our consecration perfectly (2Cor.6:14-7:1).*

Such thoughts do not logically flow from what precedes or from what follows. The use of such terms as righteousness, lawlessness, temple of the living God, idols, flesh and spirit appear out of place in this section of the Scriptures. These were common terms in First Corinthians. The thoughts expressed here would certainly be in line with Paul's reference to his first letter: *"I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral persons" (1Cor.5:9)*. This has led certain scholars to deduce that St. Paul treated these matters superficially in his first letter (now lost), and in a deeper fashion in our First Corinthians, and that what we have conserved here is a fragment of that first, lost letter.

In Second Corinthians we certainly discover a wide range of emotional responses and attitudinal changes. It is a composition of sunshine and storm,

resulting in emotional climate changes within the writing of the letter. Those opting for the one letter, attribute the emotional changes to the arrival of fresh information that changed Paul's emotional response. Others maintain that Paul wrote the first part of the letter--the serene sections--to the majority of the Corinthians, and he wrote the latter section--the stormy sections--to the recalcitrant Corinthians. We do see that when the letter begins it is being written by Paul and Timothy, and it speaks of "we." Then suddenly the "we" disappears and is replaced with "I."

We have opted for the hypothesis that Second Corinthians is a combination of letters. Probably it includes at least part of Paul's first letter, his letter of tears, and his letter of reconciliation. It may also include sections of a letter in which Paul defended his apostolic power, and other letters in which he recommends Titus and others for the purpose of taking up the collection.

If Second Corinthians is but one letter, it certainly possesses a drastic mood change between the writing of the first nine chapters and the writing of the last three chapters. It is a change from sunshine to storm. However, we do know that Paul's relationship with the Corinthians ended, apparently, in harmony and peace. He arrived in Corinth for the winter. There, in relative peace, he wrote his letter to the Romans. For a more harmonious completion of Paul's written correspondence to the Corinthians and his relationship with the Church there, we will presume that the last three chapters of Second Corinthians are part of the letter of tears, and were written prior to the first nine chapters. We will study this last section first.

It seems strange that a man of such transparent frankness and sincerity should ever have been accused, and so often, of double-dealing. It certainly reflects upon the spirit of discernment within the Community, and its ability to make an honest evaluation. Paul speaks of himself so frequently in the first person because he had an apostolic necessity to do so. His character and his role as an apostle are dominant subjects of discussion. The situation in which he found himself forced this upon him.

These were crucial matters. Paul was God's duly appointed teacher to these people, and not only to them but to the entire Church. There was a correlation between his character, and his apostolic commission and the gospel he preached. Regardless of how distasteful it may have been, Paul had to defend his character. As he wrote, he must be "*concerned not only for God's approval*

*but also for the good esteem of men” (2Cor.8:21).* It was because of his concern for the gospel that he felt he, personally, must be esteemed rightly.

John the Baptist expressed the aim of every true disciple of Christ: *“He must increase--I must decrease.”* A disciple should have no intention of fostering self, only Christ. The great saints of God all possessed a great reluctance to reveal, as Therese of Lisieux, “the secrets of the King”--the spiritual favors and experiences received. It was extremely distasteful for St. Paul to manifest his personal spiritual experiences. He told the Corinthians they had forced it upon him. Not without personal pain, Paul bares his heart and soul in Second Corinthians. He reveals the secret of his motivation and his sanctity when he writes:

*The love of Christ impels us who have reached the conviction that since one died for all, all died. He died for all so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who for their sakes died and was raised up (2Cor.5:14-15).*

Paul’s farewell speech to the elders at Miletus reveals how well he lived this doctrine:

*Never did I shrink from telling you what was for your own good, or from teaching you in public or in private... I put no value on my life if only I can finish my race and complete the service to which I have been assigned by the Lord Jesus, bearing witness to the gospel of God’s grace (Acts 20:20,24).*

Second Corinthians carries messages from the world’s greatest missionary to a missionary Church, as timely today as two thousand years ago. These Scriptures should be carefully studied and re-read often. They offer great insight, inspiration, encouragement, and direction to all apostolic people.

## THE ROOT PROBLEM

Paul dealt with the symptoms of the problem in First Corinthians. He saw the tip of the iceberg. During his painful visit to Corinth that followed his letter, he discovered the problem causing the spiritual disintegration of his people. Other so-called apostles and teachers had arrived on the scene and, like termites, they were destroying the foundation laid by Paul. Apparently, these men were Jews who stressed the importance of their Jewish background. They were not original members of the congregation. They came from

elsewhere, and claimed to be the true apostles of Christ, establishing the true Church. They probably stressed the importance of the Mosaic Law and presented Christianity as a mere evolution of Judaism, thereby depreciating the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ. We can see from Paul's words that they endeavored to turn the Corinthians from the true gospel as preached by Paul:

*My fear is that, just as the serpent seduced Eve by his cunning, your thoughts may be corrupted and you may fall away from your sincere and complete devotion to Christ. I say this because, when someone comes preaching another Jesus than the one we preached, or when you receive a different spirit than the one you have received, or a gospel other than the gospel you accepted, you seem to endure it quite well (2Cor.11:3-4).*

These teachers sought to usurp Paul's authority in order to destroy his teaching and the power of its hold over the minds and hearts of the Corinthians. If one desires to undermine a man's word, one begins by undermining the man's character. These teachers questioned and discredited Paul's apostolic commission; they ridiculed his behavior as being unworthy of a true apostle, and accused him of totally lacking apostolic power and authority. On the other hand, these teachers paraded their spiritual and natural powers. They presented themselves as super-spiritual, and bragged about their spiritual experiences. In comparison Paul appeared insignificant, non-assertive, and void of any spiritual appeal.

The crux of the problem lay in the spiritual immaturity of the Corinthians. Being themselves unspiritual, they were incapable of perceiving true Christian spirituality. What they judged to be signs of spirituality were, in truth, signs of spiritual childishness. When a man of Paul's spiritual maturity appeared, they had neither measure nor ability by which to judge his spirituality. Since they failed to find in him what they admired in themselves, they judged him to be deficient. When men as unspiritual as themselves appeared on the scene, they were quickly seduced with cunning speech and worldly ways. In actual practice the attitude of these teachers toward the people indicated contempt for them. Paul noted their unloving attitude when he wrote: "*You even put up with those who exploit you, who impose upon you and put on airs, with those who slap your face*" (2Cor.11:20). Apparently the false teachers had demanded that the Corinthians support them.



The Corinthians attack Paul's character by insinuating that he is a coward. As an illustration of this cowardliness, they apparently recount his escape from Damascus as being cowardly, and being let down in a basket as ludicrous. They maintain that when Paul stands face to face before the Corinthians, he is pathetic and faint-hearted, with no force of character or strength of will. However, when he gets to a safe distance, he endeavors to bully them with the written word. He is strong in written criticisms of them, but when present he is ineffectual: "*His letters, they say, are severe and forceful, but when he is here in person he is unimpressive and his word makes no great impact*" (2Cor.10:10). As a preacher he is miserably ineffective.

They insinuate that Paul is a weak authoritarian character who assumes divine authority to lord it over people. As typical of the authoritarian person, he claims divine and unquestionable authority, and constantly recommends himself. Paul was sensitive to this criticism, for we hear him asking later: "*Am I beginning to speak well of myself again; or do I need letters of recommendation to you or from you as others might?*" (2Cor.3:1). Paul's enemies present him as a man under the flesh and not under grace. He is no apostle of Jesus Christ: he comes with no letters of recommendation; he lacks apostolic strength of character and power of preaching; he preaches an erroneous doctrine; he does not dare to ask for money directly as he knows he has no right to support. However, he seeks to trick money out of people by sending his friends to take up a collection.

Paul had the exhausting and unappreciated task of raising the maturity of the Christian people. Only his heroic patience gave him the strength of spirit to remain steadfast in his love and perseverance in loving the Corinthians, even when they failed to recognize and appreciate his gift of love; even when they went so far as to misinterpret and attribute false and devious motives to Paul's humble and loving efforts.

Paul and Christian teachings are under attack, and the very people who should be defending Paul and standing up for the truth--fighting for it--go along with the enemies of Paul, and remain silent in the face of misconceptions, half-truths and whole lies. Regardless of how weak and weary Paul may be physically, and regardless of how emotionally drained, he picks up the sword and engages the enemy. Error needs only truth's silence and, feeding on that silence, it grows, like a social cancer. As long as Paul lived, truth could not be silenced. He tirelessly proclaimed it with utter disregard for

his own well-being. *“We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the sake of the truth” (2Cor.13:8).*

Paul would be ashamed of the many Christians today who remain silent as Christian truths are assailed and destroyed. He would make short work of those “prudent” reasons for silence. Truth has its own power, but it must be proclaimed in order to release that power which destroys error.

### PAUL’S DEFENSE

Paul left the Corinthians an example. Paul imitates Christ’s spirit of meekness and kindness, but the Corinthians do not even recognize an imitation of Christ. They are so spiritually immature they fail to recognize Christian characteristics. They see light and call it darkness. They are always ready to receive the false coin. Paul begins his rebuttal of the false charges by calling to mind the meekness and kindness of Christ: *“I, Paul, exhort you by the meekness and kindness of Christ, I who (you say) when present in your midst am lowly, but when absent am bold toward you” (2Cor.10:1).*

What they criticize in Paul, he maintains is his imitation of Jesus Christ. The meekness and kindness of Christ have motivated Paul’s behavior toward the Corinthians. Jesus claimed meekness as a personal quality in His own life. In the New Testament, meekness is a quality that expresses one’s condition before God, not before man. It has been defined as a condition or quality of the human spirit in which we accept God’s dealing with us in this world, without disputing and resisting it.

The classic Christian example of meekness would be Jesus in the Garden of Olives, when he prayed that the chalice of suffering would pass, *“yet not my will but yours be done” (Lk.22:42).* Meekness enables the Christian to endure patiently the evils encountered in life, as one perceives the Will of God working within these situations. As Jesus expressed to Pilate, *“You would have no power over me whatever unless it were given you from above” (Jn.19:11).*

The Greek word for kindness is *epieikeia*. The word loses much of its power and beauty when translated into English. Aristotle used the word *epieikeia* to describe the clemency exercised by a judge who was good as well as just. It is the judge who realizes that circumstances alter cases, and that an adherence to the strict letter of the law sometimes results in an even greater injustice. A classic Christian example of *epieikeia* was shown by Jesus when He refrained

from passing judgment upon the woman taken into adultery. Christian *epieikeia* was once beautifully described in a sermon as:

*Giving people time; not quickly taking them at their word; not closing up the account, or forcing a complex matter to a speedy issue; not insisting that people must mean all that their words or even their deeds imply; making allowance for the different capacity and form and character and movement of different minds; remembering by what different avenues the same truth may be penetrating different hearts.*

Paul sees it as a Christ-like quality to always use gentle methods to win submission of men to Christian truth. More severe methods should be employed only as a last resort. Paul is most reluctant to use severity with others. He appeals to the Corinthians to reform their lives, and not to confuse his gentleness with weakness and cowardliness. He does not want to express in person the severity expressed in his letters. Paul makes it clear that he is a weak human being, and he does not depend upon the powers of his humanity to fulfill the work assigned to him. If he must go to war with others, he will not be depending upon his human resources. He writes:

*I beg you that when I am there, I may not have to act boldly, with that assurance I might dare to use courageously against certain ones who accuse us of weak human behavior. We do indeed live in the body but we do not wage war with human resources. The weapons of our warfare are not merely human. They possess God's power for the destruction of strongholds. We demolish sophistries and every proud pretension that raises itself against the knowledge of God; we likewise bring every thought into captivity to make it obedient to Christ. We are ready to punish disobedience in anyone else once your own obedience is perfect (2Cor.10:2-6).*

If necessary to conserve the Church at Corinth, Paul will not hesitate to exercise the spiritual authority possessed by him. Paul's enemies have misinterpreted his meekness and kindness as human weakness. Paul does not deny his human weakness, nor does he hide it. However his enemies are mistaken to judge his future performance by his present weakness. He is an apostle of Jesus Christ, and in all apostolic activities he relies upon the spiritual powers and weapons given to him by the Holy Spirit. Herein lies the

permanent and unlimited source of strength and courage for himself and every humble apostle of Jesus Christ.

Paul may have to contend with flesh and blood, but he knows the real war is against the spiritual forces of evil that invade the minds and hearts of human beings. There these evil forces fortify themselves against God, throwing up their intellectual ramparts to resist the truth of God. Human reason and natural methods may win temporary battles against these sophistries and proud pretensions, but they fail to drive the evil from its fortress.

Here is where faith in the power of the gospel is demanded; here is where the apostles must use *“the sword of the spirit, the Word of God”* (Eph.6:17). *“Not by might and not by power, but by my spirit, says Yahweh Sabaoth”* (Zec.4:6). It is true, as Paul has taught: *“The natural man does not accept what is taught by the Spirit of God. For him, that is absurdity”* (1Cor.2:14). But it is equally true, as the Scriptures say, *“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and thwart the cleverness of the clever”* (1Cor.1:19). In the face of gospel truth, many a brilliant mind came to an obedient submission in faith to Jesus Christ. Augustine received the grace of conversion when he read:

*Let us live honorably as in daylight; not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual excess and lust, not in quarreling and jealousy. Rather, put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the desires of the flesh* (Rom.13:13-14).

Paul appeals to the Corinthians not to be superficial in their judgment of the situation in the Church, nor of his ministry: *“You view things superficially”* (2Cor.10:7). It was surface judgment to describe his ministry as being weak and ineffectual. From the first day he preached in Corinth, he made a determined effort *“to be ignorant of everything except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”* As a result, the faith of the Corinthians rested upon the testimony of God, not upon man.

For what Paul was criticized, he should have been praised. At times, the best and highest motives are misunderstood because the source from which they flow are beyond the awareness of those who operate on lower levels. The criticism directed toward Paul truly falls upon the hearts of his critics. They consider themselves to be highly spiritual, and yet, are unable to discern the works of the spirit. The Scriptures confirm that men of flesh war against men of the spirit. Due to their immaturity and superficiality, the Corinthians were

vulnerable to spiritual contamination. They were being subjected to temptations before they had been able to build a firm spiritual edifice on the foundation laid by Paul. Culturally they had an innate weakness for oratory, philosophical speculations, and the cultic--the more mysterious and involved the better. Their spiritual values were superficial.

This had been demonstrated to Paul by their over-evaluation and misuse of the gift of tongues. They were very open to being influenced by visions and extraordinary spiritual phenomenon. Regardless of their shortcomings in the faith, Paul was still their father in the faith and he dearly loved them. He would not abandon them to the wolves. He knew he would be unable to continue his own apostolic work until this situation at Corinth was resolved to his satisfaction.

Certain men in Corinth made proud boasts of their relationship with Jesus Christ. They measured themselves by other men, and found themselves superior. Paul knows that in this relationship he takes no second place. He is too wise to be drawn into the snare of letting others set up a measure and norm for his ministry or for his life in Christ. He writes: *“Since people like that are their own appraisers, comparing themselves with one another, they only demonstrate their ignorance” (2Cor.10:12).*

Christ criticized the Pharisees for seeking the approval of men rather than the approval of God. A man can only rightly be measured by the rule, *kanon*, of God. Let a man be judged by his works, not his words. The Lord had laid down the ground rules for Paul’s work: *“The same person whose action had made Peter the apostle of the circumcised had given me a similar mission to the pagans” (Gal.2:8).*

These super-apostles boast of their work in Corinth. Paul maintains that they have come into the field and reaped from the labors of others. However, Paul has only worked in the area assigned to him by God. He labored in fields where the gospel had never been preached. The birth of the Christian Community as a result of his labor is his boast. It is the validation of his apostolic commission. This fruitful labor is his letter of recommendation, written by Christ Himself. This is the Lord’s recommendation, and there is no doubt about it. So Paul concludes: *“Let him who would boast, boast in the Lord. It is not the man who recommends himself who is approved but the man whom the Lord recommends” (2Cor.10:17-18).* *“By their fruits you will know them!” (Mt.7:20).*

## PLAYING THE FOOL

No doubt about it, Paul had been deeply hurt on that brief visit to Corinth. The degree to which he came under attack came as a surprise. He had not been prepared for it, or for the reaction of the Corinthians. Not one single person came to his defense. The success of his enemies was quite evident! Instinctively, as a good general would when facing unexpected and overwhelming odds, Paul retreated.

Back in Ephesus he worked it all through. Paul's First Temptation begins: "Let them all go to Hell. No better than they deserve! Aha, but no! Remember Christ died for them. Christ loves them and you love them, too. Well, don't sit there! Fight for them! They may never understand what you do but it's the only thing to do, for it is the way of love. You must be willing to lay down your life for them. Yes! that would be easy. However, you must do more. You must lay down your self-respect. You must fight them on their own terms. You must beat them at their own game. Never mind how you appear to others. It is the victory that matters. Yes, Paul, this is war!" The enemy won the first encounter but the war had only begun.

Paul planned his campaign. Even now across the battle lines came the ridiculing echo: "*Look how brave he is--shooting from a safe distance his verbal barrages.*" "*His letters, they say, are severe and forceful, but when he is here in person he is unimpressive and his word makes no great impact*" (2Cor.10:10). His response to that was, "*Well, let such people give this some thought, that what we are by word, in the letters during our absence, that we mean to be in action when we are present*" (2Cor.10:11..) As another commander named Paul once said: "*Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead! We have not yet begun to fight!*"

More than once Paul's critics accused him of inconsistent behavior. Paul defended his behavior by maintaining that one constant internal principle directed his external behavior. He sought always to be all things to all men in the hope of winning some of them to Christ. We see this principle in action.

The Corinthians were infants in the spirit; they were impressed with childish spirituality. They were impressed by people who boasted of spiritual gifts,

mystical powers, and visions from God. They were impressed by the “vanity of vanities”--men who made a pretense of having their hearts lost in God. Paul realized that this was no child’s play. Cunning men used these techniques to capture and corrupt the faith of believers, leading them away from the true Church. They were enjoying considerable success.

It is the work of firemen to extinguish fires, not light them; however, at times the fireman lights a backfire to control a greater fire. Paul would fight fire with fire. He loved the Corinthians more than he loved his natural pride, his self-esteem, his good image. Regardless of how naturally repugnant it was for himself, he would go down to their level and use foolish means to win them. He emptied out his own spiritual maturity and became spiritually foolish. How hard this was for him, we see from that cry of pain: *“What a fool I have become! You have driven me to it. You are the ones who should have been commending me” (2Cor.12:11).*

Nevertheless, the other side of that coin is love. His love is truly revealed for them in that he would become a fool to save them. If Paul loved them, he had to fight for them, and that required becoming a fool. Being a fool implied being ungodly. The fool leaves God out of the picture. It implies the use of natural means to achieve one’s end. Paul’s motives were pure; he preferred his means to be godly but, in this case, only foolish weapons and victories could impress fools.

The war is between Paul and the false teachers. The spoils of war are the minds and hearts of the Corinthians. Paul had won them for Christ. As he told them, *“I do not want what you have, I only want you” (2Cor.12:14).* Not so the others. They had come to steal and rob. They had come to steal away people in the name of Christ for themselves and their destructive intentions. Out of this experience in Corinth Paul later preached:

*I know that when I am gone, savage wolves will come among you who will not spare the flock. From your own number, men will present themselves distorting the truth and leading astray any who follow them. Be on guard, therefore (Acts 20:29-30).*

It is Christ’s battle, but Paul must fight it. He knows the enemy well. The enemy comes clothed in the armor of cold pride. Paul knows nothing can defeat that enemy more than love and humility. Humility is truth incarnated. Paul will fight with truth incarnated as lived and experienced in his own life.

The price of using such weapons is to be utterly humiliated before the eyes of others. Paul pays the price for the love of Christ and the Corinthians.

### WEAPONS OF FOLLY

As the war with the weapons of folly begins, Paul explains his position. *“You must endure a little of my folly. Put up with me, I beg you! I am jealous of you with the jealousy of God himself, since I have given you in marriage to one husband, presenting you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2Cor.11:1-2).*

As we know, Paul believed the Second Coming to be imminent. Paul looks forward to the Lord’s return, and hopes to have the joy of presenting his converts at Corinth as a chaste bride to Christ the Bridegroom. Everything he had done has been with the sole objective of enabling them to say that they belonged completely to Christ. They were his *“work in the Lord” (1Cor.9:1)*; he had begotten them *“in Christ Jesus” (1Cor.4:15)*. But just as a father is not only responsible for bringing his daughter into the world, he also “gives her away” to her husband, so Paul had espoused the Corinthians to one husband. The word “one” stresses the truth that, just as the marriage relationship is exclusive, so Christians owe an exclusive loyalty to Christ.

When Paul thinks of these “super apostles,” the figures of the serpent and Eve come to his mind. As Satan subtly used the serpent to seduce Eve from the will and love of God, these men, with their subtle philosophies and cunning lies, were leading the Corinthians from their pure and sincere devotion to Jesus Christ. Single-hearted devotion to Christ is easily destroyed. After the word of God is sown, Satan sows in the same field to keep the word of God from bearing fruit. Paul writes:

*My fear is that, just as the serpent seduced Eve by his cunning, your thoughts may be corrupted and you may fall away from your sincere and complete devotion to Christ. I say this because when someone comes preaching another Jesus than the one we preached, or when you receive a different spirit than the one you have received, or a gospel other than the gospel you accepted, you seem to endure it quite well (2Cor.11:3-4).*

Here Paul subtly implies the real power behind the scene to be that of Satan.



It has been said that the danger of false teachers lies in their erroneous estimation of Jesus Christ, and in their desire to improve upon the simplicity of the gospel by additions and subtractions. When the religious lives of people cease to be Christ-centered and no longer draw their power and inspiration from the Presence of His Spirit, and when they look away from the Cross of Calvary to find their salvation, their religious lives lose their Christian simplicity, and a pure hearted devotion to Christ becomes corrupted.

In order to be humble one must often be willing to be thought of as proud. Paul's first folly is the boast that he is in no way inferior to those "super-stars" of the apostolate. He acknowledges that he may lack Grecian eloquence of speech; however, speech is but a means to express knowledge. When it comes to knowledge, no one has surpassed Paul, and he proclaims it: "...*I am not lacking in knowledge. We have made this evident to you in every conceivable way*" (2Cor.11:6).

Paul must next boast of his love for them. This would indeed have been distasteful to him. In his ministry to them, he had always given to them and taken nothing. He realized how immature they were, and how readily they would have mistrusted his motives if he had ever taken up a collection. "*Could I,*" he asks, "*have done wrong when I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge, humbling myself with a view to exalting you?*" (2Cor.11:7). This section is not written without a bit of irony and sarcasm. Paul does this not because he does not love them, "*God knows I do,*" but as he said: "*What I am doing I shall continue to do, depriving at every turn those who look for a chance to say that in their much-vaunted ministry they work on the same terms as we do*" (2Cor.11:12). Their false teachers have not hesitated to take from them; they have demanded from them and fleeced them; they have labored, not for the love of God, but for personal gain; they have used the gospel to make money. At this point, Paul comes out with bare knuckles and hurls the biting words of truth: "*False apostles!*"

*Such men are false apostles. They practice deceit in their disguise as apostles of Christ. And little wonder! For even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. It comes as no surprise that his ministers disguise themselves as ministers of the justice of God. But their end will correspond to their deeds" (2Cor.11:13-15).*

Deception is the weapon of all false teachers. Deception is the serpent's deadly trait. By his cunning, Satan can enter into the most sincere spirits where

humility fails to stand guard. Without their awareness he seduces them into becoming his ministers. He dupes them into thinking themselves to be ministers of Christ. The Scriptures warn us to test every spirit; John indicates that orthodoxy of doctrine is one of the true tests. Satan accomplishes his work in the disguise of “an angel of light”--the Noonday devil. He deceives and seduces the spirits of men and makes them channels of his deceptions. The Scriptures warn us: Satan has his ministers in this world and his ministers appear in this world as ministers of Christ.

Christ identified Satan as a lying and destructive spirit. All of Satan’s disciples will contaminate the truth. They counterfeit goodness. The Pharisees consciously saw themselves as righteous men who defended the Law of God. Christ referred to them as sons of Satan. The opponents of Paul were professed Christians who were not conscious of the source of their beliefs or of their energy. Christians are warned against passing final moral judgment upon people; however, this does not extend to teachers who falsify gospel truth.

Paul warns us to stay clear of men who “*make a pretense of religion but negate its power*” (2Tim.3:5). Isaiah said: “*Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who change darkness into light and light into darkness...*” (Is.5:20). Perversions of the Christian Doctrine are never to be defended as a partial acceptance of truth, but rejected as teachings destructive to the truth. Evil should be tagged properly--called by its proper name. Truth must not be compromised. As Paul proclaimed: “*We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the sake of the truth*” (2Cor.13:8). We are told not to grieve the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth.

With great natural and spiritual repugnance Paul is forced to brag and boast. It is not how Christ Himself behaved. The Holy Spirit never leads His disciples to do such. No boastings of self could ever be said to be a fruit of the Spirit. Out of necessity, Paul assumes these tactics, nevertheless they are against his Christian spirit and apostolic methods. He makes it clear this method does not flow from his apostolic grace: “*What I am about to say in this self-assured boasting, I speak not as the Lord desires but after the manner of a fool. Since many are bragging about their human distinctions, I too will boast*” (2Cor.11:17).

Paul is reduced to acting like a fool, but he is no fool. The part is a difficult one for him to play, “*I repeat: let no one think me foolish. But if you do, then*

*accept me as a fool all the way and let me do a little boasting” (2Cor.11:16). He asks them to bear with his foolishness; it shouldn't be too difficult for them as they bear with true fools every day. Paul is clearly being caustic when he says, “To my shame I must confess that we have been too weak to do such things” (2Cor.11:21). What things? Exploit them, impose upon them, put on airs, slap their faces? In Paul’s mind the ultimate foolishness for a man of God is to boast about human distinctions. It is “absolute foolishness.” “Are they Hebrews? So am I! Are they Israelites? So am I! Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I! Are they ministers of Christ? Now I am really talking like a fool--I am more” (2Cor.11:22-23a).*

Paul’s adversaries had dazzled his converts with their boastful accomplishments. They painted visions of “super-apostles.” Paul’s image paled into insignificance beside these colorful fantasies. In counteraction, Paul presents a realistic portrait of a true “super-apostle;” he presents his own apostolic portrait: *“With my many more labors and imprisonments, with far worse beatings and frequent brushes with death. Five times at the hands of the Jews I received forty lashes less one” (2Cor.11:23b-24a).*

At that time Paul had already been beaten eight times, and we can infer from the text that some of these beatings were so severe he nearly died from them. Five times he had been beaten by his fellow countrymen. They had prescribed that *“forty lashes may be inflicted on a criminal, but no more” (Dt.25:3).* These lashes would have been inflicted by the synagogue authorities. They had the legal right to punish offending members of the Jewish religion. Evidently, on five different occasions they looked upon Paul as a criminal. Apparently, it was not as easy as the Scriptures state--this going into the synagogues of different cities and preaching Jesus Christ.

Paul suffered chastisement with rods during his first visit to the Roman colony of Philippi. Apparently, on three occasions Paul’s legal rights were violated. He writes, *“I was stoned once.”* Acts records that the stoning took place during his missionary journey through Galatia. The Acts tell us much about Paul’s travels but little about the circumstances involved. Paul gives us a glimpse of them:

*I was stoned once, shipwrecked three times; I passed a day and a night on the sea. I traveled continually, endangered by floods, robbers, my own people, the Gentiles; imperiled in the city, in the desert, at sea, by false brothers; enduring labor, hardship, many*

*sleepless nights; in hunger and thirst and frequent fasting, in cold and nakedness. Leaving other sufferings unmentioned, there is that daily tension pressing on me, my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak that I am not affected by it? Who is scandalized that I am not aflame with indignation? (2Cor.11:25b-29).*

These last words describe Paul's mental and psychological sufferings, and reveal his heart. The care of these Churches made continual demand upon his love. When Paul speaks of his feeling the weakness of others and, "*aflame with indignation,*" he emphasizes two complementary aspects of Christian love: sympathy with the weak, and indignation and anger over scandal. Indifference, not hatred is the opposite of love.

An interesting psychological aspect occurred as Paul attempted to boast. He begins by telling his positive aspects but quickly drifts into speaking of the sufferings and humiliations of his life--the very thing avoided by the naturally boastful person. There is a psychological force strongly operative in a truthful person. When circumstances demand a revelation of such a person's worth and goodness, they experience an imperative need to balance the picture with a presentation from the dark side of their character. What the proud eagerly hide from themselves, the humble eagerly reveal to themselves and to others. Unconsciously, Paul formulates a Christian principle of boasting--a principle operative in Paul at this moment. "*If I must boast, I will make a point of my weaknesses*" (2Cor.11:30). He goes on to relate the humble story of his escape from Damascus. However, this attitude is a bit premature and Paul must return to some real foolishness:

*I must go on boasting, however useless it may be, and speak of visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who, fourteen years ago, whether he was in or outside his body I cannot say, only God can say--a man who was snatched up to the third heaven. I know that this man--whether in or outside his body I do not know, God knows--was snatched up to Paradise to hear words which cannot be uttered, words which no man may speak. About this man I will boast (2Cor.12:1-5a).*

Five such mystical experiences are mentioned in Acts. This incident may have occurred around 44 A.D., when Paul prayed in the temple. Acts gives this account: "*Once, after I had got back to Jerusalem, when I was praying in the Temple, I fell into a trance and then I saw him*" (Acts 22:17). Most probably

these visions took place during that quiet and hidden time of his life when the grace of God prepared him for his great vocation. Perhaps St. Teresa of Avila describes just such a vision when she writes:

*Our Good God now desires to remove the scales from the eyes of the soul, so that it may see and understand something of the favor which he is granting it, although He is doing this in a strange manner...an intellectual vision, in which by a representation of the truth in a particular way, the Most Holy Trinity reveals itself, in all three Persons. First of all the spirit becomes enkindled and is illumined, as it were, by a cloud of the greatest brightness. It sees these three persons, individually, and yet, by a wonderful kind of knowledge which is given to it, the soul realizes that most certainly and truly all those three Persons are one substance and one Power and one Knowledge and one God alone; so that what we hold by faith the soul may be said here to grasp by sight, although nothing is seen by the eyes, either of the body or of the soul, for it is no imaginary vision... They are in the interior of the heart...in the most interior place of all and in its greatest depths (Interior Castle, Sec:7th Dwelling Place, Chap.1).*

After such experiences, St. Teresa relates that raptures, generally, come to an end. By this she means a suspension of the senses as Paul experienced in the temple: *“I fell into a trance and then I saw him.”* Apparently, at this point the spirit becomes one with Christ, as Paul relates: *“He who is joined to God becomes one spirit with Him.”* From this point, the life of the mystic becomes one of great apostolic charity. The heroic lives of the saints are by-products of their life of prayer--their union with God. Too often Christians seek to have the by-product without having the product--the life of prayer. This is why many Christians fall on their face, or worse still--fall apart.

Every age has its false mystics. This age is no exception. Nothing more dangerous can come to a spiritual person than that Satan delude them about their sanctity--to lead them to believe that they have reached a degree of sanctity and love of God that, in reality, is yet far removed from them. That satanic spider of pride may well catch and destroy their souls in a subtly woven web of pride.

A priest once had a luncheon with a group of people who discussed their visions and revelations over lettuce and tomato salads, with a casualness with which ladies swap recipes or discuss a bride hand. They vied with one

another in relating visions of the Lord and elocutions from Him. They had seen Him in the desert (Palm Springs, no less), on the mountains, and at the sea. They saw Him in cloud formations, in puddles of rain, and in sunbeams--not to mention dreams. They heard Him in the wind, in their sleep, and when they awoke. The priest was tempted to tell them: "My dog once had a vision--nevertheless, he still remained a dog!"

To speak of such things has always been most difficult for saints. Only out of obedience have most of them been revealed. St. Therese spoke of it as "guarding the secrets of the King." These areas of the spiritual life are closely guarded because there is great danger for spiritual pride. Paul claims that he will boast about God's working in his life, but when it comes to self, he will boast only of his weakness. Human weakness does not frighten the truly humble man or woman of God. Self-sufficiency, self-assurance, and self-reliance frighten them, for therein can lie their defeat. If they are contending against "flesh and blood," well enough, for their "flesh and blood" may be as strong or better than the next person's. *"However, our battle is not against human forces but against the principalities and powers, the rulers of this world of darkness, the evil spirits in regions above"* (Eph.6:12). Therefore, it is a war that must be fought with the spiritual powers of Christ: *"All power in heaven and earth has been given to me."* Paul teaches that a conscious knowledge of one's personal weakness keeps one from becoming a spiritual fool:

*In order that I might not become conceited I was given a thorn in the flesh, an angel of Satan to beat me and keep me from getting proud. Three times I begged the Lord that this might leave me. He said to me, "My grace is enough for you, for in weakness power reaches perfection." And so I willingly boast of my weaknesses instead, that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2Cor.12:7-9).*

In other words, Paul says that if I am always consciously aware of my personal weakness then I will always be consciously aware, when engaged in "the star wars," that I must have the power of Jesus Christ or else face defeat. Paul humbly confesses: *"Therefore I am content with weakness, with mistreatment, with distress, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ, for when I am powerless, it is then that I am strong"* (2Cor.12:10).

Paul patiently endures the human situation. He has learned to live at peace in a fallen world and with the frailties of human nature--his own and others. He never despairs, for despair is pride. Pride finds power in self. Defeat of self

often produces despair in the proud, but never in the humble. Paul admits that he groans inwardly while he awaits the redemption of his body (see Rom.8:23), when he will no longer experience “a thorn in the flesh” or the blows of Satan’s angel.

He lives in joyful hope. As he says: “*And hoping for what we cannot see means awaiting it with patient endurance*” (Rom.8:25). The foundation of his peace, his patience, his hope is the Presence of Christ in his life. He will never be alone. Whatever comes, Christ will be with him and that faith gives him confidence and assures him an ultimate victory. “*I am content...for the sake of Christ.*” Christ’s presence gives Paul contentment in all the difficulties of life. He has learned the secret of the saints: “*When I am powerless, it is then that I am strong.*” Because of Christ’s presence in his life, Paul knows the Corinthians were never short-changed by his ministry. Looking back over that ministry he maintained: “*Even though I am nothing, I am in no way inferior to the ‘superapostles.’ Indeed, I have performed among you with great patience the signs that show the apostle, signs and wonders and deeds of power*” (2Cor.12:11b-12).

They have witnessed in his ministry all those “*signs and wonders and deeds of power*” reported to be performed by apostles in other places. Such things cease at times so that faith may flourish, and those who cannot live without them retard their souls and remain infants in the spirit. Those who go seeking after them rarely realize that at the end of signs and wonders and deeds of power may lie Satan. The truly righteous “live by faith.”

Paul asks the Corinthians in what have they received less than the other churches. He replies to his own question with a bit of sarcasm:

*You were less burdened than the other churches--is that it? Is the real problem being that I loved you more than all the rest? Did I love you too much? Was my love too refined, too delicate, too sensitive for you to perceive the quality of it and appreciate it? Is this sad fact true that because I have loved you too much, I am now to be loved so much less? (see 2Cor.13-15).*

How often that becomes a reality in the human situation! Those whose love is the finest are often loved the least in return. The classical Christian example is Jesus Christ.

In the commentary on chapter thirteen of First Corinthians we observed love to be a power for life. It is a laboring power. Love labors for the growth of life. It seeks to protect and conserve the life of its beloved. Love sacrifices itself so that the loved one may grow and develop. This quality of love Paul expressed for the Corinthians. However, being spiritual children, it was not easy for them to understand this quality of love. Children do not understand the meaning of true and perfect love. Children do know what it is to be liked. They know what it is to be nice. But love does not always like us, nor is it always nice to us, but it is always good for us and to us. If one fails to understand the true nature of love one can easily accept the false coin of love, which has like on one side and nice on the other; essentially it's made of a baser metal than is love.

True love may run the risk of being unrecognized as love. The quality of love may be so high the loved one may not recognize it as love. When a person seeks the eternal welfare of a person whose interest lies solely in his temporal welfare, there can be a lot of misunderstanding.

What is one to do? One must continue to love as one has the power to love. Love means life. One must live at the level of life at which one possesses the power to live. In the case of people like Paul, love means patience. It means persevering in love whether one's love is appreciated or not. It is the way of love: it is the Way of Christ. By such a love one hopes, eventually, to raise the level of maturity in the loved one. It may be that only such a love will save the person.

This quality of love we see operative in Paul. Love is resourceful. When one means fails, another is tried. Paul does not wish to intimidate the Corinthians, but if exhortation fails, he will use intimidation. He plans a third visit and he desires peace between the Corinthians and himself before the visit.

However, Paul will not accept peace at any price. He desires the peace that comes from the ordering of one's life in keeping with God's commandments. If, on his third visit, he still finds discord and disorder, the Corinthians will not be to his liking, and Paul will certainly not be to their taste. They will see a Paul they have never seen before. Paul himself dreads such a visit. If they "*have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication and sensuality they practice,*" (*akatharsia, porneia, aselgia*), it will be like visiting the graveside of departed friends. If sexual promiscuity continues in the Christian community, Paul's work in Corinth has failed. He will face the embarrassing results of his labor.



As Paul expressed it: *“I fear that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may have to mourn over the many who sinned earlier and have not repented” (2Cor.12:21).*

Be that as it may, he will not give up. Love endures all things and it is willing to experiment. He will come, and if need be, he will come carrying a big stick. As Jesus Christ cleansed the mess out of the temple with zeal in His heart and a whip in His hand, so Paul will come to Corinth.

*I fear that when I come I may not find you to my liking, nor may you find me to yours (2Cor.12:20).*

*I said before when I was there the second time--and I repeat it now in my absence--to those who sinned before and to all the rest, that if I come again I shall not spare you (2Cor.13:2).*

*We are ready to punish disobedience in anyone... (2Cor.10:6).*

*We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the sake of the truth (2Cor.13: 8).*

The truth is Paul loved the Corinthians more than they loved themselves. They would willingly settle for less, but he will not leave them in peace to do so. They must reject evil and embrace the good, not for his sake but theirs. Paul will not rest with their spiritual immaturity and imperfection, nor will he permit them to rest in it: *“Our prayer is that you may be built up to completion” (2Cor.13:9).*

## CHAPTER 2

### PORTRAIT OF MATURITY

#### INTRODUCTION

Scholars and students agree that Second Corinthians is the most biographical of all the writings of Paul. This letter enables the perceptive person to peer into the heart of Paul. There his words faithfully reflect his feelings at each given moment. He is too sincere to mask his feelings. We see his motivations, his anguish, his fears, his hurt feelings, his hopes, his joys, and his enduring love. Every word is written under the power of a strong emotional response that reveals his dynamic personality. These writings present us with an autobiographical description of the way Paul lived out his Christian life amidst slander, disloyalty, ingratitude; amidst bodily weakness and sufferings and dangers to his physical life.

#### LETTER OF RECONCILIATION

From Macedonia, Paul writes his letter of reconciliation. It is written in Timothy's name as well:

*Paul, by God's will an apostle of Jesus Christ, and Timothy his brother, to the Church of God that is at Corinth and to all the holy ones of the Church who live in Achaia. Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (2Cor.1:1-2).*

Since men question Paul's authority within the Christian Community, he seldom fails to state his credentials before he expresses his teachings. He has an apostolic ministry, and he possesses authority to teach because God chose him as an apostle of Jesus Christ: "*An apostle sent, not by men or by any man, but by Jesus Christ and God His Father who raised him from the dead*" (Gal.1:1). As an apostle he was the ambassador of Jesus Christ, an ambassador who came with the full authority of Jesus Christ; an ambassador very sensitive to the sacredness of his ministry and the obligations it placed upon him. To the best of his ability, he sought that he, Paul, would never cloud the image of the One he represented. Therefore, he endeavored to project

himself in meekness and kindness (see 2Cor.10:1). Of himself he would say:

*... I am nothing... (2Cor.12:11).*

*...And so I willingly boast of my weaknesses instead, that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2Cor.12:9b).*

*I am the least of the apostles... But by God's favor I am what I am. This favor of his to me has not proved fruitless (1Cor.15:9-10a).*

*We do indeed live in the body, but we do not wage war with human resources. The weapons of our warfare are not merely human. They possess God's power for the destruction of strongholds (2Cor.10:3-4).*

He wrote the Corinthians:

*You are, after all, looking for a proof of the Christ who speaks in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful in you. It is true he was crucified out of weakness, but he lives by the power of God. We too are weak in him, but we live with him by God's power in us (2Cor.13:3-4).*

Paul spoke and acted in the name of Jesus; he was empowered by God to do so. He desired acceptance as Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ. He sought no other recognition. He desired that people would think no more of him than what they saw and heard (see 2Cor.12:7.) In that case, they would see him as an ambassador of Jesus Christ, whose life he imitated and whose gospel he preached. In regard to the exercise of his ministry, he stood before God with a clear conscience.

*Conscience gives testimony to the boast that in our behavior toward all and especially toward you we have always acted from God-given holiness and candor; this has been prompted, not by debased human wisdom, but by God's goodness. We never write anything that you cannot read and understand (2Cor.1:12-13a).*

As we have maintained in First Corinthians, men deviate from Paul's thought when they seek to discover hidden meaning or hidden symbolism in his words, especially in regard to the Last Supper narrative. We have Paul's own words

in reference to that exact letter; he never intended such things. The Corinthians were not “wise,” and he expressed himself with candor and simplicity to them.

Paul’s words and deeds mirror the inner man. Those with whom he worked had the opportunity to experience the real Paul. He could write, *“I hope that, just as you know us to a certain degree already, you will in time come to know us well” (2Cor.1:13b).*

Even though Paul honestly projected himself to the Corinthians in *“God-given holiness and candor,”* they failed to properly perceive and esteem him. However, the mist was beginning to lift, and they began to behold the treasure they possessed in Paul. Because this man had lived among them and shared his life with them, they have come to know and love Jesus Christ. When the Lord comes, they would be able to stand before the Lord in purity of faith and holiness of Christ because Paul espoused them to Jesus Christ. He told them: *“I do not want what you have, I only want you” (2Cor.12:14b).* What was Paul’s was Christ’s. For that reason *“on the day of the Lord Jesus,”* Paul will be their boast and they will be his.

Nevertheless, the Corinthians temporarily rejected Paul, who came in the power of an apostle: *“Indeed, I have performed among you with great patience the signs that show the apostle, signs and wonders and deeds of power” (2Cor.12:12).* However, they accepted men who came in their own names and claimed to be “superapostles.” This appears almost as a sign of a true apostle.

Jesus told the Pharisees that when a man comes in his own name, they will receive him, but when one comes whom the Father anointed and sent into the world, they reject him. They reject Him as the false prophet. Disciples can expect no better reception than the Master. We have already heard how Paul viewed his apostolic commission to preach the gospel: *“I am under compulsion and have no choice. I am ruined if I do not preach it! If I do it willingly, I have my recompense; if unwillingly, I am nonetheless entrusted with a charge (Cor.9:16-17).*

We see that Paul seeks to tie the name of Timothy with his own. Here he calls Timothy his brother; he uses the word *adelphos*, which implies blood kin. However, we know from other sources, particularly from Acts, that this is not so. There are no blood ties between Paul and Timothy. However, there are close spiritual ties. Timothy is much younger than Paul. Paul viewed himself

to be Timothy's spiritual father. He saw Timothy as his son in God. To Timothy, Paul imparted his best, he anticipated that Timothy would carry on his work. Through Timothy, Paul hoped to extend his own ministry. In order for the Corinthians to see Timothy in this light, Paul presents him before the Community, not as a son in the Lord, but as his brother in Christ. This would give Timothy a status of equality with Paul.

As we see in Paul's later letters to Timothy, it wasn't easy for the "son" to walk in the footsteps of such a father. He wrote:

*I have a solemn charge to give you Timothy, my child. This charge is in accordance with the prophecies made in your regard, and I give it to you so that you may fight a good fight, and hold fast to faith and a good conscience (1Tim.1:18-19a).*

*For this reason; I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God bestowed when my hands were laid on you (2Tim.1:6).*

*Do not neglect the gift you received when, as a result of prophecy, the presbyters laid their hands on you (1Tim.4:14).*

*The Spirit God has given us is no cowardly spirit, but rather one that makes us strong, loving and wise. Therefore, never be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for his sake; but with the strength which comes from God bear your share of the hardship which the gospel entails (2Tim.1:7-8).*

*Watch yourself and watch your teaching. Persevere at both tasks. By doing so you will bring to salvation yourself and all who hear you (1Tim.4:16).*

We later see that Paul places confidence in Timothy and assigns him no small task:

*I repeat the directions I gave you when I was on my way to Macedonia: stay on in Ephesus in order to warn certain people there against teaching false doctrines and busying themselves with interminable myths and genealogies, which promote idle speculations rather than that training in faith which God requires (1Tim.1:3-4).*

To Timothy himself Paul gives this warning: “*O Timothy, guard what has been committed to you. Stay clear of worldly, idle talk and the contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge. In laying claim to such knowledge, some men have missed the goal of faith*” (1Tim.6:20).

## DIVINE CONSOLATION

When Paul recounted the labors of his apostolic life, he added: “*Leaving other sufferings unmentioned, there is that daily tension pressing on me, my anxiety for all the churches*” (2Cor.11:28). The crisis in the Corinthian Church caused Paul tremendous tension and anxiety. While he agonizes over the scandals across the sea, he endures great persecution at Ephesus. He had written in First Corinthians: “*A door has been opened wide for my work, but at the same time there are many opposed*” (1Cor.16:9). We know from Acts that Paul had been able to teach publicly in one of the city’s popular gymnasiums: “*...held his discussions from day to day in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, with the result that all the inhabitants of the province of Asia, Jews and Greeks alike, heard the word of the Lord*” (Acts 19:9d-10). Even his enemies confessed: “*But as you can see and hear for yourselves, this not only at Ephesus but throughout most of the province of Asia, Paul has persuaded great numbers of people to change their religion*” (Acts 19:26).

This being the case, the ministers of Satan would have been busy. Paul would have been the object of Satan’s fury. Luke mentions in Acts only the riot led by Demetrius, the silversmith, that forced Paul to flee Ephesus. Paul suffered other afflictions, not mentioned by Luke, possibly even imprisonment at Ephesus. Paul warned Timothy to be on guard for Alexander the coppersmith. He wrote: “*Alexander the coppersmith did me a great deal of harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Meanwhile, you too had better be on guard, for he has strongly resisted our preaching*” (2Tim.4:14-15).

It is in Second Corinthians that Paul gives us some idea of the extent and degree of physical sufferings he endured at Ephesus. He came to the point of despairing even for his life. As he tells the Corinthians:

*Brothers, we do not wish to leave you in the dark about the trouble we had in Asia; we were crushed beyond our strength, even to the point of despairing of life. We were left to feel like men condemned to death so that we might trust, not in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead* (2Cor.1:8-9).

Acts describes an occasion in Galatia when Paul was stoned: *“They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the town, leaving him there for dead. His disciples quickly formed a circle about him, and before long he got up and went back into town”* (Acts 14:19-20). Paul goes on to say: *“He rescued us from that danger of death and will continue to do so. We have put our hope in him who will never cease to deliver us”* (2Cor.1:10).

Paul realized the power of prayer possessed by the Community. Perhaps that circle of disciples in Lystra prayed Paul back to life. As his ministry unfolded, he beheld more and more the power of prayer in his life. It filled his heart with gratitude to God, to whom all praise and glory belonged. He urged the Corinthians to aid him in this task of prayerful praise:

*But you must help us with your prayers, so that on our behalf God may be thanked for the gift granted us through the prayers of so many* (2Cor.1:11).

*Praised be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all consolation!* (2Cor.1:3).

Few men have had Paul’s dedication to God. Rare would be the Christian whose labors and sufferings surpassed those of Paul. When Teresa of Avila reflected upon the sufferings she had endured for Christ, she dryly complained to Him: *“If you treat all of your friends this way, no wonder you have so few!”*

When we reflect upon the life of Jesus of Nazareth, and that of great Christian men like Paul, one cannot but help wonder why Christians think that if they are “good,” everything must be “nice” for them. They look upon any trial or suffering as unmerited and unjust. They become angry with God who permits such suffering in their lives. It is a spiritually childish attitude. It is a sign of maturity of faith to see God’s love shining through all the trials and sufferings of life. Paul maintains one must turn to God in one’s sufferings, for He is the God of consolation. God consoles His children in their sufferings. The night His only begotten Son prayed in agony, we read: *“An angel then appeared to him from heaven to strengthen him. In his anguish he prayed with all the greater intensity, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground* (Lk.22:43-44).

Paul taught from experience that God will not permit more to come into our lives than we can bear. We are told that God gives a way out; the presumption being that we not lose confidence, and we persevere in prayer. Paul describes one of the great effects that comes forth from the divine consolation in times of suffering: we discover how to console others through the consolation we receive from God.

*He comforts us in all our afflictions and thus enables us to comfort those who are in trouble, with the same consolation we have received from him. As we have shared much in the sufferings of Christ, so through Christ do we share abundantly in his consolation (2Cor.1:4-5).*

Paul rightly sees any suffering endured as a result of being a Christian as not merely the Christian's own personal suffering, but as the suffering of Christ, for he belongs to Christ and his ministry is for Christ.

In Paul, Christ continues to be persecuted and suffer in this world. Just as God did not abandon Jesus when He suffered His personal humanity, neither will He abandon Jesus when He suffers in His Mystical Body, the Christian Community. Paul understood that these sufferings enable him, personally, to enter more deeply in the life of Jesus, who suffered so greatly in this world. How could one, Paul would ask, hope to identify with Christ, the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, without experiencing suffering in this world? The Christians who experience no suffering as a Christian could not truly know Jesus. Their union with Jesus would forever be a superficial one. It is by this union in suffering, and the experiencing of the divine consolation that the Christian grows more like Christ, and is able to bring the consolation of God into the lives of others.

Many people turn from God through their sins. They block God's entrance into their lives; they impede his ministry of consolation. God respects our freedom and leaves us free to live without Him. However, He remains the God of Consolation, and if He is not welcomed through the front door, He will humbly enter through the service entrance. For this, He must depend upon His servants who have access into the lives of suffering sinners, and through whom God can offer consolation. Through His servants, the rejected God of Consolation consoles them, disguised. How beautifully the God of Consolation entered the lives of sinners through Jesus of Nazareth. How the "religious" men of the time complained because He ate with sinners. He responded to



their complaints: *“The sick need the physician!”* Who, more than abandoned sinners, needs the consolation of God? With such an understanding, Paul can write:

*If we are afflicted, it is for your encouragement and salvation, and when we are consoled it is for your consolation, so that you may endure patiently the same sufferings we endure. Our hope for you is firm because we know that just as you share in the sufferings, so you will share in the consolation (2Cor.1:6-7).*

### PAUL’S SINCERITY

Paul writes from Macedonia. He promised in First Corinthians to visit Corinth both on his way to and from Macedonia. He failed to keep this promise. Rather, he went to Troas and crossed straight over the Aegean Sea into Macedonia. Paul had said, *“We are concerned not only for God’s approval but also for the good esteem of men.”* If Paul’s enemies could prove him untrustworthy in one thing, they could extend it to other things. Circumstances had altered the entire previous plan. Some intended to make the most out of the situation. They maintained that Paul did not know his own mind, and that he selfishly altered his plan to suit his convenience. Paul explained and defended his action:

*I wanted to visit you first so that a double grace might be yours. I planned to visit you, both on my way to Macedonia and on my return, that I might receive your help on my journey to Judea. Do you suppose that in making those plans I was acting insincerely? Or that my plans are so determined by self-interest that I change my mind from one minute to the next? (2Cor.1:15-17).*

There are some people who will not commit themselves to anything for fear something better will come along and they'll miss out. It often happens in this life that those who seek to have it all often end up with the least! Paul boldly claims that the very God of constancy grants him the grace to be constant in his own commitments, *“As God keeps his word, I declare that my word to you is not ‘yes’ one minute and ‘no’ the next” (2Cor.1:18).* Many people lack the moral courage, or merely the ego strength, to tell someone “no!” They take the easy way out and say “yes.” Later they hold resentment against others because while their lips said “yes,” their hearts said “no.” Some people make a habit of saying “yes” and meaning “no.” Lying becomes their way of dealing

with the social pressures. Needless to say, such people have neither “God’s approval” nor “the good esteem of men.” Paul offers the example of Jesus:

*Jesus Christ, whom Silvanus, Timothy, and I preached to you as Son of God, was not alternately “yes” and “no;” he was never anything but “yes.” Whatever promises God has made have been fulfilled in him; therefore it is through him that we address our Amen to God when we worship together (2Cor.1:19-20).*

Paul teaches that God’s fidelity has been proved in Jesus Christ; Jesus fulfilled all God’s promises. Because Jesus Christ is the faithfulness of God, we can have confidence in all prayers offered to God through Jesus Christ. To such prayers we can confidently add our “Amen!--Let it be!” Paul maintains that his life is lived in truth and fidelity because his life is rooted in Jesus Christ. Paul writes: “*God is the one who firmly establishes us along with you in Christ; it is he who anointed us and has sealed us, thereby depositing the first payment, the Spirit, in our hearts (2Cor.1:21-22).*”

Because Paul possesses the Holy Spirit of Truth, he maintains, “*We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the sake of the truth*” (2Cor.13:8). The Holy Spirit is the foundation of truth in Paul’s life.

Paul probably refers to Christian baptism when he speaks of being anointed and sealed. Being anointed implies consecration to God. Being signed and sealed implies that the Christian has become the work of the Holy Spirit, and bears a divine trademark. From such scriptural references come the Church’s teachings that baptism leaves an indelible mark, or characteristic, upon the soul of a Christian. Perhaps we could say baptism places the mark, and confirmation impresses it.

Paul uses a legal term when he describes the Holy Spirit as an *arrabon*--the first payment. He sees the gift of the Holy Spirit as the down payment that serves as a guarantee that the rest is forthcoming. A Christian, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, possesses the guarantee of belonging to Christ. However, the gift of the Holy Spirit is the first fruit of the redemption, and serves as a divine promise, which cannot fail, of the fullness of redemption yet to be received.

Paul calls upon God as his witness to the truth that he failed to return to Corinth out of consideration for the Corinthians. Because of the turmoil in the

Community over himself, Paul viewed it to be imprudent to return at this time. He could only come as their spiritual superior, demanding obedience to his authority. Paul did not possess an authoritarian personality; he had no need to exercise power over people in order to “feel” powerful and compensate for personal weakness.

The Corinthians, as members of the Christian Community, were subject to the authority of Christ the Lord. The apostles were the representatives of Jesus, and they came with His authority. Paul knew that for the Corinthians to obey him was to obey Jesus. Paul understood all of this, but he also knew the example given by Jesus and His personal teaching about Christian authority. Paul beautifully expressed his understanding of Jesus’ teaching, expressing at the same time the perfect principle to guide all Christian spiritual directors, when he wrote, “*Domineering over your faith is not my purpose. I prefer to work with you toward your happiness, for you stand firm in your faith*” (2Cor.1:24).

Paul knew that you do not produce spiritual maturity through domination; you do not command this or that; you teach the principles of Christ. You urge people to love those principles and direct their lives by them. Through love of Christian truth, a person may internalize those truths within his or her soul, and as those principles become part of the person and gain power over the will, a person grows in Christian maturity. Good deeds flow from the mature soul because of the love for goodness, not because the law demands it, nor because of reward or punishment. You deal with children in this way. Very often the negative behavior of people results from their immaturity, and expresses a negative dependency. They react to commands of obedience by doing the opposite. In such cases there is no real exercise of the will--no real personal choice or rejection of good or evil--only reaction to authority.

In the exercise of the will, the personality develops. The personality becomes good or evil depending upon its willed decisions. A good spiritual director seeks the spiritual maturity of those under his direction. He teaches The Way and the means; he exhorts, but he does not make decisions for others--decisions he will not have to live with.

Many people avoid maturity. They desire people to take over their lives, and run them. The great rise of cultic religions in our land indicates how strong this need is within many people. Such a need in Germany, prior to World War II, gave rise to Hitler. Immaturity provides a fertile field to produce

dictatorships in both countries and personal lives. It was G. K. Chesterton that wisely observed that a dictatorship is a tired democracy. People get tired of responsibility, and permit others to take over their responsibility. This is a way of weakness, not a way of love.

Certain times may demand an authoritarian superiority in order to dominate the situation. When martial law is declared there is a suspension of certain rights and freedoms. Paul was prepared, if necessary, to act with authority, *"We are ready to punish disobedience in anyone..." (2Cor.10:6)*. A loving superior would exercise such authority only as long as needed to correct the situation; such a condition calls a moratorium on growth and development. If one desires to destroy the personality of a person, one need only destroy the person's ability to will. Many means can be and are used, many of them in the name of "love." However, we know that true love builds-up. One does not build-up and dominate a person at the same time, unless one means by "building up," the building up of one's own ego and weakened image of self. Because love must build up, it must be patient and kind.

You cannot command joy or happiness, but you can assist or lead one to it if they are willing to risk their security; but many people anxiously settle for security in place of happiness. Unfortunately, it is a tenuous security that rests upon another human being, or when the source of security lies outside one's own soul. True happiness and joy come through the growth and proper expression of one's own powers, talents, and abilities--natural and supernatural. Someone once said, "Growth is painful, but retardation is pain beyond bearing." It is psychological and spiritual retardation that opens the door to all forms of addiction, and encourages all forms of self-annihilation.

Paul's last visit to the Corinthians, and his last letter to them, caused a lot of pain for all concerned. He did not desire another painful visit. His own happiness depended upon the happiness of these people. The happiness of the Corinthians depended upon their proper relationship with Christ, and that involved a proper relationship with Paul. What Paul had done, he had done with only one purpose in mind: the spiritual welfare of the people he loved. If he had caused them pain, it was not without causing greater pain to himself. Paul expressed his thoughts in these words:

*I did decide, however, not to visit you again in painful circumstances. For if I cause you pain, who can make me happy again but the ones I grieved? I wrote as I did so that when I come I*

*may not be saddened by those who should rejoice my heart. I know you all well enough to be convinced that my happiness is yours. That is why I wrote you in great sorrow and anguish, with copious tears--not to make you sad but to help you realize the great love I bear you (2Cor.2:1-4).*

The measure of Paul's care and concern for the Corinthians was a measure of his love for them. Because he dearly loved them, he was extremely upset with them. As often mentioned, indifference is truly the opposite of love. Who and what leaves us unmoved is the Who and what we do not love. Even the emotion of hate implies a concern for something. The Lord warned us to be hot or cold but not indifferent.

### SPIRIT OF FORGIVENESS

Paul did not seek revenge or restitution. He desired only repentance. From what was written, we can conjecture that some particular person publicly offended Paul, and scandalized many of the Corinthians. When they reflected upon what had been done--probably stimulated by Paul's "letter of tears"--they repented and reacted against the person who instigated the whole evil matter. He became the scapegoat for the Community's guilt. We know it has been true in more than one case that the person pulling the trigger of the gun has not been the true murderer.

Paul taught that love does not brood over injuries. *"There is no limit to love's forbearance...its power to endure"* (1Cor.13:7). We now see God's merciful forgiveness expressed through Paul as he intercedes for the person who injured him. Apparently he had been ostracized from the Community. As Paul deals with the matter, he simultaneously implies that the sin of one member truly affects the entire Community. Paul, at times, demanded excommunication of a member from the Community, but only for the good of the Community and the excommunicated person's spiritual welfare. Paul manifests his concern for the excommunicated member, and he requests that the member be lovingly received back into the Community:

*If anyone has given offense he has hurt not only me, but in some measure, to say no more, every one of you. The punishment already inflicted by the majority on such a one is enough; you should now relent and support him so that he may not be crushed by too great a*

*weight of sorrow. I therefore beg you to reaffirm your love for him (2Cor.2:5-8).*

Love never burns the bridge; it always leaves the way open for the sinner to return. If Paul had encouraged this excommunication, he now explains why:

*The reason I wrote you was to test you and learn whether you are obedient in all matters. If you forgive a man anything, so do I. Any forgiving I have done has been for your sakes and, before Christ, to prevent Satan--whose guile we know too well--from outwitting us (2Cor.2:9-11).*

Love does not correct in order to crush, but to heal. When the punishment has produced the desired medicinal effect, charity immediately enters to restore the repentant sinner to the family circle of love. This it does for a twofold purpose: first, so that the corrected person will not be overcome with guilt and despair--they can only experience Christ's absolution through the love and acceptance of the community. Second, it must be done for the sake of the Community, so that hot anger does not seep into the soul and become cold hatred that projects a callous, cold, and indifferent attitude toward the well-being of others.

Another person may be in need of our forgiveness, but never as much as we stand in the need of God's forgiveness. Jesus warns that if we will not forgive others, God will not forgive us. As we measure another so shall we be measured. Scriptures teach that our ability to forgive others demonstrates our filial relationship with our heavenly Father. In the light of such teachings, we can be grateful to those who do offend us, for they afford us the opportunity to prove our spiritual heritage.

### NEED FOR LOVE

Some holy people give the impression that when one purely loves God, one has no need for the love of human beings. Perhaps this may be true in the lives of certain souls. However, the life of Paul does not demonstrate this type of detachment. One wonders how "Christian" one may be, in the light of the Incarnation and the Mystical Body of Christ, who practices such detachment.

To love Christ at this moment implies loving the Christ who *is*, and that glorified Christ encompasses the entire Church. Jesus equates Himself with

the Church. Paul knew this truth from the moment Jesus said to him, "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*" Paul understood that loving Jesus implies loving the Christian Community.

Christians desire not only to love Jesus Christ, but to be loved by Him in return. Most of the love of Jesus Christ for His people must be experienced through the love in the Christian Community, or else it will never be experienced in this world. Since our own personal growth depends upon our ability to love others--on the road to Christian maturity--it is more important that we love others, than be loved by others. Nevertheless, Christians do need to be loved by Christ, and be loved by Christ through His Body--the Christian Community. Paul does not exempt himself from this need. He overtly and candidly seeks that love. He writes: "*Men of Corinth, we have spoken to you frankly, opening our hearts wide to you. There is no lack of room for you in us; the narrowness is in you*" (2Cor.6:11-12).

Paul maintains there is room for all of them within his heart. Is it possible they cannot find room in their hearts for him? Are they incapable of loving him in return? Such a thing would reveal the true poverty of their hearts. Some human hearts are narrowly confined--some hearts are no more than doll houses--but this ought never to be true of a Christian, "... *because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us*" (Rom.5:5). This divine gift gives the Christian the power to love with the heart of Christ--to love with that love of agape that brings redemption to the fallen human heart. This is the gift of love that can be motivated by the will, under grace, into actuality within one's life.

When Christian love grows within the heart, it always has power to love another human being, without loving others less. One's capacity to love increases as one strives to love. It can truly be said that one's capacity to receive God and share His eternal joy will only be limited by one's capacity to love. Our capacity to love is our capacity to receive God.

Recently a Christian lady died who had mothered thirteen children. For many years she had served as a housekeeper in a Catholic rectory. It was from this association that the priest who preached her eulogy had come to know her so well. Of her, he was able to say that she had loved her thirteenth child no less than she had loved her first child. In fact, he maintained, she loved the last the most, and that was no detraction from the first or from the rest of the children. With each child her love grew, not decreased. It is true that the love

that forever grows, grows into God. Paul says to the Corinthians, *“In fair exchange, then (I speak as a father to his children), open wide your hearts!”* (2Cor.6:13).

For the next five verses there is a break in this thought pattern. Paul speaks of association with unbelievers. This appears to be an insert from another letter; possibly it is part of Paul’s first letter, which the Corinthians had misunderstood. We find the thought expressed in chapter six, verse thirteen, continuing in chapter seven, where Paul appeals for the Corinthians to return his love: *“Make room for us in your hearts! We have injured no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one”* (2Cor.7:2).

In what he had said and done, Paul had acted from the purest motivation to preserve their faith and keep them faithful to Jesus Christ. Truly, he was their greatest benefactor. A fraternal correction implies neither condemnation nor rejection, rather, it usually signifies care and concern, indicating that one cares enough to do something about the problem. Paul reassures the Corinthians: *“I do not condemn you. I have already said that you are in our hearts, even to sharing of death and life together. I speak to you with utter frankness and boast much about you”* (2Cor.7:3-4a).

Paul feels that after his rebuke of the Corinthians, this reassurance is necessary. At times a father must withdraw the sunshine of his love in order to correct certain abuses in his children. His love is no less, it is only expressed differently--usually not nicely, or to anyone’s liking. This quality of love is often misjudged by the immature as rejection. It is a rejection of something wrong or evil within the person, but it is not a rejection of the person.

Paul assures the Corinthians that their repentance is all he desired, and despite the many personal afflictions he suffers, he is filled with joy. *“I am filled with consolation, and despite my many afflictions my joy knows no bounds”* (2Cor.7:4b). The Corinthians’ repentance brings joy to Paul’s heart.

To less spiritual persons it will always remain a mystery how certain souls can be greatly afflicted, yet filled with joy. Such a condition results from their great growth in the spirit. In such cases the human spirit dominates the lived existence. They have developed such control over the physical and psychological aspects of their lives that they are not dominated by them. Their greatest suffering will always be in the spirit. Other afflictions, although troublesome for them, never touch the heart of their being. When such souls



are at peace with God and neighbor, they may, as in the case of Paul, experience great joy amidst many external afflictions. And so Paul could truly say, *“My joy knows no bounds.”* However, this joy may be lost or eclipsed, even in the lives of the greatest saints. When this happens, their suffering is extreme. As their capacity for love and joy surpasses that of the average soul, so does their capacity to suffer. For this reason we know that no human heart ever knew the degree of suffering experienced by the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

### TIME OF ANXIETY

Paul maintains that he speaks in candor and utter frankness, and so he shares a joyless moment in his own personal life, a moment caused by the Corinthians’ rejection of him and his reaction to that rejection. Paul takes us back to the time following his writing of the *“letter of tears.”* He takes us to that interim between the sending of the letter and the discovery of the effects of the letter. He opens to us the windows of his soul and shares with us the stresses of mind and heart he endured. These stresses were so great, so disturbing to that tranquility of his entire being that he could not continue his ministry.

We need to recall that at this particular time Paul was being greatly harassed in Ephesus, and in grave physical danger. It would have been a moment of great physical fatigue and emotional disturbance. The Enemy knows when best to strike, and with perfect timing. When the soul is most vulnerable, he comes. Through Titus, Paul sent his critical, threatening letter. The die was cast.

Many a letter written in hasty anger leaves undesirable effects, resulting in enduring grief for the author and the recipient. Paul was humble enough to be anxious about the effect of his letter. He was filled with self doubt and his action haunted him. Over and over again in his mind he reviewed every aspect of his action. Had he over-reacted? Had he expected too much from them? Had he been too severe and too lacking in the meekness and kindness of Christ? Had the letter caused more harm than good--only further alienation--driving them further into the camp of the enemy? Paul had no peace and he found no relief in prayer or work. Paul explained to the Corinthians:

*When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, the door of opportunity was opened wide for me by the Lord. Yet I was inwardly*

*troubled because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went off to Macedonia (2Cor.2:12-13).*

From this incident we see the need for inner serenity for the work of the Lord. There is a need to guard that serenity. It is not good to be occupied with one thing and preoccupied with another. When we try to do two things at once, something suffers. If it is not the work, it is the human mechanism. Both one's mind and will ought to be in what one is doing. At least one should do as Paul did--do what one must.

A divided self will not endure: a divided conscious awareness drains and wears down the body. When the Lord enters, His first word to the soul is "Peace." It is the milieu in which He works. He calms the sea before He directs the boat. As Paul did, one must first do the work that leads to inner peace. As we have read in the gospel, "*Leave your gift at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift*" (Mt.5:24). And so, a much preoccupied and disturbed Paul leaves Troas and goes seeking Titus somewhere in Macedonia.

At this point in the narration of Second Corinthians, four chapters are inserted here breaking the train of thought begun in chapter two. However, this same thought is picked right up again in chapter seven, verse five. There is such a perfect correlation between what was said in chapter two, verse thirteen and chapter seven, verse five that this strongly suggests to many biblical scholars that the intervening material was an insert from another letter. We will treat it as such.

As the narration continues we discover that Paul finds neither Titus nor peace, but more trouble and disturbance in Macedonia. Changing the sky above us does not change the climate within us. "*When I arrived in Macedonia I was restless and exhausted. I was under all kinds of stress--quarrels with others and fears within myself*" (2Cor.7:5) The devil had his field day at poor Paul's expense. Where there is no inner peace, there seldom can be outer peace, almost never when it is accompanied by physical exhaustion. The person lacks the natural energy to maintain self-control. For this reason we must have a prudent concern for our physical energy, and not carelessly deplete the physical energy needed for soul conservation. One great coach constantly preached to his team, "*Fatigue makes cowards of us all!*"

Certainly Paul would have been near the breaking point at that moment in his life. The Lord keeps His promise: no more than we can bear. However, that does not mean: no more than I think I can bear, or no more than I am willing to bear. Many people throw in the towel when victory is only one more round away.

The Lord comes to the aid of His downhearted and distressed friend. Paul finds Titus and, as with the coming dawn, the night passes. It was a long night. When one suffers, the night passes slowly. As we read what Paul writes we can almost see the gloom dissipating and the sun of joy breaking forth:

*But God, who gives heart to those who are low in spirit, gave me strength with the arrival of Titus. This he did, not only by his arrival but by the reinforcement Titus had already received from you; for he reported your longing, your grief, and your ardent concern for me, so that my joy is greater still (2Cor.7:6-7).*

Paul's spontaneous and joyous reaction to the Corinthians' repentance reveals the purity of his own intentions in this entire matter. He sought, not a submission to himself, but a submission to Jesus Christ. He worked for the honor and glory of Jesus Christ and the spiritual welfare of the Corinthians. Herein rested his heart and his joy. His words reveal how pure his intentions had been:

*If I saddened you by my letter I have no regrets. Or if I did feel some regret (because I understand that the letter caused you grief for a time), I am happy once again; not because you were saddened ["Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth."], but because your sadness led to repentance (2Cor.7:8-9a).*

## TRUE REPENTANCE

Paul sees that his letter had been an actual grace. God used the letter to produce a God-given sorrow within the hearts of the Corinthians. They repented. True repentance for sin is not possible without God's grace. By this is meant a repentance that turns the soul back to God. This is a supernatural work within the soul. God used the letter to produce a God-given sorrow within the hearts of the Corinthians. True sorrow for sin is a pre-requisite for true repentance. Paul explains, "You were filled with a sorrow that came from God; thus you did not suffer any loss from us" [actually a blessing] (2Cor.7:9b).

Paul teaches the difference between supernatural sorrow and natural sorrow by distinguishing between the effects of the two kinds of sorrow. He demonstrates how true repentance restores life and vigor to one's spiritual life. The soul never regrets what it does for love--what it does for its salvation.

*Indeed, sorrow for God's sake produces a repentance without regrets, leading to salvation, whereas worldly sorrow brings death. Just look at the fruit of this sorrow which stems from God. What a measure of holy zeal it has brought you, not to speak of readiness to defend yourselves [against evil]! What indignation, fear, and longing! What ardent desire to restore the balance of justice! In every way you have displayed your innocence in this matter (2Cor.7:10-11).*

We should carefully note the fruit of true supernatural repentance. It restores renewed life and vigor to the spiritual life. There is a repentance that flows from self, rather than from God's grace. There is a sorrow that stems from the evil effect of sin, rather than sorrow for the sin. Such sorrow often leaves a residue of guilt in the soul. Guilt flows from unrepentant sin. We often repent for the symptoms of our sins rather, than the root cause of evil in our lives. Guilt is an effect of unrepentant sin. Many sins can be pushed down into the subconscious and remain beyond conscious awareness. There, from the cellars of our being, they haunt our conscious life through a spirit of guilt. Only repentance that flows from God-given grace produces healthy results in the soul. This is a grace to be highly desired. It is a grace to be sought in prayer. There are many human reasons to repent for sins; you can know the nature of your repentance by the fruit it produces.

As a proud father, Paul rejoices in the fact that the repentance of the Corinthians impressed Titus. Titus is his friend, his brother in the Lord, but the Corinthians are his children. The children have impressed the friend, and that gives joy to the heart of the father. Paul expresses his paternal pride in these words:

*Beyond this consolation, we have rejoiced even more at the joy of Titus because his mind has been set at rest by all of you. For though I had boasted to him about you, I was not put to shame. Rather, just as everything I ever said to you was true, so my boasting to Titus has been proved equally true. ["There is no limit to love's forbearance,*

to its trust, its hope, its power to endure.”] *His heart embraces you with an expanding love as he recalls the obedience you showed to God when you received him in fear and trembling. I rejoice because I trust you utterly (2Cor.7:13b-16).*

Paul’s words confirm that obedience to legitimate authority within the Christian Community is truly obedience to God. The following words sum up Paul’s motivation for writing. They reveal the purity of his intentions and the love that motivated this incident--the love that truly motivated all words and deeds of his apostolic life:

*Therefore, my writing to you was not intended for the man who had given the offense [no vindictiveness involved] or for the one offended [no self-seeking involved], but to make plain in the sight of God the devotion you have for us [the common good sought]. This done, we are comforted (2Cor.7:12-13a).*

Paul and the Corinthians had been immersed in a serious spiritual crisis. Paul had weathered the storm and calm had returned to the Church. Moments of crisis are moments of great personal revelation. The Catholic Chaplain, Capt. Angelo Liteky, was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for heroic bravery in Vietnam. His action saved the lives of many American soldiers. At the reception given in his honor in Washington, D.C., the guest speaker said that anyone who truly knew Capt. Liteky, knew that he would do precisely what he had done when placed in such circumstances. He was that kind of a man!

A crisis does not make a man or woman, but it does reveal of what a man or woman is made. A crisis raises the curtain upon the inner person, publicly revealing his or her true character. The Corinthian crisis truly revealed the real Paul. The portrait of Paul that emerges from all of this is a portrait of Christian maturity--a portrait that displays a reincarnation of the love of Christ. Yes, Paul had the courage and the right to say in all humility: *“Imitate me as I imitate Christ!”*

## CHAPTER 3

### TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS

#### INTRODUCTION

Paul and the Corinthians are again one in the Spirit. Union with Paul meant union with Christ. At this point Paul shares with them his vision of the apostolic vocation, in which the apostles appear as captives of Christ, captured through the grace of God. *“But, thanks be to God, who always leads us on in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the odor of the knowledge of him in every place” (2Cor.2:14).*

Paul pictures Christ as the conquering Victor in this struggle against the kingdom of darkness. Christ achieved victory through the power of God. Paul sees himself as part of Christ’s victory over sin and darkness. As the vanquished become the slaves of the Conqueror, and march behind him in his victory march as part of his triumphal train, so Paul pictures his apostolic life--a life that must follow Christ through this world, empowered by God’s unfailing grace to do so. Paul attributes to God the grace of apostolic fidelity.

#### THE WISDOM OF GOD

The Old Testament compares Divine Wisdom to a fragrant plant that produces sweet perfume permeating the world: *“Like cinnamon, or fragrant balm, or precious myrrh, I give forth perfume...like the odor of incense in the holy place” (Sir.24:15).* The substance of Wisdom, as perfume, may not be visible, but its presence cannot be denied. Its inescapable odor perfumes the air. The Sacred Scriptures teach wisdom to be the Spirit of God moving in this world. It speaks of Wisdom as:

*...an aura of the might of God and a pure effusion of the glory of the Almighty...the refulgence of eternal light, the spotless mirror of the power of God, the image of his goodness (Wis.7:25-26).*

Scripture speaks of Wisdom as being *“fairer than the sun” (7:29)*, and *“governs all things well” (8:1)*, as the power that *“can do all things, and renews*

*everything while herself perduring; and passing into holy souls from age to age, she produces friends of God and prophets (7:27).* It could be said that this description of Wisdom best reflects the early Christian Community's concept of Jesus Christ. In Jesus of Nazareth this Divine Spirit of Wisdom incarnated itself. The great Christological manifestations in the New Testament all reflect this concept. Philippians speak of Christ as being "*in the form of God*" but "*being born in the likeness of men*" (see *Phil.2:6-7.*) The Gospel of John projects the same thought when it says:

*...the Word was God. ... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we have seen his glory: The glory of an only Son coming from the Father, filled with enduring love (Jn.1:1,14).*

*No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, ever at the Father's side, who has revealed him (Jn.1:18).*

Colossians speaks of the preeminence of Christ:

*He is the image of the invisible God... In him everything in heaven and on earth was created... He is before all else that is. In him everything continues in being... It pleased God to make absolute fullness reside in him and, by means of him, to reconcile everything in his person, both on the earth and in the heavens, making peace through the blood of his cross (Col.1:15-19).*

And finally we read in Hebrews:

*This Son is the reflection of the Father's glory, the exact representation of the Father's being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven (Heb.1:3).*

Hebrews reveals that the Father "*has spoken to us through his Son whom he has made heir of all things and through whom he first created the universe*" (*Heb.1:2*).

This exalted picture that the Scriptures present of Jesus Christ expresses well the content of the Christian Faith in the first century, and accurately expresses the belief and understanding of Paul. The apostles possessed this divine knowledge, and had been commissioned to spread it throughout the

world. Paul speaks of God as having manifested “*through us the odor of the knowledge of him in every place*” Paul conceived this knowledge as creating a celestial perfume surpassing all other sweetness or fragrance in this world. In other words, it is the surpassing knowledge, knowledge of Jesus Christ, that surpassed all earthly knowledge. And it was the divine mystery hidden from former times--even angels desired to have looked into it--that was now being revealed through the Church. Paul, as an apostle, was an ambassador of this knowledge. To actually possess this knowledge made the possessor a sweet fragrance in this world; as would a person in this world who carried an exquisite perfume on their clothing or body.

*We are an aroma of Christ for God’s sake, both among those who are being saved and those on the way to destruction; to the latter an odor dealing death, to the former a breath bringing life (2Cor.2:15-16a).*

Through this analogy Paul expresses the effects of this revelation on the souls of men. Those who are open in faith receive it as life-giving truth; it brings to birth within the soul the life-giving principle of faith. However, for those who harden their hearts by rejecting this truth, it remains the harbinger of their impending death.

What does all this say? It proclaims that an apostle of Jesus Christ has an awesome task in this world. The apostle carries the knowledge that produces eternal life, or the knowledge that may bring eternal condemnation. Many never measure the effects of their lives beyond this present world. But the apostles of Jesus Christ ought to realize they carry into this world a heavenly fire that has eternal consequences. They are the keepers of the flame of eternal life. No human existence could have greater purpose or value when measured upon the eternal scales of values. It is sad to say that many ministers of Christian knowledge confine their conscious awareness to the visions of this world. Many measure the success and worth of their lives by the worldly standards of success and worth, and become discouraged and depressed by the effects of their works of Christian Faith.

The work of a Christian apostle is so spiritual it can never be measured by earthly standards. Many have no true concern for the spiritual effects of their work, but only for the by-product it may produce in their lives: a respected position in society, power over the lives of others, a role from which to dominate the faith of others, and the most base of all--a means for making



money. We see much of this today, and none of it is new; it has always been with us. Paul understood so well that no human being could worthily hold such a position in this world. No one should take it upon himself unless called by God to do so. When one receives the vocation, one could, with great care and concern, exercise this ministry and seek always to work with purity of intention and with a good conscience before God.

Paul revealed his own concept of the apostolic role when he asked, *“For such a mission as this, is anyone really qualified?”* (2Cor.2:16b). He was aware that many unqualified human beings boasted of their qualifications for being apostles. Of himself and Timothy, Paul wrote: *“We at least are not like so many who trade on the word of God. We speak in Christ’s name, pure in motivation, conscious of having been sent by God and of standing in his presence* (2Cor.2:17).

Paul suggested that many speak in the name of Christ, but not from pure motivation. However, he maintains his motive is pure. He is conscious that he has *“been sent by God;”* he is a divinely appointed ambassador of Jesus Christ; he declared he was under compulsion to preach the gospel. In the exercise of this ministry he tells us he is conscious of standing in the presence of Christ. This implies an awareness that he must carefully answer to Jesus Christ for the exercise of this ministry.

Paul knew he had a God-given right to demand financial support from the congregation, which was not the same thing as *“trading on the word of God.”* It would be a matter of justice; *“The laborer is worthy of his hire.”* However, he refused to accept from the Corinthians any financial remuneration for his ministry because, as he said, *“What I am doing I shall continue to do, depriving at every turn those who look for a chance to say that in their much-vaunted ministry they work on the same terms as we do* (2Cor.11:12).

These same men would have been those who traded on the word of God. Paul says of them, *“Such men are false apostles. They practice deceit in their disguise as apostles of Christ”* (2Cor.11:13). They are deceitful because they pretend to be interested in the spiritual welfare of others, but their hearts are motivated by selfish ends and purposes--the most base of all would be to preach Christ for the sake of money. Judas was the first apostle to sell Jesus, but he will not be the last! The Scriptures warn us:

*In times past there were false prophets among God’s people, and*

*among you also there will be false teachers who will smuggle in pernicious heresies... Through them, the true way will be made subject to contempt. They will deceive you with fabricated tales, in a spirit of greed... They lure the weaker types. Their hearts are trained in greed... They have abandoned the straight road and wander off on the path taken by Balaam, son of Beor. He was a man attracted to dishonest gain (2Pt.2:1-3,14b,15).*

The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that one of the signs of false apostles and teachers is the motivation of greed--to teach and preach for worldly gain. Not too far behind that sign will follow another--they teach, consciously or unconsciously, false doctrines.

Previously, Paul had been forced to compare himself favorably to other so-called apostles within the Church. Once again he has done so. Sensitive to the criticisms of his enemies that his only recommendation is from himself, he reflects, "*Am I beginning to speak well of myself again?*" (2Cor.3:1).

It was customary in the early Church for itinerate preachers or apostles, when coming into a new Christian Community, to bring letters of recommendation from other Christian Communities--the most prestigious of all would have been from the Church at Jerusalem. We saw an example of this custom in Acts, when Apollos desired to go from Ephesus to Corinth for the first time. We read in Acts, "*He wanted to go on to Achaia, and so the brothers encouraged him by writing the disciples there to welcome him*" (Acts 18:27).

This would be the general rule but, in the case of Paul, it did not apply: Paul went into areas where no Christian Community had been established. Through his labors the Church would be established. Therefore, he rightly argued that his letter of recommendation came from the God who commissioned him. "*By their fruits you will know them.*" The very fact that the Christian Church came into existence and blossomed in Corinth is Paul's letter of recommendation. He attributed all his success to the power of Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, he can maintain that the Church at Corinth is his letter of recommendation written by Christ; not written as human letters with ink on papyrus, but written in the very personalities of the people who were once pagans and unbelievers, and now are Christians. So Paul writes:

*Or do I need letters of recommendation to you or from you as others*

*might? You are my letter, known and read by all men, written on your hearts. Clearly you are a letter of Christ which I have delivered, a letter written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh in the heart (2Cor.3:1-3).*

## NEW COVENANT MINISTRY

As Paul wrote these words, they triggered the thought of the New Covenant, and its difference from the Old Covenant. Paul moved in the direction of this thought, possibly stimulated by the knowledge that the false apostles preached the importance of the Old Covenant, and subordinated the New to the Old. Exodus relates that the Covenant was a divine-human contract by which God and the Hebrews entered into a contractual agreement that made the Israelites the People of God. This Covenant agreement occurred at Mount Sinai amidst smoke, fire, earthquake and trumpet blast, with Moses representing the Israelites. God called Moses to the top of the mountain:

*Moses stayed there with the Lord for forty days and forty nights, without eating any food or drinking any water, and he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments (Ex.34:28).*

The tablets were two stones the Lord had commanded Moses to cut from rock. Exodus goes on to relate:

*As Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the commandments in his hands, he did not know that the skin of his face had become radiant while he conversed with the Lord (Ex.34:29).*

The people were afraid to approach Moses, and so Moses put a veil over his face and “*whenever Moses entered the presence of the Lord to converse with him, he removed the veil until he came out again*” (Ex.34:34).

Certain prophets of Israel foretold the coming of the New Covenant. Even Moses implied there would be a new Moses and new teachings from Yahweh. Jeremiah foretold: “*The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah*” (Jer.31:31). The Lord told Jeremiah the New Covenant would be different from the Old: “*I*

*will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God and they shall be my people” (Jer.31:33).*

The prophet Ezekiel proclaimed that Yahweh said *“I will give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the stony heart from their bodies, and replace it with a natural heart....thus they shall be my people and I will be their God (Ez.11:19-20).*

We see from the prophecies that the New Covenant will be internalized. It will occur through the Spirit of God entering into the souls of men. The Spirit of God will transform human lives by giving them a love for the will of God--by giving them an obedient spirit. A disobedient heart is an unloving heart, which is symbolized as a heart of stone. A person with a heart of stone cannot love. The Spirit of God will turn that heart of stone into a human heart which symbolizes a living heart. In other words, a loving heart must essentially be an obedient heart.

In the New Testament we see the Last Supper presented as a banquet celebrating the inauguration of the New Covenant--Christ's death on Calvary as ratification of the New Covenant, and Jesus' sending the Holy Spirit as manifesting the New Covenant in the world.

With this background we can better appreciate Paul's flow of thought on the topic of the New and Old Covenant. Paul knows that by the Grace of God he is a very qualified minister of this New Covenant. This implies he is a minister of the Spirit, not a minister of legalism. His ministry is filled with the Holy Spirit. He writes:

*This great confidence in God is ours, through Christ. It is not that we are entitled of ourselves to take credit for anything. Our sole credit is from God, who has made us qualified ministers of a new covenant, a covenant not of a written law but of spirit. The written law kills, but the Spirit gives life (2Cor.3:4-6).*

Paul saw himself as a qualified minister of the New Covenant; he is quite aware of the source of his qualification. He does not attribute anything to nature, but to the power of God operating through him. Paul knew one does not accomplish a supernatural task by natural means. If God calls him to such a task, only God can give the power to accomplish it. Paul has briefly called to mind the thoughts developed in his Roman letter.

The Old Covenant only served to convince men of their sinfulness; it prepared them for the moral necessity of accepting a Savior from God. Paul saw Law as increasing sin. Since death came through sin, the Law was an administration of death. However, the New Covenant resulted in the gift of the Holy Spirit, the principle of eternal life. It is the Covenant of the Spirit, and therefore the Covenant of life. The Holy Spirit brings the very spirit of Christ, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom from every kind of bondage:

Freedom from the Law: *“If you are guided by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (Gal.5:18).*

Freedom from fear: *“You did not receive a spirit of slavery leading you back into fear, but a spirit of adoption through which we cry out, ‘Abba!’ (that is, ‘Father’)” (Rom.8:15).*

Freedom from sin: *“The law of the spirit, the spirit of life in Jesus Christ, has freed you from the law of sin and death” (Rom.8:2).*

Freedom from corruption: *“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will bring your mortal bodies to life also, through the Spirit dwelling in you” (Rom.8:11).*

To the degree a Christian finds himself in these bondages, the Christian fails to be spirit-filled!

From this point Paul proceeds to demonstrate the superiority of the ministry of the New Covenant. Probably this was stimulated by a hidden agenda. It is possible the false apostles presented themselves as ministers of the Old Covenant with a ministry that could bring men into the ecstatic encounter with God once enjoyed by Moses. If in the Old Covenant Moses had enjoyed such a religious experience, it was possible for his ministry and his ministers to bring its adherents to this ecstatic experience. Paul cannot help but compare the glory of the New Covenant with that of the Old:

*If the ministry of death, carved in writing on stone, was inaugurated with such glory that the Israelites could not look on Moses’ face because of the glory that shone on it (even though it was a fading glory), how much greater will be the glory of the ministry of the Spirit? If the Ministry of the covenant that condemned had glory, greater by far is the glory of the ministry that justifies. Indeed, when*

*you compare that limited glory with this surpassing glory, the former should be declared no glory at all. If what was destined to pass away was given in glory, greater by far is the glory that endures (2Cor.3:7-11).*

We should recall that glory in the Old Testament signified some visible manifestation of God in this world. Paul is asking what could compare with the manifestation of God that has occurred in Jesus Christ, and occurs now in the Church through the Holy Spirit of God!

Paul emphasizes the temporary nature of the Old Covenant by comparing its glory to the glory that shone upon the face of Moses. Just as the glow on the face of Moses faded, so the power and presence of God in the Old Covenant faded. It was a transitory glory. Paul implied Moses covered his own face to hide the fact of his fading glory. The minds of the Israelites were too dull to see this reality. Even today, when they read the Old Testament Scriptures (as with the face of Moses a veil hangs over these Scriptures) they fail to see their faded glory; they fail to see that the glory of yesterday has passed. However, Paul maintains that Christians do not veil their faces, for they have full confidence in the permanence of God's glory shining on the face of Christ;- such glory will never fade. As they look upon the face of Christ, and as they seek to reflect Jesus Christ in their own lives, they reflect (with each passing day, with greater brilliance) the unfading glory of Christ. The glory of Christ transforms the Christian into a true Ikon of the Holy Spirit. Paul expresses his thoughts in these words:

*Our hope being such, we act with full confidence. We are not like Moses, who used to hide his face with a veil so that the Israelites could not see the final fading of that glory. Their minds, of course, were dulled. To this very day, when the old covenant is read the veil remains unlifted; it is only in Christ that it is taken away. Even now, when Moses is read a veil covers their understanding. But whenever he turns to the Lord, the veil will be removed. The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. All of us, gazing on the Lord's glory with unveiled faces, are being transformed from glory to glory into his very image by the Lord who is the Spirit (2Cor.3:12-18).*

Here Paul emphasized that the rejection of Jesus as the Christ by the Jews implies a spiritual blindness. This blindness extends itself to all the Scriptures.

In the Letter to the Romans Paul maintained:

*Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery lest you be conceited: blindness has come upon part of Israel until the full number of Gentiles enter in... They were cut off because of unbelief and you are there because of faith... And if the Jews do not remain in their unbelief they will be grafted back on, for God is able to do this... Do not be haughty on that account, but fearful. If God did not spare the natural branches, he will certainly not spare you (Rom.11:25,20,23,20-21).*

The Old Testament Scriptures are only fully intelligible in the light of Faith in Jesus Christ. Paul writes: “*For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ*” (2Cor-4:6). Paul has taught that as we behold this glory shining on the face of Christ we ourselves become like mirrors that reflect His glory, “*All of us, gazing on the Lord’s glory with unveiled faces, are being transformed from glory to glory into his very image by the Lord who is the Spirit*” (2Cor.3:18). This statement well may be the key to understanding Pauline mysticism. It suggests that the Christian does not seek direct vision of God or union with God as did Moses on Mount Sinai. The Christian does not by-pass the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ. True enduring glory comes through faith in Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

The Christian seeks conformity with Christ by conformity with His will as expressed in the Scriptures, through the Holy Spirit in the Church, and through the Holy Spirit in prayer. It is not a life that seeks visions and ecstatic experiences. Such experiences are temporary with transitory effects. Permanent divine glory for the Christian lies in conformity with Christ. Only by walking daily in Christian Faith does the Christian come truly into Christ, who is in God. “*No one comes to the Father except through me.*” As the true glory of Jesus Christ was hidden behind the veil of humanity during His earthly life, so, too, is the true glory of the Christian and his relationship with God hidden behind the veil of his external life and even his conscious awareness. As St. John of the Cross said, “*Only the lamp of faith guides one’s steps through this dark night.*” In the light of this faith Paul could say:

*Because of this we no longer look on anyone in terms of mere human judgment. If at one time we so regarded Christ, we no longer know him by this standard. This means that if anyone is in Christ,*

*he is a new creation. The old order has passed away: now all is new!*  
(2Cor.5:16-17).

However, it is only when Jesus comes in glory that the glory of Christian saints will be revealed. In the meantime, *“We walk by faith, not by sight”* (2Cor.5:7).

Despite the beauty and glory of the gospel, Paul knew quite well that many who hear the gospel will not believe, for they are perishing. This is not the same as to say that they are lost. The battle is not yet over. However, at this point in life, the gospel remains veiled. This condition of spiritual blindness results from their being under the influence of the god of this world. Christ defeated Satan at Calvary, but Satan still maintains power over the minds and hearts where Christ has not been enthroned. When the spirits of men are under the power of the Prince of Darkness, the god of this world, the light of the gospel cannot reach their hearts. Paul writes:

*If our gospel can be called “veiled” in any sense, it is such only for those who are headed toward destruction. Their unbelieving minds have been blinded by the god of the present age so that they do not see the splendor of the gospel showing forth the glory of Christ, the image of God (2Cor.4:3-4).*

Paul said of his apostolic role that God *“manifests through us the odor of the knowledge of him in every place!”* This knowledge is the wonderful certainty that *“God, in Christ, was reconciling the world to himself, not counting men’s transgressions against them... For our sakes God made him who did not know sin, to be sin, so that in him we might become the very holiness of God”* (2Cor.5-19,21). Paul teaches the wonderful knowledge that, not only is God removing the sins of men, but through union with Christ, is bringing them into *“the very holiness of God.”* He proclaims redemption and sanctification.

As an apostle, Paul has been called by God to be a minister of reconciliation. Paul writes that God *“has given us the ministry of reconciliation...he has entrusted the message of reconciliation to us. This makes us ambassadors for Christ, God as it were appealing through us (2Cor.5:18b-20a).* This is an awesome and divine task. It is a task not for human strength, but divine. Paul is not discouraged by his divine commission. He does not depend upon human recourse for its fulfillment, and he certainly does not stoop to use unworthy means. Paul maintains:



*Because we possess this ministry through God's mercy, we do not give in to discouragement. Rather, we repudiate shameful, underhanded practices. We do not resort to trickery or falsify the word of God. We proclaim the truth openly and commend ourselves to every man's conscience before God... It is not ourselves we preach but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake (2Cor.4:1-2,5).*

As an ambassador of Christ and a minister of reconciliation, Paul has been guided not by human prudence but by the example of Christ and by the love of Christ. *"The love of Christ impels us who have reached the conviction that since one died for all, all died. He died for all so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who for their sakes died and was raised up (2Cor.5:14-15).* Paul relates the extent to which the love of God compelled him to no longer live for himself:

*We avoid giving anyone offense, so that our ministry may not be blamed. On the contrary, in all that we do we strive to present ourselves as ministers of God, acting with patient endurance amid trials, difficulties, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, and riots; as men familiar with hard work, sleepless nights, and fastings; conducting ourselves with innocence, knowledge, and patience, in the Holy Spirit, in sincere love as men with the message of truth and the power of God; wielding the weapons of righteousness with right hand and left, whether honored or dishonored, spoken of well or ill (2Cor.6:3-8).*

He tells us that apostles have become *"men familiar with hard work, sleepless nights and fastings"* (2Cor.6:5b). In the world they are called imposters and nobodies; considered to be people who are poor, sorrowful, and dead. But in reality, Paul maintains that apostles are people who are alive, truthful, famous, and always rejoicing, who enrich many; people who *"seem to have nothing, yet everything is ours!"* (2Cor.6:10b).

## IN EARTHEN VESSELS

Paul has proclaimed the glories of the New Covenant in which we Christians share. We are being transformed by it from *"glory to glory."* We may be called to be ambassadors of Christ and ministers of reconciliation, nevertheless Paul reminds Christians of the present state of affairs. While we are in this world,

the glory of our lives will only be expressed in a humbled condition, and only through faith do we perceive it. Paul teaches us, *“This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us” (2Cor.4:7).*

As Christians we possess the most treasured of all possessions. However, the wonder of the divine will is that, while an earthly treasure is usually preserved in a beautiful and fitting container, the treasure of the Gospel is not. It is entrusted to people subjected to the infirmities and limitations of the human condition. How many reject the gospel message because the “container” does not meet their standards? They would have it less human. The chosen vessels of the Lord are earthen vessels, which contain jewels that are not their own. They are lamps of clay that do not give forth their own light. *“It is not ourselves we preach but Christ Jesus as Lord...”* These earthen vessels make it clear that gospel-power is not a product of clever human genius but a revelation of the power of divine love.

Because Christians are “earthen vessels,” they endure all the trials and tribulations of a human existence in a world of darkness, but with a difference: God’s power sustains the Christian. From experience, Paul can say:

*We are afflicted in every way possible...but never abandoned; we are struck down but never destroyed. Continually we carry about in our bodies the dying of Jesus, so that in our bodies the life of Jesus may also be revealed. While we live we are constantly being delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our mortal flesh (2Cor.4:8-11).*

Paul has no regrets for the sufferings of his apostolic life. Through these sufferings many have come to be reconciled with God. Greater glory has been given to God, and it truly has been a glorious life for Paul. However, the strenuous life lived by Paul took its toll. The human mechanism, like a machine, eventually wears down. Paul saw before him the possibility of his physical death--He may not live, as he had hoped, until the Second Coming of the Lord. However, the debilitation of his earthly body did not discourage him. He writes:

*We do not lose heart, because our inner being is renewed each day even though our body is being destroyed at the same time. The*

*present burden of our trial is light enough, and earns for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. We do not fix our gaze on what is seen but on what is unseen. What is seen is transitory; what is unseen lasts forever (2Cor.4:16-18).*

His human body was a temporary structure vulnerable to the wear and tear of everyday life, just as is a nomad's tent. His earthly tent will dissolve in death. This does not overcome him with fear and dread. A heavenly tent prepared by the Lord will clothe his spirit. He longs now for the covering over with his heavenly body so that he will not have to physically die:

*Indeed, we know that when the earthly tent in which we dwell is destroyed we have a dwelling provided for us by God, a dwelling in the heavens, not made by hands but to last forever. We groan while we are here, even as we yearn to have our heavenly habitation envelop us. This it will, provided we are found clothed and not naked [dead] (2Cor.5:1-3).*

Paul teaches here that a heavenly existence awaits the spirit at the end of its earthly life. He is not overcome with despair if he must die before the Second Coming. But he knows that as long as he is in this tent he will suffer, and he cannot but long for the day when his human weakness will be dissolved in the putting on of the heavenly body: *“While we live in our present tent we groan; we are weighed down because we do not wish to be stripped naked but rather to have the heavenly dwelling envelop us, so that what is mortal may be absorbed by life” (2Cor.5:4).*

This teaching is not inspired by wishful thinking but by faith. *“God,”* he says, *“has fashioned us for this very thing and has given us the Spirit as a pledge of it” (2Cor.5:5).* Once again Paul teaches the presence of the Holy Spirit to be God's guarantee to us. It is the Spirit Himself that creates the longing to which Paul gives expression. The Holy Spirit is the author of these inner desires to be one with God. His presence in our life, particularly at the time of death, is the divine guarantee of immortality. Paul holds that the Holy Spirit not only gives us hope for the future but He gives us, here and now, good courage. *“Therefore we continue to be confident.”*

A true Christian should never lose confidence, regardless of the conditions and circumstances of one's life, for the Holy Spirit abides with us always. Despair is alien to Paul. For Paul to despair is to disown the Holy Spirit and

cease to be a Christian. A Christian remains confident in the face of death. The natural repugnance for death ought to be overcome within the Christian by the knowledge that death brings full union with Jesus Christ. In this life a Christian feels a sense of alienation and separation from Christ that only death or the Second Coming will end. *“We know that while we dwell in the body we are away from the Lord. We walk by faith, not by sight. I repeat, we are full of confidence and would much rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2Cor.5:6-8).*

Paul expresses his entire life’s ambition in these following words: *“This being so, we make it our aim to please him whether we are with him or away from him” (2Cor.5:9).* Paul does not want the Corinthians to be misled into believing earthly life is not of the greatest importance. It is the time of merit. It is the time of spiritual growth that will measure our ability to share in the life of God. The time of life can pass without the purpose of life being fulfilled. In this existence the Christian must always live by faith. The man from Tarsus, the ambassador of Christ, still speaks to us and emphasizes:

*We walk by faith, not by sight (2Cor.5:7).*

*We have that spirit of faith of which the Scripture says, “Because I believed, I spoke out.” We believe and so we speak (2Cor.4:13).*

*We implore you, in Christ’s name; be reconciled to God! ...As your fellow workers we beg you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, “In an acceptable time I have heard you; on a day of salvation I have helped you.” Now is the acceptable time! Now is the day of salvation! (2Cor.5:20b,6:1-2).*

Paul would bring this sober thought before the mind of every Christian: our death will not only bring us into the presence of Christ, but it will also bring us into that Presence that judges us: *“The lives of all of us are to be revealed before the Tribunal of Christ so that each one may receive his recompense, good or bad, according to his life in the body... Now is the day of Salvation! (2Cor.5:10;6:2c).*

Chapters eight and nine of Second Corinthians deal with a very important and practical aspect of Christian life: financial contributions within the Christian Community. Through Paul we learn of the generosity of the early Christian Community of Macedonia. He mentions their deep poverty side-by-

side with their abundant generosity. He relates their willingness and insistence on giving beyond their means. In the same breath Paul speaks of their overflowing joy despite severe trials. There is a correlation between generosity and joy. It is intimated that there is greater joy in giving than in receiving. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to the same generosity. He exhorts them to become rich in the charity of almsgiving.

In Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians, he has left us rich advice on this matter of giving alms. Paul makes no reference to the Old Testament's requirement of donating ten percent of one's revenue to the service of God (charity). That would be a legal requirement. Christian charity ought to be guided by the Spirit, not by legalism. Paul furnishes some prudent advice about giving alms--motives for it, and exhortations to do so. Paul does not command (8:8), or exact (9:5) donations from people. Alms ought to come as a gift of generosity. Paul prudently advises Christians to give according to their means. He gives this caution:

*The willingness to give should accord with one's means, not go beyond them. The relief of others ought not to impoverish you; there should be a certain equality. Your plenty at the present time should supply their need so that their surplus may one day supply your need, with equality as a result (2Cor.8:12-14).*

The poverty practiced by St. Francis of Assisi was a charism. Such poverty should be practiced by those who receive the call and the gift to do so. The majority of Christians would do well to adhere to Paul's advice.

Paul maintains that one should not give out of external pressure but from an internal decision. Giving should be intelligent and free, and done in a spirit of joy: *"Everyone must give according to what he had inwardly decided; not sadly, not grudgingly, for God loves a cheerful giver"* (2Cor.9:7). In order to exhort the Corinthians to give alms, Paul reminds them of Christ who, being rich, made himself poor in order to enrich others. Jesus becomes the model for this Christian charity. Paul reminds Christians, *"He who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will reap bountifully"* (2Cor.9:6). Paul suggests that God will bless those who give to others by generously giving to them. *"God can multiply his favors among you so that you may always have enough of everything and even a surplus for good works. ...he will multiply the seed you sow and increase your generous yield (2Cor.9:8,10b).*

Paul has already implied that by giving alms one imitates Jesus and the Heavenly Father. He now recalls four other good effects flowing from such charity:

*The administering of this public benefit not only supplies the need of the members of the Church but also overflows in much gratitude to God. Because of your praiseworthy service they are glorifying God for your obedient faith in the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with all. They pray for you longingly because of the surpassing grace God has given you (2Cor.9:12-14).*

Therefore, giving alms not only aids others but brings gratitude and glory to God, and prayers for the benefactors who have expressed so concretely their belief in the gospel.

## EPILOGUE TO CORINTHIANS

In the first century of Christianity we had two kinds of Christian Communities: one typified by the Jerusalem Community, and the other by the Corinthian Community. The Jerusalem Community could be identified as an institutional community, and the Corinthian Community as the charismatic Community. That is not to say that the Jerusalem Community lacked charisms nor that the Corinthian Community lacked institutional structure, but rather to say that the dominant characteristic of one was institutional and the other charismatic. The Jerusalem Community was born amidst highly institutionalized Judaism. It could be called Judaism Christianized.

The Corinthian Community was born on pagan soil. It was fathered and directed by the preaching ministry of a unique man, Paul of Tarsus. It had no true religious culture in which to be rooted or by which to be guided. It was a new creation that discovered its identity in the workings of the Spirit. The charisms of the Spirit characterized the Community, and were the source of its power and appeal.

Although both forms existed in the early Church, only the more institutional form survived. As a result of the need to ensure orthodoxy of doctrine, or curb abuses of power and survive in the pagan environment, the Church had to regulate its doctrines and ministries more firmly. The Jerusalem hierarchical model, with its ordained ministry, was better suited for the survival of the

Church. However, the loss of the early charismatic spirit within the Church was detrimental. It had failed to be integrated into the mainstream of Church life, and to a great extent failed to survive. As a result the stream of Church life moved through the centuries with less power, less warmth, less enthusiasm--all to the detriment of its own life and mission.

Today has seen a revival of the charismatic spirit within the Church. If that spirit is to survive, it must be integrated into the institutional life of the Church, not be set in opposition to it. Speaking of this very problem, Ronald Knox wisely observed that Catholic teaching is a balance of doctrine--not only a balance of doctrine, but also a balance of emphasis. To overemphasize a Christian truth is as destructive to the balance of truth as to teach error. In the defense of the Charismatic spirit within the institutional Church, Knox wrote:

*How nearly we thought we could do without a St. Francis, without St. Ignatius! Men will not live without vision; that moral we do well to carry away with us from contemplating, in so many strange forms, the records of visionaries (the enthusiasts). If we are content with humdrum, the second-best, the hand-over-hand, it will not be forgiven us (Ronald Knox).*

DEO GRATIS!

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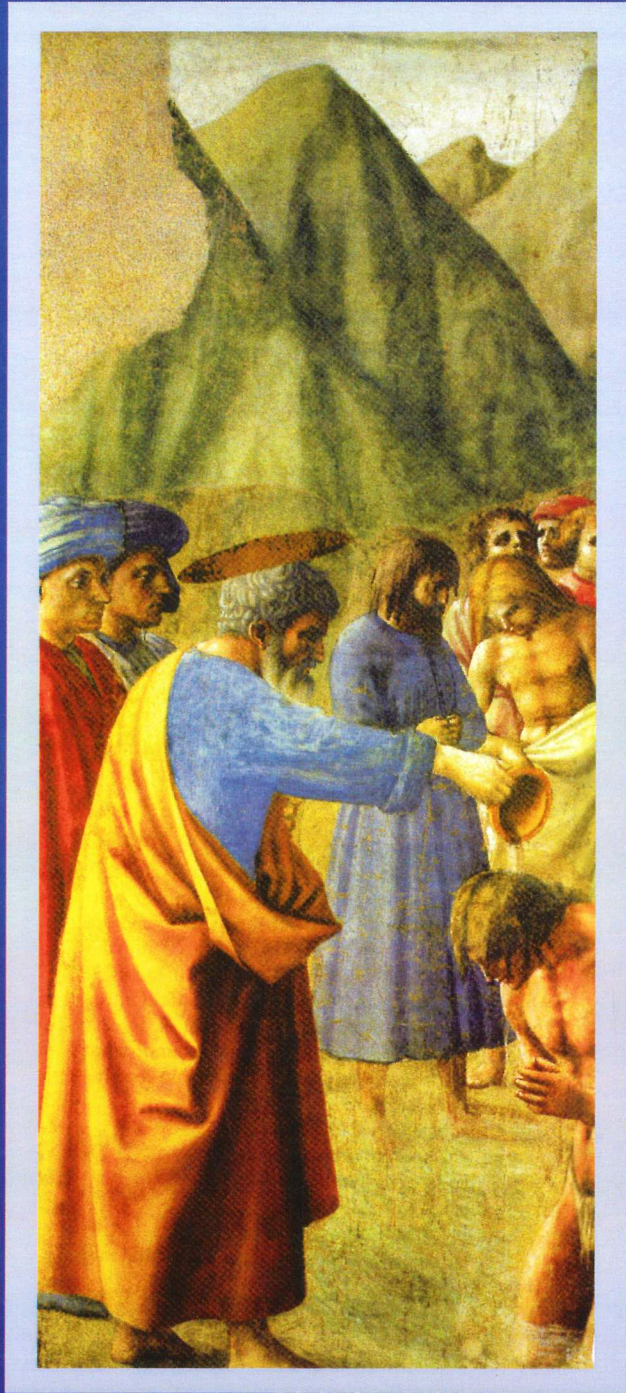
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