**1 Corinthians Commentary**

**1 Corinthians Chapter 1**

1Co 1:1

**“called to be an apostle.”** See commentary on Romans 1:1.

**“Sosthenes.”** See commentary on Acts 18:17.

1Co 1:2

**“called to be holy ones.”** See commentary on Romans 1:7.

[For more on why the Christian is called a “holy one,” see commentary on Philippians 1:1.]

**“call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** In this context, to “call on the name” of the Lord means to pray to him, to ask him for something. Christians are to call on the name of the Lord Jesus, that is, pray to him for help in life. Throughout the Old Testament, when people “…called upon the name of the Lord,” it was to pray to, appeal to, or ask for help from God.

Abraham was in the habit of praying to God, and he “called on the name” of Yahweh (cf. Gen. 12:8; 13:4). Isaac “called on the name” of Yahweh (Gen. 26:25). In 1 Kings 18:24, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal and said, “you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of Yahweh.” Then the prophets of Baal “called on the name of Baal,” meaning they prayed to Baal (1 Kings 18:26), and after that, Elijah prayed to God, and God answered with fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:36-38). The Syrian general Naaman was angry when the prophet Elisha did not come out and personally pray to God for him: “Naaman was angry and went away and said, ‘Behold, I thought he would come out, yes, come out to me and stand and call on the name of Yahweh his God and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper’” (2 Kings 5:11). David also prayed to God, he “called on Yahweh,” and was answered by fire from heaven (1 Chron. 21:26). Psalm 99:6 indicates many people called on the name of Yahweh and their prayers were answered by Him. In Zechariah 13:9, God says, “They will call on my name and I will hear them.” The pagan sea captain in the book of Jonah asked Jonah to pray, using the terminology “call on your god” (Jon. 1:6).

The New Testament uses the same terminology to refer to praying as the Old Testament does. When a person calls on the name of Yahweh, he prays to Yahweh. When a person calls on the name of the Lord Jesus, he prays to Jesus. So we see that 1 Corinthians 1:2 mentions prayer to Jesus: “To the church of God that is at Corinth…with all those in every place who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—theirs and ours.” This is clearly the same phrase used in the Old Testament, and it is applied to Jesus as well as God.

Vincent writes about the phrase, “call upon the name of” in 1 Corinthians 1:2. He says, “It is used of worship, and here implies prayer to Christ.”[[1]](#footnote-27113) R. C. H. Lenski writes, “‘To call on him’ means to praise, bless, thank, worship him, and to ask of him all that we need for body and for soul.”[[2]](#footnote-29060)

The context of Romans 10:12-13 shows that the word “Lord” refers to Jesus, and Rom. 10:12 says, “since there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is *Lord* of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.”

Romans 10:13 says, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” This verse is a quotation of Joel 2:32, which is a prophecy of people calling on the name of God for help and deliverance—definitely prayer to God. The fact that the Word of God takes the quote about prayer to God from the Old Testament and applies it to Jesus in the Church Epistles is very solid evidence that God is showing us we can pray to Jesus.

2 Timothy 2:22 also shows believers calling on the Lord: “Flee youthful passions and diligently pursue righteousness, faithfulness, love, peace, with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Old Testament believers called upon the name of Yahweh to get help, and we today can call upon Jesus for help. The fact that the same phrase for prayer and supplication is used in both the Old and New Testaments shows that as Old Testament believers prayed to God, we can pray to Jesus and expect him to answer our requests.

Another verse that shows that Christians prayed to Jesus is Acts 9:14, where Paul was sent to arrest those people who called on the name of the Lord. Stephen also called on the name of the Lord as he was being stoned to death. He had a vision of Jesus standing for him, and then prayed to him for help (Acts 7:59).

[For more on praying to Jesus, see Appendix 13: “Can We Pray to Jesus?”]

1Co 1:4

**“because of”** (*epi* with the dative; see Lenski).

**“in *union with* Christ Jesus.”** On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), being “born again” of God’s spirit first became available, and Christians became part of the Body of Christ and identified with him (crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, and raised with him). Today, Christians are “in Christ” (“in union with Christ”) by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ, and it is important that we also are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ” because we obey him and lead godly lives. When we read a phrase such as “in Christ” or “in him,” we must pay careful attention to the context to see if it refers to our spiritual union due to being part of the Body of Christ, or whether it refers to our being in union with Christ because of our obedience and godliness, or if both meanings apply in that given context. A lot of the blessings that Christians enjoy today are due to the fact that we are in union with Jesus Christ. The wages of sin is death, but because the Christian is “in union with Christ,” when he died, it is as if we also died and paid that penalty.

It is due to our union with Christ that we have been given grace, not because of our own merits. This verse might well be translated, “through your union with Christ Jesus.” Lenski writes: “All the divine gifts of grace which enrich the Corinthians and all the grace itself from which they flow are connected from beginning to end with ‘Christ Jesus.’”[[3]](#footnote-11841)

[For more on being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3. For more information on the Christian’s identification with Christ, see commentary on Rom. 6:5.]

1Co 1:5

**“in *union with* him.”** The Greek simply says, “in him,” but it is referring to our connection with, our union with, Christ. (See commentaries on Rom. 6:3 and Eph. 1:3). The New Testament by Williams reads, “through union with him.” Some versions merely take the Greek word *en* (“in”) as an instrumental dative, and read, “by him,” but the truth the verse is expressing is deeper than that.

1Co 1:6

**“just as the testimony.”** This verse is a parenthesis, the figure of speech epitrechon, a sentence incomplete in itself but thrown in for explanation.[[4]](#footnote-29642)

**“testimony about the Christ.”** This is an objective genitive.[[5]](#footnote-28082). In this sense, it means the testimony concerning (or “about” ESV) Jesus. The Corinthians learned about Christ from Paul, and now that testimony is confirmed in them as they are enriched by God.

**“confirmed.”** This confirmation, as Gordon Fee says[[6]](#footnote-15226), is most probably because of the spiritual gifts—the “gifts of the spirit” (or more properly, “the manifestations of the spirit” (1 Cor. 12:7))—that were manifest among them, confirming the presence of the gift of holy spirit and thus the New Birth. When a Christian gets born again, they receive the gift of holy spirit, which enables them to manifest the spirit by things such as speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, and prophecy.

[For more on the manifestations of holy spirit, see commentaries on 1 Cor. 12:7 and 14:5.]

1Co 1:7

**“trailing behind *the others*.”**[[7]](#footnote-20121) The Greek means that the Corinthian church was enriched so that they did not have less measure than others, they were not “left behind.”[[8]](#footnote-12881) Christ will enrich all Christians if they will let him.

1Co 1:8

**“confirm.”** This is the same word, “confirm,” *bebaioō*, (#950 βεβαιόω), that occurs earlier in the sentence in 1 Corinthians 1:6. To get the impact of what Paul is saying here, we must read the whole sentence, which is 1 Corinthians 1:4-8. The sentence opens up with our being given grace “in union with Christ Jesus.” That phrase hearkens back to what Paul had already written about being “in Christ” in Galatians (Gal. 2:4, 17; 3:14, 26, 28; 5:6), and would later expand in Romans (Rom. 3:24; 6:11, 23; 8:1; 12:5; 15:17; 16:3, 7, 9, 10). The person who is born again is a member of the Body of Christ and is “in union” with Christ such that they were baptized with Christ, crucified with Christ, died with Christ, buried with Christ, raised with Christ, and seated in the heavenlies with Christ (Rom. 6:1-10; Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:10-13).

1 Corinthians 1:5 continues the sentence and says that Christians were “enriched” in union with him, which is somewhat similar to Ephesians 1:3, which says that Christians were blessed in union with him. Then 1 Corinthians 1:6 says that the testimony about Christ was “confirmed” in them. This confirmation, as Gordon Fee[[9]](#footnote-14517) says, is most probably because of the spiritual gifts—the “gifts of the spirit” (or more properly, “the manifestations of the spirit” (1 Cor. 12:7))—that were manifest among them, confirming the presence of the gift of holy spirit and thus their being born again.

1 Corinthians 1:7 is a word of encouragement to the Corinthians that they had what other Christians had, and were not somehow left out or left behind by God despite the many problems they were having.

1 Corinthians 1:8 finishes the sentence that began in verse 4 by ensuring the Corinthians that the God who “enriched” them (1 Cor. 1:5) would “also” “confirm” them to the end. Then it continues and confirms what was said at the beginning of the sentence about them having God’s grace and being in union with Christ (1 Cor. 1:4). It is confirming that the salvation of the Corinthians is secure. Gordon Fee writes:

“Significantly, he [Paul] makes this affirmation by repeating the verb ‘to confirm,’ which appeared in the metaphor of 1 Cor. 1:6. …Paul says that in the same way that God first ‘guaranteed’ our testimony to Christ while we were with you, he will also ‘guarantee’ or ‘confirm’ you ‘to the end.’ That this is a purposeful repeating of the legal metaphor from v. 6 is further evidenced by the word ‘blameless,’ which carries the sense of their being guiltless because Christ’s righteousness has been given to them. Finally, the use of the phrase ‘on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ’ also points to the final judgment.”[[10]](#footnote-32177)

In case we are tempted to doubt God’s confirmation that Christians will indeed be saved on the Day of Judgment, 1 Corinthians 1:9 reminds us that the one who called us into fellowship with His Son Jesus “is faithful,” He will not retract His grace or our being in union with Christ.

A number of English versions translate the Greek word *bebaioō* in verse 8 as “strengthen” or as a similar word, but that would mean that it would occur twice in the same sentence with two different meanings, and this is unlikely, especially when there is no need for the meaning to shift.

[For more information on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on our New Birth, see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:3. For more on the holy spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more on the manifestations of holy spirit such as speaking in tongues, see commentaries on 1 Cor. 12:7, 8, 9, 10.]

1Co 1:10

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority.

[For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6.]

**“made complete.”** The thought is more than just “united,” as many translations have. There is a completeness (more literally, a perfection) in thinking the same thing.[[11]](#footnote-28197)

1Co 1:11

**“Chloe’s followers.”** The Greek is more literally, “the ones of Chloe.” “Chloe” is a feminine name, so Chloe was a woman. This verse testifies to the importance women had in the fellowship community of the early church. Although in general the phrase could refer to Chloe’s household or Chloe’s slaves, in this case it seems that the people who reported to Paul were people who followed her. It is obvious that in this verse the Greek *adelphoi*, “brothers,” refers to brothers and sisters in the Lord.

1Co 1:13

**“baptized in the name.”** See commentary on Acts 19:5.

1Co 1:23

**“stumbling block.”** The Greek is *skandalon* (#4625 σκάνδαλον), the trigger stick of a snare or trap, but used of something that causes offense. Christ is more than a stumbling block, but for those who stumble and do not ever believe, he is the trigger of the death trap, and rejecting him results in everlasting death.[[12]](#footnote-16817)

1Co 1:24

**“called ones.”** In the Epistles this phrase refers to those who have accepted God’s call and are saved. See commentaries on Romans 1:1 and 8:28.

1Co 1:25

**“foolishness.”** See Word Study: “Fool.”

1Co 1:26

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“not many…not many…not many.”** The figure of speech ellipsis is used powerfully here. Ellipsis emphasizes what is in the text, while de-emphasizing what has to be supplied (in italics). “Not many” of those who would be valued by the world are called, but God, by those He calls and works with, puts the world to shame.

1Co 1:27

**“no-good.”** See Word Study: “Fool.”

**“put to shame.”** See commentary on Romans 9:33.

1Co 1:28

**“treated with contempt.”** From *exoutheneō* (#1848 ἐξουθενέω). See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:20.

**1 Corinthians Chapter 2**

1Co 2:1

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“sacred secret.”** “Sacred secret,” not “testimony” is the correct reading in this context. The reading *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) seems better supported textually than *marturion* (#3142 μαρτύριον).[[13]](#footnote-12225) The next ten verses are about the Administration of the Sacred Secret. The REV translates the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *mustērion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm.

[For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

1Co 2:2

**“to know.”** This is the figure of speech heterosis.[[14]](#footnote-16342) Paul decided not to “know anything among them,” actually, “make known [preach] anything among them” except Christ.

1Co 2:6

**“among those who are mature.”** When we read 1 Corinthians 2:1-10, we see that Paul taught differently to the immature believers than he did to mature believers (the new or immature were called “babies in Christ,” cf. 1 Cor. 3:1). Paul taught immature believers about Jesus Christ and about the crucifixion, and no doubt about the resurrection as well (1 Cor. 2:2). Also, he did not just teach with wise words, but walked in demonstration of the power of the holy spirit (1 Cor. 2:4). In the biblical culture, his demonstration of power was an important sign that he was a man of God and qualified to teach the things he was teaching.

However, when we read about what Paul taught to the mature believers, we might well have questions. He taught about God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that was kept in a sacred secret, hidden in God, and meant for our glory. “But we speak God’s wisdom, in a sacred secret, that hidden [wisdom], which God marked out beforehand, before the ages, for our glory” (1 Cor. 2:7 Rotherham).

The Greek word that Rotherham correctly translates as “sacred secret” is *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον), which almost every English version mistranslates as “mystery,” but which refers to secrets in the sacred or spiritual realm, and thus is correctly translated as “sacred secret.” A study of *mustērion* in the Church Epistles shows that there is a whole Administration that starts on the Day of Pentecost and ends with the Rapture, which the Bible calls the “Administration of the Sacred Secret” (Eph. 3:9). Furthermore, in the “Administration of the Sacred Secret” there are a number of individual sacred secrets that God kept from mankind until He was ready to reveal them. Some of these sacred secrets are: Jews and Gentiles being joint partakers of the blessings of God; men and women being equal in Christ; each believer being empowered to manifest the holy spirit by way of speaking in tongues, prophecy, receiving revelation, and manifestations of spiritual power such as healings; and salvation being via the New Birth and guaranteeing one’s salvation.

When it comes to the sacred secrets that are part of the bigger picture of the Administration of the Sacred Secret, we speak about those things to brand new believers, unlike Paul, who spoke about them only to the mature believers. For example, even if an unbeliever is asking questions about the Christian Faith, it is common to tell him that every Christian is equal in Christ, or that Christian salvation is guaranteed, or that every single Christian has “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Why are we so free to talk about those “sacred secrets” with new believers or even unbelievers when Paul only told them to people who were mature in Christ? The answer to that question lies not in the information that is taught, but in the historical context of the time of Paul. We can talk about the sacred secrets of the Church Epistles with new believers because they are now 2,000 years old and in our Bible, which is accepted as divine revelation, but the New Testament Bible did not exist at the time of Paul.

Any time we are talking to unbelievers or immature believers, we want to teach things that build people’s trust in God and in the Word, and in us too, so that we are in a better position to be allowed to continue to teach them. That applied to Paul too. So when Paul was with new believers, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 shows us that he stuck to subjects he could verify from the Scriptures, and by “the Scriptures,” we mean the Old Testament Scriptures. So he taught about Jesus the Messiah and his sacrificial death for mankind, and Paul would also have taught about the power of the holy spirit, which Scripture (as well as John the Baptist and Jesus) said was to come. Furthermore, in traditional Jewish fashion, he also demonstrated the power of God as a confirmation that he was a man of God and qualified to teach. He knew that the “Jews demand signs” (1 Cor. 1:22), and he provided those signs by the power of God.

This model of teaching worked very well. Thus, for example, when Paul went to Berea, it was because Paul taught things that the Bereans could substantiate from the Old Testament that the people were able to receive what he taught “with great willingness, examining the Scriptures daily, *to see* if these things were so” (Acts 17:11). The “Scriptures” the Bereans searched were the Old Testament Scriptures, the only Scripture they had at the time, and frankly, because they were still unconverted Jews, the only Scripture they trusted (Paul had likely written Galatians by the time he went to Berea, but it is very unlikely he would have shown them a copy upon just meeting them; and Thessalonians had not yet been written). The point Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 is that when Paul was with curious unbelievers or new believers, he stuck to subjects he could substantiate from the Old Testament and to the demonstration of the power of God.

The Church Epistles introduced new “sacred secrets” to the Church, entirely new concepts that could not be substantiated by Old Testament prophecy. This was a real challenge to New Testament teachers like Paul, Barnabas, and Silas. What were Paul and the other teachers to say to people who asked them, “Where did you get all this new information?” The true answer was understandably hard for unbelievers or immature believers to believe: “Jesus told me.” But in Galatians that is exactly what Paul said: “I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11-12 NIV84).

Paul could not tell immature believers much about the new things Jesus revealed to him, because many of them contradicted the Old Testament and would have caused doubt and confusion. How could Paul tell immature Jewish converts that they could eat any meat they wanted, did not have to circumcise their baby boys, or did not have to keep the Sabbath? Those things were a source of conflict throughout the entire New Testament period. But Paul could teach differently to the mature believers. Believers who had been with Paul for a while and had grown to trust that he was a mighty man of God and that Jesus spoke to him were in a position to believe that Paul had indeed received new information from Jesus, even information that had been a “sacred secret” from the foundation of the world and that was not in the Old Testament. Thus, once a believer was mature, Paul could teach him about the wisdom of God that God had kept in a sacred secret, which is exactly what 1 Corinthians 2:7 says.

Once we see who Paul taught the basics of Christianity to, and who he considered mature and taught information about the sacred secret to, we can see how important it is to take very seriously our commission as “ministers of Christ, and stewards of the sacred secrets of God” (1 Cor. 4:1). Christian teachers must recognize when people are babies in Christ and need “the milk of the Word,” and they must have a plan for helping them grow in Christ. The goal we must have in our minds is to always be “admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we can present everyone mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28).

We are also to understand the principle that each Christian goes through a growth process as they mature in Christ. Because today the New Testament is accepted as the Word of God, we can teach things that are written in it to new Christians that Paul could not have taught to new Christians, but the principle Paul used was the same: there are things that build trust in new believers and things that cause questions and doubt. New Christians need the milk of the Word, and teachers are to be skilled in helping Christians grow from a diet of milk to a diet of the meat of the Word.

Every Christian should desire to grow and mature to be stewards of the sacred secrets of God (1 Cor. 4:1), and we are to steward the sacred secrets properly. Just as a biblical house manager was responsible to his master for the prosperity and posterity of the household, we are responsible to God to see that we are doing all we can so the sacred secrets of God are taught, understood, and passed down.

[For more on stewards, “house managers,” see commentary on 1 Cor. 4:1.]

1Co 2:7

**“But we speak God’s wisdom *that was kept* in a sacred secret.”** In this context, the “Sacred Secret” was the Administration of Grace and the things pertaining to it. The REV translates the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *mustērion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm.

The Greek phrasing is difficult in this verse, as the large number of different translations in the English versions show. This is exacerbated by the fact that the “mustērion” (the “sacred secret”) is not well understood. There is division among the scholars as to whether the prepositional clause *en mustēriō* has an adjectival force (“secret wisdom”) or an adverbial force (“in a secret”). In other words, is the verse speaking of “the sacred secret wisdom of God,” or speaking “the wisdom of God in a secret.” We argue that the phrase is adverbial, and is referring to the content of what Paul is speaking about, in this case, the wisdom of God that is kept in a sacred secret.

It should be said that sometimes the phrase “in a sacred secret” is talked about as if it referred to the manner in which Paul was communicating, that is, he was speaking about the wisdom of God but doing so in a secret manner—speaking in a secret way that only the mature could understand. There is no merit to that interpretation. Paul spoke in plain language when he taught, but he did make a distinction when it came to who was taught what. The mature believers were taught more mature subject matter that may have been confusing for new believers.

The phrase, “*that was kept* in a sacred secret” is a translation of the Greek phrase which many versions simply translate, “in a mystery.” We have already explained that *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον), should not be translated as “mystery,” but “sacred secret.” Furthermore, the Greek preposition *en* (#1722 ἐν) is the most widely used preposition in the New Testament and has many different meanings, depending on the context. Often it refers to a relation and refers to attendant circumstances, and that is the case here. The *en* is pointing to the fact that there is a relation between the wisdom of God and a sacred secret, but how to translate the English to bring out that relation is more difficult. One could, for example, say, “God’s wisdom relating to a sacred secret.” In this case, since it is clear from the context and scope of Scripture that God’s wisdom concerning the sacred secret was hidden from the ages past, we can translate *en* as “*that was kept*,” for it was kept in God until the New Testament (Rom. 16:25, 26; 1 Cor. 2:7-10; Eph. 3:4, 5, Col. 1:26).

[For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

**“decided in advance.”** The Greek word is *proorizō* (#4309 προορίζω). The basic meaning of the word is to “decide upon beforehand,” or to decide in advance. Bratcher and Nida have, “having decided ahead of time.”[[15]](#footnote-25463) Ages ago God decided that He would conceal a “sacred secret” from the Devil, a wisdom that was for our glory and was so different from what has gone before it that what Christians have today is so glorious that the Law had “no glory” in comparison (2 Cor. 3:10). Indeed, God gave “every spiritual blessing in heaven” to the Church (Eph. 1:3), and what we have today is so glorious and powerful that had the Devil known about it, he would not have crucified the Lord (1 Cor. 2:8).

[For more information on “decided in advance,” see commentary on Eph. 1:5. For more information on Calvinism and Predestination, see Appendix 9: “On Calvinism and Predestination.”]

1Co 2:8

**“which none of the rulers of this age knew.”** The “rulers of this age” are the Devil and his demons. Scholars and Bible teachers are divided over this point. Many of them say that the “rulers of this age” are earthly rulers such as Herod, Pilate, and the Jewish leaders, while many others assert they are demons, not people. The reason for the division is that the context is misunderstood, and the vocabulary is ambiguous because it is general in nature and in one form or another is used of both earthly rulers and demonic rulers.

Because words like “rulers” can be used of people or demons, the context is the great key to understanding who these “rulers” are. From the context, we learn that what the “rulers” did not know was the Sacred Secret (cf. 1 Cor. 2:7, *mustērion*). Neither earthly rulers nor demonic powers could have known the Sacred Secret, because it was hidden in God, as we have seen from many verses (cf. Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:5).

1 Cor. 2:8 says that the rulers did not know the Sacred Secret, and if they had they would not have crucified Jesus. Thus, in order to properly understand who the “rulers” are, the question we must answer is, “Who would not have crucified Christ **if** they had known the Sacred Secret?” If the earthly rulers like Pilate and Caiaphas had known the Sacred Secret, including that believers would have the fullness of holy spirit and that Jews and Gentiles would be joint partakers of the promises of God, would they have so wanted to keep those blessings from believers that they would not have crucified Christ? No, they would not have. The earthly rulers would not have cared that God’s holy spirit would have been poured out on believers or that Gentiles would be able to be God’s people too, along with the Jews. Jewish rulers like Caiaphas may well have even expected it because the Old Testament spoke of the Gentiles being blessed by the Messiah and the holy spirit being poured out on “all flesh.” Also, Gentiles like Pilate would likely have been more inclined—not less inclined—to crucify Jesus if they had known that it would open the door to everyone being a “chosen person,” instead of just the Jews. From reading the Gospel record, and knowing how the Romans, in general, felt about the Jews, we can well imagine that Pilate was sick and tired of the Jews’ “holier than thou” and “we are special to God and you aren’t” attitude, and if he thought that crucifying Jesus would make the Jews and Gentiles equals before God, he may well have crucified Christ just for that reason alone.

So the rulers in 1 Corinthians 2:8 cannot be the earthly rulers. In contrast, the Devil would not have crucified Jesus if he knew that if he did crucify him, then every believer would have the fullness of holy spirit and “Christ in them,” and that God’s chosen people would no longer be just the Jews, but anyone on earth who chose to believe. It is the Devil who, if he had known that every Christian would have many blessings and the power to cast out demons, would not have crucified Jesus. It is the Devil who would have rather dealt with one man, Jesus, than with an army of God on earth, multitudes of Christians, all secure in their salvation and empowered by holy spirit.

Those people who teach that the “rulers” in the verse are human rulers usually point out that had the worldly rulers known God’s plan of salvation, or that Jesus was the Messiah, they would not have crucified him. But that is not what the context is speaking about. The context is set by 1 Cor. 2:7, which refers to God’s wisdom in the “Sacred Secret” that the rulers did not know. While it is true that the rulers did not know Jesus was the Messiah, they could have—and the Devil did. It was not a secret. Jesus told his disciples he was the Christ right after the Transfiguration, then told both the Jewish rulers and Pontius Pilate that he was the Christ when he was tried before he was crucified. So it was not a sacred secret that Jesus was the Messiah or that he brought salvation to God’s people. In contrast, Corinthians tells us there is a sacred secret that no mind had even conceived of, which if the rulers had known they would not have crucified Jesus. What is there about the Sacred Secret that would have kept Satan from crucifying Jesus? It is that now, in the Administration of the Sacred Secret, every Christian is spiritually powerful and equipped to stand against him. Satan was the only “ruler” who would have feared the Sacred Secret. Only by understanding that if Satan had known the Sacred Secret he would not have crucified the Lord can we understand the true reason for God keeping the Sacred Secret a secret and fully appreciate the enormity and power of what we have been given in Christ. Christians have the fullness of the gift of holy spirit, and great spiritual power—collectively more than enough to make things difficult for the Devil if we would only walk in the power we have.

1Co 2:11

**“*things*.”** The word “things” is missing for both men and God, only the definite article “the” being in the Greek text (this is the figure *ellipsis*). The context shows that it refers to all the deep things: thoughts, motives, etc. We could say “heart,” but that would be too restrictive.

1Co 2:14

**“worldly-minded.”** The Greek word, an adjective, is *psuchikos* (#5591 ψυχικός, pronounced psoo-key-'kos). The adjective *psuchikos* comes from the noun *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), which is usually translated as “soul.” In order to properly understand *psuchikos,* it is important that we understand *psuchē*, soul.

*Psuchē* has a large number of meanings, as any good Greek-English lexicon will show. Although some of the definitions are found more clearly in Greek literature than in the Bible, many of them are clearly in the Bible. Meanings of “soul” (*psuchē*) that we find in the Bible include:

* The life force that animates the body, both human and animal. Thus, “soul” often equals “life.”
* Our emotions, attitudes, thoughts, and feelings.
* The person himself or herself; the individual.

[For a much more complete explanation of “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

The adjective *psuchikos* means “of, belonging to, somehow relating to, the ‘soul,’ *psuchē*,” and as such, it can have a lot of different shades of meaning, depending on the context in which it is used. *Psuchikos* can be a characteristic of the earthly body, in which case it is “physical,” “natural,” but that is not the emphasis in this context. In this context, it relates to the person as he is being governed by sensual appetites. Thus, it means “natural; unspiritual; fleshly; worldly; governed by soul.” It “pertains to behavior which is typical of human nature.”[[16]](#footnote-13994) It means, “governed by the ψυχή, [*psuchē*], i.e., the sensuous nature with its subjection to appetite and passion.”[[17]](#footnote-17640)

It will help us to see the impact this section of Scripture had on early Christians if we realize that in secular Greek, *psuchikos* was a word of honor, much like today in the secular realm a person who is well-educated, well-traveled, and well-experienced might be called “worldly,” whereas we Christians use the word “worldly” in a negative sense to mean someone who is not oriented toward God but to the world. Aristotle, for example, used the word *psuchikos* to refer to the higher things of the soul versus the lower things of the *sōma*, body. The New Testament, introducing the truly higher things of the spirit of God, *pneuma*, takes the world’s vocabulary and puts it in the proper perspective from God’s point of view. Being *psuchikos*, “of the soul,” was not a good thing, because it related to the lower, natural, and earthly things of man, not the higher spiritual things.

Sadly, although the New Testament placed *psuchē* and *psuchikos* in their proper place as primarily belonging to the flesh and lower order of things (although our attitudes and emotions can certainly be godly), as the doctrine of the “immortality of the soul” grew in Christianity, particularly in the fourth and fifth centuries, the “soul” began to be elevated in people’s thinking as a wonderful thing that would survive the death of the body, and that theology is still dominant today, making translations such as “of the soul,” “soul-oriented,” or “soul-governed,” unclear to many readers. We need to get back to the proper meaning of biblical words to correctly understand the Bible.

It seems that in this context, when Paul describes people using the word *psuchikos*, he is primarily referring to people who are not born again of God’s spirit; they are only “soul people,” although a Christian could be a soul-minded person. But that this context refers to people who are not born again is supported by 1 Corinthians 3:1, where Christians who have not yet matured in Christ are not referred to as *psuchikos* (natural; soul-governed), but as *sarkikos* (#4559 σαρκικός), “flesh-governed;” “flesh-oriented” (from the word *sarx*; #4561 σάρξ; “flesh”).

It is difficult to translate *psuchikos*, especially since it has different shades of meaning in different contexts. Here in 1 Corinthians 2:14, it refers to people who are focused on the things of this life, worldly things. They may be unsaved, or simply Christians who do not focus on the things of God, but in any case, they are people who are oriented to the cares of this life, or “soul-oriented.” In 1 Corinthians 15:44, 46, *psuchikos* refers to the life force that animates the body, and so “soul body” is about as well as can be done. In James 3:15 and Jude 19 *psuchikos* is used of earthly and demonic wisdom apart from the spirit of God.

**“spiritually.”** The Greek word is *pneumatikōs* (#4153 πνευματικῶς), and it means “spiritually; in a spiritual manner or spiritual way; on a spiritual basis. “The things of the Spirit are judicially and properly examined and probed only πνευματικῶς, ‘in a spiritual way.’”[[18]](#footnote-20661)

**“discerned.”** The Greek word is *anakrinō* (#350 ἀνακρίνω), to question, examine. In a judicial sense, as it is in this verse, to examine as a judge would examine an accused person; judge, examine as if looking to find if there is a fault. The things of God have to be examined with spiritual insight.

1Co 2:16

Similar to Romans 11:34 (see commentary on Isa. 40:13).

**1 Corinthians Chapter 3**

1Co 3:1

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“of the flesh.”** The Greek word is *sarkikos* (#4559 σαρκικός, pronounced sar-key-'kos), and is from the word *sarx* (#4561 σάρξ ), flesh. It means “of, belonging to, somehow relating to, the ‘flesh.’” The word *sarkikos* can be more literal and pertain to the human or animal body which is flesh, or it can be more metaphorical. When used metaphorically, *sarkikos* refers to being “fleshly” or “carnal,” i.e., “having the nature of flesh” and being under the control or influence of the natural passions and desires of the body. It can thus refer to being controlled or governed by mere human nature instead of the spirit of God.

Here in 1 Corinthians 3:1, “of the flesh” refers to Christians who have not yet decided to live by the spirit and are being influenced by their flesh nature. Thus, *sarkikos* (“of the flesh”) is directly contrasted with *psuchikos* (“of the soul” cf. 1 Cor. 2:14), which refers to the person who is not born again (See commentary on 1 Corinthians 2:14). The *psuchikos* person is unsaved (1 Cor. 2:14). The *sarkikos* person is saved but has not made the decision to obey God and so is still influenced by the flesh (1 Cor. 3:1).

**“babies in Christ.”** When a person who has lived a worldly life for years gets saved, they have the guarantee of everlasting life, but they still do not know or practice the things of God. They are considered babies in the Faith, and need time to mature. Sadly, in Corinth some of the people who had time to mature in the Faith had never taken it seriously, so by the time Paul wrote the First Epistle to the Corinthians, they were still “of the flesh” and still babies in Christ. Some people that Hebrews was addressed to were in exactly the same state, and so Hebrews 5:12 says, “For indeed, being morally obligated to be teachers due to the length of time *you have been taught*, *instead,* you need someone to teach you again the rudiments of the beginning of the words of God. Indeed, you have become ones who need milk, not solid food.” God challenges each believer to grow in the Faith.

1Co 3:5

**“Servants through whom you believed.”** There was a problem in Corinth with the believers being divided over following certain leaders in the one Body (1 Cor. 1:11-12). This verse, 1 Cor. 3:5, explains the shift from including Peter in the list of 1 Cor. 1:12 and 1 Cor. 3:22, to only mentioning Paul and Apollos here in 1 Cor. 3:3-11. It seems Peter did not actually go to Corinth to plant or water, only Paul and Apollos did. This is why they were the “servants through whom you [Corinthians] believed.” Paul planted by starting the church and Apollos watered by ministering to them, and “he who plants and he who waters are one… God’s fellow workers. You [Corinthians] are God’s field, God’s building” (1 Cor. 3:6, 9). Peter is left out of these verses because the point of 1 Cor. 3:3-11 is how the Corinthians should think of the ministers that *particularly* served them in the body of Christ. Hence he says, “Now these things, brothers, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes” (1 Cor. 4:6). Peter did not go to Corinth, so it makes sense that he would not be a part of this section. However, after dealing with this subtopic Paul gets back to the broader point of wrong-thinking about ministers generally (not just those who directly plant and water your church), concluding with, “So, let no one boast about human beings! For everything is yours—whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas” (1 Cor. 3:21-22).

1Co 3:8

**“but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.”** People sometimes do not get what they deserve in this life, but they will on Judgment Day and in the next life. The teaching that on Judgment Day people will get what they deserve, good or bad, based on what they have done in their life is taught many times in Scripture (e.g., Job. 34:11; Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8; see commentary on Ps. 62:12).

[For more on rewards in the future and people getting what they deserve, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

1Co 3:10

**“According to the grace of God that was given to me.”** In this context, the “grace of God” that was given to Paul was his ministry as an apostle (cf. Rom. 1:5), and he used that apostolic ministry to lay down the foundation of Christ in many places. Corinth was one of those places, because when Paul arrived in Corinth there was no church there. Paul founded the church in Corinth and laid the foundation of Christ for the people who believed (Acts 18:1-18).

1Co 3:11

**“already been laid.”** The verb “laid” is *keimai* (#2749 κεῖμαι) and it is in the present tense, passive voice. In this case, the present tense is not indicating that the foundation is still being laid (1 Cor. 3:10 says it was already laid), but rather that the foundation is laid and presently standing, permanently in place.[[19]](#footnote-15837)

1Co 3:12

**“if anyone builds on the foundation *using*.”** As we will see, all of these materials are important building materials. It has been debated as to whether the materials listed in the verse are actual building materials used as metaphors for the skills that people use to build the Body of Christ, or whether they are metaphors being used to point out that some building materials were good and others not good. While the different materials certainly had differing values and status to humans, they were all valuable building materials. In that light, the list of materials is similar to the list of individual parts of the body (and the Body of Christ) in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. In that list, some parts of the body are “respectable,” while other parts seemed “weaker” “less honorable,” and “unrespectable” (1 Cor. 12:22-24). But God corrects worldly thinking by saying that the parts that seemed weaker “are more necessary” (1 Cor. 12:22). As it is with the parts of the body, so it is in building the Body of Christ. Some people seem to be important builders, running churches, doing missionary work, and such very visible work as that, and they are like the “gold” that shines. Other members of the Body of Christ are almost unseen, building up the Church by simply living godly lives and being faithful servants of Christ, and they are like the grass that holds the clay bricks together—they are mostly unseen but are very necessary. It is noteworthy that at no point in the text is any material in the list of building materials denigrated in any way—they were all important in building ancient buildings. It is not the material that is judged, it is the way people build with it that is judged; it is the “work” that is judged, not the material (1 Cor. 3:13).

After giving the list of building materials, the text shifts to being less metaphorical and more literal. Every Christian builds in one way or another, and every person’s “work” will be judged. God’s judgment fire will test and reveal each person’s work, and what remains after the fire will be clearly seen. Every material in the list can be destroyed in some way by fire; gold and silver will melt, stone will fracture or become powder, and wood and hay will burn up. But by the same token, God’s fire is righteous, and a wooden structure built with God’s love will survive while a golden temple built out of pride and avarice will melt away to nothing. Christians need not fear that what they do is not important and will not survive the fire, any act done with the love of God will do well on the Day of Judgment.

**“gold, silver.”** While gold and silver are generally too soft to be structural building materials, they were used in important ways in adorning and decorating buildings, including the Tabernacle and Temple.

**“costly stones.”** In the ancient world, “costly stones” could be costly because of their size and the way they were cut, or costly like gemstones. So, for example, Solomon had huge stones cut out for the foundation and walls of the Temple, and they were called “costly stones” because of their size and the workmanship it took to square them up to fit together perfectly (cf. 1 Kings 5:17; 7:9-11). Similarly, “costly stones” could be costly because of the material they were, like the marble pillars and beautiful flooring of the palace of Ahasuerus (Esth. 1:6).

**“wood.”** Wood has always been an important building material, and there was expensive wood like the cedar that Solomon used in the Temple, and regular wood from local trees that the average person used in building their house.

**“hay, straw.”** Hay and straw had a number of different uses when it came to building. Both were used in making bricks, and the fiber inside the bricks held the brick together (cf. Exod. 5:12-14). Also, people would put dirt and sod on their flat roofs to help keep them waterproof, and the grass in the dirt would help with that. Besides that, sometimes the roofs themselves were made of hay or straw that had been bundled tightly together, and grass huts and roofs still exist today. Hay is an important building material in many parts of the world because it is abundant and cheap.

1Co 3:13

**“Day.”** This refers to the Day of Judgment. Every builder has a “day of judgment.” For those who are hired to build a house, for example, the day of judgment is when the owner shows up to look at the finished product. At that time, the quality of the work will be evident, and the builder will be rewarded by being paid, or he will suffer loss by having to redo his work, or by not getting paid the money he was expecting.

God gives us our lifetime to build for Him. On the Day of Judgment, our work will be evident to all. If we have not built well upon the foundation of Christ, our work will be burned and we will enter the kingdom saved, but with no rewards.

There are questions about rewards or loss of rewards that God has not clearly answered in the Bible. For example, exactly how are the rewards we receive calculated? If a person does well for years and then turns away from God, do they lose all their rewards, or just those they could have earned after they turned away? It seems that the answer to that lies in how fully a person has served God, and how completely they turn away, and what they do after they turn away. For example, if they turn away and actually begin attacking God, Jesus, and the Church, and “mar” it, then “God will mar him” (1 Cor. 3:17), and they will get no rewards (1 Cor. 3:15).

But what if a person turns away from actively following God but only in the sense of becoming a non-supporter, not in the sense of attacking God or His people? The Bible makes it clear that we get rewarded for our work for the Lord, and do not get rewards when we do not work for the Lord. Beyond that, we know that on our Day of Judgment, God will be a righteous judge. Everyone turns away from God for a different reason. One person may turn away from the things of God because evil people who infiltrated the Church caused them great harm, so they blame God, while another person may turn away because they did not guard their heart and allowed the lusts of the flesh to become more attractive to them than the things of God. Only God knows the heart, and history is full of people who experienced terrible things in life but never turned from God (cf. Job). We can take comfort in the fact that God will judge rightly and righteously on the Day of Judgment.

No Christian should be trying to calculate what fleshly desires they can give in to, or to what degree they should seek God, balancing the pleasures of this life with rewards in the coming Kingdom of Christ. Paul warns against this attitude when he says, “Should we continue in sin so that grace will increase? Absolutely not!” (Rom. 6:1-2) He is warning against this mentality of thinking it is okay to sin. The commands are clear: we are to seek God first (Matt. 6:33), and love Him with ALL our heart (Matt. 22:37). We should all be trying to serve God as best as we can.

[For more on rewards in the Kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

**“the fire itself will test each one’s work.”** Each material in the list—gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, straw—can be destroyed in a building by a hot fire. The list is not saying that wood, for example, is a bad building material. In fact, in the ancient world wood was a very important building material just as it is today. If a person builds in a careful and godly way with what they have, they will receive a reward. But if a person builds in an ungodly way, even with gold and silver, they will suffer loss. It is the “Day,” i.e., the Day of Judgment, that will reveal the “kind” (quality) of the work.

1Co 3:14

**“reward.”** See commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:13: “Day.”

1Co 3:15

**“he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved.”** To understand what 1 Corinthians 3:15 is saying, we must understand that there are two different aspects to Christian salvation: the salvation itself, that is, having everlasting life, and also receiving rewards for the good and godly works the person has done. If a person does good works, they will be rewarded. But if a person becomes a Christian and then sins, those “bad works” they have done are not righteous works and therefore, they will be burned and they will suffer loss, but they themselves will still be saved.

It is important to take notice of the fact that for both of these examples, the person is building upon the foundation of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 3:10, Paul stresses that each person is to “be careful how he builds on it,” and in 1 Corinthians 3:11 he says, “no one is able to lay a foundation other than the one that has already been laid, which is Jesus Christ.” So, the foundation that both of these examples in verses 14 and 15 are building upon is Jesus Christ. So, the “if anyone” in verse 14 is referring to any Christian, and the “if anyone” in verse 15 is also referring to any Christian. In other words, Paul is only referring here to people who have built upon the foundation of Christ. Understanding this helps substantiate that Paul is discussing rewards for Christians. Non-Christians are not in view here.

Paul’s analogy here in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 is quite beautiful. Paul says that every Christian’s faith is founded upon Christ, it is as if Christ is literally the foundation of a building. As Christians live their lives, their good and bad works build up over time. These could be compared to building upon a building foundation with different materials such as “gold, silver, wood, and straw” (1 Cor. 3:12). But there is a time of testing and judgment that is going to come (1 Cor. 3:13) and this judgment of good and bad works could be compared to setting a building on fire and seeing which materials remain. But no matter what work is burned or what work remains, Paul reassures the believer “he himself will be saved” (for more on the building materials such as gold, silver, wood, etc., see commentary on 1 Cor. 3:12).

So, the entire point of Paul’s analogy is to clarify the teaching about rewards on Judgment Day. A Christian’s good works will be rewarded (1 Cor. 3:14), and a Christian’s bad works will not.

Christian salvation is not achieved or maintained by doing good works, and it cannot be lost by not doing good works. The New Birth is a one-time event and it occurs when a person acts according to Romans 10:9 and confesses and believes that Christ is their Lord and that God raised him from the dead. However, having rewards in the future is an important part of God’s grace to us and should be very important to every Christian, and something they should strive for.

[For more information on salvation and the guarantee of everlasting life, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For the difference between salvation and rewards in the Kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

1Co 3:16

**“you together.”** The word “you” is plural and refers to the whole Body of Christ, who together are the sanctuary of God (cf. Eph. 2:21). This verse is not saying that each individual person is the “sanctuary” of God. We are all holy, but it is together, as a Church, that we are God’s sanctuary. This fact is glossed over in most English translations.

**“sanctuary.”** There are two Greek words that get translated as “temple.” Here in 1 Cor. 3:16, the word translated as “sanctuary” (or “temple” in some English versions) is *naos* (#3485 ναός), which means the inner sanctuary of the Temple complex, the inner sanctuary of the temple proper, although it is occasionally used by association for the Temple building that houses the inner sanctuary. Then, by metonymy, the Greek word *naos* is used of the Body of Christ.[[20]](#footnote-11794) In contrast, the Greek word *hieron* (#2411 ἱερόν) refers to the Temple complex; the Temple building along with its porches, outer courts, and all associated outbuildings. Interestingly, the *hieron* is never used figuratively in the Bible, it is always literal. In this verse, the “sanctuary” of the Lord is the Body of Christ.

It is hard to understand this verse without a mental picture of the Temple in the Old and New Testament times. We are used to our church buildings, which have just one building and then you are inside the church. Although the Old Testament and New Testament Temples differed somewhat, they were both a “Temple complex,” with walls and courtyards, and not just a building. In its simple Old Testament form, the “Temple” (*hieron*) was a walled enclosure with a courtyard inside the wall that had the altar of burnt offering, the laver for washing, tables for butchering animals, and much more. Then, in the courtyard was the “sanctuary” (*naos*), which was the actual dwelling place of God. It had a large, rectangular first room that had the menorah, table of the Bread of the Presence, and golden incense altar. Then it had a second square room that held the ark of the covenant. God said He dwelt in the second room, the “Holy of Holies.”

The Temple complex in New Testament times was much larger and more complex than in Old Testament times, and had an outer wall that surrounded a courtyard that Gentiles were allowed into; then an inner wall that surrounded the courtyard where Jewish women were allowed; then another more inner courtyard for Jewish men; and then the very inner courtyard for the priests, altar, laver, etc., and then finally the sanctuary building itself, with the first large room (the Holy Place) and the Holy of Holies.

When we understand the layout of the Temple, and the difference between the *hieron* (Temple complex) and the *naos* (the inner building itself; the sanctuary), we can see why the Church is called the “sanctuary” and not the “Temple.” God dwells in the Church, and it is equivalent to, and replacing, the physical *naos*, the “sanctuary.”

[For more information on the Church collectively being where God lives, see commentary on Eph. 2:21.]

1Co 3:17

**“Harms...harm.”** The Greek word translated “harm” is *phtheirō* (#5351 φθείρω). It has a number of meanings, including “destroy, harm, ruin, corrupt, bring into a worse state, spoil.” Examples of how *phtheirō* was used include: destroying a house (BDAG), financial ruin; seducing and thus “ruining” a virgin; ruining or corrupting someone by false teaching or immoral behavior; ruining a contest by breaking the rules; and of ruining something by destroying it. *Phtheirō* is used in verses such as “Bad company corrupts good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33) and “Put off the old self … that is being corrupted because of deceitful desires” (Eph. 4:22).

In this context, the Bible is speaking of Christians, but the biblical truth applies to both Christians and non-Christians. However, this is a dire warning to Christians; they are the ones Paul is addressing in the context. Given that Paul had just addressed Christians getting rewards a few verses earlier (1 Cor. 3:8, 14-15), this strong warning in verse 17 includes more than just rewards, it includes the loss of salvation.

In the context, the “sanctuary” refers to the Christian Church (1 Cor. 3:16-17). As we see in many contexts, the “church” often refers to a part of the church, a group of Christians (e.g., Acts 8:3; 11:26; 12:5; 15:3-4; 18:22; 1 Tim. 3:5). So also this verse is saying that if anyone harms or destroys Christians, God will harm or destroy him. Many English versions use the word “destroy,” and that certainly would be part of the meaning here.

People in the Bible who harm or destroy the Church include Hymenaeus, Philetus, and Alexander, who overthrew and/or shipwrecked the trust of some Christians. Paul also mentions Jewish Christians who overthrow whole house churches by their teaching (Titus 1:10-11). The point of 1 Corinthians 3:17 is that if a Christian (or anyone else) harms or destroys Christians, God will harm or destroy him, particularly at the Judgment.

[For more information on salvation in the New Testament, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For the difference between salvation and rewards, and rewards in the Kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.” Rewards are earned by good works; similarly, doing ungodly and sinful things can lead to increased wrath at the Judgment; see commentary on Rom. 2:5.]

**“sanctuary.”** See commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:16.

1Co 3:18

**“Let no one deceive himself.”** The final six verses in 1 Corinthians 3 are the conclusion to the argument that Paul has been developing from 1 Cor. 1:18.[[21]](#footnote-13212) Paul’s conclusion is divided into two parts, one more confronting (1 Cor. 3:18-20) and one more encouraging (1 Cor. 3:21-23). Both sections of Paul’s conclusion begin with, “let no one.”

Paul was powerful and honest when he confronted the Corinthians. “Let no one deceive himself.” The Corinthians were deeply divided, and sadly, the division was in part around who they would follow and believe, whether it was Peter, Apollos, or Paul. So Paul pointed out that what seemed to be “wisdom” to some of them (and the Greeks were fixated on wisdom) was actually foolishness. Those “wise people” needed to become fools in their own minds so they could be truly wise. All three men—Peter, Apollos, and Paul—were godly men, and God is not divided. The “wisdom” the Corinthians were manifesting in the church was ungodly foolishness.

After that confrontation, Paul then encouraged the church (1 Cor. 3:21-23). He told them not to boast about any human being, because “all” (“everything”) was theirs, that is, was for their blessing and benefit. The Corinthians did not need to argue and divide about who was the “right” or “real” leader; all of them, and more, including life itself and the things to come, were for their benefit.

**“deceive.”** The word is *exapataō* (#1818 ἐξαπατάω), “thoroughly deceive” (See commentary on 1 Tim. 2:14). We have translated the word simply “deceive” in order to avoid possible confusion. Otherwise, one might interpret the verse as saying, “Let no one *thoroughly* deceive himself,” implying that a little self-delusion is acceptable, but thorough self-delusion is not.

1Co 3:19

**“*He is* the one catching the wise in their craftiness.”** An amazing thing about this quotation from the Old Testament is that it contains a hidden twist. The original statement was made by Eliphaz, one of Job’s “friends” who turned against Job and was reproving him for supposedly not turning to God in his hour of need. Eliphaz was in fact accusing Job of being wise in his own eyes and crafty before God, and warning Job that God would catch him in his own craftiness. But we know from reading Job that it was actually Eliphaz who was wrong (Job 42:7); Eliphaz was the “wise man” who was caught in his craftiness. So what Eliphaz said was true: God catches the “wise” in their craftiness, but Eliphaz did not know that in that particular case he himself was the wise man who got caught.

1Co 3:20

**“the wise.”** This refers in context to the worldly-wise, unsaved but supposedly wise people. Jeremiah 8:9 says, “The wise men will be put to shame...they have rejected the word of Yahweh, so what kind of wisdom is in them?

**“worthless.”** The “reasoning” itself may have a point, but since the person is unsaved the reasoning is “worthless” (and “pointless”) in the scheme of things; they will have no lasting impact. See commentary on Psalm 94:11, where the quotation comes from.

1Co 3:21

**“So, let no one boast about human beings.”** This phrase starts the final part of the conclusion of the argument, which conclusion started with 1 Corinthians 3:18, “Let no one deceive himself” (see commentary on 1 Cor. 3:18). The Corinthians had been divided over which “leader” they followed, and were even boasting about it. But that is ungodly, unwise, and divisive, and Paul knew that kind of thing had to end.

**“For everything is yours.”** 1 Corinthians 3:21 is the beginning of the second conclusion to Paul’s argument that started in chapter 1 (see commentary on 1 Cor. 3:18). 1 Corinthians 3:21-23 is an exhortation and encouragement to see things as they really are from God’s point of view, that everything is for the benefit of the believers. The “everything” in 1 Corinthians 3:21-22 is qualified by the figure of speech epanadiplosis (encircling), because the list that follows starts with “everything is yours” (1 Cor. 3:21), and ends with “everything is yours” (1 Cor. 3:22). When a phrase with “all” or “everything” encircles a list, the “everything” includes what is in the list, not “everything” there is in the universe. We are very used to this kind of communication using “all” or “everything,” even when it does not use the formal form of epanadiplosis. For example, if you have a new bag of cookies and go to open it and have some, but find that someone else in the house has eaten the whole bag, you might exclaim, “You ate all the cookies!” It is well understood you do not mean all the cookies in the world, but all the cookies reasonably being discussed. The Bible uses the same language, and sometimes formalizes it by the figure of speech epanadiplosis.[[22]](#footnote-10454)

In this case, the list is “Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the world, life, death, things present, and things to come,” and the point God was making was that the Corinthians were allowing themselves to be divided over things such as which leader was the right or best one. At this point, God could have kept the argument to just the leaders, but the Corinthians were being small-minded about what God had provided for them, so He expanded the list to include more than the leaders. Christ died for the Church and God has given all the leaders, and this life, and the future, to benefit the believer, and that is the essential meaning of “everything is yours.” It is not that the believer “owns” everything, but God gave all those things to the believer so they could benefit from them, and the Corinthians, and all believers everywhere, need to realize that.

1Co 3:22

**“Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas.”** Note that Paul leaves “Christ” out of the list of leaders even though some of the Corinthians said they followed him (1 Cor. 1:12). But putting Christ as just one of the human leaders that the Corinthians argued over would be out of place here. It was well recognized that Christ was the head of the Church, and Paul will introduce him in the next verse.

**“everything is yours.”** That is, everything is for your benefit (see commentary on 1 Cor. 3:21).

1Co 3:23

**“you belong to Christ.”** The believer belongs to Christ. He paid for believers with his blood and believers made him “Lord” when they got born again (cf. Rom. 10:9).

**“Christ belongs to God.”** As the Son of God, Jesus is not co-equal with the Father. God is the Father and creator of Jesus Christ.

[For more on Christ belonging to God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

**1 Corinthians Chapter 4**

1Co 4:1

**“stewards.”** The Greek is *oikonomos* (#3623 οἰκονόμος), and means, “The manager of a household or of household affairs; especially a steward, manager, superintendent (whether free-born or, as was usually the case, a freedman or slave) to whom the head of the house or proprietor has entrusted the management of his affairs.”[[23]](#footnote-16501) In our case, we are *oikonomoi*, stewards or “house managers,” entrusted by Jesus Christ with the affairs of the *oikonomia*, the “Administration” of the Sacred Secret.

**“sacred secret.”** We translate the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *mustērion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm.

[For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

1Co 4:3

**“man’s day.”** Versus The Lord’s Day, when the judgment will be right, just, and final.

1Co 4:4

**“I am not aware of anything against myself.” “**Not a statement of fact, but a hypothesis to show the unreliability of mere complacent self-satisfaction. Note the use of *sunoida* (second perfect active indicative with dative (disadvantage) of the reflexive pronoun) for guilty knowledge against oneself (cf. Acts 5:2; 12:12; 14:6)… Failure to be conscious of one’s own sins does not mean that one is innocent.”[[24]](#footnote-28912)

**“declared righteous.”** Being declared righteous by God is a judicial decision. It does not mean that we do not sin or that our sin does not matter; it does matter. See commentary on Romans 3:20.

1Co 4:6

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“puffed up”** is the literal meaning of *phusioō* (#5448 φυσιόω), which is “a later substitute for φυσάω; it is largely limited to Christian literature…lit. ‘blow up, inflate’ from φῦσα [*phusa*] (orig. ‘pair of bellows’, then var. ‘wind, blast’, etc.). Thus, figuratively, to cause to have an exaggerated self-conception, puff up, make proud. The Passive in an active sense, become puffed up or conceited, put on airs.”[[25]](#footnote-27348) Be arrogant. Six out of its seven usages in the NT are in 1 Corinthians. After saying that some are puffed up (1 Cor. 4:18; 5:2), Paul notes that love is “not puffed up” (1 Cor. 13:4).

1Co 4:9

**“as men doomed to death.”** Paul is drawing this analogy from the Roman Triumph, which was a parade that followed certain military victories, which was followed by gladiator fights or by the losers being killed by wild animals in the arena. Paul uses the Triumph analogy in several places (see commentary on 2 Cor. 2:14). In the Triumph parade, the men who lost the war and who were taken prisoner were paraded through the streets of Rome, and then at some time after the parade were usually condemned to death in the arena. What is ironic in this verse is that Paul portrays himself as one of the losers: last in the parade, a spectacle to the jeering crowds who lined the streets and filled the seats of the arena, and “doomed to death.” Of course, this is ironic. Paul did not think of himself as a loser but as “more than a conqueror” in Christ (Rom. 8:37). But the ironic point he was making in 1 Cor. 4:7-14 by portraying himself as one of the losers was designed to warn the Corinthians (v. 14). At that time, the believers in Corinth were not treating Paul as their teacher and leader in spite of the fact that he himself had started the church in Corinth. Thus, he admonished them, “be imitators of me” (1 Cor. 4:16).

This section of 1 Corinthians shows us that how we think and behave as Christians really does matter to God. It is becoming more common in Christianity today to believe that “whatever anyone does that they are at peace with is fine with God and with me.” That is not true. God wants His children to know the truth and live it, and there will be a Day of Judgment for Christians, not to determine who is saved and who is not, but to determine what rewards or lack of them each person will have in the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth. Paul knew this and worked to correct the thoughts and actions of the Corinthians whom he had fathered in the Word, and we Christians are to lovingly help each other think and live the way God wants us to, as is set forth in Scripture.

[For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on rewards for godly behavior, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

1Co 4:15

**“though you have 10,000 guides.”** This verse would have had more impact in ancient Corinth than it does today. The children of the wealthy were escorted to school by a “pedagogue,” a person who oversaw their safety, which is why some translations have “guardian” here, while we have “guide” (because eventually the pedagogue did more than just escort and protect, they did some guiding of the child). However, a child from a wealthy family would have many pedagogues, but still, only one father in the family. Paul is making that point, that any Christian will have many guides in their life, but he was their spiritual father, he founded the church at Corinth.

1Co 4:17

**“For this reason I sent Timothy to you.”** Timothy was in Ephesus with Paul, but with all that was going on in the church at Corinth, Paul thought it best to send Timothy to them. However, Timothy, who was accompanied by Erastus, the treasurer of Corinth, went to Corinth through Macedonia, apparently to strengthen the disciples there before going to Corinth (Acts 19:22). It was because Timothy was going to Corinth via Macedonia that Paul expected his Epistle, 1 Corinthians, to reach Corinth before Timothy did (1 Cor. 16:10).

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

1Co 4:21

**“a spirit of meekness.”** That is, with a meek and humble attitude. One of the meanings of spirit was the attitudes and emotions of the mind.

[For more on the uses of “spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

**1 Corinthians Chapter 5**

1Co 5:1

**“there is sexual immorality among you.”** The Torah (the five books of Moses) forbade a man from having his father’s wife (Lev. 18:8; 20:11; Deut. 22:30), and people who were closely related were not to have sex with each other (Lev. 18:15; 20:12, 14, 20). Sexual holiness is very important to God, and requires great restraint and diligence on the part of people, because humans have such strong sexual urges. People who love God make the effort to obey Him and fulfill His requirements. Although it was permissible in the Old Testament for a man to have more than one wife, for Christians today God has brought sexual fulfillment back to His original design: inside a marriage between a man and a woman. Scripture says that each man is to have his own wife and each woman her own husband (1 Cor. 7:2). That means that God designed marriage to be between one man and one woman.

1Co 5:2

**“Let him who has done this deed be removed.”** The Greek verb translated as “removed” is in the imperative mood, and so the verse can be translated like it is in the REV, or it can be translated: “The one who has done this thing must be removed.” In this context, and in light of 1 Cor. 5:5, it seemed that Paul would have used a softer tone and directed the Corinthians on what to do, rather than commanding them what to do, hence the transition in the REV. Paul says this again, more harshly, in 1 Corinthians 5:13, but that is after he has made his point as to why this sexually immoral person needs to be excluded from the church.

This type of church discipline, excluding a person from church membership, is not common today, but was very important to the early church. The developing church faced many trials, and it was important to them that the congregation be obedient to God. Certainly there were differences in doctrine among the believers, in part because the entire New Testament had not been written, and in part because people didn't even have all the books that were written, and in part because people then, like people today, don't believe what the text actually says. However, there is a big practical difference between differing about doctrine and willfully disobeying what the entire congregation knows to be the will of God. Especially during times of great persecution, it can greatly weaken the will of some people to stay faithful if there are people in the congregation who are willfully unfaithful, and even flaunting that fact. Church membership, especially in the early church when believers lived close to one another and helped one another greatly, was a privilege. Excluding a person from membership in the congregation not only protected the church, it gave the sinner the opportunity to realize the tremendous privilege it was to be part of a close-knit and loving congregation, and so to repent and rejoin the church congregation.

1Co 5:3

**“present in spirit.”** This use of “spirit” here in 1 Corinthians 5:3 refers to a person’s mental and emotional life. Paul used this same meaning of “spirit” in other places (e.g., 2 Cor. 2:13). There is no need to, and no precedent for, making this use of “spirit” into something other than Paul’s thoughts and emotions. There is no “mystical connection” between Paul and the Corinthian believers such that Paul was actually among them in some incorporeal way, as in, say, astral projection or some other kind of incorporeal presence.

Paul had trained the Corinthian believers in the Word, and now that he was not with them it was upon them to make the righteous but difficult judgment about what to do with a person who was having sex with his father’s wife. When Paul says he has already judged the guilty person, he is reminding the Corinthian believers how he obeyed God and stood against sin even when it was difficult.

R. C. H. Lenski writes about Paul’s use of “spirit” in this context and says: “The separation is only physical, ‘as to the body’; Paul is, nevertheless, present in Corinth, namely ‘as to the spirit’ (datives of relation). We need not puzzle our heads about this type of presence, for we still say: ‘I am with you in spirit,’ when in some important matter mind and heart are united with distant friends.”[[26]](#footnote-20084)

1 Corinthians 5:4 uses “spirit” in the same way: Paul’s thoughts and emotions, which he constantly demonstrated to the believers at Corinth when he was with them. Paul’s example had already shown the church how to deal with flagrant sinners, and his example is still among them. Simon Kistemaker writes how Paul is assembled among the believers at Corinth: “He [Paul] admits that geographical distance separates him from the recipients of his letter, but this does not mean that his written words can be taken lightly. On the contrary, he is with the church in spirit, and in that sense he is giving personal leadership. In spirit he takes the gavel in hand, so to speak, and chairs the meeting of the local church. He knows that he and the Corinthians have to remove the blemish from the congregation. He does this through prayer on behalf of the Corinthians and through his Epistle.”[[27]](#footnote-12490)

[For more information on the uses of *pneuma*, “spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

1Co 5:4

**“and my spirit.”** In this case, Paul’s “spirit” is an aspect of his personality. Ellingworth and Hatton write: “‘Spirit’ does not refer to the Holy Spirit or to a spiritual entity or separate personality in Paul’s body, but refers to Paul’s mind or thoughts. In most languages it will be helpful to render ‘I am present in spirit’ as ‘I am present with you in my thoughts.’”[[28]](#footnote-31669) C. K. Barrett writes, “‘spirit’ is in this context an aspect of Paul’s personality.”[[29]](#footnote-31755) The grammar helps us because the “my” is emphatic in Greek. This is not God’s gift of holy spirit, this is Paul’s spirit, an aspect of his personality, an aspect of Paul. Paul is saying in a slightly different way what he had just said in 1 Corinthians 5:3, that he was present in spirit; that is, in his thoughts and emotions.

The Corinthian church was dealing with a sinful person without their founder and mentor, Paul, being present with them. But Paul assured them he was with them in his thoughts, and more than that, in saying that “my spirit” was present, he knew they remembered how he thought and the principles he lived by, and thus his influence would be greatly felt in the Church.

What Paul was saying is not well understood by commentators, and there are many different opinions about what Paul is saying, including such things as his spirit somehow being present in some transcendent way, a non-physical presence; or his spirit being the Holy Spirit and being present as the power of Jesus Christ. However, there is no need to be mystical about this. It is well understood that a person’s “spirit” can be a part of them and refer to their thoughts, attitudes, and emotions, and for Paul to say that his spirit was with the Corinthians as they worked through a very tough situation would be perfectly normal and understood.

[For more information on the uses of *pneuma*, “spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

1Co 5:5

**“to hand over such a one to the Adversary.”** To hand over (some versions have “deliver”) to the Adversary means to put out of the Church (see commentary on 1 Tim. 1:20).

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see commentary on Mark 1:13.

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“destruction of the flesh.”** The Greek word translated “destruction” is *olethros* (#3639 ὄλεθρος), which occurs four times in the New Testament (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:3; 2 Thess. 1:9; and 1 Tim. 6:9). The word means *desolation* or *destruction*, though literal annihilation is not always intended. The English word destruction is a good translation, except that it can be then confused in English with the stronger word *apōleia* (#684 ἀπώλεια), which denotes a more irrevocable and harsh destruction than *olethros*.

“Flesh” is the figure of speech metonymy[[30]](#footnote-32279) for “the desires of the flesh,” or the carnal nature. That use of “flesh” is very common in the writings of Paul (cf. Rom. 8:8; 2 Cor. 10:2; Gal. 5:13, 19; Eph. 2:3; Phil. 1:22; Col. 2:23). The person is excommunicated from the Church and put out into the world, where he is unloved, and (hopefully) his fleshly desires will come to an end (be destroyed) as he comes to realize the value of Christian fellowship. Thus, his “spirit” (his attitude toward God and thus his rewards), “may” (the subjunctive expresses the possibility) be saved when Christ returns. The word “saved” is in the subjunctive mood, expressing the possibility that putting someone out of the church “may” bring him to repentance, but there are people who leave the Church and never repent, but become very worldly. God, however, opts for the greater possibility and expresses His desire for the person. Instead of kicking him out and saying he “may” stay worldly, He says that he “may” yet regain his Christian attitude and rewards.

The Roman world was very harsh and cruel, which made the commands to Christians to be especially kind one to another, loving, and hospitable stand out even more strongly in Roman times than they do today. Christian fellowship with like-minded, loving believers was a safe harbor and a blessed place to be in contrast to the Roman world, which could “destroy” the “flesh”—the fleshly worldly mind—fairly quickly. Paul speaks of the many dangers he faced as he traveled in the Roman world (2 Cor. 11:26) and how he was often tired, hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, cold, and treated badly (1 Cor. 4:11-13; 2 Cor. 11:27), and he had loving Christians to support him. A person who got ejected from Christian fellowship and thus had no loving support could have his fleshly attitude “destroyed” by the world quite quickly and repent and return to the church so that his mental state—his attitudes, thoughts, and emotions—are restored. The “destruction” of the flesh does not refer to destruction in the sense of the person’s death, although many commentators think that is its meaning. A person’s death does not result in their “spirit” being saved. When a person’s flesh is “destroyed” and he could be weak, sick, hungry, and uncared for, that state of want and need can cause a person to rethink life, repent, and attempt to return to better circumstances, in this case, back into the church and Christian belief.

**“so that *his* spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord Jesus.”** The word “spirit” (Greek: *pneuma*) has many different uses in the New Testament, and here in this phrase, it refers to a person’s mental state: the thoughts and emotions. In this verse, it means that a person’s mental state may be made whole, and thus be that way in the Day of the Lord. The phrase here in 1 Corinthians 5:5, “so that *his* spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord Jesus,” has engendered much discussion. However, the word “spirit” had already been used twice in the immediately preceding verses (1 Cor. 5:3-4), and there is no demanding reason that the meaning of “spirit” should suddenly change here; in fact, the same use of spirit—the activities of the mind such as thoughts, attitudes, and emotions—fits as well in 1 Corinthians 5:5 as it does in 1 Corinthians 5:3-4.

The word “saved” is the Greek word *sōzō* (#4982 σῴζω), and it has many meanings, including to rescue from danger or destruction, to keep safe, to heal, to make whole, and to save from everlasting destruction. In this case, the evidence is that *sōzō* has the meaning of “to heal, to be made whole.” There are a number of reasons to come to that conclusion. One is, as has been pointed out, that in the immediate context, the word “spirit” refers to the activities of the mind—one’s attitude, thoughts, and emotions—and those things are not “saved” in the sense of being given everlasting life. One’s godly mental state can be restored, healed, or made whole, but it is the person who receives everlasting life, not a person’s mental state. Also, we can see why the Bible would use “spirit” here, referring to the thoughts and emotions. The context is a man whose thinking was so unsound that he was having sex with his father’s wife. But that kind of sinful behavior based on unsound “thoughts and emotions” (the person’s “spirit”) is one of the things that was promised to be healed at the Rapture and resurrections (Isa. 32:4).

Also, although a common explanation of 1 Corinthians 5:5 is that it is the “human spirit” of a person that is “saved” (granted everlasting life), that is not what the Bible teaches. It teaches that the “person” is granted everlasting life, not any “human spirit” people may or may not have. Many verses speak of “people” being saved, and many different phrases are used to describe that fact. In contrast, there are no verses that indisputably teach that a part of a person can be saved but somehow not the other parts saved in the same way. Furthermore, at the Rapture, Christians will not have the kind of body we have now but a totally new and “complete” body like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21), we will not be partly saved or partly changed.

Another thing we should take into account is that “the Day of the Lord Jesus” may not just refer to the Day of Judgment, but in fact refer to the time when the Lord rules the earth. Simon Kistemaker points out: “Also, the phrase *Day of the Lord* can refer to more than the end of time when the judgment will take place. It can also mean a unique period during which God’s people rejoice in the Lord. The Old Testament prophets understood the phrase to mean a time in which God claimed victory over the world and his people triumph with him.”[[31]](#footnote-19841)

So the lesson of 1 Corinthians 5:5 is that if there is an egregious sinner in the Church, rather than letting the arrogant ungodly attitude of that person affect the whole Church, put the person out of the fellowship in the hope that his “flesh,” his sinful behavior and thoughts, will be destroyed and that his “spirit,” his attitude and emotions will thus be whole in the Day of the Lord Jesus.

[For more on the use of the word “spirit” referring to the activities of the mind, including one’s attitude and emotions, see Word Study: “Pneuma.” For more on rewards in the future kingdom of Christ on earth, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.” Also see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

1Co 5:6

**“whole lump.”** This refers to the “whole lump” of dough that is baked into bread. A little leaven, or yeast, works through the whole batch of dough, and leavens the whole batch. The leaven, the yeast, is what causes the whole loaf to rise and become more tasty.

The point Paul is making is that if you let sin go unchecked in your meetings, it will grow and become entrenched and eventually affect the entire group. Hebrews 12:15 warns of the same kind of thing, and alerts us to look out for any “root of bitterness,” a bitter person in the congregation, whose bitterness and discontent spreads until many are defiled.

1Co 5:9

**“associate”** in the more formal sense of the word, to be in association, close company, with, or to mix together.

**“sexually immoral people.”** The noun is masculine, and men are indicated by the context.

1Co 5:10

**“not at all *meaning* with the sexually immoral people of this world.”** What Paul is saying here is that we are not to associate with sexually immoral people in the church. In the world, both in the time of Paul and today, it is almost impossible to live without associating with sexually immoral people, because the world doesn't necessarily consider things that the Bible calls sexually immoral to be a terrible sin. In fact, Christians are to intermingle with the people of the world so that they can see by our love and good example that getting saved and being a Christian is actually good and beneficial. So we want the church to be morally pure, but we intermingle with sinners in the world in order to win them to Christ.

1Co 5:11

**“named *as* a brother or sister.”** That is, one who is claiming to be a Christian. The Greek word *adelphos* (typically translated “brother”) is often not gender exclusive, in other words, it often refers to both genders.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

**“not to eat.”** This seems very harsh, and to understand it we must take it in the context of biblical custom and culture; not our modern culture. In the biblical world, people were very careful about who they ate with. Sharing a meal, which almost always had salt in it, was a way of taking the salt covenant together and meant a pledge of friendship and support. That is not at all the case today. When we eat with perfect strangers and know nothing about them, our meals do not come with implied friendship and salt covenant commitments. Paul is not saying not to be kind to Christians who persist in living in sin, but he is saying not to become friends with them.

[For more on the salt covenant people took when they ate together, see commentary on 2 Chron. 13:5.]

1Co 5:12

**“For what have I to do with judging those who are outside *the church*?”** Christians should pay close attention to Paul’s words here. Far too often Christians look down upon nonbelievers and have contempt for them. There is no evidence that Christ lived that way, and we are not supposed to either. We love and bless those who are outside the church and do our best to win them to Christ.

1Co 5:13

**“Remove the wicked *person* from among yourselves!”** Paul had said this earlier (1 Cor. 5:2). Now, after explaining why this sexually immoral person had to be removed from the church, he makes the statement again in a very direct manner.

It does seem that this man was excommunicated from the church, and then repented. It seems that Paul is advising the church to now forgive him and bring him back into fellowship (2 Cor. 2:5-8).

**1 Corinthians Chapter 6**

1Co 6:2

**“judge *and administer*.”** The Greek word is *krinō* (#2919 κρίνω), and it means “to make a selection; to pass judgment on; to judge; to condemn.” Here it is used in the active voice, meaning that it is not a one-time judgment, but rather an ongoing process of judgment, or what we would call ruling or administering, because administering is made up of a series of individual judgments. The Amplified Bible says that believers will one day “judge and govern” the world, and that is the sense of the word.

The Bible tells us that when Jesus comes down from heaven, he will set up his kingdom on earth. Christians who have been faithful will help rule that future earth (Matt. 19:28; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26; see commentary on Jer. 23:4). The same word, *krinō* in the active voice, is used in 1 Cor. 6:3 of angels, letting us know that we will also judge and administer angels.

The word “judge” when used of the world and angels not only refers to administering the world to come, but also refers to the Day of Judgment, at which point the righteousness of the saints will “judge” or condemn those who have ignored or stood against God and the things of God.

[For more on the Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

1Co 6:4

**“have no standing.”** From *exoutheneō* (#1848 ἐξουθενέω). See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:20. This word is usually translated elsewhere as “treat with contempt.”

1Co 6:7

**“loss.”** See Lenski.[[32]](#footnote-29290)

1Co 6:9

**“will not inherit the Kingdom of God.”** Inheriting the Kingdom of God refers to being saved. Paul’s warning is that people who live a lifestyle of practicing the sins listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 will not have everlasting life (see commentary on Gal. 5:21, “those who practice such things” and “will not inherit the Kingdom of God”).

**“unrighteous.”** 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 refers to people who are unrighteous and are living out the things that are listed. The list is inclusive and refers to all people who live ungodly lives, no matter if they are non-Christian or Christian. This list of ungodly behaviors is not exhaustive but representative (cf. Lenski).[[33]](#footnote-29023) Nevertheless, it is complete enough that Christians are to clearly understand that a Christian cannot live in opposition to God’s will and expect His blessings. There are similar lists with some of the same sins and some different sins mentioned in places such as Galatians 5:19-21 and Ephesians 5:5.

[See Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

**“nor...nor...nor...nor.”** The repetition of “nor” before each entry is the figure of speech paradiastole, a form of anaphora.[[34]](#footnote-28556) The repetition before each noun emphasizes each noun individually, so they don’t get “lost in the list” so to speak. The figure is saying, “Pay attention to each point on the list, they are all very important.”

**“sexually immoral.”** The Greek is *pornos* (#4205 πόρνος), which is a masculine noun and technically refers to a man who is sexually immoral or a male prostitute. However, the masculine form was used in a broad sense that included sexually immoral women. A female prostitute or a sexually immoral woman was a *pornē* (#4204 πόρνη), but whereas the masculine form was used to include women, the feminine form was not generally used to include men. In early Greek, *pornos* and *pornē* referred much more specifically to prostitutes and prostitution. Greek (and Roman) morals were much looser than Christian morals. For example, in both Greece and Rome, slaves were the sexual property of whoever owned them, and a slave owner having sex with a slave was not only overlooked but pretty much expected. By the time of Christ, and especially in the Christian world, the words, and the neuter noun *porneia*, were not just used of prostitution but of sexual immorality in general.

**“idolaters.”** The Greek is *eidōlolatrēs* (#1496 εἰδωλολάτρης), and it means “image worshiper” or “idolater.” The primary meaning is a Christian who worships images. However, over time, it was broadened to include other things that were considered idols. The first of the Ten Commandments is to not have any other gods besides the one true God. Anyone who gets “spiritual power,” “spiritual advice,” or “just worships” another god or thing is an idolater. Christians need to be very careful who they pray to for help and what they look to for spiritual help, such as “lucky” items that supposedly exert an invisible influence. God is offended by them. Also, something that is usually overlooked in modern idolatry is that ancient idolatry often had some kind of sexual immorality as part of the worship.

**“adulterers.”** The Greek word is *moichos* (#3432 μοιχός ), and it refers to someone who is married but having sexual intercourse with someone other than his or her spouse. In the Old Testament, and in both the secular Greek and Roman world, the definition of adultery was different. In the Old Testament, “adultery” properly referred to a married or betrothed woman having sexual intercourse with someone other than her husband. The Greek, Roman, and Hebrew concept of adultery was substantially the same; the infidelity of the husband did not constitute adultery. The New Testament specifically commands that each man and woman is to have his or her “own” spouse, and thus the New Testament definition of adultery is narrower than the Old Testament definition, including any married person having intercourse with someone other than his or her spouse. The world and its evil forces want to discount the evil in adultery, so it is called “an affair,” cheating,” or “indiscretion,” as if it were no big deal. But it is a big deal, and God has always firmly commanded that people do not commit adultery. Verses forbidding it are in the Old Testament (Exod. 20:14, *etc.*), the Gospels (Mark 10:19, *etc.*), and in the Church Epistles (Rom. 13:9, *etc.*).

**“passive homosexual partners.”** The Greek is *malakos* (#3120 μαλακός), and it literally means “soft” or “soft to the touch.” Although it had other uses such as “soft clothing,” it was the standard word in the Greek language for the “passive” one in the homosexual relation. In the Greco-Roman world, the “passive” partner was often a youth, and so, for example, the New American Bible says “boy prostitutes,” but *malakos* is general enough to refer to the passive person in the relationship. The masculine form of the Greek is used, but as it is used in this context, it would also refer to the passive partner in a lesbian relationship.

**“homosexuals.”** The Greek is *arsenokoitēs* (#733 ἀρσενοκοίτης), which is from *arsen,* “male,” and *koite*, “bed,” and describes a man who “beds” another man, i.e., a homosexual. Although *arsenokoitēs* is sometimes used in a wide sense referring to all homosexuality, it also had a narrower sense, referring to the one who took the dominant or “male” role in the homosexual relation. Because 1 Corinthians 6:9 also specifically refers to the *malakos*, the use of *arsenokoitēs* in this verse refers to the dominant homosexual.

God created the human race with two sexes, male and female (Gen. 5:2), and designed them to be together and to have families, and the family was designed to be the stable center of God’s human society. The “natural use” sexually of the man is with a woman and vice versa (Rom. 1:26). As this list in 1 Corinthians shows (and it is quite limited), godly human sexual behavior has been under attack since Genesis. The list in 1 Corinthians 6 starts with “sexual immorality,” which is a very broad category and covers many sexual behaviors that are sinful, and then the list gives a few specific sins under the broad category of sexual immorality, including adultery and homosexual behavior. Homosexual and lesbian relationships are sinful in the eyes of God, as are adultery and other acts that defy, ignore, or destroy the centrality of the God-designed human family. (Other verses that mention homosexuality are Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, and Rom. 1:24-27).

1Co 6:10

**“verbally abusive.”** The Greek word translated as “verbally abusive” here in 1 Corinthians 6:10 is *loidoros* (#3060 λοίδορος), and it means “one who intentionally abuses another with speech; reviler, slanderer, abusive person.”[[35]](#footnote-19055) The word only occurs here and in 1 Corinthians 5:11 of a person who is verbally abusive, although other forms of the word that occur in the New Testament are *loidoreō* (the verb) and *loidoria* (the feminine noun for verbal abuse or insults).

Christians must be especially careful not to be verbally abusive because it is a serious sin and our modern culture abounds with it and influences us. For example, on social media and in email, people say all kinds of horrible, and often untrue, things about each other. But God and Jesus do not care about our modern culture. The ancient cultures were verbally abusive too (thus the existence of the word in ancient Greek), and believers were not to get involved with it. As we see here in 1 Corinthians 6:10, making a practice of being verbally abusive can cost a believer rewards in the coming Kingdom of Christ.

That believers are not to be verbally abusive, and that it is a serious sin, is not new. Jesus sternly warned his followers about being verbally abusive and making verbal judgments about others, for example, not to call others “You no-good” (“Fool” in many versions—Matt. 5:22), which is a somewhat poor modern translation of what in the Aramaic and biblical culture had the deeper meaning of a godless person who rebelled against God. The proper Christian response to being verbally abused is to bless the person (1 Cor. 4:12) and ignore the attack and move on (1 Pet. 2:23). We should imitate the behavior Jesus exemplified when he was on trial (Matt. 26:63; John 18:23). Christians are to work diligently to have pure, kind hearts, and to speak words of blessing. We can be honest with one another, but we are to do that honestly and kindly, and always ask ourselves if what we want to say needs to be said at all.

Jesus taught us that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks (Matt. 12:34; 15:18). If a person finds it hard (or impossible) to not revile others when hurt or insulted, that is a sign that the person needs to have their heart healed. There is no excuse for living with an unforgiving, bitter heart that causes the mouth to sin. Healing the heart and forgiving ourselves and others may not be easy, but it is part of the work that believers must do to live godly lives.

**“will inherit the Kingdom of God.”** See commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:9, “will not inherit the Kingdom of God.” Inheriting the Kingdom of God refers to being saved. Paul’s warning is that people who live life practicing the sins listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 will not have everlasting life (see commentary on Gal. 5:21, “those who practice such things”).

1Co 6:11

**“declared righteous.”** Being declared righteous by God is a judicial decision. It does not mean that we do not sin or that our sin does not matter; it does matter. See commentary on Romans 3:20.

**“in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”** This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority.

[For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6.]

1Co 6:16

**“joined.”** The Greek word is *kollaō* and means “joined.” A closely related term, *proskollaō*, occurs in the Gospels and Ephesians 5:31, and means “to be glued.” Ann Nyland notes that *proskollaō* means “glued,” but alone, without the prefix *pros*, *kollaō* means “joined.”[[36]](#footnote-17815)

1Co 6:18

**“outside the body.”** There has been much discussion about why sexual immorality is considered a sin “against his own body,” while other sins are “outside the body.” Questions arise about why sins like getting drunk or taking illicit drugs are called sins “outside the body” when they go “inside” our body and affect it from the inside out. To understand the verse and Paul’s argument here, we must read it in light of the scope of the whole Scripture.

Almost all sin affects the “inside” of us in one way or another. Sin can make us feel guilty, unworthy, depressed, angry, etc., and can result in us acting out in very harmful ways. So the verse is not saying that sexual sin is the only sin that is “against our body” in the sense that it harms us; all sin harms us in some way, including mentally, emotionally, or physically.

The key to understanding what Paul is saying here is to pick up the flow of his argument especially starting in 1 Corinthians 6:15, where Paul says that we are “members of Christ” and we should not “take away” the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute. That verse should grab our attention because when a Christian sins, including sexual sin, he does not lose his salvation.

When an unsaved person gets saved, he enters into a spiritual union with Christ (this is often expressed as being “in Christ,” see commentary on Eph. 1:3). The saved person becomes a “member” of Christ, a member of the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:18, 27; Eph. 5:30), and sinning does not remove, “take away,” or amputate, a member of the Body of Christ from the Body. But 1 Corinthians 6:15 says that sexual sin “takes away” a member of Christ and makes him a “member” of a prostitute. This tells us that there is something special and spiritual happening when a person has illicit sexual intercourse that is in conflict with being a member of the Body of Christ.

The act of sexual intercourse is a union of both flesh and spirit that cannot be seen or tested in a laboratory. The act of sexual intercourse causes a profound spiritual and physical change and joining that is bound up in the very sexual nature of mankind, but about which mankind knows very little. That change and joining is referred to by God as being “glued” together (Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7; Eph. 5:31; see commentary on Matt. 19:5). Paul uses that same kind of vocabulary here (but not the exact word “glued”), pointing out that a person who is “joined” to a prostitute (which would include other sexual immorality such as adultery) is “one body,” and “one flesh” (1 Cor. 6:16). He then immediately points out that because we are “joined” to the Lord we are “one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17).

The implication in the verse is that being joined to the Lord and being “one spirit” with Jesus is in conflict with being joined to a prostitute and being “one flesh” with her. It is as if the act of illicit sex tears us away from being a member of Christ and causes us to become a member of the prostitute (although we do not actually lose our position in the Body of Christ). The act of illicit sexual intercourse has physical and spiritual consequences that cannot be easily seen or tested, but are clearly there and known to God. Of course, we can see some of the consequences of illicit sexual unions, but just because we cannot see all of them does not mean that they are not there; the act of illicit sex is a sin against our body in a unique way.

One danger of the “one flesh” union in illicit sex that is not mentioned in this context, is that people engaged in illicit sex, especially people such as prostitutes, often have demons, evil spirits, inhabiting their minds or bodies. There are many demons involved with sexual sin, including demons of lust, perverse spirits, and a demon the Bible refers to as “a spirit of prostitution” (Hos. 4:12; 5:4). The spiritual ramifications of sexual touch are very powerful, and touch has long been known to occasionally “transfer” things that are spiritual in nature, because touch establishes a connection that, while hard to exactly define, is widely recognized. For example, it is common for people on both sides of the spiritual conflict, Christians and Satan worshipers alike, to hold hands to make a petition especially powerful. When Jacob wanted to bless Ephraim and Manasseh, he put his hands on their heads (Gen. 48:12-20), and for generations, touching people has been a standard way of identifying with them. That is one reason the New Testament says, “Do not be hasty to lay hands on anyone and *thus* share *responsibility* for the sins of others. Keep yourself pure” (1 Tim. 5:22). 2 Corinthians 6:17 says, “stop touching anything unclean, and I will welcome you.” If one of the partners has a demon, the act of illicit sex can give it access to the other person, and a Christian having illicit sex with someone who has a demon can end up with a demon themselves.

1Co 6:19

**“of the holy spirit.”** Genitive of content. Our bodies are sanctuaries that *contain* the holy spirit.

**“the holy spirit.”** The Greek puts “in you” between “the” and “holy spirit” making the article hard to recognize for beginning students, nevertheless, *pneuma hagion* (holy spirit) refers to the gift. This is clear because it is “in you,” and God is not “in us,” and we have this holy spirit “from God.” The gift of holy spirit is the seal that God seals believers with that guarantees them everlasting life (Eph. 1:13-14).

[For more information on the holy spirit and uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” and also see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

**“from God”** is the genitive of origin, sometimes translated “of God.”

**1 Corinthians Chapter 7**

1Co 7:1

**“touch”** is euphemistic in the Greek language for touch in a sexual way, especially sexual intercourse (the Hebrew language has the same idiom, cf. Exod. 19:15; Ruth 2:9). This verse is referring to sexual intercourse in marriage since sexual intercourse outside of marriage is sin (and it would be superfluous for God to say that sinful sex is not “good”). The NIV picks up the sense of the verse when it reads, “…it is good for a man not to marry.” The question remains, then, as to why God did not simply state that people should not marry, why did He use the idiom? It is because the word “touch,” although used euphemistically, still has literal overtones. Just as most men are stimulated by sight (hence the huge market for women’s lingerie), women can be stimulated by being touched, being held. It is not good for men to touch women and get them emotionally distracted if the man has no intention of marriage.

**“woman.”** The word woman is in the genitive case because it is a Greek idiom that words following touch are in the genitive.[[37]](#footnote-10422)

1Co 7:2

**“so much sexual immorality.”** The Greek simply reads “immoralities” in the plural, but this is a plural of emphasis (Bullinger calls this “Heterosis of number”).[[38]](#footnote-24608) There was so much sexual immorality in Corinth (and in the world in general, which is still true today) that in order to keep from being sexually distracted, each person should have his or her “own” spouse. Relief from sexual pressure is not the only reason for marriage, but it is an important one; other reasons include companionship and children. This verse sets the standard for the New Testament: that God has moved away from the polygamy that was allowed in the Old Testament.

**“let each woman have her own husband.”** We translate this verse as “let each woman have” because the verb “have” *echō* (#2192 ἔχω; “to have”) is in the present tense, active voice, imperative mood. Verbs in the imperative mood are either commands or exhortations, and “have” in this verse is an exhortation. The verse is not saying “Every man must have his own wife and every woman must have her own husband,” as if each man and woman in the Church “must” be married. The context of this chapter makes it clear that is not the meaning. The point of the imperative exhortation is that there is so much sexual immorality in the culture that, if a person needs sexual release, the man must have his OWN wife, and the woman her OWN husband.

If this verse had only mentioned the man and not the woman, and said, “Let every man have his own wife,” it would not have caught anyone’s attention in the culture of the day. Although some of the Jewish and Middle Eastern men in Paul’s audience had more than one wife, most did not. Furthermore, having more than one wife was not a part of the Greco-Roman culture. However, the unspoken cultural norm for all of Paul’s audience was that men were free to have sex with many women besides their wives, but if a wife had sexual intercourse with another man, that was “adultery.” For example, any household slave was the sexual property of the man of the house, and it was accepted (and even rather expected) that men had sex with their slaves. Also, for a man to have sexual intercourse with a prostitute was also accepted behavior. Furthermore, if a man was traveling and stopped at an inn, the proprietor often would provide a slave woman (or a slave boy or man for those with homosexual desires) for a fee. In fact, it was part of many upper-class Roman dinner parties that the host would provide prostitutes after the meal.[[39]](#footnote-24001)

When it came to proper sexual behavior for God’s people, 1 Corinthians 7:2 changed what was accepted behavior: Paul wrote that God’s command is that the woman had her OWN husband. Thus, the godly man was not free to have sexual intercourse with others besides his wife.

The effects of this verse were very far-reaching. First, it elevated the woman’s position in the family and culture. It is a common Christian myth that Paul was somehow against women. Of course, given the way his writings have been mistranslated and misinterpreted, it certainly could seem Paul was against women. However, when we properly translate this verse and others like it, we can see that the New Testament was a Magna Carta for women, giving them rights and privileges they had never had before. That a woman would have the sexual attention of her own husband and not share him with slaves and strangers was a huge advance for women.

[For other verses in the New Testament that elevate women’s position in the culture, see commentaries on 1 Cor. 14:34, 35; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12; 3:2; 5:14 and 1 Pet. 3:7.]

Another thing this verse did was protect women from the selfishness of men. Any man who professes to be a Christian must keep his hands off other women, even if the culture in which he lives gives him the legal right to use them sexually; like a Christian Roman had the “legal right” to use his slaves. A slave in the house of a committed Christian would be secure in the knowledge that the master of the house would make sure she would not be used by the men of the house or be passed around at one of his dinner parties—something that was not uncommon.

Another effect this verse had was it separated Christian men from their non-Christian friends. The average man in the Greco-Roman culture would have thought it very strange for a man not to fulfill his desires by having sex with his slaves and with prostitutes, and thus this command in 1 Corinthians 7:2 caused a division, and some suspicion, between the Christian men and the non-Christian Romans around them. Thus, obeying this command of God posed a dilemma for many men, who had to choose between their culture and their God. Thankfully, eventually, when the Roman world became Christian after the time of Constantine, this verse would define not only Christian behavior but what acceptable behavior was for “good people.”

There was one thing this verse did that we today would not expect: it placed women in a dilemma when it came to sex with their husbands. At the time of Paul, the average lifespan of a woman was quite a few years less than a man’s expected lifespan and generally in the low 30s; around age 32. This was in large part due to the fact that between 5 and 10 percent of the women died in childbirth (some died as a result of an attempted abortion, trying to avoid the risk of childbirth). This fact was not lost on many women of the time, and thus many of them preferred that their husbands had sex with their slaves or a prostitute so that they would not get pregnant and risk their lives in childbirth.

Thus, this verse, which is the very foundation of the Christian family, that “family” would be built upon a man and a woman in an exclusive relationship, also caused great difficulties for both the men and the women. The men were often estranged from their friends and culture, and the women, who gained greatly by the command, also then bore the risks of childbirth. The Christian life is simple, but rarely easy.

1Co 7:3

**“obligation.”** If you marry, you are obligated to provide sexual intercourse to your spouse. The Greek word we translated “obligation” is *opheilē* (#3782 ὀφειλή) and means, “that which one ought to do, *duty*” and also “that which one owes in a financial sense, *obligation*; as *debt.*”[[40]](#footnote-16244)

1Co 7:4

**“The wife does not have authority over her own body…likewise also the husband…”** Both the husband and the wife have authority over their own bodies before they get married. However, when one enters into a marriage covenant, he or she agrees to no longer have authority over his or her own body, but to give that authority over to the husband or wife.

1Co 7:5

**“mutual consent.”** The Greek word *sumphōnos*, (#4859 σύμφωνος, which moved from Greek to Latin to the English word “symphony”) from the time of Homer, Plato, Aristotle down, means *harmonious, accordant, agreeing*; by mutual consent, by agreement.[[41]](#footnote-18457) If the husband and wife are going to abstain from sexual intercourse, it must be only for a season, and they must be in harmony about the decision.

**“that you have leisure time for prayer.”** This is literally the way the Greek reads.[[42]](#footnote-18203) It could also be translated “that you may give yourself to prayer” because the reason for the leisure was so that time could be given to prayer. “That you may devote yourself to” as in some versions, seems a little strong for the Greek. One needs to ask why God would word the verse this way. Why “leisure” for prayer? The answer is in the greater context of the chapter. The person who marries will have trouble in the flesh (1 Cor. 7:28) and has to be concerned for his or her spouse and marriage (1 Cor. 7:32-35). In that context, if the couple can be apart for a while, they have “leisure” to pray and focus on the things of God.

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see commentary on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”

**“because of your lack of self-control.”** This does not flatter our human nature, but it is an honest assessment of the situation. Most people do not have much self-control when it comes to sexual continence.

1Co 7:6

**“I say this…”** The word “this” is *touto*, which starts the verse in the Greek, and regularly refers to what has just been stated. Paul had stated that the husband and wife did not have authority over their bodies, their spouses did. However, then he said that they could “deprive” each other for prayer if it was by consent. However, this was not a command. The couple did not have to spend time apart. He does not command time apart, even for prayer. He allows it as a consent if the couple feels it is best.

**“by *God’s* command.”** The Greek phrase *kata epitagē* (κατά ἐπιταγή) is a technical phrase that means “by the command of; by order of.” In this case, the command would have been by God (or the Lord Jesus Christ, doing God’s will), so “*God’s*” is added in italics for clarity. See commentary on 1 Timothy 1:1.

1Co 7:7

**“just as I myself.”** There is debate in the Church about whether Paul had ever been married, and the fact is there is not enough evidence to make a conclusive decision about it, although the evidence leads us to draw a pretty firm conclusion that Paul had been married at one time. From a cultural perspective, he would have been married early in his life, before he started his ministry. Marriage was such an expected part of the biblical culture that even the Greek language has only one word for “wife” and “woman” (which causes some confusion about the meaning of passages like 1 Tim. 3:11). Furthermore, Paul was a Pharisee from Pharisee parents (Acts 23:6), and at that time when marriages were arranged, for Paul’s parents to not arrange a marriage for him would have been a disgrace to the family. It would have been highly unusual for someone of Paul’s stature not to be married.

It is sometimes taught that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin and members of the Sanhedrin had to be married and have at least one child. That is possible, even likely, but not a conclusive argument. First, there is no conclusive evidence that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin. Paul was present when Stephen was stoned, and he “cast his vote” against believers (Acts 26:10). While that could well mean that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, it could also refer to the fact that he had been given some kind of special authority by the High Priest (cf. Acts 9:2; 22:5).

Also, there does not seem to be conclusive evidence from Jewish writings at the time of Christ that a member of the Sanhedrin had to be married. Although it seems logical, the evidence from the time period is not conclusive. Some later Jewish writings say Sanhedrin members had to be married, and the Jewish scholar Maimonides (c. AD 1135) said a requirement was that a member must not be “a childless man,” but it is possible that those requirements did not exist during the lifetime of Paul. Josephus testifies that the members of the Sanhedrin were married, but that may have also been due to the cultural norm, and not an absolute requirement. For example, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, in mentioning the requirements for Sanhedrin members, says nothing about marriage. Nevertheless, the culture would dictate that someone as prominent as a member of the Sanhedrin would almost certainly be married—it would be very unusual if they were not.

It seems almost certain that Paul was married before he started his ministry and then became single due to an unstated event. He was certainly single by the time he wrote Corinthians (1 Cor. 7:7-8). The most likely reason for Paul not having a wife would be that his wife had died. The average lifespan for women in the Roman world at the time of Christ was in their early 30s, with childbirth being a leading cause of death among young women (that was actually why some wives preferred that their husbands have sex with prostitutes and household slaves than with them; see commentary on 1 Cor. 7:2, “let each woman have her own husband”). It is also possible, but less likely, that his wife was from a powerful Jewish family and left him when he became a Christian.

Given the evidence we have, the strongest possibility is that Paul was married but became single for an unstated reason. It is possible, but much less likely, that he was never married.

**“gift.”** Here “gift” refers to the ability to live without sexual pressure being a hindrance to godliness. Some people feel the need for sex and companionship more acutely than others. If a person feels no need to get married, then this chapter is giving guidance that if he stays unmarried he will be able to serve the Lord without distraction.

1Co 7:8

**“unmarried.”** The term “unmarried” can be a general term, and here probably refers to the unmarried men. The Greek culture had a specific word for widows, but not a word for the male side, “widowers.” If “unmarried” was used to include unmarried women, then the more specific term “widows” would be added because the pressure to remarry would be especially strong for widows, who had a very hard time on their own in most ancient societies, the Greco-Roman society being no exception.

1Co 7:9

**“are not exercising.”** The present indicative tense of the verb means that the action is happening at the time. The other use of this word (1 Cor. 9:25) is also in the present indicative tense and refers to athletes who are exercising self-control in their athletic training. The people this verse refers to are not exercising self-control sexually—they are stepping over the morality line. This is not referring to people who strongly desire to have sexual intimacy and are having a hard time waiting, it is referring to people who are not waiting, they are acting upon their sexual desires. These people should get married so they stop sinning. It seems foolish to us today to say that just because you cannot seem to control your sexual urges toward someone you should then marry that person, but that is the biblical mandate.

**“burn *with desire*.”** The Greek word means “burn” and can refer to burning with sexual desire (Thayer), but since burning with passion is derived from the context and not the word itself, we felt it better to put “with desire” in italics. Not putting it in, as in the NASB, has caused some to teach that if you sin sexually you will “go to hell” and burn. This is written to the Christian Church, whose salvation is assured, so that is not the meaning.

1Co 7:10

**“command.”** From the Greek *parangellō* (#3853 παραγγέλλω). Technically, to bring an order from one to another, thus some translate as announce, but the origin was an order, so command is best here and many other places.

**“not I, but the Lord.”** Many Scriptures testify that the Bible is God-breathed, literally, the words of God. Some testimony is in the form of direct statement (2 Tim. 3:16: “All Scripture is God-breathed”), while other testimony is derived from the way the Bible speaks of itself, for example, that if anyone adds to the words of the Bible he will be cursed (Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18), and still other testimony comes from the statements of the men of God, including Jesus, who relied on Scripture as being the Word of God and not the words of man (Job 23:12; Jer. 15:16; John 5:39; 17:17). There is no evidence that the “Word of God” is a mixture of the Word of God and the ideas of man. How could anyone separate which was which and rely on that kind of document?

Paul made it clear that the epistles he wrote were by revelation (Gal. 1:12), and that each of them was from God and Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 1:3). However, when Paul wrote, he wrote in the first person (actually, Paul dictated most of the epistles to a professional scribe who wrote down what Paul said, then Paul would sign the end of the epistle; cf. commentary on Gal. 6:11). This would not have confused his readers, who were used to prophets and angels speaking for God. There is no evidence that Paul’s readers thought that Paul was putting his own thoughts down as he wrote, even though he consistently used the word “I.” All through Corinthians (indeed, all through all his epistles), Paul uses “I” and is personally representing the Lord. He uses “I” dozens of times in 1 Corinthians alone (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10; 5:9; 10:19; 14:5). Furthermore, the other New Testament writers did the same as Paul (cf. Acts 1:1; James 2:1; 1 Pet. 2:11; 1 John 2:7; Jude 1:3).

In light of the information above, readers can be confused when they read in 1 Corinthians 7:10, “I command, not I, but the Lord,” because it makes it seem like Paul is inserting his own opinion in these verses. He is not. Instead, what he doing is similar to what he does in all his epistles when he quotes Scripture as a basis for further authority. For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:19, he quotes Isaiah 29:14 to help people understand the point Scripture is making and to add weight to what he is saying. He could write his epistles without quoting the Old Testament as an authority, but the quotation helps. However, the Four Gospels were not written when 1 Corinthians was written, so Paul could not say, “As Jesus said and it is written [in Matt. 19:6] ‘Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.’” So instead, Paul makes a reference to the well-known teaching of the Lord Jesus about marriage: that the wife should not be separated from her husband. Paul reminds people that this is something that the Lord himself taught while on earth by saying, “not I, but the Lord.” Then, in 1 Cor. 7:12 when Paul stops referring to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, he says, “But I (not the Lord), say to the rest....” At that point, Paul resumes writing in the first person by revelation, as he had been doing.

**“depart”** From *chōrizō* (#5563 χωρίζω, pronounced core-'ee-zō). From Herodotus down *chōrizō* means: to separate, divide, part, put asunder.[[43]](#footnote-12740) It has been used for, and can mean, divorce. However, in the Gospels, the word “divorce” (sometimes translated “put away”) is properly *apoluō* (#630 ἀπολύω). It seems that if only divorce was being referred to, that is the word that would be used here. By using the word *chōrizō*, the Lord places emphasis on the fact that the wife is not to separate from her husband, which would include divorce. However, as many marriage counselors will testify, many women who are married are “separated” from their husbands in all but local proximity. As Christians, our marriages are to reflect Christ and the Church, and there is to be no separation between the people.

1Co 7:12

**“But to the rest I say (*I*, not the Lord).”** See commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:10

1Co 7:14

**“brother.”** The context makes it clear that this “brother” is the Christian husband of the woman.

1Co 7:15

**“the brother or the sister.”** The context makes it clear that the “brother” or “sister” in this verse is a Christian, while their spouse, “the unbelieving,” is not. Many people in biblical times did not have much choice in whom they married. For example, many marriages were arranged and the bride, in particular, was given no choice in the matter. Also, most people married young so it was common for people to convert to Christianity after they were married. As Christianity spread, many married people became Christian even though their spouse did not. So there were many reasons a Christian might be married to an unbeliever. In all those mixed marriages, the Bible comforts us by saying that if an unbelieving spouse departs, let them go; you are not “under bondage” in those cases, meaning you are free to remarry.

1Co 7:18

**“Let him not become uncircumcised.”** This seemingly enigmatic phrase was very real in the Roman world of Paul. Almost all Jews circumcised their children as per the ancient custom that started with Abraham, while the Greeks and Romans valued the foreskin and looked upon the ritual of circumcision as being barbaric and defacing. A Jew, or a Jew who had become a Christian, might have several reasons for wanting to hide his Jewish origin in a Gentile world. One reason would have been to be able to go to the public baths and blend in, but a major reason that people who were circumcised would want to “become uncircumcised” was to join in the athletics in a gymnasium or even compete in an athletic event at any of the games. The operation that restored what looked like the foreskin on the penis was called epispasm. The Books of the Maccabees reveal that many Jewish men chose to undergo epispasm, the ancient practice of foreskin restoration by stretching the residual skin, so that they could conform to Greek culture and take part in these sports (1 Macc 1:11–15); some also left their sons uncircumcised (1 Macc 2:46).[[44]](#footnote-25626)

It is not accidental that “becoming uncircumcised” is mentioned in Corinthians, because one of the four major games in the ancient Greco-Roman world was the Isthmian games, which were held at Corinth every two years and was a huge athletic event with thousands in attendance. The Isthmian Games were one of the four major athletic games: the Olympic Games, the Isthmian Games, the Pythian Games, and the Nemean Games. Living in Corinth and being able to join in the athletic exercise, training, and events could be very attractive to young men who enjoyed exercise and sports.

[For more on the ancient game in general, see commentary on 1 Cor. 9:24; for more on the four major games, see commentary on 1 Cor. 9:25.]

1Co 7:21

**“Do not be concerned about it.”** A Greek idiomatic phrase.[[45]](#footnote-18621) A Christian slave would worry that his circumstances would keep him or her from serving much, or as he or she would want to. The Lord says he understands the circumstances and “not to worry.” This is a word of comfort to all of us. Moms may feel that all the responsibilities of family may keep them from the Lord; Dads may feel that work limits their ability to serve. The Lord knows that we must take care of obligations on earth.

**“rather do *that*.”** Some commentators and translators (cf. NRSV) believe that having said that each one should remain in the calling in which they were called in 1 Cor. 7:20, a slave should remain a slave even if offered freedom. Yet the chapter has several examples of people changing from unmarried to married, bound to loosed, etc. Should not a slave be able to change also? Certainly. The point of verse 20 is that we should not labor at change for change’s sake, because the Lord can work with us in the situation we are in. However, if the opportunity to better oneself arises, then avail yourself of that.[[46]](#footnote-22047)

1Co 7:22

**“in *union with* the Lord.”** This translation more accurately reflects the meaning of the phrase “in the Lord,” which uses what Greek grammarians refer to as the “static *en* (in)” to refer to our union with Christ. When a person gets born again, they come into union with Christ.

On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), being “born again” of God’s spirit first became available, and Christians became part of the Body of Christ and identified with him (crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, and raised with him). Today, Christians are “in Christ” (“in union with Christ”) by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ, and it is important that we also are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ” because we obey him and lead godly lives. When we read a phrase such as “in Christ” or “in him,” we must pay careful attention to the context to see if it refers to our spiritual union due to being part of the Body of Christ, or whether it refers to our being in union with Christ because of our obedience and godliness, or if both meanings apply in that given context. A lot of the blessings that Christians enjoy today are due to the fact that we are in union with Jesus Christ.

[For more on being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3. For more information on the Christian’s identification with Christ, see commentary on Rom. 6:5.]

**“slave…freedman…free…slave.”** The Greek word translated “slave” is *doulos* (#1401 δοῦλος), and in the Greco-Roman culture, it was used of a slave, a servant, and a bond-servant. In this context, “slave” is the best translation.

The interpretation of this verse is straightforward: anyone who is a slave is still free in the Lord, and anyone who is free is a slave of the Lord, bought with the price of his blood and duty bound to serve him. The application of this verse, however, is very broad, because we are all “slaves” to one thing or another. No one is “totally free.” Most people need a job to pay for the costs of living. They are not “free” with their time. But job responsibilities do not release a person from the duty to serve the Lord. Time must be made for prayer, reading the Bible, fellowshipping with others, sharing the Faith, etc. Another example might be that it is common for people to have debt. It is sometimes necessary to take on temporary debt to get ahead in life, such as taking on a home mortgage with the idea that someday you will have a place to live relatively inexpensively. But the person who has taken on a debt is not released from serving the Lord; time must be made to serve and obey the Lord.

1Co 7:24

**“Brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

1Co 7:27

**“loosed from a wife.”** The Greek text of 1 Cor. 7:27 does not read, “Are you unmarried,” like the NIV84, but rather, “Are you loosed from a wife.” While at first the two phrases seem the same, they are not. In the context of the verse, the meaning of “loosed” is very clear. The Greek text of 1 Corinthians 7:27-28 reads, “Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if indeed you do marry, you have not sinned....”

To understand the meaning of the word “loosed” in the third phrase of verse 27 we must pay close attention to how it is used in the second phrase of the verse. The second phrase of the verse, “Do not seek to be loosed,” makes it clear that “loosed” refers to divorce. There are three ways a man can be “loosed” from his wife. these are: 1) she dies; 2) she divorces him (women did, on occasion, divorce their husbands in the Roman world); or 3) he divorces her. The phrase “Do not seek to be loosed,” makes it clear which of the three choices Paul is referring to. The only viable way the man could “seek” to be loosed from his wife would be by divorcing her. Paul is certainly not saying a man should seek to be loosed from his wife by her dying.

Since the phrase “Do not seek to be loosed” refers to divorce, then the next phrase “Are you loosed from a wife,” most naturally would also refer to divorce, but could also include a man being loosed because his wife was dead or had divorced him. However, to assert that the third phrase in the verse, “Are you loosed from a wife” does not include being loosed by divorce, when the word “loosed” in the immediately preceding phrase refers to divorce, is not good exegesis.

Once we see that the phrase “Are you loosed from a wife” can refer to being loosed by divorce, then we have two seemingly contradictory phrases to deal with. The first is the last phrase of verse 27, which says not to marry, “Do not seek a wife.” The second phrase opens verse 28, and says, “But if indeed you do marry, you have not sinned...” This is a difficult section of Scripture. God tells “loosed” people not to marry, but then says if they do marry they have not sinned. How can this be?

The answer to that question lies in the way God deals with us humans. There are times when people, due to weakness, ignorance, or hard-heartedness, cannot or will not obey Him. God knows what is best, and even states it, but then He makes adjustments for people. The Bible is full of examples of this, and this chapter has some too. In the opening of chapter 7, God says it is best not to marry but then also makes it clear that marriage is not a sin, even though God considers it a distraction from His work (1 Cor. 7:32-36). In that same sense, what seems like a clear command in verse 27, “Do not seek a wife,” is modified by the opening of verse 28 which says if a person does decide to marry, he or she has not “sinned.” Even though God does not recommend marrying after divorce, it is not a “sin” if a person does. In a very similar fashion, the Bible tells us that if a woman’s husband dies, it is better if she not remarry, but she has not sinned if she does remarry (1 Cor. 7:39-40). We would think the woman would know that from 1 Corinthians 7:28-29; nevertheless, He restates it in verses 39-40.

More evidence that God allows for divorce and remarriage comes from the Old Testament. Jesus acknowledged that the Mosaic Law allowed for divorce, and stated that although divorce was never God’s intention, He allowed it because of the hardness of people’s hearts (Matt. 19:7-8). The “law” about divorce that Matthew 19:7-8 refers to is Deuteronomy 24:1, and it is clear that Jesus considered that law valid, because he did not say that Moses was wrong, nor did he change it, he clarified how to apply it in his day and time.

But Deuteronomy 24:1 is not the whole story about marriage and divorce. Deuteronomy 24:2-4 continues setting forth regulations about divorce, and it allows for a divorced woman to marry again. Furthermore, if the woman’s second husband dies or divorces her, it is clearly implied in the context she can marry yet again. We know that because the Law specifically forbids her from remarrying her first husband, whereas if she could not marry a third time it would simply say the woman could not remarry. So the Law of Moses was that a divorced person could remarry, and even remarry multiple times. Is divorce and remarriage God’s primary will? No. But is it a “sin?” No, it is not. In 1 Corinthians 7:27-28, Paul is simply saying again, and thus confirming, what the Law of Moses had decreed concerning divorce and remarriage.

[For more on what Jesus said about divorce, see commentary on Matt. 5:32.]

1Co 7:36

**“the bloom of her youth.”** The phrase, “past the bloom of her youth” refers to the age that is considered getting past the proper age to marry, which was usually 12-14 in the Middle East, and a little older than that in the Roman world. We today would consider those ages far too young to marry.

1Co 7:39

**“has fallen asleep.”** Sleep is being used as a metaphor and euphemism for death (see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead”).

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

**1 Corinthians Chapter 8**

1Co 8:1

**“knowledge puffs up.”** This phrase has been taken out of context and used as a proof text against gaining knowledge, but that is clearly not its intent. While it is true that knowledge can puff up, it only puffs up people who have a character flaw, it does not puff up the truly humble and godly people. It certainly did not puff up Jesus Christ. Nor did it puff up Moses, who was the most humble man on earth at the time (Num. 12:3). Nor did it puff up Paul, Peter, or the prophets of old. God says He wants us to get knowledge. God wants everyone to come to a full knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). Proverbs 18:15 (ESV) says, “An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.” Proverbs 15:14 (ESV) says, “The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge.” In fact, part of the purpose of Proverbs is to give knowledge to the simple (Prov. 1:4). Fools hate knowledge (Prov. 1:22), and people are destroyed because they lack knowledge (Hos. 4:6). However, true knowledge can be hard to find, and we may have to search very hard for it, but it is worth it once we have the knowledge (Prov. 2:3-5). It is important to keep in mind that the purpose of gaining knowledge is not just to have it, but to use it to better obey God and help mankind.

1Co 8:2

**“he does not yet know as he ought to know.”** If a man has come to know about idols and meat offered to idols, yet if he stopped with just that knowledge, and never put the total picture together as it relates to living in the love of God toward the brothers, then he really does not know as he ought. See Lenski for a detailed explanation.[[47]](#footnote-20406)

1Co 8:3

**“that one is known by him.”** When we compare 1 Corinthians 8:3 with Matthew 7:23 some clarity emerges. Matthew 7:23 reads, “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness!’” The context of the verse concerns people who falsely believe that they had genuine saving faith because of their works. Jesus ends his teaching by essentially saying that many will be surprised on that day, who thought that they would enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Not only does Matthew 7:23 warn us not to take a stance of pride in thinking that our good works could get us into the Kingdom of Heaven, but it also contains this peculiar phrase, “I never knew you.” What makes this peculiar is that we would expect Jesus to say, “You never knew me,” but instead he says, “I never knew you.”

We find insight into the meaning of Matthew 7:23 when we compare it with 1 Corinthians 8:3 which makes clear that, “if anyone loves God, that one is known by him.” Now, although the subject in 1 Corinthians 8:3 is God and the subject in Matthew 7:23 is Jesus, the underlying principle is present in both. The idea is that if someone loves God and Jesus, if they have genuine trust in Jesus and in God, then, they are known by both God and Jesus. So, when we “know” God, we become “known” by him.

The word “know” is the word *ginōskō* (#1097 γινώσκω), which occurs more than 200 times and has a wide semantic range including intellectual knowledge (Acts 1:19; 23:28) and experiential knowledge. For example, when the Bible says that Jesus “knew” no sin (2 Cor. 5:21 KJV), it is not that he did not have intellectual knowledge of sin, but rather that he had no experiential knowledge of sin. Therefore, in Matthew 7:23 Jesus can say, “I never knew you,” and intends to say that he never had experiential knowledge of, or a relationship with, that person. They did not really love him, or walk with him.

What a beautiful truth 1 Corinthians 8:3 teaches. If anyone loves God, they are known by him. They are intimately known and cared for by the God of the universe.

1Co 8:4

**“we know.”** There is agreement between Paul and the Church at Corinth on the subject of idols. “No idol in the world *really* exists.” The Corinthians were surrounded by idols, images of Zeus (Jupiter), Artemas (Diana), Hermes (Mercury), Aphrodite (Venus), etc. The primary definition of “idol,” *eidōlon* (#1497 εἴδωλον), in Greek writing from Homer forward is an image, a likeness. It refers to the image of a heathen god: Acts 7:41; 1 Cor. 12:2; Rev. 9:20.[[48]](#footnote-27977) Thus, this verse is saying that in reality there are no such gods as “Jupiter,” etc. Paul will later tell the Church that the realities are demons (1 Cor. 10:20). The two phrases marked off in quotes follow the context and the style of the RSV, the NRSV, and the ESV. These were things that everyone knew, and apparently, someone had said.

1Co 8:5

**“so-called gods.”** The translation “so-called gods” is widely acknowledged and accepted (cf. Lenski,[[49]](#footnote-31806) ESV, NIV, NRSV, Rotherham). Paul grants the “even if” to satisfy any doubters, but then stakes his claim that to us there is only one (true) God and one (true) lord (1 Cor. 8:6). In the Greco-Roman religion, there were gods in heaven, such as the Olympian gods, and gods on earth, such as the forest-dwelling gods, etc. Also, the word “lord” refers to human dignitaries as well. For example, Nero was called lord both in the Roman writings and in the Bible (Acts 25:26).[[50]](#footnote-18919)

Furthermore, in the biblical languages, the word “god” was not used of only one Supreme Being but was used of spirit beings and human beings of high rank, stature, or power. These “gods” can be high-ranking good beings who serve the true God, or evil beings such as the Devil, who is called “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4). Deuteronomy 10:17 says, “God is a God of gods,” and Psalm 136:2 says to give thanks to the God of gods. So in fact there are many gods and many lords, both good and evil.

1Co 8:6

**“one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we are for him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we are through him.”** This verse clearly distinguishes between Jesus and God. There is one God and Father, and there is one man, Jesus, who is our “Lord.” This verse shows how God and Jesus work in unity to get the Church what it needs. God gave Jesus all authority and made him head over the Church, so now we get what we need “through” Jesus.

Some Trinitarians say that this verse supports the doctrine of the Trinity because it says that all things came through Jesus Christ. But what the verse actually says is that all things came “from” God, “through” Jesus. That stands in contradiction to Trinitarian doctrine because it places Jesus in a subordinate role to God. According to this verse, Jesus is not “co-equal” with the Father; the Father is “God” and the ultimate source of all things, and Jesus is not called “God.”

The context is the key to understanding what the phrase “all things came through him” means. There is no mention in either the immediate or the remote context about the creation of the world such that the “all things” refers to the original creation of Genesis. This verse is speaking of the Church. God provided all things for the Church via Jesus Christ.

The whole book of 1 Corinthians is taken up with Church issues, and Paul starts 1 Cor. 8:6 with “for us,” i.e., for Christians. 1 Corinthians 8:4-5 had said that even though there were “so-called” gods, for us “there is no God but one.” The Roman world was polytheistic, and people were used to having different “gods” and different “lords” provide different things in different ways. As the various gods provided things, often those provisions would be mediated and distributed to the people through “lords,” lesser gods or people, such as the priests. That was a major reason the Romans had so many temples and shrines to the different gods and worshiped them all—to curry as much of their favor as possible. But Paul challenged that commonly accepted practice, and boldly stated that there was only one God “from whom are all things,” and only one Lord “through whom are all things.”

The very next two verses, 1 Cor. 8:7-8, have a practical application of the truth that there is only one God who provides everything for us through Jesus Christ. Since “no idol in the world really exists,” (1 Cor. 8:4), then they do not really provide the food that is sacrificed to them and cannot affect it for better or worse. Thus, for the Church, there are no laws against eating food sacrificed to idols. Verse 1 Cor. 8:8 says, “But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.” However, this revelation was new for the Church. The Old Testament believers did not have this freedom. They had dozens of food laws, and many people who had converted to Christianity still could not eat food with a clear conscience if it had been offered to an idol—even though the idol was nothing and the source of the blessing was God working through Jesus Christ. Hopefully though, by explaining the situation, more Christians would become free in their conscience and not be bound by old regulations.

By wording the verse the way he does and saying there is one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus, Paul pens this verse in a way that clearly stands against the Trinity. If the Trinity really existed, then this verse would have been the perfect place to say so, and have something such as, “for us there is only one God made up of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost,” or something similar. There is no good reason that the verse would be written in a way that is so clearly non-Trinitarian, calling the Father, “God,” and Jesus, “Lord,” if the Trinity existed. Furthermore, the logical reason that this verse is worded the way it is and the reason that the Bible does not make a clear statement about the Trinity, here or anywhere else, is that there is no Trinity. There is, as this verse says, “one God” and “one Lord, Jesus Christ.”[[51]](#footnote-32009)

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“one Lord, Jesus Christ.”** This is very clear that Jesus Christ is not part of the “one God” mentioned earlier, he is in the “one Lord” category. Paul is clearly defining God in a Unitarian way.

Some propose that this statement excludes God from being called “Lord.” However, Paul is not doing that, rather, he is excluding God from being “The Lord” which is a title Paul reserves for Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:3; Rom. 1:7; Eph. 4:5; etc.). So, in Paul’s mind there is only one “God” and one “Lord.” This does not mean that the word “Lord” cannot rightly be applied to Yahweh (it is many times: Gen. 15:8; Deut. 3:24; Matt. 4:7) but it means that to Paul, there is one who holds the title/office “Lord” (Jesus) and one who holds the title/office “God” (the Father). Just as one could say that there is one President Donald Trump while Donald Trump held office in the United States, even though technically there are many Presidents of different clubs and organizations, such as President of the Senate (the Vice President) or a President of one’s local HOA. So this does not mean other people could not rightly be called president, it just means that they are not “The President.”

Therefore, 1 Corinthians 8:6 does not mean that God or other people in positions of authority cannot be called “Lord,” because they are (Matt. 10:24; 20:8; 1 Pet. 3:6), but it means that they are not “The Lord” which Paul reserves as a title for Jesus Christ.

**[“and one holy spirit, in whom are all things.”]** There is a textual variant included at the end of 1 Corinthians 8:6 which is very clearly a scribal addition. Neither modern Bibles nor earlier English versions, such as the King James, the Geneva Bible, and Wycliffe’s translation, include it or consider it authentic, as it does not appear in any manuscripts before the seventh century.[[52]](#footnote-18102) The first time something close to this reading is seen anywhere is in the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus, a Trinitarian theologian from the late fourth century. This addition is clearly Trinitarian, adding the “3rd” person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, into a text that defines God and only names the Father and Son anywhere in the immediate context. Trinitarians could see this as a problem, because they see all three members of the Trinity as equally God, thus, one can see how they would desire to add this into the text of Scripture. This is not the only place where Trinitarians have attempted to add Trinitarian doctrine into the text of Scripture. In 1 John 5:7 the entire phrase, ‘the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one,’ is only present in very late manuscripts and is the reading chosen by the KJV. Likewise, it is very likely that Jude 1:5 was corrupted as well (cf. commentary on Jude 1:5), and many others could be cited.

1Co 8:8

“**bring us close to God.”** From the Greek word *paristēmi* (#3936 παρίστημι).[[53]](#footnote-14243) Cf. NIV, NRSV.

**“left behind.”** The Greek word means to fall behind, be inferior, to be left behind in a race.[[54]](#footnote-23935)

**“overflow of credit.”** The word is *perisseuō* (#4052 περισσεύω). Intransitive and properly, *to exceed a fixed number or measure; to be over and above a certain number or measure,…to exist or be at hand in abundance…to abound, overflow,*[[55]](#footnote-29845) to be an excess of credit.[[56]](#footnote-18007) This verse would have been hard-hitting to the Corinthians, where wealth, luxury, and sports were intertwined, and some men fell behind, while others had an excess or overflow. In the case of food, not eating does not cause us to be left behind with God, nor does eating give us an overflowing abundance of credit.

1Co 8:13

**“brother or sister.”** The Greek word *adelphos* (typically translated “brother”) is often not gender exclusive, in other words, it often refers to both genders.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

**1 Corinthians Chapter 9**

1Co 9:1

**“Are you not my work in the Lord.”** Paul traveled to Corinth before any Christians were there, and in a period of about one and a half years opened the city to the Lord, converting quite a few people to Christ, including Crispus, the local synagogue leader (Acts 18:1-18).

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

1Co 9:2

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

1Co 9:4

**“the right to eat and to drink.”** This is a good example of a place where knowing the context and the culture is vital to properly understanding the verse. Paul is speaking of living off of the giving and support of other believers, people they minister to, and the people of Corinth would have understood that. If we were to expand this phrase we might say: “Do we not have the right to eat and drink and be supported by the believers that we serve?” The answer, of course, is yes, the apostles had that right.

1Co 9:5

**“Don’t we have the right to lead about a wife.”** Paul was unmarried when he wrote Corinthians, and although the Bible never says he was married, the evidence seems to support that he had been married at one time. Paul was a prominent, highly educated Jew and in a culture in which marriage was the norm and often even arranged, it would have been very unusual for Paul not to be married. This is especially true in light of what he wrote in Galatians, that he was advancing in Judaism more than other people his age (Gal. 1:14). The Jews were very anchored in their traditions, and an unmarried man of his position and upbringing would have been an anomaly and likely would not have advanced as quickly as a married man. Also, Paul clearly seems to have been a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews, and there is some good evidence that a person had to be married to be part of the Sanhedrin.

It seems likely that if Paul had been married, given the high position he held in Judaism, including being trained at the feet of Gamaliel himself (Acts 22:3), that he would have been married to a woman from a powerful and important family. That makes it quite likely that she would have left him after he converted to Christianity, although it is also possible she died. The average age for a woman at the time of Paul was less than 35. If Paul had been married and divorced, and yet here he speaks of having the right to lead about a wife, then this verse may be supporting evidence that a minister of the Gospel can be divorced, remarried, and still minister. However, since we do not know the circumstances of Paul’s life, we cannot say that for certain.

[For more on divorced people getting to be leaders in the Church, see commentary on 1 Tim. 3:2, “husband of one wife.”]

1Co 9:15

**“rather to die than…. No one will take from me.”** Here in 1 Corinthians 9:15, Paul abruptly breaks off his thought. This is the figure of speech anacoluthon, in which the speaker abruptly stops speaking about one subject and either stops completely or continues with another line of thought.

An anacoluthon usually occurs at times of uncertainty, or in times of great emotion or intensity, which is certainly the case with Paul here. Paul pointed out to the Corinthians that as a minister of the Gospel, he had the right to be supported by the money that came in for the furtherance of the Gospel, but he had not used the money to support himself but instead had worked with his hands. In spite of that, there were people who were suspicious of Paul and his lifestyle (1 Cor. 9:3). So he explained how he lived, ending with his affirmation that he had not used ministry money to support himself and was not writing about it in order to get people to support him. He then said, “It would be better for me to die than….” We understand why Paul broke off his sentence. He could not easily say, “better to die than live off the Gospel” because God had decreed that it was okay for a minister to live off the Gospel. Yet Paul considered his situation special to him, and thus concluded, “no one will take from me my grounds for boasting.” Paul was setting an example to the Corinthian believers of how a godly minister could behave, and he was not going to allow some people with groundless suspicions to ruin his reputation. Other examples of anacoluthon are Exodus 32:32, and Mark 11:32.

[See Word Study: “Anacoluthon.”]

1Co 9:16

**“obligation has been placed upon me.”** This verse shows the dynamic relationship between God and His creation. God calls people to certain tasks, and we are “fellow workers” with Him (1 Cor. 3:9). Once God has called us, given us a position in the Body of Christ, and equipped us to do His work, including the grace to protect us, bless us, and enable us, we have an obligation to Him to carry out the task He assigns us. We are “necessary” for His work. Woe to us if we spurn Him and ignore His requests.

**“Indeed.”** The Greek particle is *de*, and many translations simply leave it untranslated, which is fine too, but here it can be “indeed.” Some versions have “and,” but we believe that implies more than the text is actually saying, and the same with “for.” *De* usually either introduces a new thought or is somewhat disjunctive.

**“how terrible it will be for me if I do not proclaim the good news.”** When God gives an assignment as clearly as He gave it to the apostle Paul, He expects it to be carried out, and there are consequences both in this life and the next for ignoring or disobeying God. Jesus said, “Everyone to whom much was given, from that one much will be required, and from the one to whom much was committed, even more will be demanded” (Luke 12:48).

1Co 9:21

**“not being without God’s law, but subject to the law of Christ.”** The Jews would say that they too are under God’s law, but they reject the law of Christ.

1Co 9:22

**“by every *possible* way.”** The Greek is *pant*ō*s* (#3843 πάντως), an adverb that can mean “by all means, certainly, probably, doubtless,” when it pertains to strong assumption; “totally, altogether,” when pertaining to extent; “of course” when it expresses an inevitable conclusion, or “at least” when it is used as an expression of the lowest possible estimate on a scale of extent.[[57]](#footnote-23150) Although most English translations read “by all means,” that is somewhat confusing because usually when we say “by all means” we are expressing a firm intention, whereas in this case, the phrase means “by every possible way,” expressing Paul’s flexibility in being with different people in whatever way may win them. It is also possible that this word could be the figure of speech amphibologia, where one thing is said but two things can be meant.[[58]](#footnote-26139) These two would be “by all means,” which is the most accepted translation, but also the meaning proposed in BDAG, “in order to save *at least* some,” expressing Paul’s knowledge that not all people would believe, but by doing his best to relate to people, he could win at least some of them.

[See Word Study: “Amphibologia.”]

1Co 9:24

**“but *only* one receives the prize.”** 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 contains one of the many athletic metaphors in the New Testament, and to best understand it, it helps to understand what athletic events were like at the time of the Apostle Paul. Sports were very important, and although there were four major games in the Greco-Roman world—the Olympic Games, the Isthmian Games, the Pythian Games, and the Nemean Games—many cities had their own local games. At these games, there were no team events. Every event was individual, and each man competed on his own. Also, there was no “second place” or “third place” in the ancient games; in each event, there was only one winner and everyone else simply lost. So, as Paul says, “only one receives the prize.”

Competing for the prize was at the very core of the games. Although all the games were dedicated to a god, and honoring the gods was a very important part of the games, competing for the prize was basic to the games. The Greek word *athlon* “is a noun that means, initially, at least, ‘prize,’ or ‘reward.’ This prize can take any form: money, victory crowns, shields, [amphora](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amphora) filled with olive oil. Its value may be real or symbolic, but the *athlon* [prize] is omnipresent in competitions. Its verbal form, *athleuein*, means, ‘to compete for a prize,’ and the competitor was called an *athletes*, ‘one who competes for a prize.’ …Sport for sport’s sake was not an ancient concept.”[[59]](#footnote-28089)

Another major difference between the ancient Greek games, and most Roman games too, was that the men competed in the nude, and women were not allowed. There were rare exceptions, but generally, this custom was adhered to and was so strict in ancient Greece that a married woman who snuck into the games to watch was put to death if she was caught. In fact, the word “gymnasium” comes from the Greek word *gymnos*, “nude.” Thus, the athletic events were different from the fights, exhibitions, and executions in the Roman Colosseum because women were allowed in the Colosseum, although they had to sit in the very top rows with the slaves and not down close to the action like the men were. The various athletic games and the Colosseum events were so widespread in the Roman world that they were as well-known to the average Roman as the various sports are to the people of our modern world. So, for example, archaeologists have uncovered over 200 amphitheaters in the Roman world, with the most important one being “the Colosseum” in Rome.

When Paul wrote, “but only one receives the prize,” he was not implying that only one Christian would get a reward for being a dedicated Christian. Instead, he was using the athletic metaphor to make a couple of related points. One point was that each Christian should strive diligently to win a reward when Jesus Christ comes back. Another is that some Christians have behaved so poorly that they will get no reward at all when Christ comes. When Christ returns, he will give rewards and crowns to people who have taken their Christianity very seriously and worked diligently to be obedient to God and Christ. In contrast, people who have not taken their Christianity seriously or even worked against Christ will get less or no reward at all (cf. 1 Cor. 3:12-17). Getting or not getting rewards when Christ comes has nothing to do with salvation and whether or not a person is saved and has everlasting life. A person can believe in Christ and get saved (Rom. 10:9-10) but then not take their Christianity seriously and live like a regular “nice” unbeliever. That is the kind of “saved” person that 1 Corinthians 3:15 is speaking about.

**“So run in such a way that you attain it!”** The Greek verb translated as “run” is in the imperative mood, and thus the exclamation point at the end of the sentence. Here in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul is borrowing a metaphor from the athletic games that were common all over the Greco-Roman world, and encouraging all Christians to “run” (i.e., live their lives) in a way that would result in them getting a reward when Christ comes back. Gordon Fee states it well: “Paul is urging the Corinthians to ‘run’ the Christian life in such a way, in this case *by exercising proper self-control* (the emphasis in vv. 25-27), as to obtain the eschatological [End Times] reward.”[[60]](#footnote-18798)

When Jesus Christ comes back and rewards people for what they have done, not everyone will get the same reward. People will be rewarded for what they have done, and Christians who have taken the commands of God seriously and have diligently obeyed them will get more rewards than people who have not diligently obeyed God. It is important to note that it is difficult to picture how rewards or lack of them would work if one believes the orthodox teaching that saved people go to heaven when they die and live there forever. How could there be rewards or no rewards in heaven? What the Bible teaches is that Jesus will come back, fight the Battle of Armageddon, and conquer the earth. Then he will set up his kingdom on earth with believers who have been raised from the dead, and except for the absence of the Devil, evil people, and “natural disasters,” it will be much like a kingdom on earth now. Christ will be king and there will be rulers under him, and there will be all kinds of workers doing different jobs, some with more honor and some with less.

[For more on rewards when Jesus comes, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.” For more on the Millennial Kingdom, Christ’s 1,000-year reign on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on dead people being actually dead now, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

1Co 9:25

**“competing *in the games*.”** Athletic events were a huge part of the Greco-Roman world, and there are many athletic analogies in Corinthians. There were four “Panhellenic games” that had gone on for centuries, and these were massive athletic games with many different kinds of events, just as in the modern Olympic Games. The most well-known of the games was the Olympic Games, which were held every four years in Olympia in Greece in honor of the god Zeus, and the winners received an olive wreath crown (and by the time of Paul, usually lots of money and other benefits). The second most popular games were the Isthmian Games, which were held every two years at the isthmus of Corinth between the Gulf of Corinth and the Saronic Gulf, about ten miles south of Corinth, and they were timed so they occurred the year before and the year after the Olympic Games. The Isthmian Games were held in honor of Poseidon, and the winner received a crown made from wild celery during Greek times and during Roman times a pine wreath crown (and lots of money).

The other two Panhellenic games were the Pythian Games, which honored Apollo and were held every four years at Delphi (staggered two years so they would not conflict with the Olympic Games), and the Nemean Games, which were held every two years at Nemea in honor of Zeus and Hercules. And besides these games, there were many lesser “games.” Corinth had a number of smaller games, much like schools today have “local meets,” “regional meets,” and “national meets.” According to the Greek records, the Isthmian Games were held in the spring of AD 51 when Paul was in Corinth, and it seems very likely that he would have attended those games and tried to spread the Gospel message there.

**“crown ... incorruptible.”** God desires to motivate people through love and have them make the free will choice to serve and obey Him. Therefore, God describes ways in which He will reward Christians who go “above and beyond” what most Christians are willing to do. Many people never consider that in the future Messianic Kingdom on earth there will be a difference between those Christians who have worked hard to obey God and those who have gotten saved but not tried to “seek first the Kingdom of God” (Matt. 6:33). In fact, the obscure hope of “being in heaven” has so dulled the average Christian that many of them think that getting saved is all that really matters to God. But there is much more to Christianity than getting saved—although getting saved is the most important thing. God wants us to “get saved and come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4), and in the biblical culture, you only really “know” the truth if you obey it as well.

God has also laid out an “extra credit” program for Christians, and God’s extra incentives are referred to in Scripture as “crowns.” Although the exact nature of these crowns and what they entail is not specifically stated, it is clear that they are desirable rewards, just as any crown in the biblical world would be a reward and mark of honor.

The five crowns are:

* **The incorruptible crown**: given for exercising self-control and striving to be the best you can be for the Lord (1 Cor. 9:25 KJV).
* **The crown of boasting**: given for winning others to Christ (1 Thess. 2:19 KJV).
* **The crown of righteousness**: given for loving his appearing (2 Tim. 4:8 KJV).
* **The crown of life**: given for enduring under trial (James 1:12).
* **The crown of glory**: given for eagerly, faithfully, shepherding the flock (1 Pet. 5:4).

The **incorruptible crown** is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 9:25 in the context of athletes who go into “strict training.” The NIV84 translates it as a “crown that will last forever.” The AMPC reads: “Every athlete who goes into training conducts himself temperately *and* restricts himself in all things.” Athletes train hard to be the best they can be. Top athletes do not settle for “good enough,” they constantly endeavor to improve. God wants Christians to have that kind of attitude and behavior. The goal of the Christian should not only be to avoid sin, but to excel in righteousness—to “hit a home run for God” so to speak. While it is wonderful to live a godly life, it is more wonderful to aggressively seek personal improvement and advance the purposes of God on this earth. Although every Christian has an individual calling and ministry in which he or she can excel, there are many areas where every Christian should seek to excel because there are many things that God exhorts all Christians to do, such as pray, give to others, fellowship with other Christians, work to spread the Faith, etc. God has an incorruptible crown for those people who endeavor to excel in their Christian walk.

[For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more information on rewards and punishments in the future kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10. For information on the crown of boasting see commentary on 1 Thess. 2:19. For information on the crown of righteousness see commentary on 2 Tim. 4:8. For information on the crown of life see commentary on James 1:12. For information on the crown of glory see commentary on 1 Pet. 5:4.]

1Co 9:26

**“aimlessly.”** The Greek is *adēlōs* (#84 ἀδήλως, pronounced ä-'day-lōs), meaning, aimless, or without aim, i.e., not as one who has a fixed goal.[[61]](#footnote-14785) It refers to being without a special goal or purpose, to doing something without specific intention, to be “aimless.” It can be understood simply as “without having some goal” or “without some reason” or “without trying to accomplish something.”

1Co 9:27

**“I treat my body harshly.”** The Greek word translated as “treat...harshly,” *hupōpiazō* (#5299 ὑπωπιάζω), like almost every word, has several meanings. BDAG[[62]](#footnote-16673) lists three primary meanings: 1) To blacken an eye; give a black eye, strike in the face. 2) To bring someone to submission by constant annoyance, wear down. A more appropriate rendering in a figurative sense would be “browbeat.” “Blacken my face” means to slander, besmirch. 3) To put under strict discipline, punish, treat roughly, torment (1 Cor. 9:27 of the apostle’s self-imposed discipline. But the expression is obviously taken from the language of prize-fighting in 1 Cor. 9:26). Of these three, number 3 is the most preferable given the context of 1 Corinthians 9:27 and what we have to do to control our bodies.

**“treat my body harshly and make it my slave.”** By the time of Paul, most of the athletes who competed in the major games around the Roman Empire were professional athletes. A good athlete could make money by winning events or by getting sponsors. Winning an event at a major game brought enough fame to a city that quite often people in the city (or a wealthy person in the city) were willing to sponsor an athlete who could bring fame and honor to their city. Top-tier athletes made enough money that many of them had a personal nutritionist who watched over their diet and a personal physician who worked to keep them healthy and often the athlete had even more helpers and servants than that.

**“disqualified.”** An adjective in Greek, thus the REV adds the object “*for the prize*” in italics:

**1 Corinthians Chapter 10**

1Co 10:1

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

1Co 10:4

**“the spiritual rock that followed them.”** The rock that came after (“followed”) the Israelites was Christ. As history and chronology turned out, Christ “followed” the Israelites by about 1,400 years. The Israelites drew strength and comfort from knowing the Messiah would come, just as we get strength and comfort from knowing he is coming again.

The Greek text does not have the article “the” in the phrase “the spiritual rock,” but it is not necessary for the Greek text to have the definite article when a noun comes after a preposition (see commentary on Matt. 1:18. Here in 1 Cor. 10:4 the preposition is *ek*).

The Greek word translated “follow” is *akoloutheō* (#190 ἀκολουθέω, pronounced ah-koe-loo-'thay-ō) and its basic meaning is “to come after,” which can be either in time or spatial sequence. Thus, it refers to following after something sequentially. It also can mean to accompany someone who was taking the lead, thus “go along with.” It was used metaphorically for following someone doctrinally as a disciple, thus “be a disciple.” This use came from the fact that the disciple did actually “follow” the teacher where he went both physically and mentally. It was also used of following in the sense of obeying or complying, as in “follow my directions.”

The common definition of *akoloutheō*, combined with the scope of Scripture, shows that here in 1 Corinthians 10:4, “follow” means to come after. Jesus came centuries after the Israelites. The Israelites did “drink,” i.e., *get* nourishment, from knowing about the Christ who was to come after them, just as did Abraham, who rejoiced at seeing the day of Christ (John 8:56).

There are some very Trinitarian versions, such as the NIV, that translate the word “follow” as “accompany,” as if Jesus were accompanying the Israelites on their journey. But *akoloutheō* appears in the *Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament* 90 times, and even in the NIV it is translated as some form of “follow” (like “follows,” “following,” etc.) 83 of those times. The NIV translates *akoloutheō* as “accompanied” only twice, here and in Mark 6:1, and we submit that the NIV does so here because of the translators’ Trinitarian bias and not because the context calls for it.

While it is true that lexically *akoloutheō* can be translated as “accompany,” it should not be translated that way here for several reasons. First, we must remember that when *akoloutheō* is used as “accompany,” it is still used in the sense of following, or going with, a leader. It is not used in the sense of “accompanying” a group while at the same time being the leader of the group. But if the Messiah was with Israel, he clearly would have been leading the group in some way, not just following them around.

Also, the scope of Scripture shows that “follow” in the sense of “come after” is the correct interpretation. Since this verse mentions the Israelites in the desert, the desert wanderings become the “remoter context” against which one must check any interpretation. No Old Testament reference shows that Christ was either with the Israelites or was somehow following them around. In contrast, there are many things that show that the Israelites were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. The Passover Lamb foreshadowed the coming of the Messiah. The manna anticipated Christ being “the true bread from heaven.” The Tabernacle, with all its offerings, foreshadowed Christ in many ways, including being the place where people would meet God. The sin offering foreshadowed Christ being the sin offering that paid for the sin of humankind (2 Cor. 5:21).

Besides those things that foreshadowed Christ’s coming, the people of God did not think he was somehow with them, but rather, they expected him to come. Abraham did (John 8:56; Heb. 11:8-10), and Jacob did (Gen. 49:10). Moses was looking forward to the Messiah (Heb. 11:24-26), and he certainly would have told other Israelites about him. While Israel was wandering in the wilderness, some prophecies of the coming Messiah were given about him. The prophet Balaam, who prophesied during the time of Moses, said, “his [Israel’s] king will be higher than Agag” (Num. 24:7), and, “A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel” (Num. 24:17). The “king,” “star” and “scepter” refer to the coming Messiah. But very importantly, Balaam prophesied about the Messiah and said, “I see him, but not now. I behold him, but not near” (Num. 24:17). These words of Balaam are very accurate. Balaam foretold that the Messiah was not “now,” not “near,” and indeed the Messiah was not near and he did not come until 1,400 years after Moses. This prophecy of the Messiah spoke of him as a future reality, not a present one. The prophecy that the Messiah was not “near” precludes the idea that he was somehow with the Israelites.

Not only the verses associated with the wilderness wanderings, but the whole Old Testament, spoke of the Messiah as a future hope. For example, Micah 5:2 foretells his birth in Bethlehem, and Isaiah 53 shows his future life and death. Also, verses such as Jeremiah 33:14-15 show that the Christ was the “promised Messiah.” But there is no need to promise the Messiah if he was already with the people. No clear verses say the Messiah was with Israel, and the Jews never understood that to be the case.

The lesson from 1 Corinthians 10:4 is that the people looked forward to the coming of the Messiah and “drank,” i.e., got strength and nourishment, from knowing that he was coming, just as we today get strength and nourishment from knowing that he is coming again.

[For more on Jesus being a fully human being and not being present on earth until he was born, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

1Co 10:7

**“and rose up to play.”** This is quoted from Exodus 32:6, and the “play” is sexual play, immoral sex as part of the worship of the pagan bull god (see commentary on Exod. 32:6).

1Co 10:9

**“We must not tempt the Lord.”** This verse, and its context, make it clear that it is not at all wise to test the Lord. People regularly ignore God’s commands, as they are free to do, for this is “man’s day” (1 Cor. 4:3). But there is a day coming when God will hold people to account, and we will all want to be found righteous on that day. Although the verb “tempt” is present subjunctive, it has the intensifier “*ek*” as a prefix, and thus the translation “must” is considered appropriate (cf. ESV, NRSV, RSV, The Source NT, God’s New Covenant).

Many translations read “Christ” instead of “Lord” and use this verse as a support of the Trinity. Some Greek manuscripts read “Lord,” some read “God,” and some read “Christ.” Furthermore, the Church Fathers are divided as well, because different Fathers quoted the verse differently, clearly because they were reading manuscripts that differed from one another. The subject of textual criticism is very involved, and it is common that scholars differ in their opinions as to which texts are original and which texts have been altered. In this case, there are early texts that read both ways, so the job of determining the original reading from textual evidence becomes more difficult. Although there are a wide variety of manuscripts, even old ones, that read “Christ,” as Bart Ehrman points out, “These arguments, however, are not persuasive. In fact, we know that most Christians had no difficulty at all in understanding how Christ could have been active in the affairs of the ancient Israelites. Most of them believed he was actively involved and read his involvement into Old Testament narratives on every possible occasion.”[[63]](#footnote-23177) Ehrman goes on to point out why the text would have been changed to read “Christ” and shows that the Alexandrian text is usually considered more accurate, and the Alexandrian texts (Sinaiticus, 33 BC) read “Lord.” We agree with Ehrman’s conclusions and the authors of the English versions that read “Lord,” and believe “Lord” was the original reading.

As it is translated in versions that take the word “Lord” as original, there is no Trinitarian inference or support (cf. ASV, AMP, GW, NASB, NIV84, NJB, Rotherham, RSV, etc.). There is only a Trinitarian inference if the manuscripts that read “Christ” are considered original.

Every translator will testify to the importance of *context* in determining the correct translation of Scripture. The context makes it clear that “Lord” is the correct reading. Although there are many times that the Israelites were said to tempt “God” or “Yahweh” (often translated “the LORD”) in the Old Testament, there is not even a single reference to tempting Christ. Furthermore, there is not even a reference to tempting “*adonay*,” the generic word for “lord.” The Israelites tempted their God, Yahweh, never “Christ.”

By reading 1 Corinthians 10:9 carefully, we obtain a vital clue to its meaning and the proper translation. The verse says that when the Israelites tempted “the Lord,” they were “destroyed by serpents.” This phrase allows us to find the exact record in the Old Testament that is being referred to. In Numbers 21:5, the Israelites “spoke against God” and then “Yahweh sent venomous snakes among them” (Num. 21:6). In the record of this event in the Old Testament, “God” and *Yahweh* are both mentioned, but “Christ” is never mentioned, and neither is the generic Hebrew word for “lord.” Furthermore, there is no scripture anywhere in the Old Testament that says “Christ” poured out his “wrath,” and certainly not by sending serpents. Thus, if some Greek texts read “the Lord” and others read “Christ,” the context points to “Lord” as the correct interpretation.

There are some commentators, however, who assert that the context mentions Christ because 1 Cor. 10:4 says that the Israelites drank of the rock, and the rock was Christ. We would first point out, as we have in the commentary, that actually 1 Cor. 10:4 militates against the reading “Christ” in 1 Cor. 10:9, because 1 Cor. 10:4 says that the Christ was coming in the future, in which case he could not have been tempted by the Israelites (see commentary on 1 Cor. 10:4). In fact, we know that Christ followed the Israelites by 1,400 years. When the prophet Balaam said the Messiah was coming in the future (Num. 24:17), no one protested and said he was with them at that very time. In fact, all the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah coming in the future were never contested or clarified as if they meant only that he would come “in the flesh” in the future but was with them at that time as a spirit.[[64]](#footnote-25871)

1Co 10:13

**“common to humankind.”** This translation explains the Greek adjective *anthrōpinos* (#442 ἀνθρώπινος), meaning “pertaining to being human.” Paul is saying no temptation has taken hold of you that isn’t *human*—that is, “such as comes to a human being, and such as a human being may endure.”[[65]](#footnote-30207) We translate this “common to humankind” to avoid the confusion that this refers to temptations that *originated by fellow humans*. This is not the meaning, for Satan is directly or indirectly behind every temptation.

**“but.”** The particle *de* (#1161 δέ) is usually used when there is a weak contrast, or a pause. It is often better represented by “and” than “but.” However, in this context, “but” is more appropriate, to make clear the contrast between our temptation and God who does not tempt us (James 1:13). God is very much opposed to the temptation’s success. He will never allow the force of the temptation to exceed our ability to choose against it, and furthermore, not only will he assure this but “also” (*kai*) provide a way out. Therefore, man is without excuse. If he sins, he cannot blame God (James 1:13), nor can he claim the lure of the situation overpowered his will, nor that there was no other choice. If we sin, it is *always* our fault in that the choice was ours.

1Co 10:15

**“Judge what I say.”** This is another instance in Scripture when Christians are told to judge something or someone (along with John 7:24; 1 Cor. 5:12; etc.). Thus, the simple act of judging is not wrong in and of itself as many twist Matthew 7:1 to mean, but rather, it is necessary and beneficial to keep one’s path straight and to judge evil so that one does not partake in it. Think about it: if we cannot judge what is right and wrong, then we would never be able to run the Christian race, which entails throwing off sin (Heb. 12:1), or even repenting of sin (Mark 1:15), because we would not be able to identify sin as sin.

Paul encourages the Corinthians to use the minds God has given them, to see if what he is saying makes sense. We should be doing this as Christians, not simply blindly trusting someone because they have a degree or are in a position of authority, but rather testing the ideas that they are proclaiming. If the Corinthians could rightly judge Paul, it is fair to say, we can rightly test the words of our pastors.

[For more information on “judging” see commentary on Matt. 7:1.]

1Co 10:18

**“Consider Israel according to the flesh.”** In other words, “Consider physical, unsaved, Israel,” i.e., the nation of Israel which has rejected the Messiah and still continues with the fleshly sacrifices of the Old Testament.

1Co 10:20

**“demons.”** Evil spirit beings. Here in Corinthians, the Bible reveals the truth that when people sacrifice to idols, they are really sacrificing to demons. Psalm 106:36-37 reveals the same truth and shows that some of the demons worshiped as idols in the Old Testament required human sacrifice (see commentary on Ps. 106:37).

1Co 10:30

**“thankfulness.”** The literal Greek is with “grace,” *charis* (#5485 χάρις), but that phrase was used for “with gratitude,” or “with thankfulness.” It is used that way also in Colossians 3:16.

**“slandered.”** The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. Paul was being slandered, personally attacked, for behavior that was not sinful. This is done far too often in Christianity. We slander people and hurt their personal reputation over things that are our personal opinion (like what should be worn when, what hairstyles are “right,” what cars people should drive, etc.). This is not the Christian way to behave. We have no right to slander others who are just living their own lives.

[For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

1Co 10:32

**“Give no offense.”** Lenski writes, “…in all things we act so that no one can take real offense, i.e., stumble in regard to God and the gospel. Some may, indeed, take offense, namely wrongfully; we are not to give offense. The former no Christian can avoid; the latter all Christians are to avoid.”[[66]](#footnote-20440) Lenski is correct that Christians cannot avoid offending some people, because the cross of Christ is a “rock of offense and a stone of stumbling.” But we can avoid being unnecessarily offensive.

1Co 10:33

**“the *benefit* of the many.”** The double use of the article is evidence that the second word “benefit” is implied. The reality is that “the many” are not saved, but Paul wants to reach them so that they can be.

**1 Corinthians Chapter 11**

1Co 11:3

**“the head of Christ is God.”** This is one of the clear verses that shows that Jesus and “God” are not equal, in fact, God is over Christ. This accords with 1 Chronicles 29:11, which says that Yahweh is “head” above everything else.

[For more on Jesus Christ not being God or a member of the “Godhead,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

1Co 11:4

**“dishonors.”** This is the Greek word *kataischunō* (#2617 καταισχύνω); see commentary on Romans 9:33, “put to shame.”

1Co 11:5

**“with her head uncovered dishonors her head.”** This verse shows how important to God it is that there be order in the church. Many verses in the NT let us know that God is a God of order and decency (cf. 1 Cor. 14:33). It was a custom among the Jews that women cover their heads in public. Although it is often taught that the Romans had that custom also, archaeologists and historians have provided enough evidence to show us that although women often covered their heads, it was not a hard and fast cultural norm. Nevertheless, among the Romans, untidy, or natural, free-flowing hair was often associated with unrestrained behavior or even prostitution. Thus, in light of the culture of the time, we can see why God did not want the church meeting to be the place where different cultures clashed and things were uncomfortable.

Proper attire was not the only thing in the first century that the cultures clashed over. The Jews had very strict laws about eating, while the Romans did not. That caused tension in the Church, which Paul addressed in Romans 14:13-21. In that section the Word of God says, “It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall” (Rom. 14:21 NIV). The “do anything else” includes the way we dress—if it makes people uncomfortable, the loving thing is to not dress that way.

Although the simple clash of the Roman culture with the Jewish culture is enough to explain why Paul had to address the issue of women’s head coverings, there may also be another reason. It was becoming clear that men and women were one in Christ, both empowered by holy spirit, and both with important ministries in the Church. Thus, it is possible, and suggested by some commentators, that the women were taking off their head coverings as a symbol of their equal position in Christ with the men in the Church. That is certainly a possibility, and if it is the case, then this verse shows us that equality in Christ does not remove the responsibility each Christian has not to turn the church into a place of uncomfortable debate. It also shows that there are certain gender differences between men and women that are reflected in attire even though the men and women are one in Christ and both able to minister in the congregation (see commentaries on 1 Tim. 2:11, 12, 13, 14 and 2:15). Thus, there are a few places in the NT that specifically address the way women dress, while not mentioning how men dress (cf. 1 Tim. 2:9).

It is important for us to understand that this verse is addressing the cultural norms of the time, and instructs women to cover their head (not their face) in public meetings. Today, our cultural norms are not the same as in biblical times, and so women regularly go to church without a head covering. On the other hand, we see how Christians with the correct attitude understand the culture of a certain region or even an individual church. If the people in a certain church put on their “Sunday best” for church, with ladies in dresses and men in a coat and tie, a loving Christian who visits that church will dress in the same way and not press his or her freedom in Christ.

How we dress affects other people as well as reflects on how we relate to our holy God. Other verses that show that clothing reflects on our relation with each other and with God include Deuteronomy 22:5; Psalm 29:2; Ezekiel 44:18; and Revelation 19:14.

**“dishonors.”** This is the Greek word *kataischunō* (#2617 καταισχύνω); see commentary on Romans 9:33, “put to shame.”

1Co 11:8

**“man did not come from the woman, but the woman from the man.”** This is referring to the original creation of humankind, when Adam was created first and Eve was created “from” the man, Adam. After this original creation, humankind, both men and women, were born from their mothers.

1Co 11:9

**“man was not created for the woman, but the woman for the man**.” The actual meaning of this verse has been hotly debated. It employs the figure of speech irony. By this irony, God hopes to “wake up” the Corinthians to the fact that He placed all of them in the Body as it has pleased Him.

1Co 11:10

**“*symbol*.”** Something that represents something else, especially if the thing represented is immaterial or spiritual. A “sign” usually points to something else, not as much “represents” something else (as a road sign points to the condition of the road ahead, not “represents” the conditions, or the “signs” that Jesus did pointed to his Messiahship, not represented his Messiahship.)

1Co 11:11

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

1Co 11:17

**“results in more harm than good.”** The NIV translation of this verse, while not literally following the Greek text, is a very clear dynamic equivalent translation, and catches the meaning of the verse: “your meetings do more harm than good.” This should be a very powerful lesson for all Christians, because our tendency is to say that if someone goes to church, that is a good thing. Not necessarily. Our gatherings should be a place where we are encouraged, challenged, taught what the Bible really says, and mentored in the Faith. The goal of the meeting is to produce strong Christians who are doing the will of God in their lives. If church has become a social gathering place, or a place where our sin is accepted and we are not challenged to change, or a place of education without instruction in obedience, or a place where traditional teachings not based on the Bible are regularly taught as truth, then our meetings are doing more harm than good.

1Co 11:18

**“as a church.”** The Greek word “church” is *ekklēsia* (#1577 ἐκκλησία; see commentary on Matt. 16:18). The Greek text reads, *en ekklēsia* “in assembly,” which we represent in the REV as “as a church,” in other words, when your congregations get together. This is not just a chance meeting of friends, but a purposeful meeting of the “church.” The churches were small and usually met in homes (cf. Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Phlm. 1:2), although no doubt sometimes they found venues, even outdoors, when the entire congregation of believers in an area could be together. Sadly, even when the Christians in Corinth met as small groups, there were divisions among them.

[For more information on *ekklēsia,* see Word Study: “Ekklēsia.”]

1Co 11:21

**“each one goes ahead with his own supper.”** The use of “supper” in this phrase is important, and makes a sharp contrast between 1 Corinthians 11:20 and 11:21. The people here in Corinth were not eating the “Lord’s Supper,” which at the time Christ established it was a shared meal that highlighted the sacrifice of Christ—his broken body and shed blood—and thus set the pattern of self-sacrifice that Christians were to live. No, that was not being done in Corinth! Instead of the Lord’s “supper,” each person ate their own “supper” and ignored the needs of the others at the meal.” Christ would never have lived like that or condoned it. No wonder some Christians were weak and sick and some had died (1 Cor. 11:30), the Christians were not taking care of each other.

**“supper.”** The Greek *deipnon* (#1173 δεῖπνον) means 1) the main meal of the day, 2) an elaborate dinner or feast for guests, or 3) a meal with cultic significance, such as the Passover or Lord’s supper. We have stayed with “supper” because “the Lord’s supper” is a part of Christian vocabulary, and in many places in the English-speaking world, “supper” is the main meal of the day.

1Co 11:25

**“new”** The Greek *kainos* means new in quality. It is not just “new” in time, which would be *neos;* the New Covenant is new in quality. It was ratified at the Last Supper, and will be effective when Christ returns to earth and sets up his kingdom. Just because Christ ratified the New Covenant in his death does not mean it is in force. God gave Abraham the land by covenant, and yet he never saw it in his life, and in fact, the Israelites never had the full extent of the land God promised in the covenant, but they will get it in the Millennial Kingdom. Thus, there can be a large gap between when a covenant is made and when it is fulfilled. That is the case today. All one has to do is study in the OT what God says will happen when the New Covenant is in force to realize it is not in force yet. We today are living in the Administration of the Sacred Secret.

1Co 11:27

**“in an unworthy manner.”** The context tells us what that is in this case: the people of Corinth were not helping each other out. The rich came and were stuffing themselves and getting drunk, while those who had “nothing” (1 Cor. 11:22) went hungry. Thus, because the “body,” (the Church) was not recognized as one body with many members, each as important as the other, some people were weak and sick, and others had died.

1Co 11:29

**“body.”** Many versions have “body of the Lord,” or “the Lord’s body,” but in this verse the text just reads “body.” The reference is almost certainly an amphibologia.[[67]](#footnote-15514) It refers to the body of Jesus which was broken as a sacrifice for others, and thus stands as an example of how we ought to live sacrificially for others; and it also refers to the fact that anyone who ate his fill and got drunk while another Christian nearby was starving did not properly discern the body, i.e., the Body of Christ, in which all people are members of one body, each of equal importance and each needed.

[See Word Study: “Amphibologia.”]

1Co 11:31

**“examining”** is *diakrinō* (#1252 διακρίνω), a word with many meanings. It is more than just “judge,” which is *krinō* (#2919 κρίνω). We have to make an accurate judgment of ourselves. Where are we strong, where are we weak, how can we contribute, where are we in need of help or possibly in error? If the Corinthians were open to that kind of constructive criticism, and then did the hard work of self-correction, they would not be behaving in such an un-Christlike manner as to not share their food with each other.

**“we would not be being judged.”** (*krinō*) i.e., by the Lord, and even by circumstances now.

1Co 11:33

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

1Co 11:34

**“And the remaining *matters*.”** There is more than just what is mentioned in Corinthians that needs attention, but Paul will deal with that personally when he arrives, which indicates that it is not essential that it be handled immediately.

**1 Corinthians Chapter 12**

1Co 12:1

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“spiritual *matters*.”** The Greek text has the definite article “the” before “spiritual,” which may mean, as it seems apparent from the context, that the Corinthians had written Paul about spiritual matters even as they had about sexual matters (1 Cor. 7:1). Thus, Paul would write about “the” spiritual matters, using the figure ellipsis to emphasize “spiritual.”

The word “spiritual” is *pneumatikos* (#4152 πνευματικός), which is an adjective, so most translations supply “gifts” as the noun that “spiritual” modifies. However, the context is much broader than gifts, so “gifts” is too narrow a word to supply as the noun in this particular context. “Things” usually refers more to concrete entities or objects, whereas “matters” refers more to ideas and concepts, so “matters” seems to be the best noun to supply in this context. In 1 Corinthians 14:1, “things” is more appropriate than “matters,” because we diligently pursue spiritual things.

“Spiritual *matters*” or “spiritual *things*” fits the subject of chapters 12-14, which are about spiritual matters*,* including “gifts” (1 Cor. 12:4), “service” (ministries) (1 Cor. 12:5), “working” (energizings) (1 Cor. 12:6) and “manifestations” (1 Cor. 12:7-10). It is common for translators to try to get the sense of the context and supply a noun to complete the sense of *pneumatikos*. For example, Romans 15:27 says the Gentiles share in the *pneumatikos* of the Jews. The NIV and ESV supply “blessings,” while the KJV and ASV say “things.” 1 Corinthians 2:15 uses *pneumatikos*, and the NIV84 supplies “man,” reading “spiritual man,” while the ESV supplies “person,” and reads “spiritual person,” and the KJV reads “he that is spiritual.” In 1 Corinthians 9:11, *pneumatikos* is used in the context of spiritual things that are sown into a person’s life, so the NIV supplies “seed,” reading “spiritual seed,” while the KJV supplies “things,” reading “spiritual things,” and the NRSV says, spiritual “good.”

The wide variety of spiritual matters being discussed in 1 Corinthians 12-14 dictates that “matters” or “things” be supplied to complete the sense of *pneumatikos* in 1 Corinthians 12:1; 14:1, etc. Those chapters are speaking about spiritual matters of many kinds, not just spiritual “gifts.” Adding the word “gifts” obscures what God had so clearly stated in the original text and causes people to be confused about the manifestations of holy spirit.

[For more on “gifts,” see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:1.]

1Co 12:2

**“mute”** The Greek construction contrasts the mute idols with the living God. It is worded in such a way as to emphasize the word “mute.” It is not just “mute idols,” but “the idols, the mute [ones].” It is factual, of course, that the pagan idols are mute, but it is also a slap at them, almost sarcasm. This verse echoes the Old Testament, which points out several times that idols cannot speak (Ps. 115:5; 135:16).

**“led…led astray.”** The difference between “led,” *agō* (#71 ἄγω) and “led astray” *apagō* (#520 ἀπάγω) is one of intensity. *Apagō* has the sense of forcefully carried off. So although the people did follow willingly, the forceful presentation and charisma of the pagan leaders was a powerful force in leading people astray.

The point that the verse is making is a powerful one. People trust their spiritual leaders to lead them to truth and right. However, Paul makes the point that when the Gentiles were led to idols, they were being led astray. This happens today with many teachers, who lead their flocks astray and into hurtful and harmful doctrines and practices.

1Co 12:3

**“make known to you”** (as per Fee, etc.)[[68]](#footnote-19634) sets the contrast with “I do not want you to be ignorant” in 1 Corinthians 12:1.

**“speaking in *union with* the spirit of God.”** Speaking “in union with” the spirit comes from the preposition *en*, which describes a relationship (see commentary on Romans 6:3. Lenski also has, “in union with.”[[69]](#footnote-17183)). Also, it can be instrumental and be translated “by,” however, that is not the primary meaning here as can be seen by the “in” in the last phrase of the verse. It is about being in a state of agreement or concord with the holy spirit. In the wider context of this section of Scripture about the manifestations of holy spirit (chapters 12-14), it can be seen that speaking “in” the spirit of God can include speaking in tongues, and it might well be thought by pagans that people speaking in tongues were cursing God, which Paul says does not happen.

**“in *union with* the holy spirit.”** In this context, the Greek word *en* (“in”) is more than just an instrumental dative for “by.” To be “in” the spirit is to be in a state of agreement or concord with the spirit such that one’s actions can agree with, and sometimes even flow from, the holy spirit. When a person says, “Jesus is Lord,” and really means it, that person’s words agree with God’s declaration about His Son. Anyone can mouth the words “Jesus is Lord,” but saying them without meaning them would not be “in,” (“in a state of agreement with”) the holy spirit and the words of God. An unsaved person can see the truth about Jesus and confess him as Lord and be “in” (in agreement with) the holy spirit and get saved.

The “the” is not needed in the Greek text before the words “holy spirit” because the preposition *en* can make the *pneuma* (spirit) definite without the article. In this case, the Greek text does not have a definite article before “holy spirit.” The preposition *en* is before the phrase which means it can be understood as if the “the” was actually present. In Greek, if a preposition governs a noun, it is the context that determines whether the noun is definite or not, and therefore whether there should be a “the” or not in the English translation. Daniel Wallace writes: “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.”[[70]](#footnote-18519) A. T. Robertson writes: “...the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. ...The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. ...[As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.”[[71]](#footnote-11965) Robertson then cites some examples that use *ek.*

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

1Co 12:4

**“being distributed.”** The Greek word is *diairesis* (#1243 διαίρεσις), it is plural, and it is generally used in reference to “distribution,” meaning that there are different distributions of the gifts, i.e., that different people are being given different gifts.[[72]](#footnote-18032) That the gifts differ is too obvious to mention, and misses the point. The gifts differ, but the point is that the gifts are distributed to different people, so the whole Body of Christ working together is necessary if we are to have all the gifts of Christ working fully.

**“spirit.”** The word *pneuma*, spirit, must be studied carefully because the word “spirit” can refer to many things, including the gift of holy spirit, or to Jesus, or to God, depending on the context (both Jesus and God are called the “Spirit”). There are a few reasons that “spirit” here in 1 Corinthians 12:4 could refer to the gift of holy spirit: the fact that “spirit” in 1 Cor. 12:3 refers to the gift of holy spirit; the fact that 1 Cor. 12:4, 5, 6 would then have the gift of holy spirit, the Lord (Jesus), and God; and the fact that although there are many “gifts,” there is only one gift of holy spirit. However, there are also some reasons that “Spirit” can refer to Jesus or God. 1 Cor. 12:4 and 12:11 are almost parallel, with the “Spirit” distributing to people. If “Spirit” in verse 4 refers to God, the word “Lord” in 1 Cor. 12:5 refers to Jesus Christ, and “God” in 1 Cor. 12:6 refers to God, then we have a chiasmic structure that is common in other parts of Scripture: “A—B—A,” in this case, “God—Lord—God.” The weight of evidence, however, seems to favor that “spirit” in verse 4 refers to the gift of holy spirit.

1Co 12:6

**“energizings...energizes.”** If anyone is going to do signs, miracles, or wonders, he must understand that he must, by trusting God, bring the power of God to bear on any given situation, but it is always God who provides the power, the energy, for the event to happen. See commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:20, “ambassadors.”

Often in charismatic churches, when a minister is energized by the Lord, the person is said to “have the anointing.” To Christians in more traditional denominations such as the Presbyterian Church, this can be very confusing because they cannot see that kind of language in the Bible. When we use non-biblical language to describe spiritual events then confusion is often the result. 1 Corinthians 12:6 speaks of “energizings” being given to people by the Lord, and if the Church would use that biblical vocabulary, and could point to the verses that speak of that energizing, then there would be less confusion and a better chance of having unity among Christian believers.

Biblically, the “anointing” refers to the time a person gets the gift of holy spirit, which for people in the Old Testament occurred when God put holy spirit upon them, and for Christians occurs when they get saved; born again (cf. Acts 10:38). After receiving the holy spirit, believers will from time to time be “energized” to do miracles, healings, etc. Note that in the life of Jesus Christ, he was “anointed” only one time, when he received the holy spirit after being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. At no time after that, when Jesus did miracles and healings, was Jesus said to be “anointed.”

1Co 12:7

**“manifestation.”** The word “manifestation” is the Greek word *phanerōsis*, (#5321 φανέρωσις), and it means, “to cause something to be fully known by revealing clearly and in some detail – ‘to make known, to make plain, to reveal, to bring to the light, to disclose, revelation.’”[[73]](#footnote-27358) The English word “manifestation” comes from two Latin words, *manus*, meaning “hand,” and *festare*, meaning “to touch.” A “manifestation” is something concrete and tangible that can be “touched with the hand,” so to speak. The gift of holy spirit is not tangible, because it is spirit. That is why Scripture does not promise that one will feel anything when he gets born again. God may accompany someone’s New Birth with a miracle in the senses world so that he knows it without a doubt, but that is rare and certainly not promised.

To understand this verse, indeed, 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14, it is vital to understand the difference between the “gift of holy spirit” and the “manifestations” of that gift of holy spirit, which are also referred to as gifts. Each Christian receives the “gift of holy spirit,” at the moment they are saved, born again (Acts 2:38; Eph. 1:13). The gift of holy spirit that seals each Christian cannot be detected by the five senses. No one can see, hear, smell, taste, or touch it. However, the gift of holy spirit inside each Christian can be manifested, brought forth into evidence, in the nine ways set forth in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. Electric energy in a light bulb is manifested (made obvious) in the form of light and heat. A manifestation of the chickenpox virus, which cannot be seen, is a rash with small pimple-like sores. While the gift of holy spirit cannot be detected by the five senses, the “manifestation of the holy spirit” is detectable by the five senses.

The multipurpose “Swiss Army” knife (today there are many “multi-purpose” knives that are similar) is a good example of the difference between the gift of holy spirit and a manifestation of that gift. The traditional Swiss Army knife has a red handle, and many come with two blades (big and little), two screwdrivers (flathead and Phillips), a can opener, an awl, scissors, a file, and a pair of tweezers (nine manifestations!). If you receive one Swiss army knife as a gift, you can use (bring into manifestation) any or all of its implements, and cut, snip, tweeze, etc. The one gift of the Swiss knife has many manifestations. Similarly, the one gift God gives each believer is holy spirit, which can be manifested in nine ways.

[For more on the manifestations of the gift of holy spirit also being referred to as “gifts,” see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:1.]

**“of the spirit.”** There has been much scholarly discussion about the exact nature of the genitive, “of” in the phrase, “the manifestation of the spirit.” The confusion is in large part due to the fact that most theologians think the “Spirit” is God. The spirit in this verse is the gift of God, holy spirit, and the genitive is the genitive of origin or production. The gift of holy spirit is the source of the manifestations, and the phrase means, the manifestations that originate with, or are produced by, the spirit of God. A somewhat parallel phrase occurs in 2 Corinthians 4:2, which has “the manifestation of the truth” (KJV, which has the articles accurately placed). One cannot see the “truth” in the apostle’s minds, but it is there, and it is the origin of their behavior, which can be seen by everyone. The gift of holy spirit and “truth” are invisible in a person, but they produce manifestations that can be clearly seen in the world of the senses.

**“common good.”** The Bible specifically says that the manifestation of holy spirit is for the “common good.” Benefits are missed, or consequences occur, when Christians do not walk with the power of the manifestations of holy spirit. Imagine the Bible with no manifestations of the power of God—no record of Moses smiting the rock, or Joshua stopping the Jordan River, or Samson pushing down the pagan temple, or God telling Samuel to anoint Saul as king, or Elijah calling down fire from heaven, or God telling Jonah to go to Nineveh.

The Bible would be much less exciting and would bring much less hope and blessing if the power of God were absent from its pages. If Ananias had not walked in the power of the manifestations, he would not have had the blessing of healing Paul (Acts 9:10-18). If Peter had not walked in the power of the manifestations, he would not have had the blessing of being the first to lead Gentiles into the New Birth (Acts 10:9-46). If Paul had not walked in the power of the manifestations, Eutychus would have remained dead (Acts 20:9-12). If a Christian does not speak in tongues, he misses out on its being a sign from God that he is saved (1 Cor. 14:22). Similarly, if the manifestations are absent or misused, there are consequences. If everyone in the congregation speaks in tongues at the same time, for example, an unbeliever may get the wrong impression (1 Cor. 14:23).

1Co 12:8

**“For to one.”** This verse (and verses 9 and 10), seem to indicate that each Christian gets only one manifestation, something that has confused many Christians. When we understand what the manifestations of holy spirit are, it becomes obvious that each Christian has the ability to manifest each of them. For example, 1 Corinthians 14:5 says it is the will of God that every Christian speak in tongues, and 1 Corinthians 14:23 gives an example of everyone in the Church in Corinth speaking in tongues. But if every Christian spoke in tongues, but each Christian could only have one “gift,” then no Christian could have any other “gift” except for speaking in tongues. Obviously, that cannot be the case. For one thing, every Christian is encouraged to speak in tongues, and also to prophesy and interpret (1 Cor. 14:5). That means each Christian is encouraged to operate three manifestations, not just one! But there is more. The manifestation, “a message of knowledge,” is God or the Lord Jesus giving knowledge to believers by revelation. Every believer can get guidance from God or the Lord via the gift of holy spirit inside them. But if each believer can only have one “gift,” and every believer can communicate with God via the gift of holy spirit inside them and thus get a message of knowledge, then every believer could only have that one “gift” of the spirit and none of the other “gifts.” These examples should be very clear, and the evidence that each believer can operate all of the manifestations of the gift of holy spirit. Furthermore, that becomes even clearer as we study the subject. For example, every believer needs to have spiritually energized faith to accomplish God’s will in their lives. But since “faith” is in this list that many people say a person only gets “one” of, that would mean if a believer had this “faith,” that would be the one and only thing on the list he would get. Could the Bible really teach that if a person speaks in tongues, or prophesies, or gets revelation knowledge from the Lord, he cannot have faith? Of course not! That makes no sense.

More evidence that each person can operate the different manifestations of the spirit is that the people in Acts did. For example, Peter spoke in tongues (Acts 2), prophesied (he penned 1 and 2 Peter), received words of wisdom and knowledge, and did miracles and healings. So did Paul. But there is no verse that says or implies that leaders in the Church somehow get to operate the manifestations in ways that other Christians cannot.

This verse is not saying that each person only gets “one” manifestation. It is teaching that God energizes different people at different times. Here in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, “to one” means “to one person.” The point that God is making is that at any given time or meeting, God energized different people in different ways. He would give one manifestation “to one” person and another “to another” person. For example, one person might get a message of knowledge, another person may prophesy, another person may have the opportunity to heal, and so forth. To make sure that things in the Church are done “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40 KJV), at any given time the Lord energizes different manifestations in different believers. The Church at Corinth had some problems. One was that people were not working together to bless one another (1 Cor. 11:17-19). This was so much the case that Paul wrote, “you meet *together*, but it results in more harm than good,” or as the NIV puts it, “your meetings do more harm than good” (1 Cor. 11:17). At other times when the church at Corinth met everyone wanted to speak up, so Paul had to write, “How is it then...when you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation? Let all things be done for building *people* up.” (1 Cor. 14:26). So whether the church was so divided that the people did not respect each other or take care of one another (1 Cor. 11:17-19), or whether the church was so anxious to speak up that the people did not respect each other or take care of one another (1 Cor. 14:26) what was needed was for people to walk by the spirit and realize that God was building unity in the Body by energizing different manifestations in different people, so each person was important and had a part to play in the meeting and in the church.

[For the difference between “to another” and “to a different one” see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:9.]

**“is given through the spirit.”** The manifestations of the spirit come via the gift of holy spirit. We must be clear that God can give knowledge or wisdom to people in many ways. For example, He spoke to Moses via a burning bush. He spoke to Gideon via an angel. He can send a prophet. Messages given in ways such as that are revelation, but they are not “manifestations of holy spirit.”

To be a manifestation of holy spirit, the revelation has to come from God or the Lord Jesus Christ to the Christian via the gift of holy spirit within him. In most cases in the Old Testament and the Gospels, when God wanted a person to prophesy or, like Joseph, to be a wise ruler, He put holy spirit on him so He could more fully communicate with him. Joseph had the spirit of God upon him so he could hear from God (Gen. 41:38). Moses and Joshua had the spirit of God (Num. 11:17; 27:18); the 70 elders of Israel had spirit upon them (Num. 11:25). God put his spirit on Bezalel so he could get the wisdom of God on how to build the Tabernacle (Exod. 31:1-5). Judges of Israel such as Othniel (Judg. 3:10), Gideon (Judg. 6:34), Jephthah (Judg. 11:29), and Samson (Judg. 14:19), had the spirit of God to help them rule and fight. King Saul had the spirit, and prophesied (1 Sam. 10:6). When the spirit of God came on Amasai, he heard from God and prophesied (1 Chron. 12:18). So did Azariah (2 Chron. 15:1-2), Jahaziel (2 Chron. 20:14), Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:20), and others. Furthermore, it was holy spirit that gave David the power to hear from God and get the plans for the Temple (1 Chron. 28:12). John the Baptist had the spirit of God upon him from birth (Luke 1:15). Thus, when we speak of “a message of wisdom” and “a message of knowledge” being manifestations of holy spirit, we are speaking of God or the Lord Jesus giving direct revelation to the person via the holy spirit born within that individual.

It is very important to realize that when the Bible says “manifestation of the spirit,” it means exactly that—these are evidences of holy spirit, not natural abilities that God has given to the person. They are the presence of holy spirit being made visible. We make this point because some people treat these manifestations as if they were talents that some people have, with no specific connection to the gift of holy spirit they received when they were born again. It is true that God does give different people different talents. Some people sing well; some people are very athletic; some are very intelligent; some people are great artists, etc. These are all God-given talents, but they are not manifestations of holy spirit. On the other hand, the manifestations of the spirit such as speaking in tongues, interpretation, prophecy, trust (“faith”), gifts of healings, and miracles, require both the power of holy spirit and the cooperation and action of the believer involved. The manifestations of holy spirit do not operate apart from the free will of the believer. Take speaking in tongues, for example. The Lord will provide the words to say, but the believer must do the speaking. The manifestations are good examples of us being “fellow workers” with God (1 Cor. 3:9).

**“message.”** The Greek word is *logos* (#3056 λόγος). It is translated as “message” because the Greek word *logos* refers to an intelligible communication. The first definition of *logos* in *Thayer’s Lexicon* is “*a word,* yet not in the grammatical sense (equivalent to *vocabulum*, the mere name of an object), but language, *vox*, i.e., a word which, uttered by the living voice, embodies a conception or idea.”[[74]](#footnote-17252) The NIV uses “message,” and other versions, such as the RSV, NRSV, and NJB, use “utterance,” which would be fine as long as it is understood that it is the Lord who “utters” the message to the person via the gift of holy spirit, and not the person who “utters” the message of wisdom to someone else.

The translation “message” communicates accurately exactly what the Lord gives by revelation: a message. The message may come in many ways: an audible voice, a picture or vision, a physical sensation, an emotion, or a firm realization (an inner knowing). The King James Version says “word of wisdom” and “word of knowledge” and so those terms are widely used, and “word” is used for “message” in Christian jargon. Nevertheless, it could be misleading to a new Bible student who might think of revelation as “words,” especially because in our experience the majority of the revelation any person receives is not a “word” and not even by “words,” but much more often by an impression or picture.

In this verse, the Greek word *logos* is used of individual revelation to people. This is important because both *logos* and *rhēma* (#4487 ῥῆμα) are used of individual messages of revelation given to Christians. We say that to correct the error of some Bible teachers who say that *rhēma* refers to individual revelation while *logos* refers to the Word of God. This verse, 1 Corinthians 12:8, is a good example of *logos* being used of revelation to an individual, and examples of *rhēma* as individual revelation include: Matthew 4:4; Luke 2:29; 3:2. In contrast, examples of *rhēma* being used of the whole word of God include 1 Peter 1:25 (cf. Heb. 6:5).

**“a message of wisdom.”** Definition: A message of wisdom is God or the Lord Jesus Christ, by revelation, providing a person with wisdom. It is God or the Lord giving a person direction, or guiding them in how to apply the knowledge he has about something.

For an explanation of how a message of wisdom works, see commentary on “a message of knowledge.” Both “a message of knowledge” and “a message of wisdom” are revelation.

[For more on what “revelation” is and how it works, see commentary on Gal. 1:12.]

For years scholars have discussed the manifestations of holy spirit, and there are many differing opinions. For example, reading different commentaries shows that some scholars think “a message of wisdom” is being able to understand the wisdom of God, or perhaps being able to express the wisdom of God. The Living Bible, for example, calls “a message of wisdom,” “the ability to give wise advice.” Many people, saved and unsaved, give wise advice. That is not a manifestation of holy spirit. The manifestation of a message of wisdom occurs when God gives a Christian a message about what to do in a given situation via the gift of holy spirit.

The reason for the discussion and the uncertainty is that the manifestations are not defined in 1 Corinthians. There is a good reason for their not being defined. It is common in all writing that authors leave out details and descriptions that everyone knows. Writers today commonly mention cars, planes, the Internet, and thousands of other things that they do not explain because the readers know what those things are. There are many examples of this in the Bible also.

A good example occurs in the Gospel of Luke. Luke did, for the time in which he lived, a good job of dating the birth of Christ by telling us it was about the time of the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria (Luke 2:2). No doubt everyone in Luke’s day who read that said, “Ah, now I know when the birth of Christ occurred.” Today, however, not much information about Quirinius has survived the centuries, and so there is controversy about the date of the birth of Christ. Another example involves biblical animals. No doubt when Job was written, everyone knew what the “behemoth” was (Job 40:15). Today we do not know enough information for scholars to agree on what the animal is. Another example involves nations. Genesis and other books of the Bible mention the “Hittites” (Gen. 10:15), but that nation was lost in history so completely that until the nineteenth century when archaeologists uncovered entire Hittite cities, some scholars even doubted their existence.[[75]](#footnote-14758) Nevertheless, the Bible never describes the Hittites because the biblical readers knew exactly who they were and where they lived.

The people of Corinth and other Christians in the first century were familiar with the manifestations of holy spirit, so there was no need for Paul to explain what they were or how they worked. God’s people had been manifesting holy spirit for generations (except for speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues, but the Corinthian Church was familiar with those by the time Paul penned Corinthians). God had put holy spirit upon people in the Old Testament such as Moses, Joshua, Deborah, David, Elijah, and many others, and those people could then hear knowledge or wisdom from God (thus, the message of knowledge and wisdom). They had the trust (“faith”) to do what God asked of them even when it seemed impossible, they did miracles, and when Jesus came on the scene, he taught his disciples to heal and cast out demons. The believers of Corinth were familiar with all these manifestations, and of course, Paul, who founded the Church in Corinth on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18), had also instructed them.

Some scholars have tried to look in Greek culture to find the meaning of the manifestations based on the definitions of the Greek words themselves (for example, “wisdom” was very important in Greek culture). That misses the point, and for the most part, has been unhelpful in discovering the nature of the manifestations, and is one reason why there is so much debate about the manifestations by scholars. The manifestations were not Greek experiences or concepts, but the timeless manifestations, outward evidences, of the inward presence of holy spirit. These manifestations were not to be found in Greek culture, vocabulary, or history, but in the experiences of the men and women of God throughout the centuries.

English culture today is somewhat similar to the Greek culture in that there has been very little accurate exposure to the power of holy spirit and very little accurate teaching on it. Therefore, we need a clear explanation of the manifestations so we can understand them. Like the Greeks of old, we need to get our understanding from the Bible itself and then add to our understanding by utilizing and experiencing the manifestations.

“**a message of knowledge**.” A message of knowledge is God or the Lord Jesus Christ, by revelation, providing knowledge to a person, i.e., giving that person information, insight, and understanding about something.

The message of wisdom and the message of knowledge are “revelation” manifestations, and they are covered in this one entry because they often work seamlessly together, with a single revelation from God consisting of both a message of knowledge and a message of wisdom. These are called “revelation” manifestations because they deal with God or the Lord Jesus “revealing” something.

[For more on what “revelation” is and how it works, see commentary on Gal. 1:12.]

We can understand the difference between “a message of knowledge” and “a message of wisdom” by understanding the difference between “knowledge” and “wisdom.” Knowledge is information about a situation, while wisdom is what to do about the situation. The first definition of “wisdom” in *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary* captures its essence: “the right use or exercise of knowledge.” Since the time of Adam and Eve, it has been important for mankind to hear from God. When God speaks to individuals, if what He says is knowledge, i.e., information and insight, the revelation is “a message of knowledge.” If what He says is wisdom, i.e., direction or what to do about a given situation, the revelation is “a message of wisdom.”

A good example of a message of knowledge would be Joseph interpreting Pharaoh’s dream (Gen. 41:25-27). God gave Joseph knowledge about the meaning of the dream, which was that there would be seven years of plenty, then seven years of famine. That revelation is a message of knowledge because it only gives information, the facts of the case.

When God gives someone a message of knowledge, He may or may not need to give a message of wisdom so the person will know what to do. For example, if a person has lost his car keys, all God has to do is let the person know where they are, He does not have to give a message of wisdom and say, “Go get them.” The person will do that without having to have a message of wisdom. Often, however, God will give a message of wisdom when He gives a message of knowledge. What if God had told Joseph about the years of plenty and the years of famine, but then never said what to do about it? The best Joseph could have done in that case would have been to pick a reasonable solution. However, God did give Joseph a message of wisdom when He told Joseph to tell Pharaoh to store up 20 percent of the harvest during the plenteous years for the upcoming famine years (Gen. 41:33-36). When God gives a person direction, and tells him what to do, then it is “a message of wisdom.”

The Bible is full of examples of “a message of knowledge” and “a message of wisdom,” and God gives us numerous examples so we will understand how He communicates and directs us. The Bible usually does not make it clear whether these examples are via the gift of holy spirit or simply the audible voice of God, but they are all revelation nevertheless. In Numbers 11:16-20 Moses gets both knowledge and wisdom from God. In Joshua 1:2-9 God gives Joshua both knowledge and wisdom. In Judges 7:4 God gave Gideon both knowledge and wisdom. In 1 Samuel 8:7-9 God gave Samuel wisdom, telling him what to do, and knowledge, telling him why to do it. In 1 Kings 14:5, God gave Ahijah knowledge of what was going to happen, and wisdom, telling him what to say. In 1 Kings 17:2-4, God gave Elijah wisdom by telling him what to do, and knowledge, telling him what would happen. These are only a few examples of “a message of knowledge” and “a message of wisdom,” but we can learn a lot from them. For one thing, we see that these manifestations could work independently, but they often work seamlessly together in one “message” from God. Another thing we can see is why God did not need to define the manifestations to the people of Corinth. God’s revelations of knowledge and wisdom are clearly laid out in the Bible and are essential to living a powerful and successful spiritual life.

A message of knowledge and a message of wisdom are God “speaking” to us to guide and help us. It is inconceivable that He would not do that for each and every Christian. Surely He would not give guidance to one Christian and not to another. Every Christian can, and needs to, manifest holy spirit in messages of knowledge and wisdom in order to live a rich and successful Christian life. No doubt most Christians have heard from God via the manifestations without even realizing it. Although there are times when God gives a message of knowledge or wisdom in such a clear and powerful way that it cannot be missed, usually God speaks in a “gentle whisper” or “a still small voice.” (1 Kings 19:12; NIV, KJV).

We need to be aware that there is a difference between “a message of knowledge” and “the manifestation of a message of knowledge” and also between “a message of wisdom” and “the manifestation of a message of wisdom.” A message of knowledge or wisdom can come from God in many ways: God’s audible voice (Deut. 4:12); an angel (Judg. 13:3-5); a miracle such as a donkey speaking (Num. 22:28, 30), or handwriting on a wall (Dan. 5:5). That type of revelation is a message of knowledge or a message of wisdom, but it is not the “manifestation” of a message of knowledge or wisdom because it did not come via the gift of holy spirit.

The “manifestation of a message of knowledge (or wisdom)” is a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit, which means the information comes from God or the Lord to the person via the gift of holy spirit inside the person. One thing that is important to realize and keep in mind is that a message of knowledge and a message of wisdom are manifestations of holy spirit, but they come via the human mind. The fact that the revelation from God comes to our minds via the spirit opens the door to a few different problems: first, we may not be sure whether we are receiving revelation or “just thinking something,” second, we may think we are hearing from God when we are not, and third, we may think that a “thought” was just us thinking when it really was revelation from the Lord. It is noteworthy that the Greek word *pneuma* (as well as the Hebrew word *ruach*) is used of both our thoughts and emotions, and the “spirit” God gives us, and it can sometimes be very hard to distinguish revelation from our thoughts.

1Co 12:9

**“to a different one.”** God has placed the nine manifestations of holy spirit into three groups, or categories, with two manifestations in the first group, five in the second group, and two in the third group. Most English versions are not sensitive to this, and read “to one” or “to another” eight times, as if the list was one large group. However, there are actually two different Greek words, *allos* (#243 ἄλλος), and *heteros* (#2087 ἕτερος), that need to be properly understood and translated, rather than both of them simply being translated “to another.” In Greek, *allos* was generally used to express a numerical difference and denotes “another of the same sort,” while *heteros* usually means a qualitative difference and denotes “another of a different sort.” When a list is put together, and the items are said to be *allos*, they are of the same kind or nature. When they are said to be *heteros*, they are different in nature.

However, when there is a list of items, the alternating of *allos* and *heteros* is a way of breaking the list into different categories or divisions. Robertson and Plummer write: “if we take each ἑτέρῳ [*heteros*] as marking a new division, we get an intelligible result. Of the three classes thus made…”[[76]](#footnote-27676) Thus, what we see in this section is God separating the manifestations into three groups, dividing the groups by the word *heteros*, which we showed in brackets when we quoted the verses. In the REV, we use “another” when the Greek word was *allos*, and “different one” when it was *heteros*.

Studying the groups reveals that two manifestations are revelation (hearing from God), five manifestations relate to the power of God, and the last two manifestations are oriented toward worship.

* **Revelation**: A message of knowledge; a message of wisdom
* **Power**: Trust (“faith”); gifts of healing; miracles; prophecy; discerning of spirits
* **Worship**: Speaking in tongues; interpretation of tongues

Although it is helpful to study these manifestations separately so we can best understand them, we need to be aware that we are doing that only for the sake of clarity. God never intended them to be completely separate and distinct in the lives of the believers who experience them. He is our Father and He wants a relationship with us, and He wants us to be effective fellow workers with Him (1 Cor. 3:9). In order to do that, we must be able to worship God (the worship group), hear from Him (the revelation group), and work for Him (the power group). In the day-to-day life of a believer who is striving to love God, live a holy life, and do God’s will, the manifestations will often work seamlessly and result in great blessing for the believer and the people affected. For example, a Christian woman, let’s call her “Susan,” may be by herself enjoying worshiping God by singing in tongues to some Christian music she is playing. Then the phone rings, and it is her friend who needs prayer because many things are going wrong in her life, and today she is sick. Susan immediately feels the leading of the Lord to pray for specifics about her friend’s life (the revelation manifestations at work) and then commands healing to take place in the name of Jesus Christ (faith and healing). By the time she gets off the phone, her friend is feeling better emotionally and physically. In this scenario, Susan did not think to herself, “Now I need a message of knowledge. Now I need a message of wisdom. Now I need the manifestation of trust. Now I need the manifestation of gifts of healings.” No, she had a relationship with God and love for her friend, and the manifestations worked together seamlessly to produce the “common good” mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:7.

**“trust.”** The manifestation of trust is a person having the confidence or trust that what God or the Lord Jesus Christ has revealed to him by revelation (a message of knowledge or a message of wisdom), will come to pass or come to pass at his command.

The manifestation of trust is the first manifestation that God places in the second group of manifestations, which we call the “power” manifestations. We believe that trust is the foundation of the power manifestations. “Trust” is the translation of the Greek word *pistis* (#4102 πίστις), which means “trust,” “confidence,” or “assurance.” The REV uses “trust,” although many English versions use “faith.”

[See Appendix 2: “‘Faith’ is ‘Trust.’”]

It is important to distinguish the biblical definition of “faith” from today’s definition that has permeated the Christian Church and society. When most people think of “faith,” they think of it in terms of the modern definition: “firm belief in something for which there is no proof.”[[77]](#footnote-29085) When religious people have no proof for what they believe, we often hear them say, “You just have to take it by faith.” It is vital to understand that “belief in something for which there is no proof” is not the biblical definition of “faith.”

The biblical definition of “faith” is “trust,” and we trust things only after they have been proven to us. Jesus never asked anyone to believe he was the Messiah without proof. He healed the sick, raised the dead, and did miracles, and he asked people to believe the miracles that he did (John 10:38). Similarly, God does not ask us to believe Him without proof. He has left many pieces of evidence that He exists and that His Word is true. Thus, when God asks us to have “faith” (trust), He is not asking us to believe something without proof. God proves Himself to us, and because of that, we trust Him, that is, we trust what He says to us.

1 Corinthians 12:9 uses the word trust (“faith”), but it is in the context of the manifestations of the spirit (12:7). Thus, “trust” in 12:9 is the “manifestation of trust,” not just our regular “trust” (“faith”). All of us have trust in a large number of things. In fact, ordinary life would be impossible without trust. A person would not sit down if he did not trust the chair would hold him. God asks us to trust that Jesus has been raised from the dead because the Bible, history, and life give plenty of evidence for it.

In contrast to ordinary trust, the manifestation of trust is necessary to accomplish the special tasks that God, by revelation, asks us to do. For example, Jesus said that a person with trust could tell a mountain to be cast into the ocean and it would be done (Mark 11:23). Well, all of us have seen mountains, and we know that we do not have the human power to move them, so how can we just “trust” that we can cast a mountain into the sea just by commanding it to happen? We need to access the power of God to move the mountain. To be able to “trust” that God’s power is available to us to perform a miracle we need God to tell us we can do it.

The way the manifestation of trust works is that God first tells us to do something by revelation. Then, having the revelation from God that we can do the miracle, we trust the revelation and command the miracle to happen. The trust we must have in what God told us by revelation is “the manifestation of trust,” and when we truly trust what God has revealed to us, miracles happen.

Moses brought water out of a rock by the manifestation of trust (Exod. 17:5-6), Gideon defeated the Midianites by the manifestation of trust (Judg. 6:16), Elijah multiplied the oil and bread by the manifestation of trust (1 Kings 17:14-16), and the other great miracles of the Bible were done by the manifestation of trust. When it comes to miracles and gifts of healings, we need the manifestation of trust because we cannot heal the sick or do miracles by our human power. God must give us a message of knowledge and a message of wisdom, letting us know that it is His will for us to heal someone or do a miracle, and then we must trust God that since He gave us the revelation to do the miracle, we can in fact, do it.

Every Christian needs to utilize the manifestation of trust. Christ said that when people received holy spirit they would receive power (Acts 1:8), but no one can operate the power of God without the trust to do so. Since every Christian needs to use the manifestation of trust to bring to pass the revelation that God gives him, every Christian has the ability to manifest trust. Thus, we see that the manifestation of trust, like a message of knowledge and a message of wisdom, is for every Christian, not just certain ones.

The understanding of the manifestation of trust is obscured by the fact that often the Bible just says “trust” when the context dictates it is the manifestation of trust that is being referred to. God expects us to know what the Bible says about the manifestation of trust and how it works. While there are many records where the revelation from God clearly precedes the person operating the manifestation of trust and accomplishing the miracle, many records do not explicitly state that God gave revelation first. Although this could seem confusing, it is simple to understand. God expects us to understand how the manifestation of trust works by studying the whole Bible. If we cannot do something by our natural human ability, then we need God’s power, and that means we must have a word (revelation) from Him that we can have trust in. Once God gives us the revelation we can then trust what He says and command the miracle, which God’s power then brings to pass.

In the case of Moses turning the Nile River to blood, the Bible tells us God gave the revelation to Moses of what to do, then Moses trusted God and did it (Exod. 7:14-20). When Moses split the Red Sea, God gave him the revelation of what to do, and Moses trusted and did it (Exod. 14:16, 21). When Joshua conquered Jericho, God told Joshua exactly what to do (Josh. 6:2-6) and Joshua trusted what God said (operated the manifestation of trust) and brought the miracle to pass. When David battled the Philistines, he did not just go to battle in his own strength. He first got a revelation from God that he would win the battle, then had trust in the revelation he received and went to war and won (2 Sam. 5:19-21). There are many records that show God giving revelation to a person who then trusted the revelation and brought the miracle to pass.

There are, however, many times in the Bible where the text does not explicitly say God gave revelation first. Does that mean that God did not give revelation in those cases? No. In order for there to be “trust,” there has to be something to trust in. No one can just “trust” to divide an ocean or move a mountain. No human has that power. So unless God tells us by revelation that He will do the miracle, we have nothing to trust in. We do not just have “trust;” we trust in something.

The fact that God does not always tell us in His word about the need for revelation before the manifestation of trust explains why, for example, so many people read Jesus’ teaching about casting a mountain into the sea (Mark 11:22, 23) and are confused. The context of Jesus’ teaching about the mountain was him cursing a fig tree. But he did not do that without revelation from His Father. He told his disciples that he could not do anything of himself, but did what the Father showed him (John 5:19; cf. John 5:30; 8:28). Thus, in the context of acting by revelation and operating the manifestation of trust, he spoke of casting a mountain into the sea.

Hebrews 11 is the great chapter on trust. But if we closely examine the records, we can see that the trust in the chapter is mostly the manifestation of trust. Enoch was a prophet who heard from God (Heb. 11:5; Jude 1:14). Noah received revelation to build the ark (Heb. 11:7; Gen. 6:13-22); God gave Abraham revelation to move to Canaan, and Abraham obeyed, operating the manifestation of trust (Heb. 11:8; Gen. 12:1). Sarah gave birth to Isaac by the manifestation of trust, trusting in God’s specific promise to her (Gen. 18:10-15; Heb. 11:11). Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice because of a specific revelation from God (Heb. 11:17; Gen. 22:1). Moses kept the Passover by trust, because he trusted what God said to do and how to do it (Heb. 11:28; Exod. 12:1-14). Moses also split the Red Sea by the manifestation of trust in response to the revelation God gave him (Heb. 11:29; Exod. 14:16, 21). Joshua’s trust in the revelation God gave him caused the walls of Jericho to fall (Heb. 11:30; Josh. 6:2-6). These are just some of the examples of the manifestation of trust in the Bible, and they show us that we do not just “have trust,” we trust what God has told us.

When we understand the manifestation of trust, we can see how inseparably it works with the other manifestations of the spirit. The manifestation of word of knowledge or word of wisdom is God telling us what we can do. The manifestation of trust is our trusting that what God just told us is true and is the reason we then act on what He said to bring the miracle or healing to pass, and the manifestation of miracles or healings is the power of God being applied and accomplishing the miracle or healing. To be truly effective for God, the Christian needs the confidence to operate all nine manifestations of the gift of holy spirit.

[For more on revelation and how revelation works, see commentary on Gal. 1:12.]

“**gifts of healings”** is a person exercising his God-given spiritual ability to heal by the power of God, according to what God or the Lord Jesus has revealed to him by revelation (a message of knowledge or a message of wisdom).

We cover the manifestations of gifts of healings and working of miracles together because they are similar in many ways. The “gifts [plural] of healings [plural]” is so-called because God does multiple healings, and each of them is a gift, done out of His grace or mercy. Gifts of healings and working of miracles are manifestations of holy spirit because it takes a believer to do them by the power of God that he has been given. It is very important to realize that it is people, empowered by holy spirit within, who do healings and miracles. On rare occasions, God heals or does a miracle without human agency, but that is not “the manifestation” of gifts of healings or miracles because the gift of holy spirit inside a Christian was not employed.

To do a healing or miracle, several manifestations come into action. First, the person needs a message of knowledge and/or a message of wisdom to know what the situation is and what to do about it. Second, he needs the manifestation of trust to bring to pass the healing or miracle. Third, he must represent Christ on earth and, via the power of God, bring to pass the miracle as God supplies the energy for it. Notice how Peter raised Tabitha: he said, “Tabitha, get up” (Acts 9:40). Then she got up from the dead. Peter spoke the miracle into being. First, Peter prayed. Then, when he had revelation from the Lord to go ahead, he raised her from the dead by the power of God. Once Peter received the revelation to raise Tabitha, he performed the miracle. We believe that there would be more miracles and healings in Christendom today if Christians would step out and really trust what the Lord tells them to do. Too often, we are waiting for God to do Himself what He has given us the spiritual power to do.

It is not our intention to demean the power of prayer in any way. Christians are commanded to pray, and should do so as much as possible. However, when God or the Lord Jesus gives us the revelation to do a healing or miracle, that is not the time to pray; it is the time to step out and act, trusting that the Lord will energize the miracle as we command it to come to pass. If the miracle or healing takes time, the one receiving the revelation must keep on trusting and praying to see it accomplished.

Jesus’ apostles and disciples had holy spirit upon them (John 14:17), which is why he could send them out to heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons (Matt. 10:8; Luke 10:9). Furthermore, Jesus said that when people have holy spirit, they have power (Acts 1:8). It is clear that since every Christian has the gift of holy spirit, then every Christian has the power to do healings and miracles (John 14:12), just as the disciples of Christ and the prophets of old did. We need to increase our trust and step forth boldly to do what the Lord directs us to do. We realize that although the presence of holy spirit gives each Christian the spiritual power to do healings and miracles, not everyone is called to walk in that kind of ministry. There is a difference between inherent spiritual ability and how that ability will actually be evidenced in the life of an individual Christian. Nevertheless, we assert that many more Christians would be doing healings and miracles if they knew they had the ability and were confident to act on the spiritual power they have.

The manifestations of gifts of healings and working of miracles are often interwoven. There are certainly miracles that are not healings, such as when Moses parted the sea so the Israelites could escape Egypt. Also, there are healings that are not miracles, when, although the natural power of the body to heal itself is augmented by the healing power of God, the healing is not instantaneous. However, there are many miracles of healing in the Bible, such as the instantaneous healing of Bartimaeus, who was blind (Mark 10:46-52). Also, casting out a demon can be a miracle (Mark 9:38-39).

1Co 12:10

**“energizings of miracles.”** The manifestation of energizing of miracles is a person exercising his God-given spiritual ability to do miracles by the power of God, according to what God or the Lord Jesus has revealed to him by revelation (a message of knowledge or a message of wisdom). The phrase “energizings of miracles” is working more than one miracle and represents that the verb is plural in the Greek.

[For more explanation of the manifestation, see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:9, “gifts of healings.”]

“**prophecy.”** The manifestation of prophecy is speaking, writing, or otherwise communicating a message from God or the Lord Jesus Christ to a person or persons. God or the Lord Jesus gives the Christian a message of knowledge or a message of wisdom via the holy spirit born inside him, and when he gives that message to someone else, it is prophecy. The revelation that is spoken as prophecy can come in the moment, coming almost word by word as the speaker says them, something we refer to as “inspirational prophecy.” However, it can also come as a complete revelation given to the speaker before it is spoken as prophecy, or prophecy can come as a combination, with some revelation coming beforehand and some coming as the prophecy is spoken. In the Old Testament, when a person had holy spirit, he or she almost always prophesied. That is why Joel said that when holy spirit was poured out on all believers, they would prophesy (Joel 2:28), and why Peter, in his teaching on the Day of Pentecost, referenced Joel (cf. Acts 2:17, 18).

God says His servants will prophesy, so there should be little argument about it. The manifestation of prophecy is to strengthen, encourage, and comfort people (1 Cor. 14:3). It can reveal the secrets of people’s hearts so that they can be closer to God (1 Cor. 14:24, 25). A study of prophecy in Scripture shows that prophecy is part of the power of God, which is why God places prophecy in the “power” group of the manifestations. Some Bible teachers have placed prophecy in the “worship” group of manifestations, but prophecy is not primarily worship, it is speaking a message from God to people. It is used in a worship service, yes, but that does not make it worship. At any given Christian service, all the manifestations may come into play, depending on the needs of the people.

Many Christians do not prophesy, but not because they do not have the spiritual ability. Scripture makes it clear that every Christian has the power to prophesy because of the presence of holy spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:17; 1 Cor. 14:1, 5, 24). If a Christian does not prophesy, either he has not been sufficiently instructed, or he does not have the trust to step out on what he has been given, or he does not want to prophesy.

There is a reason why each Christian should covet to prophesy. Bringing God’s messages to His people is not only a tremendous privilege, it is essential for the well-being of the Church. A study of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, reveals how valuable the prophets were in the spiritual wholeness of the people of Israel. Prophecy is not only about speaking about the future. Not only can every Christian prophesy, as the Scripture says, but we should want to. That every believer can prophesy gives us more conclusive evidence that each believer can manifest all nine manifestations.

[For more on prophecy, including what it is, how it comes to the Christian via holy spirit, that each Christian should want to prophesy, and the difference between the manifestation of prophecy and the ministry of a prophet, see John W. Schoenheit, *Prophecy.*]

“**discerning of spirits.”** This phrase has two separate meanings and applications; it is a double entendre (the figure of speech amphibologia). On the one hand, it refers to God or the Lord Jesus Christ revealing to a person information about the presence or absence of spirits (including both the holy spirit and demons), and sometimes including the identity of any demons present and whether or not they may be cast out. It also can refer to God or the Lord giving information about the “spirits,” the things spoken or supposedly spoken by the power of the spirit of God.

[See Word Study: “Amphibologia.”]

The Greek word translated “discerning” is *diakrisis* (#1253 διάκρισις), and it has several meanings. It can mean a “distinguishing” or “differentiation.” Also, it can mean to quarrel.[[78]](#footnote-27249) One of the definitions in Liddell and Scott’s Greek lexicon is “decision by battle, quarrel, dispute.”[[79]](#footnote-11715) Thus, *diakrisis* can be much more than just “discerning”; in some contexts, it can refer to quarreling or fighting. Since “discerning of spirits” is a total package of recognizing “spirits” and dealing with them, God places it in the “power” group of manifestations. The word *diakrisis* (discerning) is plural in the Greek text because discerning is not a one-time action, but an ongoing process, and we felt that the English word “discerning” had the overtones of an ongoing process and did not need to be pluralized. If a person is “discerning,” it is because he has exhibited discernment in many situations.

The manifestation of discerning of spirits is necessary if men and women of God are going to deal effectively with the spiritual realities of this fallen world. There are many “spirits” in this world, including angels, the gift of holy spirit, and prophecies, but because of the spiritual battle that rages around all of us, a very important aspect of discerning of spirits is dealing with the demonic forces of this world. Ephesians 6:12 makes it clear that Christians do not primarily wrestle against fleshly forces, but spiritual forces.

Our Adversary, the Devil, walks about as a roaring lion, seeking people to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). God has not left us helpless in that situation but has empowered us to deal with him. The manifestation of discerning of spirits is more than just recognizing evil spirits, it also involves entering into battle against them and casting them out. Protecting believers by recognizing demons and casting them out is part of “discerning of spirits.”

[For more insights into the spiritual battle, see commentary on Mark 1:25 and Jesus “subduing” evil spirits.]

The manifestation of discerning of spirits is interwoven with the other manifestations. For example, a believer manifesting discerning of spirits may be simultaneously aware of the presence of the demon, know what to do about the situation, and begin to command it to come out of the person. Receiving the information about the demon and knowing what to do is similar to and interwoven with a message of knowledge and a message of wisdom, while the casting out the demon can be in the category of a miracle (Mark 9:38, 39), even as a healing can be a miracle (Acts 4:16).

Every Christian will encounter demons, whether he recognizes them or not. What a great blessing and comfort to know that God has equipped each of us to deal with any demon that comes against us. Ephesians 6:12, which says we wrestle with demonic powers, is written to every Christian. Therefore, every Christian can manifest discerning of spirits.

Another very important aspect of “discerning of spirits” is being able by revelation to discern the “spirits” that are being spoken by others. The word “spirit” (or “spirits”) is often put by metonymy for that which is spoken by the spirit, especially prophecy. We are not to just accept the prophecy of another Christian, but are to judge it (1 Cor. 14:29), and also we know that there are many false prophets in the world (1 John 4:1). We cannot afford to simply guess at whether or not what people say is right, we need God’s help to discern what people say, and the manifestation of discerning of spirits helps with that. That “discerning of spirits” can refer to discerning a prophecy helps explain why it comes after prophecy in the list of manifestations instead of following “a message of wisdom” and “a message of knowledge,” which are the revelation manifestations that start the list.

[For a more complete explanation of “spirit” being a metonymy for those things that are spoken by the spirit, such as prophecy or interpretation, see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:12.]

The word “spirits” in the phrase “discerning of spirits” likely does not refer in a primary sense to “attitudes,” even though that is one of the meanings of *pneuma* (“spirit”). But God or the Lord could give revelation about someone’s thoughts and attitudes. But we must remember that the list in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 is a list of manifestations of holy spirit, not a list of natural abilities. Many people are very sensitive and can “read” people and situations very well, but many of them are unsaved. “Discerning of spirits” does not refer to a natural ability; it is in the list of manifestations of the gift of holy spirit.

In some Greek texts, the word “and” occurs before “to another, prophecy” and also before “to another, discerning of spirits.” We have left out the word “and” because textual research shows that it is more likely that “and” was added to some texts rather than being deleted from other texts.

“***various* kinds of tongues.”** The manifestation of the spirit that involves speaking languages the speaker does not understand is commonly known as “speaking in tongues.” Speaking in tongues is a Christian speaking a language of men or angels that he does not understand, a language that is given to him by the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:33). It is one of the great blessings that God has given to the Christian Church, and He desires that every Christian speak in tongues: “Now I want all of you to speak in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:5). For a much fuller explanation of speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:5.

**“the interpretation of tongues.”** The interpretation of tongues is interpreting, or giving the sum and substance, in one’s own language, that which he has just spoken in tongues. The word “interpretation” is *hermēneia* (#2058 ἑρμηνεία), which means interpretation or exposition. It does not necessarily mean a word-for-word translation, but rather an interpretation, giving the gist or sum and substance. Thus, the interpretation of tongues is giving the gist of what was just spoken in tongues. The Bible makes it clear that speaking in tongues is always “to” God (1 Cor. 14:2), so the interpretation will be to God also, and will be praise and prayer to Him. That is the big difference between prophecy and the interpretation of tongues. Prophecy is a message to the people (1 Cor. 14:3), while interpretation of tongues is to God (or the Lord Jesus Christ), but is heard by the congregation, who are then edified by it.

The interpretation of tongues, like speaking in tongues itself, is given by the Lord and is a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit. No one understands what he is saying in a tongue, so no one could give an interpretation of what he is saying from their understanding alone. The interpretation comes from the Lord Jesus Christ, just as the tongue does. The manifestation of the interpretation of tongues works just like speaking in tongues and prophecy do—the words come from the Lord Jesus Christ to the individual via the gift of holy spirit inside him. When a person speaks in tongues in a meeting, he should interpret so that the people in the meeting can be edified (1 Cor. 14:5).

While prophecy is a message to the people, the interpretation of tongues is an interpretation of what the speaker just spoke in tongues. 1 Corinthians 14:2 says the person who speaks in tongues speaks “to God,” and what the person speaks in tongues, although he or she cannot understand it, can include blessing God and praying to God (1 Cor. 14:15-16). The records in the book of Acts confirm that when a person speaks in tongues, it is “to God,” that is, it is prayer and praise to God, just as 1 Corinthians says. For example, in Acts 2 when the apostles spoke in tongues, the tongues that the Lord gave them to speak were the native languages of the people in the crowd, such that the crowd could understand what was being spoken, and the message in tongues was praise to God and was about “the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11). Similarly, in Acts 10 when the Gentiles spoke in tongues they were “exalting God” (Acts 10:46).

Speaking in tongues and prophecy are two totally different manifestations with two totally different purposes. Prophecy is how God brings messages to His people, while tongues is how people commune with God and praise and pray to Him, so when speaking in tongues is interpreted it is fundamentally different from prophecy and includes praise and prayer and usually sounds very much like many of the Psalms that are praise and/or prayer to God (cf. Ps. 8, 19, 23, 33, 47, 67, 84, 93, 96, 100, 111, 113, 117, 150). That praise and prayer edify the Church in the same way that reading the Psalms edifies the Church; it is comforting and encouraging, and reminds us of all the great things that God has done and why he deserves our loyalty, praise, and thanksgiving.

The interpretation of tongues is to be done by the one who spoke in tongues, just as 1 Corinthians 14:5 says (see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:27).

1Co 12:11

**“are energized by the one and the same Spirit.”** 1 Corinthians 12:6 tells us that the one who does the energizing is God, and thus we conclude that the “Spirit” that does the energizing here in 1 Corinthians 12:11 is God also. It is worth noting, however, that the word “Spirit” (“spirit”) can and does refer to God, Jesus Christ, and the gift of holy spirit, and actually all three are involved when the manifestations of the spirit are in operation in a believer. God ultimately provides the energy, and “energizes,” but He most often does so through the agency of Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 2:33), at which time the holy spirit in the believer is energized and the manifestation of the spirit occurs in the senses world.

**“purposes.”** The word “purposes” at the end of the verse is one of the contextual keys that “Spirit” does not refer to the gift of holy spirit, for the gift of holy spirit does not “purpose” anything, but only speaks what it hears (John 16:13).

**“distributing to each one individually just as he purposes.”** The phrase “as he purposes” refers to God who is working through the agency of Jesus Christ. It is God and Jesus who direct what is spiritually going on in the Church. Christ gives each person a ministry (Eph. 4:8-12), and in any given church meeting he energizes people in different ways so that each person has a part and the Body of Christ must work together to best bless each other and the Church as a whole. It is God through Christ distributing and energizing individuals that explains why in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, the phrases “to one” and “to another” occur nine different times. Any one given person has the spiritual ability to manifest all nine manifestations, but God does not energize them that way. He energizes one thing in one person and another thing in another person so that the church needs everyone to participate in order to get the fullness of what God has for them.

[For more on understanding how God energizes different things in different people, see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:8, “for to one.”]

1Co 12:13

**“in one spirit.”** The Greek word we translate as “in” is “*en*” (#1722 ἐν), and it can be translated in its plain sense as “in” or as an instrumental dative, “by.” If it is “in” one spirit, it indicates that all Christians are baptized in the gift of holy spirit, which is the case. However, some people would argue that the word *pneuma* (“spirit”) refers to Jesus Christ and should be capitalized (Jesus is called “the Spirit” a number of times in the NT; see commentary on Rev. 2:7). However, we were not all “made to drink” of Jesus Christ, as the last phrase in the verse indicates. Thus, when we read the entire verse, the only way “spirit” can be used consistently is if it refers to the gift of holy spirit. Every Christian is baptized in the gift of holy spirit, and that happens when the person is born again. We were all baptized in spirit, and made to drink of it (John 7:37-39). For the fact that a person receives the gift of holy spirit the moment he is saved or “born again,” see commentary on Ephesians 1:13.

**“into one body.”** The “body” that we were baptized into and became part of is the “Body of Christ,” a spiritual entity with Christ as the head and each believer as a “part” or “member” of that Body (see commentary on Eph. 1:23).

**“drink of one spirit.”** The word “drink” is not literal, but is an idiom referring to experiencing something, or to partake of something. Christians all have the experience of receiving the gift of holy spirit. Jesus used the figure of drinking in John 4:14; 7:37-39. A related idiom is the word “cup.” Thus, Jesus asked James and John if they could “drink the cup” that he himself would drink (Mark 10:38), and Jesus asked God to “take this cup from me” (Luke 22:42).

1Co 12:23

**“less honorable.”** The reference to the “less honorable” parts of the body is a general euphemism for the buttocks, genitals, and breasts, but it could also have a wider application depending on what one considers to be “less honorable.” For other sexual idioms see commentary on Leviticus 18:6.

1Co 12:27

**“the body of Christ.”** The “Body of Christ” is a spiritual entity with Christ as the head and each believer as a “part” or “member” of that Body (see commentary on Eph. 1:23).

1Co 12:28

**“tongues.”** For a much fuller explanation of speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:5.

1Co 12:29

**“Are all apostles? Are all prophets.”** The emphasis of 1 Corinthians 12 is that the Christian Church is the “Body” of Christ, and different people have different abilities and giftings. Yet at Corinth, there was envying and rivalry among the believers rather than each person being thankful for their part in the Body and rejoicing that the Body can work together to get the work of the Lord done on earth. Paul is not ending the chapter by elevating one person or ministry above another, in fact, he had done just the opposite in 1 Corinthians 12:22-25. Rather, he is obviating the fact that there are differences between people and thus setting forth the fact that each person needs to be thankful for the giftings he or she has and be zealous to work together with others—in love—which is where the argument leads in 1 Corinthians 13, and why 1 Corinthians 13 opens with such a detailed section on love.

1Co 12:30

**“Do all speak in tongues?”** The Greek here in 1 Corinthians 12:30 is similar to the Greek in 1 Corinthians 12:29 in that it expects and anticipates a negative answer, “No.” However, that has been generally misunderstood by the Christian Church. This verse is not saying, and the Greek text certainly does not use the word “can” and say, “Can everyone speak in tongues?” The answer to that question would be “yes,” as 1 Corinthians 14:5 and the general scope of the understanding of the manifestations of holy spirit indicates. Every genuine Christian has the gift of holy spirit born in them, and thus can manifest the spirit if they are taught how and have the desire to do that.

Speaking in tongues is a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit, and therefore every Christian has the God-given ability to speak in tongues. Nevertheless, many do not, for different reasons. The key to understanding this verse is realizing that the things listed (tongues, interpretation, and healing) are manifestations of holy spirit that some people are especially gifted at or are energized to do in the Church. It is a fact that everyone does not speak in tongues or interpret, or heal, even though technically they have the spiritual power and ability to do so. There are different reasons people do not manifest the gift of holy spirit that is created inside them. Some people have not been taught how to manifest it fully, some people are afraid to use it, and other people simply have no desire to manifest the holy spirit. The point is that every Christian has the ability to manifest the gift of holy spirit, but “does” everyone do that? No, they do not. For more on speaking in tongues, see commentaries on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.

1Co 12:31

**“But earnestly desire the greater gifts.”** This verse has caused some people to conclude that speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, and the manifestation of prophecy are “gifts.” Although there is a sense in which everything Christians have from God are gifts, speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues are technically “manifestations” of “the gift” of holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:7). Since tongues and the interpretation of tongues are manifestations of the gift of holy spirit, why do they seem to be called “gifts” in 1 Corinthians 12:31?

First, as was just stated above, everything we get from God could be referred to as a “gift.” For example, good health and our daily food could be considered gifts from God because in a very real sense they are, even though they are not technically called “gifts” in the Bible. Also, the list Paul gave in 1 Corinthians 12:28-30 includes apostles, prophets, teachers, helps, and governments, and those are true gift ministries. And also in the list are people who have a special energizing in the area of miracles, gifts of healings, and speaking in tongues (being able to speak in various kinds of tongues), as well as those who interpret tongues. We should note that the “prophets” in the list are people with the gift ministry of a prophet, not just believers who operate the manifestation of prophecy, which every Christian can do (cf. 1 Cor. 14:24). Thus, the majority of the list are genuine “gift ministries” from God, and most of the rest of the list, such as workers of miracles, are gifts in that they are special energizing from the Lord. So since the majority of the list is actual “gifts,” it is proper to use that word for the whole list with the understanding that people would get the point Paul was making, which is that the Church had a need for some giftings more than others.

[For a better understanding of manifestations such as speaking in tongues being called a “gift” see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:1. For a better understanding of gifts and manifestations, in general, see the REV commentaries on 1 Cor. 12:7, 8, 9, and 12:10. For more on gift (equipping) ministries, see commentary on Eph. 4:11.]

**“a more excellent way.”** The more excellent “way” is love. If any giftings are not being operated in love, they do not really profit.

**1 Corinthians Chapter 13**

1Co 13:1

**“speak with the tongues.”** For information on speaking in tongues, see commentaries on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.

**“love.”** The Greek is *agapē* (#26 ἀγάπη), and it refers to the love of God. The noun form is *agapē* (#26 ἀγάπη), the verb form is *agapaō* (#25 ἀγαπάω). *Agapē* love is the very nature of God, for God is love (1 John 4:7-12, 16). The big key to understanding *agapē* is to realize that it can be known from the action it prompts. In fact, we sometimes speak of the “action model” of *agapē* love. People today are accustomed to thinking of love as a feeling, but that is not necessarily the case with *agapē* love. *Agapē* is love because of what it *does*, not because of how it *feels*. For example, God so “loved” (*agapē*) that He gave His Son. It did not feel good to God to do that, but it was the loving thing to do.

*Agapē* love is not simply an impulse generated from feelings, it is an exercise of the will, a deliberate choice. This is why God can command us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44; Exod. 23:1-5). He is not commanding us to “have a good feeling” for our enemies, but to act in a loving way toward them. There are Christians who say they love God, but their lifestyle is contrary to the will of God. These people mistake their feelings of affection for God for true *agapē* love. Of course, *agapē* love can have feelings attached to it, and the ideal situation occurs when the loving thing to do also is what we want to do.

*Phileō*, which is translated as “love” in many English versions, is different from *agapaō* love (*philos* is the noun form (#5384 φίλος), and *phileō*, (#5368 φιλέω) is the verb form of the root word.) *Phileō* means “to have a special interest in someone or something, frequently with focus on close association; have affection for, like, consider someone a friend.”[[80]](#footnote-13274) It would probably be helpful if *phileō* were never translated “love” in the New Testament because it refers to a strong liking or a strong friendship.

[For more on the Greek concept of love and the difference between *agapē* and *phileō* see commentary on John 21:15.]

**“sounding bronze.”** The Greek is *chalkos ēchōn* (χαλκὸς ἠχῶν), which is literally something like “bronze ringing,” “bronze sounding out,” or “echoing bronze.” Its reference to bronze was an appropriate metaphor to use in the Epistle to the Corinthians because Corinth was famous for its bronze. Nevertheless, it is an unclear phrase to us now, because it does not clearly refer to any instrument we know of. Because of that, a number of different interpretations have been set forth to explain it. One is that trumpets and horns were made of bronze or brass in the Roman world, so it could refer to a “sounding brass” [horn]. The horn would make a loud noise, but often just for show.

Perhaps the more accurate explanation of *chalkos ēchōn* is that it refers to the resonating jars that were set in niches at the theaters. These large bronze jars would vibrate with the sound of the actor’s voices and help to amplify them. Corinth had resonating jars, but in the second century BC, they were sold to raise money for public use. We do not know if they were replaced, but in any case, Paul and his audience would have known about them. The jars amplified the voices of actors who were just “playing a part,” so the resonating jars would be an appropriate metaphor for speaking in tongues—or doing anything else for that matter—without love.

Vitruvius Pollio was a military engineer under Augustus and knew Julius Caesar. He wrote *On Architecture* sometime before 27 BC It records some of his own experience and discoveries, as well as some earlier discoveries in architecture and engineering. He wrote:

…bronze vases are to be made in mathematical ratios corresponding to the size of the theatre. They are to be so made that, when they are touched, they can make a sound from one to another of a fourth, a fifth and so on to the second octave. Then compartments are made among the seats of the theatre, and the vases are to be so placed that they do not touch the wall, and have an empty space around them and above. They are to be placed upside down. On the side looking toward the stage, they are to have wedges put under them not less than half a foot high. Against these cavities openings are to be left in the faces of the lower steps two feet long and a half a foot high….

7. Someone will say, perhaps, that many theatres are built every year in Rome without taking any account of these matters. He will be mistaken in this. All public wooden theatres have several wooden floors and naturally resound. We can observe this also from those who sing to the zither, who when they wish to sing with a louder tone, turn to the wooden scenery, and, with this help, gain resonance for their voice. But when theatres are built of solids, that is of the rubble walling, stone or marble which cannot resound, the use of bronze vases is to be followed.

8. But if you ask in what theatre this is done, we cannot show any at Rome, but we must turn to the regions of Italy, and to many Greek cities. We find a precedent in Lucius Mummius who destroyed the theatre at Corinth, and transported these bronze vessels to Rome, and dedicated them, from the spoils, to the temple of Luna. Further, many clever architects, who in towns of moderate size have built theatres, have chosen, for cheapness’ sake, earthenware vessels with similar sounds, and arranging them in this way have produced very useful effects.[[81]](#footnote-17933)

People who act without love are like human-sized hollow jars that make a noise but do not actually accomplish anything important to God. Love is truly “Christianity 101,” and it is imperative that we think, speak, and act in love.

**“clanging cymbal.”** The word “clanging” is onomatopoetic. “*Alalazon*” was used of a wail or a battle cry. Although there were pagan cults that used cymbals, the use in this verse is not necessarily an allusion to that kind of use. Cymbals were also used as musical instruments. The obvious point that Paul is making is that speaking in tongues without love is just like a clanging symbol—there is a lot of noise but no actual lasting godly effect.

1Co 13:2

**“sacred secret.”** We translate the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *mustērion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm.

[For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

1Co 13:3

**“if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*.”** This is hypothetical, it is not something that actually happened in Paul’s culture. No one gave all their possessions away. Also, “the poor” is not in the Greek text, nor is any object. The versions handle the sentence without the object in various ways, including “if I give away all my possessions.” Other versions supply the object with “the needy,” “others,” and “to charity,” but many versions follow the tradition of the King James Bible and have “the poor,” which fits the culture well.

**“if I give my body to be burned.”** Like the illustration of giving away all your possessions, this illustration of giving your body to be burned is hypothetical and meant to portray a huge sacrifice. In the culture Paul lived in, the Romans did not burn criminals to death, although fire and hot metal were used to torture criminals. Paul’s audience of Jews and Romans would have well understood animal sacrifices, and it is possible that Paul could have been in some way alluding to that, but the illustration really does not fit because the animal was killed first and humans were not burned that way. So it seems best to think of this as only a hypothetical illustration for impact. To make a huge sacrifice but have no profit from it would surely catch people’s attention.

**“it profits me nothing.”** The Bible is not saying that good works are not important, because they are. But good works must be done from the right motivation, which is love. A person can do good works like the Pharisees, who missed the point of the works and thought it was the works that made them righteous. Works never make a person righteous or acceptable to God. God looks on the heart. Christ taught that a good tree produces good fruit, and if the heart is right—godly and good—there will be good works.

1Co 13:4

**“love.”** The Greek is *agapē* (#26 ἀγάπη), and it refers to the love of God. See commentary on 1 Corinthians 13:1, or for a more detailed explanation of love and the difference between *agapē* and *phileō* see commentary on John 21:15. We love God and Christ by keeping the commandments and obeying them (John 14:15, 21-24).

**“kind.”** It is the kindness of God that leads people to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

1Co 13:7

**“bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”** This verse is written in a way that presses believers to stretch what they can do and rely on God. Too many people give up on themselves and others far too soon. Yet the very scope of Scripture shows us that the verse is hyperbolic and overstated. God Himself does not bear “all” things, believe “all” things, hope “all” things, and endure “all” things.

“Bears all things” is not about carrying a load that someone has dumped on us and we hold it up and carry it due to love. The word “bear” here is much closer to “endures” or even “suffers.” The believer taps into God’s strength to endure a lot of suffering. God bears and endures a lot, year after year, century after century, but He has limits. Examples of that abound. He put up with mankind’s sin until it got so bad that He regretted He had made mankind (Gen. 6:6), then He caused the Flood. He put up with King Saul’s disobedience but finally tore the kingdom away from him (1 Sam. 15:23-26). He bore with Israel’s idolatry for centuries, but finally decided to divorce her and send her away (Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8; cf. 2 Kings 17:1-23). The believer is challenged to act like God, to bear on and on with the sins and shortcomings of others, but sometimes there is an end to that bearing, and it is always a heart-wrenching time of much reflection and prayer to finally have to say, “No more.” We pray and hope that it does not come to that end.

God “believes all things” in the sense that He believes the believable and is always open to dishonest people changing and becoming upright in mind and heart. He asks us to do the same. He does not expect us to believe people who have proven themselves to be liars or deceitful, that would be sheer foolishness. But He does expect us to enter into relationships and situations with a positive attitude rather than a suspicious one. That does not mean we are not wise, because God’s children are to be wise, but there is a world of difference between wisdom and suspicion. We work to believe people and believe the best about people. We must keep in mind that it is always better to be wronged than to wrong another. No one has ever lost anything doing the work of God that he or she won’t be repaid for many times over.

Love hopes all things in the sense that it does not give up hoping until all hope is truly gone. There are times in life when things go wrong or relationships dissolve, but love keeps on hoping that there will be changes for the better. But the basis for truly godly hope is not just natural optimism but rather the grace of God and God’s loving action in the world. God is always working behind the scenes for godly success—a success we can hope for.

1Co 13:8

**“Love never ends.”** There are quite a few translations that translate this phrase, “Love never fails” (KJV, NASB, NIV, NKJV). Although this is certainly a lexical possibility for *piptō* (#4098, πιπτω) which most often means “to fall” or “be destroyed,” that translation does not provide the right nuance of the word in this context, and it can lead to some potential misunderstandings. Perhaps the first problem with using “never fails” is that love does fail quite often. There are countless times when we love others or when God loves us, and the desired result or outcome that should happen does not occur. A clear illustration of this is when Jesus heals the 10 lepers in Luke 17:11-19, only one returns to thank Jesus. Clearly, this level of love should have produced a more thankful response from the other nine, but it did not. This is a byproduct of free will. If God has given us free will, which he has, then we should expect that love sometimes will not be reciprocated because people have the choice to accept or reject our love.

In this context, the proper nuance is captured using “love never ends.” Paul is discussing how these other manifestations of the spirit (knowledge, prophecy, and tongues) will cease or be done away, but he does this in contrast to love, which remains (1 Cor. 13:13) and will never end. The contrast being made is not that love never fails but that manifestations do fail; rather, the contrast Paul makes is that love never ends but manifestations of the spirit do end at some point.

It is also worth noting that there is a pretty significant textual variant in this verse with many manuscripts reading *ekpiptō* (#1601, ἐκπίπτω) which “retains the vividness of falling off, like a leaf which has decayed and lost its life (cf. Job 13:25, LXX; Jas 1:11; 1 Pet 1:24).”[[82]](#footnote-13809) Although this textual variant is likely not original to the text, it does capture the nuance more closely that Paul has in mind. It is not that love never fails, but that it will never fall off or fall away like the other manifestations of the spirit given in 1 Corinthians 13:8.

**“where *there is a message of* knowledge.”** The reference in the context, which mentions the manifestations of prophecy and speaking in tongues, is to “a message of knowledge.” Paul would assume that since the OT prophecies said that “the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh like the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9), and he will go on to say that we will know even as we are known, that “knowledge” will not pass away, but the manifestation of “a message of knowledge” (1 Cor. 12:8) will pass away. This is so compelling, and we have seen such confusion regarding it, that the REV adds the italics to clear up the point.

1Co 13:10

**“the Completeness.”** The exact Greek phrase is *to teleion* (τὸ τέλειον #5046), literally in this context, “the complete,” (or perhaps, “the perfect,” or even, “the end”). “Complete” is a substantive, an adjective being used as a noun, so “the completeness,” or even “that which is complete,” is a good translation. The context lets us know what “the complete” is, the completion of all things. The real “Completion,” or “time of perfection” (NLT), is when the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, the curse on the earth is finally removed, and God lives with mankind and sees people face to face (Rev. 21:1-4; 22:3).

[For more on substantives, see commentary on Matt. 5:37.]

When we study the vocabulary of this verse, it seems clear that it was written very purposely in a way that lends itself to a partial fulfillment and an ultimate fulfillment. “the Completeness,” or “the time of perfection,” certainly in part refers to Rapture for Christians when they get a new body like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21). Then there is a more complete “time of perfection” at the Second Coming. At that time the Old Testament believers are raised from the dead, the earth and animal nature are restored, and Christ rules from Jerusalem. After the Millennial Kingdom, the final and ultimate “time of perfection” comes when the New Jerusalem comes to earth and there is a new heaven and new earth.

Many conservative theologians see the time of completeness as the Second Coming of Christ, the Parousia, which involves the return of Christ and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom on earth. It is true when that time comes there will be a perfection that does not exist now—the air and water on earth will be restored, animal nature will change, and there will be no war or hunger. Also, the believers who are raised from the dead at the First Resurrection will have new bodies like Christ’s body, and since Christ is ruling in Jerusalem, we will see him face to face.

[For more on the Messianic Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Given the perfection in the Millennial Kingdom, are there reasons why it would not be the time of perfection spoken of here in 1 Corinthians 13:10? There are several reasons. Although many things will change in the Millennial Kingdom, many will not. There will still be death (Isa. 65:20-22), the earth will still be subject to when it was cursed (Gen. 3:14-18; Rev. 22:3), and Christ will rule with a rod of iron (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 19:15). Also, although 1 Corinthians 13:8 says that prophecy will cease when the time of perfection comes, it is clear that prophecy will not cease in the Millennial Kingdom. Many prophets wrote that the spirit would be poured out from heaven during that time (Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28, 29), and Joel wrote that “your sons and daughters will prophesy” (Joel 2:28). So if prophecy stops when the time of perfection comes, but people are still prophesying during the Millennial Kingdom, then the time of perfection has not yet come.

Although it is generally assumed that the phrase “face to face” is speaking of Christ, that is only an assumption. Actually, the phrase is referring to seeing God face to face. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve walked and talked with God Himself, and he took on a human form to fellowship with them. Since the Fall, although God has taken on human form and appeared to a few people such as Abraham, Moses, and the apostle John, most people never see God. However, that will change in the Everlasting Kingdom when the New Jerusalem comes to earth. At that time “The tabernacle [dwelling, CSB, ESV] of God is with man, and he will live with them” (Rev. 21:3). God is “with” us now, so when Revelation 21:3 says that God will be with us and live with us, it is referring to a restoration of the relationship that Adam and Eve had with God, and that quality of relationship will not be restored until the Everlasting Kingdom is established after the Millennial Kingdom comes to an end.

[For more on God appearing in human form, see commentary on Acts 7:55.]

Many theologians have argued that “the completeness” is the Parousia, at the end of this age. We believe, as we have said above, that “the completeness” refers to the Everlasting Kingdom, not the Parousia and the Millennial Kingdom. Nevertheless, in light of the fact that these theologians were arguing that the “Completeness” was a time of perfection and not the completion of the canon or any other such thing, it is appropriate to quote from a few of them. Joseph H. Thayer, in his entry on *teleios*, says that 1 Corinthians 13:10 refers to “the perfect state of all things, to be ushered in by the return of Christ from heaven.”[[83]](#footnote-24505) R. C. H. Lenski states: “The aorist subjunctive ἔλθῃ [“comes”], marks the great future moment when the goal shall be reached, namely the Parousia of Christ. Then this entire state of imperfection which is now evident upon the earth will be abolished, for it will have served its purpose. An entirely new way of apprehending, of seeing, and of knowing shall take its place.”[[84]](#footnote-29922)

Gordon Fee writes: “…the term ‘the perfect’ has to do with the Eschaton itself [the end of this Age], not some form of ‘perfection’ in the present age. …At the coming of Christ, the final purpose of God’s saving work in Christ will have been reached; at that point, those gifts now necessary for the building up of the church in the present age will disappear, because ‘the complete’ will have come.”[[85]](#footnote-18561) Ray Collins, a Roman Catholic theologian, translates *to teleion* as “the end.” He writes: “In English, *to teleion* can be rendered as ‘the end’ or ‘the perfect.’ Given the eschatological [future] thrust of the pericope, it seems useful to render the Greek by ‘the end.’ It is clearly a reference to the eschaton.”[[86]](#footnote-13381)

Some theologians have argued that “the complete” has already happened, and that it was fulfilled when the Word of God was fully written. That, of course, would mean that speaking in tongues and prophecy had passed away, which is usually the main reason for drawing that conclusion in the first place. Theologians who do not see, or do not believe in, speaking in tongues, but clearly see it in Acts, had to have a reason to say that it no longer exists, and 1 Corinthians 13:10 was the closest thing they could find to a verse that said that. But to conclude that speaking in tongues has passed away because this passage says “the complete” has come, and then to make “the complete” the complete canon of Scripture, is to misunderstand the whole section of Scripture.

Even a straightforward reading of the passage in the King James Version says that “now” we know in part, but when “that which is perfect is come, that which is in part will be done away.” Can anyone really say that our knowledge, which is now “in part,” has been done away? We still know “in part”! Furthermore, we still see as if in a mirror, darkly (i.e., an indistinct image). Can anyone say we see clearly yet? Also, the Bible says “then” we will know “face to face.” We will only know both God and Christ face to face in the Everlasting Kingdom.

Paul wrote the book of 1 Corinthians, in about AD 53, long before the canon of Scripture was finished when John wrote Revelation, which was likely close to AD 90. Think about what it would mean if Paul wrote in Corinthians that speaking in tongues would pass away when the canon of Scripture was complete. It would mean that, in essence, God told Paul, “In about 40 years, speaking in tongues, prophecy, and knowledge will pass away.” What would have been the point of God telling people what would go away in 40 years? Would it have made people more zealous to speak in tongues and prophesy while they still could, before those things stopped? No, it would not have.

In his commentary on First Corinthians, Richard Hays writes that some groups of Christians interpret 1 Cor. 13:10 to mean that the charismatic gifts in the church cease to operate after the New Testament canon is completed, and he says, “This interpretation is simply nonsense. There is nothing in the passage about ‘the New Testament’ or about a future revocation of revelatory gifts in the Church. …Only ‘then,’ in the consummation of God’s kingdom, will we know fully—as God knows us already in the present.”[[87]](#footnote-11292)

Besides the Scriptural argument that 1 Corinthians 13:10 does not say that speaking in tongues has passed away—and no other verse does either—there are other important things to consider on the subject. For one thing, speaking in tongues is a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-10). It is not a separate “gift” (the Greek text never calls speaking in tongues a “gift,” see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:1). Speaking in tongues is one of the nine ways the spirit of God in us is revealed. If speaking in tongues is gone, we would normally think the other manifestations of the spirit would be gone too, which would mean things like the manifestation of trust (“faith”), word of knowledge, and miracles had passed away too. If the spirit of God born in Christians does not change, how can one manifestation of it disappear, but the others remain the same? That does not make sense.

Also, we should ask ourselves, “Why would God take speaking in tongues from the Church?” The benefits and blessings of speaking in tongues are as necessary today as they were 2,000 years ago. The Bible gives us many benefits of speaking in tongues: it is prayer in the spirit; it is giving thanks to God; it is proof of one’s salvation; it builds a person’s trust; and more. Surely these things are as necessary in the Church today as they were in the first century, so why would God take tongues from the Church? We think it is clear He did not.

[For the benefits of speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:5.]

There are Christians who do not believe in, or do not want to believe in, speaking in tongues. Sometimes that is because that particular Christian has never seen speaking in tongues, and sometimes it’s because the person has seen people speak in tongues, but do it improperly. Speaking in tongues is under the control of the one speaking, which is why God tells us where and how to do it (this is in contrast to the teaching that God is in control of speaking in tongues—but He is not). Many people, often in Pentecostal churches, ignore the way the Bible says to use speaking in tongues and so misuse it. For example, the Bible says that not everyone in the church should speak in tongues at the same time; and it also says that if someone does speak in tongues publicly, it must be interpreted. The misuse of tongues has alienated some people to such an extent they think that what they saw cannot be from God.

Thankfully, there is a time of perfection coming when we will be face to face with God and Christ and there will not be any confusion on these subjects.

1Co 13:11

**“When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I thought as a child.”** This is an appropriate addition to 1 Corinthians 13, because the love of God and others is beyond children. They are naturally self-centered and think of themselves. In the process of growing and maturing, they learn to think of others. The Christian pushes that knowledge far beyond where the unsaved person goes. The unsaved person may think a little about others, but they are still the center of their universe. The mature saved person learns to move themselves out of the center of their universe and put God and others there.

1Co 13:12

**“in a mirror.”** This was an apt illustration in Corinthians because the city of Corinth was known for its mirrors.[[88]](#footnote-16710)

**“darkly.”** The Greek word translated as “darkly” is *ainigma* (#135 αἴνιγμα), from which we get the English word enigma. “Darkly” is one of the possible meanings of *ainigma*, but an inexact one. The lexical idea of *ainigma* is “something that is expressed in puzzling fashion,” thus, a riddle.[[89]](#footnote-32707) The English versions vary greatly, trying to catch that meaning and make it fit with an ancient mirror made of bronze. Thus, they have: “obscurely” (CJB, LSV, YLT), “indistinctly” (NAB), “dimly” (ESV, LSB), “mere riddles” (NJB), “imperfectly, like puzzling reflections” (NLT).

The clear glass mirrors that we use today were not invented until 1835, although there were better mirrors than bronze ones earlier than that. In biblical times and right up through the times of the Roman Empire, mirrors were made of bronze. The bronze was highly polished so that people could see a kind of reflection of themselves, but it was not a very good reflection. This is why 1 Corinthians 13:12 says that people see in a mirror, but “darkly,” like looking at a riddle: “What is this that I am seeing?” The image in a bronze mirror was both dark and indistinct. This also explains why Exodus 38:8 says that the mirrors of the ladies were melted down and made into the bronze basin that held the water for washing in the Tabernacle. The bronze mirrors were melted and made into the bronze basin.

**“know fully…fully known.”** This verse contrasts what we know today with what we will know in the future. Part of the way it does that is by contrasting two Greek words for “know”: *ginōskō* (#1097 γινώσκω; “to know, understand, come to know”) and *epiginōskō* (#1921 ἐπιγινώσκω), which is *ginōskō* with the preposition *epi* added as a prefix. In this context, *epi* is used as an intensifier, so *epiginōskō* means “to know fully, thoroughly; to come to fully know.” R. C. H. Lenski writes: “The addition of the preposition to the simple verb makes the sense intensive and perfective, a knowing which penetrates completely.”[[90]](#footnote-24060)

The verse reads: “Now I know (*ginōskō*) *only* in part, but then I will know fully (*epiginōskō*) just as also I was fully known (*epiginōskō*). Today we “know” only a little, but in the future we will fully know. Many people ask if we will remember this life after we are in the next life, and the answer is yes. We will have new bodies like Christ (Phil. 3:21), and just like Jesus remembered his friends (and enemies) when he was resurrected in his new body, so too we will remember the things of this life after we are resurrected from the dead (or raptured into the air).

1Co 13:13

**“love.”** The Greek is *agapē* (#26 ἀγάπη), and it refers to the love of God. See commentary on 1 Corinthians 13:1, or for a more detailed explanation of love and the difference between *agapē* and *phileō* see commentary on John 21:15.

**1 Corinthians Chapter 14**

1Co 14:1

**“Diligently pursue.”** The Greek word is *diōkō* (#1377 διώκω), “to follow with haste, and presumably with intensity of effort;”[[91]](#footnote-11309) to move rapidly and decisively toward an objective.[[92]](#footnote-18695) In light of the definition and context, we felt “diligently pursue” was better than just “pursue.”

**“the things of the spirit.”** The Greek word translated by the phrase “things of the spirit” is *pneumatikos* (#4152 πνευματικός), which is an adjective and thus modifies a noun that in this case is implied rather than specifically stated. The phrase “the things of the spirit” is a good translation of the Greek and is used in some translations and commentaries (cf. CJB, YLT, Gordon Fee.[[93]](#footnote-14697) Also see “spiritual [manifestations]” DBY; “the spiritual endowments” Goodspeed; “the special abilities the Spirit gives” NLT).

The word “gifts” is not specifically in the text, although it is supplied in many versions based on the context of the passage, which reaches back to chapter 12 where Paul began to discuss the diversity of the gifts that are given by God that exist within the body of Christ. There are “gifts,” “ministries,” and “energizings” that are distributed to individuals and there are the “manifestations of the [gift of holy] spirit,” which are given to each Christian in order to benefit God’s people (1 Cor. 12:4-7)

It needs to be noted that there is a distinction in Scripture between the “gift” of holy spirit that is given to believers at the time they are born again (Eph. 1:13-14; Acts 2:38) and the “manifestation” of that gift of holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-10) which are also “gifts” in and of themselves (1 Cor. 12:31). The manifestations of the “gift of holy spirit” are referred to as gifts because they are graciously given by God, and are thus properly called “gifts.”

Admittedly, it can be somewhat confusing to have the singular “gift” of holy spirit and then “gifts” (also called “manifestations”) that flow from the gift of holy spirit, but that is the way the Bible presents it. Biblically, God and the Lord Jesus give the “gift of holy spirit” to each believer at the time they get born again, and then God works in people to “manifest” the spirit, that is, to outwardly show its power—God energizes the spirit in a person and they choose to bring forth a manifestation (i.e., evidencing). Scripture often refers to one thing by two or more different names, calling people, places, and events by different names. So we should not think it unusual for the “manifestations” of the gift of holy spirit to also be referred to as “gifts,” especially because it is God Himself who graciously energizes them.

When we look at the list of the “manifestations” of the gift of holy spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, (a message of wisdom, a message of knowledge, trust, gifts of healings, energizings of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues), we can see that although to handle them properly the believer cannot be passive but must act, on the other hand, the spirit must be energized by God, and as such, the “manifestation” is a “gift” from God. Therefore, each “manifestation” is a “gift” in and of itself.

It is common in English Bible translations to read “gifts” in a number of places (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:1; 13:2; 14:1, 12, 37). While the Greek word translated “gift,” *charisma* (#5486 χάρισμα), is used in 1 Corinthians 12 only in 1 Cor. 12:4 and 1 Cor. 12:31, the context is carried throughout chapters 12-14 dealing with the activity of the spirit, which Paul calls “gifts.” One place we see this is at the end of 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul exhorts the Corinthian believers to “earnestly desire the greater gifts” (1 Cor. 12:31). But what “gifts” is he referring to? We can see from the context that he has in mind the list in 1 Cor. 12:8-10 because in 1 Cor. 14:1, when Paul picks his argument back up from 1 Cor. 12:31, he uses the same Greek phrase but instead of saying “earnestly desire the greater gifts (*charismata*),” he says “earnestly desire spiritual (*pneumatikos*),” and then adds, “especially that you prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:1). This parallel phrasing is an indication that the “spiritual” (which is plural in the Greek text) that Paul has in mind are the spiritual things referred to as gifts (plural) that he was talking about in chapter 12. And because of the apparent confusion about speaking in tongues and the misuse of it that was happening in Corinth, Paul tells the Corinthian believers that they should desire spiritual gifts, but especially prophecy rather than speaking in tongues. He goes on in the following verses in chapter 14 to support the reason for preferring prophecy over speaking in tongues when in a church gathering.

Another place in Scripture that confirms that Paul is using the word “gift” to describe what is also referred to as a “manifestation” of the gift of holy spirit is in Romans 12. Paul specifically says that believers have received “gifts,” and then the first example he gives is “prophecy.” Romans 12:6-8 says, “But since we have gifts that differ according to the grace that was given to us, let us use them accordingly. If it is prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our trust; 7if it is serving, let us give ourselves to our serving; if it is teaching, to teaching; 8if it is encouragement, to encouragement; the one who gives, do it with liberality; the one who leads, do it with diligence; the one who shows mercy, do it with cheerfulness.” Prophecy is the only gift in the list in Romans 12 that overlaps with the list in 1 Corinthians 12, but what it reveals is that prophecy is, in fact, a gift.

When discussing the gifts of the spirit, it is very important to understand that some of them are given individually to members of the Church, while some are given to every member of the Church. For example, Romans 12:7 mentions the gift of serving and the gift of teaching. These are both gifts that some people have but other people do not have. In contrast, the gifts that are also referred to as “manifestations” (1 Cor. 12:8-10) can all be energized by God differently in believers (see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:8). It is because these gifts are manifestations of the spirit that is given to every believer (1 Cor. 12:7). Accordingly, Paul can then speak about desiring for everyone to speak in tongues and prophesy (1 Cor. 14:5, 23-24). The gifts of the spirit are all possible for every believer as God energizes the spirit in them so that a believer can have “trust” (1 Cor. 12:9), get revelation knowledge and wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8), and discern spirits (1 Cor. 12:10).

It is both sad and harmful to Christianity that most churches do not embrace the “power” that has been given to each believer (Acts 1:8). For example, many churches teach that things like speaking in tongues and prophecy died out with the original apostles and so do not endorse or promote those manifestations of holy spirit (but most of those same churches would say that God can give revelation knowledge to people even though “a message of knowledge” is in the same list as speaking in tongues and prophecy, 1 Cor. 12:8-10). Many other churches teach that speaking in tongues is still available, but teach that only some Christians have the “gift” of tongues in a special way, and others do not have it. Rather than understanding that each energizing of the spirit is both a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit and a “gift” in and of itself that God gives by His grace, they make the manifestation itself a gift that the person possesses. But God energizes His spirit in believers in many different ways to carry out and accomplish what He wills for them to do.

Many Christians are hoping that one day God will give them a “gift,” such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, or some other gift. A believer may even plead with and beg God and end up disappointed with Him for not answering their prayers. Christians need to know that they have received the “gift of holy spirit,” and as Jesus said, when the believer gets that gift, he or she gets spiritual power (Acts 1:8). God energizes His spirit as it pleases Him and according to His will, but the will of the believer is also required for the energizing to be effectual and produce a manifestation that will benefit others. If God energizes holy spirit in a believer to manifest a spiritual, grace-filled “gift” that he is giving, then it is the choice of the believer to act or not according to that energizing. But fear, social pressure, ignorance, and a whole host of other factors can prevent a believer from demonstrating the gift that God is giving to them at that moment and for a specific purpose.

Lastly, it is important to remember that in many English translations, such as the ASV, KJV, NASB, and REV, when a word is in italics, it means that there is no word in the original text (Hebrew or Greek) that directly corresponds to the italicized word. The italicized word or words are added in an attempt to clarify what a verse is saying. In contrast, in today’s English writing, words are sometimes italicized for emphasis. A reader must keep in mind that versions that use italics to identify supplied words are not emphasizing them but simply marking them out as being added to the original text to help clarify the meaning of the passage.

**“prophesy.”** The Greek word is *prophēteuō* (#4395 προφητεύω), the verb “prophesy.” Although it is in a *hina* clause (a clause containing the Greek preposition *hina*, which forces the phrase to be in the subjunctive mood), in this context, the *hina* is not “in order that” but rather just a statement; “that you prophesy,”[[94]](#footnote-29357) or even just “to prophesy.”[[95]](#footnote-31553)

1Co 14:2

**“does not speak to people.”** The Greek masculine plural noun *anthrōpos*, here translated as “people,” was often used with an inclusive meaning, and thus included both men and women, and that is the case here, so “people” is an accurate translation. Here in 1 Corinthians 14:2-3, the Bible helps us understand the manifestations of the gift of holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-10). A person who speaks in tongues speaks to God, not to people, and so the interpretation of tongues is also to God (praise and prayer to God), while prophecy is to people (see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:10).

[For more information on the Holy Spirit and the gift of holy spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“for no one understands.”** The phrase, “for no one understands,” is an accurate translation of the Greek text. The point the verse is making is that when someone speaks in tongues, he does not understand what he is saying. Many versions add the word “him” at the end of the phrase, saying “for no one understands **him**.” Adding the word “him” when it is not in the Greek text changes God’s intended meaning, and causes the verse to be in error. There are times, such as in Acts 2 and as has been reported in Christian history, when someone in the audience will understand what another person says in tongues. Thus, if 1 Corinthians 14:2 is made to say that no one listening to someone speaking in tongues will ever understand what the speaker is saying, it creates a contradiction in Scripture and confuses people who want to be able to read and understand the Bible. 1 Corinthians 14:2 is very clear: when it comes to an individual speaking in tongues, “no one understands,” that is, no one will understand what he himself is saying. This is also what 1 Corinthians 14:14 says: “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.”

**“by the spirit.”** The Greek text simply has “*pneuma*” (spirit) in the dative case, *pneumati* (πνεύματι), which in this case would mean, “by spirit” or more fully, “by way of the spirit.” God, or the Lord Jesus Christ, gives the divine language (speaking in tongues) to the person syllable by syllable, word by word. The person speaks out what the Lord gives him as it comes to him from the Lord, speaking word by word. The individual speaking does not know the language; it is “tongues” to him. When the Lord gives a message in tongues or prophecy, the message comes from the Lord and “by the spirit,” that is, by the gift of holy spirit that is born in the person. At the Last Supper, Jesus taught about getting information via the gift of holy spirit, and he said, “it will not speak on its own, but whatever it hears, it will speak” (John 16:13). That is very true. The gift of holy spirit is not a “person” or a “being,” it is spirit born inside the person that allows the person— who is a new spiritual being—to communicate fluidly with God and the Lord Jesus. The gift of holy spirit does not, indeed cannot, speak on its own. What it “hears” (or “receives”) from God or the Lord Jesus it then “speaks” (“passes on”) to the person.

**“sacred secrets.”** The Greek word translated “sacred secrets” is *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον). *Mustērion* actually refers to a secret in the religious or sacred realm. The reader must keep in mind that what were truly “sacred secrets” to the early Church are almost common knowledge today. For example, the New Birth is commonly spoken of today, but in the early church it was a new revelation from the Lord, so it was a sacred secret then, although people might not call it a “secret” today since it has been in the New Testament for some 2,000 years. Many of the things that were newly revealed to the early Church, such as the believer’s imputed righteousness, the Rapture, the Millennial Kingdom, and speaking in tongues itself, were “sacred secrets” to the early Church, but are widely known today.

[For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

1Co 14:3

**“speaks to people.”** The word “people” is the masculine plural form of the Greek word *anthrōpos* (#444 ἄνθρωπος), which is the word for “men,” but in the Greek world, it was also used to refer collectively to men and women. In this verse, *anthrōpos* refers to both men and women, which is why so many modern versions use “people” instead of “men” (CJB, ESV, HCSB, NET, NIV, NRSV, REV). Older versions of the Bible, such as the King James Version (1611), or the American Standard Version (1901), or more formal versions of the Bible such as the NASB, use “men,” but even in those versions, “men” is known to refer to men and women.

Prophecy is one of the important ways God and the Lord Jesus communicate to mankind, which is why the Bible says to earnestly desire spiritual things, but especially prophecy. Every Christian should be open to hearing from God via prophecy, and also able to “test” the prophecies, as 1 John 4:1 says, to know whether they are from God, the Adversary (1 Kings 22:23), or just people’s own thoughts (Jer. 23:16, 26; Ezek. 13:17).

Some Christians have used 1 Corinthians 14:2-3 to teach that there must be at least three people present to manifest prophecy or the interpretation of tongues. They claim this verse limits us to speak to “men” (plural), and that God does not intend prophecy or interpretation to be done with only one other individual present. But that teaching is not correct. The word “men” can be used in two different ways: it can be used in a numeric sense (i.e., one versus more than one) or in a generic sense (i.e., “men” or “people” versus animals or other “kinds”). In 1 Corinthians 14:2-3, the word *anthrōpos* is generic: the verse means that speaking in tongues is not to “men” (humankind) but to God (God-kind). In contrast, prophecy is to “men” (people, humankind) and not to God (“God-kind” if you will). Interpretation of tongues, as an interpretation of what was spoken in tongues, is “to” God, but because it is in the language of the body of people present, edifies the people. So we see that in 1 Corinthians 14:2-3, the word “men” is generic (mankind) and does not refer to the number of people present.

We can prophesy or interpret if there is anyone to listen, even just one person. We can see this is correct by examining Scripture. We do not have any records in the Bible of anyone speaking in tongues and then interpreting, but we do have records of people prophesying. If people are right who teach that the word “men” in 1 Corinthians 14:2-3 means more than one man, it would then follow that no one who gave a genuine prophecy ever gave it to just one man. But when we examine prophecy, we discover that prophecy was often spoken to just one man both before and after the Day of Pentecost. For example, Samuel gave Saul a prophecy with no one else around (1 Sam. 9:26-10:8), and Nathan gave David a prophecy—in that case, others were there, but the prophecy was only to David. Similarly, in Acts 8:18-24, Peter gave a prophecy to Simon, and in Acts 21:10-11, Agabus gave a prophecy to Paul. So prophecy can definitely be to just one “man,” and it would then follow that interpretation could be to one person also.

Furthermore, Jesus said that if “two or three” people were present, he would be there with them (Matt. 18:20). One of the powerful ways we can experience the presence of the Lord is by manifesting holy spirit: speaking in tongues, interpreting the tongue, and prophecy. It does not make sense that the Lord is there if there are “two” or “three,” but we must have three before we can manifest interpretation or prophecy.

It is not the point of 1 Corinthians 14:1-3 to limit our manifesting the gift of holy spirit to only when we have a group of at least three people. Rather, 1 Corinthians 14:1-3 makes the point that when we speak in tongues it is “to God” and not “to humankind,” and when we prophesy it is “to humankind,” not “to God.”

[For more on the manifestations of holy spirit, see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:7; and for more information on any specific manifestation of holy spirit, see the commentaries on 1 Cor. 12:8, 9, 10. For more information on revelation from God or the Lord Jesus, see commentary on Gal. 1:12.]

**“*for* building *them* up, and encouragement, and comfort.”** Each of these is equally important, a point that God makes clear through the figure of speech polysyndeton, or “many ands.” Putting an “and” before each noun emphasizes each one. Proper grammar would have only one “and,” after “encouragement.” The phrase “building up” is translated from the noun *oikodomē* (#3619 οἰκοδομή) (see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:5). There are rare occasions when a prophet (usually a person with the ministry of a prophet) gives a message that is not comforting or does not seem comforting. This happened a lot in the Old Testament (e.g., 1 Kings 21:19; Jon. 3:4). However, when we dig deeper into those prophecies, we see that they are actually a type of warning instead of a prophecy of unchangeable impending doom. Ahab repented and the prophecy changed (1 Kings 21:27-29) and the Ninevites repented and the prophecy changed (Jon. 3:5-10). In fact, if we are going to understand prophecy biblically, both prophecies of blessings and prophecies that seem to speak of doom are almost always dependent on the way the person or people respond to the prophecy (cf. Jer. 18:1-10).

[See Word Study: “Syndeton.”]

1Co 14:4

**“while.”** We have translated the *de* as “while.”[[96]](#footnote-28300) The *de* is a soft contrast, and the fact is that both tongues and prophecy edify. So *while* the tongues speaker edifies himself, the prophesier edifies the church.

**“builds up the church.”** The phrase “builds up” is translated from the Greek verb *oikodomeō* (#3618 οἰκοδομέω). Both the noun *oikodomē* and the verb *oikodomeō* are used in 1 Cor. 14:3-5, and the Church is built up in many different ways (see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:5).

1Co 14:5

**“I want.”** The Greek word is *thelō* (#2309 θέλω), and in this context, it means “want or desire.” It does not mean “wish” in the sense of “a desire for something generally unattainable,” as “I wish I had a billion dollars.” It can mean “wish” if “wish” is understood to mean “want” or “desire,” but since we generally use “wish” to mean a desire for something we generally cannot have or that is unlikely, “wish” is not a good translation here. Speaking in tongues is a manifestation of the spirit, and anyone who has the spirit, which means anyone who is saved, has the spiritual ability to speak in tongues. God never forces people to speak in tongues; we must operate the manifestation ourselves and speak. Thus, it takes personal desire and proper instruction to speak in tongues, which explains why God wants Christians to do it, but most do not. “Want” is a very good translation here, as seen in the RSV, ESV, etc., and “would like” is good too, as seen in the NIV and NRSV.

**“speak in tongues.”** Speaking in tongues is a manifestation of holy spirit that contributes greatly to the quality of our lives as Christians. Before we see what speaking in tongues is, it is helpful to examine five things it is not.

**Speaking in tongues is not:**

1. Although it is a gift from God, as all the manifestations of holy spirit are, speaking in tongues is not a “gift” in the sense that it is an additional gift apart from the gift of holy spirit. Tongues is a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit, so tongues is a “gift” from God in the sense that it is God who willingly energizes it in every Christian who speaks in tongues. Tongues is not like an equipping ministry (Eph. 4:11-12) that is given to one person but not another (i.e., one person is an apostle, another person is not). Speaking in tongues is one of the “manifestations” of the gift holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-10). A person who has the “gift” of holy spirit can operate the “manifestation” of speaking in tongues, which is why God can say he wants every Christian to speak in tongues.
2. It is not gibberish, babble, or a made-up language. Some languages sound strange to our ears, but the Word of God assures us that genuine speaking in tongues is indeed a language of men or angels.
3. It is not speaking a language you already know. When a person speaks in tongues, they do not know the language they are speaking. The Bible says, “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful” (1 Cor. 14:14, cf. 1 Cor. 14:2).
4. It is not designed for missionary work. The language people speak when they speak in tongues is not chosen by the person speaking; it is given by the Lord via the gift of holy spirit. The Bible gives many reasons Christians should speak in tongues, and missionary work is not one of them. Furthermore, there is no record in Scripture where anyone used speaking in tongues to do missionary work. That idea came from the early Pentecostal movement when God, apparently to show people that speaking in tongues was not gibberish, gave known languages to people as they spoke in tongues, just as he did on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:11). For example, when Agnes Ozman manifested speaking in tongues, she spoke in Chinese.[[97]](#footnote-18195) Upon hearing known foreign languages, people listening assumed speaking in tongues was for mission work.
5. Speaking in tongues is not “dead,” “gone,” or “passed away.” Some Christians believe that it was only for the early Church and is now gone, but that cannot be the case. Tongues is prayer in the spirit, is giving thanks well to God, is proof of one’s salvation, and more. Surely these things are as necessary in the Church today as they were in the first century. 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 says that speaking in tongues will pass away when “the Completeness comes,” and when we know even as we are known. That is still in the future, at a time when we will be with the Lord Jesus Christ, as verse 12 makes clear when it says we will be “face to face” with him. Furthermore, we will know as we are known only when the Lord comes, and until then we will continue to know “in part” (1 Cor. 13:12).

**Speaking in tongues is:** Let us now look at 15 different and important things about speaking in tongues.

1. Speaking in tongues is a Christian speaking a language that he or she does not understand, a language that has been given by the Lord Jesus Christ via the gift of holy spirit.
2. It is something God wants us to do. “Now I want all of you to speak in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:5). The late J. E. Styles, a Charismatic teacher who led many people into speaking in tongues during his ministry, wrote, “From our own experiences, and from the testimony of many others, both ministers and laymen, we are convinced that every Spirit-filled child of God should speak with tongues every day in his own private prayer life.”[[98]](#footnote-21799)
3. It is the absolute proof to a Christian that he is saved, born again, and guaranteed everlasting life. Speaking in tongues is supernatural, i.e., it is beyond man’s natural ability. It is a God-given ability made possible by the presence of holy spirit that is born inside each Christian. No non-Christian can speak in tongues. Because speaking in tongues is a manifestation of holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-10), the only people who can speak in tongues are those who have holy spirit, and every Christian was sealed with holy spirit when he believed (Eph. 1:13).
4. Speaking in tongues makes a person operate the most basic principle of the Christian walk, which is trusting and obeying the Word of our heavenly Father. God says to speak in tongues, but to do so a Christian must trust that what God says is true, and then he must walk out on that trust and obey what God says.
5. It is a witness of the resurrection of Christ to the believer, and also a sign to unbelievers (1 Cor. 14:22).
6. It is speaking a language of men or of angels (1 Cor. 13:1), which explains why there are so many tongues that are not known human languages.
7. It is speaking to God, not to men (1 Cor. 14:2).
8. It is speaking sacred secrets (the Greek word *mustērion* means “sacred secret,” not “mystery,” and it is translated “sacred secret” in *Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible*). It is a blessing and a privilege for Christians to be able to speak sacred secrets to God by speaking in tongues.
9. It is speaking the wonders of God (Acts 2:11). On the Day of Pentecost, the tongues the Lord gave the apostles to speak could be understood by the audience, and even the skeptics had to admit that the apostles were speaking the wonders of God.
10. It is praise to God (Acts 10:46; 1 Cor. 14:16, 17).
11. It is giving thanks to our Heavenly Father (1 Cor. 14:17).
12. It is prayer in the spirit (1 Cor. 14:14, 15). It is very important to realize that speaking in tongues is prayer in the spirit. Sometimes Christians call fervent or emotional prayer “prayer in the spirit,” but in the Bible, that phrase refers only to speaking in tongues.
13. It builds up the one speaking (1 Cor. 14:4; Jude 20). Speaking in tongues does not build up the understanding of the one speaking because the speaker does not understand what they are saying when they are speaking in tongues. Speaking in tongues builds up the one speaking in their trust of God and in their spiritual sensitivity because the words come from the Lord through the spirit of God in the person and then to the person’s mind. Thus, speaking in tongues is an act of trust that God will fulfill His promise and the words in tongues will enter the speaker’s mind and thus can be spoken.
14. It is under the speaker’s control. If the person does not “speak,” i.e., move their mouth, their tongue, and make the sounds, the person will not speak in tongues. A Christian speaking in tongues can start and stop when they want to. The speaker can speak loudly or softly; they can sing or shout in tongues. Since it is under the speaker’s control, it can be misused and operated incorrectly. This is why the Word has directions in 1 Corinthians 14 on how to speak in tongues correctly. For example, there is no profit in someone standing up in front of a group and speaking in tongues, because those listening will not understand the tongue and the speaker will be speaking “into the air” (1 Cor. 14:6-9). Similarly, if the whole church has gathered and everyone is speaking in tongues at the same time, if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in, they will probably say you are all out of your mind (1 Cor. 14:23). One thing we need to be aware of is that on rare occasions a person who is demonized (“possessed”) will be taken over by the demon and forced to speak in a language they do not understand (demons know angel languages). This is not speaking in tongues; the counterfeit can be recognized because it is never under the control of the speaker. (It should be noted that when a person becomes comfortable speaking in tongues, they can speak in tongues in their mind in the same way that we can hold a conversation with ourselves in our mind. We can “hear” the words in our head. But it is easier for beginners if they speak in tongues out loud.)
15. Speaking in tongues is primarily designed for one’s personal edification and use, but it is also to be utilized in a gathering of Christians by following it with its companion manifestation, the interpretation of tongues, so that the Church is edified by one’s praise to God. Speaking in tongues followed by the interpretation of tongues enables each believer to obey God’s exhortation to “…strive to excel in building up the church” (1 Cor. 14:12, ESV).

**How does a person speak in tongues?**

1. Remember that God would not ask you to do something you cannot do. He clearly says, “I want all of you to speak in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:5).
2. Act. Open your mouth and utilize the mechanics of speech, but do *not* speak English or any other language you know. What you will be speaking is whatever language the Lord chooses to give you. The only way to fail is to not speak. Do not wait for the Lord to give you a sentence. The syllables form as you speak them. The water did not become firm for Peter before he stepped on it, but as he stepped. It is the same with speaking in tongues.
3. Keep speaking even if it seems strange. You are not used to speaking words without understanding them, but that is what you have to do to speak in tongues. Practice makes it easier.
4. You may tend to repeat the same syllables or words over and over. Although that is speaking in tongues, it is not the developed language that you should desire. Remember that **you** are doing the speaking, so relax and let the Lord help you expand your vocabulary with different sounds.
5. Overcome any fears you have about it. Some people do not speak in tongues due to a fear about it. One common fear people have is that they will not really speak in tongues, but instead will have some kind of counterfeit. God never warns us about counterfeit tongues, so we should not worry about that. When a Christian is speaking words he does not understand, and is in control of his mouth, then he is speaking in tongues (cf. Luke 11:13). Another common fear people have is that they are making up the language they are speaking. Speaking in tongues is part supernatural and part natural; part spirit and part flesh, because the language comes via the spirit, but we have to use our flesh to speak. In fact, some Christians do not speak in tongues even when they know it is God’s will because they expect God to speak through them, i.e., take over their mouths and make them speak. He will not do it. The Bible says the Christian does the speaking. Thus, it may feel like you are making up the language, but as you speak more and more, and the language starts to really flow out of you, you will realize there is no way you could be making it up. Keep speaking and let the language develop. Another fear some people have is that they will “sound stupid.” Nothing that comes from the Lord is ever “stupid.” We should be very thankful for whatever language the Lord gives us. Another fear some people have is that they are not “good enough.” Since speaking in tongues is a manifestation of holy spirit, if you are saved, then you already have holy spirit and can therefore speak in tongues. Remember also that speaking in tongues is prayer and praise in the spirit. Everyone is “good enough” to pray and praise God, so get speaking in tongues!

**“the church is built up.”** A more literal translation of the Greek would be “receives building up,” but that is quite awkward in English, and the meaning is that the church is built up. Many things “build up” the Church. The Greek noun is *oikodomē* (#3619 οἰκοδομή), and it has a lexical range that includes both a building itself and the act of building or building up. *Oikodomē* is also used metaphorically as if a person or group were a building, and thus *oikodomē* is used of “building up” (“edifying”) a person so that they are stronger or more mature in their Christian life and walk. Many things can “build up” a person. 1 Corinthians 14:1-5 say that the manifestations of interpretation of tongues and prophecy build up the Church. Romans 14:19 is in the context of walking in love toward other Christians and how that promotes peace and builds people up. Similarly, Romans 15:2 speaks of living in a manner that is pleasing to others and thus builds them up. Similarly, Ephesians 4:29 says that believers are to speak in a way that builds people up. 1 Corinthians 14:26 gives a short and incomplete list of things that can be done in the Church that build up the congregation, things such as reading the Psalms or a good teaching, and concludes with, “Let all things be done for building *people* up.” Paul had the authority from God to build up the Church, which he would have done in many and various ways (2 Cor. 10:8; 12:19; 13:10). The equipping ministries in the Body of Christ build up the Church so it can fully walk in its calling (Eph. 4:12), and then as the members of the Church walk in their own calling the people of the Church are built up.

The Church is built up in many ways. We have seen some of the ways the Church is built by studying the noun *oikodomē*, and we see even more ways the Church is built up if we study the related verb, which is *oikodomeō* (#3618 οἰκοδομέω) (cf. Acts 20:32; 1 Cor. 8:1; 14:4; 1 Thess. 5:11). For example, 1 Corinthians 8:1 contains the well-known phrase that knowledge puffs up but love builds up (*oikodomeō*).

1Co 14:6

**“But now.”** Here, Paul shifts the subject somewhat. He has been stating some of the purposes of speaking in tongues and prophecy, and has said that prophecy is a message to people, while speaking in tongues is speaking to God. The congregation at Corinth was a very young congregation. Paul started it himself, and no doubt many people were excited about knowing they would live forever and that speaking in tongues was an outward sign of the inward presence of the gift of holy spirit. Thus, we can see why many people in the congregation would burst forth in tongues due to the joy and excitement that was in them that they could demonstrate the power of God and know they were saved. So now Paul takes 14 verses (1 Cor. 14:6-19) to explain to people why they should not speak in tongues out loud in the church unless the tongues are interpreted.

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“how.”** The Greek is *ti*, “for what reason” (cf. RSV).

**“speaking in tongues.”** Speaking in tongues is a language of men or angels, and it is not understood by the speaker or anyone speaking the same language or languages he speaks. The manifestation of interpretation of tongues is for the edification of the congregation. For more on speaking in tongues, see commentaries on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.

**“revelation.”** For what “revelation” is, see commentaries on Galatians 1:12 and 1 Corinthians 12:8.

1Co 14:7

**“lifeless.”** Without *psuche*, soul-less (occurs only here in the NT).

1Co 14:9

**“a message.”** *Logos* can be what is said, a message.

[For more information on *logos*, see commentary on John 1:1, “word.”]

1Co 14:10

**“undoubtedly.”** This is a contextual rendering of the Greek phrase *ei tuchoi*, which more literally means something like “if perhaps,” but the phrase had different meanings in different contexts. Paul is not doubting that there are many different “voices” (both languages and voices) in the world, and this would be especially obvious at Corinth, which was one of the three or four busiest trading emporiums in the Mediterranean basin. People from all over the known world traveled through there. “Undoubtedly” is a good translation given the context (cf. CJB, ESV, NIV, NRSV, RSV; also see the CSB).[[99]](#footnote-29944)

**“voices, voiceless.”** Not just “languages.” That is not the word here, although some commentators think that *phōnē* (#5456 φωνή) means “languages.” However, then the verse makes no sense: there are many kinds of languages, and none are languageless.[[100]](#footnote-20613) The “voice” can refer to individual human voices (explains better “it may be,” not trying to set any number), and no voice is “voiceless,” i.e., without sound.

1Co 14:11

**“But if I do not know.”** The phrase “but if I do not know” catches both the sense of Paul’s argument and the sense of the Greek and is used with slight variation in many English versions (e.g., CJB, CEB, CSB, ESV, Goodspeed, NAB, NASB2020, NLT, RSV, and also see BBE, Mounce, NJB).

1Co 14:12

**“zealous for spirit*-empowered words***.” In both Greek and Hebrew, the word translated “spirit” (Hebrew*: ruach*; Greek: *pneuma*) has many meanings. In this verse and a number of others in both the Old and New Testaments, the word “spirits” is put by the figure of speech metonymy for the manifestations produced by the spirit. In other words, “spirits” means “manifestations of the spirit,” which would include speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecy, revelation, etc. Lenski correctly understands that “spirits” refers to the manifestations of the spirit: “This term ‘spirits’ designates the different manifestations of the one Holy Spirit [holy spirit] in the individual Christians.”[[101]](#footnote-30265) Understanding that “spirits” can mean the manifestations of holy spirit is essential to understanding a number of verses in the Bible. For example, this same use of “spirits” is used in 1 Corinthians 14:32; 1 John 4:1, 2, 3; 2 Thessalonians 2:2, 8; Isaiah 11:4 (translated “breath” in most versions).

The people in Corinth were very zealous for spiritual power. When they came together, everyone had a tongue (i.e., everyone spoke in tongues in the congregation), an interpretation, or a revelation (1 Cor. 14:26). Although their zeal needed to be tempered, they were in the spot that most Christians should be: zealous to use the spiritual power God has given us. Too many Christians are content not to utilize the spiritual power they have.

1 John 4:1 says, “do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits,” and since the context is false prophets, the word “spirits” in that verse (and 1 John 4:2-3) also primarily refers to prophecies. The exhortation in 1 John is that Christians should not just believe every prophecy and spiritual utterance, but test them to see if they are from God. This is necessary because many false prophets are gone into the world, and thus the information that every prophecy that acknowledges that Jesus has come in the flesh is from God, while those prophecies that do not, are not from God. We do need to acknowledge that the use of “spirit” for “utterances of the spirit” also leaves the door open for the word “spirit” to be a literal reference to the “spirit” (the gift of holy spirit or the demon) that is producing the prophecy.

2 Thessalonians 2:2 is another place where “spirit” primarily refers to a prophecy, and Paul warns the church at Thessalonica not to be unsettled or alarmed by a prophecy that the Day of the Lord has already come (see commentary on 2 Thess. 2:2).

2 Thessalonians 2:8 says the Lord will kill the lawless one “by the spirit (*pneuma*) from his mouth.” There again we see that the use of “spirit” is a reference to the prophetic word. Although we do not fully understand it, it is clear that Christ is prophesying and destroys the lawless one by the “spirit,” the powerful spiritual utterance that he speaks. In the beginning, God created the universe by speaking it into being (Gen. 1), and after his resurrection, Jesus received all authority from God (Matt. 28:18). Thus, it makes perfect sense that Jesus could destroy the wicked by a prophetic word, an utterance with true spiritual power. This is also foretold in Isaiah 11:4, which says, “He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath [*ruach*; “spirit”] of his lips he will slay the wicked” (NIV). The phrase “rod of his mouth” is the genitive and can be translated “rod from his mouth,” and similarly, “spirit of his lips” can be translated “spirit from his lips,” i.e., the spiritual utterance from his lips.

The prophetic word coming from the mouth of Jesus Christ is portrayed as a sword coming out of Christ’s mouth in Revelation 1:16; 2:16; 19:15, 21. We are told in Ephesians 6:17 that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God.

**“strive.”** The Greek is *zēteō* (#2212 ζητέω), which means seek or strive for. Here, “strive” is better than “seek,” because it is not that we have to look for how to build up the Church; we have to strive, or push ourselves, to do it.

**“to.”** The Greek preposition hina is being used as an equivalent of an infinitive.[[102]](#footnote-12656)

**“abound *in them* with a view to the building up of the church.”** Cliques, divisions, different groups, and that some people considered themselves better than others were a problem in the Corinthian church (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:11-13; 3:1-3; 11:17-19; 12:12-17). So the message in 1 Corinthians 14:12 is, “Be zealous for spirits (spiritual gifts and manifestations), yes, but be zealous so you can build up the church, not just magnify yourself.”

1Co 14:13

**“so that.”** The person speaks in tongues “so that” he can interpret. People who speak in tongues in a meeting without interpretation cannot be understood and thus do not build up the Body of Christ by what they say, so Christians in meetings should speak in tongues “so that,” i.e., with the intention of interpreting, so everyone can understand and be built up.

The traditional explanation of this verse is that people should pray for the ability to interpret speaking in tongues. “Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret” (NRSV). That cannot be correct, because the interpretation of tongues is a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit, and anyone who has the gift of holy spirit, which means every Christian, has the spiritual ability to interpret speaking in tongues (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:1, “the things of the spirit”). We do not “pray” for the ability to interpret; we “pray” in tongues so that we will have a message to interpret.

The next verse (1 Cor. 14:14) uses the word “pray” for speaking in tongues. It says, “for if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays.” This makes it clear that “pray” in these verses is referring to speaking in tongues. 1 Corinthians 14:13-14 read: “Therefore, let the one who speaks in a tongue pray so that he can interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.” If we understand “prayer” is speaking in tongues in this context, the verse is saying: “Therefore, let the one who speaks in a tongue, pray in tongues so that he can interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.” This now makes perfect sense. The context of these verses is edifying the congregation (1 Cor. 14:12, 16, 17). If I speak in tongues, I am edified, but the congregation is not. Therefore, if I am going to edify the congregation, I must pray in tongues so that I will then have something to interpret. Then the congregation can be edified by my interpretation.

Frederic Godet wrote that 1 Cor. 14:13 did not mean, “Let him ask of God the power to interpret.” Godet wrote:

“But the terms *aitein* or *deisthai* would perhaps suit better a positive position than *proseuchesthai*, which rather denotes the state of prayer; and the use Paul makes of this same term *proseuchesthai* in the following verses, specially to denote ecstatic prayer, hardly admits of our taking it in verse 13 in another sense. The words: let him pray (in tongues) that he may interpret, therefore signify: “In giving himself up to the Spirit who leads him to pray in a tongue, let him do so with the intention and with the settled aim beforehand to reproduce the contents of his prayer afterwards in intelligible language.”[[103]](#footnote-16163)

Thomas Edwards came to the same conclusion as Godet, and both of them use the term “ecstatic prayer” for speaking in tongues. Edwards wrote that the *hina* phrase in Greek should be understood to have its normal telic meaning, and added:

“‘let him that has that gift of tongues pray with tongues, but let him do it with the purpose of interpreting his utterance afterwards;’ that is, he should not be content with ecstatic prayer, but should strive after the gift of interpreting his prayer.”[[104]](#footnote-14908)

Samuel Green notes that the general meaning of the subjunctive mood (and the word “interpret” is in the subjunctive mood, derived from the preposition *hina*) is to signify possibility or intention. Thus it says, “In 1 Cor. 14:13 it is not meant that the disciple is to pray for the power to interpret, but that his gift of prayer is to be so exercised as to involve the power of interpretation.”[[105]](#footnote-30986)

Because the congregation cannot understand what we are saying when we speak in tongues, in a meeting we should speak in tongues out loud with the specific intent of interpreting the tongue and thus edifying the body of believers.

1Co 14:15

**“What, then, is *to be done*?”** The opening phrase is difficult in English. The NIV has the sense, “So what shall I do?” The same phrase is in Acts 21:22. See NASB there.

1Co 14:16

**“Otherwise.”** The Greek word is *epei* (#1893 ἐπεί, pronounced ep-'ā), which is a marker of time, cause, or reason. Here it is a marker of reason, and a very important one, because it links 1 Cor. 14:15 and 14:16 together and shows that it is not proper for someone to “bless” (bless and praise God) with the spirit (i.e., by speaking in tongues) in the congregation unless that person interprets. If there is no interpretation, the people do “not know what you are saying.” Thus, although it is possible to “pray with the understanding” and “sing with the understanding” without it being an interpretation, in this context, that is the most important emphasis.

**“praise with the spirit.”** The Greek verb translated “praise” is *eulogeō* (#2127 εὐλογέω). The prefix “*eu*” means “good,” and *eulogeō* more literally means “to speak a good word.” Its meanings include “to praise, to invoke blessings, to consecrate with prayers, to ask God’s blessing, to extol” and it can even mean “to make happy” or “to bestow a favor.”[[106]](#footnote-29096) Here in 1 Corinthians 14:16 *eulogeō* includes a wide semantic range related to speaking well of God, and it could well be translated in this context as “praise” (CEB, CSB, NET, NIV, NLT); “give thanks” (ESV; cf. CJB); “bless” (ASV, KJV, NASB). The idea here is expressed in other places that say that speaking in tongues exalts God, is giving thanks to God, and is praising God.

**“is unlearned.”** The Greek is literally, “occupies [or “fills”] the place of the unlearned.” It is not as if the unlearned have a special place just for them. “Occupying the place” is an idiomatic way of referring to them being there and taking up space, or “a place.” “Instead of merely using the term ‘the unlearned,’ ‘the layman,’ Paul very properly describes the man: “he that occupies the place of the unlearned.”[[107]](#footnote-18381) This is an example of when an idiom in a language makes translating difficult. Translating the Greek literally introduces questions and confusion in the mind of the English reader that would never occur to a Greek reader, thus we feel justified in simplifying the English. One should not have to learn Greek idioms to understand the English Bible.

1Co 14:17

**“you are giving thanks very well.”** Speaking in tongues is speaking to God, and a part of what is spoken is giving thanks to God.

[For more on speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:5.]

1Co 14:18

**“I thank God; I speak in tongues more than you all.”** It is important to understand what Paul is and is not saying. Paul is not saying, “I thank God THAT I speak in tongues more than you all.” First, that would be prideful bragging. But beyond that, that translation would totally miss the point of Paul’s argument. He had just finished saying that if you spoke in tongues in the congregation (without interpretation) that other people would not understand and would not be built up (1 Cor. 14:16-17). He would never follow that by saying that he was thankful he spoke in tongues more than everyone else—that would defeat what he had just said! Instead, he was making the point that he “thanked God” (he had just said speaking in tongues was thanking God; 1 Cor. 14:17), in fact, he said that he spoke in tongues more than anyone in the Church. But then he added that he would rather speak five words people could understand than 10,000 words in a tongue that they could not understand.

**“speak in tongues.”** For more on speaking in tongues, see commentaries on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.

1Co 14:20

**“Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking.”** The Greek text is “brothers,” but that often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

This verse starts a new section, and reminds the believers to use their minds and their wisdom. The use of “children” is directly related to the quotation from Isaiah 28 that is in the next verse. The Israelites had repeatedly ignored God’s warnings about their sin, so as the clock moved forward to their destruction by Assyria, God asked them, “To whom will he [God] teach knowledge? To whom will he [God] explain the message? Those who are weaned from the milk and just taken from the breasts?” (Isa. 28:9). Then two verses later He says, “Indeed, he will speak to this nation with stammering lips and in another language” (Isa. 28:11).

Here in Corinthians God is using the quotation from Isaiah and its mention of “children” to good effect. God’s people are not supposed to act like children who cannot think or see consequences. To the world, speaking in tongues should be seen as a great miracle. Here are people, Christians, obviously speaking languages they have never been taught. This should be a “sign” to them (God speaking **to** them!), that He exists. Sadly, it was for the early Church as it was for Isaiah 700 years before Christ, and as it is for us today, “and not even *then* will they listen to me**,** says the Lord.” Most Christians do not see the value in speaking in tongues and even deny its existence. Most unbelievers scoff at it.

1Co 14:21

**“In the law.”** This is the general use of “law,” where “law” refers to the whole Tanakh (technically, this use of “law” is a form of synecdoche, the part for the whole, the “law” [of Moses] being put for the whole Old Testament). In later Jewish writings, the term “law” was even sometimes used of some of the Jewish traditions that had become firmly embedded in society.

[See Word Study: “Synecdoche.”]

**“I will speak to this people, and not even then will they listen to me.”** This quotation is from Isaiah 28:11-12. It is not a prophecy foretelling that people would speak in tongues. No one would have understood such a prophecy. The point of what God said in Isaiah 28 was that for years, God had “spoken” to the people of Israel in many different ways to get them to return to Him. These ways included God warning them verbally in their own language, Hebrew, and through many other signs, but they had ignored what God said.

One way God had spoken to Israel was through his prophets, who, of course, spoke Hebrew. He warned the people of Israel about their sin and told them they needed to return to Him. Amos, much earlier than Isaiah, had said Israel would face dire consequences for its sin: “Thus says the Lord: ‘For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,” (Amos 2:6 ESV). Hosea had also spoken of Israel’s sin and its consequences. “Then the LORD said to Hosea…‘I will soon punish the house of Jehu…and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel’” (Hos. 1:4 NIV).

God had also “spoken” to Israel in other ways as well. God made it clear in the Law of Moses that if Israel obeyed Him they would be blessed (cf. Deut. 28:1-14), but if they turned away from Him they would be cursed (cf. Deut. 28:15-68). In fact, Deuteronomy specifically stated that if Israel turned away from Him they would be defeated by their enemies (Deut. 28:47ff) and carried away from the Promised Land (Deut. 28:64ff). Israel had a covenant promise from God that He would bless and protect them if they would be faithful to Him. Therefore, when they were not faithful and things started to go wrong in Israel, that was God “speaking” to them and warning them that they were not right in His sight.

Amos chapter 4 lists some of the ways God said he “spoke” to His people, but noted that it did no good. Thus God said, “‘you have not returned to me,’ says Yahweh” (Amos 4:6). God spoke to Israel by famine, by the fact that it rained in one city but not in another, by the scorching east wind, by the mildew that ruined their crops, by crop-devouring insects, by plagues, by wars, and in other ways as well (Amos 4:6-13).

Isaiah 28 is one of the many places where God is reproving Israel for its sin. The leaders were proud and drunkards (Isa. 28:1), even the priests and prophets (false prophets) were drunkards (Isa. 28:7). Since the prophets in Israel no longer represented God or spoke on His behalf, then God would have to speak to Israel Himself, which He said He would do (Isa. 28:11). But how would He do that? Israel had refused to listen to Him speaking through His true prophets or His warnings of famine, plague, and war, so how would God speak to them? God said He would speak to them by fulfilling His promise of Deuteronomy 28:64; Israel would be carried away from the Promised Land by strangers, Assyrians. The Assyrians were the “lips of others,” who “spoke” to Israel with other languages, but sadly, Israel did not even hear God then (Isa. 28:11-12).

When they were conquered by the Assyrians and carried away from the Promised Land, Israel should have realized that God was fulfilling His promise in Deuteronomy, and they should have repented with all their heart and soul. Even Solomon, in his prayer at the dedication of the Temple, prayed that if Israel sinned and was carried away from their land, “yet if they will turn their heart in the land where they are carried captive, and repent and plead to you … saying, ‘We have sinned and have committed iniquity; we have acted wickedly,’ if they return to you with all their heart and with all their soul … and they pray toward their land that you gave to their fathers … then hear from heaven…their prayer and their petitions, and do what is right for them, and forgive your people who have sinned against you.” (2 Chron. 6:37-39). Alas, Israel never repented, and so never did return from their captivity. God foresaw that, and thus He said, “yet they would not listen” (Isa. 28:12).

When we understand the history of Israel and what Isaiah 28 is saying, we are able to understand why God quoted Isaiah 28:11-12 in 1 Corinthians 14:21. The congregation in Corinth started with the Jews (Acts 18:1-18), and it was the Jews, historically God’s chosen people, who harassed Paul in Corinth, even dragging him before the regional government (Acts 18:12). The Jews resisted Paul and the Gospel he preached, and they were not listening to God (nor were most of the Gentiles) just as Israel had behaved in the days of Isaiah. Therefore, just as in the days of Isaiah, God decided to speak to them and give them a sign of His presence and power, even though again it looked like, “and not even *then* will they listen to me.” However, this time the sign He gave the unbelievers was not prophecy, which was a manifestation of the spirit and a sign they had encountered (and ignored!) for hundreds of years, but a new manifestation of the power of God: speaking in tongues. That is why 1 Corinthians 14:22 says that “tongues are for a sign” to those people who do not believe. It is indeed a sign of God’s power whether they ignore it or not, but as Israel ignored God’s signs and suffered because of it, those who ignore God’s signs today will also suffer consequences.

The point of 1 Corinthians 14:21 is that God, as always, is trying to reach out to people, giving them signs of His presence and power. The Assyrians, with their powerful armies and strange language, were a sign to Israel that they had abandoned God and His covenant blessings. Now, the strange language of tongues is again a sign to unbelievers, and if they ignore that sign, they do so to their peril. Christians should realize that one of the great blessings of speaking in tongues is that it is a sign to unbelievers of the power and presence of God, and we Christians should speak in tongues as part of our Christian witness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the gift of holy spirit.

1Co 14:22

**“so then, tongues are for a sign.”** Because of the context, this short statement is very weighty. The previous verse, 1 Corinthians 14:21, had quoted Isaiah 28:11-12, and although Isaiah did not use the word “sign,” once we understand what Isaiah was saying to Israel we can see that for God to use that verse from Isaiah and then call speaking in tongues a “sign” is very sobering. Throughout the Old Testament there were dozens of “signs” given to both individuals and to entire countries, so for God to pick this one example of a sign from the book of Isaiah should catch our attention.

God spoke to Israel through His prophets and they did not listen, so He then “spoke” through an invading army, the Assyrians, who did not speak Hebrew, and who thus had “other tongues” (the Assyrians spoke Imperial Aramaic). God had promised that if Israel obeyed Him, then they would defeat their enemies (cf. Lev. 26:2-8), so Israel’s being defeated by Assyria was a “sign” of their sin. The book of Isaiah shows that Israel was deeply in sin, including its leaders and “prophets” (the false prophets). For example, Isaiah 28:7 says, “And these also stumble around because of wine and stagger because of beer. The priest and the prophet stumble around because of beer. They are confused by wine. They stagger because of beer. They stumble around *while having* visions. They totter *when giving* judgments.” Israel’s leaders were seeking temporal pleasure and were involved in things such as idolatry, sexual immorality, and drunkenness. Israel was ignoring God and deeply in sin, and being defeated by the Assyrian army was a “sign” to them of their sorry state.

Our knowledge of Israel at the time of Isaiah gives us great insight into why God chose the quotation out of Isaiah that the Assyrian conquest of Israel was a “sign” to them, and compared it to the “sign” of speaking in tongues. At the time of Paul, Rome looked a lot like Israel did in the time of Isaiah. Rome, and especially Corinth, which was like the “sin city” of the Roman Empire, was steeped in idolatry, sexual sin, drunkenness, and other types of sensual pleasure. So in a very appropriate way, speaking in tongues was a warning “sign” that spoke to the unbelievers and neophytes and said, “God is real and He is here. You people need to listen to Him. You need to repent of your ways and obey God.” As we know from history, a few people did heed the “sign” of speaking in tongues and repent, but the majority did not.

**“not *a sign* to the unbelieving.”** The second occurrence of the noun “sign” in this verse [in italics] is supplied from the context and Greek grammar. It is an important key to understanding this verse and 1 Corinthians 14:24, and while it can be easily assumed from the Greek text, its absence in English can cause confusion. It is vital to understand the impact that the word “sign” has in this verse to properly understand what it is saying.

“Signs” were very important in the Jewish culture, so important that it is hard to overstate that fact. It was believed that if God acted, He would almost always announce His actions with a sign. This shows up throughout the Old and New Testaments, and dozens of examples could be given. God gave Moses “signs” so the Israelites would believe him when he returned to Egypt (Exod. 4:8). Gideon asked for a sign from the angel when he was called to lead Israel (Judg. 6:17). The Jews asked Jesus, “We want to see a sign from you” (Matt. 12:38), and Jesus’ powerful acts that are called “miracles” in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are called “signs” in the Gospel of John because they pointed to Jesus’ being the Messiah. Paul correctly penned, “For Jews demand signs” (1 Cor. 1:22).

The first part of the verse says that speaking in tongues was a “sign” to the unbelieving Jews, and it was for a couple reasons. First, it was an obvious act of power, because people who spoke in tongues spoke a language they never took time to learn. Also, speaking in tongues was something that pagans could not do. Speaking in tongues is a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit, and people who are not born again cannot speak in tongues.

However, in that culture, to be an effective “sign” to unbelievers, the speaking in tongues had to be done “decently and in an orderly way” (1 Cor. 14:40). If everyone in the congregation all spoke in tongues at the same time, then the Christian assembly would look like the pagan assemblies in which the congregants got taken over by demons. It happened in some pagan assemblies that the people, or some of the people, got taken over by demons and all started speaking and behaving wildly, and if all the Christians in an assembly started speaking in tongues at one time, then the tongues would cease to be a “sign” of the power and presence of God, and the Christian meeting would look like a pagan meeting in which the people were taken over by demons (for more on the pagan assembly, see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:23, “raving mad”).

The second part of the verse says that prophecy was not a sign to unbelievers. To properly interpret the Bible, it is important to understand what it is not saying as well as what it is saying. Speaking in tongues is a “sign” to unbelievers, but prophecy is not a “sign.” But that does not mean prophecy is not “for” unbelievers. Prophecy is very beneficial to unbelievers, as we see from 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, when the believers prophesy to unbelievers with wonderful results.

But why isn’t prophecy a “sign” to unbelievers? The answer is in the culture. Many pagans and unbelievers prophesied. In fact, false prophecy by the priests of Baal and false priests in Israel can be seen throughout the Old Testament. Prophecy was also an important part of many pagan religions of the Greco-Roman world. There were a number of places where people could go to get a prophecy from an oracle; one famous one was the oracle of Delphi. Also, there were many false prophets: “many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Thus, it is not surprising that Paul ran into false prophets on his missionary journeys. Bar-jesus was a false prophet on the island of Cyprus (Acts 13:6), and when Paul was in Philippi, a slave girl who had a spirit of divination followed him and kept prophesying about him and saying that he was a servant of the Most High God (Acts 16:16-18). Since there was so much prophecy in the pagan world the Jews lived in, prophecy was not a “sign” of the power and presence of the true God. There was far too much false prophecy for that to be the case. True prophecy was wonderful, but it was not a “sign” to the Jews. However, true prophecy would be a “sign” to believers because they were already convinced it was from God (or the Lord) and would easily see the power and presence of God when true prophecy was given.

So speaking in tongues is a “sign” for unbelievers, but prophecy is not a “sign” even though it is obviously “for” unbelievers in the sense that it benefits them.

1Co 14:23

**“everyone speaks in tongues.”** Paul had just made the point in 1 Cor. 14:22 that speaking in tongues was a sign to unbelievers. It can be easily seen that this could be overplayed by the congregation, who might think that if the unbelievers saw not just one person speak in tongues, but everyone speak in tongues, that would be really convincing. However, the Word tells us what modern experience has confirmed: that when unbelievers come across a whole church speaking in tongues at one time, they are not convinced; rather, they are generally confused or frightened and think something is wrong with the people. Churches that make a practice of having everyone speak in tongues at one time need to take heed to this verse.

[For more on speaking in tongues, see commentaries on 1 Cor. 12:10 and 14:5.]

**“raving mad.”** The Greek word is *mainomai* (#3105 μαίνομαι), and the translation “raving mad” (some versions read, “mad,” or “out of your mind”) is an attempt to translate the meaning of the Greek text in this context of public worship, which, unfortunately, cannot be easily done.

In the Greek pagan worship, it occasionally happened that the devotees were taken over by demons, and they acted in a frenzied, frantic, raving manner (this has been observed in modern times occasionally in Africa and Haiti). The New Testament scholar, C. K. Barrett, writes: “*You are mad*…does not mean, You are suffering from mental disease, but, You are possessed…”[[108]](#footnote-11447)

God wants to prevent confusion in Christian fellowships. He never wants people who attend church to think that the congregation has been taken over by demons and gone into a religious frenzy. He makes it clear that what is done in the service “…must be done for the strengthening of the church” (1 Cor. 14:26). The manifestation of speaking in tongues was a “sign” to unbelievers of the power and presence of God, but it would cease to be a sign of God’s presence, and would be taken as a sign of the presence of “gods” (we know as demons) if everyone in the congregation spoke in tongues at the same time.

1Co 14:24

**“convinced.”** The Greek word is *elegchō* (#1651 ἐλέγχω) and it is difficult to exactly translate here. We went with “convinced” because it is being contrasted to the ones who, upon seeing tongues, were not convinced but said the people were “raving mad” (demonized; taken over by demons). However, *elegchō* also carries the meaning of being openly exposed, brought to light. In prophecy, the life of the person is often brought to light in a way that convinces them that God is among you.

It is obvious in 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 that prophecy benefits unbelievers and those who are still learning about the Faith. It is important to understand how 1 Corinthians 14:22 and 14:24 fit together. 1 Corinthians 14:22 says speaking in tongues is a “sign” to unbelievers while 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 show that although prophecy is not a “sign” it is very beneficial for unbelievers and those who don’t know much about the Faith. The mature believers, however, do not doubt the source of Christian prophecy, God or the Lord Jesus, and to them, the deep and accurate prophetic messages are indeed a “sign” to them of the power and presence of God, and also they are a blessing to them.

[For more on speaking in tongues being a sign to unbelievers, see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:22.)

1Co 14:26

**“brothers and sisters.”** See commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:20.

**“each one.”** This is likely a hyperbole. It is doubtful, although possible, that every person in the congregation had something to say. It is more likely that Paul is exaggerating the situation to make the point that there was confusion in the congregation.

**“revelation.”** For what “revelation” is, see commentaries on Galatians 1:12 and 1 Corinthians 12:8.

**“Let all things be done for building *people* up.”** This is the point that Paul is making. No matter how the service develops as people contribute, the end result should be that people are built up in the Lord. If edification is not the result of the meeting, the leaders should step in and make some changes.

1Co 14:27

**“one at a time.”** The Greek phrase *ana meros* (ἀνὰ μέρος), which literally translates into something like “up a part,” is idiomatic, and means “one at a time.”[[109]](#footnote-32155) The point of Paul saying this was that in the church in Corinth there was confusion and people were speaking at the same time.

**“one must interpret!”** The Greek for this phrase may be read two different ways—“one, as in anyone, must interpret,” or “*the* one, he alone must interpret.” Those who claim that a different person may interpret someone’s tongue in an assembly favor the first reading. However, we will see that this creates problems with the context of chapter 14 and is therefore most likely not the sense of the Greek. The underlying Greek text is composed of the word *heis*, (#1520 εἷς) which is the cardinal number one (however, we will see it is not always used in that simple manner), and the verb for “interpret,” *diermēneuō* (#1329 διερμηνεύω), in the third-person singular, imperative mood. When the verb is put in this form, it means “he/she/someone must interpret.”

We use the word *must* to indicate that this is a command. Although the imperative mood is sometimes used of exhortations and can be represented by “let,” in this case, the context and scope of the subject dictate that the imperative mood is better served by the English word “must,” rather than “let.” In English, “let” usually indicates passivity rather than activity of command; the person is allowed to do something if they want to, but is not being told they must do it. Thus, “I will let you eat one of my cookies if you want to,” versus “You must eat a cookie.” Thus, “let” does not capture the sense of the verse in this situation. If someone speaks in tongues in the congregation, no one understands him, so to be walking in love and obeying God, he “must” interpret. Paul is giving a command here.

Putting *heis* and *diermēneuō* together, we get “one must interpret.” If this is taken to mean that one, as in anyone, can interpret the tongue, then this verse seems to go against what Paul has written up to this point on how tongues ought to be interpreted. There are three places prior to this verse where the practice of interpreting tongues is discussed. These are 1 Corinthians 14:5, 13, 15-16:

1. 1 Cor. 14:5 tells us that a person who speaks in tongues is not edifying the church unless he interprets. This would seem to indicate that the person who speaks in tongues would be edifying the church if that same person (he) followed the tongues with an interpretation. According to normal Greek syntax, the logical antecedent for the verb “interpret” would be *ho lalon* (“The one speaking” in tongues).
2. 1 Cor. 14:13 instructs us that a person who speaks in a tongue should “pray” that he may interpret. This instruction seems clear that the same person who spoke in the tongue should be the one who interprets. In Greek, “the one speaking in tongues” is the subject of the verb “interpret.”
3. 1 Cor. 14:15-16 begin with Paul rhetorically asking the question “What, then, is *to be done*?” regarding the proper place and practice of tongues and interpretation in the church assembly. He then answers the question by stating that it is proper to “pray/praise” with the spirit and then “pray/praise” with the understanding; otherwise, people will not be edified because they will not understand the tongues (praying/praising with the spirit) by itself. The first word of verse 16 is a key to understanding Paul’s intent in these two verses. It is the word “otherwise.” Paul is saying that unless he follows his speaking in tongues with an interpretation others will not be edified. 1 Cor. 14:15-16 clearly indicate that Paul is teaching that the person who speaks in tongues should follow it with an interpretation. He says *I* will pray with my spirit then *I* will pray with my understanding also. Paul sets the example of the same person giving the interpretation.

It seems, then, that every verse to this point indicates that the person who gives the tongue ought to be the one to give the interpretation. This is strong evidence that we should not read Paul as going against this in 1 Cor. 14:27. Instead, there is a legitimate alternative reading that clears up the apparent inconsistency. A closer look at the Greek word *heis* reveals that this word is not always used in the sense of the number one. Lenski states that “There is no reason to stress εἷς to mean one person only for the two or the three speakers…”[[110]](#footnote-20971) BDAG lists four different definitions for *heis,* while Thayer lists five different definitions with numerous subcategories under each category. One of the definitions that Thayer provides in his second definition category is the usage of the word *heis* in the sense of ‘alone’ or ‘only.’ He cites Mark 2:7 as an example of this usage: “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (ESV). The word translated “alone” is the Greek word *heis.* It makes no sense to translate their statement, “Who can forgive sins but God one.” It is made clear by this verse that a legitimate biblical usage of the Greek word *heis,* meaning “alone,” does exist. The sense is to indicate the “one and same” nature of the subject; *this one God only* can forgive sins.

If we bring this meaning back into 1 Corinthians 14:27, we get the following phrase, “he alone must interpret” or “this same one must interpret.” This sense, put along with the rest of the verse, would read as follows: “If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let it be* by two, or at the most three, and one at a time, and the same one must interpret.” This reading lines up with Paul’s earlier instruction in the chapter and actually prohibits the very activity that the contradictory reading promoted (i.e., someone else interpreting). We should note that if Paul had meant to teach that someone else should interpret the messages, he could have said it in many different and clearer ways. He could have used the following words instead of *heis*:

*tis* - this would have indicated that anyone could have given the interpretation.

*heteros* - this would have indicated that any other one could have given the interpretation.

*to autos* - this would have indicated that the same one should give all interpretations.

*hekastos* - this would have indicated that each one in turn should give his own interpretation after someone speaks in tongues.

However, 1 Cor. 14:27 uses none of these words. It does use the word *heis*, which in contrast to these other words, shows that “the one and the same” one who spoke should interpret the message.

1Co 14:28

**“But if there is no one to interpret.”** This translation fits the context and follows versions such as the ESV, RSV, and NRSV. This verse is saying that if no one in the room has been instructed in interpretation or if no one desires to speak in tongues and then interpret at that time, then instead of speaking in tongues out loud without interpretation, each person should just keep quiet.

This verse is not saying that the “interpreter” is a different person than the one who speaks in tongues. The phrase, “if there is no one to interpret” is a simple statement of fact—not a reference to another person. There are many people who speak in tongues and who do not interpret, as is clearly evidenced in congregations of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. So, it can happen that “there is no one to interpret” for several reasons. For one, people may not have been instructed in interpretation or may have even been taught that since they speak in tongues they cannot interpret. Or people may not want to interpret because they are comfortable with just knowing how to speak in tongues. Or even that people may not feel like interpreting in that particular meeting. In each of these cases, there is “no one to interpret” in the room.

Far from showing that the person who interprets is different than the person who speaks in tongues, this verse is more evidence that the person speaking in tongues is the same person who must interpret. In a large congregation, especially with new people and visitors coming and going, how would anyone who might desire to speak in tongues know if someone else in the room was “an interpreter?” And since the Bible says not to speak in tongues in public worship without there being an interpretation, that would place a terrible burden on the person who becomes inspired to speak in tongues to be sure that someone in the room would interpret. The only real and practical way to be sure that if someone speaks in tongues, there will be an interpretation, is if the one who speaks in tongues is the same one who interprets. Both speaking in tongues and interpretation are manifestations of the gift of holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:10) and are both operated from the free will and trust (“faith”) of the individual Christian. So when a Christian has been instructed in the use of the manifestations and wants to use them in a meeting as a blessing to the people there, he or she will speak in tongues and then interpret the message so the congregation can understand it.

1Co 14:30

**“revealed.”** For what “revelation” is, see commentaries on Galatians 1:12 and 1 Corinthians 12:8.

1Co 14:32

**“And spirit-*empowered words spoken* by prophets are subject to the prophets.”** This verse has a primary interpretation and some sub-themes. First, it is accurate as translated above. The text does not read, “the spirits” or “the prophets.” There are no definite articles. Second, “spirits” is the figure of speech metonymy for “spiritual utterances,” or prophecies, due to the fact that they originate from the spirit. Thus, if this verse were to be expanded according to meaning, it would be: “The prophecies of prophets are subject to prophets.” That “spirits” refers to spiritual manifestations, prophecies, can be seen both from this chapter and from a similar use in 1 John. For example, in 1 Corinthians 14:12, people are said to be “zealous for spirits.” In that verse, as in this one, “spirits” is put by metonymy for that which is produced by the spirit, which is the manifestation, or evidences of the spirit (see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:12). Here in 1 Corinthians 14:32, the “spirits of,” is a genitive of origin, and should be understood as “spirit from,” or expanded as, “And spiritual manifestations, prophecies, from prophets are subject to prophets.”

Another example of this use of “spirits” is in 1 John 4:1: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits *to see* if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” The context of 1 John 4:1 makes it clear that we are to test the “spirits,” the manifestations (specifically prophecies), **because** many false prophets are in the world, and thus there are many false prophecies (“spirits”) in the world. Then the context of 1 John 4 goes on about what the false prophets say (see commentaries on 1 John 4:1 and 4:2). For another use of the word “spirits” in the sense of a prophetic word, see commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2:2.

1Co 14:34

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 are in brackets because there is good evidence that they were not part of the original text, but were an early textual note that was copied into the text. It is more accurate to the original text to omit these verses when reading. As much as we dislike omitting a verse or verses that have been accepted as part of the text, it is honest to recognize that occasionally the biblical text was changed, and in this case, there is good evidence that these two verses are an early addition to the text.

[For more information and full commentary on these verses, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women In The Church.”]

1Co 14:35

See commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:34.

1Co 14:38

**“If anyone does not acknowledge this, he is not acknowledged.”** (Cf. Lenski;[[111]](#footnote-31739) NAB) If anyone in the congregation is hard-hearted and does not acknowledge that what Paul was writing was the word and direction of the Lord, then that person should not be acknowledged in the Church as a leader, teacher, or spiritual person.

1Co 14:39

**“brothers and sisters.”** See commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:20.

**“do not forbid *anyone* to speak in tongues.”** In spite of this command, many congregations forbid people from speaking in tongues. The Corinthian church needed instruction on the subject of the manifestations of holy spirit, which Paul provides in chapters 12-14. He clarifies the manifestations themselves in chapter 12 and encourages people to manifest. He tells people to eagerly desire spiritual things (1 Cor. 14:1), to speak in tongues (1 Cor. 14:5; which means that not everyone was), and to seek to edify the church (1 Cor. 14:12). Paul set the example for the Corinthians by saying that he spoke in tongues more than all of them combined (1 Cor. 14:18), and he explained that tongues were a sign to unbelievers (1 Cor. 14:22). In light of the clear command to not forbid speaking in tongues, it is astounding how many Christian denominations do exactly that, clearly contradicting the clear teaching of Scripture. Christians should take to heart the desire of God that is clearly expressed in 1 Corinthians 14:5: God wants every Christian to speak in tongues.

Due to the construction of the words in the verse, it sometimes gets suggested that this verse is the figure of speech tapeinosis, or understatement, and that what Paul is really saying is “Greatly encourage people to speak in tongues.” Although God would like us to greatly encourage speaking in tongues, the evidence is that this is not the figure tapeinosis. In considering whether or not a verse is a figure, we must keep in mind that the literal reading is always to be preferred if it makes sense in the context. In this case, the fact that on his third missionary journey, Paul had to write to the people of Corinth about the manifestations shows that the people had become unclear about them. After all, only a couple of years earlier Paul would have instructed them about the manifestations when he was there for a year and a half (Acts 18:11). Nevertheless, division started in the Church (1 Cor. 1:10ff), and along with that came confusion about the manifestations. It got to the point that there were people who were not speaking in tongues, and apparently not eager to do so (hence the encouragement to speak in tongues and be eager about the manifestations). It is easy to see in that context that there even would have been some people trying to stop the speaking in tongues, just as there are today in the Church. In that context, a clear warning not to forbid speaking in tongues was necessary. This would put an end to any debate about whether or not the manifestations had a place in the Church. Also, in 1 Corinthians 14:38, Paul wrote that if a person did not acknowledge this instruction, he was not to be acknowledged as a spiritual person. Thus, the people in Corinth were instructed not to endlessly debate the issue with those who were defiant toward the power of God, but simply not acknowledge as leaders or people of authority anyone who stood in opposition to what Paul was teaching.

**“speaking in tongues.”** For more on speaking in tongues, see commentaries on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.

**1 Corinthians Chapter 15**

1Co 15:1

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek text is “brothers,” but that often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“I want to remind you.”** This is the correct sense of the Greek, although the death and resurrection of Christ was fundamental, and something they should have known and boldly stood on. In the REV, we, like some other versions such as the NIV, have translated this “I want to remind you.” That is the essence of what Paul was writing to the Corinthians, but he worded it as “I make known to you,” which is the way some of the more literal English versions, such as the NASB, read. Paul had already told the Corinthians about the resurrection, so by saying “I make known to you” something they already knew, he was mildly reproving them for not standing on what they knew. Grosheide writes: “The solemn beginning of this chapter must be understood against this background. I make known is not, “I remind you,” but “I make known emphatically”[[112]](#footnote-15024) (cf. Gal. 1:11). There are a couple of reasons why “remind” is better than “I make known to you” in this verse. First, it clears up what is otherwise a cause of confusion in the English and makes it clear that Paul was telling them something that he had already taught them. Second, in English, reminding someone can be a mild reproof if the person was already supposed to know what you were reminding them of, so in this case, the sense of reproof in the verse is not totally lost by the translation: “I want to remind you.”

1Co 15:2

**“are being saved.”** The Greek verb translated “are being saved” is *sōzō* (#4982 σῴζω), and it has many meanings in the New Testament. These include: to rescue from danger or destruction (Matt. 8:25; 27:49); to keep safe (Acts 2:40); to heal or make well (Matt. 9:21-22; 14:30; Mark 5:23; Acts 14:9); to make whole (Luke 7:50); and to save from everlasting destruction by giving everlasting life (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 3:15). In some places in the New Testament, especially in the Four Gospels, more than one meaning applies. For example, when Jesus healed a blind man (Luke 18:42-43), the man was healed, but he likely was made whole in other ways as well. At the time believers are saved in the complete sense of the word, which occurs at the return of Christ, they are given everlasting life, but inherent in that is that they are also made completely whole as well.

It is worth noting that in the Gospels and Acts *sōzō* has a broad range of meanings, but in Paul’s epistles the word *sōzō* occurs 29 times, and in all of them (with the possible exception of 1 Timothy 2:15, the meaning of which is not clear), *sōzō* is used of being “saved” with the sense of being granted everlasting life.

When it comes to Christians being “saved,” there are verses that say we have already been “saved” (Eph. 2:8), verses that say we currently are being “saved” (1 Cor. 15:2), and verses that say we will be “saved” in the future (Rom. 10:9; 13:11). Although it is common for us to think of Christians being “saved” now, that is due to an idiom of the language, not because our salvation is already a fully accomplished reality. What Christians have now is the hope of salvation (1 Thess. 5:8), and can be assured that, “our salvation is nearer than when we *first* believed” (Rom. 13:11). When a believer’s salvation is a reality, their body will be like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2). What Christians have today is a down payment of everlasting life. We received that downpayment when we believed and were marked with the seal of God’s holy spirit (Eph. 1:13-14).

[For more on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on salvation vs. rewards, and rewards in the Kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

**“in vain.”** The Greek adverb translated by the phrase “in vain” is *eikē* (#1500 εἰκῇ), and it has several meanings, including “without cause,” “without success or result,” “without purpose,” and “without careful thought,” not all of which seem to be used in the New Testament.[[113]](#footnote-27804) Thus, Robert Thayer gives the meaning of *eikē* in 1 Corinthians 15:2 as “in vain, without success or effect.”[[114]](#footnote-27370) The Bill Mounce Greek Dictionary has “in vain, for nothing, to no purpose.”[[115]](#footnote-30901) Lenski writes: “The adverb εἰκῇ, ‘in vain,’ means ‘at random,’ i.e., so that your believing led you nowhere, brought you nothing.”[[116]](#footnote-24848) The adverb *eikē* is used five times in the New Testament, always in the epistles of Paul (Rom. 13:4; Gal. 3:4 (2x) Gal. 4:11, Col. 2:18). Some manuscripts have *eikē* in Matthew 5:22, but that use seems to have been added to the text (see commentary on Matt. 5:22).

It is possible to become a Christian but then do nothing with it and lose out on rewards in the future kingdom of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 3:13-15). However, that does not seem to be what Paul is writing about here in 1 Corinthians 15:2. The conditionality of the statement, that the believer is “being saved” if they “hold on firmly to the message [of the good news]” comes with a warning about the potential outcome that if they don’t continue to hold on firmly. If that is the case, then Paul says that their faith (i.e., their belief in the good news) really amounted to nothing, indicating that Christians can forfeit their salvation by turning away from Christ and rejecting him. In that sense, what they believed about Christ was truly “in vain.”

[For more on salvation and the possibility of forfeiting it, see commentary on Gal. 5:21.]

1Co 15:3

**“as of first importance.”** The phrase *en prōtos* is literally “in the first place” (or position), and in this context refers to what Paul thought was the most important. Paul is not remembering the very first thing he taught the Corinthians, but rather what he thought was most important.

1Co 15:4

**“was raised.”** This is a better translation than “rose again.” See commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:15.

1Co 15:5

**“then to the Twelve.”** Before Judas committed suicide after betraying the Lord, the apostles were sometimes referred to as “the Twelve” (cf. Matt. 26:14, 20, 47; Mark 4:10; 6:7; 10:32; Luke 8:1; John 6:67, etc.). Once Judas committed suicide, “the Twelve” were referred to as “the Eleven” by those very early believers (Luke 24:9, 33; Acts 2:14). Because the term, “the Twelve” is not explained here in 1 Corinthians 15:5, there are a couple of possibilities for what it means. It does not refer to the original twelve apostles including Judas, because Luke 24:9, 33, and Matthew 27:1-5 show that Judas was dead before Jesus was raised from the dead and began appearing to people (see commentary on Luke 24:9).

The two major possibilities for the meaning of “the Twelve” are: “the Twelve” is a general use of the old title, “the Twelve,” which was used for the original apostles without actually meaning that all twelve apostles were there at the time. A reference like that might have made sense to the people of Corinth, who would have likely been aware that the apostles were called “the Twelve” and may not have been aware they were later called “the Eleven.”

The other explanation for the term “the Twelve,” which is the most likely one, is that after Matthias joined the eleven apostles, they were again called “the Twelve.” After all, Acts 1:21-22 says that Matthias had been with the disciples from the baptism of John until the ascension, and therefore he was likely present in the room with the apostles when Jesus appeared on the Sunday after his resurrection. Although most of the focus of Jesus’ appearing to people on the Sunday after his resurrection is on the apostles, the Bible shows us other disciples were there too (Luke 24:33). The presence of other disciples with the apostles in the days after Jesus was crucified may explain why John 20:18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, and 20:30 say, “the disciples” rather than “the apostles.” If Matthias was in the room when Jesus appeared, and it seems most likely he was, and he became one of “the Twelve,” then the statement that Jesus appeared to Peter and then to “the Twelve” is completely accurate, using the term “the Twelve” to apply to the eleven plus Matthias even though Matthias was not chosen to be an apostle at that time.

Historically, the statement that Jesus appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve, is not complete; it leaves out Jesus’ appearances to the women. In reading the Four Gospels, we learn that Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:1-19), then, before he appeared to the apostles as a group, he appeared to the women who followed him (Matt. 28:8-10). The omission of Jesus’ appearances to the women here in Corinthians is likely due to the Roman culture that dominated Corinth. In Roman culture, women were thought to be unreliable witnesses, so there would be no point in mentioning them as witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection.

1Co 15:6

**“to more than 500 brothers and sisters at once.”** Paul writes that Jesus appeared to more than 500 “brothers and sisters” at one time to assure people that Jesus really was seen alive. It would be hard to fool that many people, or to get that many people to enter into making a hoax together.

[For more information on “brothers and sisters,” see Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

1Co 15:9

**“the least of the apostles.”** Paul refers to himself as the least of the apostles, a feeling that is easy to understand. He would naturally feel that way toward the original Eleven, and even Matthias, who all knew the Lord personally. His statement reflects a humility and self-awareness that seems to deepen with his Christian experience. See commentary on 1 Timothy 1:15, where Paul refers to himself as the worst sinner.

1Co 15:10

**“yet not I, but the grace of God.”** Paul is not saying he did not labor. In many places, he made it clear he worked very hard for the Church (cf. 1 Cor. 4:12; Phil. 4:3). The text is idiomatic, and could easily read, “yet not I only, but also the grace of God that was with me.” For this idiomatic way of speaking that in this case deemphasizes Paul and emphasizes grace, see commentary on 1 John 3:18.

1Co 15:12

**“if Christ is being preached.”** A good example of the idiomatic Greek use of “if” meaning “since” (cf. Eph. 3:2). However, it is so well understood in English that Christ had been being preached that leaving the “if” does not cause confusion, and the sentence reads smoother with it left in.

**“from among the dead.”**[[117]](#footnote-25687) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

**“why are some among you saying that there is no resurrection of the dead?”** The Greek text literally says, “how,” not “why,” but we would say “why” in English.

This is an interesting question in light of the Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultures and beliefs that the congregation in Corinth came out of. It shows how thoroughly Paul communicated the basic beliefs of the Christian Faith, and how essential those beliefs are to Christianity.

When Paul went to Corinth he first went to the synagogue so that he could convert the Jews and Greek “God-fearers” who were there (Acts 18:4; for more on “God-fearers,” see commentary on Acts 13:16). When Paul was rejected in the synagogue, he went to the “Gentiles,” the non-Jews (Acts 18:6).

When Paul talked to the Jews in the synagogue, it is likely that at least some of them were of the persuasion of the Sadducees, that there was no resurrection (Matt. 22:23), or had taken on some of the beliefs of the Greeks and Romans around them, that the soul (life-force) of the body lived on after the body died, but the soul never occupied a physical body again. The Greeks and Romans believed that the soul lived on after the death of the body, but without a physical body, and they scoffed at the resurrection of the dead (Acts 17:32).

Given that so many of the congregation had come from a background in which there was no physical resurrection, it seems logical that at least some of the Christians in Corinth would have remained unconvinced, or at least be confused, about the need for a physical resurrection. It seems that Paul would not have needed to ask the question, “Why are some among you saying that there is no resurrection of the dead,” because many people would answer, “We never believed in a physical resurrection.” So what Paul’s question really tells us is that the physical resurrection of the dead is an essential piece of the Christian Faith and that he had taught it thoroughly, so the congregation should have been convinced about it. Paul’s question also shows us that the teaching on the resurrection of Christ should be a fundamental part of the teaching in every Christian church.

Sadly, however, the situation in Corinth is similar to the situation in much of Christianity today. Many Christians are convinced that Christians “go to heaven when they die,” meaning their “soul” goes to heaven but leaves their body behind, and they are confused about the need for a physical resurrection, even though it is clearly part of the Christian Faith (Acts 24:15; Rom. 6:5; 1 Cor. 15:44-54; Phil. 3:11; 1 Thess. 4:16; 2 Tim. 2:18; Heb. 11:35; cf. the prophecies of the dead being raised in the Old Testament and Gospels: Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:11-14; Hos. 13:14; Dan. 12:2, 13; Luke 14:14; John 5:24-29). The truth is that the “soul” is the life force of the body and dies when the body dies, and people who have died are in the ground awaiting the Rapture or resurrection from the dead.

[For more on what the soul is, see Word Study: “Psuchē.” For more on death and that when a person dies, he is dead in every way and awaiting the resurrection of his body, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

1Co 15:14

**“in vain.”** See Word Study: “Fool.”

1Co 15:15

**“in contradiction to God.”** The Greek here for “contradiction” is from the preposition *kata* (#2596 κατά). BDAG defines *kata* as contradiction in this verse: “give testimony in contradiction to God,”[[118]](#footnote-18752) Paul’s reasoning starts by assuming that God always knows the true position of things and speaks the truth. Supposing for argument’s sake that God did not in fact raise Christ, then God’s position would be that He did not raise him. And thus Paul would be testifying *against* God by saying He did something He did not in fact do. Testifying against God in this sense would be to speak in contradiction to God.

1Co 15:18

**“asleep.”** The Greek verb is *koimaō* (#2837 κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60. If Jesus has not been raised, then there is no resurrection from the dead, no Rapture to be with Christ, and those who have died are not just dead, they have “perished.”

1Co 15:19

**“we have only put our hope in Christ.”** This sentence is a lot clearer in Greek than in English, and in trying to make it clear in English the English versions vary greatly, especially on what to do with the word “only.” To understand 1 Corinthians 15:19, we must know that the original Greek was all capital letters with no punctuation at all, just one letter after another. That meant that in the original Greek text, it was somewhat easier to see how a phrase that appeared earlier in the text influenced something written somewhat later. In this case, the phrase in 1 Corinthians 15:17, “And if Christ has not been raised...” influences the meaning of 1 Corinthians 15:19, which is two verses later. The meaning of the text (expanded for clarity) is: 17“And if Christ has not been raised, your trust is pointless; you are still in your sins. 18And if Christ has not been raised, then also, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19And also, if in this life we have only “hope” (but not certainty) in Christ (because Christ has not been raised), we are of all people to be pitied the most.” If the “hope” (“expectation”) we have about Christ is based on a falsehood, an illusion, then we are to be pitied for being so deceived.

1Co 15:20

**“Christ has been raised from among the dead.”** This verse, 1 Corinthians 15:20, is just one of the many that says “Christ” has been raised from the dead. This is a profound truth that has been ignored by orthodox Christianity. Christians are taught that Christ’s body died, but “Christ” (or the God-part of Jesus) kept on living. In fact, some teachers claim that in the three days and nights when Jesus Christ’s body was dead, “Christ” went and preached to the spirits in prison. Jesus Christ did go and proclaim his victory to the spirits in prison, but it was after his resurrection (1 Pet. 3:18-19; see commentary on 1 Pet. 3:19).

Many verses say Jesus Christ died. Some say “Christ” died (cf. Rom. 14:9); some say “Jesus” died (cf. Acts 5:30); some say “Jesus Christ” died (cf. Acts 4:10). But none say that “Jesus’ body died.” Furthermore, Scripture says that “Jesus” rose from the dead (cf. 1 Thess. 4:14) or “Christ” rose (cf. Rom. 14:9), but none say that Jesus’ “body” rose. Like every human, Jesus was a whole being of body, soul, and spirit. There is no verse that says that only part of Jesus died. “Jesus” died. Then he was raised from the dead in a new spiritual body, as all Christians will be (Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2).

In Genesis, God told Adam that if he sinned, “you will surely die” (Gen. 2:17 NET). By “you,” God meant “Adam, the whole person, not just Adam’s body only. The Devil contradicted God and told Eve she would not surely die (Gen. 3:4). The Christian world has bought into the Devil’s lie and done away with death. They admit the body dies, but they assert that the “person” does not die, they go on living, usually in heaven or hell. But if only the flesh body dies, and not the whole person, then “Jesus” did not actually die and the sins of mankind were never paid for. There is no verse that says that sins can be paid for by the death of just a flesh body.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is worthless, *and* your trust is also worthless. For if the dead are not raised, then even Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your trust is pointless; you are still in your sins.” (1 Cor. 15:13-14, 16-17).

Paul’s argument is a strong one. If “Christ” was not raised from the dead then we are still in our sins. But Paul’s argument assumes, and his audience believed, that “Christ” died before he could be raised from the dead, so the death of Christ was understood and not in question. But “Christ” was not raised from the dead if “Christ” never died in the first place. So, if Christ did not really die such that he could be raised from the dead, then, as Paul said, we are still in our sins—they were never paid for by the death of Christ.

The good news is that “Christ” did die—body, soul, and spirit—and was raised, so we are not in our sin.

[For more on dead people being totally dead and not alive in any way, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on the fact that the soul can and does die, see Word Study: “Psuchē.” For more on why it cannot be that the human part of Jesus died but the God part did not, see commentary on Matt. 27:50. For more on Jesus being fully human and not “God in the flesh,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” Also see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“from among the dead.”**[[119]](#footnote-27121) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

**“asleep.”** The Greek verb is *koimaō* (#2837 κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

1Co 15:22

**“in Adam…in Christ.”** The Greek word translated “in” is *en* (#1722 ἐν), and here refers to a relationship, a connection.

[For more on the “in” of connection, see commentaries on Col. 1:17 and Rom. 6:3.]

**“Adam.”** The Greek reads, “the Adam,” letting us know that it is the well-known one, the first man created. However, we do not reproduce the word “the” in English. Adam was created from the ground (Gen. 2:7), and Eve was created with material taken from Adam (Gen. 2:22). Adam and Eve were the first two human beings, and from them came every human who has ever lived.

[For more on Adam and Eve being literal and the ones who began the human race, see commentary on Gen. 2:7.]

**“all die.”** The Greek word translated “die” is *apothnēskō* (#599 ἀποθνῄσκω) in the present tense, active voice. Robertson calls this the “frequentative present,”[[120]](#footnote-24279) and it is also called the iterative present. It means “they go on dying.” It refers to the ongoing process of people dying. It is “in Adam,” that is, in connection with Adam that everyone is condemned to die, because Adam sinned and then passed on the sin nature to every human with the result that every human dies (Rom. 5:12-17). The statement that “all die” is a general principle, not an all-encompassing truth. We know that when the Rapture of the Church happens, some believers who are alive will be changed (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:16-17), but that will be an exception for a very small percentage of the people who have lived on earth. The general truth is that because of the sin of Adam, “all die.”

**“all will be made alive.”** The Greek word translated “will be made alive” is *zōopoieō* (#2227 ζῳοποιέω), and it is future tense. Robertson rightly refers to this as a punctiliar future, because different groups of people will be made alive en masse in the future: first at the Rapture, then at the first resurrection, and lastly at the second resurrection.

[For more on the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15.]

This verse has confused many and has been a central pillar in the teaching of the doctrine referred to by theologians as “Universalism,” that is, that every person who has ever lived will be saved, no matter what they believed or how they behaved. A central part of that argument is that both uses of “all” should be understood the same way, that is, if “all” (everyone) dies, then “all” (everyone) must be made alive (i.e., everyone must be given everlasting life). Proponents of Universalism argue that it does not fit the context to make the first “all” refer to everyone, but the second “all” refer only to Christians.

The key to understanding what Paul is saying is the context, which is about Christians and the resurrection. Paul is not discussing the fact that everyone dies; he is discussing why there must be a resurrection, because some people were saying there was no resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12). The whole argument in chapter 15 is about Christians only; it is not about “everyone,” i.e., both Christians and unbelievers. Paul is discussing Christians who die and then must be resurrected to be alive. Paul starts by pointing out that this was the pattern for the founder of the Faith, Jesus Christ, who himself died and then was made alive via resurrection (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Then Paul points out that if there is no resurrection, then Christ is not raised (1 Cor. 15:13), so he must be dead, and our trust in Christ is therefore futile (1 Cor. 15:17). If that were true, it would mean the Christians who have already died have 'perished'—they are forever dead (Cor. 15:18). But Paul then triumphantly says that in fact Jesus has been raised from the dead, and is the first one to be raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20).

Of course, it is clear that Christians are dying, just as it will be clear that Christians will be raised from the dead, but Paul clearly states this point in 1 Corinthians 15:22 so no one will misunderstand. He says, “For just as in our connection with Adam all Christians die, so in our connection with Christ all Christians will be made alive.”

Many of the underlying arguments of the Universalist position are based on the assumption that God is love, so He cannot allow anyone to suffer in Gehenna or perish. However, those arguments misunderstand love. The nature of love is not controlling, but rather allowing someone the freedom of choice even if the choice is a bad one with bad consequences. We should all understand this. We see people every day make choices that are harmful to them, but we also understand that they have the freedom to make those choices even if we wish they would take a better path in life. It is not loving for us to force people to live the way we want them to, even if it would be better for them. Similarly, it is not loving for God to force people to live in a way that is good for them, even if their bad choices ultimately lead to death.

The Bible is clear that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18), so if He says the wicked will be destroyed, then they will be. There are many extremely clear teachings in the Bible about the destruction of the wicked, and we cannot simply discount them because we wish people would do well now and in the hereafter (cf. Matt. 10:28; 2 Pet. 2:4-6). God cannot tell us the wicked will be destroyed and then not follow through with it. It is because God is love that He warns us over and over to be wise and do what is right.

[For more on the destruction of the wicked see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

The Bible has warning story after warning story of people making bad choices and suffering and even dying because of them, but we do not see God removing their free will and making them make good choices so they will not suffer and die. Instead, we see God pleading with people to make the right choices and do well (cf. Ezek. 33:11). Much of the point of the emphasis on wisdom in the book of Proverbs is so people will make the right choice and not suffer and die.

1Co 15:24

**“when… after.”** This verse contains the Greek word *hotan* (#3752 ὅταν) twice, which we have rendered “when” and “after.” The proper translation of this word unlocks the temporal sequence of the end that Paul is revealing. *Hotan* is a temporal term that can signify either *simultaneous* action with the main clause or *prior* action to the main clause. The difference depends on the tense and mood of the verb that it modifies: “with the present subjunctive, when the action of the subordinate clause is contemporaneous with that of the main clause… with the aorist subjunctive, when the action of the subordinate clause precedes that of the main clause.”[[121]](#footnote-28801) Here in verse 24 the main clause is “then comes the end,” the action that is contemporaneous with the end is “when he delivers (present subjunctive) the kingdom to God,” and the action that is prior to the end (making the end “after” this) is “he abolishes (aorist subjunctive) all rule and all authority and power.” Paul is being very precise in revealing the order of events. First, Christ abolishes all the powers, then he delivers the kingdom to God, and this delivery is simultaneous with the end. The end is the *telos*, or end goal, the desired conclusion of the creation project. Compare BDAG’s definition of *telos*: the goal toward which a movement is being directed, *end, goal, outcome*.[[122]](#footnote-16728)

Some commentators say that 1 Corinthians 15:23-24 proves there is no Rapture or Millennial Kingdom, but only the resurrection of Christ followed years later by the resurrection of everyone else. The Millennial Kingdom, the 1,000-year reign of Christ described in Revelation 20:1-10, was not clearly described in the Old Testament or by Christ when he was on earth, although there are verses that allude to it, such as Daniel 7:14. Nevertheless, the book of Revelation sets it forth very plainly. The fact that the order of the Rapture and two resurrections are not set forth here in Corinthians does not show they do not exist any more than the fact that this section does not set forth the timing of the Great Tribulation shows it does not exist. It is not Paul’s point to exactly describe the End Times chronology here. His point is to focus on Christ. Christ is the firstfruits, then he resurrects “those who are Christ’s,” then comes the end when Christ puts an end to those who oppose God. There is a whole lot more to End Times chronology than that, but this list is Christocentric, focusing on what Christ has done and will do.

**“he.”** The pronouns in this section of Corinthians can be difficult to follow: exactly who does the “he” refer to? We believe the pronouns in verses 20-28 should be understood as follows:

20But in fact, Christ has been raised from among the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21For since death *came* by a man, the resurrection of the dead also *came* by a man. 22For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then those who are Christ’s, at his coming. 24Then *comes* the end, when he (Jesus) delivers the kingdom to *his* God and Father, after he (Jesus) brings to an end every ruler and every authority and power 25For it is necessary for him (Jesus) to reign until he (Jesus) has put all his enemies under his (Jesus’) feet. 26*The* last enemy *that will be* brought to an end *is* death. 27For **He** (God) **has put all things in subjection under his** (Jesus’) **feet**. But when it says, “all things” have been put in subjection, it is clear that the One (God) who subjected all things to him (Jesus) is not included. 28And when all things have been put in subjection to him (Jesus), then the Son will subject himself to Him (God) who put all things in subjection to him (Jesus), so that God is all in all.

**“to *his* God and Father.”** The Greek is more literally, “to God and Father,” but that is unclear in English. Although most translations read “to God the Father,” that is not the way the Greek reads, which has the article before “God” and the word “and” between “God” and “Father.” The context makes it clear that Jesus is the one giving the kingdom over to God, so “his” is properly supplied, but it is avoided by most translators because Trinitarians do not like to think in terms of God being Jesus’ God, even though he himself says so on several occasions.

[For more on Jesus not being God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

**“brings to an end every ruler and every authority and power.”** In this case, the context, especially 1 Corinthians 15:25, shows us that the “rulers” (*archē*, #746 ἀρχή), “authority” (*exousia*, #1849 ἐξουσία), and “power” (*dunamis* #1411 δύναμις), are the demonic powers that oppose God. Sometimes these titles can be used of “good” spirits, or even human rulers. However, in this context, they refer to evil spirits, because the text says it is necessary for Christ to reign “until he has put all the enemies under his feet,” and the only enemies in the context are the rulers, authorities, powers—and the last one—death. Scripture teaches that there are angelic rulers and cosmic powers who hold certain authority in the universe, and that some of these powers are hostile to God (E.g., Dan. 10; Psalm 82; Matt. 24:29; Luke 4:6; Rom. 8:38-39; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 6:12; 1 John 5:19; Rev. 12:3-10).

The different categories of evil spirits listed here—rulers, authority, and power—are listed together in several other places in Scripture. For example, Ephesians 6:12 and Colossians 2:15 both list “rulers” and “authorities” together, referring to evil spirits. The “rulers” and “powers” that are listed together in Romans 8:38 are evil spirits because they try, but fail, to separate the believer from the love of God, something no “good” spirit would try to do. Also, “rulers,” “authority,” and “power” are listed together in Ephesians 1:21 just as they are here, although in Ephesians the titles refer to both good and evil beings (cf. Eph. 3:10; and see commentary on 1 Cor. 15:25).

Jesus is the one who brings an end to every ruler and all authority and power that opposes God. He has the ability to do that because God gave it to him (Matt. 28:18; John 5:21-29; Acts 2:34-36; Eph. 1:22; Phil. 2:9, 10; Heb. 1:3, 4; Jude 1:15; Rev. 1:18; 22:12). Here, Paul is saying that Christ “brings an end” to these demonic powers. The phrase “brings an end” is translated from the Greek word *katargeō* (#2673 καταργέω). BDAG gives the following definitions for *katargeō*, all of which can adequately describe what Christ does to the demonic rulers, authorities, and powers: 1) to cause something to lose its power or effectiveness; hence invalidate or make powerless; 2) to cause something to come to an end or to be no longer in existence; hence abolish, wipe out, set aside. 3) to cause the release of someone from an obligation (one has nothing more to do with it); hence be discharged, be released.[[123]](#footnote-14566)

All authority has been transferred to Christ (Matt. 28:18) and he will discharge the demons of their rule, wipe out their authority, and render their power ineffective. But as Hebrews 2:8 makes clear, even though everything has been put under Christ’s subjection, we do not yet see everything subjected to him. The powers are still in the heavenly places now (Eph. 6:12). It is not until the end that Christ takes his mighty power and begins to reign, starting with the war in heaven and the conquering of Satan and his minions (Rev. 11:15-18; 12:10).

[For more on the use of “rulers” and “authorities” in the New Testament, see commentary on Eph. 6:12.]

1Co 15:25

**“all his enemies.”** The Greek has the definite article, and literally reads, “all the enemies.” This refers to a particular set of enemies, namely the spiritual forces behind “all rule and all authority and power” just mentioned in 1 Cor. 15:24, and that is why we, along with most other versions, replace “the” with “his.” The enemies are Christ’s enemies. This echoes Ephesians 6:12 (ESV):

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the **rulers**, against the **authorities**, against the cosmic **powers** over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (emphasis added).

It is necessary for Christ to reign until all *these* enemies are put under his feet. (See also Heb. 2:5-9; 1 Pet. 3:22, and Rev. 11:15-18; 12:10).

1Co 15:26

**“*that will be* brought to an end.”** In the Greek this verb, *katargeō* (#2673 καταργέω), occurs in the present tense. It is an instance of the Prophetic Present, presenting a future reality as certain by speaking of it in the present tense. “This tense startles and arrests. It affirms and does not merely predict. It conveys a sense of certainty.”[[124]](#footnote-17102) This idiom uses a present tense verb, instead of a future tense verb, to express an action in the future, and by doing so emphasizes that the action is certain to come to pass, and usually quite soon (See commentaries on Eph. 2:6 and Luke 3:9 for more on the prophetic present). In this case, the words “brought to an end” are in the present tense, and Young’s Literal Translation has a very literal translation of the verse: “the last enemy is done away—death.” The problem with translating the Greek literally here, as Young’s does, is that most Christians are not familiar with the prophetic present idiom or the prophetic perfect idiom, and would tend to misunderstand a literal translation—because death has not yet been abolished. Nevertheless, the idiom gives great comfort to the knowledgeable reader who understands that God is communicating clearly that death will indeed be destroyed, and soon. However, most English versions use the English future tense, translating the verb in a way that does not confuse the reader. Thus, the NASB reads, “The last enemy that will be abolished is death.”

**“death.”** This is death, the absence of life, not just the death of the body. In the Garden of Eden, God said to Adam that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would “die” (Gen. 2:17). God said “die,” not “live forever in a bad place” (i.e., “hell”). When people die, they are “dead,” and by definition, death is the absence of life. When it comes to things that we cannot know, such as what happens when a person dies, we must trust that God has given us the answers in His Word. It is important to realize this because there are some people who assert that “death” means “separation,” but that is not biblically correct. When a person “dies,” he is not alive and “separated” from God; rather, he is not alive in any form or in any place. The Bible uses the same Hebrew and Greek words for the “death” of humans, as for the death of animals and plants. There is no special word for the “death” of people that means “separation,” and no reason to say that the word “death” means “separation” when referring to a person but actual “death” when referring to an animal. There is a reason God uses the same words for the death of a human and the death of animals—death is the same for all of them, and “death” is the total absence of life.

[For more information on the state of the dead, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

1Co 15:27

**“it says.”** Some versions translate this “he says” (KJV, ASV, NASB), which would make God the first-person speaker being quoted. Although it is true that God inspired the Scripture and is its author, in this instance, Paul is dealing with the biblical text of Psalm 8:6 where the Psalmist, as the narrator, is speaking of God; it is not God who is speaking in the first person. This is a quote from the narration of Scripture and should be handled as it often is by preachers and teachers who say, “the Bible says…it says,” not “the Bible says…He says.”

1Co 15:28

**“when all things have been put in subjection to him.”** Right now all things are not yet subject to him (Heb. 2:8).

**“subject himself.”** The form of this verb, *hupotassō* (#5293 ὑποτάσσω), can either be passive (“be subjected” ESV, NASB, NIV) or be a middle future, “the son will subject himself.”[[125]](#footnote-10054) The latter translation makes sense, that the son subjects himself. In every other use in this context, the active or passive of “subject” refers to the use of force, but that certainly does not apply to the Son, who out of love for His Father and of his own free will subjects himself after all enemies are subjected by force.

**“to Him.”** In this case, the REV capitalized “Him” because it refers to God. Usually, the REV does not capitalize pronouns that refer to God, but occasionally the context would be so confusing to many readers that the editors decided that an exception to the general practice would be helpful.

1Co 15:29

**“baptized for the sake of those who are dead.”** The exact way to translate this verse has been debated for centuries. In 1770, John Salomon Semler proposed that the standard translation was likely not correct, and broke the first sentence into two, making something such as: “Otherwise, what are they doing who are baptized? It is on behalf of dead ones if the dead are not raised.”

While the exact translation may be debated, the essential meaning of the section is not. Although we have no records of it today outside the Bible, it seems clear that Christians were being baptized as a ritual of standing in place of those who had died without being baptized. The fact that this is not mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament, or by any of the Church Fathers, or in the secular writings of those who speak (usually disparagingly) about Christianity, shows that the practice was probably local and very short lived. It is very common that ancient cultures had practices of which we today know very little because many local customs were never written down or the records were lost.

The text speaks of being baptized “for the sake of” [*huper*] those who had died. The Greek preposition *huper* means “for the sake of” or more colloquially, “in the place of.” Paul’s argument is thus right to the point: if there is no resurrection from the dead, then being baptized for someone who has died is pointless, and anyone who doubts the resurrection, but gets baptized on behalf of a dead person, is contradicting what he says by what he does.

The most likely explanation for the custom is that living Christians were being baptized for people in the congregation who were known to be faithful and believers but had not as yet received the rite of baptism. In the early centuries of the Church, especially once the Roman persecutions had started, it was often the case that a person had to be faithful to the Church for some probationary period before he or she was allowed to be baptized, which granted them the full status of membership in the congregation. It seems probable from this passage of Scripture that at some point in the early Church, a new custom started such that if a person in the probationary period died, someone else was then baptized in his or her place, most likely as a demonstration that the person really was a believer and would be in the resurrection, and that was being practiced at Corinth.

1Co 15:31

**“I swear this, brothers and sisters, by your reason to boast, that is, Christ Jesus our Lord.”** It would seem by the large number of ways that this verse has been brought into English that it is a very difficult verse.

Some versions start with “I protest.” While that gets the sense of the fact that Paul is upset with the people of Corinth, it misses the sense of the Greek, which is a well-attested formula by which people swear to something. A number of versions (cf. GW, NAB, NJB, NLT, The Source NT) and commentators[[126]](#footnote-13057) explain that Paul is using a grammatical formula that the Greeks used in making oaths. A. Nyland writes:

Paul used the common Greek expression for swearing by a divinity (νὴ, ne, with accusative)…This Greek word has no other meaning. In Greek times, people frequently said, ‘I swear by Zeus!” and here Paul is saying, “I swear by your reason to boast!” and the Greek requires that the reason to boast must have divine implication. Paul used the word καύχησις *kaukhēsis*, which is ‘reason to boast,’ which cannot mean ‘pride’ or ‘glory,’ and in no way is he suggesting here that he is proud of the Corinthians—quite the opposite. He is giving the Corinthians a severe roasting for their behaviour. Paul is saying that his reason to boast is their reason to boast, and this reason to boast is Jesus.[[127]](#footnote-14213)

Despite the number of translations that say Paul is boasting in the Corinthians (cf. CEB, HCSB, GW, NASB, NET, NIV, NJB), there is every reason to believe the verse should not be translated that way. Starting right from chapter 1, Paul has said he is upset with the Corinthians. They were divided (1 Cor. 1:10ff; 11:18ff), and Paul was glad he had not baptized them (1 Cor. 1:14). He treated them as if they were immature in the Faith (1 Cor. 2:1ff; 3:1ff). He reproved them for their arrogance and had to admonish them to imitate him (1 Cor. 4:8ff). He reproved them for the sexual immorality allowed in the church (1 Cor. 5:1ff). He reproved them for taking each other to court (1 Cor. 6:1ff). He had to defend himself against personal challenges to himself and his ministry (1 Cor. 9:1ff). He told them their meetings were doing more harm than good (1 Cor. 11:17). He had to give them exact instructions on love (1 Cor. 13:1ff). They were not respecting each other in the meetings but were stepping on each other (1 Cor. 14:26ff).

If all the above were not enough reason to see that Paul is not boasting in the Corinthians, early in chapter 15, some church members were actually saying there was no resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:12). Paul really went after that and argued forcibly that Jesus was raised from the dead. By 1 Cor. 15:30 he says his life is in jeopardy every day for Christ, something he confirms in the first phrase of 1 Cor. 15:31: “I die every day!”

It would be strange indeed if, at this point in 1 Corinthians, Paul suddenly reversed his tone and told the Corinthians that he boasted about them. On what possible basis? That cannot be what Paul is saying. Instead, in 1 Cor. 15:31 Paul is saying that he swears by Jesus Christ, who is their boasting too, that what he has been saying is true. It seems natural, given the doubt that some in the church at Corinth had about Paul, that he would want to bolster his words by swearing that what he was saying was true. When he wrote 2 Corinthians, likely less than six months later, he had to emphasize that he was not lying (2 Cor. 11:31).

In light of the whole scope and tone of 1 Corinthians, it makes perfect sense that Paul would swear “by your reason to boast, that is, Christ Jesus our Lord,” and in saying that he really means “Christ Jesus our *risen* Lord.”

1Co 15:32

**“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”** It is truly sad that the Devil has persuaded so many people there is no afterlife, and no reason to be godly, get saved, and live forever. It is a reasonable sentiment that if this life is all there is, then we should do everything we can to enjoy it the most we possibly can. “Let us eat and drink,” is idiomatic for enjoying life to the fullest, which means living as one wants, without restraint.

The idea that we should do what we want in this life because tomorrow we will die was a common sentiment through the ages. For example, this phrase in Corinthians was quoted from Isaiah, which was written more than 700 years before Corinthians. A Roman tombstone reflects this same sentiment, and reads, “Baths, wine, and sex ruin our bodies. But what makes life worth living except baths, wine, and sex?[[128]](#footnote-23495)

The sad thing about trying to enjoy life to the fullest without restraint because “tomorrow we die,” is that it is misinformed but works out to be exactly what happens. If a person lives a selfish, self-centered, and self-fulfilled ungodly life and throws off restraint, he will die. The Bible makes it clear that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23) and that death will come by being annihilated in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

Ironically, if a person does not “eat and drink” and throw off godly restraint in this life, but instead is humble and obeys God and gets saved, then he will “eat and drink” in the next life. The joy that people so long for in this life will be theirs in the next life if they are humble and obedient in this life. The fallen nature of this world means that godly people must be patient and self-sacrificing to live a godly life today, but when Jesus comes and restores the earth then we will have plenty to eat and drink, with many friends and much joy.

[For more on the ungodly being annihilated in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more on the next life being a Paradise on earth see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

1Co 15:33

**“bad company.”** In biblical times “bad company” referred to being with worthless or evil people. Today the “company” we keep can also include the television and movies we watch, the video games we play, etc., as well as the worthless, ungodly, or evil people we spend time with. We must make no mistake, who or what we spend our time with will greatly influence how we think and act. That is why the wise Christian is careful to spend time praying, reading the Bible, and in fellowship with other serious Christians. Many other verses in the Bible have this same general message (cf. Prov. 14:7).

The Greek phrase the REV translates as “Bad company corrupts good morals” is an exact quotation from the play “*Thais*” by the Greek poet Menander (342-291 BC). Although Paul may have read Menander, it is more likely that by Paul’s time the concept was so well-known and so often observed that it was a common saying. Today it is well known that people, especially children, can be badly influenced by the “wrong crowd.”

1Co 15:40

**“There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies.”** Some versions use the adjectives, “celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial” (which contrasts the earth with the planets) while some use the adjectives “heavenly bodies and earthly bodies,” which places contrast more on heaven and earth. The immediate context does have “sun, moon, and stars,” which favors “celestial” and “terrestrial,” but the chapter is all about the resurrection of the dead, which is about the difference between our earthly body and the heavenly body we will have. Also, there is no reason that angels and other spirit beings are not included in the “heavenly bodies” description, and planets and stars are in fact “heavenly bodies,” so that is the way we have gone in our translation.

1Co 15:44

**“soul body…spiritual body.”** 1 Corinthians 15:44 speaks about our body and makes the point that now we have a body (a flesh and bone body) that is powered by “soul,” but in the future, our body—still flesh and bone—will be like Christ’s body and be powered by “spirit.” The Greek phrase translated in the REV as “soul body” is *sōmapsuchikos* (#4983 *sōma* σῶμα, and #5591 *psuchikos* ψυχικός), and the Greek phrase translated “spiritual body” is *sōma pneumatikos* (#4983 *sōma* σῶμα, and #4152 *pneumatikos* πνευματικός; in the Greek, the noun “body” comes before the adjective, while in English we put the adjective first). The adjective *psuchikos* comes from the noun *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), which is usually translated as “soul,” and the adjective *pneumatikos* comes from the noun *pneuma* (#4151 πνεῦμα), which is usually translated as “spirit.”

The adjective *psuchikos* means “of, belonging to, somehow relating to, the ‘soul’ (*psuchē*),” and the adjective *pneumatikos* means “of, belonging to, somehow relating to, the ‘spirit’ (*pneuma*).” In this case, from the context and scope of Scripture, we can see that the verse is saying that today we have a body that is related to the soul and “soul-powered,” while in the future we will have a body that is related to spirit, and “spirit-powered.”

[For more on *psuchikos,* see commentary on 1 Cor. 2:14, “worldly-minded.”]

The human body is now animated by what the Bible calls “soul,” but when believers are raised from the dead or changed at the Rapture, we will no longer be animated by soul, but will be animated by spirit. So, for example, Ezekiel 37:5-14 says that God puts *ruach*, “spirit,” into people, making them come alive. “Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves…I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live.” (Ezek. 37:12-14 NRSV abridged). Unfortunately, many English versions translate the Hebrew word *ruach* in Ezekiel 37 as “breath” and not “spirit,” but some versions, such as the Douay-Rheims, NAB, Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible, and YLT, say “spirit” in these verses. A study of the whole Bible on this subject shows that God will put spirit into people’s dead bodies, which will then come to life (see commentaries on John 3:3 and 3:6).

The phrase “soul body” seems awkward, but “soul” is not easily made into an adjective in English. “Spirit” is much easier, and becomes “spiritual,” but it seems the best we can do with “soul” is “soul body.” It is tempting to use the translation, “soul-powered body,” but the soul does more than just power the body. Partly because of the difficulty with “soul body,” many versions translate *sōmapsuchikos* as “natural body,” but that is not really what the verse is saying. The verse is not saying that our body is “natural,” it is saying that our body is animated by “soul.” This verse is contrasting our current soul-powered body, which will die, with our future *pneumatikos* body, a spirit-powered and spirit-enabled body that will live forever. Marvin Vincent correctly states that the phrase *sōma psuchikos* (“soul body”) “signifies an organism animated by *psuche*, soul.”[[129]](#footnote-14445) And just as our “soul body” is animated by soul, so in the future, our “spiritual body” will be animated by “spirit,” and it will live forever.

It is important that we do not become confused and think that when 1 Corinthians 15:44 says a “spiritual body,” it means a non-corporeal body, like a ghost. The meaning of a *sōmapneumatikos* (“spiritual body”) is clear from the context. A “soul body” is a body animated by soul, and a “spiritual body” is a body animated by spirit, not a body that has no physical substance and is immaterial.

When we are raised from the dead or changed at the Rapture, we will have a body like Jesus Christ has now (1 Cor. 15:48-49; Phil. 3:21). When Jesus first appeared to his followers who were inside a room with locked doors, “they were terrified and frightened, and thought they were seeing a spirit [*pneuma*]” (Luke 24:37 REV). Those disciples had never seen a resurrected body, and because Jesus came into the locked room where they were staying, they thought they were seeing some kind of ghost-like being with a non-corporeal body. Jesus quickly corrected their misconception and said, “Look at my hands and my feet, *and see* that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you can see that I have” (Luke 24:39 REV). Even in his resurrected body, Jesus has flesh and bones, and we will too. However, our new flesh and bone body will not be powered by the soul that we have today, it will be powered by, and relate to, spirit.

**“Since there is.”** We translated this as “Since there is,” because that is more the meaning of the Greek text than the conditional statement. The condition expressed by the Greek word *ei* is assumed to be true, so translating *ei* as “if” can be misleading. For more on translating the Greek word *ei*, usually “if,” as “since,” see commentary on Ephesians 3:2, “surely you have.”

1Co 15:45

**“the first man, Adam.”** Paul is being literal here. Adam was the first human created by God, and from Adam and Eve came every human who has ever lived. Adam was created from the ground (Gen. 2:7), and Eve was created from material from Adam (Gen. 2:22). Adam and Eve were the first two human beings, and from them came every human who has ever lived.

[For more on Adam and Eve being literal and the ones who began the human race, see commentary on Gen. 2:7.]

**“soul.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; and attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here *psuchē* is used of the person himself. Thus, many modern versions say “living being,” or “living person.” Adam’s body was just inanimate (“dead”) material until God breathed life into it. That is the one and only time God created life for people. God took life from Adam (his “rib” or “from his side”) and made Eve, who then had life. Since that time, the life (“soul”) of Adam and Eve has been passed down to their progeny. Every person alive today has the life that God breathed into Adam.

When God breathed life into Adam, He did not breathe in something that was like a ghost that inhabited the body and could live apart from the body. He gave “life” to every cell of Adam’s body. In fact, it is the presence of what the Bible calls *nephesh* in the Hebrew Old Testament, and *psuchē* in the Greek New Testament, which we call “soul” in English, that differentiates between something alive and something dead. A living cell has “soul,” while a dead cell does not.

The soul is sustained by the body, which provides a medium in which it can survive, and when the body can no longer function, the “soul,” the life, dies. It does not go anywhere when it dies, it just dies. “Soul” dies in millions of cells in the body every day, yet we never ask, “Where did the life go?” We believe the cells just died. Confusion about “soul” only occurs when every cell dies together, in other words, when the person himself dies. At that time, we ask, “Where did the soul go?” But the answer is the same no matter how many cells die at one time—the “soul” just dies and is gone, it does not “go” anywhere. The dead person is then completely dead in every sense of the word, and is awaiting the resurrection and the Day of Judgment.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

**“*has become*.”** The verb is not in the Greek text. It is supplied from the context and scope and is placed in the REV text in italics for the English reader. The first human, Adam, “became” a living soul when God took his body that was formed from the ground and breathed life into it: “Yahweh God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). Here in 1 Cor. 15:45, Jesus Christ has become a “life-giving spirit.” When God raised Jesus from the dead, the “last Adam” had a spirit-powered body and the authority to give life to people.

[For more on the body Jesus has now, see commentary on 1 Cor. 15:44.]

**“life-giving.”** There is a lot of meaning in the phrase that Jesus is a “life-giving” spirit. The primary meaning is that God has given Christ the power to raise the dead (John 5:21; 6:39-54; 11:25). That is why the phrase “life-giving spirit” is used in this verse. The context is speaking of raising the dead (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35, 42). However, it is also true that Jesus gives us power in this life, but that is a secondary meaning in this context (Cf. 2 Cor. 4:7-10; 2 Cor. 12:9; 2 Tim. 1:7).

**“spirit.”** Jesus is referred to as a “spirit,” but has a flesh and bone body. See commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:44. Because when Jesus was raised from the dead he had a spiritually powered body, the New Testament sometimes refers to him as “the Spirit” (cf. Acts 2:4; 10:19; Rom. 8:26-27; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13 and 22:17; see commentary on Rev. 2:7).

1Co 15:46

**“soul *body*.”** See commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:44.

1Co 15:50

**“Now I say this.”** This phrase opens up a new dimension to the line of logic and argument that Paul has been developing. Although some versions translate the opening like, “Now what I am saying is this:” as if Paul were now going to describe in different words what he had already said, instead Paul is giving more and different information than he already had given. So 1 Corinthians 15:50 is not a rehash of what has been said, but some new information. The Greek word *hoti* that starts the next part of the sentence in the Greek text is not likely meant to be translated as “that,” but rather marks the beginning of the new thought.

**“flesh and blood is not able to inherit the Kingdom of God.”** To understand what Paul is saying here, some basics must be understood. First, the “Kingdom of God” is the Millennial Kingdom, the kingdom that Jesus will set up on earth when he comes and conquers the earth in the Battle of Armageddon. The “Kingdom of God” is not “heaven.” Also, what Paul means by “flesh and blood” is explained by the next phrase and the use of “corruption” and “incorruption,” and also in the scope of Scripture. There will be some flesh and blood people in the Millennial Kingdom, but they will not “inherit” it, they will age and die in it (cf. Isa. 65:17-25). As 1 Corinthians 15:50 says, “corruption” (the natural body) cannot inherit “incorruption” (the incorruptible Kingdom of Christ and living forever). R. C. H. Lenski correctly observes, “ ‘flesh and blood’ describes the human body as it exists in this life….”[[130]](#footnote-13101) As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:44, Christians will be raised with a spiritual body, and Philippians 3:21 says the new body that Christians will have will be like Christ’s glorious body. So 1 Corinthians 15:50 is saying that “flesh and blood,” that is, the human body we now have, will not be able to inherit the Kingdom of God. Also, we know from Scripture that there will be survivors after the Battle of Armageddon, and some of them will be allowed to enter Christ’s kingdom on earth (see commentary on Matt. 25:32). However, those survivors will not “inherit” the kingdom in the same way that those people who have been raised from the dead and are “incorruptible” and have everlasting life in bodies like Jesus’ glorious body (Phil. 3:21) will inherit it. The natural people who enter the kingdom will age and die in the kingdom, not “inherit” it in the full sense of the word.

[For more on natural people being allowed to enter Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth, see commentary on Matt. 25:32. For more on Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”)

1Co 15:51

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20. This is the only time *idou* appears in 1 Corinthians, so it brings a very important emphasis (cf. more than 60 times in Matthew). God wants us to pay serious attention to the sacred secret that involves our resurrection (or Rapture) and receiving new bodies that will be spiritual bodies like Jesus’ body.

**“sacred secret.”** The REV translates the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *mustērion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm.

[For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

**“sleep.”** The Greek verb is *koimaō* (#2837 κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

**“but we will all be changed.”** That living believers would be instantly changed at the Rapture was indeed a “sacred secret,” just as 1 Corinthians 15:51 says. That living believers would be changed was part of the Administration of the Sacred Secret (Eph. 3:2), and therefore unknown until the Lord revealed it to the apostle Paul. There are other scriptures in the Church Epistles that also tell us details about the change believers will experience at the Rapture (cf. 1 Thess. 4:15-18, Phil. 3:20-21, Eph. 2:6).

To understand what a powerful impact these words of Paul about living Christians being changed had on Christians, we must first understand what the Old Testament and Gospels said about people who will be alive on earth when the Messiah sets up his kingdom. Actually, the Old Testament is entirely silent about what happens to living believers when the Messiah conquers the earth and sets up his kingdom. In fact, what Old Testament believers knew about the Messiah had lots of missing details as well.

There were scriptures that said the Messiah would be born and grow up and then conquer evil and rule the world, and that was the almost universal belief at the time of Christ (cf. Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-9; 61:1-3; Mic. 5:2; Zech. 9:9-10; Mal. 3:1-3; 4:1-3). There were a couple of verses—only a couple—that spoke of the death of the Messiah (cf. Isa. 53:8-10), but even those were not properly understood, which is why the people at the time of Christ did not think the Messiah was going to die (cf. Matt. 16:21-22; Luke 18:31-34; 24:19-21, 44-46; John 12:34; 20:9). Furthermore, there were a lot of verses in the Old Testament about a time of terrible trouble on earth, which we know as the Great Tribulation (see commentary on Dan. 12:1), but there were no clear scriptures that explained when that terrible time was going to happen.

So before the ministry of Jesus Christ, what most Jews believed about the Messiah and the End Times was that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, grow up and fight evil and conquer the earth and then rule the earth in a godly way. He would build the Temple and rule from Jerusalem. Also, at some point, likely early in his kingdom, there would be a resurrection from the dead and the righteous dead would get to live in the land of Israel (Ezek. 37:12-14).

But what about the people on earth who were not killed in the war when Christ conquered the earth? Nothing is specifically said about those people. Some of them had to be allowed to enter the Millennial Kingdom because Scripture shows that they are in it, but that is assumed, not specifically stated. Furthermore, Isaiah 65:20-23 says that they will live very long lives and bear healthy children, but then they die, and then what? The Bible does not say.

Jesus Christ clarified the situation somewhat when he added to what the Old Testament said by teaching about the “Sheep and Goat Judgment” (Matt. 25:31-46). Jesus said that when he sets up his throne on earth all the living people on earth will be brought before him and he will separate them into two groups: the sheep (righteous people) and goats (unrighteous people). The goats will be thrown into the Lake of Fire while the sheep will be let into his kingdom. At that point we have to assume that what Isaiah said will come to pass: those righteous people will live very long lives, marry and bear children, age, and die (we later see from the book of Revelation that that is what happens). But like the Old Testament, Jesus never taught about what happened to them after they died. He was silent about if or when they would be raised from the dead and judged. So the Old Testament and Jesus were both unclear about what happened to believers who were alive on earth when Christ set up his kingdom. They would live in the wonderful Millennial Kingdom of Christ on earth, but grow old and die, and nothing was known beyond that.

Then a totally new revelation came to the apostle Paul about the Christian Church! It was new, and very different from what the Old Testament said and what Jesus taught would happen to living believers at the time Jesus returned to earth and conquered it at the Battle of Armageddon. The Lord showed Paul a “sacred secret,” which was that born-again Christians who were alive at the Rapture would be changed! They would not enter the Millennial Kingdom as mortals and age and die like the Old Testament taught would happen to people. Instead, the mortal bodies of Christians would change and “put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:52-53).

This would have been an amazing revelation to the people of Paul’s time and revealed part of the big and wonderful difference between the people of the Old Testament and Gospels and the Christian Church, which did not exist before Pentecost (Acts 2) and will end with the Rapture. Combined with 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, we now know that at some point in the future Jesus will shout from heaven and dead Christians will rise and living Christians will be changed, and both will get new bodies like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:20-21), and we will go up and be seated in the heavenlies like Christ is (Eph. 2:6). No wonder Paul could write to the Thessalonians, “comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:18).

For the record, we now know from what the apostle John wrote in the book of Revelation that the people who got old and died in the Millennial Kingdom will get up and be judged in the Second Resurrection at the end of Christ’s 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom on earth (Rev. 20:11-15).

[For more about the Millennial Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

1Co 15:52

**“last trumpet.”** The key to understanding the “last trumpet” is understanding the athletic and cultural analogy it refers to. It is not the actual last trumpet in time, but the trumpet that closes the event or festival. The Age of Grace (the Church Administration) will close with the Rapture, accompanied by the trumpet of God (1 Thess. 4:16).

Some commentators try to determine the time of the Rapture by the “last trumpet,” and believe in a mid-Tribulation Rapture because they say the “last trumpet” in Revelation is the seventh trumpet of Revelation chapters 8-11 (the seventh and last of the seven is Rev. 11:15). But that is not what the “last trumpet” means. For one thing, the seventh trumpet in Revelation is chronologically not the last trumpet in the Bible (more on this below). Besides that, however, 1 Corinthians was almost certainly written in AD 55 or 56, but the book of Revelation, which reveals many truths that were not known before, including the 7 trumpet judgments, was not likely written until sometime around AD 90. When Paul wrote about the “last trumpet” to the Corinthians, they surely understood what he meant, something they could not have done if they needed to have the book of Revelation (or Matthew!) to be able to understand what Paul wrote. The “last trumpet” was known by the Corinthians because they knew the common custom of trumpets ending the events they attended.

There are many athletic analogies in Corinthians. This makes perfect sense when you understand the history and culture of Corinth, especially in light of the Greco-Roman athletic culture. Athletic events were a huge part of the Greco-Roman world. There were 4 “Panhellenic games” that had gone on for centuries. The most well-known were the Olympic Games, which were held in Olympia in Greece in honor of the god Zeus, and the winners received an olive wreath crown (and lots of money). The second most popular games were the Isthmian Games, which were held at Corinth in honor of Poseidon, and the winner received a pine wreath crown (and lots of money). The other two Panhellenic games were the Pythian Games, which honored Apollo and were held every 4 years at Delphi (staggered 2 years so they would not conflict with the Olympic Games), and the Nemean Games, which were held every 2 years at Nemea in honor of Zeus and Hercules. And besides these games, there were many lesser “games.” Corinth had a number of smaller games, much like schools today have “local meets,” “regional meets,” and “national meets.”

Because of the importance of athletics to the Corinthians, there are a number of athletic references in 1 and 2 Corinthians. For example, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 has many athletic terms. 1 Corinthians 9:24 has “run” (*trechō*, to run in a race); “race” (*stadion*, race-course); “prize” (*brabeion*, the prize for the contest). 1 Corinthians 9:25 has “is competing” (*agonizomai*, to strive in a contest). The word *agonizomai* is from *agōn*, the place where the games took place. 1 Corinthians 9:25 also has “exercises self-control” (*egkrateuomai*, to exercise self-control in training); and “crown” (*stephanos*, the crown or wreath received for winning the contest). 1 Corinthians 9:26 has *trechō* like 1 Cor. 9:24, and also “box” (*pukteuō*, to box); “beat the air” (*aera derōn*, to beat the air or shadow box). In 2 Corinthians 10:13, 15, and 10:16, the word “sphere” is *kanōn*, meaning rule or standard, and was used of the measure of a leap in athletics. 1 Corinthians 7:18 mentions becoming “uncircumcised.” It was embarrassing for a Jew to participate in the Grecian games because the contestants were nude, so an operation was devised whereby the skin of the penis was cut and pulled forward so that when it healed it looked like the contestant was uncircumcised.

Closely aligned to the athletics of Greece were the Roman games, which often involved gladiators and people fighting animals. 1 Corinthians 4:9 mentions the spectacle of the arena, and the procession that it sometimes involved. 1 Corinthians 15 has a couple of allusions to the Roman games. In 1 Corinthians 15:32 Paul wrote, “If for *merely* human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me if the dead are not raised? **Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die**.’” Paul was not actually in the arena, but the analogy to the Roman games was well understood at Corinth.

It was standard for the Roman Games to begin and end with trumpets. The Corinthians would easily understand that “the last trumpet” was the one that ended the Games. For the Church, the ending, the “last trumpet,” is the trumpet that accompanies the Rapture, which ends the Church Age. It is important for the analogy to realize that no Corinthian would think that the “last trumpet” meant there were no more trumpets and no more Games. It just meant that those particular Games were over. The next Games would begin some weeks or months later. The last trumpet of Corinthians accompanies the Rapture of the Church to heaven and ends the “Church Game” on earth, then “the Game of life” continues on with the Tribulation, which has 7 Trumpets we know of (Rev. 8:6-8, 10, 12; 9:1,13; 11:15). Then, after the Battle of Armageddon, Christ will gather the elect with a loud trumpet (Matt. 24:31). We can see from the scope of Scripture that this gathering of the elect includes both the gathering of the people who are still alive on earth and also the First Resurrection, also referred to as the Resurrection of the Righteous.

[For more on the Resurrection of the Righteous, see commentary on Acts 24:15.]

It is noteworthy that the Age of Grace, the Age of the Christian Church, began with a sound and will end with a sound. The day the Christian Church started on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), it started as “a sound came from heaven like a strong rushing wind” (Acts 2:2). The Day of Pentecost was in June, and a typical June day in Israel is cloudless and quite calm. There was no “strong rushing wind,” there was only the sound of one, which is why all the people were amazed. If there had been a strong wind accompanied by the sound of strong wind, no one would have thought anything of it. It was only because there was the sound of the wind without the wind itself that it caught people’s attention.

The Church Age will end as it began, with a sound, in this case, the sound of a trumpet. The trumpet and Rapture will mark the close of the Church Age and the end of the Body of Christ on earth.

1Co 15:54

“**Death has been swallowed up in victory.”** This is paraphrased from Isaiah 25:8. Isaiah 25:8 says, “He will swallow up death forever,” which is rightly paraphrased as “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

1Co 15:55

**“O Death.”** This verse is paraphrased from Hosea 13:14. The Hebrew text of Hosea 13:14 reads, “Death, where are your plagues? Sheol, where is your destruction?” One of the adaptations of the Hebrew text in Corinthians is that the Old Testament text addressed two different entities: Death and Sheol, whereas the NT only addresses “Death.”

**“Death”** is in the vocative case, the case of direct address. This is the figure of speech personification (prosopopoeia) where death is set forth as a person and spoken to.

1Co 15:58

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

**1 Corinthians Chapter 16**

1Co 16:1

**“Now concerning the collection for the holy ones.”** This “collection” is the collection of money to support needy believers.

1Co 16:2

**“prospered.”** See commentary on 3 John 1:2, “doing well.”

1Co 16:5

**“for I intend to pass through Macedonia.”** The Greek text reads, “For I am passing through Macedonia.” Paul was not passing through Macedonia at the time, but was writing 1 Corinthians from Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8). This is a case where the Greek present tense is used to indicate an intention. This is also a common idiom in English. We say, “I am going to the store,” using the present tense, when actually we are sitting at home discussing what we will do during the day. Many versions translate the intention into the text and say, “I intend to go through Macedonia.” While this is clear, it is always good to have some understanding of the idiom of the original.

Paul’s original intention was to go from Ephesus to Corinth, then north to Macedonia, then back to Corinth, then on to Judea. He ended up going first through Macedonia, then south to Corinth, then back north to Macedonia, then back to Judea (see commentary on 2 Cor. 1:16).

1Co 16:11

**“treat…with contempt.”** From *exoutheneō* (#1848 ἐξουθενέω). See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:20.

1Co 16:12

**“our brother Apollos.”** Cf. CJB. The Greek literally reads “Apollos the brother,” with the word “brother” in the genitive case. It is a descriptive genitive, describing an attribute of Apollos, that he is a brother in the Lord. To translate this “Apollos our brother,” as many versions do, shifts the emphasis of the phrase from Apollos’ membership in the whole family of God (brother Apollos), to his relationship to Paul and company (our brother), so the REV stayed with “brother Apollos.”

The weight of evidence is that Apollos was not at Ephesus with Paul when Paul exhorted him to go to Corinth, because it seems certain that Paul would have sent greetings from Apollos to the church at Corinth if Apollos had been there, just as Paul sent greetings from Priscilla and Aquila (1 Cor. 16:19).

Paul’s second missionary journey (Acts 15:40-18:22) likely started in AD 50 (perhaps AD 49), and 1 Corinthians was written from Ephesus on Paul’s third missionary journey, likely in AD 55.

1Co 16:13

**“be courageous.”** The Greek is an idiom, and literally reads**, “**act like a man,” from the Greek word *anēr*, a male, a man, also used for “husband.” The idiom is to be courageous, be brave. Battle has always been dangerous, but the battles of the ancient world almost always involved hand-to-hand combat, with armies of men rushing at each other and engaging in brutal and bloody conflict. It took great courage to charge at the enemy knowing that even a small wound could cause an infection that would painfully take one’s life.

But courage is not just for the battlefield. Life is full of times when it takes courage to do the right thing, as well as self-control to not do the wrong thing. Most people are afraid of what others will say or do, and because of that are afraid to freely obey God, and Jesus had to remind his disciples that we better fear God, not people: “And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul. But rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna” (Matt. 10:28). We can draw courage to do the right thing if we remember that there is a Day of Judgment coming, and God will richly reward those who serve Him. Scripture promises, “Whatever you do, work from *the depths of your* soul, as for the Lord and not for people, because you know that you will receive the inheritance as a reward from the Lord. *So,* serve the Lord Christ!” (Col. 3:23-24). It takes courage and involves risk to do the will of the Lord, but it will be rewarded.

**“be strong.”** The BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon* gets the sense correct in this context when it says, “In the psychological sense of encouragement to remain firm.”[[131]](#footnote-28036) We are to maintain our position in the face of the enemy. It is not helpful to be courageous at first but then be unwilling to remain firm on our position.

1Co 16:15

**“Brothers and sisters.”** The Greek text is “brothers,” but that often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

1Co 16:17

**“they provided what you were not able to.”** See commentary on Philippians 2:30.

1Co 16:18

**“give recognition.”** This is from the Greek word “to know” *epiginōskō* (#1921 ἐπιγινώσκω). The Greek adds the preposition *epi* as an intensifier. Paul’s command to “know” such men is rightly understood by all versions to mean “acknowledge” such men, or “give recognition” to such men. Included in the sense, but hard to translate, is the idea that the people would not only be recognized publicly, but they would be appreciated by the believers. For this translation, compare Williams’ *The New Testament: a Private Translation in the Language of the People*, CJB, and NJB. The *Complete Jewish Bible* and *New Jerusalem Bible* translate the word “appreciate” here, which captures the sense very well.

1Co 16:19

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

1Co 16:20

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek text is “brothers,” but that often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

1Co 16:21

**“in my own hand.”** Paul usually wrote some kind of closing to his epistles in his own handwriting. See commentary on Galatians 6:11.

1Co 16:22

**“is not a friend with the Lord.”** The Greek word we translate “is…a friend with,” is *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). It is hard to translate the Greek verb *phileō* in this context and keep the English as a verb. If we say, “love,” as most versions do, we lose the meaning of *phileō* here, and confuse it with *agapē* love. We could say if someone is not “friendly to” or “fond of,” but these seem too weak. Likewise, “attached to” seemed too unclear, because when a person is saved they are attached to the Lord by virtue of being a part of the Body of Christ. It seemed that using the noun, “a friend” and having “with the Lord” as an indirect object of the verb instead of the direct object that it is in the Greek was still the best way to keep the meaning in English. For a more complete understanding of *phileō*, see commentary on John 21:15.

1Co 16:23

**“you all.”** The “you” is plural, thus “you all.”

1. Marvin R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, 3:186. [↑](#footnote-ref-27113)
2. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-29060)
3. R. C. H. Lenski, First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-11841)
4. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 472, “epitrechon”; J. B. Lightfoot, Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul, 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-29642)
5. Cf. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 4:70; Lightfoot, Notes, 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-28082)
6. Gordon Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians [NICNT], 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-15226)
7. Cf. Kenneth S. Wuest, The New Testament: an Expanded Translation, 383. [↑](#footnote-ref-20121)
8. Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “ὑστερέω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12881)
9. Gordon Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians [NICNT], 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-14517)
10. Fee, Corinthians [NICNT], 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-32177)
11. Cf. NASB; Thayer, s.v. “καταρτίζω”; Lenski, First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-28197)
12. Cf. Lenski, Corinthians, 66-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-16817)
13. see Metzger, Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 545. [↑](#footnote-ref-12225)
14. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, “Intransitive for the Transitive,” 510-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-16342)
15. Bratcher and Nida, A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, commentary on Eph. 1:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-25463)
16. Louw and Nida, Greek English Lexicon, s.v. “ψυχικός.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13994)
17. Thayer Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “ψυχικός.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17640)
18. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-20661)
19. Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-15837)
20. E. W. Bullinger; W. E. Vine. [↑](#footnote-ref-11794)
21. Cf. Gordon Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians [NICNT], 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-13212)
22. See E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 245, “epanadiplosis.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10454)
23. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “οἰκονόμος.” [↑](#footnote-ref-16501)
24. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 4:103. [↑](#footnote-ref-28912)
25. BDAG, s.v. “φυσιόω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27348)
26. Lenski, St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-20084)
27. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians. [↑](#footnote-ref-12490)
28. Paul Ellingworth and Howard A. Hatton, A Handbook on Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, UBS Handbook Series. [↑](#footnote-ref-31669)
29. C. K. Barrett, The First Epistle to the Corinthians [BNTC], 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-31755)
30. See Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 538, “metonymy.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32279)
31. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians. [↑](#footnote-ref-19841)
32. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-29290)
33. Cf. Lenski, St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-29023)
34. E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1968, p. 238-240. [↑](#footnote-ref-28556)
35. Friberg, Analytical Lexicon, s.v. “λοίδορος”; cf. BDAG, s.v. “λοίδορος.” [↑](#footnote-ref-19055)
36. Nyland, The Source New Testament, 315n4. [↑](#footnote-ref-17815)
37. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 273; Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 4:124. [↑](#footnote-ref-10422)
38. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 528-29, “heterosis.” [↑](#footnote-ref-24608)
39. David Instone-Brewer, Divorce and Remarriage in the Church, 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-24001)
40. BDAG, s.v. “ὀφειλή.” [↑](#footnote-ref-16244)
41. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “σύμφωνος.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18457)
42. Also see Lenski’s translation, First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-18203)
43. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “χωρίζω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12740)
44. Cf. Wikipedia, “Religion and circumcision,” accessed January 22, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion\_and\_circumcision. [↑](#footnote-ref-25626)
45. Lenski, First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 302. [↑](#footnote-ref-18621)
46. Cf. Lenski, Corinthians, 302-304. [↑](#footnote-ref-22047)
47. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 335-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-20406)
48. Thayer, s.v. “εἴδωλον.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27977)
49. Cf. Lenski, First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 337-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-31806)
50. See Adolf Deissmann, Light from the ancient East, 353-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-18919)
51. For more discussion on this verse, see J. S. Hyndman, Lectures on The Principles of Unitarianism, 58-63; Patrick Navas, Divine Truth or Human Tradition, 42-45. [↑](#footnote-ref-32009)
52. Nestle-Aland 28th Edition: Critical Apparatus, 532. [↑](#footnote-ref-18102)
53. See BDAG, s.v.“ παρίστημι,” definition “e.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14243)
54. Thayer, s.v. “παρίστημι.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23935)
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56. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 4:140. [↑](#footnote-ref-18007)
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59. Stephen G. Miller, Ancient Greek Athletics, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-28089)
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61. BDAG, s.v. “ἀδήλως.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14785)
62. BDAG Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “ὑπωπιάζω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-16673)
63. Bart Ehrman, The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture, 89-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-23177)
64. For more discussion on this verse, see Ehrman, The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture, 89-90; Don Snedeker, Our Heavenly Father has No Equals, 441-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-25871)
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69. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 494. [↑](#footnote-ref-17183)
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71. Robertson, Grammar of the Greek New Testament, 790-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-11965)
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73. Louw and Nida, Greek English Lexicon, s.v. “φανέρωσις.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27358)
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79. Liddell and Scott, s.v. “διάκρισις.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11715)
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87. Richard B. Hays, First Corinthians, 229-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-11292)
88. Cf. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians. [↑](#footnote-ref-16710)
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99. Also see Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians [NICOT], 665 and n35. [↑](#footnote-ref-29944)
100. see Lenski, Corinthians, 587-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-20613)
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105. Samuel Green, Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek Testament, 350. [↑](#footnote-ref-30986)
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123. BDAG, s.v. “καταργέω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14566)
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125. Lenski, First and Second Corinthians, 683-84; Robertson, Grammar, 809. [↑](#footnote-ref-10054)
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128. Gregory Aldrete, Daily Life in the Roman City, 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-23495)
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