

May 19, 2002

"Congregational Differences"

I Cor. 1

Couples Class

Wendell Alford,

Teacher

I. Examining Paul's first letter to the saints at Corinth immediately following a study of his letter to the Ephesian believers is a natural flow of doctrinal thought, because Paul sought in Ephesus a unity among the believers regardless of their religious background, especially whether Jewish or Gentile. Now we look at a letter to a congregation made up primarily of converted Gentiles who had little, if any, knowledge of Old Covenant history, doctrine, or tradition. Cohesive factors were very weak, and in such matters relating to general disagreements, lawsuits, immorality, questionable practices, abuse of the Lord's Supper, the resurrection, false apostles, and spiritual gifts, the congregation needed and asked Paul for answers. In the letter Paul admonishes the saints at Corinth concerning the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit's leadership of believers and the results of not following that Lordship and leadership, I Cor. 6:15-20. For the Corinthians to seek Paul's counsel in basic doctrinal matters was logical since he had founded the church there on his second journey as a missionary. He was there in about 52-53 AD and stayed there for about eighteen months, and this letter was written in Ephesus probably about 56-57 AD, some 3-4 years after his first stay in Corinth. The Corinth which Paul knew had been founded as a Roman Colony during the century before Christ. It was strategically located in the Roman province of Achaia about forty miles west of Athens on a narrow strip of land between the Aegean and Adriatic Seas, with two adjoining ports. The city's location made it a center for trade routes passing from west to east, and the resulting prosperity brought both luxury and immorality. "To live like a Corinthian" meant to live in gross immorality, and many pagan temples located in the city encouraged this licentious way of life through temple prostitution. The population of Corinth was about four hundred thousand, a mixed multitude. Sailors, merchants, adventurers, and refugees from all over the Roman Empire filled its streets. Religion was also thought of as a commodity. A magnificent temple was built for Venus (Greek, Aphrodite), the chief local goddess. About a thousand priestesses served in this temple and administered a base, heathen "worship experience" which consisted of nothing more or less than licentious sexual activities (whore-mongering), all in the name of religion!

II. It is no wonder that I Corinthian's theme is the supremacy of Christ and the Lordship of Jesus through the leadership of God's Holy Spirit. Essentially Paul emphasizes that loyalty to God's eternal Son is the answer to all of their questions, for Jesus had said, "If you love me, your life will reflect my teachings," John 14:15; I John 5:3. Paul begins his letter by declaring that he is indeed one of God's few apostles, commissioned by the will of God himself to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle addresses the communication to "the ekklesia of God which is at Corinth, to them who are sanctified (set or called apart) in Christ Jesus, called to be saints along with all (believers) in every place [who] call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, [i.e., both their Lord and

ours]." Paul in so stating that the inclusion of all believers, wherever located on the earth, make up God's ekklesia without physical proximity or without leadership from other than God's Holy Spirit, is a very important point, I believe. Note that in the first three verses of greetings and in the following six verses of Paul's prayer of thanksgiving that Jesus Christ is called by name in every verse (by pronoun in vs. 5) which underlines my assertion above that the apostle's theme for the Corinthians' lifestyles (and ours) should be anchored in the person of Jesus Christ, and his teachings should be followed because of our love for him.

III. In vs. 10 Paul introduces the body of his letter by pleading with them in the name of "our Lord Jesus" that the Corinthian believers "be perfectly joined together" in their doctrine (beliefs) and conduct (same mind and judgment). Please remember that not all of the members met at the same place, but in private homes in various locations. The apostle's news about their situation in Corinth had come to him from the family of one Chloe, a woman about whom we know nothing except that Paul trusted her family's testimony. Apparently at least a part of the misunderstanding among the Corinthian believers was due to loyalties to different leaders whom they had known or heard about, Paul, Apollos, Peter, and even Christ himself. Paul then asks them some rhetorical questions regarding such loyalties. "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you immersed (baptized) in the name of Paul?" Note that some believers could have become confused about the relationship of immersion and their salvation (being sealed in Christ). The general sentiment expressed by Paul in vss. 14-17, to me, relegates immersion to a less important place certainly than it has come to have for many who profess to be Christians today. Some denominations claim that baptism is the rite that makes one an official believer, even if one is baptized before one's own will can be exercised, i.e., as an infant. In vs. 17 Paul states simply that baptism is not the important thing, but proclaiming the Gospel (so that it can be believed) is, and what he (Paul) came to do. Had the Corinthians come to look upon baptism as more than it was originally intended to be, a symbol for signifying a new believer's belief in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ? It appears that some believers had become confused about the part baptism has to do with putting one's faith in the Lord and had substituted the rite of baptism for faith in the sacrificial death of our Savior. This concept of intellectually weaving human logic into the simplicity of the Gospel, is assuming the Good News to be somehow too unsophisticated a foundation for eternal life. In some way humanity must do something for or herself to insure God's grace, Rom. 9:30-33. The part of human interference in God's salvation plan begins in vs. 13 and continues on into the next chapter. Paul says that the cross (sacrifice of Christ Jesus) is sheer foolishness to unbelievers, but to those relying upon God's free grace [for which he (God) alone has paid the price], the cross is the very power of God. Paul quotes Isa. 29:14 in vs. 19 which defies the so-called "wisdom" of some men as compared with the complete knowledge of the Creator. The Jews demanded of Jesus a sign which would make faith unnecessary (Matt. 12:38-45), but Jesus told them that belief in his own death, burial, and resurrection would be their only hope. The Greeks want to be able to reason their way to truth, but "the power and wisdom of God" is "Christ crucified," vs. 24. No human can glory in God's presence, but for believers God has made Jesus Christ to be wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. We believers should "Praise God from whom all blessings flow - glory only in the Lord."

May 26, 2002

"Spiritual Language"
I Cor. 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Since Corinth was the most important city in Greece in Paul's day, many philosophies were considered to be the chic and "cutting edge" for the more sophisticated inhabitants. The mix of peoples who had found their way to this metropolis created an atmosphere of a "melting pot," much like that being experienced in the United States of America today. Corinth's religious milieu supported a polyethnic following, because geographically the city was influenced by the remnants of Greek religions and the Roman versions of the same heathenism. If Paul had tried to lay a groundwork for a believing faith in God's Savior, Jesus Christ, by argument or disputing, the result would have been much like the message he brought to the Greeks on Mars Hill, Acts 17:17-33. In fact, Paul's first visit to Corinth occurred immediately following that Mars Hill experience at Athens, Acts 18:1. Having this information in mind makes the first Corinthian letter much easier to understand. We stressed last week how Paul in the first ten verses repeated references to the person of Christ Jesus over and over, in every verse. Nothing about the Greek's superstitions, their unwillingness to accept Jesus' resurrection, and their own unrighteousness in God's sight were given by the apostle to encourage them to unite and pull together in their faith. The end of Chap. 1 concluded with the concept that God had made Jesus Christ to be wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption for all believers. Believers are all in Christ Jesus, period, and if they are to realize any glory in being right with God, their Father in heaven, they can see that glory only in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. Paul in 2:1 further stresses his determination to put Christ Jesus at the forefront of his total message. Loyalty to the Lord Jesus is the basis for all the admonitions which follow through the entire letter. In Chap. 1 he noted that the Corinthians believers were divided in their loyalties to various individuals, including Jesus himself. Paul reminds them that at the very beginning when he established the body of believers there in Corinth, his communication had not been to prove his own knowledge of the world's philosophy and human logic couched in flowery terms and phrases. His message was simply what the Lord had told him (while he was in Arabia for about three years, Gal. 1:15-19). After the Athens episode, Paul was ever more determined to make his message one of sheer simplicity, i.e., "I determined not to know (impart) anything among (to) you, except Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Perhaps in Paul's dogged determination to make sure that the Corinthian believers began their believing lives firmly fixed on Jesus alone, he had left them with so many questions unanswered about applying their faith in daily activities. Nevertheless, his answers to their questions became a portion of God's Word for all subsequent believers who were to follow through the centuries, including us. This is proof that God knew exactly what he was doing in Paul's overall activities. In vss. 4-5 the apostle is saying that after he stated the Gospel simply (Jesus and him crucified), he then depended upon God's power through the wooing and convincing of God's Holy Spirit

to bring about God's bidding in each Corinthian hearer of the Word who became a believer, John 6:44. It is also obvious from these verses and the remainder of the chapter that it is possible for people to mix and weave their own unspiritually logical "wisdom" into the simple Gospel and make the total result man-made error. Today, God's written Word gives guidance and credence to the Holy Spirit's leadership, Lk 12:12; John 14:23-30.

III. After God's message (Word, Jesus Christ - John 1:14) came to earth to reveal God's love to all mankind, the princes (political leaders) and world-produced thinkers misinterpreted that message in order to further their own advantage and glory. They speak of God's action in their own worldly language. Had they accepted God's love and grace and given God the glory, all would be well with them, but they chose to change the message from the Holy Spirit's language into their own worldly language. Concrete evidence that there are two languages, worldly and spiritual, is what happened to the Lord Jesus. They took the physical life of "the Lord of glory," vs. 8; Acts 2:23,36; 3:15. Paul proclaims that he speaks the wisdom of God in a mystery (a revelation of God not known before), even the hidden wisdom which God predetermined ages ago for our (believers) glory. In vs. 6 Paul notes that this wisdom (knowledge) of God is understood only by perfect (mature) believers. The implication is that a believer must grow in God's grace before he or she can receive the spiritual wisdom to comprehend truly what God's grace has accomplished for believers in and through his Son, Christ Jesus, vs. 6; Eph. 4:15; I Pet. 2:2; II Pet. 3:18. Spiritual language gives the true meaning to the evidence which Paul gives as he quotes Isa. 64:4 in vs. 9, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man (or woman), the things which God hath prepared for them (believers, trusters in his Son, Jesus Christ) that love (waiteth for, cf Isa. passage) him." The language of the world cannot know what that precious quote means, "But God hath revealed them to us (believers) by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep [hidden to the world] things of God," vs. 10. The importance of the agency of God the Father's Holy Spirit is made very paramount in this chapter of the Corinthian letter. Paul is revealing that the believing spirit in a human being can understand God's communication only as God's Holy Spirit interprets God's thoughts to him or her. Our channel of thought from God is not from worldly (human) thought but from God himself, vs. 13; Rom. 8:14-17. To understand what we believers need to know from God, we must learn to speak and think God's spiritual language which is different from what the world speaks or understands, vs. 13. The natural man (born of water only and not also from above of God's Spirit, John 3:6-7) does not understand the Spirit of God's language (It is foolishness to him.), because spiritual facts are understood only with the insight of God's spiritual language, vs. 14. One (a believer) who is led directly by God's Holy Spirit and follows his leadership cannot be judged by another human spirit (will), because that believer is led by the same Spirit that was in Christ, God's Holy Spirit, vss. 15-16. The emphasis here is the direct relationship of the individual believer with God through Christ Jesus, and not through another person or corporate group.

June 2, 2002

"Only One Foundation"
I Cor. 3

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. This chapter reveals some secrets about a believer's working relationship with God through Christ Jesus that are perhaps more explicit than elsewhere in God's Word. What about a believer who for some reason through neglect or misdirected priority does not grow in God's grace? Is it possible for a believer to be reborn (from above) and remain a spiritual infant or preteenager for twenty, forty, or even seventy years? If such is possible, what will be the final result of such a lukewarm spiritual life? For a believing person who is serious about his or her relationship with the Lord, answers to these questions should be of grave concern. Paul tackles these questions head-on in Chap. 3. He uses the divisions noted earlier in the letter about loyalties to certain Gospel messengers as an explanation for spiritual immaturity and for gradations or levels of service in God's kingdom. The apostle lists two groups of believers, those who are "spiritual" and those who are "carnal." They are both "in Christ," including those who are carnal. However, the carnal believers are referred to as "babes in Christ," vs. 1. The word "carnal" is the King James translation of the Greek word sarkikois and means literally, "fleshly." Our English word "sarcasm" comes from the same Greek word. Sarcasm means to "tear flesh" or "to bite ones lips in rage or anger, or sneer," i.e., "to demonstrate immature or childlike emotions." The King James word "carnal" has the same Greek base as our word "carnival." A carnival is a situation where a person is entertained, generally by games and activities with nonproductive, and no serious, goals. Carnal believers are those who "play" with their faith, not allowing that faith to be a serious and dedicated priority in their lives. Serious Bible study to them can be tolerated only if it is devised by some method to make the occasion entertaining and "fun," Matt. 11:11-19. Paul states that "baby believers" must be fed with milk and not solid spiritual food, vs. 2. Exactly how do carnal believers think and act as a result of their immaturity? Paul characterizes them in vs. 3: "For ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and dissensions, are ye not carnal (fleshly), and walk (conduct your lives) as [natural] men?" Further, aligning oneself with any particular messenger who brings the Gospel is likewise carnal. "Carnal" when related to "as men" refers to a person who acts as though he or she has not yet been born of God and become an indweller of God's Holy Spirit. In other words, they are believers in Jesus Christ but have not yet matured sufficiently to allow God's Holy Spirit to direct and control their activities.

II. Beginning with vs. 5 and through the rest of Chap. 3, Paul develops the perspective of one who brings the Gospel to others with the effect of that Good News, Gospel, on the hearers. Those who proclaim God's Good News of Jesus Christ are like farmers who plant seeds and tend the subsequent plants. One may plant and another provide water and nutrients, but the miracle of the seeds coming alive and becoming plants which reproduce their own kind is a miracle of God. Only God can create life. God alone is the one who quickens a person and makes him or her spiritually alive,

at one with God the Father through faith in his only Son, Christ Jesus. God is the Husbandman. Believers do not belong to the messenger but to the one who makes the message a reality. One who testifies to God's truth that faith in Jesus Christ assures eternal life, is serving (God's laborer) the Lord. If the messenger proclaims the Good News (John 14:6), and the hearer does not accept that truth, it is not the fault of the proclaimer or God, but the hearer's refusal to obey the leadership of God's Holy Spirit. Also, if a believer does not follow the leading of the Spirit, that believer alone is responsible for having grieved (saddened) God's Spirit, Eph. 4:30. One of the mysteries of all the ages is that God, the Almighty, decided from mankind's beginning (in the Garden of Eden) not to force any person against his or her own will to either recognize, respect, love, or worship him (God). Any person is free to choose or reject God or his will, but the Lord has not removed the appropriate consequences of making the proper or improper choice, Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19-20; II Thes. 1:5-10.

III. All true messengers of God are alike (vs. 8) in that only one foundation is available for receiving God's gift of eternal life and fellowship with God, and that foundation is Jesus Christ, vs. 11. It is on this foundation that the ekklesia, God's building, is being built. By God's grace believers become the building blocks which are to be God's building (kingdom). The apostles during the apostolic period produced and has made available through the centuries God's Word (message of Jesus Christ), and subsequently, persons (all believers) have been built on God's foundation (Jesus Christ). On that firm and only true foundation can one build (serve) in several ways, with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or stubble, but those superstructures will be evaluated by God in due time. The test will be by fire and obviously the works of wood, hay or stubble will be consumed because of their unworthiness. The endurance and validity of the superstructure's reflection and glorification of the foundation (Jesus Christ) will be tried in fire (the judgment), Deut. 4:24; II Cor. 5:10; Heb. 12:28-29. Note very carefully that the service in the Lord's kingdom is to be rewarded (vs. 14), but those rewards are not to determine ones spiritual salvation, vs. 15. After stating that a believer is to be rewarded for kingdom service, the apostle further states that he or she may suffer loss, but he or she (as a believer) shall be saved, vs. 15. The basis for this truth is noted in vss. 16-17: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" Doing contrary to the will of God can even cause the destruction of the believer's temporary dwelling place (vs. 17a), but in that body God's Holy Spirit has joined together with the believer's spirit (atonement). That joining together of the believer's spirit with God's Spirit makes the dwelling place holy, separated or set apart for God's purpose and service. For one to think otherwise is self-deception. Such thinking is foolish by the world's (carnal) view of spiritual truth. An unbeliever will label these thoughts as gobbledygook, because they do not conform to carnal logic. In vss. 19-20 Paul quotes Job 5:13 and Psa. 94:11 to say, in effect, that the truth relating to those whom God has called and placed in the charge of his Son is not dependent upon who brings the message, but upon the foundation, Jesus Christ, our Savior, vss. 22-23; John 10:27-30.

June 09, 2002

"Found Faithful"
I Cor. 4

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. In Chap. 4 Paul concentrates further on the relationship that should exist between a believer and the one who was God's servant by whom that believer learned of God's love in Jesus Christ. There were those in the Corinthian believing group of called out ones (the ekklesia) who were "taking the bull by the horns" and, by aligning themselves with different proclaimers of the Gospel, claiming thereby to be superior to those who identified with another Gospel messenger. We noted this problem in Chap. 1:12. The specific act which identified a believer with a given proclaimer of the Gospel was who immersed (baptized) the particular believer. This relationship situation was by Paul evidently considered to be extremely important, for the first four chapters of this letter emphasizes problems associated with an improper view of a believer's feeling of superiority relating to who immersed him or her. In all probability Jesus had instructed Paul (down in Arabia, Gal. 1:15-20) about the problem of some believers becoming overly ambitious about their new membership in God's family of faith. I suggest this probability because of Jesus' reaction to an incident which took place as he was entering the Jerusalem area for the last time before he was crucified, Matt. 20:17-28. We should not, in retrospect, ignore the importance of the principle at play here. At the very outset of God's calling out his people in the earth through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ, how to be organized was a problem for some. I do not believe there should be a formal organization at all, but each individual is to be directed by the power of God's Holy Spirit. Jesus' own position was rather explicit in the Matt. 20:20-28 passage which we cited above. Believers were not to organize themselves like the Gentiles do, i.e., politically or bureaucratically. Certainly they were not to organize themselves as was happening among the Corinthians around this leader or that leader, and not Christ. The pattern of the association of believers among themselves and other congregations, during the time the N. T. was being given by God, made the local congregation autonomous, I believe. It is true that the beginning congregations, on occasion, would consult with one another, but there is no Biblical instance in which one congregation would dictate to another what their doctrines or practices should be. Perhaps the best Biblical example of one congregation conferring with another is found at Acts 15:1-35. At that time the congregation at Antioch and Jerusalem, through representatives, discussed the matter of whether Gentiles could become believers in Christ Jesus without first being circumcised. Probably the best example in church history when Jesus' admonition at Matt. 20:25-28 was most brazenly overridden was when the Roman Emperor Constantine, after his October 27, 312 AD "conversion," issued first in 313 AD, his Edict of Toleration. But in 325 AD he ordered his subjects (all Romans) to "embrace Christianity." After this time the church at Rome became the official seat of all "Christianity" with such strength and political influence that Constantine himself was driven eastward to Byzantium which he renamed Constantinople, "Capitol of the New Christian Empire." Ultimately, this organization of all "believers" was split into an eastern divi-

sion (Eastern Orthodox Catholic) and a western division (Roman Catholic). Today both divisions have chief executive officers and a bureaucratic organization, far from Jesus' plan in Matt. 20:20-28. Other groups who call themselves Christians have similar plans.

II. In I Cor. 4 Paul (God's Word) discredits any arrangement in which a congregation would rally around one leader who exercises authority, in any fashion, over other believers or congregations. He again insisted that apostles and pastors (elders) were simply servants of God in Christ, stewards of God's message of grace telling forth the mysteries which God was, through them, revealing to the world. Paul declared in vs. 1-5 that his position and activities were nothing more or less than fulfilling his duties as a faithful steward. His position should not be judged according to standards set by the world's organizing of human activities, i.e., politically, militarily, socioeconomically, etc. In vs. 5 especially, Paul appeals to believers to leave judgment of the work to implement God's growing kingdom until the Lord returns. Then, and only then, will the real motivations of people be known for sure. In this regard, examine carefully Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43.

III. Beginning with vs. 6 the apostle states that he is using himself, Apollos, and Cephas (Peter) figuratively to illustrate how that believers should not "think of men" above that which is written [now we can appropriately say, "in God's New Covenant"] about them. Believers should not "ride the coattails" of any given spiritual leader in order to feel self-pride and more important than another believer. The idea is essentially not to use "name calling" in an attempt to prove oneself to be better than any other believer. In Corinth the three persons listed above were considered by various ones to be their allies and who made them feel better than others. Paul states that the Corinthians, as believers in Christ Jesus, were indeed "kings without us," vs. 8, i.e., as ones led by God's Holy Spirit, they did not need anyone else as authority. (Note also 3:21-23.) The apostle, nevertheless, did not state that the Corinthian believers should ignore the sincere message (Christ and him crucified) which he, Apollos, and Cephas (Peter) were proclaiming to them. In Paul's own case he admitted that his service in furthering God's kingdom had made him the subject of much abuse. He had been despised by both Jewish leaders and Roman authorities. He had worked with his own hands as a tentmaker to support himself and others rather than be accused of proclaiming the Good News for monetary gain, Acts 18:3; 20:33-34. The King James terminology is very telling at vs. 13 where Paul refers to himself and the other apostles as "Being defamed (slandered), we encourage; we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day." Paul was quick to say that his self-effacement was not to intimidate them, but to indicate that their own false pride was not for their best spiritual welfare. He reminded them that they were his spiritual offspring, for he had led them to Christ Jesus. They should, therefore, emulate his service by doing the same service for other unbelievers. He notes in vs. 17 that he had sent Timothy to them. He too was Paul's spiritual offspring, and the apostle had hoped that Timothy's instruction for them would change their attitudes toward ekklesia leaders and make the true power, the Lord's power, preeminent in their thinking. Paul wanted to remain gentle on his next visit rather than be dogmatic and negative. They should strive to be like Christ Jesus himself, Phil. 2:5-11, and be faithful to him above all others.

June 16, 2002

"Immoral Believers?"
I Cor. 5

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. In Chaps. 1-4 of the first Corinthian letter, Paul lays the groundwork for understanding the disorder and dissension among members of God's ekklesia living there. Oddly enough, the basis for much (perhaps most) of the immoral choices being made by some of the believers was an improper alliance with various messengers of the Gospel of God. Various ones were following their infantile (babes in Christ), immature knowledge of Christ Jesus and of God's Holy Spirit's leadership, 2:10. It appears that, because they followed different human bearers of the Gospel, they felt free to practice different lifestyles which were according to their own carnal desires and designs, 3:3,5. Had they been loyal to Christ Jesus first and to the leading of his Spirit, their practices would have been different and more uniformly patterned after the Lord's will. This hodgepodge of various beliefs caused Paul to ask at 1:13: "Is Christ Divided?" These believers in Jesus Christ for eternal life and oneness with the Creator of the universe were engaging in immoralities which even unbelievers (Gentiles) would not. We are aware that Paul's message, his emphasis in fact, was that believers in Christ Jesus were free even as Jesus had said at John 8:36. Today in Chap. 5 we look at one such immoral practice and Paul's reaction to it, because being free does not give a believer license to do that which is against God's will. We shall see further evidence of this later in this letter regarding the eating of meat sanctified for idol worshipers. Jesus said that if we love him, we will follow his teaching, John 14:22-26. The Lord here is referring to those who accept him as Messiah (Savior) and are led by his Spirit. Paul's emphasis on the believer's freedom from the ceremonial, Jewish Law was misunderstood by some (Gal. 5:1), even as Peter noted at II Pet. 3:13-18. In this connection we should note also that, according to Paul (God's Word), Peter had trouble under certain conditions with his own freedom in Christ Jesus, Gal. 2:11-21. We believers in Christ should give a proper perspective to our emphases in our faith, e.g., note what James, a close worker with Peter, has to say about the relationship of our faith with our lifestyles, James 2:14-17. The big difference in these two emphases, I believe, can better be seen by observing two Biblical citations: James 1:1 where James (still God's Word) is addressing believers who had been Jews ("to the twelve tribes"), and Gal. 2:4-10 where Paul (God's Word) declares the freedom of believing Gentiles from the Jewish ceremonial and social Law. I include "social" as a part of the law, because it was Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah (Savior), i.e., James, Peter, Barnabas, and John who were implicated as ones who took offense when socializing with believing Gentiles, Gal. 2:9,11-13,21.

II. Now, when we examine Chap. 5 of I Cor., we see a believer who is offending God's Spirit by trespassing, not his ceremonial Law, but his moral Law. Again, we believers should maintain a proper perspective of the ritualistic (symbolic) element of the Law and the moral element. Chloe and her family (1:11) apparently had informed Paul that there was one Corinthian believer who was cohabit-

ing with his father's wife. My belief is that the woman was the believer's step-mother, very likely not a believer, and certainly not his own mother. In any case, God's Law (Word) forbids such Lev. 18:6-8; 20:11. Not only does God's Law forbid such activity, but Paul (also God's Word) makes it very plain that God's Spirit will not lead a believer, in good conscience, to engage and live in such sexual immorality. Vs. 1 states that this arrangement of sexual sin was common knowledge (reported commonly) within the ekklesia as well as among outsiders, unbelievers. [Could it have been that such reports regarding some Gentile believers caused Peter and the other Jewish believers to have been reluctant to associate with Gentile believers as noted above?] Well, not only was a believer cohabiting with his father's wife, but at least some of the ekklesia members were proud of their "freedom, broadmindedness" to condone such sin which grieves God's Holy Spirit, Eph. 4:30! Rather than proud, Paul says that they should have mourned, because the offender should have been publicly denounced as not being in good fellowship (standing) with the congregation. With the full authority of (in the name of) our Lord Jesus Christ the congregation should, in business conference, deny that they, as a group, approved of such a lifestyle. The group, as a group, is to disassociate themselves from such sinning so that the offender's witness will be marked (destruction of fleshly witnessing efforts). His lack of rewards will be noted even though his spirit will be among the spiritually salvaged at the time of Jesus' return, vs. 5 and 3:15. Note especially that Paul nor the congregation has the power to relegate his spirit to hell (separate him from his Lord), but his severance from congregational fellowship is "with the power of (authorized by) our Lord Jesus Christ," vs. 4b. Paul did make his own position clear in vs. 3. Jesus gave instructions about such immoral actions by believers, Matt. 18:15-20.

III. In vss. 6-8 Paul outlines the very practical reason why a congregation should publicize fellowship expectations. If sexual immorality is overlooked by a congregation of God's people, believers in Christ Jesus, unbelievers will rightfully assume that such immorality pleases the God of that congregation. Congregational fellowship is compared by Paul to the leavening in a loaf of bread. A little evil leavening will in time create havoc throughout the entire loaf. The loaf should be leavened by sincerity and truth. If the loaf rises (grows) with false leavening, eventually the whole loaf will be perceived as being raised with old leavening, i.e., what difference is there between the believer and what he was before believing in Jesus Christ? Believers are indeed to feast (enjoy spiritual nutrition), but that nutrition should be identified with Christ and his crucifixion for our sins. Believers are to be passed over precisely because of the shed blood of God's sacrificial Lamb, Jesus Christ, who died that all who trust him will not be charged with their sins, Exod. 12:12,21-23; John 19:13-16. In vss. 9-13 Paul refers to an earlier letter he had written to the Corinthians (now lost) in which he had said that the believers there should not associate with unbelieving immoral people. Here in I Cor. he is telling them to witness to such unbelievers, but not to embrace a fellow believer as though he were a member in good standing in the ekklesia.

June 30, 2002

"Believers And The Law"
I Cor. 6

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. To understand how a believer in Christ Jesus should be affected by the law, we should at the outset define what law is. For our purpose in seeking to comprehend the apostle Paul's instructions to the first ekklesia at Corinth, law is divided into two segments. This division is based upon Jesus' admonition to us followers at Matt. 22:15-22. The occasion happened shortly before our Lord was sacrificed for our sins. Various groups of the Jewish religious leaders were attempting to trap Jesus in a faux pas which would make the Lord appear shameful in public. He has just driven the money changers out of the Temple, and therefore, many were watching him closely as he taught the temple crowds. First the Pharisees and Herodians together came to Jesus, and after flattering him, they asked him to commit himself concerning the legality of the Jews' being taxed by the Roman government. (Recall that the Jewish leaders' plan was to make Jesus to be an insurrectionist against the Romans during this Passover.) After announcing that his questioners were hypocrites, Jesus asked for a coin and about whose likeness was on the coin. They answered that Caesar's image was on the coin. Jesus then answered their question about whether they, as Jews, should pay taxes to Rome: "Pay to Caesar his due, and [likewise] pay to God the things that are his." Jesus' answer clearly involves an appropriate dual allegiance, one to the temporal, governmental law as well as a second to the law (will) of our heavenly Father. (We Baptists have traditionally interpreted Jesus' answer in this instance to mean that for believers there should be maintained two allegiances, and that they should be maintained as two distinctly separate entities. What this means is that governments should never infringe upon a believer's right to support his community of faith, the local ekklesia, nor should a government ever become, in effect, amalgamated with the church or churches, i.e., create a "state church." A believer is to support his or her government and, at the same time, support God's kingdom, and never put the government first, Acts 4:19; Rom. 13:1-4; I Tim. 2:1-5. When any state or government presumes to take the role of God (as his ekklesia or church), the result is unadulterated idolatry. We define law, then, as we believe Jesus stated such definition, to be twofold: One, the laws made by mankind for his segment of the earth's population, and, two, God's law for all on earth who will believe that he is (John 1:12-13; Heb. 11:6), that Jesus is his Savior (II Cor. 5:14), and that God's Holy Spirit gives direct guidance to those with faith in Jesus Christ (John 14:26; Gal. 5:18). Even though we can refer to God's will as God's law (Matt. 22:34-40; Gal. 6:2), our final status before God depends upon God's grace, not upon our keeping his law, Eph. 2:8-10. However, God is pleased when we adhere to his will as the Spirit leads, because of our love of Christ Jesus, John 14:15-18; Eph. 1:13; 4:30.

II. With the above as background, we now come to the sixth chapter of I Corinthians which begins with a question: "Dare any of you, having a matter against another [of your ekklesia], go to law [governmental court] before the unjust [unrighteous or unbelievers],

and not before the saints [believers, the local ekklesia]?" Paul then proceeds to illustrate that the use of the former legal authority by believers is preposterous, for "the saints [believers] shall [are scheduled to] judge the world? (Dan. 7:18,21-22; Rev. 1:5-8) If the world is to be judged by you (believers), are you then unworthy to judge in the smallest (everyday) matters? Even angels [God's special spiritual agents] are to be judged by you (II Pet. 2:4). How much greater wisdom will be needed to render such judgment than things pertaining to this mortal life!" You should be able to select from your group those who can make appropriate decisions regarding disputes and disagreements. What is happening is that you believers (saints) are bypassing the Holy Spirit's leadership and going before the Roman courts instead of reaching proper conclusions among yourselves. Such activities demonstrates utter failure on your part. You would be better off simply to overlook such disagreements, Matt. 5:40-41; 18:15-20. The kingdom of God is to be made up of citizens for whom the Lord Jesus Christ is King. We believers should not be deceived, because in that kingdom there will be no citizen whose attitudes and actions embrace such unrighteous (unGodly) characteristics as: sexual activity of an unmarried person, idol worshipers, adulterers (sexual activity of a married person with other than ones own spouse), homosexuals (Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:24-28), sodomites (group homosexuality as at Gen. 19:1-5,24), thieves, covetous (Col. 3:5), drunkards, users of abusive language, takers of other peoples property through illegal ingenuity. Paul notes that some of the Corinthian believers had practiced the above evils, but now they had been, through their faith in Christ Jesus, made clean and set apart by God as righteous and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

III. Paul in vs. 12 turns again to the effect of law on a believer. He states flatly that while all things are legal for a believer, all things are not helpful for the believer or the other members of the ekklesia. Even if all things are lawful for those in God's grace, Paul's own example is not to be brought under the power of anything contrary to the Spirit's leading. In vs. 13 Paul expresses the same idea as that which Jesus gives at Matt. 15:15-20, i.e., the most important thing for the believer is that which is spiritual (permanent), not temporal. The believer's body is not just for physical food or to satisfy ones temporal sexual appetites. Because God has raised Jesus, he will also raise all believers who are trusting his promise. Their bodies are, therefore, "engaged" to the Lord Jesus and are not to be joined to another. Believers are to be ready for the marriage feast of the Lamb, Rev. 19:7. They are to live lives according to God's will, because they are living eternal lives (spiritually together with God forever). Already God lives within the believer, and that makes his or her body to be a temple, God's dwelling place. That arrangement makes our bodies special in that God has purchased us, and we are to glorify him both in our bodies and with our spirits (wills). We are not to sin as God's children, but if we do, we have a solicitor who is at one with the Lord of all, John 10:25-30; I John 1:8 - 2:2.

"Take time to be holy; speak oft with thy Lord.

Abide in him always, and feed on his Word."

July 7, 2002

"Marriage of Believers"
I Cor. 7

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Chap. 7 begins a change in subject matter in Paul's first Biblical letter to the Corinthian believers. Through Chap. 6 the main concern is the information Paul had received from the family of Chloe about the ekklesia at Corinth. Now in Chap. 7 and through the remainder of the letter, the apostle announces at 7:1 that he is answering specific questions which they had written to him. Those inquiries had to do with marriage (7), food offered to idols and proper worship of God through Jesus as Lord (8-11), spiritual gifts (12-14), the resurrection of the dead (15), and the special offering for the destitute believers at Jerusalem (16). The question relating to marriage must be considered in the context of the human sexual milieu of Corinth at the time the Gospel of God first reached that area. Please recall that we gave a cursory look at the situation on May 19 in our introduction to the Corinthian letter, the mix of nationalities, the constant passage of itinerant visitors including military and merchants, and the combining of religion with human sexual activities. The latter involved the magnificent temple dedicated to the worship of Venus, the goddess of love (carnal) and beauty. Most men had three to five wives who were considered servants and who served the various needs of the husband. The wives were considered to be primarily property of the husband, but sexual appetites were satisfied much of the time by visiting the temple prostitutes who were especially chosen for their physical beauty. This temple activity was considered an act of worship of the goddess Venus. To understand Paul's (God's) communication to the Corinthian believers in Chap. 7, it is imperative that these factors be kept in mind. Otherwise, one can miss the message completely, and the intended communication is lost entirely if one attempts to compare the thoughts there within our current historical setting. For example, in vs. 1 Paul admonishes a man not to touch a woman [outside marriage], but notice that in vss. 2-5 he encourages male believers to satisfy sexual appetites exclusively through cohabiting with their own wives. We should pay particular attention to the number of the noun "wife," i.e., that it is singular, one. In other words, the Word is telling believing males to have only one wife and to receive and render sexual needs between him and his wife alone. [The admonition for males is equally appropriate for the believing wife of a believing husband - WA.] Yielding to the temptation to be a believing fornicator with temple prostitutes, or anyone else, is not fitting for one who is trusting Christ Jesus for spiritual salvation. Such is idolatry. To practice sexual activity with other than ones spouse is improper (against the will of God). The privileges and joys of sexual intimacies is honored by God only under these conditions. The two, husband and wife, are to realize that they should feel completely free and shameless to share sexual affection for one another, understanding that such sexual affection is to come from no other person. God has declared them to be one flesh because of their singularly marital commitment to one another. Further, they are not to deprive one another of sexual activity unless they do so for short periods by mutual consent. To do so could create an occasion for Satan to cause an abuse of the

believer's self-control, vs. 5. In vs. 6 Paul states that he has spoken in vss. 1-5 by permission (as lead by God's Spirit), rather than by direct word from Christ Jesus (Gal. 1:12, 15-18).

II. Paul asserts in vs. 7-9 that he, personally, was able to control himself without practicing any sexual activity, and his suggestion to singles and widows (and widowers, as I believe Paul was) was that they should abstain from sexual activity. He recognized that this suggestion is not appropriate for all since some have strong inclinations for sexual activity. Those who cannot abstain should marry, for, Paul says (God's Word), that it is better to be married than to wrestle continually with passionate, sexual temptations, vs. 9. Now in vss. 10-11 the apostle states that the Lord himself has made divorce wrong for a believing married couple, but in vss. 12-16 Paul again specifies that his admonitions are through the Spirit rather than by direct, written commandment. When one spouse is not a believer, the other spouse who is should remain married if such can be done peacefully (vs. 15b), because the believer could possibly win the unbelieving spouse to a saving, personal belief in Jesus Christ. Then Paul makes clear that being married to a male believer who is circumcised or not makes no difference in the attitude a believing wife should have toward her husband. Further, the marriage of believers who are slaves does not alter the marital guidelines Paul is giving the other Corinthians. All believers are bought with the same price (Christ and him crucified) whether a believer is circumcised (Jewish), uncircumcised (Gentile), slave, or free. Not one of these statuses makes one believer better or worse than another believer. Vs. 20 underscores that becoming a truster of Christ Jesus does not require a change in ones status regarding circumcision or slavery.

III. The term "virgins" in vs. 25 refers to an unmarried daughter as it does through Chap. 7. Paul says that he does not have a specific word from the Lord about this particular problem during "the present distress," vs. 26, but he does believe that his judgment represents the mercy of the Lord. The "present distress," I believe, has to do with the deplorable, immoral conditions which prevailed there then. Couples were not free to "fall in love" and "move in together" or even to be married without permission. The decision regarding to whom and when a daughter should become a bride rested solely with the young woman's father. That is why Paul addresses the fathers in vss. 28-38 concerning a virgin's marriage. The first question is whether, under the conditions in Corinth, a believer should consider marriage at all for his daughter. Vs. 28 clearly makes marriage within the will of God, but the marital state could create unusual problems for a young female believer. Under such immoral pressures then extant, a believer, especially a young female believer could face tremendously difficult decisions, vs. 28b. Paul knew that those perverted moral conditions could not last for long, because they have built-in self-destructive features, vs. 31. The moral obligations of a believing married young woman are distinguishable from those of an unbeliever. The unbeliever has no compunctions about doing contrary to God's will while a believer is ever aware of whether she pleases her Lord Jesus, vss. 32-34. In vss. 36-37 Paul tells the young woman's father that if it appears that his daughter will become a spinster, the changed situation should be taken into account. The apostle leans toward the position that becoming an "old maid" could be preferable, because the believing woman (or man) is committed to God's will (Law) until/if a spouse dies, vs. 39-40. If she/he marries again, it should be to a believer.

July 14, 2002

"Diet And Faith"
I Cor. 8

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. We should perhaps give some review to Chaps. 6 and 7 to recognize the personality of the Corinthian believers as a family of faith. Remember, that Paul characterized the group as spiritual "babes in Christ," i.e., in Christ but immature, spiritual infants. In retrospect we can actually sense how immature a group must be to be feeling a pride in their "broadmindedness" toward a believer who was practicing incest, living carnally with his stepmother (Chap. 6). Then in Chap. 7 the members of that same family of faith were asking whether marriage was to be considered acceptable for believers at all. As we approach Chap. 8, another question has been submitted to the Apostle Paul by the Corinthian believers. In order to understand the import of the question involved, we need to examine dietary laws in general and the Jewish concerns for the eating of certain foods in particular. The latter people (Jews) would have had more influence on Paul (humanly speaking) than anyone else since he had been a strict keeper (Pharisee) of the Jewish Law before he trusted Christ Jesus for his spiritual salvation, Acts 23:6. Where polytheism (belief in many gods) prevails, there are many deities and there are about as many ways of serving those gods as there are gods. In fact, mankind's profound spiritual needs caused him to "create" gods to meet those needs. The people of Greece (Corinth was in Achaia, a region of Greece.) worshiped many gods which acts constituted, of course, idolatry in its most obvious expression. Many of the Roman religions simply aped the Grecian religions with different names given to them. For example, the chief god of the Corinthians was Venus at the time of Paul's writing this letter, but Venus was successor to the Greek goddess Aphrodite, goddess of sexual love and beauty.

II. Idol worship by humanity through the ages has been accompanied by social gatherings and activities. When the Israelites had been delivered from the Egyptians by the Lord and were in the wilderness, they turned to idolatry while Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving God's Law, Exod. 32:1-9. Aaron (Moses' brother), at the insistence of the people, took the people's golden earrings and formed an idol, a golden calf, and the people bowed down and worshiped it. They gave the idol credit for freeing them from Egyptian slavery. The Lord God was outraged by their actions. I call attention to this idolatry to note Exod. 32:6 where the result of the idol worship follows immediately. After bowing down to the idol, the people "sat down to eat and drink and rose to play (dancing, sensually, Exod. 32:19)." Again, at Num. 25:1-9, the Israelites socialized with the Moabites and worshiped their gods. As they did so, they sat down with them and ate food dedicated to the idols of Moab. God was highly displeased, and a plague which killed twenty-four thousand followed the Israelites' idolatry. These incidents and other like occurrences, along with the strict Jewish dietary laws (Lev. 11; Deut. 14), established Jewish traditions which were to be perpetual, Lev. 3:17. No doubt this long tradition was what bothered the apostle Peter in Acts 10 when he was instructed in a dream by a voice from heaven

telling him to eat a number of meats from unclean animals. Peter was so insistent against following the voice that the Lord repeated the command, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat," three times before the apostle realized what the vision meant. The truth which Peter was being told by God was that Gentiles, too, can be saved spiritually by God if they trust Jesus Christ for eternal life. Eating, then, has had a major role in peoples' relating to God.

III. The Corinthian believers faced a real problem when they, as new creatures in Christ Jesus, were tempted to eat meat which they knew had been butchered for the express purpose of worshiping gods of idolatry. In the first verse of Chap. 8 Paul sets the tone for the proper attitude and action to follow by a believer when confronted with such a situation. He or she should be guided by agape love. The real truth is that idols are not real but imaginary, because there is, in fact, only one God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, any meat offered in sacrifice to a false god means absolutely nothing, truthfully. Not only is this reality applicable regarding food, but also all matters relating to idolatry. In Rom. 14 Paul deals with this same problem of relating to other believers who have qualms about giving any credence to superstitions (idolatry). Those who have placed their trust in Jesus Christ but are weak in the faith (immature) are not to be ostracized or despised, Rom. 14:1-3. A believer with mature faith should not judge a weak believer, "for God hath received him," Rom. 14:3b. We believers cannot escape from having to associate with believers of various levels of spiritual maturity and even unbelievers who disallow the very existence of God, John 17:14-15; Rom. 14:7; I Cor. 5:9-10. In relating to others we must remember that the Lord has reserved unto himself final judgment, Rom. 14:10. Therefore, we are not to judge, Matt. 7:1-2; Rom. 12:19; 14:3. Rom. 14:5 states that, [as the Holy Spirit leads], we are to be fully persuaded in our own consciences. We should not hate those who disagree with us, Rom. 14:14. According to Rom. 14:1-5 and I Cor. 8:8-13, the guiding principle for mature believers is that they should relate to immature believers motivated by love, not their own freedom. Discouraging fellow-believers destroys their witnessing, and Paul declared that he would be guided by how his own actions affected other believers, I Cor. 8:13. If we agree to follow Paul's example, and subject ourselves to the weaker believer's conscience, we are, in effect, adjusting our actions to his or her conscience. Recall now again vs. 1 where the basis of our relating to one another as fellow-believers is to be love. In other words, our first allegiance is to the Lord who gave himself that we may receive, through faith in him, eternal life with God, our heavenly Father. This problem of interpersonal relationships has to do with those things not explicitly documented in God's Word. For example, today we believers face such decisions as artificial insemination, artificial birth control, women's role in the work place other than the traditional motherly and homemaking responsibilities, extending human mortal life far beyond God's natural processes, the role of women in organized church activities including ordinations and pastoral ministries, men's responsibilities in fatherhood including effective support (physical, emotional, and spiritual) of the father's offspring, and many, many decisions which have to be made that make eating meat dedicated to idols seem remote and simple for us. Only love of the Lord Jesus Christ can lead a believer to make the proper, Spirit-led decisions.

July 21, 2002

"Paul As Apostle"
I Cor. 9

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Perhaps the most sensitive problem for Paul was for people whom he had won to Christ and were now being spiritually nurtured by him, to be told that he was not a true apostle, i.e., he had not been sent by God but was acting on his own for money, prestige, etc. In Chap. 9 Paul speaks in no uncertain terms about his full credentials as an apostle, one commissioned and sent by the Lord. The chief reason for Paul's qualification as an apostle rested squarely upon the fact that he had been with Jesus Christ, the Lord. He asks in vs. 1, "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" The Scripture verifies Paul's having been with Jesus on two occasions. First, Jesus confronted Saul (Paul) on the road between Jerusalem and Damascus as a dedicated Pharisee seeking to annihilate this new "sect" (followers of Jesus as the Messiah) of Judaism, Acts 9:1-9. Secondly, Jesus was with Paul for some portion of or all of three years, Gal. 1:6-24. During both of these meetings Jesus had already bodily ascended back to our heavenly Father (Acts 1:9-11), and we have only the briefest details of the mechanics of these consultations of Paul with our Lord. On the road to Damascus the Pharisee Paul was with others who heard the voice of Jesus but saw no one speaking, only a very bright light which apparently surrounded Saul, Acts 9:5,7; I Cor. 15:8. In the I Cor. 15:8 passage Paul states that he had seen Jesus "as one born out of due time." We are not told explicitly in Scripture what "due time" means, but I believe it means after Jesus' bodily resurrection. In Acts 1:21-22 Peter said that the apostle who was to be chosen (by election) to succeed Judas Iscariot must have been one who had accompanied Jesus during the entire period of his "going in and out among us" beginning with John the Immerser's immersion of Jesus in the Jordan until after Jesus' resurrection from the Mount of Olives. The fact that Paul had not done so caused some, I believe, to doubt the reality of his apostleship. Therefore, Paul said that his seeing Jesus was "as one born out of due time." Another rhetorical question Paul asks in vs. 1 is "Am I not free?" I believe this "free" is being free from any other person's direction to speak authoritatively for God. We can, then, take Paul's writings which we call Scripture or portions of the Bible to be, in actuality, God's Word. The Corinthian believers first heard and believed the Gospel from Paul, and that caused the fourth rhetorical question in vs. 1, "Are ye not my work in the Lord?" Before God had his Word codified (written), Paul's testimony was in this apostolic period God's only message to the Corinthians. They were his "work in the Lord."

II. Another questionable (by his critics) action exercised by Paul was that on occasion he used some offerings donated by those who had believed the Gospel through his proclamation for supporting himself. Many do not, I believe, catch the facetious point Paul in making in vs. 5. I believe that Paul was a widower and could not have been supporting a spouse on his missionary endeavors, but he notes that Peter and the Lord's half brothers, James and Jude, are doing so. Could Paul have been saying, in effect, "At least

I am supporting only myself, while others have families also to be supported?" Regarding missionary support Paul quotes Deut. 25:4. (See also at I Tim. 5:18.) Herein the principle is given that oxen should not be muzzled while threshing grain so that they can eat while threshing. Paul states that God is saying that people who labor in spiritual work should also be fed by those who reap spiritual gain. If Paul had not been willing to compare himself as a missionary with an ox, who else would? It certainly is a valid comparison in principle. He further illustrates this same principle by mentioning military personnel living from the taxes of the people they protect, a planter of a vineyard consuming the fruit therefrom, and herdsmen drinking milk from his herd. Should not Paul and Barnabus (Paul's helper) also be free to live from the efforts of those whom they served spiritually? Where there were serious questions (usually from nonbelievers or weak believers) about whether Paul was "working for money," he earned his own keep through his trade of tentmaking, Acts 18:1-3; II Thes. 3:8-10. In fact, Paul was in Corinth at Acts 18:1-3, and he made reference to the fact that he supported himself while among the Corinthians, vs. 12. In vs. 13 Paul notes the Old Covenant directive that those who serve others spiritually should be supported materially by the ones served, Lev. 6:16,26; 7:6,31; Num. 18:8-32. Paul's capstone of this principle was Jesus' instruction at Matt. 10:5-10; 12:1-8.

III. In vss. 15-27 God's Apostle, Paul, relates a very introspective view of his calling by God to spread the Good News that God has a plan through the Lord Jesus Christ to reclaim spiritually everyone who will trust that one and only begotten Son of God. In vs. 15 Paul expressly states that he has used none of the privileges of material support, because he would rather experience mortal death than have his testimony cheapened and considered unworthy (void or untrue). He takes no credit for being someone special, for it is the message he proclaims and the Lord of that message that is the essence of value in his (Paul's) activities. His greatest sorrow would be if, for any reason, he were not using every ounce of his strength to proclaim what Jesus himself had declared to him. This proclamation has a self-contained reward, and Paul considered his assignment to be what we call today a "window of opportunity." For Paul it was "now or never," a special "stewardship of the Gospel is entrusted unto me," vs. 17. He determined to "make the Gospel of Christ without charge" rather than [be seen as one who] "abuses his [apostolic] rights in the Gospel," vs. 18. Again, in vs. 19, the apostle declares his freedom from all men, but he has deliberately sought, by being socially (culturally) acceptable to all, to be more able to win everyone (who will listen) to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord. To illustrate his cultural freedom, he states that he does not shun the Jews (many wanted Paul dead), but he witnessed in their synagogues, Acts 16:1-3. Likewise, Paul was willing to accept Gentiles (nonJews) who had no understanding or knowledge of the Law (Pentateuch), Rom. 10:12; Gal. 2:11-12. If he needed to appear weak to win those who were weak, he did so. He associated with everyone ("all things to all men") to encourage them to accept the Lord Jesus Christ. This he did for the furtherance of the Gospel, and, notice the special remark, "that I might be partaker thereof with you," vs. 23b. A sports illustration then follows. In a race everyone conditions their bodies in preparation, but only one wins the race. Every believer should be prepared, honest, and self-disciplined so that their lives can best present Jesus Christ to those who do not know him as Savior and Lord of life. We should strive not to be "castaways," ineffective witnesses.

July 28, 02

"Liberty And License"
I Cor. 10

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Liberty and license can perhaps best be illustrated by assuming that a government would enact a law removing all restriction on the speed a driver could maintain on the nation's highways. Some automobiles are capable of going one hundred fifty miles per hour or more, and undoubtedly some hot-rodders would delight in demonstrating their "prowess" with their speed. The point is that even though one would be licensed to drive at such speeds, should one choose to exercise such liberty to forsake the safety of self and others on the highway? Paul, the apostle of God, discusses the relationship of liberty with license for believers in Jesus Christ in the tenth chapter of his first Biblical letter to the Corinthian believers. He assumed that their then current belief was not correct regarding liberty and license, "I would not have you be unaware." Paul's approach was to review the history of the Israelites and what happened as they took unreasonable advantage of their freedom of choice, even though God had given them instructions to keep them safe and happy. The Jews were guided by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night as they journeyed from Egypt to the land God had promised them. In the first part of this travel they were led by God through the Red Sea on dry ground. They were baptized unto Moses, i.e., the Jews were immersed (surrounded) in God's leadership through Moses. The cloud and Red Sea were the water symbolically of immersion, and, following that, the Jews were further protected by God with "spiritual meat," manna, and "spiritual drink," water from a Rock supplied also by God. In vs. 4 Paul states very plainly that that spiritual Rock was none other than the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Remember, in our look at Chap. 8 we noted that while Moses was absent from the Jews receiving the Law for a short period, they demanded an idol to worship. They also complained about the manna and the scarcity of water, Exod. 16:9,28; 17:3-7. During this Exodus period, God was not pleased with the children of Israel, vs. 5.

II. In vs. 6 Paul gives his reason for recalling for the Corinthians this episode in Jewish history. We are to reflect on their experiences and choose not to complain or "lust after evil things as they also lusted." They expressed a desire to return to Egyptian bondage (Exod. 16:3) rather than carry out God's will for them as a free people. Nor are we to serve false gods as idolaters, covetousness, Col. 3:5. Paul here repeats the two occasions which we examined in Chap. 8, Exod. 32:6 and Numb. 25:1-9 when the Israelites socialized sensually while reinforcing each others idolatry and sexual immorality. In vs. 9 Paul admonishes us believers not to put Christ to the test as some of the Jews tested God, Exod. 17:2,7. Also, we are not to murmur (complain) as they did, Exod. 16:2 and Numb. 14:36-38. The bad things happened to these Israelites because they were disobedient to God's will. Their physical lives were terminated and their effort could no longer influence others (the nonJews) for God. These experiences are recorded as evidence that those who, privileged by God to follow his will throughout the earth and thereby spread God's spiritual peace and reclamation to all mankind, should not become derelict in that assignment of God.

If God's people do not continue to practice his will and share the Good News with others, the end result will be that God will end the Gospel era, II Thes. 2:3-12; II Pet. 3:8-10. We as believers in Jesus Christ are God's final witnesses in the world, "upon whom the ends of the ages are come." We are not to regard our privilege of being God's children and evangelists as immunity from evil temptation. We are not assured of being free from temptation of sensual immorality and covetousness (idolatry: the love of money, materialism, secularism, Matt. 6:19,21,24,32-33; Col. 3:5b; I Tim. 6:5-10). Yielding to the temptation to serve self in these ways can take away part or all of our time and effectiveness as witnesses of what God has done for us through our faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. As such defective witnesses, we are not able to "go ye therefore, and teach all nations, immersing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," for it is only as Christlike witnesses will Jesus Christ be "with you alway, even unto the end of the age." We are to maintain our fellowship with God the Father by following (the will of) his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

III. Even as God remained faithful during the early period of their history, the Israelites were tempted to disfavor God's will for them by yielding to those temptations. Now when we as believers in Jesus Christ are tempted as were the Jews, we have God's assurance that he will not permit us to be tempted beyond his willingness to empower us to overcome (endure) that temptation (testing). Vss. 14-15 tells us to stay away (flee) from idolatry, and be wise in our judgments (decisions). How are we to be encouraged to walk with Jesus Christ in our daily lives? Paul here reminds us of Jesus' instituting his memorial meal during his last Passover celebration with his apostles. He was, with this meal, signifying that his forthcoming sacrificial death would begin God's New Covenant with mankind. The New Covenant was created by the sacrifice of God's personification (God's becoming human, II Cor. 5:19) for the forgiveness of the sins of all who will confess and trust him as Savior and Lord. The Lord's Supper is to be practiced by all believers to keep continually reminded of God's love for his creation. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son," Lk 22:7-20; John 3:16a. [I believe that this reminder was a part of the worship service from time to time as the early believers assembled for worship, and is why God's Word tells us "not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together," Heb. 10:14-25.] Paul in vss. 14-15 tells the Corinthians that participation in the Lord's Supper at worship services symbolizes the believers' fellowship with the person of our Lord Jesus. Such participation shows the oneness of, not only the local believers with one another, but also the oneness of the local group to the Lord himself. Carrying forward the relationship of believers with the people of Israel, Paul states that as the Israelites all partook of the altar sacrifices as one, so do all believers partake of the Lord's Supper as one body. But we believers should not confuse eating meat offered to idols with either the Jews' eating God ordained sacrifices at the altar of God or the believers' remembering our Lord during their participation in the Lord's Supper. When buying meat at the market, a believer should not even inquire whether the meat was prepared for idol worship, but when there is a question, do not confuse liberty with license. Every believer should consider the license of (especially immature believers) others and not just his or her own liberty. Agape love is to control ones actions with Christlike grace.

I. We should remind ourselves that Paul in this section of the First Corinthian Letter is answering specific questions which had been directed to his attention by the congregation members themselves. In Chaps. 11-14 the general problems being addressed were appropriate conduct in the worship services. Keeping this theme firmly in ones mind is imperative if we are to understand what Paul (God) wants us believers to know and practice. Not remembering that Paul develops the church's conduct in the entire Chaps. 11-14 passage can lead us to misunderstand God's truth there. Further, the contemporary customs and cultural norms should be taken into account throughout the context of Chaps. 11-14. To do otherwise, as many have done, such passages as, "Let your women keep silence in the congregations: for it is not permitted unto them to speak;" (I Cor. 14:34), can be readily misunderstood and abused. We noted, for instance, in Chap. 7:2-4 that Paul makes believing spouses equal in their relations with each other, a truth which was utterly unacceptable by that culture at that place at that time. This concept that faith in the Lord Jesus made women free (See also Gal. 3:28.) was so unheard of that many of the new female believers were having difficulties adjusting to their new freedom. (Recall that Peter himself had trouble accepting Gentile customs which, according to Paul, had nothing to do with disputing the basic truths of the Christian faith, Gal. 2:11-21.) In other words, not only were the women believers having adjustment problems, but so were the men believers.

II. With the above in mind, we now examine the text of Chap. 11. Paul begins the two principle concepts in the chapter, proper believer's attire and partaking appropriately of the Lord's Supper by inviting the Corinthian believers to emulate his own attitudes and actions by keeping the customs (ordinances) he had practiced while among them, Acts 18:18. Evidently, a custom of the Corinthians related to some degree to the present-day practice of many Mideastern women, i.e., to keep their head covered in public places. In vss. 3-10 Paul gives the evidence of the Old Covenant (the Pentateuch especially) indicating why head covering was symbolic of the relationship of human male-female differences. The first human male, Adam, was God's first priority in his (God's) creation of humankind. The woman was subsequently created to fill the male's need for companionship, Gen. 2:18. In Paul's day head covering was the symbolic evidence of the authority of the male over the female, vs. 7. For example, temple prostitutes regularly went about in public without head covering indicating that they were not under the authority of any man but felt free to engage any male. In fact, a sure way of recognizing who the whores were was the lack of a head covering. (Today they not only leave their heads bare but also just as much of the rest of their bodies as the law permits, and beyond.) One can readily understand why believers were so sensitive about the dress habits of both men and women believers, for both were implicated, vss. 6-7. What one wore on his or her head symbolized authority. I recall during WWII that the custom (order) was that

military personnel were never to go hatless while bearing personal armor (firearms). Carrying a pistol represented, in effect, the nation's constitutional authority. Its use represented national, corporate authority. Paul's conclusion concerning wearing headdress is given in vss. 11-16. In vss. 11-12 he states clearly that following the creation of Eve no man can claim independence apart from women. No man after Adam, came into being (including our Lord Jesus himself) apart from the involvement of a woman. The race's continuation makes males and females interdependent. So, in vs. 13 Paul leaves the matter of headdress to personal judgment for each believer [as led by God's Holy Spirit]. By nature men's hair grows shorter than women's normally. In vss. 14-15 Paul notes this natural difference. The authority which was associated with head coverings from Adam and Eve to God's sending Jesus to institute a New Covenant with mankind has been altered. We can note this change (that Jesus "leveled the playing field") in Paul's summary conclusion at vs. 16: where there is a contention about authority as indicated by wearing or not wearing head covering, "we have no such custom neither the churches of God." Leaving the concept of authority, we should not forget God's insistence that men and women never neglect to show their sexual differences, including the outward appearances involved in clothing, Deut. 22:5. There, not keeping men and women distinctive in dress is declared detestable to the Lord. This distinction of sexuality has a special spiritual importance as regards sexual activities, Gen. 19:4-13; Lev. 20:13; Rom. 1:26-28; Jude 7.

III. The second question asked Paul and answered in Chap. 11 is the manner in which the Lord's Supper should be conducted. This ordinance (custom) was initiated by our Lord himself at his last observance of the Jewish Passover, Matt. 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:19-20, just before he was sacrificed for believers' sins. Obviously some of the Corinthians were abusing this important custom which Jesus said should be practiced by his followers (believers) as a commemoration of what Jesus had done for all mankind, "especially of those who believe," I Tim. 4:10. How were the Corinthians abusing the Lord's Supper? Paul's revelation in vss. 17-22 indicates that the remembrance meal was an occasion for doing more than just remembering the Lord's sacrifice. First, the observance gave evidence that the believers were divided. Some were bringing their own full meals and making the time primarily one of receiving physical nutrition rather than commemorating the Lord's death. Some were even surfeiting without sharing and drinking until drunk, vs. 21. Note in vs. 23 that Paul received his instructions regarding the Supper directly from the Lord Jesus. In vss. 24-25 the apostle quotes Jesus himself regarding the Passover observance on the night he was betrayed. Taking the bread first, he indicated that the bread [symbolized] his body which was broken for believers. Then he took the cup and remarked "this do, as oft as you drink it, in remembrance of me." Jesus said that the drink represented "the new covenant [sealed by] my blood." Paul states, "- - as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death 'till he come." Eating a regular meal together in fellowship with the family of faith can be a joyous experience, but such socializing does not commemorate the Lord's sacrifice for our sins appropriately. As we participate in observing the Lord's Supper, we are to examine our attitudes and actions in light of God's will for us as we live our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Aug. 11, 2002

"Jesus Is Lord"
I Cor. 12

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. We began last Sunday to consider the first of Chaps. 11-14 which have to do with proper conduct for believers especially during the formal worship experiences. In Chap. 12, the second chapter, Paul discloses how the Lord directs each believer on a one-to-one basis to do his will for them. A reminder is first given to these Corinthians who were, for the most part, Gentiles without the benefit of a knowledge of Jewish history and their customs. The apostle repeats a clause given several times in this letter: "I would not have you [to continue] ignorant." Gentiles historically worshiped (were carried away by) dumb (silent or lifeless) idols. After turning from their idols to a living, personal faith in Jesus Christ, they were to follow the Lord's will by listening to God's Holy Spirit, the Spirit that was in Christ. Why should a believer depend upon the Spirit's leadership? Because the Holy Spirit, without exception, properly, appropriately, and precisely relates a believer to Jesus as Lord of life, Ezek. 11:19-20; John 14:22-29. "I want you to understand that no person who is led by God's Spirit refers to Jesus as "anathema" [or denounce Jesus as other than God's only begotten Son and Messiah (Savior)."] Put another way, "no person can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit," vs. 3; John 6:41-47; 16:7-15. Jesus, the Son, and God, the Father, (who are one) are one with the Holy Spirit, and it is through God's Spirit that individual believers are assigned and empowered by God to do his various assignments in the Kingdom or God. These assignments are varied, but they are all given by that one Spirit, vs. 4. These tasks involve many services, but there is only one Lord, vs. 5. Although individual believers are assigned many different activities, it is the same God who is performing his many works through every and all believers in the local congregations. Each task is added to the overall work of God, vs. 6. To illustrate the importance of each believer's contribution to the whole work of God in the earth, Paul states that the one Spirit gives to one believer the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge, to another faith, to another the ability to heal, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy (witnessing, evangelizing, preaching), to another the ability to distinguish various spirits (I John 4:1-6), to another speaking in languages other than his or her own, and to another the ability to interpret those other languages, vss. 8-10. The Holy Spirit makes these and various other assignments of responsibilities to different believers as the Spirit sees fit, vs. 11.

II. Apparently some of the Corinthian believers were of the opinion that the Spirit's distribution of tasks was making a distinction by importance of assignment. In other words certain believers considered those with certain tasks to be more important than others. To offset this lack of understanding, Paul proceeds to liken the congregation members' assignments to the many parts of a human body. The ekklesia makes up the extension of Christ's body with the Lord Jesus Christ being the Head of that body. We as believers are initially drawn to accept Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior) through the agency and power of God's Holy Spirit. As we yield to the Spirit's

leadership, we are immersed (with physical immersion symbolizing that confession that Jesus is now our Lord of life) into that spiritual body of which Jesus is Head and of which all his believers (the ekklesia) are the body, vss. 12-13. When we become believers, we are new creatures (as parts of Christ's body) regardless of our mortal statuses, i.e., Jews, Gentiles (all nonJews), slaves, or free, [men or women, Gal. 3:28]. Just as the mortal body is made up of many parts even so is Jesus' body, the ekklesia. Therefore, one member of the ekklesia is as important to the total welfare of the entire spiritual body of Christ as any part of the human mortal body is to any human being. It is irrational to assume that because the feet are all that are necessary for bodily locomotion, the body has no need for hands. Contrariwise, the hands are no less important to the body's overall functioning than are the feet. [With only feet one could get to the pea patch but could not pick the peas without the hands.] Saying that one body part is so important does not exclude the need for any other part. Paul then notes even those body parts which many would consider most important, the eyes and the ears would, by themselves, make a useless nonfunctional body. Even today mankind has not developed prostheses for all parts of the human body nor the ability to transplant all necessary organs to sustain physical life, the brain for instance. We sympathize with quadriplegics (person without the use of both arms and both legs), and Paul (God's Word) is saying that an ekklesia can be so handicapped if all members do not perform the assignments which the Holy Spirit has given them. Likewise, if every member performed the same type function, how imbalanced the congregation would be! If on a given occasion, everyone uses his or her tongue to speak and no one uses his or her ears, the ekklesia is accomplishing nothing for the good of each other or God. We should not lose sight of the importance of all the necessary functions of the ekklesia, nor should we assume that those parts which could be considered less important (feeble) to be unnecessary, vs. 22. In fact, in vs. 23, Paul states that because some parts of the congregation (individuals) appear to be so insignificant that no one wants them, they are even more important. [It is like someone saying in today's world, "She does not work, she's only a housewife, homemaker, mother, etc." What a pitiful shame! - WA] For the most obviously important parts of Christ's body, the ekklesia, there is no need for special emphasis, but for those of seemingly less prestige, more encouragement is needed. Paul says that one's satisfaction should come from, not just that he or she is performing his or her assignment well, but the satisfactory results for the entire congregation, vs. 24. The ultimate result should be that there be no divisions (schisms) in the group. All members should care and respect every other member of the congregation, vs. 25. When one member suffers, all members should suffer out of Godly sympathy, and when one member is honored, all the members should rejoice in the honor, vs. 26. We believers are individuals but still make up the one body of our Lord, vs. 27. Now, vss. 28-30 are extremely important in Paul's (God's) thesis, I believe. While there are apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, helpers, coordinators of business affairs, those who speak foreign languages they have not learned formally, and those who interpret those foreign languages, no one person is to do all. The understood answer to Paul's rhetorical questions about this is, "No." In vs. 31 Paul introduces the answer to all misunderstandings about congregational differences, Chap. 13.

Aug, 18, 2002

"A More Excellent Way"
I Cor. 13

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Last week we noted in Chap. 12 the various gifts of God's Holy Spirit which various believers of the Corinthian congregation were assigned for nurturing the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is true that individual believers grow in God's grace through exercising the Lord's assigned tasks in his kingdom, but Paul's (God's) emphasis in practicing God's desires for them was that the entire fellowship be enhanced in the process. In vs. 31 of the preceding Chap. 12, Paul admonishes the Corinthian believers to "desire earnestly the best gifts," meaning that a given believer should choose and give him or herself to the task God's Spirit is leading. The best gift for one believer can be all wrong for another believer. In other words, a believer should choose what is best for him or her. But can one be most satisfied that he or she is doing what pleases the heavenly Father? Paul realizes how frustrated a believer can become in trying to please the one, true, holy Creator of the universe. Paul states in 12:31 " - - and now I will show you the best way to apply yourself to the tasks of God for you." He, with this introduction, leads us to the famous "Love Chapter" of the New Covenant.

II. The reason for love, agape, being the supreme motivation for a believer's attitudes and actions, is because it is a sure sign that one is being Godlike. At Matt. 5:43-48 Jesus in his lengthy Sermon on the Mountain speaks of his disciples' choosing not only to love their neighbors but also their enemies. The Lord's climax of this discussion concerning believer's loving everyone is, "Be ye therefore perfect (complete or whole), even as your Father in heaven is perfect." Further, John 3:16 tells us why God brought his second and final Covenant with humanity into existence. He loved all people, and now, through faith in his only begotten (through his Holy Spirit) Son, anyone, even enemies of God, can appropriate God's love by believing and accepting this Good News. In summary, if a believer is to be Godlike, he or she must love as God loves, agape, without expectation of something in return. Now we can better understand how we can, when led by God's Spirit, associate amicably with our enemies and even our fellow believers! Truly, God's way is "a more excellent way!" (I Cor. 12:31)

III. Please note that vs. 1 contrasts those who speak in tongues of any other language than their own or even of angels (heavenly) and do not agape everyone, he or she is like beating noisy cymbals or the high and piercing sounding brass musical instruments. Speaking, however loudly, does not necessarily communicate that which is expressing genuine love and concern for the best welfare of God's ekklesia. [I believe, because of what follows in Chap. 14, Paul is emphasizing that the gift of speaking in tongues unknown to the one uttering that language, is not exercising a spiritual gift which makes that speaker "spiritually superior," Chap. 12. Exercising this gift was, in fact, being abused by certain believers in the Corinthian congregation. Specifically, who the abusers of this gift were, Paul deals with in Chap. 14.] Likewise, understanding and exercising the gift of prophecy (witnessing of God's love

through Jesus Christ) including the deep mysteries of God's working with his creation without that agape which moved God to love us who are unholy (sinners), we are reduced to nothing. We are also nothing (unworthy) if we have an inexhaustible faith as described by Jesus in Matt. 17:20 but which is not motivated by agape. Paul in vs. 3 relates agape to the beneficent giving of everything one has to feed and care for those less fortunate, the poor. There is no spiritual profit or advantage when one subjects his or her very body to be physically abused (even burned), without regard to agape for God and ones fellow human beings. Many men were crucified during the period when our Lord suffered his sacrificial death on the cross, but they were not put to death to express God's love for all people to have life eternal with God. God's agape made the difference! We should keep in our minds (emphasized week before last, 8-4-02,) that Paul is addressing specific problems in the Corinthian congregation, abuse of certain spiritual gifts (especially the gift of tongues), envy of others gifts, selfishness as expressed by prolific use of lawsuits, impatience with others (especially in public meetings and worship services), and divisions in the membership (cliques). In the first verses of this chapter Paul lists five of the spiritual gifts: tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith, and sacrificial giving of material possessions. Even doing good things equals nothing in God's sight without agape!

IV. Why is agape so important as an adhesive to worthiness in practicing God's spiritual assignments, gifts? The answer is given in the rest of the chapter, vss. 4-13. Before we examine this cohesion (the necessary combination of a believer's service with agape), we should remember God's communication to us at I John 4:7-21. Agape is extremely patient and considers others as equals (at-one-ment); agape is not egotistical nor boastful, nor arrogant. Agape is not rude nor a promoter of oneself at the expense of others. Agape does not incite others to anger nor hold a grudge against others (keeps no account of evil against others). Agape is not delighted when another person stumbles spiritually and sins, but rather, is happy when another person is growing in God's grace to become more like our Lord Jesus Christ in attitudes and actions. Agape sustains ones loyalty to others without regard to cost to self, stands by them against opposition, expects them to do well, and believes in their integrity and worth. Eventually, believers will have agape alone as the only needed gift, because agape lasts always and never fails. On the other hand, spreading God's message of spiritual salvation will no longer be necessary, the speaking of (tongues) the language of others will no longer be needed, and knowledge will be universal. At this time our knowledge is partial, and our understanding is limited with flesh-and-blood (mortal) limitations. Perfect, complete understanding has been promised by the Lord, and when that promise is granted by God, we believers will have all ignorance taken away. We are childlike (exercising hope through faith, Matt. 18:1-4) in this life, but eventually we will be like Jesus Christ, Rom. 8:29; I John 3:1-3. At best, we believers now see the future hazily, but in God's own good time we will see Jesus face to face. Paul finally compares faith, hope, and agape and concludes that the greatest (of absolute necessity) of the three

Aug. 25, 2002

"Prophecy, Tongues, And Worship"
I Cor. 14

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Just as Paul began Chap. 13 referring to speaking in a foreign language, he likewise begins Chap. 14 (vs. 2) making reference to the same activity. In other words, this problem keeps recurring in the letter in this section, Chaps. 11-14. Now as we come to Chap. 14, the apostle confronts the problem which was occurring in the Corinthian congregation head-on. In vs. 1 the theme of Chap. 13 is repeated, "Be guided by agape and desire to follow spiritual concerns [as contrasted with carnal concerns noted in the beginning chapters of this letter: division, legal actions against other believers, incest, etc.], and, rather than dote on proving yourself to be spiritually superior to others, seek (desire) to witness of the Gospel to the lost, pure and simply," vs. 1. Because speaking languages other than your own is a proof of God's special revelation (Mk 16:17; Acts 2:3-4,11; 10:46; 19:6), and is not usually appropriate in a monolithic situation such as existed in the congregation there at Corinth, except when foreigners attended the services. If you witness to the French in Russian about the Gospel, to the French what you are saying is not communicating useful information, and the Gospel still remains a mystery to the French. Please note that the word "unknown" in vs. 2 should be italicized, because it does not appear in the original Greek text. Further, "unknown" does not modify tongue(s) elsewhere in the New Covenant in this regard. "Tongue" in our today's communication should be "language" or "speech," and "unknown" should then be supplied as "a foreign." Our word "glossary" comes from the New Covenant Greek word which is translated "tongue," glotta or glossa. In the first six verses of this chapter Paul stresses the importance of communicating the essence of the Gospel to those who have not heard, rather than speak what amounted to gibberish or gobbledygook (a language without meaning to the hearer). If a member of the congregation speaks a language which makes him or her feel good or exalts him or herself, but does not further the cause of Jesus Christ (purify or build up his body, the ekklesia), then the Lord does not receive glory and credit for what is happening. Speaking foreign languages as a special assignment (gift) from God was most useful in spreading the Gospel, especially during its (the Gospel's) early years. The evidence is that many were used of God to speak of Jesus Christ to those whose native language which the ones witnessing did not know, but it is also evident that many of the Corinthian believers were abusing this gift of God for self-edifying (aggrandizement). Paul believed that the ability to speak a foreign language was desirable at times in the Corinthian location, but he saw a greater need for the members to witness to those who spoke their own tongue, vs. 5. In vs. 6 the apostle speaks directly to the fact that miraculously speaking in a foreign language was intended to reveal a special (unknown before) knowledge from God.

II. Beginning with vs. 7 Paul (God) explains the tongue gift in more detail than is found elsewhere in the New Covenant. The inherent evidence in these verses makes clear that "tongue speaking" had become something not originally intended by God for its use.

Believers were uttering sounds that communicated nothing to anyone. For sounds to communicate intended thoughts from person A to another person, B, there must be a commonality in both. For example, if someone is playing music on a flute, a hearer must have heard a flute to know what instrument is being played. The hearer would know that the sound heard is not coming from a harp. Likewise, a trumpeter could call a military unit to begin conflict with an enemy, but if the soldiers did not know the correct bugle call, they might retreat instead. So it is for those who seek to communicate God's love through his Son, Jesus Christ. They must speak words that are intelligible to the hearer if he or she is to give reasonable consideration to God's position regarding sin and salvation. When singing praise to God, more than words should be used. God's Spirit should be evident in the song sung by a believer. When the Spirit leads one to convey God's message to another, there should be evidence of both the mechanics of communication and also the urgency of God's Spirit in the spirit of the conveyer, vs. 15. Music that glorifies the Lord by a vocalist involves much more than timbre, tone, pitch, and timing. Such music must have the right words as well as the right spirit. In vs. 18 Paul admits that he spoke more foreign languages than all the Corinthians put together. In his missionary endeavors God enabled the apostle to be a communicator in languages which he had not learned through formal training. But, even so, in a group who all spoke the same language, he would rather speak five words of their native language than ten thousand words of a language foreign to them. Understanding what is spoken is the prime reason for speaking in the first place, vs. 21. In this verse he quotes Isa. 28:11-12 wherein the Jews, even when hearing God's message, refused to interpret properly and heed the message. In vs. 22 Paul states plainly what he stated above in vs. 6, tongues were used by God for special revelations of God's relating to mankind, Mk 16:17; Acts 2:3-4,8,11; 10:46; 19:1-7. Now note especially vs. 23 in which Paul states that it is possible for the gift of speaking in another language to create activities in the congregational meeting where outsiders (unbelievers) can justly consider the participants to be insane (mad), i.e., without reasonable communication experienced. For conversions to take place and praise of God to be shown, proper worship of God should be understood by all those present.

III. In vss. 26-40 Paul gets very specific about the problem of the confusion (vss. 33,40) of the misuse and abuse of what had been a legitimate use of the miraculous speaking of foreign languages to establish and communicate special changes in his relating to the ekklesia. This misuse and abuse was especially prevalent during worship services. Remember that back in 1:11 we learned that it was from Chloe's (a woman) family that Paul had learned how the congregation was doing, including its problems. No doubt, Chloe mentioned the confusion which the gift of tongues was causing. Apparently, the chief participants who were causing the public interruptions were the women, vs. 34. That the women were especially involved in the confusion can better be understood by noting that at I Cor. 11:5 we learned that the women participated in both public prayer and prophecy. Perhaps in their new freedom in Christ Jesus, they were in the process of learning their new responsibilities.

Sep. 1, 2002

"You Shall Never Die Spiritually"
I Cor. 1 5

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The portion of Scripture which we are considering today is one of the highlights of God's communication with humankind. It contains a factual, eyewitness account of the grace God has shown for the restoration of any human spirit who will accept God's plan in vss. 1-11. This chapter stresses the importance of the part Jesus' bodily resurrection from mortal death (separation) plays in God's plan, especially in vss. 12-28. A person's expected response to this Good-News-plan of God for individuals is outlined in vss. 29-34, 58. The glorious details of the coming resurrection of those who accept God's plan of salvation is detailed in vss. 35-58. We believers would be without some of the most inspiring details of God's promise to us who are trusting his gift of spiritual salvation from Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, if we did not have information contained in this chapter. Jesus promised in John 11:25-26 that, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he may die (physically), yet shall he live (spiritually). And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Jesus taught openly and without any doubt that there is to be a resurrection in Matt. 22:23-33. In that passage Jesus quoted Exod. 3:6, 15 which he interpreted saying, "I am the God of Abraham, - Isaac, - Jacob. God is not the God of the dead [those separated from God spiritually], but of the living [those at one spiritually with him, immersed in God's atonement, reborn from above, John 3:3-7; Rom. 5:9-11]."

II. Paul could never have divulged Chap. 15, I believe, if he had not received it directly from Jesus personally, Gal. 1:12, 15-20. The apostle states as much in vs. 3 in which he says forthrightly, "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures," Psa. 16; 22; Isa. 25; 53. [Paul's Scriptures were, of course, the Old Covenant.] In vs. 1 Paul confirms that the Corinthians had received by faith this Good News which he (Paul) had delivered (witnessed) to them. Their very faith was built on this sure foundation, "- - that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures," vss. 3-4. After his resurrection, Jesus was seen by Peter, the twelve, over 500 at once, by James, all the apostles, and finally, and lastly by Paul, "as one born out of due time," vss. 5-8.

III. Evidently, some had falsely believed and were informing the Corinthians that there is to be no resurrection of believers who had died. Paul in vs. 13 directly and firmly bases believer's eventual resurrection upon the fact that God raised Jesus from physical death back to life. The Gospel would not be the Gospel (Good News) if Christ had not arisen from among the dead, Psa. 16:10; Acts 2:29-36. The resurrection is a necessary, essential element in the Gospel. When Paul was approached by Christ at his Damascus Road conversion experience, Paul's first response to Jesus was, "Who art thou, Lord?" He recognized the lordship of the one who had

spoken to him, but he "knew" Jesus was dead. When Jesus identified himself as one very alive, Paul immediately knew that Jesus had been, in fact, resurrected from among the dead. Now in Chap. 15 Paul relates Jesus' resurrection to Jewish history. He says that Jesus' resurrection was "the firstfruits" of God's new order of resurrections of the just (trusters in Jesus Christ). If Christ did not die physically as all people die physically and was then resurrected to life, then there is no basis or foundation for a believer's faith, I John 4:2-3. It is upon this faith that God is building his ekklesia, Isa. 28:14-16; Matt. 16:16-18; 21:42-46; I Pet. 2:1-10. Christ's miraculous birth, perfect life, and sacrificial death were given approval by God in his having resurrected his precious Son from among the dead (hades). If Christ was not raised by God, then believers have no hope and Paul's testimony (God's Word) is untrue which leads Paul to say, "If in this life (mortal) only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable (miserable)," vs. 19, and those who die trusting Christ are perished (annihilated or cease to exist), vs. 18.

IV. In vs. 20 Paul states plainly that Jesus has, in absolute fact, risen from death and, in so doing, has become the firstfruits of them who have believed and have died physically. The "lastfruits," all believers, will be made alive distinctively (resurrected) when Christ returns to earth to claim his entire body, ekklesia, of believers. Mortal death is the direct result of sin and all have sinned since and including Adam and Eve. But in and through Jesus Christ, all who trust him will be made alive, and every believer in his or her own order, vs. 23, i.e., Christ will bring those who have died before his second coming (firstfruits) and afterwards make spiritually alive those believers who are physically alive at his second appearance on earth. When Christ returns, he will set up the Kingdom of God on earth, "for he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet," vs. 25. The last enemy (Satan) who has promoted sin which separates people from their Creator God, will be subdued by Christ who will be subject to God, the Father, vss. 24-28. At vs. 29 Paul (God's Word) deals with those who have been immersed into God's favor (will) through faith by becoming one with God through Christ. Look carefully, with vs. 29 in mind, at Rom. 6:3-14. Vs. 29 is saying, I believe, that if Christ is not resurrected from the dead, why should we be immersed (covered by or allied with) his life and sacrificial death since there is to be no resurrection (afterlife) at all. [Present-day Christianity has, in large part, made immersion to be a rite, baptism, and to have a mechanical connotation rather than what it was originally, a physical symbol of a spiritual reality which unites a truster of Jesus Christ with God the Father who is Spirit. The theological term is "atonement" which means reconciliation, at-one-ment.] Vs. 29 says that if Christ was not raised from death, then he is still dead. If he is dead, why be an ally (through immersion) with him, because there is no spiritual advantage in doing so. Believers are still in their sin, physically alive, or dead, vss. 16-18. If Christ were still dead, then those believers who have died physically are lost forever, and we who are still alive physically are in constant jeopardy, vs. 30. If there is no afterlife, we

should just as well eat, drink and make merry for we will all die physically eventually. But no, we should not be so deceived, because every person is to give an account, believers for rewards for their services rendered to our Lord-of-life while in the flesh (Matt. 5:12; Rom. 14:12; I Cor. 5:5; I Pet. 4:5; Rev. 20:2-8), and unbelievers to eternal separation from God (Rev. 20:11-15). Therefore, "awake to righteousness and sin not; for some of you are not conducting your lives according to the knowledge you should have as believers. I speak this to your shame," vs. 34, and see also II Pet. 3:11-15.

V. As mentioned above, beginning with vs. 35 and through the remainder of the chapter, Paul reveals God's plan, with considerable detail, for those who have made, through faith, Jesus Christ Savior and Lord of their lives. How can a person believe that those who die physically can logically be made alive again? Their bodies will deteriorate, and how could they ever be put back together again? Paul says that, remembering the Creator God's omnipotence such questioning makes one foolish in their thinking, Matt. 22:29 and vs. 36. When one sows any seed such as grain, the seed deteriorates, but the result produces the same type of seed. The planted seed does not remain, but another seed is produced. This reproduction can only take place through the creative power of God, vss. 36-38. Not only is this true regarding plants, but animals have different types of flesh according to God's creative ability. God has created bodies (beings) which are either earthly or heavenly bodies. There are different types of heavenly bodies, for example, the sun and the moon. One type of celestial body has a different glory (priority) than another type, as pleases God, vss. 38,40-41. In vs. 42 Paul then likens God's creativeness as noted above to the resurrection of believing people after they have died physically. A believer's body is subject to material destruction when it no longer has a spirit within, i.e., is physically separated [dead] from its spirit [life]. The body is buried as a corrupted being, a body of weak limitations. Before physical death the human body is patterned after other things of an earthly nature, but there is a body which God will create for those salvaged spirits who are trusting him through Jesus Christ. In vss. 45-50 Paul reveals that there was an Adam without an eternally living spirit first, and then God breathed into him an eternal spirit with his (God's) own likeness (eternal life). The first Adam was made of dust (like the other animals) with the potential of becoming spiritually eternal in God's likeness. That likeness will only reach its ultimate maturity for believers after we die physically, and Jesus comes again to claim us as his own. When he comes, there will be some believers physically alive on earth. As Jesus nears the earth with all firstfruits believers who have died physically before his return, (I Thes. 4:13-18), along with all believers then physically alive, will instantaneously be changed into incorruptible bodies (beings), vs. 50, i.e., bodies not susceptible to physical limitations such as mortal death (separation), I Thes. 4:17b-18. In this process, finally, for believers, the saying, "Death is swallowed up in victory," will come to pass. Death was encountered by all humanity because of their sins (disobedience to God's will) before and after

God revealed his Law to mankind. After the Law came, the effects of sin was compounded, because mankind knew directly what God wanted him to do. Nevertheless, the situation was hopeless for everyone until God the Father sent his only Son, Christ Jesus. Faith in God's righteousness through Christ Jesus brings complete victory over the grave and the sin which puts one there. Being assured of ultimate victory through Christ, we should serve the Lord diligently and continually, "forasmuch as we know that our labor for the Lord is not futile," vs. 58. The sting of death is neutralized through the miraculous birth, faultless life (sinless), sacrificial death, burial and resurrection of the person (body) of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

"Low in the grave he lay - Jesus my Savior. Waiting the coming day - Jesus, my Lord!
 Vainly they watch his bed - Jesus my Savior. Vainly they seal the dead - Jesus, my Lord!
 Death cannot keep his prey - Jesus my Savior. He tore the bars away - Jesus my Lord!

Up from the grave he arose, with a mighty triumph o'er his foes. He arose a victor from the dark domain, and he lives forever with his saints to reign. He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!"

"Work, for the night is coming, work thro' the morning hours;
 Work while the dew is sparkling. Work 'mid springing flowers.
 Work when the day grows brighter. Work in the glowing sun.
 Work, for the night is coming, when man's work is done.
 Work, for the night is coming under the sunset skies;
 While their bright tints are glowing. Work for daylight flies.
 Work till the last beam fadeth, fadeth to shine no more.
 Work while the night is darkening when man's work is o'er."

Sep. 8, 2002

"Inspired Sharing"
I Cor. 1 6

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Paul continued his doctrinal teaching through the first fifteen chapters of this first letter to the believers at Corinth, and now turns to the very practical matter of their sharing with the destitute believers in Judea. This letter to Corinth was written about AD 57 from Ephesus. Paul knew that those who had been faithful to Christ Jesus back in Jerusalem and its environs (Judea) were undergoing trials and deprivation of food and other necessities of life. Mentioning taking a collection for the believers there presents a vivid contrast with the previous chapter where heavenly, spiritual details have been explained. One of the emphases of this first Corinthian letter was that God's people were to respect and love one another wherever God's ekklesia was being gathered. Paul also was very interested in demonstrating that there is no difference in God's sight between believers who are either man, woman, Jew, Greek (Gentile), bond (slave), or free (nonslave). What could demonstrate such love for fellow believers more than the sharing of their possessions with foreign Jews by Corinthian Gentiles? In vs. 1 the apostle made clear to the Corinthians that, not only were they being given the opportunity to share, but other believers (Galatians) were being asked to do likewise. The universal nature of God's grace through Christ Jesus was through the believers' individual faith in God's Messiah. The spiritual bond of faith truly made all trusters in Jesus the one body of which Christ is the head. It is very noteworthy, I believe, that Paul, in giving instruction for the method of collecting the money for the Judean saints, did not appeal to the Old Covenant pattern of tithing, nor did he advocate a general, special offering upon his visit. He did ask that the fund be a regular offering when they met to worship which was on the Lord's Day, the first day of the Jewish week, not the Jewish Sabbath. They evidently met for corporate worship on the day of the week which honored the Jewish day of the week on which our Lord was resurrected. Since giving to the mission fund (to be used for what we would call social welfare) was during the worship service, this act of sharing was considered a part of the worship experience. This regular offering was to be proportionate to their earnings of the previous week, "as God hath prospered him." Paul admonished the believers as individuals, not as a corporate body, "- - let every one of you lay by him in store (to become a part of the group treasury) as God hath prospered him - -." This arrangement would allow flexibility within the group. Undoubtedly, some individuals could share more than others. In my opinion, proportionate giving is not a flat amount such as a tithe, but relates to what one has as a remainder after sharing, rather than the amount given. Grace giving is always fairer than law giving, and it can amount to more or less than a tithe. I believe that such a statement must be justified by Scripture to be valid: Jesus did not commend the widow because she gave a tithe, nor did he commend the Pharisees and Scribes for their meticulous attention to tithing, Matt. 23:23-24; Lk 18:9-14; 21:1-4; [Heb. 7:5]. What one gives in the name of Christ is a reflection of the giver's spirit, not to supply a need which God has. The only thing which God does not already own is an unbe-

liever's spirit. Paul's business method for handling money which is sanctified for the Lord's use should be noted. The Corinthians were to put in writing from whom and to whom the money, "your liberality," was to be sent. Further, Paul agreed to accompany the offering if that arrangement seemed appropriate to the group. Note in vs. 3, "them" will be sent to Jerusalem with the money. The "them" probably meant a committee, or, at least several. Church offerings should always be entrusted to more than one person, to avoid unnecessary temptations. At Acts 19:21 and Rom. 15:25-28 (on Paul's third extended mission out of Antioch) the apostle stated that one engaged in spiritual labor can justifiably live from the efforts of those served. This entire project of collecting help for the believers in Judea was in keeping with his promise at a Jerusalem conference, immediately following his and Barnabas' first missionary journey, that he would remember the poor [at Jerusalem?], Gal. 2:9-10.

II. Beginning with vs. 5 and through the remainder of the letter, Paul tells the Corinthians about his tentative plans and what he knows of certain of his associates and their plans. Note how tentative Paul's plans were, vs. 6, "it may be" and "ye may bring (send) me," vs. 7, "but I trust to tarry (stay) a while with you." It appears that the apostle was deliberately not attempting to force God's plans for him nor delay when those plans became assured for him. Also, Paul did not attempt to dictate his own will upon his associates who worked with him. For example, note that in vs. 12 he states that he had urged Apollos to visit the Corinthians on an occasion, but Apollos' decision against the request prevailed. Paul states that Apollos would visit at his own convenience. The reason for his not leaving Ephesus for Corinth at the time was that, "a great door (of opportunity) is opened to me, and there are many adversaries [here at Ephesus]." When he could come to Corinth, he hoped to "stay a while [rather than just hurry through], if the Lord permit," vs. 7. In the event that Timothy should visit Corinth, Paul vouched for his veracity in Gospel service. In fact, he declared Timothy's mission equal to his own and worthy of support and encouragement. In vs. 13 Paul again admonishes the believing Corinthians to be alert constantly, courageous in their faith in Christ Jesus. All actions should be carried out with love as the motive, vs. 14. Paul commends to them Stephanus who was the first convert in Achaia and whom Paul had personally immersed himself. Included with Stephanus were Fortunatus and Achaicus who had likewise supported Paul in his missionary work. Actually, Paul admits that these men had been more available to help the Corinthians than he had himself, vs. 17. Knowing that they had been of assistance to the Corinthians refreshed the apostle's spirit. Aquila and Priscilla sent their greetings along with the other believers who met for worship in their home. Paul then signed the letter in his own handwriting, stating therein that, "if any man [person] love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema [Aramaic for "accursed" or "damned"] Maranatha [Greek for "our Lord comes"]. These two words can be justifiably translated, I believe, "Let those who do not love our Lord be cursed, for our Lord is definitely coming for those who love him and love his appearing," II Tim. 4:8.