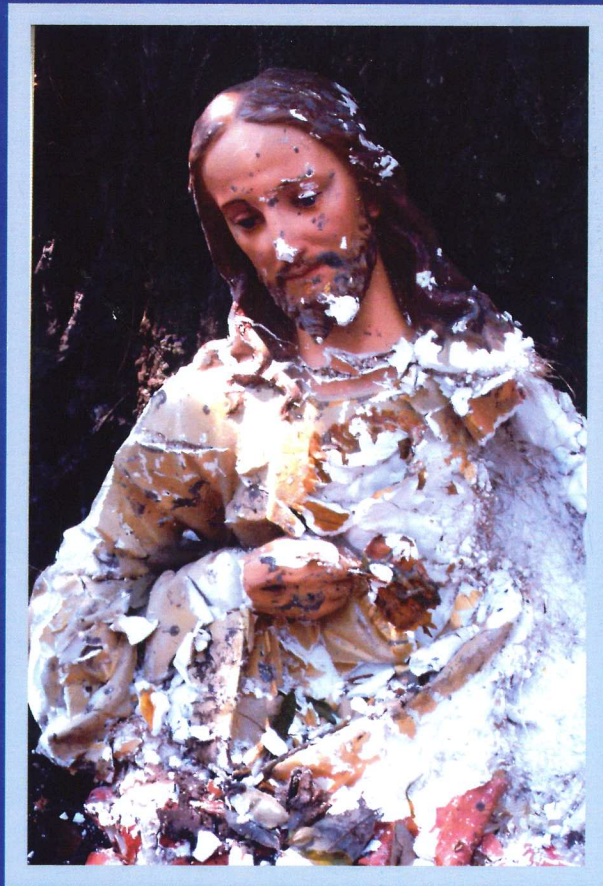


THE FRAGMENTED CHRIST



MEDITATIONS ON ST. PAUL'S
LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS

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.

THE FRAGMENTED CHRIST

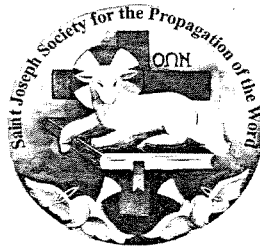
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MEDITATIONS ON ST. PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS

FIRST AND SECOND CORINTHIANS

JAMES P. O'BRYAN, S.T.



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

www.invitetodiscipleship.org

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 REVISTED, 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, Pearlington, 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.

The Bible Study and the above books may be ordered directly from:

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MEDITATIONS ON ST. PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS

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ST. PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 1

PROLOGUE TO FIRST CORINTHIANS

INTRODUCTION

Rome destroyed Corinth in 146 B.C., under the command of Lucius Mummius. It was rebuilt 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. Some believe that Paul was looking at the general population of Corinth when he wrote: "*They are filled with every kind of wickedness.*" In Romans 1:29-32 he described this wickedness.

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. 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 being manifested the righteousness of God*" (Rom.1:16-17).

Paul arrived in Corinth around 50 A.D. During his first stay in Corinth, Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians. He testified to the Jewish opposition to the Church 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.

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 came 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.

TROUBLE IN CORINTH

There is certainly an interesting history behind this letter. Paul left a Church at peace, both with him and itself. After his departure other teachers came to Corinth. Later Paul wrote 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.1:15,17).

About two years passed and Paul began to receive disturbing reports about the Church at Corinth. The Congregation was splitting into rival groups centering on their favorite teachers. More serious problems than divisiveness were reported. There were cases of immorality in the Church.

Paul wrote a letter around the spring of 55, in which he warned the community not to associate with immoral people. From what we read in First Corinthians (5:9), they misinterpreted his letter. Shortly afterward, Paul received a letter from the Corinthians in which they put a series of questions to him. Paul made reference to this in the first chapter of First Corinthians.

By the time Paul wrote our first letter to the Corinthians, he had gathered a rather accurate picture of the spiritual state of the Christian Community there. 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 at Corinth toward Paul appears to be that of children who feel they have outgrown their father. Paul's attitude toward them appears to be ambivalent, suggestive of the love-hate relationship often characterized in parent's reaction to adolescent rebellion. Paul probably detected that the Corinthians were not being perfectly frank with him in the questions they addressed to him; as we would say, they were not playing with a full deck. They did not seek information on questions of which they were ignorant, but 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.

GENERAL CONTENTS OF THE LETTER

Paul deals with the varied subjects presented in a discernible, logical order. 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 upon the relationship of the 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 the integrity of the union between the Christian and Jesus Christ is threatened 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 that this union is desecrated by idolatry. Chapter eleven teaches how this union is actualized by the reception of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, and twelve through fourteen teach how it 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.

FIRST NINE VERSES

The opening of Paul's letter, like the overture of an orchestral work, sounds the themes that will be expanded in the letter. He follows the accepted protocol of letter writing by identifying himself, greeting the recipients of the letter, and offering thanksgiving to God. The introduction formula is truly loaded. He is not only Paul the apostle but "*Paul, called by God's will to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.*" He writes therefore with God-given authority. In his role as apostle he is not inferior to Cephas, and by his call he is superior to Apollos.

In a few words Paul describes the Christian Vocation: "*consecrated in Christ Jesus and called to be a holy people.*" There are no individual greetings. The spirit of individuality is already too great in Corinth. He greets the community. He ardently desires that they come to an awareness of themselves as a community. They are the "Assembly of God." They are no ordinary gathering of people who have assembled because of mutual interests. This Church is a work of God, a divine creation. The Church of God is entirely God's creation. With his very first notes, Paul describes the unworldliness of the Church. He proceeds to speak of the members composing this Community as people "consecrated." Paul does not address them as "saints," but he

reminds them, as consecrated people, they are “called to be a holy people.” He emphasizes their individual responsibility to be a holy people, to be a holy community. Paul was underlining “holy” because that signified a separation from this profane world, and purification of its contamination, in order that as People of God, their dedication to God would truly be honorable and worthy.

One of the major causes of division in Corinth resulted from pride in the spiritual gifts received. What the Holy Spirit gave for building up the Community was being perverted into instruments of self-glorification and divisiveness. Paul acknowledges in his prayer of thanksgiving the abundance of spiritual gifts received by the Community. However, he seeks to torpedo their pride by emphasizing that these gifts come from God to whom all glory is due. Paul thanks God for what they have received, and subtly implies they still have a long way to go “*as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” They are turning in upon themselves. They are losing sight of the Lord. Paul seeks to raise their eyes and behold this Lord to whom one day they must give an account for their membership in the Church of God, as they stand before the seat of eternal judgment.

In the first nine verses, the Name of Jesus appears eight times and that of Christ, nine times. The notes are played loud and clear, Jesus Christ is the heart and essence of the Christian Life. All Christian holiness depends upon being united heart and soul with Jesus Christ.

ERIS IN THE CHURCH

Paul used the formal part of his letter to describe what ought to be the Church of God. Now he turns to deal with what is the Church in Corinth. He will struggle to bring the reality into some degree of harmony with the ideal. Paul comes immediately to the point--disunity within the Community. He appeals to the Church, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come to that unity of spirit that brothers in the Lord ought to possess. He writes: “*I have been informed, my brothers, by certain members of Chloe’s household that you are quarreling among yourselves*” (1Cor.1:11).

The word used to express quarreling is *eris*. *Eris* is a work of the flesh. It is closely connected to *echtra*, as a child is to its mother, as the fruit is to the tree. *Echtra* expresses the feeling and attitude of hatred towards another. *Eris* is the external expression of *echtra*, which incarnates itself as *eris* in quarrels, brawls, factions and 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.

CULTS IN THE COMMUNITY

Eris within the Christian Community was finding expression in individual cults. These cults were centered on great personalities like Christ, Cephas, Paul, and Apollos, but there was no true imitation of the personalities. Cultists support their own egos by assuming identification with their leader, but they become no more like their leader than a Dodger or Ram fan becomes like one of the players on the field. Cultists remain unchanged, while making the leader an extension of their own personalities. They pride themselves on the virtues, powers, and talents of the leader, as if they themselves personally possessed them.

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). 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). He does not occupy himself with the beliefs and practices of any cult. He is concerned with the sinful divisive spirit pervading the Church that threatens the unity of the Body of Christ. The fundamental question of the whole passage is "Has Christ, then, been divided into parts?" Of course the answer would be in the negative. If Christ has not been divided, and the Community at Corinth has been divided, the deduction is clear: none of the cults are of Christ.

PAUL IS NO CULTIST

Paul not only rebukes the party spirit, but he makes it clear that he has never cultivated it by proposing himself as a cultic leader. He is an apostle of Jesus Christ. He has represented Jesus, and he had not presented Paul. God called him to preach the gospel, and Paul had indeed preached--Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Paul proclaimed that Christ sent him *"...to preach the gospel--not with wordy 'wisdom,' however, lest the cross of Christ be rendered void of its meaning!"* (1Cor.1:17). He tells the Corinthians, *"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" 1(1Cor.2:1-5). Was his preaching now a point for his condemnation?

The Greeks loved wisdom. They believed with Socrates that salvation lies in knowledge. Evil was a matter of ignorance. There was a great revival of old religions among the Greeks and Romans that promised to the initiated secret knowledge leading to salvation. No doubt, an intellectual elite had gathered around Apollos. Paul recognized in their attraction to the wisdom of this world a rejection of the "wisdom of the cross", and a turning from Jesus Crucified. On the scale of human wisdom, Jesus Christ was found wanting as a Savior, "...a stumbling block to Jews, and an absurdity to the Gentiles" (1Cor.1:23). To the worldly mind there was no wisdom in Jesus, only tragedy and divine retribution. The Wisdom of God will always escape the mind of man as long as the deeds of God are examined from the point of view of man's wisdom and measured by his logical standards. Man's mind must be re-made in order to understand God's workings in this world. 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).

The Corinthians prided themselves upon their salvation, and the spiritual gifts lavished upon them. However, they have become enamored with the "wisdom" of this world. Paul forces a comparison between the lives of the Corinthian Christians and the "wise" of this world. He seeks to make them see that they themselves have come to true wisdom in Christ, while the wise men of this world have rejected Christ. For all their wisdom, these "wise men" have not come to true wisdom, and as a result are perishing. Paul concludes, "Yes, Jews demand 'signs' and Greeks look for 'wisdom' but we preach Christ crucified..." (1Cor.1:22). Paul implies that salvation does not flow from seeing miracles or hearing logical presentations, but through proclaiming the Word of God.

Paul seeks to attack the pride of the Corinthians. They viewed themselves as wise men, and they looked down on others not as wise as they. Paul delights in reminding them of their lowly origins, and points out to them that they are part of "God's folly in this world." Paul implies that they are fine peacocks now, walking around Corinth with a big tail spread, making shrill noises. But he reminds them they were once no more than poor field hands--cotton pickers. If it hadn't been for God's grace they would never have been

anything more. Paul maintains that God used them to destroy the pride of the proud, and to confound the strength of the strong. Of themselves, they have never been anything, and of themselves, they never will be. All they have is from God. If the gifts of God were withdrawn, what would they have? What are their grounds for self-boasting? Paul writes, *“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).*

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 world vanities are after that supreme vanity, small faults quickly corrected.”*

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.”*

PROLOGUE TO FIRST CORINTHIANS
SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS

SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)

“GOD IT IS WHO HAS GIVEN YOU LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS. HE HAS MADE HIM OUR WISDOM AND OUR JUSTICE, OUR SANTIFICATION, AND OUR REDEMPTION.” (1Corinthians 1:30)

FIRST DAY: Read Acts of the Apostles 17:10-34.

- 1. What brought Paul to the city of Athens?**
- 2. What was the effect of this city upon Paul?**
- 3. What was Paul’s effect upon the city?**
- 4. What lesson do you learn about the apostolate from these effects?**

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: Introduction; Acts 18:1-23.

- 1. How does the foundation of the Church in Corinth demonstrate in a special way the power of the gospel?**
- 2. In what way do we see the providence of God working in Paul’s life?**
- 3. What was Paul’s greatest obstacle in establishing the Church in Corinth?**
- 4. What kind of membership composed the Church in Corinth?**

THIRD DAY: Read Summary through First Nine Verses; 1Corinthians 1:1-9.

- 1. What appears to be the cause of the trouble in the Church at Corinth?**
- 2. In what way is one theme expressed throughout this letter?**
- 3. What is the essential message of Paul’s “greeting”?**
- 4. What do you learn from the Introduction to his letter?**

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary through Cults in the Church; Acts 18:24-28; 1Corinthians 1:10-17.

- 1. What does the presence of *eris* reveal about the Christian Community?**
- 2. What is your impression of Apollos?**
- 3. What do you understand to be a Christian cult?**
- 4. What purpose do you see that cults serve?**

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary through Paul Is No Cultist; 1Corinthians 1:18-25.

- 1. What precautions did Paul take in order not to become a cultist leader?**
- 2. What are the dangers of cults in the Christian Community?**
- 3. What was Paul's opinion of the wisdom of the World?**
- 4. What do you understand by 1Corinthians 1:25?**

SIXTH DAY: Read 1Corinthians 1:26-2:5.

- 1. How did Paul try to humble the pride of the Corinthians?**
- 2. What do you understand by 1Corinthians 1:30?**
- 3. How did Paul proclaim the gospel in Corinth?**
- 4. What does this teach you about evangelizing?**

CHAPTER 2

RELIGION PURE AND UNDEFINED

INTRODUCTION

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. He came to the realization that Jesus, through his birth, death and resurrection, had radically altered man's relationship with God. It 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.

Early members of the Christian Community sought to adapt Christian Revelation to the Jewish Religion. The first battle to preserve the purity of the Christian Religion had to be waged against the Judaizers within the Community. 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.

In Corinth, Paul engaged in a new war. There the Christian Religion confronted the world. 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, promising salvation to those who possessed its secret, esoteric knowledge. This would render void the meaning of Christ Crucified.

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. His Word 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 men through its power to remove sins and bestow life-giving grace. As such, it must be preserved, for it is the world's one hope for salvation. Paul knew that we must not seek to conform Christ to ourselves, our cultures, or our world. It is not so much that Christ is in us, in our culture, in our philosophies, in our religion, but rather that we and our cultures, philosophies, and religion are in Christ. Herein alone lies salvation!

THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

Paul, better than anyone else, understood this truth. For this reason he developed, expounded, and defended the theology of the Cross. Nothing could be more antithetical (contrary) to Greek wisdom and Jewish messianic expectations than the Cross of Christ. God chose the cross as the means of His supreme and ultimate revelation. God willed, by means of the cross, 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.

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.

CHRISTIAN SOPHIA

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 attacked 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 had been proposed as Christian means for conversion and salvation. To rely on such negates the power of the Gospel. Certain members of the Church were enchanted with Sophia; they were turning toward natural philosophy and knowledge, and magical sciences, combining them with Christian Revelation. This is what Paul had to contend with.

Paul informs the Corinthians that there exists a true Christian Sophia, and he strongly suggests they have failed to access it. Paul distinguishes between two types of human beings and two classes of Christians. He calls men of this world *psychikoi* (unspiritual men). These are children of Adam who are animated and motivated by the *psyche* (soul) inherited from Adam. They possess a natural life, and depend upon natural senses and human powers of reason and mundane knowledge. In contrast with them 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 between the *pneumatikoi* within the Church. Some he calls the *teleios*. These are the *pneumatikoi* who are fully developed--the spiritually mature. But also the Christian Community houses the *nepioi*. These are 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 discern properly the things of God. The *teleios* cannot speak to the *nepioi* of the deeper things of God because the *nepioi* are still too deeply immersed in this world and cannot comprehend the deeper religious mysteries. The *nepioi* are not all that removed from the *psychikoi*. Paul considers the Corinthians as *nepeoi*; they, however, consider themselves to be *teleios* because of the many charismatic gifts they possess.

Paul does not teach the Corinthians Christian Sophia. However, this knowledge is known to the "spiritually mature:" "*Yet God has revealed this wisdom to us (the teleios) through the Spirit*" (1Cor.2:10). Paul confirms such knowledge is not accessible to human reason, but comes only through revelation. 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. "*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)*. All the baptized may possess the Holy Spirit, but 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. To them it all sounds like nonsense; it is considered ridiculous. Paul makes it clear that the *sermo sapientiae* (words of wisdom) expressed by the teleios will be misunderstood and misinterpreted by both the psychikoi and the nepeoi. They will not only misunderstand the words of wisdom of the telios, but they will rashly and harshly misjudge their behavior. The teleios within the Christian Community are constantly criticized by the men and women of the world, and by the spiritually immature within the Church.

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 in depth, and the response demanded by them, the mind of the Christian must be illuminated by the Holy Spirit. 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.”*

TEMPLE OF GOD

Paul endeavors to place the Christian Community, with its membership and working body, in proper focus: *“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)*. Both workers and members have a serious responsibility to love and carefully preserve the Church. 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.

Reflecting upon his own work, Paul’s conscience cannot 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. Now others have arrived in Corinth, and they are building upon the foundation laid by Paul. He cautions them, and he warns them, that they will be held responsible

for how they build. He compares the material one teaches to the building materials of this earth. He speaks of those who are truly channels of the Holy Spirit as building in gold, silver and precious stones. Paul speaks of foolish teachers who preach novelties and philosophies and “sugar and spice and everything nice” as building in “wood, hay or straw.” One day, what has been built will undergo the test of “fire.” Amidst this fire, will the Christian lives endure in faith, hope and charity? Paul ties the reward and the punishment of the teachers in with their students. He seems to suggest that both share in the responsibility for what has been constructed and endures, or what has been constructed and crumbles:

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).

If the lives and works of Christians have been but vanities, there will be no reward for the lives lived, nor for their life's work. However, they will not lose their souls; because of their foundation in Jesus Christ, they will be saved. Paul's words seem to imply some kind of punishment. As his words are so closely connected with the Judgment, they seem 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, “*If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him*” (1Cor.3:17).

CHRISTIAN REALITY

Up to this point Paul's criticism of the Corinthians has been somewhat general. He now becomes more defensive of his own role in the Church, and more critical of the Community membership. Within a few verses he goes from defensiveness to bitter sarcasm to severity--then to sweetness, and ends with threats.

Paul knows the position assigned to him in the Church because Christ has assigned this role to him. 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*, has assumed the juridical meaning of one who was an “official witness” in court. Paul implies that he is a servant—one with an official duty of witnessing to truth in the Christian Community. The second term, *oikonomos*, designates a servant entrusted with the administration of the household. In the political world it conveyed the concept of one in the government structure who would be the prime minister. Paul sees himself as one entrusted with the managing of the Lord’s household. 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. 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 a faithful and trustworthy steward.

The source of the problems in Corinth lay in pride. The people have forgotten their own personal spiritual poverty. They lived in a fantasy world concerning the Christian life. They had 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, he responded with bitter sarcasm. They behaved as if they had reached the summit of perfection, and they were now seating themselves at the eternal banquet. Paul tries a little shock treatment: he contrasts true Christian reality, as lived by the apostles, with the fantasy world of Christianity created by the Corinthians.

Paul seeks to bring the Corinthians back into the real Christian world. He realized he may have pushed too hard, because he abruptly changes his approach to one of gentleness. Within this fantasy world of theirs they failed to recognize Paul’s true relationship with them. He was 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 one else will ever have. Out of the responsibility of this relationship he writes to them. He writes not to hurt them, but to correct them as a loving father. All that he says and does ought to be viewed as the acts of a concerned and caring father who loves his children. Does not God chastise those He loves?

Paul proposes himself as a model for their behavior. Not only has he preached to them, but he has revealed Christ to them, not only in word but in deed. God's Holy Spirit has incarnated itself in the very life he lived. He offers his own example as a model of Christian behavior.

Paul plans to send Timothy to them. When he reflects what may be awaiting Timothy, who is his beloved son and dearest friend, he once again becomes the stern father who now threatens that he will one day personally return to Corinth, and the troublemakers will answer to him. He will measure their "puffed-up" speech against the deeds of their lives, which he intends to scrutinize in the light of Christ. Once again he reminds them of the true nature of the Christian Community: *"The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power"* (1Cor.4:20). It is a matter of human lives manifesting the Holy Spirit of God!

RELIGION PURE AND UNDEFILED

**SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)**

“ARE YOU NOT AWARE THAT YOU ARE THE TEMPLE OF GOD, AND THAT THE SPIRIT OF GOD DWELLS IN YOU?” (1 Corinthians 3:16)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary through Theology of the Cross.

- 1. What do you see to be the uniqueness of the Christian Revelation?**
- 2. What danger does this Revelation constantly face in this world?**
- 3. What do you understand by Paul’s theology of the Cross?**
- 4. What does the Cross mean to you?**

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: Christian Sophia; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16.

- 1. How does St. Paul divide people in the world from people in the Church?**
- 2. Why do people fail to understand Christian Revelation?**
- 3. How does one come to possess Christian Sophia?**
- 4. Why do many Christians fail to properly understand their faith?**

THIRD DAY: Read Summary: Temple of God; 1 Corinthians 3:1-17.

- 1. How does St. Paul describe the “infants” in the Church?**
- 2. What is the responsibility of workers and members within the Church?**
- 3. What was Paul’s understanding of his role in the Church at Corinth?**
- 4. What do you understand by 1 Corinthians 3:16-17?**

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary: Christian Reality; 1 Corinthians 3:18-4:5.

1. What do you understand by 1 Corinthians 3:21-23?
2. How does Paul view his position in the Church?
3. Why does he consider himself above the judgment of the Community?
4. What kind of judgment do you think Paul criticizes at this time?

FIFTH DAY: Read 1 Corinthians 4:6-13.

1. What is the source of the problems in the Corinthian Community?
2. How does Paul try to correct it?
3. How were the Corinthians viewing the Christian life at this time?
4. How does Paul seek to bring them to a realistic view of Christian existence in this world?

SIXTH DAY: Read 1 Corinthians 4:14-21.

1. How does Paul view his personal relationship with the Corinthians?
2. Why does Paul propose himself as a model to the Corinthians?
3. What do you learn from this?
4. What do you understand by 1 Corinthians 4:20?

CHAPTER 3

CHRISTIAN MORALITY

INTRODUCTION

Morality is 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, people in all ages have accepted the existence of a natural law that objectively dictates morality. 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 norms would be based upon natural law. This would be natural morality.

The Catholic Church accepts belief in natural law. The Church finds confirmation of it in both Romans and Wisdom. It holds the tenets of natural law to be the foundation of Christian morality. However, Christian morality exceeds the tenets of natural law. Christian morality is based upon divine revelation. It has its foundation in the revelations coming through Jesus Christ.

Christian morality, of necessity, surpasses the morality of this world. A Christian cannot conform one's conduct merely to the moral standards of this world and remain a moral person. A Christian must conform one's life and behavior to the Christian standard, which is not a standard acceptable in the world.

There is a Christian ideal. Paul holds nothing less before the eyes of Christians. The Christian ideal is the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth. His words and deeds became the standard for Christian morality. Christian perfection consisted in perfected love. Christian morality will always express agape-love to some degree. Immorality, for the Christian, will always be acts destructive of Christian love. Paul knew there was no in justice in demanding

such perfection and morality from Christians: *“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 remains forever the pilgrimage to perfection in agape-love.

There is usually a vast difference between the Christian ideal and the Christian people here on earth. Although we may be 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. Below the surface of our consciousness lurks an inveterate and hostile pride that bristles its quills when frustrated and corrected. 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 relevant goals to be achieved on the road to perfection without losing sight of Jesus--the Absolute Ideal.

FRATERNAL CORRECTION

One of the most difficult aspects of agape-love is fraternal correction. It is especially difficult because the instruments chosen by God to make the correction are never perfect themselves. The only reason for Christian correction is medicinal. Sincere love for the individual or the community ought to motivate fraternal correction.

In the mind of Paul some things must not be tolerated within the Christian Community. He sees them as completely incompatible with life in Christ. Apparently he considered certain moral conditions to be mortally sinful--to be sin “unto death.” He does not speak of individual sins but immoral life styles. He is looking at habitual sin that is incompatible with life in the spirit.

Paul had given a general admonition to the Corinthians to refrain from judging one another, but he insists that in some cases a judgment of condemnation must be made. Paul was aware that certain behavior was intrinsically evil within itself. Such behavior causes 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 demanded as well. One famous psychiatrist maintains that people are sick because they do sick things; if you want them to be healthy again, you must stop them from doing the sick thing.

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 (see Jn. 20:23). Peter used this power when he judged the behavior of Ananias and Sapphira to be a lie to the Holy Spirit. Paul exercises this power in the Corinthian Church, and he calls upon the leaders of the Community not only to second his judgment, but to carry it out.

EXCOMMUNICATION

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” (1Cor.5:1)*. Paul considers this to be gross immorality. He excommunicates the man from the Christian Community, and he wants the Community to enforce this excommunication. By excommunication he implies the man is placed once again under the dominion of Satan. Paul implies that communion with the Church removes a person from being under Satan's direct power. Paul believes that through the affliction of Satan the man's health would be destroyed, and the sinning would cease. However, Paul suggests *“his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord” (1Cor.5:5b)*. There was a 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. The Feast of Passover was a time to put all impurity out of the household of the faithful; 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 new dough of unleavened bread was made. Paul implies that the Christian Community on earth is a continuous process of celebrating the Christian Passover: *“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. 5:7-8,13)*.

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. Second, 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. It affects the entire body and becomes the responsibility of the entire body. Since “*the wages of sin are death*” (Rom.6:23), the life of the Community may depend upon the eradication of the sin.

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. To understand Paul’s attitude one has to appreciate his concept of the Christian Community. 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), which implies that they must be removed from the contaminations and the impurities of this world.

It appears that Paul 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 misinterpreted his letter as a directive not to associate with immoral people in the world. Paul corrects this misinterpretation:

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. 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 (1Cor.5:9-11).

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 worldly association is not on the same level at all.

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 and corruption of this world are mixed into the body of the Church, it 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).

CHRISTIANS IN CIVIL COURTS

Reflecting upon what ought to be the image that the Church presents in the world, Paul is reminded of another scandalous practice among the Corinthians. 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?*" (1Cor.6:1-2). Again we see how far removed is the Christian Community from Paul's ideal picture of the Church.

Lawsuits within the Church testify to the extent of the divisiveness, and what really exasperated Paul was the fact that pagans were called in to pass judgment upon the "saints." 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.

Paul maintains that members of the Church are qualified to pass these judgments. If necessary, Church courts must be erected to settle disputes among Christians. In the mind of Paul the very existence of these disputes manifest the triumph of the world and the flesh within the Community, and the defeat of the Spirit of Christ. Motivated by Jesus' teachings upon the Mount of the Beatitudes (see Mt.5:38-42), Paul maintained that it was better for Christians to suffer financial loss than to go into court with one's brother. But what disturbed Paul the most was the fact that the Christians were cheating one another: "*...you yourselves injure and cheat your very own brothers*" (1Cor.6:8).

Paul knows that such people who do these things may consider themselves to

be “brothers” within the Christian Community but they deceive themselves. Paul warns them, *“Do not deceive yourselves! Can you not realize that the unholy [within or outside of the Church] will not fall heir to the kingdom of God? (1Cor.6:9).*

EVIL OF SEXUAL IMMORALITY

The Christians likewise misinterpreted Paul’s teachings on Christian liberty. He writes, quoting them no doubt, *“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).* Christ freed the Christian from the enslavement of Satan and the power of sin. They have been freed, through the blood of Christ, to follow the Law of Christ--to follow the Spirit of Jesus. In other words, Christians are to conform their lives to the Holy Spirit. Paul does not deny the principle that expresses freedom from the Mosaic Law, but he denies its interpretation. Just because a thing is lawful does not mean it is “good.” (It is lawful in this country to kill an unborn child but that does not make it good!) Paul holds that Christian morality rises above the lawful to embrace that which is truly good and godly. Christian morality flees anything that would enslave Christian liberty, rendering the Christian powerless to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit and to move freely along with the breath of the Spirit.

Some of the Corinthians perverted this doctrine of liberty into a license for sexual promiscuity--especially for *porneia*, which has been translated to mean fornication, sexual vice, or sexual immorality. Porneia is used here as a general word for all unlawful and immoral sexual relationships. By reading between the lines, it appears that in sexual matters the pendulum was swinging to the two extremes: sexual promiscuity on the one hand and sexual asceticism on the other. These tendencies seem to indicate the spirit of Gnosticism.

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. Therefore, these things had nothing to do with the spirituality of a person, and consequently were 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. The human body was the means by which sexual union was expressed. This body would not cease to be for it would share in the resurrection. Therefore the body was

purchased by Jesus Christ on the Cross, and it belongs to Christ. The presence of the Holy Spirit within the body makes the body the Temple of the living God. The body is sacred.

In Paul's mind the sin of fornication is more than the misuse of the power and faculty of sex--it is a sacrilege. He asked, "*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!*" (1Cor.6:15). Clearly and dramatically, Paul teaches the sacredness of the human body of a Christian--it is part of the Body of Christ. Paul is set against immorality in sexual matters. He writes to the Corinthians, "*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). Paul writes to the Thessalonians, "*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*" (1Thes.4:3-5).

Sin is like leaven. If the sin is not purged out and a person continues to abide in it, it will sooner or later contaminate the whole spirit. Herein lies the real danger of an attachment to sin of the flesh. In the mind of Paul the best counteraction to sexual immorality is for a Christian to behold the human body in the light of its Christian dignity: "*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).

CHRISTIAN MORALITY

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

“YOU MUST KNOW THAT YOUR BODY IS A TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHO IS WITHIN-THE SPIRIT YOU HAVE RECEIVED FROM GOD.” (1Corinthians 6:19)

FIRST DAY: Read the Introduction to the Summary

- 1. How would you define natural morality?**
- 2. How would you define Christian morality?**
- 3. What do you see to be the essence of Christian morality?**
- 4. What do you see as a relevant goal to perfection for yourself?**

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: Fraternal Correction; John 20:22-23; Acts 5:1-11.

- 1. What do you understand by fraternal correction?**
- 2. Who should give fraternal correction within the Community?**
- 3. Why is it seen to be necessary within the Community?**
- 4. What good came to the Community by Peter’s dealings with Ananias and Sapphira?**

THIRD DAY: Read Summary: Excommunication; 1 Corinthians 5:1-6.

- 1. Why did Paul demand the excommunication of the incestuous man?**
- 2. What good does he hope to achieve by it?**
- 3. What is being implied by handing the man over to Satan?**
- 4. Why do you think Paul goes to such an extreme?**

FOURTH DAY: Read 1 Corinthians 5:6-13.

- 1. What does Paul's analogy of the yeast teach us about sin?**
- 2. What does it teach us about the Church?**
- 3. Why would Paul tolerate some sins but not others in the Church?**
- 4. What do you learn from this attitude of Paul's?**

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: Christians in Civil Courts; 1 Corinthians 6:1-11; Matthew 5:38-42.

- 1. What do we learn about the Community in Corinth because of their civil suits?**
- 2. What especially exasperated St. Paul in this matter?**
- 3. How should a Christian be directed in these matters?**
- 4. What did you learn from these readings?**

SIXTH DAY: Read Summary: Evil of Sexual Immorality; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20.

- 1. What do you understand by 1 Corinthians 6:12?**
- 2. What was the Corinthian's excuse for sexual immorality?**
- 3. What was Paul's argument against it?**
- 4. What do you learn from 1 Corinthians 6:19-20?**

CHAPTER 4

MARRIAGE AND CELIBACY

INTRODUCTION

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. There are more references to the “body” in First Corinthians than in all the other epistles combined. The body not only housed the spirit, but incarnated the spirit. 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. 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. All the reverence due the temple Paul transferred 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. Paul rightly maintained the body to be holy and sacred. The Scriptures present the Church as the corporate Body of Christ on earth, wherein dwells the Holy Spirit. It confirms each individual member to be a unique stone within the structure of the temple. These stones, however, are not dead and cold as are 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, as they no longer transmit the inner beauty of the Church.

As human beings we possess many human faculties. These faculties should be instruments of the Holy Spirit. They ought to be channels that express and transmit the power of the redemption into human existence. Only that which

truly expresses the human spirit expresses the person, and what truly expresses a person finds expression in the flesh. The invisible spirit becomes visible in bodily expression.

As spiritual beings empowered by the Holy Spirit, Paul believed the Christian life ought to be expressed in truth and love (see 1Cor.5:8). Paul calls for Christians to be sincere. Being sincere implies that one should not project a false image--should not play the hypocrite. The hypocritical person lies with his entire behavior.

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 the expression of truth incarnated expressed. Humility is lived truth. The first work of a Christian is to be truthful--with self and in self-expression. Being sincere does not mean that a person expresses every thought, feeling, or emotion that crosses the threshold of one's heart or consciousness. However, it does mean that what is being expressed honestly conveys what is in one's spirit. Feelings neither guide nor dominate the behavior of mature Christians. A loving Christian must often act completely contrary to how he feels. Paul teaches that the Christian must not let one's faculties obey one's lusts, but rather make them instruments and slaves of goodness. 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.

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.

QUESTION OF MARRIAGE

The Corinthians had addressed a series of problematic questions to Paul. He responds to these questions, apparently in the order asked. To keep these teachings of Paul in proper perspective, especially his teachings on marriage, we need to bear in mind several vital 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. Equally

important to bear in mind is Paul's personal belief that the end of the world was imminent. Preceding the return of Christ, 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. There are certain principles underlining the advice given in these particular circumstances, which 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. 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.

Paul begins his response with a possible quote from the list of Corinthian questions: *"A man is better off having no relations with a woman"* (1Cor.7:1b). Paul has no illusions about the present "angelic" status of the Christians. He knew such illusions stemmed from a failure at self-acceptance motivated by pride. On the other hand, Paul would not go along with those "naturalists" within the Community that insisted everyone must be married.

It seems 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 potentially a temptation to sexual immorality. 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 a 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. Paul makes no distinctions between the sexual needs or rights of men and women (see 1Cor.7:3-5). Paul gives the 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. As he writes, *"I say this by way of concession, not as a command"* (1Cor.7:6).

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--it is his personal preference that they not marry. But he insists that they be realistic about the matter. If they are going to be preoccupied with sexual desires, it is much better they marry. He writes, "It is better to marry than to be on fire" (1Cor.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. But there is no command to marry. There should be no pressure in the Church to marry. 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.

QUESTION OF DIVORCE

Paul turns to the problem of divorce within the Christian Community. 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.

When the Pharisees confronted Jesus with the question of divorce, it was in the context of the dispute between two moral schools of thought. Jesus arises 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. Jesus abrogates the Jewish dispensation to divorce one's wife. 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 certain moderation. He appears to tolerate separation if there is no remarriage (see 1Cor.7:10-11).

QUESTION OF MIXED MARRIAGES

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 as a complete washing away of their old lives--old family ties, old social ties, and old marriages. Paul maintains that these old marriages remain in force even if one party remains pagan (see 1Cor.7:12-13). He argues that the pagan is sanctified through union with the Christian because a Christian man or woman is joined to Christ Jesus. Sexual relationship within their marriage does not destroy their union with Christ. 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 (see 1Cor.7:14). We have here a very literal interpretation of how marriage makes a couple one in the flesh. Obviously Paul sees, through such a union, the possibility to convert the non-Christian.

THE PAULINE PRIVILEGE

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 do so. The believing husband or wife is not bound in such cases. God has called you to live in peace"* (1Cor.7:15). Does Paul grant more? 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 this from the general principle stated in verse seventeen. However, from the fourth century the Christian Community has interpreted this text in Corinthians as permission to remarry. The Church legislation refers to this as the Pauline Privilege.

In the 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 marriage is to one in the Church.

Paul 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; in certain unique cases--it has been interpreted--he has permitted remarriage after divorce.

PAUL'S GENERAL LAW

Paul's general rule, stated four times, is "*each of you should continue before God in the condition of life that was his when he was called*" (1Cor.7:24), because of the "*present time of distress*" and because "*the time is short.*" "*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*" (1Cor.7:27). "*Were you a slave when your call came? Give it no thought...*" (1Cor.7:21). "*...those who make use of the world as though they were not using it, for the world as we know it is passing away*" (1Cor.7:31).

Paul certainly was not indifferent to the social environment. He was too consciously aware of life not to know its importance. Likewise, he realistically knew men and women must often live in social situations not of their making and not to their liking, but one due to circumstances that must be endured. He emphasizes what is essential for a Christian in all situations on this earth, whether good or evil: "*What matters is keeping God's commandments... Do not enslave yourselves to men*" (1Cor.7:19,23). In time this external world will pass away, but eternity will remain, and they will remain. It is important that they belong to Christ, that they remain united to Jesus amidst all the passing circumstances of this life--good or ill. Christians must permit nothing to come between them and the love of God that comes to them in Jesus Christ. In other words, Paul teaches that the external conditions of life that will pass away are not as important as the Christian's internal condition that will one day certainly be eternalized. In all the changing fortunes of this world, the question to be asked is: "Does one belong to Christ?" That is eternally important. All else should be dealt with in the light of eternal reality.

Paul teaches that the unmarried, the virgins, and the widows are free to marry "*but on one condition, that it be in the Lord*" (1Cor.7:39). However, he encourages them to remain unmarried because "*such people will have trials in this life, and these I should like to spare you*" (1Cor.7:28). Paul has a preference for the state of virginity and celibacy in "*this present time of stress*" because "*the time is short.*" By being freed from the obligations of marriage, one has a greater opportunity for a life of prayer, and to share 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. The state itself can be an occasion for selfish living. In a life of virginity or celibacy the Christian grows in Christian love, or the Christian grows in problems: *“They learn how to be idle and go around from house to house--becoming not only time-wasters but gossips and busybodies as well, talking about things they ought not... Already, some have turned away to follow Satan” (1Tim.5:13,15)*. Paul tells the Christian: *“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. I am persuaded that in this I have the Spirit of God” (1Cor. 7:35,40)*.

Chapter seven of Corinthians teaches the important lesson that all aspects of the 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 experiential awareness of their own failure. Christian tension ceases only at death, or by the denial of Christ.

MARRIAGE AND CELIBACY

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

“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.” (1Corinthians 7:17)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary: Introduction.

- 1. What does it mean to say “the Lord is for the body” and “the body is for the Lord”?**
- 2. What part should the human body play in our spiritual life?**
- 3. What does it mean to be “a living stone” in the Temple of God?**
- 4. What do you understand by “the hypocritical person lies with its entire behavior”?**

SECOND DAY: Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Mark 10:2-12; Matthew 19:3-12.

- 1. For what reason did Moses permit divorce?**
- 2. What was Jesus’ response to this?**
- 3. Why did Jesus’ teaching oblige all men?**
- 4. What did Jesus teach about celibacy?**

THIRD DAY: Read Summary: Question of Marriage; 1Corinthians 7:1-9; Ephesians 5:21-33; Luke 20:27-36.

- 1. What should be taken into consideration when studying Paul’s attitude toward marriage in Corinthians:**
- 2. Why were certain Corinthians apparently against marriage?**
- 3. What does Paul teach in 1Corinthians 7:3-5?**
- 4. What do you understand to be Paul’s concept of marriage?**

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary through The Pauline Privilege; 1Corinthians 4:10-16; 2Corinthians 6:14-7:1.

- 1. What is Paul's teaching on divorce?**
- 2. What is his general teaching on marriage of Christians to pagans?**
- 3. Why does Paul teach about the union of a Christian to a pagan?**
- 4. What do you understand by the Pauline Privilege?**

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: Paul's General Law; 1Corinthians 7:17-35.

- 1. What do you understand by 1Corinthians 7:24?**
- 2. How would you answer the charge that Paul favored slavery?**
- 3. What were Paul's arguments for celibacy?**
- 4. What do you think about his attitude?**

SIXTH DAY: Read 1Corinthians 7:35-40; 1Timothy 5:3-16.

- 1. What is Paul's general advice to widows and virgins?**
- 2. What should be the purpose of a life of virginity and celibacy within the church?**
- 3. What do you understand by 1Timothy 5:6?**
- 4. What do you see to be the important lesson of chapter seven of 1Corinthians?**

CHAPTER 5

THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

INTRODUCTION

Paul understood that the Christian Community could not be an irreproachable island in a sea of paganism. That would be contrary to its commission to the world. However, it must not become part of this world: *“Do not conform yourselves to this age...” (Rm.12:2a)*. *“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 writes for Christians to keep themselves *“unspotted from this world” (1:27)*.

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)*. St. John teaches that the world is overcome through faith in Jesus. Where this faith is lacking or weak 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; it has become synonymous for worldly, or 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 those of eternal life. Such Christians reveal almost no loyalty to the faith they profess. They give lip service to the principles of religion, while the standards and principles of this world guide their lives.

To a certain degree the Church must be secular, as it must remain in the world as a visible society. The ever present problem remains of how to be a secular institution, yet keep free from the contamination of secularism, which implies succumbing to the temptation of conforming the Church and the lives of Christians to the standards of the world.

SECULARISM IN CORINTH

Paul dealt with secularism in the Christian community at Corinth. There was always the danger of the Christians being submerged into their pagan environment. The Church must survive in an idolatrous society. Idolatry is a very subtle and deep spiritual perversion. Idolatry is human revolt against God. It cuts God down to man's size. Idolatry gives man a subtle control over the Divine. Moreover, man deifies self through idolatry. The gods and goddesses appear with all the strengths and weaknesses of human beings.

People instinctively feel a need to escape the powerlessness of self through submission, and worship of something external and greater than self. They experience a need for some personal identification with a greater power. Human beings pervert this instinctive need when they fail to recognize it as a true human need for God, who transcends all that is human, and they surrender themselves to false gods of their own creation. In reality "false gods" are but external projects of internal pride and egoism. Idolatry begins in the unconscious desire to deify self; it ends in the corruption of self, and the enslavement of self to that which is less 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.

One of the secular problems facing the Christian in Corinth was the very mundane business of grocery shopping and the problem of dining out. They became problems because of 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 marketplace not previously sacrificed to some god or slaughtered on some pagan altar. The problem of eating meat in Corinth had become a real conscience problem within the Church, and a cause of scandal and division. Certain Christians felt they had a right to eat this meat, and even attend banquets held in a temple area. Other Christians, however, believed these things to be immoral and idolatrous.

Paul turns his attention to the problem. He does not deny the arguments that were raised, but he qualifies and distinguishes them. 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 that this fear has a base in reality, since idol worship for the sincere believer involves a real communion with evil spirits. Obviously, for

many Corinthians, idols had no hold on their belief; they faced no problem of conscience when eating meat sacrificed to idols, and they felt that the scrupulosity of others should not curtail the freedom they had in the Lord.

In chapter eight Paul recognizes the correctness of their reasoning, but points out how spiritually short-sighted they are. Paul acknowledges that eating and drinking of itself is an indifferent matter, but if it becomes an occasion of sin for another person in the Church, it is then not an indifferent matter, and it can become a callous disregard for the Body of the Lord. Christians ought to 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 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* became a synonym for Yahweh. For the Christian there is but One God, whose relationship is so intimate that 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 all 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 agape-love can be disastrous for all concerned.

Only when one loves, can one build a secure personal foundation. A knowledgeable person without love can become anything from a windbag 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, and the other truly remains 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 (except 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),

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 toward 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)*.

PAUL’S DEFENSE

In chapter nine, Paul goes immediately into a defense of himself. Paul not only defends himself against the accusations made against him, but he offers himself as a living example of being a free but responsible person. Apparently Paul was accused of being inconsistent 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. Once his position as an apostle had been affirmed, Paul argues from the point that as an apostle, he possessed the same rights and privileges as 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.

No doubt Paul’s objective behavior did seem to be inconsistent with the principles he taught, especially to those who judge only by surface appearances. Some lacked the charity and/or the intelligence to be able to look into the spirit of the man. There 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 the hope that he could bring some of them to salvation. His personal defense reaches its climax in verses 19-23. In summary he says, *“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.9:22-23)*.

SELF-DENIAL

Paul exhorts 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 to be found in their own front yard; he uses the example of the athletes in the Isthmian games to encourage their self-denial. Paul asked the Corinthians to reflect upon all the sacrifices demanded to win a perishable crown and fleeting glory. How much more eager should Christian athletes be to practice self-denial, in order to win the crown that never perishes and the glory that never fades. Our Lord Himself implied that the children of this world are more prudent than the children of light in the achievement of their worldly ambitions (see Luke 16:8b).

Paul teaches Christians the necessity of mastering their passions and desires, which is achieved 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 mortification of the appetite. 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 anything else. This is true for both physical and spiritual athletes. This would be the practical application of what Paul later wrote 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).

SPIRITUAL COMPLACENCY

Paul had realistically assessed the Corinthians to be infants in the spirit--to be *nepeoi*. 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. Their own spiritual complacency blocked his efforts. Their 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 by contrasting the spiritual gifts received by Israel with those received by the members of the Church--the New Israel. He sees them to be comparable. Israel's following Moses through the Red Sea and passing from the slavery of Egypt to freedom in the desert is seen as a baptism. The Israelites 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." 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, providing them with water. 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.

What appeared in the Old Testament serves Christians as a warning against their own spiritual complacency. For all their spiritual gifts, the Corinthians can likewise come to a bad end. With an eye upon their spiritual complacency Paul warns them, "*For all these reasons, let anyone who thinks he is standing upright watch out lest he fall!*" (1Cor.10:12).

Idolatry sums up the temptations the Christian community faces within this world: to worship the things of this world rather than the one true God. Regardless of the personal problems faced by individual Christians, there is never an excuse to turn from the lordship of Christ--from the worship of the one true God. All Christians have the power to remain faithful to their commitment. Paul writes, "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).

HOLY COMMUNION

The Holy Eucharist becomes for Paul the greatest deterrent to idolatry. There was an ancient belief, which Paul confirms, that worshippers actually communicated with the gods by participation in a banquet of sacrificial food. In the case of pagan worship, Paul confirms it to be a real communion service, not with some mythical god or goddess, but a real communion with evil spirits. Paul compares this to the Eucharist, and the comparison leaves no doubt in the mind of the reader the primitive belief of the early Church concerning the Real Presence, and the consequence of receiving that Presence at "*the table of the Lord.*"

I am telling you, whom I love, to shun the worship of idols, and I address you as one addresses sensible people. 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? 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? (1Cor.10:14-16,20-22).

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 you mean to provoke the Lord to jealous anger?*” 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,

No man should seek his own interest but rather that of his neighbor... The fact is that whether you eat or drink, or 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.10:24,31-33).

THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

“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.” 1Corinthians 10-13

FIRST DAY: Read Summary through Secularism in Corinth.

1. How would you describe “secularism” in the Christian community?
2. What is the evil of secularism in the Christian life?
3. What is the true evil underlying idolatry?
4. Give some examples of idolatry in our world today.

SECOND DAY: Read 1Corinthians 8:1-13.

1. What is Paul’s teaching about knowledge and love?
2. What does this teach you about your own behavior?
3. What is the danger of divorcing theology from love?
4. What do you learn from 1Corinthians 8:11-13?

THIRD DAY: Read Summary: Paul’s Defense; 1Corinthians 9:1-18; 2Corinthians 11:7-15.

1. What do you learn from 1Corinthians 9:5?
2. What is Paul’s line of defense for himself?
3. Why do you think he refused to receive any recompense for his labors from the Corinthians?
4. What motivated Paul’s behavior?

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary: Self-denial; 1Corinthians 9:19-27.

- 1. In what way would Paul's inconsistency have been manifested?**
- 2. In what way is Paul truly consistent?**
- 3. Why is self-denial important?**
- 4. What does this say to you?**

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: Spiritual Complacency; 1Corinthians 10:1-13.

- 1. What do you see to be the evil of spiritual complacency?**
- 2. What do you see to be idols in our world today?**
- 3. What has become an idol in your own life?**
- 4. What does 1Corinthians 10:13 say to you?**

SIXTH DAY: Read Summary: Holy Communion; 1Corinthians 10:14-33.

- 1. What do you see to be the early Church's teaching on the Eucharist from this reading?**
- 2. What do you learn about Holy Communion?**
- 3. What does 1Corinthians 10:24 say to you?**
- 4. What do you learn from 1Corinthians 10:31-33?**

CHAPTER 6

THE BODY OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

The Christian Community in Corinth was composed of people from diversified cultures. It would not be surprising that disunity occurred and reflected itself in the worship of the Community. One important cultural difference would have been the Western and Eastern attitude towards women. In the Greco-Roman world, women possessed emancipation perhaps even superior to women of today. The Semitic attitude of the East, however, was entirely different, and most oppressive. Women were considered more as property than as persons.

The Jewish attitude toward women completely echoed the Semitic mentality. In Jerusalem, custom--with the force of law--forbade a woman to appear in public without being veiled. She attended religious services behind a latticed barrier. A woman was forbidden to teach, and she received no formal education, not even in the Torah. She could not even pronounce a blessing over the meal. Paul and all the apostles were reared and educated in this cultural environment.

WOMEN AND WORSHIP

Certain Christian women in Corinth, in keeping with the social trend, had cast aside their veils, and attended worship without being veiled. To the Jewish Christians this behavior would be considered bold and immodest. An appeal was made to Paul, and he sided with the conservatives. Paul appeals to the Scriptures. He interprets from Genesis that woman is under the authority of man. He maintains that the Scriptures establish a hierarchy of order: God, Christ, man, and woman. Paul maintains that being veiled was a sign of a woman's submission to man. In the end he appeals to his authority 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).*

Paul later insists that women must be silent during religious worship. This was contrary to the practice in Corinth, as women both publicly offered prayers and prophesied in the Church. Paul writes: "*According to the rule observed in all the assemblies of believers, women should keep silent in such gatherings. They may not speak*" (1Cor.14:33-34). This would appear to have been an expedient directive to establish peaceful worship in a contemporary situation. In the light of the context given, it does not appear to be a directive intended to be enforced "*per omnia saecula saeculorum.*"

THE EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

Up to this point, Paul's letter to the Corinthians intimated that the Christian Community possessed a supernatural means of salvation. It implied that a sacrificial meal existed, 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, which creates a bond of union, not only with Christ, but between members of the Church. We discover that this Christian rite is called the "Lord's Supper."

This revelation comes as result of certain abuses in the Corinthian Community, affecting the celebration of the ritual known as the "Lord's Supper." It was customary for the Jews to end the Sabbath with a "Sabbath banquet" after sundown. Jewish Christians would meet at this time to share a meal in common, known as the "agape" or the love feast. Following the meal, the Community celebrated the "Lord's Supper," commonly referred to as the "breaking of the bread." As was customary, the Christian Community in Corinth would hold its meetings on the Sabbath after sundown. As the Christian Jews and the wealthy were not working, they arrived earlier, whereas the poor members of the community who had to work arrived later. The earlier arrivals refused to wait, and by the time the poor arrived, all had been eaten and too much wine had been drunk.

This behavior fractured the Body of Christ--the Community. It was sinful. Paul 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 embarrass those who have nothing? What can I say to you?*" (1Cor.11:21-22).

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 has accomplished and perpetuates through the celebration of the Lord's Supper, they are destroying by their selfish behavior. They are not only destroying the Community, they are destroying their very own lives. Paul confesses that the revelation he shares 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." Paul no doubt emphasizes these words, for he believes the Corinthians' selfish conduct is a betrayal of Christ.

There are four accounts of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. All teach that this Christian rite was inaugurated by Jesus the night before His death; it is a ritual memorial of His death. These words and actions of Jesus have been carefully preserved in the Christian Community. All four accounts begin with thanksgiving and breaking of the bread. Both 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, for 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.*"

The Eucharist is to be reenacted within the Christian Community because Jesus commanded it to be so. When Paul writes, "*Every time, then, you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes!*" (1Cor.11:26), he teaches that this rite proclaims the redemption. How is this done? It is done in a most realistic fashion; those who participate in this ritual actually experience this 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.

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 the 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* is translated

“without recognizing.” This word signifies “to make a distinction or to differentiate, to judge correctly or to recognize.” Obviously, to eat and drink without discerning the body means 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. Paul maintains that this communion seriously affects the physical and spiritual life of the communicant. What he 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)*. Paul attributes dramatic effects to the reception of Holy Communion. It affects even the very physical life. This could hardly be stated about a rite of only a symbolic nature.

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 given to that why, and many are lies. 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 the same 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 into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ? The answer one gives to that question is a measure of one’s belief in the Word!

THE SOUL OF THE CHURCH

The Christian Community, through the rite of the Eucharist, truly becomes the Body of Christ on earth. It has received, not the dead Christ, but the Risen Christ. It now 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 focuses the attention of his readers upon 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 than the operation of the Holy Spirit; it implies that the gifts are expressions of the Holy Spirit.

Paul warns the Community about enthusiasm--those strong emotional feelings experienced in religious celebrations. He makes the point that these same strong emotional feelings once led them to worship idols. Human impulses must be distinguished from the operation of the Holy Spirit. 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. Therefore one never damns Jesus under the Holy Spirit, and no one ever acknowledges Jesus as Lord unless through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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. Gifts, ministries, and works are manifestations of the Holy Spirit through particular individuals of the Church. The Holy Spirit apportions these gifts as He wills. He gives them for building-up the Body of Christ: *“To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1Cor.12:7).*

Paul enumerates many gifts of the Spirit (see 1Cor.12:8-10). They 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 the bridegroom. Paul strongly emphasizes that it is all 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” (1Cor.12:12).* 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. The personal identity of each is discovered and becomes true. Personalities are enhanced and brought to perfection within the Body of Christ. This is possible only if the person will die to self and permit the Holy Spirit, the Divine Artist, the freedom a sculptor must have over his clay. Within the hands of the Holy Spirit, one is sculpted by Love. A person can only become a creation of Love.

God fashions the Body of Christ. In this Body there are no accidents. Each member has been placed where God has willed them to be: *“...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” (1Cor.12:18-20).* It is human beings, not the Lord, who want “sameness” in this world. God had no need to duplicate His creations. It is godly to 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 is, "I did it my way!" This is why 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.1:48,49). It is the humble who accept that "*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?*" (1Cor.12:28-30). Paul clearly emphasizes that no individual can possess it all. Only as members of the Body can one possess it all. In Christ it is truly all for one and one for all. "*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).

So that the Body may be enriched by all, and all share in this richness, Paul ardently sought "*that there be no dissension in the body, but that all 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). That this dream may become a reality, he tells Christians to "*Set your hearts on the greater gifts*" (1Cor.12:31). He teaches them that the greatest of these is Love.

THE BODY OF CHRIST
SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)

“YOU, THEN, ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST. EVERY ONE OF YOU IS A MEMBER OF IT.” 1Corinthians 12:27

FIRST DAY: Read Summary through Women and Worship; 1Corinthians 11:1-16.

- 1. What do you see to be the clash of cultures in the Corinthian Church?**
- 2. What effect could this have on Christian Worship?**
- 3. What do you think about Paul’s restrictive attitude toward women in worship?**
- 4. What do you see as some cultural problems today in Christian Worship?**

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: The Eucharistic Celebration; 1Corinthians 11:17-25.

- 1. From this Scripture reading what do you learn about the Christian customs of the time?**
- 2. How was the Body of Christ being fractured in these celebrations?**
- 3. What are some of the things we have discovered about Christian Worship up to this point in Corinthians?**
- 4. Why is the conduct of Christians at the agape especially wrong in light of the Lord’s Supper?**

THIRD DAY: Reread 1Corinthians 11:23-25; Luke 22:14-20; Mark 14:22-24; Matthew 26:26-28.

1. What points do these readings have in common?
2. What are the differences to be found?
3. What do these readings teach you about the early Church?
4. What two symbols from these readings come to signify this Christian rite?

FOURTH DAY: Read 1Corinthians 11:26-34.

1. What is meant by the Real Presence in the Eucharist?
2. How does the Eucharist proclaim the redemption?
3. What effect does Paul attribute to the reception of Communion?
4. What does this tell you about his belief about the Eucharist?

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: The Soul of the Church; 1Corinthians 12:1-22.

1. What do you learn from Paul's warning about emotional feelings in worship?
2. What would you describe as the soul of the Church?
3. What does 1Corinthians 12:7 teach you?
4. What do you learn from 1Corinthians 12:11?

SIXTH DAY: Read 1Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 4:1-16.

1. What do you understand the Body of Christ to be?
2. What do you learn from the reading in Ephesians?
3. What do you learn from 1Corinthians 12:18-20?
4. What does membership in the Body of Christ mean to you?

CHAPTER 7

REDEMPTION OF THE HEART

INTRODUCTION

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. All gifts are bestowed for the purpose of enriching and up-building the Body of Christ on earth. They are not gifts to individuals but gifts to the Community through individuals.

The greatest gift 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, and through such an intimate communion of spirits the spirits become one.

When Christians fail in a personal union with the Holy Spirit, their spirits become disruptive and disturbing powers within the Body of Christ. The spiritual talents and ministries given to such spirits become avenues of selfish expressions fracturing the Body of Christ. The gifts of the Holy Spirit must be kept 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! They are not the same. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Agape. All human lives united with the Holy Spirit abide in agape-love.

AGAPE

We have seen that the Greeks had four words by which to express love: *eros*, *philia*, *storge* and *agape*. The New Testament never uses *eros* to describe love; it will use *philia* to express brotherly love; it constantly uses *agape* to express divine love. *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-denial as the road to self-life; it speaks of destruction of the self as the means to self-preservation. As a way of life, it leaves the human reason perplexed and uncooperative. Agape remains an enigma--a riddle. It is the Christian equivalent of the Buddhist *koan* (which leads the Zen Buddhist meditator to give up reliance on reason and leap into enlightened intuition).

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 neither conditioned nor curtailed by what other people do in word and deed, nor who they may be. 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 Agape, even as Christ loved you. He gave himself for us as an offering to God, a gift of pleasing fragrance*" (Eph.5:2).

As golden threads, the theme of agape runs through the letters of Paul. At this point in Corinthians, Paul presents his finest portrait of love--called by some a "hymn to love." Paul extols love. Other gifts are placed alongside it, and they pale by comparison. Nothing has any value unless infused with love. Paul writes, "*Now I will show you the way which surpasses all the others*" (1Cor.13:1). What Paul says in verses one through three is plain enough. When all the analyses 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! Love is the criterion by which all things Christian must be weighed and measured. On the scale of divine value, agape is the weight by which all else will be measured. When the Spirit of Agape is lacking, regardless of what else may be there, Christians are "the living dead" who can accomplish nothing good.

AGAPE INCARNATED

Paul does not leave agape-love in the realm of Platonic idealism. It expresses the very Spirit of God, and that very 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-love. Paul paints agape as personal attitudes rather than actions. It 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). This portrait hangs forever in the Christian gallery of time as the picture of Christian

Maturity, before which all Christians must sit and contemplate and repent. It calls all to measure the authenticity of their own Christian personalities in the light of the portrait of the Authentic Person.

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 (Cor.13:4-8).

Let us view some of these concepts a bit closer. "*Love is patient.*" Love has a great capacity for endurance of evil. It stands up under all the strain of human relationships. The word expresses patience more with people than with circumstances. In patience, love restrains itself. "*Love is kind.*" The Scriptures suggest kindness to be a divine quality. It responds positively to the unlovingness of others, and seeks to contribute positively to their happiness. "*Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, it is not snobbish.*" It is not envious and upset over the success and prosperity of another because it has a genuine concern for the well-being and happiness of others. It rejoices in their successes. Love, on the other hand, does not become "puffed-up" and brag about its powers and accomplishments. Love avoids pride in all its forms. It seeks more to serve than to be recognized. Self-importance and self-absorption do not command the consciousness of the loving person, therefore they are not snobbish towards others. "*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 and dishonorable. The rude violate good manners. They ignore the proper order and the feelings of others. They push forward to achieve their own desired ends. They are indifferent to the sensitivities and needs of others. On the other hand, love does not seek self-advantage in its relationships with others. It refrains from being self-assertive if others are injured. Self-seeking implies selfishness and 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 towards those who impede our self-willing. Anger can be hot or cold. Hot anger expresses itself overtly in some destructive way. Cold anger turns inward and takes the form of depression. Many depressed people are angry. They turn their destructive energy inward,

and usually succeed in destroying their health to some degree. The unloving brood over past injuries, and mentally plot revenge in their hearts. They bury the hatchet and mark the spot. Love does not live in the past, either with good or 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." *"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. Love finds no consolation in evil of any kind. It finds joy in truth and with the truth. Love does not rejoice where truth is denied. Paul insists on right doctrine because unsound doctrine leads to sinful behavior. Paul sees an essential relationship between the failure to think rightly and to live rightly. Love rejoices when it sees truth victorious. It implies that love rejoices in the truth of the gospel.

Paul now 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 can suffer many hardships; it has endurance and does not easily give way. Love has an openness to belief and trust. It is always ready to allow for circumstances and to believe the best. Love is not deceived by pretense and hypocrisy; it is always ready to give the benefit of a doubt. Love has hope for the future. It refuses to take failure as final. It maintains the faith that God will bring good out of evil--that good will overcome evil. It has confidence in the ultimate triumph of God's grace. Love expresses itself in an active, positive manner. It has the endurance of a soldier in battle that fights on bravely despite the opposition. Love is not overwhelmed by life's difficulties. The permanence of love is stressed. *"Love never fails."* The verb "to fail" implies to fall, collapse, or suffer ruin. Love never suffers such a fate. *"Many waters cannot quench love."* The supreme example of the never failing quality of agape-love is Jesus' death on the cross.

The last word in chapter thirteen is, fittingly, *"agape."* It occupies the supreme place. The Corinthians held the spectacular gifts, such as speaking in tongues, in high regard, but Paul maintains that the really important things are faith, hope and agape, *"and the greatest of these is love" (1Cor.13:13).*

Once again we are confronted with law. As with the law of conscience and the law of the Old Testament, so it is with the law of the New Testament--law confirms our sinfulness. We have but to look into the law of liberty--the law of

Agape--and the human spirit falls once again into the self-awareness of its sinfulness, and its need for salvation. The picture of the Authentic Person is a constant source of humiliation, constantly producing, 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.

GLOSSOLALIA

From the content of chapters twelve through fourteen, we are able to deduce that there was a conflict between Paul's ideas about charismatic gifts and the ideas of the Corinthians. They prized the more spectacular gifts and ignored the more useful ones. Many scholars feel that the Corinthians maintained that glossolalia was the main evidence for the possession of the Spirit. If a man spoke in tongues, he was known to be spiritual. Only those possessing glossolalia were recognized to be spiritual within the Community. "Tongues" appears to have been a special form of speech that was not understood by the person speaking the tongue. A special gift of interpretation was required for understanding the inspired utterance.

Some authors maintain the three chapters form one long attack upon this teaching about tongues. In chapter twelve, Paul maintains that glossolalia is the least of all the gifts. He teaches in chapter thirteen that love is the greatest of all the gifts. He teaches in chapter fourteen that where love is present the public practice of speaking in tongues is suppressed.

Paul ended chapter twelve with, "*Set your hearts on the greater gifts,*" and he begins chapter fourteen with, "*Seek eagerly after love. Set your hearts on spiritual gifts--above all, the gift of prophecy.*" He goes on to demonstrate the relative value of prophecy and tongues. Gifts should be judged by their quality, not their quantity: "*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.14:18-19). 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...*" (14:5), and "*Thank God, I speak in tongues more than any of you*" (14:8), Paul appears to "damn" speaking in tongues with faint praise. He goes on to give a long succession of arguments against the practice. He appealed to the concern the congregation must have to edify the Church (14:2-5), and to impress visitors (14:16-17). He teaches that tongues spoken in the Church

were a negative sign to unbelievers, and increased their disbelief. It would not convert them to the Church, rather, it would leave the impression that the members were mad, which would imply demon possessed.

In summary we may say that glossolalia is good for praise and private prayer. It should not occupy the place of prophecy or preaching in the Church. It is not a means for making proclamations in the Church. Unless tongues are interpreted, they do not build up the community. The guiding rule for what should be spoken in the Church is that which is intelligible--that which can be understood. "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" (1Cor.14:16-17)."

ORDER IN WORSHIP

Paul seeks order in Christian Worship. He establishes rules and regulations, and insists upon obedience to them. He does this with the conscious awareness of having God's authority in the Community. Members of the Community who consider themselves to be prophets and spiritual persons, but ignore these commandments, are not operating under the Spirit of God. He writes: "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" (1Cor.14:37-38).

Paul concludes with the appeal, "*make sure that everything is done properly and in order*" (1Cor.14:40). He encourages prophecy, and he does not suppress tongues. He strives to reach a harmonious balance between freedom and order in the Christian service. Worship is not a matter to be undertaken carelessly. It has a need for formality. Such patterns of worship help people to participate in a meaningful manner. However, the Spirit ought not to be extinguished in Christian worship; it is not wrong to allow informal expressions within the liturgy if they do not descend into egocentric displays or expressed with emotional excess. According to the mind of Paul, all things should be done in order, in good taste, and for the edification of the Church. However, Christian Worship ought not to lack vitality. One author has 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 a 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 causes schism.

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

REDEMPTION OF THE HEART

**SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)**

“FOLLOW THE WAY OF LOVE, EVEN AS CHRIST LOVED YOU. HE GAVE HIMSELF FOR US AS AN OFFERING TO GOD, A GIFT OF PLEASING FRAGRANCE.” (Ephesians 5:2)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary through Agape.

- 1. How is the Holy Spirit manifested in the Christian Community?**
- 2. How would you distinguish between the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the life of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian?**
- 3. What difference do you see between agape and love on the human level?**
- 4. What does Ephesians 5:2 mean to you?**

SECOND DAY: Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-8.

- 1. What lesson does Paul teach in verses 1 through 3?**
- 2. What does this teach you about your own life?**
- 3. What quality of agape-love do you find strongest in your life?**
- 4. Which quality is most absent in your relationships with others?**

THIRD DAY: Read Summary: Agape Incarnated; 1 Corinthians 13:8-13.

- 1. Why can this description of love be called a portrait of Jesus?**
- 2. What does it mean to you to be a “true authentic person”?**
- 3. What element of agape-love do you most admire and why?**

4. What is implied by “Love never fails”?

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary: Glossolalia; 1 Corinthians 14:1-12.

1. What do you understand by the gift of tongues?
2. What appears to be the Corinthians’ attitude about tongues?
3. Why does Paul appear to esteem prophecy over tongues?
4. What do you learn from 1 Corinthians 14:12?

FIFTH DAY: Read 1 Corinthians 14:13-25.

1. What appears to be Paul’s problem with the speaking of tongues in Church?
2. What does 1 Corinthians 14:19 teach you?
3. What effect does tongues have upon outsiders?
4. How do you feel about the use of tongues?

SIXTH DAY: Read Summary: Order in Worship; 1 Corinthians 14:26-40.

1. What does this reading teach you about conduct in Church?
2. What do you learn from 1 Corinthians 14:37-38?
3. What do you think about Paul’s silencing of women in the Church?
4. What would you like to see changed in Christian Worship?

CHAPTER 8

THE FULLNESS OF THE REDEMPTION

INTRODUCTION

The ordinary means given to Christians by which they are to possess spiritual knowledge 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 consciousness of all peoples--death, and life after death. All human beings are confronted with the inescapable fact of physical death, a fact empirically verified. Does consciousness survive physical death? This question constantly haunts the human heart, and can cause emotional responses alternating between hope and despair.

Divine revelation deals 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. The Book of Wisdom states: *"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" (1:13-14). "For God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him" (2:23).* If death does not come from God, how did it come to be? The Book of Wisdom answers: *"But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it" (2:24).*

Jesus of Nazareth confirmed that Satan *"brought death to man from the beginning" (Jn.8:44).* Paul teaches that it is sin that gives Satan power over the human life: *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world and with sin death, death thus coming to all men inasmuch as all sinned" (Rm.5:12). "The wages of sin is death" (Rm.6:23).* It is in Genesis, after the sin of Adam, that we read: *"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 Book of 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).*

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). Jesus confirmed and prophesied that He would be killed and He would rise from the dead on the third day after His death (see Lk.18:33).

ANASTASIS NEKRON

In chapter 15 of Corinthians, Paul presents the most developed doctrine we have on the *anastasis nekron*--the resurrection of the dead--in the Sacred Scriptures. Here we have a great example of living tradition entering into the written Scriptures. Since what Paul writes would have been before the written gospels, they represent some of our earliest written records concerning the resurrection of Jesus--within 25 years of the historical event. Paul uses two technical terms, *paradidomi* (tradition) and *paralambans* (receive), that express the transmitting of traditional doctrine. Paul's words also express the importance of a correct doctrine of belief. Paul ties right beliefs with salvation itself: "*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 presented it to you. Otherwise you have believed in vain. I handed on to you first of all what I myself received...*" (1Cor.15:1-3a).

The doctrine Paul teaches 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 here only about the resurrection of the Just at the Second Coming of Jesus. Paul first deals with the fact of the resurrection of the dead between verses 3 and 34; he then deals with the nature of the resurrection between verses 35 and 58. He begins by establishing the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

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 the resurrection is firmly verified. No Christian doctrine is so validated and none more reasonably believed. But the witness par excellence is Paul himself. He had not been among the disciples of Jesus. He had been a persecutor and an arch-enemy of the Christian Church. Only his encounter with the Risen Jesus of Nazareth can account for the dramatic conversion of his life, and for the subsequent ardent and zealous defender of Jesus Christ that he came to be.

It was the post-Easter faith, the faith in the Resurrected Jesus, that altered the tide of human history. The Easter-faith is an historical event not to be denied. It testifies to the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Paul proclaimed 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.15:1).

FOUNDATION OF FAITH

Even though some accepted the resurrection of Jesus, some Christians denied the resurrection of the Just. Paul sees this as a subtle denial of Christ's resurrection from the dead. If this is denied, the entire Christian structure of faith falls. *Anastasis nekron* is the foundation of Christian Faith and the rock upon which Christian Hope rests.

Paul logically demonstrates what flows from the denial of the resurrection: the preaching of the gospel is made void. It cuts the heart out of the gospel, rendering it empty of significance. It renders the apostles treacherous men who fabricated the most evil of lies--lying about God. Christian Faith is powerless to effect the forgiveness of sins and produce salvation. If Christ has not been raised, He has not been validated, but condemned by God. Therefore, all those who have died putting their hope and trust in Him have perished. Paul sums it up by saying that if there is no resurrection from the dead, Christianity is not worth the price. *No vale la penal.*

However, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a historical fact. It is the keystone of the Christian Faith. For this reason the celebration of Easter is the greatest liturgical celebration within the Christian Church.

ORDER AND DESIGN IN THE DIVINE PLAN

The resurrection of the Just flows from the power of Christ's own resurrection, and from the Christian Faith that unites the believer with Jesus Christ. Paul uses military terms to express the idea that all will come to live in a proper God-given order. As a victorious military commander, Jesus of Nazareth leads the procession. Division after division of His glorious companions will follow Him. All will rise from the dead, but in sequence. The resurrection of Jesus is the promise of the harvest to come. The Unjust will rise, but only at the time of the Final Judgment.

Between the Coming of Jesus and the Final End, there will be an interval. Christ's reign on earth will begin with the resurrection of the Just. It will not cease to be, rather, it will come to perfection when the enemies of God are subdued and made submissive to Christ. Then death shall cease, for its cause will have been crushed.

Paul reveals the triumph of humanity in and through the Sacred Humanity of Jesus. The order established by God at the beginning of creation has been re-established through the absolute obedient love of Jesus Christ, God's Son Incarnated. Creation has been restored, and, led by the Word made Flesh, its crowning moment will be when it gives filial submission to God the Father. In this act of submission, the Divinity of Jesus is not in question. It is in His humanity that the submission occurs. Truly it becomes a total union of wills. It becomes a union in which the Son loves the Father and the Father loves the Son. As Paul so beautifully expresses it: "*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).

FAITH AND MORALS

The Corinthians' association with pagans has taken its spiritual toll. The philosophies of the pagans have corrupted the faith of some. Paul points out that if they have lost their faith in the resurrection, they might as well live as Epicureans: "*If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!'*" (1Cor.15:32b).

Beliefs affect behavior. Associations affect beliefs. "*Bad company corrupts good morals*" (1Cor.15:33b). The faith of the Corinthians has been damaged by their association with the pagans. They have been led into sinful behavior. They are really "missing the mark." Paul warns them: "*Return to reason, as you ought, and stop sinning. Some of you are quite ignorant of God; I say it to your shame*" (1Cor.15:33c-34). Here Paul expresses the same sentiments Jesus expressed 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. If we desire to stand before God with a clear conscience, we must know and live according to right doctrine.

THE RESURRECTED BODY

For many people, the idea of the resurrection of the body was a grotesque concept. It conjured mental images of an eternal Halloween. Even the Jews who defended the doctrine taught that the body would return in the same condition as it went into the grave. Such a teaching left most people anything but convinced the resurrection would be a blessed event. So the discussions went on: "*How will the body come forth from the grave?*" "*What manner of body will it be?*" (1Cor.15:35b). Paul considered all such questions and discussions stupid. It is looking at a supernatural event from a natural point of view. From such a point of view, all the answers will be wrong, and the discussion futile. Paul tries to give some direction to thought and offer some answers to the problems.

The resurrection of the body will be a divine operation. We already have the pattern of that operation in Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus Christ, the source of spirit-life, was essentially different from Adam, the source of psychic-life, so will the resurrected person be different from the person buried.

Paul uses the analogy of a seed and compares it to a dead body. As the seed comes forth completely transformed, so will the human body. Just as in nature we find many different types of bodies and distinctions between them, each adapted to its own unique mode of being, so the bodies of the resurrected will be adapted to their new spiritual state of being. The best Paul could come up with to describe the essential change that will occur is to say that what is buried is *psychikon* and what comes forth is *pneumatikon*. In a word he tells us: "Don't worry. No one will be disappointed. Everyone will be glorious. Star will differ from star, but all will star!"

THE CASE OF THE LIVING

Another question arose out of this discussion: "*What about those who will be alive at the Second Coming of Jesus? Will they die?*" Paul believes that they will not die. He holds that he has received a revelation about this matter and he will share this "mystery" with them. They will not die but they must be changed, because "*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God: no more can corruption inherit incorruption*" (1Cor.15:50). Paul maintains that those still living will be instantaneously "pneumatized." A metamorphosis will suddenly occur in which the perishable will become imperishable, and the mortal will be clothed with immortality. Just as the spirituality of a human

being differs from the nature of his being, so the pneumatized body will differ from the former body of flesh.

DEATH WILL END

Paul teaches that a day will come when sin and death will cease to be. Until that day tears will fall, hurts will be sustained, loved ones will leave us, loneliness will find us, fears will seize us, trials and temptations will assail us. However, if we are in Jesus, we must not fear. He has been victorious and we will surely share in that victory. Even today hope can enable us to endure all in peaceful patience as we eagerly await the day we will be able to sing: *“Death is swallowed up in victory. ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ ...thanks be to God who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Cor.15:56-57).*

THE INTERIM

In the interim Paul knows work remains to be done, a work that will not be accomplished by Christians standing and gazing heavenward. As the angels said to the disciples on the day of Ascension, *“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).*

In the interim, the Church has been commissioned to go forth and evangelize the world in order to prepare men for the Second Coming of Jesus. Many teachings of Jesus confirm that He expects to find His disciples engaged in their ministries when He returns. He wants the Second Coming to catch them with “their boots on.” What would you like to be doing when Jesus comes again? Then let it be now, and let it be constant, and it may become, not a dream, but a reality.

IN CONCLUSION

Paul had carried the minds of his readers to the sublime heights. Now he brings them back to earth, and realistically incarnates his message: *“About the collection for the saints...” (1Cor.16:1).* He gives instructions for taking up a collection for the poor saints in Israel.

Paul could close his letter with no advice more practical 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). And what better expresses the ardor of his own spirit than his closing words: “It is I, Paul, who sends you this greeting in my own hand. If anyone does not love the Lord, let a curse be upon him. O Lord, come! (Maranatha!) The favor of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus.” (1Cor.16:21-24). These very words could be spoken today in Heaven where Paul still awaits the Parousia of Jesus Christ!

COMPLETION OF PAUL’S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

THE FULLNESS OF THE REDEMPTION

**SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)**

“BE STEADFAST AND PERSERVING ... FULLY ENGAGED IN THE WORK OF THE LORD. YOU KNOW THAT YOUR TOIL IS NOT IN VAIN WHEN IT IS DONE IN THE LORD.” (1 Cor. 15:58)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary through Anastasis Nekron; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Matthew 22:23-33.

- 1. What do the Scriptures teach about the source and cause of death?**
- 2. What do you learn in Matthew 22:23-33 about life after death?**
- 3. Why do we maintain that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is one of the most verified of Christian doctrines?**
- 4. How should these teachings affect your own life?**

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: Foundation of Faith; 1 Corinthians 15:12-19.

- 1. Why is the fact of Jesus rising from the dead so essential to Christian Faith?**
- 2. What are the consequences if one denies the resurrection?**
- 3. Why would Christian Faith be in vain if there were no resurrection?**
- 4. Why does the fact of the resurrection make the Christian life valuable?**

THIRD DAY: Read Summary through Faith and Morals; 1 Corinthians 15:20-34.

- 1. What does Paul imply by the analogy of first fruits?**
- 2. What does Paul teach about the order and design of God’s Plan?**

3. How will the work of Jesus be completed?

4. What does “Bad company corrupts good morals” mean to you?

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary: The Resurrected Body; 1 Corinthians 15:35-49.

1. What do you learn about the resurrected body from the analogy of the seed?

2. What does the teaching about different bodies tell us about the resurrected body?

3. What is the pattern for the resurrected body?

4. What does it mean to you to have a “pneumatized” body?

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary through Death Will End; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

1. What do you learn from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 about the Second Coming?

2. Why must the living be changed at the Second Coming?

3. Why do you think death will be the last enemy destroyed?

4. What does 1 Corinthians 15:58 teach you?

SIXTH DAY: Read Summary through Conclusion; 1 Corinthians 16:1-24.

1. What should Christians be doing between the First and Second Coming?

2. What would you like to be doing when Jesus comes again?

3. What lesson do you learn from chapter 16?

4. What would you say is the most important thing you have learned in the study of First Corinthians?

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 Corinthian Church. The letters are distinguished by referring to them as First and Second Corinthians. However, Paul wrote many letters to the Corinthians. A written correspondence transpired for some time. Many scholars believe Second Corinthians is 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 possess today.

In Second Corinthians we certainly discover a wide range of emotional responses and attitudinal changes. 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 have opted for the hypothesis that it is a combination of letters. 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," written prior to the first nine chapters. We will study this last section first.

THE ROOT PROBLEM

Paul dealt with the symptoms of the problem in First Corinthians. 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" had arrived on the scene and, like termites, they were destroying the foundation laid by Paul.

They 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. 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 the apostolic strength of character and power of preaching; he preaches erroneous doctrines. They stated that Paul does not dare seek financial support directly, because he knows he has no right to support. However, he seeks to trick money out of people by having his friends take up a collection.

The crux of the problem lay in the spiritual immaturity of the Corinthians. Being themselves unspiritual, they were incapable of perceiving true Christian spirituality. When men equally as unspiritual as the Corinthians appeared on the scene, they quickly seduced them with cunning speech and worldly ways.

Paul and Christian teaching are under attack, and the very people who should be defending both remain silent in the face of misconceptions, half-truths and whole lies. Error needs only truth's silence to feed on and grow as a social cancer. However, as long as Paul lived, truth could not be silenced.

Paul tirelessly proclaimed the truth 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 their "prudent" reasons for silence.

PAUL'S DEFENSE

Paul begins his rebuttal by calling to mind the meekness and kindness of Christ: *"I, Paul, exhort you by the meekness and kindness of Christ, I who when present in your midst am lowly [you say], but when absent am bold toward you"* (2Cor.10:1). What they criticize in Paul, he maintains is his imitation of Christ Jesus. The meekness and kindness of Christ motivated Paul's behavior.

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 classical Christian example of meekness would be Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Olives: *"yet not my will but*

yours be done.” 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. The classical Christian example of *epieikeia* would be when Jesus refrained from passing judgment upon the woman taken into adultery.

Paul sees it as a Christ-like quality to always use the gentle methods to win submission of souls to Christian truth. More severe methods should be employed only as a last resort. Paul is most reluctant to use severity with others, not because he is weak, but because he is Christ-like. Paul will not hesitate to exercise the spiritual authority possessed by him if necessary to conserve the Church at Corinth. Paul’s enemies misinterpreted his meekness and kindness as human weakness. His enemies are mistaken to judge his future behavior by his present performance. He is an apostle of Jesus Christ; 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.

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. Let a man be judged by his works, not his words. These men reaped from the labors of others, not their own. However, Paul has only worked in the area assigned to him by God; he labored in fields where the gospel had never been preached. His boast is the birth of the Christian Community as a result of his labor; 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).*

PLAYING THE FOOL

Paul was 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. The enemy won the first encounter but the war had only begun.

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. 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. Now 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. It is Christ's battle, but Paul must fight it. He knows the enemy well. That 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. 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 (2Cor.11:1-3).

Here Paul subtly implies the real power behind the scene to be that of Satan.

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 "superstars" 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 next must 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 been to mistrust 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). Their new 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 those 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).

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, and it shouldn't be too difficult for them as they bear with true fools every day. This section is filled with irony, and 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)*. In Paul's mind the ultimate foolishness for a man of God is to boast about human distinctions. It is “absolute foolishness.” Next Paul comes to boasting about all the labors he has endured as an apostle and he confesses, *“Now I am really talking like a fool...” (2Cor.11:23)*. Paul teaches here what it truly means to be a minister of Jesus Christ. He uses himself as the example par excellence to what the life of true service to God may entail. He lists the physical sufferings endured (see 2Cor.11:23-27), and the psychological sufferings borne when involved with the spiritual lives of others (see 2Cor.11:28-29).

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. We see this 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” (2Cor.12:1)*. To speak of such things has always been most difficult for saints. Only out of obedience have most of them spoken of them. 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 herein can lie their defeat. If they are contending against “flesh and blood”, that is well enough, for their “flesh and blood” may be as strong or stronger than the next person.

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)*. It is therefore a war that must be fought with the spiritual powers of Christ: *“All power in heaven and earth have 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 that when engaged in “the star wars” I must have the power of Jesus Christ, or else face defeat.

The Love of agape has directed Paul’s relations with the Corinthians. He has done all in order to build them up. He worked for their well-being and not his own. Has it all been in vain? When he comes again, and come he will, will God embarrass him by having to witness the failure of his work? *“I may have to mourn over the many who sinned earlier and have not repented.”* Be that as it may. He will not give up. Love endures all things and is willing to try a lot of things. He will come, and if need be he will come carrying a big stick. As Jesus Christ cleaned 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)*.

LETTER OF TEARS

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

**“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.”
(2 Cor. 11:14-15)**

FIRST DAY: Read Summary through The Root Problem: 2 Corinthians 10:1-18.

- 1. What is the reason for studying the last chapters of 2 Corinthians first?**
- 2. What is the source of the problem in Corinth?**
- 3. What is the crux of the problem in Corinth?**
- 4. What do you understand by 2 Corinthians 10:3?**

SECOND DAY: Read Summary through Playing the Fool: 2 Corinthians 11:1-15.

- 1. How would you describe Paul’s previous mode of behavior towards the Corinthians?**
- 2. What does it mean to be “foolish” in the context of the Scriptures?**
- 3. Why does Paul assume this tactic towards the Corinthians?**
- 4. What do you learn from 2 Corinthians 11:13-15?**

THIRD DAY: Read Summary: Weapons of Folly; 2 Corinthians 11:16-29.

- 1. What are Paul’s weapons of folly?**
- 2. Why do you think he uses them?**
- 3. What does this teach you about Paul?**
- 4. How would you distinguish false apostles from true apostles?**

FOURTH DAY: Read 2 Corinthians 11:30-12:10.

- 1. What does 2 Corinthians 11:30 reveal about Paul?**
- 2. What does this reading teach you about speaking of spiritual experiences?**
- 3. What does 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 teach you?**
- 4. What part do your weaknesses play in your spiritual life?**

FIFTH DAY: Read 2 Corinthians 12:11-21.

- 1. What does this reading teach you about loving others?**
- 2. What expression here best expresses Paul's love?**
- 3. What do you understand by 2 Corinthians 12:15?**
- 4. What is being implied in 2 Corinthians 12:20?**

SIXTH DAY: Read 2 Corinthians 13:1-13.

- 1. In 2 Corinthians 13:1-3, what element of love is expressed by Paul?**
- 2. What have these readings revealed to you about Paul?**
- 3. What do you understand by 2 Corinthians 13:8?**
- 4. What does 2 Corinthians 13:10 imply?**

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 which reveals his dynamic personality. Unconsciously, these writings present us with an autobiographical description of the way Paul lived out his 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*" (2Cor.1:1). Since men question Paul's authority within the Christian Community, he seldom fails to state his credentials before expressing his teachings. He possesses an apostolic ministry and power to teach because God chose him as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Of himself he could say, "I am nothing;" "I willingly boast of my weakness;" "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."

Paul desired that people would think more of him than what they saw and heard. 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 this 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).

Paul's words and deeds mirrored the inner man. Those with whom he worked had the opportunity to experience the real man 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 Paul. However the mist is now lifting, and they are beginning to behold the treasure they possess in Paul.

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*, the same word used to describe the "brethren" of Jesus; the word implies blood kin. There are no blood ties between Paul and Timothy. Paul views Timothy as his son in God. Paul imparted his best to Timothy; 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 as his brother in Christ. This would give Timothy a status of equality with Paul.

DIVINE CONSOLATION

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 in Ephesus. It is in Second Corinthians that Paul gives us some idea of the extent and degree of physical sufferings he endured there. He came to the point of even despairing for his life. Few men have had Paul's dedication to God. Rare would be the Christian whose labors and sufferings surpassed those of Paul. When we reflect upon the life of Jesus of Nazareth and that of great Christian men like Paul, you cannot help but wonder why Christians think that if they are good everything in life must be nice for them.

It is a sign of maturity of faith to see God's love shining through all the trials and sufferings of life. Paul maintains that one must turn to God in one's sufferings for He is a God of consolation. God consoles His children in their sufferings. Paul describes one of the great effects that comes forth from divine consolation in times of suffering--we discover how to console others through the consolation we have received from God.

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 to suffer in this world. Just as God did not

abandon Jesus when He suffered in His personal humanity, neither will He abandon Jesus as He suffers in His Mystical Body, the Christian Community. Paul understood that these sufferings enabled him personally to enter more deeply into 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?

It is by this union in suffering and the experience of divine consolation that the Christian grows more like Christ and is able, in this life, to bring the consolation of God into the lives of others.

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. 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 explains and defends his action. He boldly proclaims that the very God who is constant, grants him the grace to be constant in his commitments. He maintains that his life is lived in truth and fidelity because his life is rooted in Jesus Christ. He attributes his stability in truth to the Holy Spirit: *"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).

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 the Christian has become the work of the Holy Spirit, and bears a divine trademark. From such scriptural teachings comes the Church's teaching 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 a down payment that serves as a guarantee 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, Paul viewed it imprudent to return under the present bad circumstances. He could only come as their spiritual superior, demanding obedience to his authority. The Corinthians, as members of the Christian Community, were subjected 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 Christ. Paul understood all of this, but he also knew the example given by Jesus and His personal teaching about authority. Paul beautifully expressed his understanding of Jesus' teaching, and at the same time expressed 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" (2Cor.1:24).*

Paul understood 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 soul, and as those principles become part of the person and gain power over the will, the person grows in Christian maturity.

You cannot command happiness or joy, but you can assist and lead one to it--if they are willing to risk their security. Many people anxiously settle for security in place of happiness. Unfortunately, it is a tenuous security when it 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 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.

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 did so with only one purpose in mind: to enhance the spiritual welfare of the people he loved. If he had caused them pain, it was not without a greater pain for himself (see 2Cor.2:1-4).

SPIRIT OF FORGIVENESS

Paul did not seek revenge or restitution. He desired only repentance. Once Paul wrote that love does not *"brood over injuries... There is no limit to love's forbearance ... its power to endure"* (1Cor.13:5c,7). We 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. Paul had demanded excommunication of a member from the Community for the common good. Paul now manifests his concern for the excommunicated member. He requests that he be lovingly received back into the Community (see 2Cor.2:5-11).

Love does not correct in order to crush, but to heal. When punishment has produced the medicinal effect, charity immediately enters to restore the repentant sinner to the family circle of love. This is for a two-fold purpose: it saves the sinner from despair and the community from a cold, callous disregard for the spiritual well-being of others.

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, and one wonders how Christian one may be in the light of the Incarnation and the Mystical Body of Christ. To love Christ at this moment implies loving the Christ who is, and that glorified Christ encompasses the entire Church.

Christians need to be loved by Christ, and to be loved by Christ through His Body, the Church. Paul certainly does not exempt himself from the need of being loved by the Christian Community. 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. In fair exchange, then (I speak as a father to his children), open wide your hearts! Make room for us in your hearts!"* (2Cor.6:11-12;7:2).

TIME OF ANXIETY

Paul maintains that he speaks with candor and utter frankness, and so he now shares a joyless moment in his own personal life. It was a moment caused by

the Corinthians' rejection of him, and he shares his reaction to that rejection. Paul takes us back to the time following his writing 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 the windows of his soul to us and shares the stresses of mind and heart that he endured. These stresses were so great, so disturbing to the tranquility of his entire being that he could not continue his ministry: *"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. When the Lord enters, His first word to the soul is "Peace." Peace 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 the narration continues, we discover that Paul finds neither Titus nor peace, but more trouble and disturbance in Macedonia: *"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 a field day at poor Paul's expense. When there is no inner peace there seldom can be external peace. There is almost never external peace 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 preached to his team, "Fatigue makes cowards of us all!"

Certainly Paul would be near the breaking point at this moment in his life. Yet the Lord keeps His promise: no more than we can bear. The Lord comes to the aid of His downhearted and distressed friend. Paul finds Titus and, as with the coming dawn the night passes, the Corinthians have come to true repentance.

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 Christ. He worked for the honor and glory of Jesus Christ and the spiritual good of the Corinthians. Herein rested his heart and his joy.

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. Paul expresses the difference between supernatural sorrow and natural sorrow by distinguishing between the effects of the two kinds of sorrow. *“Indeed, sorrow for God’s sake produces a repentance without regrets, leading to salvation, whereas worldly sorrow brings death” (2Cor. 7:10).* The soul never regrets what it did for love--what it did for its salvation. Paul demonstrates how true repentance restores life and vigor to one’s spiritual life: *“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!” (2Cor. 7:11).*

The following words sum up Paul’s motivation in 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).*

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!”*

PORTRAIT OF MATURITY
SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)

“DOMINEERING OVER YOUR FAITH IS NOT MY PURPOSE. I PREFER TO WORK WITH YOU TOWARD YOUR HAPPINESS.
(2Corinthians 1:24)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary through Divine Consolation; 2Corinthians 1:1-11.

- 1. What is one of the major contributions of 2Corinthians in the Church?**
- 2. How do we show our maturity of faith when accepting difficulties in our lives?**
- 3. What do we learn to do through God’s consolation to us?**
- 4. Why does Paul see his own sufferings as the sufferings of Christ?**

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: Paul’s Sincerity; 2Corinthians 1:12-24.

- 1. What do we learn from 2Corinthians 1:13 about Paul’s writings to the Corinthians?**
- 2. What does that tell us about the Eucharistic presentation in 1Corinthians 11:26-30?**
- 3. What does 2Corinthians 1:21-22 teach us about the Holy Spirit?**
- 4. What does 2Corinthians 1:24 teach you about dealing with others?**

THIRD DAY: Read Summary: Spirit of Forgiveness; 2Corinthians 2:1-11.

- 1. Why did Paul write the “letter of tears”?**
- 2. How is his love for them expressed in these verses?**

3. What does 2Corinthians 2:5 teach us about sin?

4. Why is it important to forgive and reconcile others to the Community?

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary: Need of Love; 2Corinthians 6:11-7:4.

1. Why is it important that we be loved, not only by God but by the Christian Community also?

2. What does it truly mean to love Christ as He is today?

3. What does this reading teach us about Paul?

4. What does this reading seem to indicate about the composition of this letter?

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: Time of Anxiety; 2Corinthians 2:12-13, 7:5-8.

1. Why was Paul unable to do the work of the Lord in Troas?

2. What does this tell you about emotional upset?

3. What does 2Corinthians 7:5 reveal to you about Paul?

4. What does this reading teach you about your own life?

SIXTH DAY: Read Summary: True Repentance; 2Corinthians 7:8-16.

1. What is the difference between God-given sorrow and natural sorrow?

2. Why do people often experience guilt in their lives?

3. How would you describe spiritual maturity?

4. What do you see as Paul's greatest characteristic?

CHAPTER 3

TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS

INTRODUCTION

Paul and the Corinthians are again one in the Spirit. At this point Paul shares with them his vision of the apostolic vocation, in which the apostles appear as captives of Christ. 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 as part of his triumphal train in his victorious march, so Paul sees his apostolic life. It is 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 this world *"like cinnamon, or fragrant balm, or precious myrrh, I give for perfume...like the odor of incense in the holy place"* (Sir.24:15). 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). It could be said that this description of Wisdom best reflected the concept of Jesus Christ held by the early Christian Community. This Divine Spirit of Wisdom incarnated itself in Jesus of Nazareth. The Christology of the New Testament reflects this belief. 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).

This exalted picture the Scriptures present of Jesus Christ expressed well the content of the Christian Faith in the first century, and accurately expressed 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 employed *"us to diffuse the fragrance of this*

knowledge everywhere.” To actually possess such knowledge made the possessor a sweet fragrance in this world. As Paul expressed it, “We are an aroma of Christ for God’s sake” (2Cor.2:15a).

All this implies 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. Paul revealed his own concept of the apostolic life when he asked, “*For such a mission as this, is anyone really qualified?*” (2Cor.2:16b). He was aware of many unqualified human beings boasting of their qualification for being apostles. Paul suggested that many speak in the name of Christ, but not from a pure motivation. In the exercise of his ministry, he tells us that he is conscious of the fact he must always answer to Jesus Christ for the exercise of this ministry. 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 doctrine.

NEW COVENANT MINISTRY

At this point Paul’s mind turns to reflect upon the difference between the New and Old Covenants. The New Testament presents the Lord’s Supper as a banquet celebrating the inauguration of the New Covenant--a covenant ratified by Christ’s death on Calvary, and manifested in the world through the sending of the Holy Spirit. 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. This ministry would be Spirit-filled. He is quite aware of the source of his qualifications. Paul attributes nothing to nature, but all to the power of God that operates 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.

The New Covenant resulted in the gift of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, is the principle of eternal life. It is the Covenant of the Spirit--the Covenant of eternal 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--of law, fear, sin, and corruption. To the degree a Christian finds himself in these bondages, the Christian fails to be “spirit-filled.”

Paul proceeds to demonstrate the superiority of the ministry of the New Covenant. If the ministry of the covenant that condemns had glory, greater by

far is the glory of the ministry that justifies. He emphasizes the temporality 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, just so the power and presence of God in the Old Covenant faded. Paul implies Moses covered his own face to hide the fact of this 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 that shines on the face of Christ. Such glory will never fade! Paul writes, "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... 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.3:13,18).

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. The 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. This thought may well be the key to understanding Pauline "mysticism." It appears to suggest 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 and enduring glory comes through faith in Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The Christian seeks conformity with Christ, with the Will of Christ, as expressed in the Scriptures, through the Holy Spirit in the Church, and through the Holy Spirit in personal prayer. It is a life that does not seek visions and ecstatic experiences. It is not a life that seeks out of body experiences.

Only by walking daily in Christian Faith does the Christian truly come into Christ—who is in God. "No one comes to the Father except through me!" As in the earthly life of Christ, the true glory of Jesus Christ was hidden by the veil of humanity. So, too, the external lives of Christians, and even their own conscious awareness, veil the true glory of their lives and the actual depth of their lives in God. As St. John of the Cross once said, "Only the lamp of faith guides my steps through this dark night. Only when Jesus comes in glory will

the glory of the Christian saints be revealed.” In the meantime Paul says, *“We walk by faith, not by sight” (2Cor.5:7).*

However, it is in light of this faith that Paul can 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! All this has been done by God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ...” (2Cor.5:16-18).*

Paul said of his apostolic role in this world that *“God employs us to diffuse the fragrance of his knowledge everywhere!”* This knowledge is 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).* God called Paul, as an apostle, to be a minister of this divine reconciliation. Paul writes, *“(God) has given us the ministry of reconciliation... This makes us ambassadors for Christ, God, as it were, appealing through us” (2Cor.5:18b,20).* This task is an awesome one. However, Paul maintains that *“because we possess this ministry through God’s mercy, we do not give into 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 for Christ and a Minister of Reconciliation, Paul has been guided, not by human prudence but by the example of Christ. He confessed, *“The love of Christ impels us... 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 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...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, nobodies--men who are poor, sorrowful, and dead. But in reality, Paul maintains that we are men who are alive, truthful, famous, always rejoicing--men who enrich many. We are seen as “having nothing and yet possessing all things” (2Cor.6:10b).

IN EARTHEN VESSELS

Although Paul has spoken of the glory of the New Covenant in which we as Christians share, and by which we are transformed *“from glory to glory.”* Even though we may be ministers of this glorious Covenant, he desires we remain aware of our humble condition in this life. Paul tells 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 have rejected the gospel message because the “container” did not come up to their standards? They would have it less human. The chosen vessels of the Lord are earthen vessels that contain jewels not their own. They are lamps that do not give out their own light. *“It is not ourselves we preach but Christ Jesus as Lord...”* The 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.

The Christian endures all the trials and tribulations of human existence, but there is a difference—God’s sustaining power remains, and so Paul can say from experience, *“We are afflicted in every way possible, but we are not crushed; full of doubts, we never despair. We are persecuted 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 does not regret 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 has been a glorious life for Paul. However, the strenuous life lived by Paul takes its toll. The human mechanism, like a machine, eventually wears down. Paul sees before him the possibility of his physical

death. He may not live, as he hopes, until the Second Coming of the Lord. However, the debilitation of his earthly body does 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... Therefore we continue to be confident. We know that while we dwell in the body we are away from the Lord...and would much rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. This being so, we make it our aim to please him whether we are with him or away from him"* (2Cor.4:16-18;5:6,8-9).

In this life the Christian must always live by faith. Paul emphasizes, *"we walk by faith, not by sight"* (2Cor.5:7). He goes on to say *"We have that spirit of faith of which the Scripture says, 'Because I believed, I spoke out.' We believe and so we speak."*

And so the Man from Tarsus, the ambassador of Christ, still speaks to us: *"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.5:20,6:1-2). *"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"* (2Cor.5:10). *"Now is the day of salvation!"*

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 charism or that the Corinthian Community lacked institutional elements, 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 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, curb abuses of power, and survive in a 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 this early charismatic spirit within the Church was detrimental. It 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 it is to survive within the Church, it must be integrated into the institutional life of the Church, and not be set in opposition to it. Speaking on this very problem, Ronald Knox wisely observed that Catholic teaching is a balance of doctrine, and, not only a balance of doctrine, but a balance of emphases. 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 the visionaries (the enthusiasts). If we are content with humdrum, the second-best, the hand-over-hand, it will not be forgiven us.”*

TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS

**SCRIPTURE READING AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE READ)**

“THIS TREASURE WE POSSESS IN EARTHEN VESSELS TO MAKE IT CLEAR THAT ITS SURPASSING POWER COMES FROM GOD AND NOT FROM US.” (2Corinthians 4:7)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary through The Wisdom of God; Wisdom 7:24-30; 2Peter 2:1-22; 2Corinthians 2:14-17.

- 1. In what way does the reading from Wisdom express the early Church’s belief about Christ?**
- 2. In what way does it apply to the Holy Spirit?**
- 3. What does it mean to say, “We are the aroma of Christ”?**
- 4. What are some of the signs of false teachers and apostles?**

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: New Covenant Ministry; Ex. 34:27-35; 2Corinthians 3:1-18.

- 1. In what way can the letter to the Corinthians be said to be a letter written by Christ?**
- 2. What do we learn about the apostolic life from 2Corinthians 3:4-6?**
- 3. What does the veil symbolize in this reading?**
- 4. What do you understand by 2Corinthians 3:18?**

THIRD DAY: Read 2Corinthians 5:11-6:10.

- 1. What lesson do we learn from 2Corinthians 5:14?**
- 2. How would you describe the ministry of reconciliation?**
- 3. How does Paul exercise this ministry?**
- 4. What do we learn about the apostolic life from this reading?**

FOURTH DAY: Read 2Corinthians 4:1-5:10.

- 1. What do you understand by 2Corinthians 4:7?**
- 2. What does this teach you about being an apostle?**
- 3. What does 2Corinthians 4:16 say to you?**
- 4. What do you understand by 2Corinthians 5:7?**

FIFTH DAY: Read 2Corinthians 8:1-24.

- 1. What does this reading teach us about the first Christians in Macedonia?**
- 2. What is the spiritual importance of giving alms?**
- 3. What do we learn about alms-giving from 2Corinthians 8:11-14?**
- 4. What does 2Corinthians 8:21 teach you?**

SIXTH DAY: Read Summary: Epilogue to Corinthians; 2Corinthians 9:1-15.

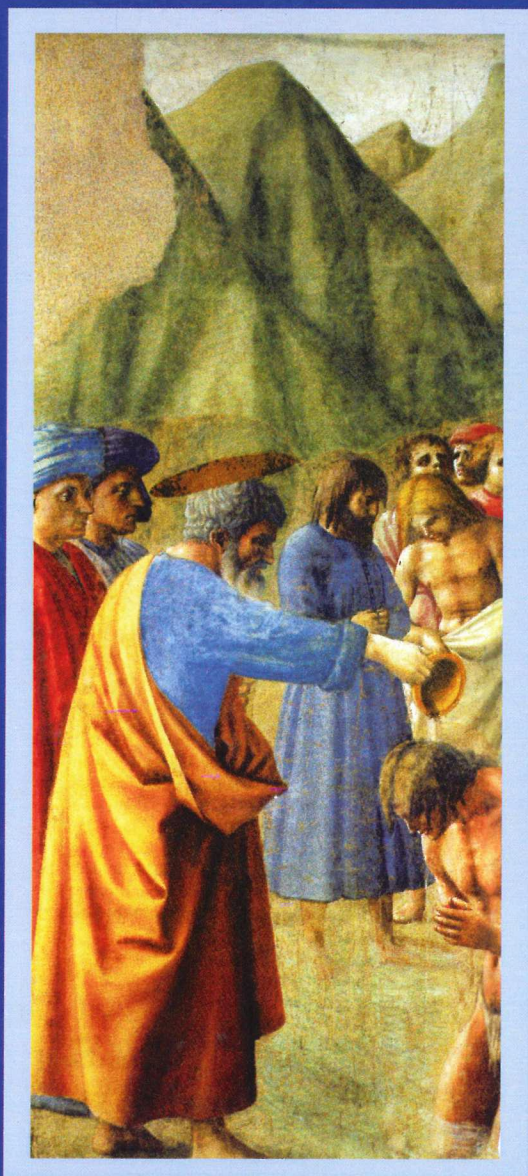
- 1. What do we learn about motivation in 2Corinthians 9:7?**
- 2. What does 2Corinthians 9:6 say to you?**
- 3. What would you say was the difference between the Jerusalem and Corinthian Church?**
- 4. What important insights have you gathered from the study of 2Corinthians?**

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Masaccio, Brancacci Chapel, Florence