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“Growth Pains in the Church: Lessons from 1 Corinthians (Part II)”

by
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About the Author



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MONDAY, OCTOBER 1
1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-3
ACTS 15:13-21

*“Now as touching things
offered unto idols ...”*

FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS

The practice of eating food offered to idols was widespread in the city of Corinth. When two parties wanted to conclude a business deal, they would often gather in an agora (community square) and seal the contract with a meal. These meals would typically be offered to an idol to procure the blessings of the “deity.” Such meals were also offered during feasts and parties. Failure to eat the food might offend the hosts and cause the individual to be ostracised by society. Thus, some Corinthian Christians chose the way of expediency and ate the food that had been offered to idols. This was in contradiction with the injunction issued by the Jerusalem Council concerning Gentile Christians: *“Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood”* (Acts 15:19-20). This is still applicable for us today.

At the same time, some brethren (who were young in the faith, with a lack of understanding and a weak conscience) might fear even eating food that were sold in the market (*“shambles,”* 1 Cor 10:25) as the food might have been offered to idols. They thought that eating such food would subject them to the power and control of the idols.

How should this confusion in the Corinthian Church be addressed? The solution is not found in philosophy, nor psychology, but in the forever inerrant and infallible Word of everlasting life. *“The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple”* (Ps 119:130). If only the Corinthian Christians would humble themselves before God’s Word, there would be clarity concerning this issue! Similarly, if we want to have clarity amid life’s perplexing challenges, we must turn to God’s authoritative Word. Will you?

THOUGHT: I must keep myself from idols (1 John 5:21).

PRAYER: Father, may all idols be removed from my life!

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 2

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-3

1 CORINTHIANS 2

“Knowledge puffeth up ...”

KNOWLEDGE WHICH DESTROYS!

When Paul said that *“knowledge puffeth up”* (1 Cor 8:1), he was not saying that doctrine is unimportant or harmful. Christianity is not a blind faith but is based upon the truth of God’s Word (John 17:17). As Christians, we must be firmly grounded in the knowledge of the Scriptures if we are to experience the fullness of our salvation and walk rightly before the Lord. Thus, the Scriptures declare, *“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee”* (1 Tim 4:16).

The issue concerning food offered to idols arose because of the Corinthian Christians’ lack of spiritual wisdom. They claimed to possess knowledge that God is the one living and true God (1 Cor 8:4), but much of this knowledge was head knowledge without much depth of spiritual understanding and application.

Some of the Corinthian Christians were young, immature believers who were grappling with this issue. They needed to be taught and encouraged in the Word of God.

However, there were those who, being full of themselves, thought that they knew better. This arrogance and presumptuousness led to wrong practices. Such pride in their head “knowledge” only led them to harm themselves, and others too.

The Rev Timothy Tow summed it up well: “Head knowledge that puffs up without heart knowledge is a dangerous thing.” Be careful not to fall into this trap! *“Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility”* (Prov 18:12).

THOUGHT: Am I humble before the Lord?

PRAYER: Father, forgive me for my proud ways.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 3

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-3

MATTHEW 11:25-26

“Knowledge puffeth up ...”

HOW DO I STUDY GOD’S WORD?

The three rules for understanding theology are: “Humility, Humility, Humility” (Calvin). No man can understand spiritual things without the help of the Holy Spirit, for spiritual things must be *“spiritually discerned”* (1 Cor 2:14). If we desire to understand theology rightly, we must humble ourselves before God and His Word.

Alas, it is so easy for one who has been a professing Christian for some years to become full of himself. He may become presumptuous in his ways, thinking that he knows all things, forgetting that it is God who grants spiritual sight and understanding. He surmises in his own heart, “I’ve known God for so many years, and thus I am better than others. What more have I to know about God’s Word?” It is to such conceited individuals that Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 8:2: *“And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.”*

We must never approach the study of God’s Word simply as an exercise to prove how knowledgeable we are. Such a self-centred and arrogant attitude dishonours God. Simply knowing the answers to questions set on paper is no proof of one’s spirituality. Rather, the proof of spiritual understanding and wisdom is seen in how a man responds to the various circumstances of life. In the case of the Corinthian Christians, their lack of spiritual maturity was seen in how they handled the issue of food offered to idols.

When we study God’s Word with the right attitude, it will lead us to see how great God is and how small we are. One who truly knows God’s Word will be humble before God and man. He will not be boasting about his knowledge, nor will he have a judgemental spirit against fellow brethren. The more he studies God’s Word, the more humble he will be. Always remember, “Head knowledge that puffs up without heart knowledge is a dangerous thing.”

THOUGHT: Do I have head knowledge or heart knowledge?

PRAYER: Father, grant me a teachable spirit, and not a proud heart.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-3

MATTHEW 11:25-26

“... but charity edifieth.”

LOVE EDIFIES

The proud spirit of the Corinthian Christians must be replaced by love. The term “*edifieth*” (*oikodomei*, 1 Cor 8:1) carries the idea of building a structure brick by brick. Pride is destructive, but love is constructive. Pride seeks to put down others, but love will seek the spiritual good of others. He will desire to see his brethren built up in the most holy faith.

True spiritual knowledge will manifest itself in love and not pride. The spiritual man will (1) love God and His Word, and (2) love man. “*Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*” (Matt 22:37-40).

The lack of love among the Corinthian Christians caused some to be lax concerning food offered to idols. First, their lack of love for God resulted in their disregard of the ill witness for Christ that arose from eating such food. Second, their lack of love for the brethren caused them not to consider how their actions might stumble others. Therefore, they had to come back to the right motive for service: to serve God and man constrained by the love of Christ (2 Cor 5:14).

Paul added: “*But if any man love God, the same is known of him*” (1 Cor 8:3). Herein is a great comfort to us that God never forsakes those who love Him. It is, however, also a reminder that those who are truly known of God will manifest love in their lives.

Is the love of Christ seen in your life?

THOUGHT: Knowledge must be applied in love.

PRAYER: Father, teach me to love Thee and my fellow men.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5

1 CORINTHIANS 8:4-6

DEUTERONOMY 6:1-15

“... an idol is nothing in the world ...”

ONLY ONE GOD!

1 Corinthians 8:4-6 is a restatement and expansion of the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4-5: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”

The adjective “one” teaches us two things:

1. The LORD is unique. This affirms the LORD’s superiority over all the gods of the nations. He is the only one worthy of all worship.
2. The LORD stands alone. He alone should be our sole object of devotion and adoration.

Some of the younger Christians in Corinth were avoiding food offered to idols with a wrong understanding and basis. Having had a pagan upbringing, they thought that these foods had some intrinsic power from the idols, and by eating the food, they would be allowing the idols to have power and control over their lives.

Paul thus lovingly corrected their fallacious understanding with his exposition of the *Shema*. Since the LORD was the one living and true God, it meant that all the idols of the world were but a big fat zero. The idols were just the works of man, made of wood, stone or metal. There was no intrinsic power or life in them. Therefore, should any of them eat food which had been offered to idols without their knowledge, there was no need to fear that such food would have any effect on them. Was not the Holy Spirit indwelling them greater than any that is in the world (1 John 4:4)? The doctrine of monotheism is thus a most comforting doctrine. It also exposes the foolishness of idolatry. Are there any idols in your life?

THOUGHT: The LORD our God is one!

PRAYER: Father, may Thou always be first in my life.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 6

1 CORINTHIANS 8:7-8

ROMANS 15:1-7

*“Howbeit there is not in every
man that knowledge ...”*

A WEAK CONSCIENCE

Due to their lack of knowledge, the consciences of young believers may sometimes be weak. They may regard that which is right as wrong as they are not clear in their judgments and convictions. It is thus the duty of mature Christians to guide them in love and in truth to develop biblical perspectives concerning the Word of God.

With regards to the Corinthian church, Paul stated that not all had knowledge that an idol was nothing (1 Cor 8:7a). Having been brought up in a pagan society, some brethren still struggled with superstitious notions of idols. The Corinthian Christians would thus have to be considerate to such brethren, lest their consciences be defiled further.

1 Corinthians 8:8 then addresses both the weak and those with supposedly “superior” knowledge. To the brethren with weak consciences, they were to discard their superstitious notions concerning food offered to idols. Should they abstain from food bought at the shambles, perchance been offered to idols? There was no need to be burdened by a guilty conscience, as such food had no power over them.

On the other hand, the strong must bear in mind that the eating of food earned them no special status before the Lord. *“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost”* (Rom 14:17).

Similarly, we must be considerate to weaker brethren and not defile their consciences. The duty to be considerate to our fellow brethren is given in Romans 15:1-2: *“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.”*

THOUGHT: Christians must help one another to grow in faith.

PRAYER: Father, help me to be considerate to others.

LORD'S DAY, OCTOBER 7

1 CORINTHIANS 8:9-13

PROVERBS 25:26

"But take heed lest ... this liberty ...

become a stumblingblock ..."

DO NOT BE A STUMBLING BLOCK!

The Corinthian Christians' right in Christ to eat all kinds of food must not become a license to sin, nor to be a license to cause others to sin. Knowledge and love must go hand in hand.

The love for their weaker brethren should have directed the Corinthian Christians to be more considerate in their conduct. Therefore, they should not have been found eating meals in idolatrous temples or events because it was expedient for them. Should the younger believers had seen the supposedly "mature" ones eating food offered to idols, would they not therefore be emboldened to eat food offered to idols themselves? These conceited ones would then lead their weaker brethren down the slippery road of sin. The already weakened consciences of their brethren would be further struck and damaged (*tuptō*), leading them to more misjudgments and wickedness.

Paul stated in no uncertain terms that the inconsiderate behaviour of the Corinthian Christians would cause their brethren to "perish" (*apollumi*, 1 Cor 8:11), i.e. "to destroy." When we are stumbling blocks to our brethren, we destroy their walk with Christ and cause them to corrupt their testimony for God.

Paul then reminded the Corinthian Christians that Christ also died for the weaker brother. If that was so, who gave them the right to damage the conscience of a brother? Was it not therefore most unrighteous to destroy his witness for Christ? Paul was most willing to let go of any of his rights so that no brother be led astray. This is what we all must do, constrained by the love of Christ.

Let us all be careful not to be a stumbling block to our brethren. To do so is a sin and an affront to Christ. May our conduct always be found worthy of the gospel of Christ.

THOUGHT: I must bear a good witness for my Saviour.

PRAYER: Father, help me not to stumble others.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 8
1 CORINTHIANS 8:9-13
ROMANS 15:1-7

*“Howbeit there is not in every
man that knowledge ...”*

BE AN EXAMPLE!

A stumbling block is one who leads others to sin against Christ by their ill example and dissimulation. However, some in an attempt to excuse their rebellion, point to others who are living righteously and accuse them of being stumbling blocks. This is twisted thinking and ought to be rejected. In fact, we should always endeavour to follow those who follow Christ. Thus, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, *“Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.”*

In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul exhorted the young pastor Timothy: *“Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”* While the direct application of these words is to pastors, nevertheless the principle holds true for every believer. We must do all we can by the grace of God to be an example of Christ-likeness for others to emulate. This is the positive application of 1 Corinthians 8:9-13.

However, those who bear a good witness for Christ may sometimes be accused by others of being stumbling blocks. Do not be discouraged by such false accusation. *“It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?”* (Matt 10:25). Similarly, Elijah was called the one who *“troubleth Israel”* (1 Kings 18:17) when the reverse was true. Therefore, continue to press on in shining the light for Christ, and upholding the Word of everlasting life. Strive to be a Christ-like example and not a stumbling block!

THOUGHT: I must let others see Christ in me.

PRAYER: Father, help me to be more like Christ my Master.

A GENUINE APOSTLE

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul expanded on the concept of Christian liberty. As an Apostle, he often had to forego his rights for the advancement of the gospel of Christ. He expected the Corinthian Christians to do the same so that Christ might be glorified and the saints edified.

Paul began this section by first asserting the genuineness of his Apostleship. He was commissioned by Christ to plant churches and preach where Christ was not named (Rom 15:20). He was afforded apostolic authority and thus he together with the other Apostles were infallible in their preaching (1 Thess 2:13) and writing (2 Tim 3:16).

Paul asked the Corinthians four rhetorical questions in 1 Corinthians 9:1, each demanding the answer “Yes!”

1. *“Am I not an apostle?”* (Yes, I am.)
2. *“Am I not free?”* i.e. *“Do I not have Christian liberty?”* (Yes, I have.)
3. *“Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?”* (Yes, I have.)
4. *“Are not ye my work in the Lord?”* (Yes, you are.)

Two qualifications stand out that attest to the genuineness of Paul’s Apostleship. First, Paul had personally seen the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-22). Second, the existence of the Corinthian church itself was the *“seal”* (1 Cor 9:2) of his Apostleship. A seal or signet is often placed on letters, certificates or items to signify their genuineness. Thus, Paul was saying that his work in the Corinthian church itself was proof of his Apostleship, for the church was a result of Paul’s ministry in the Lord.

Today, there are men who claim to be Apostles, but none have met the above criteria. Neither do their lives and teaching match up to the Apostle Paul’s. Do not be deceived!

THOUGHT: I need discernment in this age of apostasy.

PRAYER: Father, help me to be true in my calling just like Paul was in his.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 10

1 CORINTHIANS 9:3-6

2 CORINTHIANS 11:16-33

“Have we not power to eat and to drink?”

INSIST ON MY RIGHTS? (I)

Having certified the authenticity of his Apostleship, Paul then proceeded to state his apostolic rights via another series. As an Apostle, he had the right to claim the following:

1. The right to the provision of physical needs, such as food and drink (1 Cor 9:4). However, Paul in his missionary journeys often had to suffer hunger and thirst due to his frequent persecutions. *“In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness”* (2 Cor 11:27).
2. The right to get married and travel with a believing wife (1 Cor 9:5). The companionship of a wife would have helped Paul tremendously in times of loneliness. The brothers of the Lord Jesus Christ and Peter often had their wives alongside them. However, Paul did not exercise this right.

Some take this verse to mean that Paul was married at one point in his life. However, in 1 Corinthians 7:8, Paul wrote that it would be good for the unmarried and widows to abide in their calling just as he was. Therefore, Paul was single and not married.

Why did Paul not get married? Paul provided some answers in 1 Corinthians 7:25-35. A married couple will have to confront marital issues and hardships. This will divide one's attention from fully concentrating on the Lord's work. Considering the imminent coming of the Lord, the Apostle Paul desired to make every second count for the work of missions. Therefore, he chose to remain single, and not take up his right to have a believing wife, just like the other Apostles.

THOUGHT: Am I willing to give up my rights for Christ's sake?

PRAYER: Father, I am willing to surrender my all unto Thee.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 11

1 CORINTHIANS 9:3-6

ACTS 18:1-3

*“Have not we power to
forbear working?”*

INSIST ON MY RIGHTS? (II)

3. A right to refrain from physical labour (1 Cor 9:6). There were times when Paul worked with his hands in tentmaking to supply his own needs (Acts 18:1-3; 2 Thess 3:7-10). This was despite his apostolic right to claim a wage from the church since he was engaged in the work of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 9:8-11).

Some have used 1 Corinthians 9:6 in support of “biblical tentmaking.” This refers to an individual who decides to serve God with little or no income from the church, and he takes on a secular job to support himself, while using whatever remaining time he has to do God’s work.

However, “biblical tentmaking” was not the Apostle Paul’s mode of operation throughout his missionary journeys. The reasons for these short times of tentmaking was to avoid being a burden to the churches that were still in their infancy and thus unable to supply his wages. Thus, in order for the work of God to proceed, Paul was most willing to set aside his right to receive wages and worked with his hands. Such is the sacrificial spirit of the Apostle Paul.

The biblical model of missions involves a preacher sent out by the church to plant churches. The church will provide support for the missionary so that he may fully concentrate on the work of the gospel. More details will be provided by Paul in the later verses.

George Muller also practised this principle of whole-hearted dependence upon God for the daily provision of the orphanages under his care. All the orphanages were started and sustained without asking or approaching anyone for help. Muller simply brought the petitions to the Lord. The Lord provided for their every need.

THOUGHT: I must trust in the Lord for my daily provision.

PRAYER: O Lord, give me this day my daily bread.

THE RIGHT TO REMUNERATION

In another series of rhetorical questions (1 Cor 9:7), Paul demonstrated that the principle of remuneration is found in daily life:

1. In Roman times, no soldier would fight a war if he was not paid a basic wage.
2. A farmer who plants a vineyard would expect his efforts to be rewarded with a harvest.
3. The shepherd would also expect to be rewarded with milk from his flock.

Paul then proceeded to show from Deuteronomy 25:4 that remuneration is a divine principle: *“Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.”* This law instructs the children of Israel to ensure proper care for their beasts of burden. The argument here is thus from the lesser to the greater – if our beast of burden is deserving of its food after a day of labour treading the corn, surely it is demanded that we must take greater care of our fellow men!

Moreover, as an Apostle of Christ, Paul had ministered unto the Corinthian church the spiritual things of God’s Word, which are far more precious than the carnal things of the world. Was it not therefore reasonable for the Apostle to expect physical returns for his spiritual labour among them?

Paul was of course not teaching that ministers of the Word should demand more pay from the congregation. Rather, all believers should follow the example of Paul who was willing to forgo his right to remuneration so that the work of the gospel may be advanced. Are you willing to forgo your rights for the extension of Christ’s kingdom?

THOUGHT: *“... the labourer is worthy of his hire ...”* (Luke 10:7)

PRAYER: “Take my life and let it be, consecrated, Lord, to Thee!”

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13

1 CORINTHIANS 9:7-12

JOHN 12:1-9

*“The labourer is worthy
of his hire.”*

IS YOUR RELIGION YOUR BELLY?

Paul willingly forsook his right to remuneration so that the gospel might advance. The spirit of false teachers, however, is very different. They live for their bellies rather than for the testimony of God’s Word. One such example is Judas who betrayed Christ for money.

The following is the Rev Timothy Tow’s comments on Judas from a sermon on John 12:1-9:

“The one to open the conversation was Judas Iscariot. He had never spoken a word in his three years following Christ, so you could not judge him, humanly speaking. But Jesus saw him transparent through after the feeding of the Five Thousand. He exposed Judas as one who would betray Him. In this 12th chapter, the Apostle John further declares Judas’ betrayal in that while he is Treasurer, he dips into the ‘bag,’ for his own gain. That is why he objects to Mary’s anointing Jesus with the precious spikenard, costing \$3,000 today. That sum should have been given to his keeping ‘for the poor.’

Judas is a fake, a false prophet. ... Judas is one included in Paul’s warning to the Church, *‘Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple’* (Rom 16:17-18). Judas serves the Lord for his own stomach.

Now, I have been principal of Far Eastern Bible College for the last 37 years. We have graduated 350. Have I a Judas from this list? If one serves as a professional, and takes advantage of his position over Church funds, for his own interest, he is a Judas. He serves the Lord for his stomach.”

THOUGHT: (Read 1 Timothy 6:10.)

PRAYER: Help me, Father, not to be taken by the deceitfulness of riches!

THE SUPPORT FOR PREACHERS

The principle or model of support is that of the Old Testament Levites (1 Cor 9:13-14) as outlined in Deuteronomy 18:1-8: *“The priests the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel: they shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and his inheritance. Therefore shall they have no inheritance among their brethren: the LORD is their inheritance, as he hath said unto them. And this shall be the priest’s due from the people, from them that offer a sacrifice, whether it be ox or sheep; and they shall give unto the priest the shoulder, and the two cheeks, and the maw. The firstfruit also of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the first of the fleece of thy sheep, shalt thou give him. For the LORD thy God hath chosen him out of all thy tribes, to stand to minister in the name of the LORD, him and his sons for ever. And if a Levite come from any of thy gates out of all Israel, where he sojourned, and come with all the desire of his mind unto the place which the LORD shall choose; Then he shall minister in the name of the LORD his God, as all his brethren the Levites do, which stand there before the LORD. They shall have like portions to eat, beside that which cometh of the sale of his patrimony.”*

The principle here is that the Levites should not be distracted from their calling to study and teach the Word of God. Thus, they are not allowed to own any land, but are to live purely on the tithes and offerings that are brought by the people. As they teach the Word of God faithfully, the people will then be moved in their hearts to bring in what is necessary for their support.

Similarly, preachers today *“live of the gospel”* just like how the Levites of old lived of the things of the temple (1 Cor 9:13-14). The congregation must help them focus on the preaching of God’s Word.

THOUGHT: How are preachers supported in my church?

PRAYER: Father, may grace be upon Thy servants to preach Thy Word faithfully.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 15
1 CORINTHIANS 9:13-18
PHILIPPIANS 3:18-19

“... *who mind earthly things.*”

NO PAY, STILL PREACH!

While the priests and the Levites have the right to live of the things of the temple, they must take proper care never to abuse these rights to the detriment of God's people. When they demand more pricey offerings, or when they are derelict in their duties, God's people will suffer. We can see the tragic consequences of this in the history of Israel. The people were spiritually malnourished and grew to hate the Levitical worship. Israel plunged into moral declension and idolatry, and her spiritual witness for the LORD grew dim.

Similarly, preachers today who abuse their rights will do great harm to the church of God. In fact, the characteristic of hirelings is to demand that their stomachs be fed! Their principle is: “More pay more preach, less pay less preach, no pay no preach”! Thus Paul lamented in Philippians 3:18-19, *“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.”*

The Apostle Paul's spirit was very different. For him, the call to preach the gospel was so strong that he called it a necessity. He was willing to forgo his right to physical things, so that he might achieve the real preacher's reward to see the gospel preached freely and powerfully to the people. The love for Christ and His people dictated that Paul must surrender his rights for the sake of the gospel. Whether he was paid or not was inconsequential – the gospel must go forth!

The heart of a true preacher will thus say, “Woe unto me if I preach not the gospel! Pay or no pay, I will still preach!”

Dearly beloved, if the service to which you are called demands that you forsake your rights for the sake of the gospel, will you do it?

THOUGHT: I must be willing to suffer all things for Christ's sake.

PRAYER: Father, wherever Thou sendeth me, I will go.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 16

1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-23

MATTHEW 20:28

*“I made myself servant unto all,
that I might gain the more.”*

A SERVANT UNTO ALL

In 1 Corinthians 9:16-18, Paul explained that his call as an Apostle of Christ demanded of him to be a willing servant to the gospel of Christ. No matter the circumstances, he was most willing to preach the gospel of Christ. Pay or no pay, he would preach!

As one who was not financially dependent on the Corinthian Christians (1 Cor 9:19), Paul had the choice of whether to be of service to them or not. Yet, because of the necessity that was laid in his heart to preach the gospel (1 Cor 9:16), Paul was most ready to humble himself to be the servant of all.

Paul then proclaimed that he desired that *“by all means”* he would *“save some”* (1 Cor 9:22). Some have taken this to mean that compromises can be made with regard to God’s Word in order to preach the gospel of Christ. Thus, they would integrate certain practices that are contrary to God’s Word in order to reach out to others as a result of their misunderstanding of how Paul became a Jew to the Jews, and a Gentile to the Gentiles.

However, the context of the passage deals with humility and the forsaking of rights for the gospel’s sake. When Paul said, *“by all means save some,”* he was referring to his willingness to give up his rights or preferences in order to reach others with the gospel. He was not saying that we should compromise the truth in order to save souls.

With regard to the Corinthians, Paul taught them to be willing to forsake their rights to minister to those with weak consciences. They ought to be considerate in their conduct so that the weak might learn by their example and grow unto spiritual maturity. Similarly, whether at home or in the missions field, we must not go expecting to be served but rather to serve. If we can give up certain comforts to minister to others, we must be ready to do so.

THOUGHT: Will I be willing to lay down my life for others?

PRAYER: Father, grant me a servant’s heart!

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 17

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

HEBREWS 12:1-3

“So run, that ye may obtain.”

RUNNING THE RACE

Paul described his life of service as running a race. This description would be most vivid in the minds of the Corinthians as the Isthmian Games (similar to today's Olympic Games) were held in the city of Corinth once every two years.

To succeed in a race, athletes must undergo a regime of strict discipline and training. Their muscles would be stretched and pulled to be strengthened. They were willing to go through such an agonising and arduous programme in order to fulfil the goal of achieving a corruptible prize.

Christians, on the other hand, are running a race in which the prize is incorruptible. Should we not therefore put in even more earnest effort in the Christian race?

Paul did not want to run a wasted race. Neither did he want to be like a shadow boxer who vainly beat the air (1 Cor 9:26). Nor did he want to be an athlete who ran the race only to be found that he was disqualified or disapproved (i.e. “*castaway*,” *adokimos*). Therefore, Paul was willing to discipline his body to ensure that it could be used for the glory of God. He was willing to endure the ardours and agonies of ministry. To obtain the reward, Paul was most willing to give up his rights so that the gospel could advance.

Just like Paul, we are all in a race. Let us then “... *press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:14). We do not want to be found disapproved, and thus we must do all things necessary to run the race well. This includes the forsaking of our rights so that our brethren will be ministered to. May we all be found running this race with patience!

THOUGHT: How am I running this race on earth?

PRAYER: Father, help me to run a good race that is pleasing to Thee!

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 18

1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-5

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

*“I would not that ye
should be ignorant.”*

DO NOT BE PRESUMPTUOUS! (I)

One must not be proud or presumptuous, or he will soon find himself disapproved by God. Paul delved into the history of Israel as a warning to the Corinthian Christians. He pointed them to the generation of Israel who came out of Egypt. All of them experienced the following supernatural events:

- They were all under the cloud (1 Cor 10:1). The Lord supernaturally sent a pillar of cloud to guide them by day, and a pillar of fire by night (Exod 13:21-22).
- They all passed through the sea (1 Cor 10:1). The Lord parted the Red Sea to allow the children of Israel to escape from their Egyptian pursuers. After they crossed to the other side, He closed the sea on the pursuers to drown them (Exod 14).
- They were all baptised unto Moses (1 Cor 10:2). The term “*baptised*” here carries the understanding of “devoted” or consecrated. In other words, they were all devoted to Moses as their leader in their wanderings.
- They all ate the same spiritual meat. The term “*spiritual*” here refers to how the meat was supernaturally given to them by the power of God’s Holy Spirit (Exod 16).
- They all drank of that rock. This means that they drank the drink that was supernaturally provided for them by God. This water would follow them throughout their entire journey until they were ready to conquer the Cis-Jordan region (Num 20).

Nevertheless, despite experiencing these miracles and spiritual lessons, the children of Israel still did not exercise their faith in God but rebelled against God by refusing to attack the land of Canaan (Num 13). Because of their disobedience, those aged twenty years and above were not allowed to enter the Promised Land.

Let us beware: Do not be presumptuous!

THOUGHT: Am I approved before God?

PRAYER: Father, help me be a workman approved by Thee.

DO NOT BE PRESUMPTUOUS! (II)

Instead of learning the lessons God provided, the children of Israel continued to take God for granted and rebelled against Him. Their pernicious ways were seen in the following:

- They lusted after evil things (1 Cor 10:6). Despite God providing water and manna, they continued to complain and demanded meat (Num 11).
- They were idolatrous (1 Cor 10:7). When Moses was up on Mount Sinai, the impatient people demanded Aaron to make the golden calf (Exod 32).
- They committed fornication (1 Cor 10:8). This occurred when Balaam sent the daughters of whoredom to commit fornication with the Israelites (Num 25:1-3).
- They tempted God (1 Cor 10:9). They did so by questioning God’s faithfulness to His Word. *“And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread”* (Num 21:5).
- They murmured (1 Cor 10:10). The people were constantly complaining about their conditions throughout the wilderness journey (eg. Exod 16:2; 17:2; Num 14:2, 29).

All these testimonies are recorded for us not as fantasy stories to tickle our ears. Rather, they are given to us for our examples and learning. We must take heed of these warnings and admonishments.

However, if we continue in our presumptuousness, Paul has a warning for us. Read 1 Corinthians 10:12 and Hebrews 3:7-8.

THOUGHT: Pride comes before a fall.

PRAYER: Father, help me to walk circumspectly in Thy will.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20

1 CORINTHIANS 10:13

1 CORINTHIANS 1:9

“God is faithful.”

THE WAY OF ESCAPE

The antidote against presumptuousness is given to us in 1 Corinthians 10:13: *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”*

Christ knows the temptations that we face. Thus, the way out is a humble submission to the power of Christ, trusting that He will keep us from sinning and deliver us from our troubles.

With regard to the faithfulness of God, Calvin made these insightful comments: “As he exhorted them to be of good courage as to the past, in order that he might stir them up to repentance, so he also comforts them as to the future with a sure hope, on the ground that God would not suffer them to be tempted beyond their strength. He exhorts them, however, to look to the Lord, because a temptation, however slight it may be, will straightway overcome us, and all will be over with us, if we rely upon our own strength. He speaks of the Lord, as faithful, not merely as being true to his promises, but as though he had said. The Lord is the sure guardian of his people, under whose protection you are safe, for he never leaves his people destitute. Accordingly, when he has received you under his protection, you have no cause to fear, provided you depend entirely upon him.”

How does God then help us? First, He sets limits to our temptations that it may not be too much for us to bear. Second, He grants us the grace and strength to go through those temptations. When we endure these temptations patiently by His grace, we will emerge spiritually stronger from it.

Whenever we are tempted, always look to Christ! He is our Deliverer.

THOUGHT: The only escape from sin is total dependence on God.

PRAYER: Father, keep me away from wickedness!

LORD'S DAY, OCTOBER 21
1 CORINTHIANS 10:14-17
LUKE 22:19-20

*"The cup of blessing ...
The bread which we break ..."*

THE MEANING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (I)

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was instituted just before the death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (Matt 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20). As a sacrament, it does not save, but it serves as an outward symbol of our inward faith.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 96 gives a succinct answer on the meaning of the Lord's Supper: "The Lord's Supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's appointment, his death is shewed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace."

As we eat of the bread and drink of the cup by faith, the Bible tells us that we are communing with Him. Read 1 Corinthians 10:16. The word "*communion*" here is *koinōnia*, which indicates a relationship as characterised by fellowship, mutual sharing and contribution, and identification (Friberg).

When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we are identifying ourselves with Christ and His death on the cross. We acknowledge and confess that He is our Substitute and propitiation for our sins. The eating of the bread and drinking of the cup thus indicate that we belong to Christ and Christ belongs to us. We have a covenant relationship with Christ and desire to have fellowship with Him.

As the Lord's Supper is a spiritual exercise, it behoves us to observe it with much soberness. The abuse of the Lord's Supper can lead to dire consequences (1 Cor 11:27-30). Let every believer regard this sacrament with utmost seriousness.

THOUGHT: The Lord's Supper is a time of communion with Christ.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for every remembrance of Thy Son's death.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 22

1 CORINTHIANS 10:14-17

HEBREWS 7:27

“... he offered up himself.”

THE MEANING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (II)

There are four major views concerning the Lord's Supper.

1. Transubstantiation. This view is held by the Roman Catholics. It teaches that the bread and the cup become the literal, physical body and blood of Christ during the Lord's Supper. When one partakes of the Lord's Supper, he is drinking the real blood and eating the real flesh of Christ.

This view fails to consider the context of the words of Christ in John 6:53. When Christ was speaking to the hearers, He was not talking about literally eating His flesh, otherwise He would be advocating cannibalism. Rather, Christ was exhorting His hearers to have true faith and communion with Him. It is a spiritual partaking of Christ's body and blood.

This view also stands in contradiction to Hebrews 7:27, where God's Word teaches us that Christ's sacrifice is once and for all, and therefore He cannot be crucified afresh. This view is therefore heretical and ought to be rejected.

2. Consubstantiation. This view is held by the Lutherans. This view rejects that the bread and the cup magically become the physical body and blood of Christ during the Lord's Supper. The bread is still bread, and the wine is still wine.

However, this view teaches that the physical body and blood of Christ is present somewhere in, with and under the bread and the cup. It still fails to take into account the context of John 6:53 and thus must be rejected.

THOUGHT: Why do I partake of the Lord's Supper?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for instituting the Lord's Supper.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 23

1 CORINTHIANS 10:14-22

1 CORINTHIANS 11:24

“... *this do in remembrance of me.*”

THE MEANING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (III)

3. Memorial. This view teaches that the Lord's Supper is purely a remembrance and commemoration of Christ's work on the cross. The bread and the cup are but signs and images to point people to the body and blood of Christ.

This view finds its basis in 1 Corinthians 11:24: *“And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.”*

The memorial view however fails to acknowledge the spiritual presence of Christ when we partake of the elements.

4. Spiritual. This view teaches that the Lord's Supper is a spiritual exercise that ought to be taken with utmost seriousness. The fact that the Lord struck those who abused the Lord's Supper with illness and even death lends support to this argument. *“Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup”* (1 Cor 11:27-28).

Thus, the Lord's Supper must be partaken with utmost sobriety and reverence. When we do so with a worshipful spirit, the Lord will add His richest blessings to it.

The Lord's Supper is both a commemoration of Christ's death, and a spiritual exercise.

THOUGHT: The Lord's Supper has its blessings.

PRAYER: Father, may I always examine myself before I partake of the Lord's Supper.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 24

1 CORINTHIANS 10:14-22

1 JOHN 5:21

*“Do we provoke the Lord
to jealousy?”*

NO FELLOWSHIP WITH DEVILS

When the pagans sacrifice food unto the idols, they are sacrificing to the devils, and not to God. Those who participate in festivals that involve eating of such food are indicating their union and fellowship with the devils. This makes it impossible for Christians to participate in such events, for Christ has nothing to do with devils. *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people”* (2 Cor 6:14-16). This is the doctrine of biblical separation.

As we partake of the cup and the bread, we are indicating our union and fellowship with Christ. How then can we take food offered to idols? When the Corinthian Christians participated in these idolatrous rituals, it was as though Christ had union with devils. God forbid! Read what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:21.

Paul then invoked the idea of the marriage covenant in 1 Corinthians 10:22. Christians are married to the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 5:22-32). Thus, we belong to Christ. When we identify ourselves with idols rather than with Christ, we will invoke His jealousy, for it is spiritual adultery.

Dearly beloved, we must maintain the purity of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. When we eat food that has been offered at the table of devils, we pollute the Lord’s table. Let no Christian therefore eat food that has been offered to idols.

THOUGHT: What are the idols in my life?

PRAYER: Lord, I want nothing to come between me and my Saviour.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25

1 CORINTHIANS 10:23-24

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12

“Let no man seek his own ...”

EDIFICATION IS THE GOAL

1 Corinthians 10:23 is very similar to 1 Corinthians 6:12. However, their applications differ. In 1 Corinthians 6:12, Paul was applying the principle of Christian liberty concerning the use of the Christian's body. They must use their bodies to serve righteousness rather than unrighteousness. Christians must control their bodies for Christ's sake, and not let their bodies control them!

However, in 1 Corinthians 10:23, Paul was applying the principle of Christian liberty with respect to Christians edifying one another. While there are certain things in life that may be lawful in the sense that they do not infringe any morals, yet they may not necessarily be helpful in promoting the spiritual good of the individual and of others.

Unregenerate men will naturally seek their own (Phil 2:21). However, the believer goes by a different principle. Because he loves his neighbour as himself, he will consider the welfare of his fellow men first. *“Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth”* (1 Cor 10:24). In the light of the Corinthian situation, it involves the strong considering the conscience of his weaker fellow brethren. While certain things may be lawful, yet a Christian will not partake of those things so as not to defile a weaker brother's conscience.

Whenever we participate in any activity or decision, consider the following: Will it be good for others? Will it do harm to them? Will it also do damage to my spiritual life? When in doubt, do not proceed!

As an application, some online activities and games may be harmless in themselves. You may be able to engage in these activities without being addicted. However, your friend who joins you in this activity may become addicted. It would be good to refrain from this activity so that your friend will not become addicted!

THOUGHT: We must seek to admonish one another in the Lord.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to edify my brethren in the faith.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26

1 CORINTHIANS 10:25-30

1 TIMOTHY 4:4-5

*“For the earth is the Lord’s,
and the fulness thereof.”*

CONCERNING FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS

As a master teacher, Paul applied the principles he had laid out in 1 Corinthians 9-10 to two common scenarios in daily life:

1. Buying food in the market (1 Cor 10:25-26)

During the time of the Corinthians, there was every possibility that the food sold in the market had been offered to idols. Thus, when a person visited the market, he was to buy and eat the food without asking any questions. So long as he did not ask any questions, he could not be accused of being involved in any idolatrous ritual. He was to also eat the food without fear, for this food belonged to the Lord (1 Cor 10:26). 1 Timothy 4:4-5 is particularly instructive: *“For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”* This food had no power over the Christian, for the one living and true God is greater than all the false gods in this world.

2. Attending a hosted meal (1 Cor 10:27-30)

A Christian is free to attend a meal that is organised by his unbelieving friend. If the host says nothing about the food being offered to idols, the Christian may eat of the food with a clean conscience. However, if the host clearly indicates that the food has been offered to idols, then the Christian must take a stand and not eat the food. To do so would be to indicate union with false gods. The Christian must be conscious to set a good example to younger believers and not wound their conscience. He must not be a stumbling block to others, neither should he give an ambiguous message to his host concerning Christ. He must take a stand that there is only one living and true God in this world, and this God is Jehovah!

THOUGHT: God’s Word directs us in our daily matters.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to apply doctrine rightly and wisely.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 27

1 CORINTHIANS 10:31

ISAIAH 42:8

*“... do all to the
glory of God.”*

TO GOD BE THE GLORY

1 Corinthians 10:31 is the renowned verse that forms the answer to the Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 1: “What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

Man naturally seeks his self-promotion. He seeks after worldly things and the fulfilment of fleshly lusts. On the other hand, the Christian is supposed to be one who lives his life in full surrender to the Lord. He is to deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Christ.

Note here in this verse that ALL things are to be done to the glory of God. Everything that we think, say and do must promote God’s name and be done according to the Scriptures. There is not to be any part of life that is not submitted to the leading and direction of the Lord.

For the Corinthian Christians, this included what they ate and drank. They were free to eat all kinds of food. However, if what they ate contravened God’s law, or if it caused their fellow brother’s conscience to be wounded, then they had to give up the right to those foods to protect his weaker conscience. This considerateness is in line with Christ’s teachings to love fellow men, and therefore brings God the glory.

The problem with us is that we often insist on our rights without due consideration of God’s glory. We would rather hold on to our selfish ambitions than submit all aspects of our life to the Lord. Because of our self-centeredness and hypocrisy, we corrupt the testimony of God.

Read therefore the admonition of the Lord in Isaiah 42:8. Let all aspects of our life (church, home, work or play) be done to the promotion of Christ’s name and work.

THOUGHT: Do I steal from Christ’s glory?

PRAYER: Lord, may all areas of my life be pleasing unto Thee.

GIVE NONE OFFENCE

1 Corinthians 10:32-33 flows naturally from 1 Corinthians 10:31. If we are to give glory to God in all things, then it is necessary to make sure we give none offence.

The expression “*give none offence*” comes from the Greek word *aproskopoi* which has the meaning of being “blameless.” A Christian must thus conduct himself blamelessly wherever he may be. He must not give anybody an opportunity to accuse the faith.

First, the Christian must give none offence in the church. We must be careful not to be stumbling blocks to fellow brethren. Alas, the Corinthian church itself was full of a partisan and carnal spirit (1 Cor 1-3). There was much backbiting and in-fighting. The careless and worldly living of the supposedly stronger Christians was discouraging to the weaker brethren. Are we a blessing to our churches, or are we a hindrance and a destroyer?

Second, the Christian must give no offence outside the church. Sadly, while some may be on their best behaviour in church, they may be very different outside. They are belligerent in their speech and actions, conducting themselves no different from the world. Instead of winning others to Christ, they cause them to shun the truth. How sad it is to hear accounts from unbelievers that they do not want to believe in Christ because of the shameful conduct of one of their Christian family members or relatives.

Dearly beloved, your testimony matters. Make sure you are using your Christian liberty to lead others to Christ, and not away from the truth of God's Word.

THOUGHT: How is your conduct outside of church?

PRAYER: Father, help me not to stumble others.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 29

1 CORINTHIANS 11:1

PHILIPPIANS 3:17

*“Be ye followers of me,
even as I also am of Christ.”*

FOLLOW ME!

There is a popular saying, “Do not follow me. Follow Christ.” This saying is most unbiblical, for all Christians are expected to be models of Christ-likeness as witnesses for Christ. Every one of us is to be the salt of the earth, and the light of the world (Matt 5:13-16).

In 1 Corinthians 11:1, the Apostle Paul taught the Corinthian Christians to follow him as he followed Christ. The Greek verb for “follow” is where we get the English word “mimic.” In other words, Paul was asking the Corinthian Christians to mimic or copy his conduct. Of course, Paul must first be following Christ before he could tell others to follow him. Otherwise, it would be a disaster!

First, leaders in churches must be prepared for others to follow them. The first person to set the example is the pastor. In the First Epistle to Timothy, Paul exhorted Timothy not only to diligently teach the Word of God, but also to *“be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity”* (1 Tim 4:12). Otherwise, the preaching of Timothy would fall on deaf ears.

However, there are some who expect only the leaders of the church to be examples of holiness, and do not apply the same standards to themselves. But 1 Corinthians 11:1 exhorts all to mimic the example of Christ! Therefore, it is a duty of all Christians to be godly in their conduct and point others to Christ.

In Philippians 3:17, Paul wrote: *“Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.”* Paul directed believers not only to follow him, but also others who were walking after the example of Christ. One of these men was Epaphroditus who humbly ministered to the needs of Paul until he was nigh unto death. If you walk close to Christ, God can use you mightily to point others to the way of righteousness.

THOUGHT: Can others see Christ in me?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be more like Christ.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 30

PROVERBS 29:18

ROMANS 10:9

*“Where there is no vision,
the people perish ...”*

NO WORD, NO LIFE! (I)

Leaving 1 Corinthians for the moment, let us consider Proverbs 29:18, a commonly misinterpreted verse. Some use this verse to espouse the importance of vision to an organisation. However, the “*vision*” in the first half of the verse is parallel to the term “*law*” in the second half of the verse. The “*vision*” therefore refers to God’s prophetic revelation to the people in biblical times.

Today, God’s law and prophetic revelation is found in the Holy Bible, which is God’s Perfect Word. Without the Word of God, there will be no knowledge of salvation from sin. Therefore, the people will perish. On the other hand, if the people receive and believe the Scriptures, they will find great blessing in His Truth. They will be most happy to obey God’s law because they find their sufficiency and abundant joy in their blessed relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Before the Sixteenth Century Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) attempted to hide the Bible from the masses to cover up the atrocities of the priesthood and the clergy. The Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic, which the people could not understand. However, the RCC forbade the translation of God’s Word into the vernacular. As a result, the people could not read God’s Word. Those days were rightly called the Dark Ages for the people perished spiritually without the light of God’s Truth.

However, men of faith rose up during the Reformation such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, William Tyndale and John Hus, who contended for the Holy Scriptures. They had a set of principles, each representing a key belief of the Christian faith in contradiction to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. They are: Sola Scriptura (by Scripture alone), Sola Gratia (by grace alone), Sola Fide (by faith alone), Solus Christus (through Christ alone), and Soli Deo Gloria (glory to God alone).

THOUGHT: I must treasure the rich heritage of the Reformation!

PRAYER: Father, may I treasure Thy Word every day.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 31

PROVERBS 29:18

JUDE 3

“... *he that keepeth
the law, happy is he.*”

NO WORD, NO LIFE! (II)

During the Reformation, God raised faithful men who earnestly contended for the truth of the Scriptures. They were also passionate to have the Scriptures translated into the vernacular. The Bible was translated and distributed among the masses. The Scriptures opened the eyes of many men, and brought great blessing to the people. Indeed, “*he that keepeth (i.e. guardeth) the law, happy is he*” (Prov 29:18).

Today, God’s Word is still under attack just like in the days of old, for “*the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Pet 5:8). There are many who proclaim that some words are lost from the Holy Scripture and thus, they conclude, we do not have the Perfect Word of God today.

What does God’s Word say? Matthew 5:18 proclaims that till “*heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*” Matthew 24:35 also declares: “*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*” Thus, we are assured that we have God’s Perfect Word in our hands today!

The Reformers earnestly contended for the faith in the Sixteenth Century. They championed a Bible that is forever inerrant and infallible. Christians can say confidently that the Bible is our sole supreme authority of faith and practice.

We need a Twenty-First Century Reformation today, for the battle is not done. There are many false-isms out there in the world today such as Charismaticism, Neo-evangelicalism and Ecumenism. We need to uphold the truth, for without God’s Word, the people will perish. Will the professed sons of the Reformation defend the faith today?

THOUGHT: We need a Twenty-First Century Reformation today.

PRAYER: Father, help me to earnestly contend for the faith.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 1

1 CORINTHIANS 11:2

HEBREWS 13:7, 17

*“That ye remember me
in all things ...”*

HOW TO REMEMBER YOUR LEADERS

While the Corinthian Church might be beset by problems, they seemed to retain a level of respect and fondness for the Apostle Paul. Though he was not present with them then, it was not a case of “out of sight, out of mind.” Thus, the Apostle Paul remarked in 1 Corinthians 11:2: *“Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.”*

How did the Corinthian Christians remember the Apostle? Not by mere words or lip service, but by taking heed and keeping the “ordinances” which he had delivered to them. These “ordinances” (*paradoseis*) refer to the apostolic teachings and tradition that Paul had taught them while he was in their midst. Thus, we learn that the way to remember our leaders is to remember their faithful teaching from God’s Word wherever we may be.

The same principle is taught by Paul in Hebrews 13:7: *“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.”* We remember our leaders by observing attentively (*avatheōrountes*) their godly conduct and following (*mimeisthe*) the Scriptural principles which they have taught us.

When we fail to honour and obey our leaders who are faithful in their duties, it not only grieves the hearts of the leaders as overseers of God’s flock but it is also most unprofitable for us (Heb 13:17). Such rebellion hurts our walk and fellowship with God. We will be most miserable in life and lose the joy of our salvation.

Thus, let us treasure those who truly labour faithfully in word and doctrine among us. When God’s Word is preached faithfully, let us receive the preached Word not as the words of men, but as the Word of God (1 Thess 2:13).

THOUGHT: Do I know my church leaders?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant Thy flock faithful leaders.

HEADSHIP IN THE GODHEAD

The role of women in society is heavily debated today, as seen in the rise of the Women’s Rights Movement. Sadly, this debate has also affected the church. There is a growing movement of women usurping (or are attempting to usurp) the headship of men in the church. These women are fighting for their perceived “rights” to be ordained as pastors or elders. They demand a role to teach and preach in the public worship of the church.

These acts of insubordination against men’s divinely appointed headship in the church are not new. The Corinthian Church was facing such issues within its congregation where some women attempted to teach and preach publicly. Paul addressed this issue in three parts:

1. The doctrine of headship (1 Cor 11:3).
2. Women worshipping with uncovered heads (1 Cor 11:4-16).
3. Women teaching during public worship (1 Cor 14:34-35).

Let us note first that there is an equality of essence in the Godhead. The Westminster Shorter Catechism states: “There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.” The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God (1 John 5:6-8).

At the same time, a functional hierarchy exists within the Godhead, that is, there is subordination within the Godhead in terms of role. Though Christ claimed oneness with the Father (John 10:30), He claimed that the Father is greater than Him (John 14:28), for Christ’s role is to be the obedient Son fulfilling the Father’s will (John 4:34; see also John 17). “Thus, even though there was an equality of persons within the divine oneness, there was an order (a headship) to execute the divine counsel” (Robert Gromacki).

THOUGHT: Christ is always submissive to the will of the Father.

PRAYER: Father, I want to be fully submissive to Thy will for me.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 3

1 CORINTHIANS 11:3

EPHESIANS 5:22-33

“... *the head of every man is Christ ...*

the head of the woman is the man ...”

HEADSHIP IN THE CHURCH (I)

Since there is a functional hierarchy in the Godhead, it comes as no surprise that God has also determined that there should be distinction in the roles of men and women. “... *the head of the woman is the man ...*” (1 Cor 11:3). Man is to be the leader, and the woman is to submit to the leadership of the man.

This functional hierarchy is also found in the home. Ephesians 5:23 teaches that “*the husband is the head of the wife.*” Thus, husbands must love their wives, “*even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it*” (Eph 5:25). They must love their wives as their own bodies, nourishing and cherishing her by providing for her spiritual and physical needs. On the other hand, wives are to submit to their own husbands as unto the Lord (Eph 5:22). Thus, when it comes to the marriage vow, the bride pledges not only to love and cherish her husband, but to obey him. Sadly, the word “obey” is taken out of the vows made by many brides today!

Similarly, when it comes to the church, the man is the head of the woman. This means that he is responsible for taking leadership in the matters of the church. For this reason, one of the qualifications for elders in the church is that he must be a man who is faithful to his wife and rules his house well (1 Tim 3:2, 4). It is man who must take charge in setting the spiritual direction of the church.

The problem today is two-fold. First, women are not accepting the role that God has ordained for them, and thus they are most eager to usurp the authority which God has vested on man. By doing so, they are in reality going against God’s authority. At the same time, men are often derelict in fulfilling the leadership responsibilities which God has laid upon them. It is little wonder that there is chaos in churches and families today, just like it was in the church at Corinth.

THOUGHT: Men must be responsible in their roles as heads.

PRAYER: Father, help me to accept Thy lot for me in life.

HEADSHIP IN THE CHURCH (II)

In the days of Paul, it was customary for women to wear a head covering. This head covering is symbolic of the woman's submission to the authority of the man. However, there was a movement in those days which was very much like today's Woman's Rights Movement. This movement encouraged women to cast off their head coverings and to dress liberally as a show of their equality with men. Many of the pagan rituals involved priestesses and prophetesses who uncovered their heads while praying or prophesying.

Thus, Paul gave two injunctions to the church at Corinth.

First, men must not cover their heads as they worship God publicly. To do so in those days was to deny the headship which God had vested upon them. It would be an abdication and dereliction of their God-given duties.

It is also noted that in the Roman empire, men covered their heads during their public pagan devotions (Kistemaker). It seems like such a practice might have entered the church of Corinth. Paul thus wanted the worship in the Corinthian church to separate themselves from such pagan customs. The worship of God must reflect a right theological understanding of His Word.

Second, women must cover their heads in public worship. When they failed to do so, they were indicating their insubordination to the male leadership of the church. Such an act was shameful and disgraceful, just like if a woman had shaved off all her hair.

The fundamental principle here is that there must be respect for the order which God has established in the church (1 Cor 14:40). We honour God when we honour the ordinances which He has set for His worship.

THOUGHT: We must dress appropriately as we worship God.

PRAYER: Father, help me to dress modestly before Thee.

REASONS FOR MALE HEADSHIP (I)

Paul proceeded to list three reasons for male headship based on the creation account in the book of Genesis:

First argument: Man is the glory of God, while woman is the glory of man (1 Cor 11:7). Both man and woman are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). However, man is called the glory of God because he was created first and given the divine mandate to exercise authority and dominion over the earth (Gen 1:28-30). Created from the dust of the ground (Gen 2:7), man is the apex of God’s creation.

On the other hand, the woman is called the glory of man because she was created out of man (Gen 2:21-22) to manifest man’s authority, just as how man was made to manifest God’s authority.

Second argument: The woman is of the man, and not the man of the woman (1 Cor 11:8). God could have created Adam and Eve simultaneously. However, He chose to make Adam first from the dust, and then Eve out of a rib of Adam (Gen 2:18-24). “Without Adam, Eve would not have existed” (Khoo).

Third argument: The woman was created for the man, and not the man for the woman (1 Cor 11:9). The woman was created to be a help meet (i.e. appropriate, suitable) for man. None of the animals were suitable help for man, for only the woman was made in the image of God and out of man’s rib.

Nevertheless, Paul reminded his readers in 1 Corinthians 11:11-12 that man must never view himself as superior over woman. Both man and woman are equal in value in God’s sight. Is not man born out of the womb of a woman? Application: Man ought to love and cherish his wife, and not be a dictator over her!

THOUGHT: I must respect God’s creative order.

PRAYER: Father, may Thy church be ordered in Thy way.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 6

1 CORINTHIANS 11:7

EPHESIANS 4:24; COLOSSIANS 3:10

“He is the image...of God.”

THE IMAGE OF GOD IN MAN

Since God is a Spirit (John 4:24), it follows that the likeness of God in man is a spiritual likeness. The image of God in man is not physical but spiritual. The fact that this likeness is spiritual immediately makes idolatry wrong, for idols are physical images. Therefore, God commanded in Exodus 20:4: *“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”* *“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:24).

The doctrine of the image of God is also seen in the Sixth Commandment. When we kill, we are destroying the image of God in man. Thus, James rebuked those who were careless with their tongues against their fellow men: *“Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be”* (James 3:9-10).

The Westminster Shorter Catechism rightly teaches from Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10 that this image of God in man is “in knowledge, righteousness and holiness” (Question 10). Sadly, this image was corrupted when man fell into sin.

How then may this image be restored in man? Only in Christ Jesus! When a man is born again, the Holy Spirit which indwells him will make him more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Cor 3:18). *“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren”* (Rom 8:29).

The climax of this restoration occurs during the Christian’s glorification (1 John 3:2). Are you looking forward to that day?

THOUGHT: Both man and woman are made in the image of God.

PRAYER: Father, help me to be conformed to the image of Christ.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 7

1 CORINTHIANS 11:13-16

ROMANS 12:1-2

*“Doth not even nature
itself teach you?”*

REASONS FOR MALE HEADSHIP (II)

The last reason given by Paul in support of male headship is based on physiology. Some of the women in Corinth were apparently sporting hair that was as short as the men's. However, when God created woman, He gave woman longer hair than man's to make them distinct. Is this not the testimony of nature in daily life? Therefore, when the woman sports short hair, it is tantamount to her wanting to be like man and thus upsetting God's established order. Similarly, a man sporting long hair is sending a message that he despises God's assigned role for him to be the head. Is that not a shame?

Sadly, due to the influence of worldly fashions, some women dress more like men. They cut their hair short and behave with masculine panache. They think that this will win them respect in the eyes of the world. However, such conduct is an affront to God.

Alas, the men are not any better. Some grow their hair long and behave in an effeminate manner. And the undiscerning church cheers them for it. The divine order has been turned upside-down.

How then should women view their hair? The Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 11:15 that it is God's gift to them as a covering, that they may express their submission to God's order and authority over them. A woman who keeps her hair well for the Lord and conducts herself in a meek and quiet spirit is beautiful before the Lord (1 Pet 3:4). Similarly, a man who dresses and conducts himself soberly before the Lord will prove to be of great blessing to the Lord's work.

Paul ended by warning that the ordinances of God must be respected (1 Cor 11:16). No dissent will be tolerated, for the churches of God must be determined to follow the pattern set by God. The Corinthian church was to follow suit and obey God's Word.

THOUGHT: Men should dress like men, and women like women.

PRAYER: Father, help me not to conform to worldly fashions.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 8

1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-19

1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-17

*“For there must be also
heresies among you...”*

FALSE DOCTRINE DIVIDES!

In 1 Corinthians 11:2, Paul praised the Corinthian Christians for keeping the ordinances which he had taught them. However, in 1 Corinthians 11:17, Paul stated an issue which he found unpraiseworthy. This had to do with the partisan and schismatic spirit among the congregation.

We first read about the schisms in the congregation in 1 Corinthians 1:12-13: *“Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”* This sectarianism had become so bad that it affected the partaking of the Lord’s Supper. People were not looking forward to going to church. Instead of being a sanctuary of peace, members found the church to be a battleground. They were not gathering for the better, but for the worse (1 Cor 11:17).

What then was the cause of divisions in the church? Paul surmised that it must have been due to *“heresies”* (1 Cor 11:19) among them. *“Heresies”* here refer to any teachings that tear one away from Christ and cause one to have a low view of God and His Word. Thus, Paul was pointing out the insidious effect of false doctrines in the church. Because each party chose to hold on to unbiblical teachings that led to ungodly practices, there was disunity within the church.

The same is also true today. When a church is weak in doctrine, it inevitably leads to false practices and disunity. There will be quarrels and bickering in the congregation. Therefore, if we seek unity and peace, we must first pursue true doctrine. True doctrine unites, false doctrine divides. How well grounded are you then in the doctrines of the Bible?

THOUGHT: True doctrine unites, false doctrine divides.

PRAYER: Father, I want to grow in my understanding of doctrine.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 9

1 CORINTHIANS 11:20-22

JAMES 2:1-13

“Despise ye the church of God?”

AN UNWORTHY COMMUNION

In the early church, it was a common practice for the Christians to hold a feast before Holy Communion. The believers would pool their resources and break bread together. The purpose of this feast was to promote fellowship among the brethren in Christian love and unity. Thus, this feast was often called the love feast or the agape feast.

Alas, this love feast of the Corinthian church turned out to be devoid of love. Instead of love, there was selfishness and favouritism. The rich despised the poor and ate the food themselves. While the poor went hungry, the rich were partying away with the abundance of food and drink. There was much division, unforgiveness and worldliness among the brethren as they partook of the Lord's Supper. There was no focus on Christ and His love for His people.

Favouritism was also common in the early Jewish church. *“For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?”* (James 2:2-4) Such a conduct runs contrary to God's royal law for us to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Beloved, are we people who show respect of persons in our lives? Do we harbour hatred or an unforgiving spirit towards some of our brethren? May it not be so as we approach the Lord's table. Just as Christ has loved us, so let us love our fellow brethren. Christ said in John 13:34-35: *“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”* Let us not turn the love feast into a hate feast!

THOUGHT: Do I have genuine love for my brethren?

PRAYER: Father, teach me what it means to truly love my brethren.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10

PROVERBS 19:6-7

1 CORINTHIANS 11:20-22

*“All the brethren of the poor
do hate him ...”*

NO MONEY, NO TALK?

The reading for today reveals a sad reality of life: the rich are often exalted and the poor despised. The people of the world will often hang around the rich and powerful, hoping that some of the wealth will trickle down to them. Many will go all out to catch the attention of such wealthy men, seeking to please them with saccharine words or deeds of obeisance. The rich who are generous often find a following swooping to their feet like vultures!

The picture of the poor stands in stark contrast to the rich. Not only do his friends desert him, but his family does not want anything to do with him for he has no money. Nobody wants to help him for that will only cost them time and resources. Humanly speaking, there is no advantage to be gained from him!

The common denominator in the two proverbs is the love of money and the respect of persons. Sadly, this obnoxious attitude is sometimes transferred to the church. James had to rebuke this ungodly behavior in the Jewish church. *“My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?”* (James 2:1-4).

Christians ought not to have respect of persons. Is not every man a sinner in need of the grace of God? *“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”* (1 John 4:20). May the love of Christ be seen in your life.

THOUGHT: Am I a blessing to others for the sake of Christ?

PRAYER: Father, help me to love my neighbour as myself.

THE MESSAGE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

To counter the abuse of the Lord's Supper, Paul directed the Corinthian Christians back to the central message of the Lord's Supper. As mentioned earlier in the October 21 to 23 devotions, the Lord's Supper is a sacrament instituted by Christ just before His death. When we partake of the Lord's Supper by faith, we are identifying with Christ's work on the cross. We acknowledge and confess that He is our Substitute and propitiation of our sins. We also praise the Lord for His blood that was shed on the cross of Calvary, for *"without shedding of blood is no remission"* (Heb 9:22).

The Lord's Table is an important means of grace for Christians because we are forgetful people, and often take our salvation for granted. Distracted by the many challenges of life, we forget what Christ has done for us to purchase our salvation. Our salvation is freely given unto us, but it cost Christ His life and His blood. *"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"* (1 Pet 1:18-19).

A proper partaking of the Lord's Supper will lead us to re-consecrate our lives unto Christ who so loved us by giving us His all. How can we therefore not love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength?

Paul added in 1 Corinthians 11:26 that when we eat of the elements, we are proclaiming (*katangellete*) the Lord's death till He returns. It is an outward witness to believers and the world of the salvific work of Christ at Calvary. Therefore, we must make sure never to corrupt the message of the Lord's Supper by a flippant partaking of the bread and the cup.

THOUGHT: *"... without shedding of blood is no remission."* (Heb 9:22)

PRAYER: Father, keep me near the cross.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 12

1 CORINTHIANS 11:27-34

1 CORINTHIANS 10:14-22

“But let a man examine himself ...”

THE WARNING OF THE LORD’S SUPPER

The Corinthian Christians had forgotten the central message of the Lord’s Supper. They were abusing the Lord’s Supper by turning it into a time of merriment just like the parties of the world. Instead of showing forth the love of Christ, they were despising their brethren who were not well off. By doing so, they corrupted the testimony of the Lord’s death, and took the name of the Lord in vain.

The Lord views the desecration of His holy sacrament very seriously. Because the Corinthian Christians abused the Lord’s Supper, the Lord struck some of them with illness. Some even died (1 Cor 11:30). Thus, it is important to approach the Lord’s Supper with great fear and reverence, for he who partakes of the Lord’s Supper unworthily *“eateth and drinketh damnation to himself”* (1 Cor 11:29).

Some churches today treat the Lord’s Supper flippantly. This writer has seen an announcement of a love feast conducted at a youth camp which was peppered with partying and dancing before the partaking of the Lord’s Supper. There are also churches today who sell Lord’s Supper sets so that members can partake of the elements on their own. Such churches are truly playing with fire.

The Lord’s Supper is not fun and games. It is a commemoration of the Lord’s death, and is a sacred spiritual exercise. Do not surf the net or check your emails on your mobile phones when you come before the Lord’s table! Rather, meditate on God’s Word and prepare your heart to partake of the elements. “When the Lord’s Table is observed reverentially and faithfully, there comes a special blessing from heaven. Such gracious benefits from God Calvin said cannot be explained, but experienced” (Tow and Khoo).

THOUGHT: The Lord’s Supper is a sacred spiritual exercise.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for every remembrance of Christ’s death.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 13

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-3

EPHESIANS 2:11-12

“Now concerning spiritual gifts ...”

COUNTERFEIT GIFTS

Just like Christianity today, the Corinthian church was fixated with tongue-speaking and other sign gifts. Some of them were showing off their skill of speaking in tongues during the worship service, creating much chaos and confusion. Thus, the Apostle Paul had to address these abuses in 1 Corinthians 12-14.

In these chapters, Paul explained the doctrine of spiritual gifts:

- Chapter 12: The purpose of spiritual gifts
- Chapter 13: The motive of spiritual gifts
- Chapter 14: The proper use of spiritual gifts

Paul opened this discussion by pointing out that only born-again believers can have spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:1-3). The term “*spiritual gifts*” (*pneumatikōn*) literally means “spiritual things.” The emphasis here is that these gifts are from the Holy Spirit and therefore cannot be manifested by those who are not born again. Only those who have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit (i.e. the saints) are given these gifts.

Many of the Corinthian Christians came from pagan backgrounds. They would have observed temple priests who spoke ecstatically while in a trance for their religious rituals. Thus, when people spoke in tongues in churches, some might be impressed by such utterances and be taken in by them.

However, Paul made it clear in these verses that an idolater can never have a spiritual gift even though he may appear to manifest it. One commentator rightly observed that unless the Spirit indwells the person, he can never fully abandon the idols of his life and embrace Christ as the exclusive Lord of his life. Nevertheless, he may go about in his manifestations of tongue-speaking and counterfeit gifts. The Corinthian Christians were warned not to be taken in.

THOUGHT: Beware of deception and false brethren.

PRAYER: Father, grant me discernment in this world of falsehood.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 14

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-6

ROMANS 12:3

“Now there are diversities of gifts...”

THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS (I)

The Corinthian Christians were living carnally. They were walking in the flesh rather than in the spirit. This led to frequent squabbling concerning the use of their spiritual gifts. They used these gifts to glorify self, rather than to glorify God. To curb this abuse of spiritual gifts, Paul reiterated some fundamentals concerning spiritual gifts:

First, spiritual gifts are graciously given (1 Cor 12:4). The term for “gifts” (1 Cor 12:4) is different from that of 1 Corinthians 12:1. The term *pneumatikōn* emphasizes the Holy Spirit being the source of spiritual gifts. On the other hand, the term *charismatōn* in 1 Corinthians 12:4 is literally “grace gifts.” It teaches us that these gifts are not inherently of man, nor are they given because of any merit in man. They are given by God as an expression of His unmerited favour so that we may use these gifts for His glory. Therefore, there is nothing for man to boast about concerning his spiritual gifts. “*For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith*” (Rom 12:3). Humility, humility, humility!

We must also see a difference between spiritual gifts and talents. Natural talents are skills or abilities that may be manifested by both believers and unbelievers. For example, both believers and unbelievers can be highly skilled cooks. However, spiritual gifts are not natural but supernaturally given so that believers may use them to build up the body of Christ. Thus, a person may be a capable teacher in a public school since he has the natural talent for teaching, but that does not make him spiritually gifted to teach in the Sunday School.

What then are the spiritual gifts that the Lord has given to you?

THOUGHT: “The gifts of the Spirit are not the gifts of nature.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, may I serve Thee humbly with my spiritual gifts.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 15

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-6

EPHESIANS 4:7-10

“... *diversities of gifts ... of
administrations ... of operations ...*”

THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS (II)

Second, there are diversities of gifts (1 Cor 12:4). The term “*diversities*” (*diareseis*) carries the idea of “distributions” or “allotments.” Here, Paul was referring to the variety of gifts which God distributes among the believers. Different believers will have different gifts. Some will have the gift of teaching, others the gift of music, still others the gift of administration. Since God is the one who decides the distribution of gifts (Eph 4:7-10), there must be no comparison or jealousy regarding this matter.

For examples of spiritual gifts, one may refer to 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. Other examples are found in 1 Corinthians 12:28-31; Romans 12:6-8 and Ephesians 4:11.

Third, there are differences in administrations (1 Cor 12:5). The term “*administrations*” (*diakoniōn*) can also be rendered as “ministries.” While some may have the same spiritual gifts, they may manifest their gifts in different ways and be found in different ministries. For example, one may be a teacher who is most suitable for teaching children. Another may be a teacher who is gifted in instructing the adults. Let each teacher abide in his calling. Let there be no comparison or jealousy.

Fourth, there are differences in operations (1 Cor 12:6). The term “*operations*” (*energēmatōn*) refers to the effectiveness of one’s ministry which has been committed to the Lord. No Christian can serve the Lord in his own might. He must depend on the Lord to energise him for the work. And after the work is completed, the results are entirely in the Lord’s hands. It is the temptation of many a man to look at another’s work and compare the results with his own. Some may despair at their apparent lack of fruit. Others may gloat that they are more effective. May it not be so among us! Never forget that it is the Lord who gives the increase (1 Cor 3:7).

THOUGHT: Let every man abide in his calling.

PRAYER: Father, help me to know my place in Thy service.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 16

1 CORINTHIANS 12:7-11

EPHESIANS 4:12-13

“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.”

THE PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Spiritual gifts are meant for every Christian. In 1 Corinthians 12:7, Paul instructed that they were meant to be used for the profit of man. Ephesians 4:12-13 elaborates on this that the gifts are meant to build up the church of God: *“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”* Christians who use their gifts humbly and wisely will not only help the brethren to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, but will also encourage them to make better use of their gifts.

Paul then gave some examples of spiritual gifts that God uses to edify His church. Khoo comments:

“(1) The word of wisdom, i.e. the ability to impart God’s revelation. (2) The word of knowledge, i.e. the ability to explain the practical ramifications of spiritual truth. (3) Faith ... that will trust God for things impossible. (4) The gifts of healing, i.e. the supernatural ability to restore health to the sick instantaneously. (5) The working of miracles, i.e. the ability to perform things which are not humanly or naturally possible, like walking on water. (6) Prophecy, i.e. the ability to foretell the future. (7) Discerning of spirits, i.e. the ability to distinguish a truth from a lie. (8) Tongues, i.e. the ability to speak in foreign languages never learned by the speaker. (9) Interpretation of tongues, i.e., the ability to translate the content of what was spoken by the tongues-speaker.”

Some of the gifts stated above have ceased today. (This will be discussed later under 1 Corinthians 13.)

Paul once again reminded us that the Holy Spirit is the one who decides on the distribution of gifts (1 Cor 12:11). Let pride be abased.

THOUGHT: Diversity of gifts, yet unity in the body of Christ.

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me play my part in my church.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-20

EPHESIANS 4:1-6

*“For as the body is one, and
hath many members ...”*

MEMBERS IN ONE BODY

Paul now proceeded to use the metaphor of the body to describe the church. Though the church is made up of many members who have diversities of gifts, the church is still a united entity. It is just like the human body: made up of individual members, yet the body is a unified whole. The metaphor of the body teaches us several lessons.

First, it teaches us about the mystical spiritual union of believers in the church. The individual members of the body are one because Christ is one, and each one of them has been baptised into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. This mystical spiritual union among the body of believers in Christ is most beautifully described by Paul in Ephesians 4:4-6: *“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”*

Since the members of Christ are one, we must all endeavour to keep the peace within the one body of Christ in truth (Eph 4:3). Are you a keeper of peace? Or are you a troublemaker?

Second, our bodies are made up of different members with each member having a different function. The duty of each member is to fulfil its function faithfully. So it is with the body of Christ. (More of this later in 1 Corinthians 12:27-31.)

Third, each member in the body of Christ is important and necessary for the function of the whole body. Our physical bodies are a testament to this. Our bodies will not be whole if any member is missing. It is the same for the body of Christ. Some of us may be appointed by God for certain roles that may seem small and despised by others. Yet in the eyes of God, every role is significant. Take heart and be faithful in your station.

THOUGHT: What causes disunity in my church?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou guard the peace in my church.

INTERDEPENDENCE IN THE BODY

No man is an island in the work of the Lord. Just like how every member is important in the human body, so it is with the body of Christ. Can the one who is made to be the eye claim to exist on his own? No! And so it is with the head or the feet.

This writer once hit his little toe not once, nor twice, but three times on the same solid metal chair. The pain was excruciating to say the least. Not only was he unable to do his weekly runs, but the pain made it nigh impossible to concentrate on his work. And this was just a little toe.

In addition, Paul drew attention to those parts of our body that are regarded unrepresentable. We are to bestow more honour to these members by covering them up. Similarly, there may be brethren in the church who are weaker. Surely our duty is to help them and to lift them up. We are back to the theme of edifying one another!

Alas, it is often seen in churches that those who are given roles that are seemingly easy or are not in the limelight are under appreciated or despised. Sadly in the Corinthian church, we see how the rich were only interested in their own feasting and ignored the poor.

In today's context, many may cosy up to the pastor, but who will give attention to the one who sweeps the sanctuary after a day of service? Do you show your love and concern for this brother? Or do you ignore him and treat him as non-existent? Sometimes a warm hello and smile can do much to lift the spirit.

To those who may be appointed to seemingly insignificant roles, never make the mistake of despising the role which the Lord has assigned to you. When we serve faithfully in our roles, the Lord's name will be greatly magnified through the body of Christ.

THOUGHT: No man is an island in the work of the Lord.

PRAYER: Father, help me to care for those who are in need.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 19

1 CORINTHIANS 12:27-31

EPHESIANS 4:1-6

*“Are all apostles?
are all prophets?”*

ABIDE IN YOUR CALLING

Every believer is called to a particular station to serve the Lord. With respect to the early New Testament Church, there were those who were called to serve the Lord as Apostles. Others were called to serve as prophets, teachers, etc. Just as how each member of the body has a different function, so each member of the body of Christ is called to his specific ministry for the Lord.

However, some of the Corinthian Christians were not satisfied with their lot given by the Lord. They saw the prominence that was given to tongue-speaking in the church, and so some desired to speak in tongues, even though that gift was not spiritually endowed upon them. That is just like the eye of the body attempting to do the work of the mouth. It will never work.

Today, there may be some who are not satisfied with the ministry which the Lord has called them into. Perhaps they want more limelight and attention. Perhaps they desire the praise of man rather than ridicule. Therefore, they strive to push themselves into positions which the Lord has not intended for them. For example, a person may push his way into the position of a teacher even though he may not have the gift of teaching. Sooner or later, he will not only hurt himself, but also the body of Christ.

Paul concluded this section by pointing out that the Corinthian Christians were right to be zealous (*zēloute*) in the use of spiritual gifts. They were also not wrong to desire that the best spiritual gifts be manifested in the church. Yet, the use of these spiritual gifts must be accompanied by the right attitude and motive. This is the more excellent way which the Apostle Paul instructed in the next chapter.

THOUGHT: Christ, not self, in the service of the Lord.

PRAYER: Father, I will do what Thou wantest me to do.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 20

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3

2 CORINTHIANS 5:12-14

“... (If I) have not charity,
I am nothing.”

THE MOTIVE IS LOVE

The Bible declares emphatically that “*God is love*” (1 John 4:16). It also teaches that Christians should love God “*because he first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). This means when we obey God and serve Him, we must do so most willingly because we love Him. We also must love our brethren because of Christ’s love. The motive of our service must be our love for Christ.

Tragically, among the Corinthian Christians, there seemed to be a lack of love. It was a lack of love which caused the partisan spirit. It was also the lack of love which caused the Corinthian Christians to abuse the gift of tongue speaking. They were seeking after self-recognition rather than loving others. If they had loved God, they would have wanted God to be glorified rather than self-magnification.

It was with this in mind that Paul employed a series of hyperboles in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. Paul was not saying that he could speak in the language of angels (if it was known). Nor was he saying that he had ever moved mountains. What he was saying was that even if he could do these things, he would be nothing if he did not do so out of the pure motive of the love of Christ, for all these things would have been done to promote self, rather than to glorify God and to benefit others.

This writer had the privilege of attending a performance of a professional symphonic orchestra. The music played that day was simply majestic. That was until the portion where the cymbals player was supposed to come in. Somehow, the orchestra contrived to put a novice percussionist to play the cymbal. He had no regard for the dynamics of the piece and simply clashed the cymbals without proper technique. Needless to say, the good work of the orchestra was ruined. The same happens when we try to use our spiritual gifts without love. It will all be in vain and will cause great hurt to the work of Christ.

THOUGHT: I must be constrained by the love of Christ in all things.

PRAYER: More love to Thee, O Lord.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 21

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

2 PETER 3:9

“Charity suffereth long.”

WHAT IS LOVE? (I)

The word “love” in 1 Corinthians 13 is *agapē*. It stands in contrast with *eros* which is about lust and passion, or *philia* which is about love between brothers or friends. *Agapē* is often used in the Scripture in relation with God’s love. “It is love in its purest sense” (Khoo).

Why then did the King James translators render this term “charity”? It is because true *agapē* will be manifested in action. This principle is taught by John in 1 John 3:18: “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”

Since love must be the motive for our service, it behoves us to understand the many facets of love.

The first description of love is that of longsuffering (1 Cor 13:4). This term, *makrothumei*, is often used to describe patience with difficult people. When a longsuffering man is wronged, he will not strive to avenge himself even though he has the right and power to do it.

The best example of longsuffering is our Lord Himself. Is He not longsuffering with the world, not willing that any should perish, but for all to come unto salvation (2 Pet 3:9)? When we were still in our sin, could not the Lord have struck us down and destroyed us? Yet the Lord is patient and woos us by His love, so that we can be saved from darkness and translated into His Kingdom of light.

Another good example of longsuffering is Moses. Observe how patient he was with a people that was often murmuring and complaining. He had to bear with their idiosyncrasies and hardness of heart for forty long years in the wilderness. Yet the Scriptures account him a faithful servant in God’s house. So must we also be longsuffering with our brethren if we are to live constrained by the love of Christ.

THOUGHT: A longsuffering man does not retaliate.

PRAYER: Father, help me to be longsuffering with others.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 22

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

TITUS 3:4-6

“Charity ... is kind ...”

WHAT IS LOVE? (II)

The next description of love is that of kindness (*chresteuetai*). This word refers to “active goodwill.” It is not just an inward disposition of charity, but one that is manifested. “It not only desires others’ welfare, but works for it” (MacArthur). Rev Timothy Tow succinctly restated this as an injunction: “Do something good for Jesus every day.”

For the Corinthian Christians, the call to kindness was to lead them to confess their sin of self-centredness. At the time of writing, they were selfish and full of spite for one another. Kindness would demand that they set this spirit aside and start to be more considerate of one another. They were to render help to those who were in need.

Once again, the best example of kindness is our Lord Jesus Christ. Did not Christ out of His kindness come down to this world to die for our sins? *“But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour”* (Titus 3:4-6).

Kindness need not be manifested in some grandiose deed. Sometimes a little word or action can go a long way to encourage sagging spirits. Paul Lee Tan related the story of the blind hymn writer Fanny Crosby who came across a motherless boy at McAuley Mission. When she was alerted to his state, she laid her arms around the child and kissed him. That meeting inspired her to write the hymn, “Rescue the Perishing.” Years later, Mr Sankey related the incident to the crowd. A man sprung from the crowd and claimed to be the man who was kissed by Fanny that day. The act of kindness left such an impression on him that he became a Christian and a godly businessman.

THOUGHT: “Do something good for Jesus every day.” (Timothy Tow)

PRAYER: Father, help me to be kind to others.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 23

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

EXODUS 34:14

“Charity envieth not.”

WHAT IS LOVE? (III)

“Charity envieth not” (1 Cor 13:4). The term “*envieth*” (*zeloi*) carries the meaning of “to be jealous.” This involves the fierce protection of what one perceives to be his.

Due to the common negative perception of jealousy, it may come as a surprise to some that the Bible describes God as a jealous God. In fact, God’s very name is “Jealous.” “For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (Exod 34:14). All the other gods are but false gods, and can never be compared to the one living and true God. Therefore, when man worships other gods, the LORD is rightfully jealous for they have exalted the creature over the Creator, and robbed Him of His glory.

The difference between divine jealousy and human jealousy is that human jealousy is often stained with sin. A striking example of sinful human jealousy can be found in the life of King Saul. Despite knowing that God had determined David to be the next king, Saul’s jealousy caused him to make various attempts on David’s life. He wanted to hold on to his kingship, but no man can thwart God’s plan. Saul’s persistent sinful jealousy eventually led to his demise.

Such sinful jealousy is also seen in the Corinthian church where differing parties bickered to exalt their own party (cf. 1 Cor 3:4). A second example is found in 3 John where Diotrephes is said to love the pre-eminence in the church, and rejected all whom he felt were a threat to his position (cf. 3 John 9).

It was such sinful jealousy that Paul warned of in 1 Corinthians 13:4 when he said that charity “*envieth*” not. Such jealousy finds its root in a covetous and selfish heart. How many a church are destroyed because the saints are jealous of one another!

THOUGHT: Unrighteous jealousy kills.

PRAYER: Father, guard me from sinful envy and jealousy.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 24

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

NUMBERS 25:1-15

“... he was zealous
for my sake ...”

GODLY JEALOUSY (I)

Charity does not embrace sinful jealousy. However, it is also true that charity demands us to be jealous of God and His glory. As God's covenant people, we are also expected to be jealous over His honour and the faithfulness of His people.

One example of love that is manifested in godly jealousy is seen in Phinehas. The account of his godly jealousy is found in Numbers 25:11: *“Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous (jealous) for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy.”*

Balaam, the false prophet, was prevented from cursing Israel by the LORD. Therefore, he came out with a crafty and devious plan. He understood the only way Israel could get hurt was if they sinned against God. Thus, he sprung the beauty trap on the children of Israel. Enamoured by the daughters of Moab, the Israelites committed whoredom before the LORD. These strange women soon led the silly men to worship their gods. Thus, the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel, resulting in the declaration of an order for all who were joined to Baal-Peor to be slain before the LORD.

Despite this order, one man brazenly demonstrated his affection for a Midianitish woman in public! This was rebellion of the highest order. If allowed to persist, the congregation of Israel could be led away to whoredom, and the name of Jehovah would be dishonoured. It was at this point that Phinehas stood up for the LORD, thrusting his javelin through the offending man and woman.

On the account of his godly jealousy, Phinehas was rewarded with the covenant of peace and the everlasting priesthood of Israel (Ps 106:31). Those who love the LORD above all shall be richly blessed.

THOUGHT: Am I jealous for God's glory?

PRAYER: Father, help me to be zealous for Thy name.

LORD'S DAY, NOVEMBER 25

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

2 CORINTHIANS 11:2

“... I am jealous over you...”

GODLY JEALOUSY (II)

Not only are we to be jealous over the Lord's honour, the love of Christ also demands that we be jealous over His people. Paul was an example of such jealousy. *“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”* (2 Cor 11:2).

In this verse, Paul adopted a striking imagery where he was pictured as the father of a bride who was betrothed to a groom. In those days, there was usually a time interval between the betrothal and the consummation of the marriage. Moreover, both parties were expected to honour the betrothal until the time of the wedding feast. (This is unlike modern engagements where the agreement can be broken anytime.) The father was expected to do his part to keep his daughter pure until she was presented as a chaste virgin to the groom.

As the church of God (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1), the Corinthian church was the bride of Christ. Paul being the founding pastor was like the adopted father. His duty was to ensure that the church was pure until the return of Christ when He would take up His bride.

This responsibility meant that Paul had every right to be jealous over the Corinthian Christians. This jealousy was not due to a fear that others would snatch his followers from him. Rather, that the Corinthian Christians belonged to Christ. Christ had purchased them with His precious blood and redeemed them to be His bride. The bride was entrusted to the care of Paul. Therefore, Paul must strive to present the Corinthian church as a chaste virgin to Christ.

The heart of the Apostle Paul must also be the heart of any who is called to be a leader in the church today. If he loves God's people, he must be jealous over them with a godly jealousy.

THOUGHT: How is godly jealousy to be applied in the family?

PRAYER: Father, teach me to be jealous over Thy people.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 26

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

PROVERBS 27:2

*“Charity vaunteth not itself
is not puffed up.”*

WHAT IS LOVE? (IV)

“Charity vaunteth not itself.” This term *“vaunteth”* (*perpereuetai*) describes a person who likes to brag and show off. MacArthur is right to observe that while sinful jealousy “puts others down, bragging, builds us up.”

Proverbs 27:2 warns against boasting: *“Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.”* However, the Corinthian Christians enjoyed receiving the praise of others. They longed for prestige and recognition. Thus, they were all striving to speak in tongues. Even though some of these tongue-speaking occurrences were counterfeit, they boasted about them as though they were authentic. What a farce!

Remember, self-praise is no praise but outright disgrace.

“Charity is not puffed up.” The expression of being *“puffed up”* has the picture of one being so full of himself that his head goes up in a puff of smoke. We have already seen how the arrogance of the Corinthian Christians led them to be presumptuous in their conduct. Their pride also led them to think that they could excel in ministries which the Lord had not called them to. The result was a church full of strife and division.

On the other hand, we have the example par excellence of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who humbled Himself to come to this world as a man to suffer and die on behalf of sinners. *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”* (Phil 2:5-8). May we be humble like Christ!

THOUGHT: The boaster shall have gravel in his mouth.

PRAYER: Father, help me to learn from Christ’s humility.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 27

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

3 JOHN

*“Charity doth not behave
itself unseemly.”*

WHAT IS LOVE? (V)

“Charity doth not behave itself unseemly.” The term *“unseemly”* has the idea of conducting oneself in contradiction with social and moral standards to the point of invoking embarrassment and shame. Such an one is rude, crude and belligerent, and does not care for the feelings of others.

The Corinthian church was full of examples of such unseemly behaviour. First, there was the conduct of the rich at the love feasts, who forbade the poor to eat together with them. Second, the worship services were conducted in a haphazard manner where everyone could say whatever came to mind. The cacophonous nature of the worship services was so off-putting that others wondered whether they were in the house of God.

Then there was the example of Diotrephes who, in his desire for pre-eminence, did not receive the Apostle John and his fellow labourers, choosing instead to prat against them with malicious words and cast them out of the church (3 John 9-10). This is hatred and not love, as evidenced by his unseemly conduct

The conduct of Diotrephes stands in contrast with the well-respected Gaius. Gaius' genuine love for the saints led him to be most hospitable to strangers, including John and his co-labourers who visited the church. In application, how do young people conduct themselves before brethren who are more senior to them? Are they rude and uncouth, or are they courteous and respectful? Your conduct matters!

THOUGHT: Am I gracious and polite in my conduct?

PRAYER: Father, help my conduct to be worthy of Christ's gospel.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 28

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

MATTHEW 20:28

“Charity seeketh not her own.”

WHAT IS LOVE? (VI)

“Charity seeketh not her own.” Love is not selfish but sacrificial. It will think of Christ first, others second and self last. An unselfish person will always think of what is best for the welfare of others.

Once again, the Corinthian Christians are the very examples that contradict such selflessness. Their selfish and careless behaviour became stumbling blocks to the brethren of weaker conscience. The selfish rich did not share their food with the poor during the love feasts. They also sued fellow believers over trivial issues instead of suffering wrong.

The Corinthians’ conduct stood in contrast with our Lord’s. *“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many”* (Matt 20:28). Paul himself, following in the footsteps of Christ, was willing to be a *“servant unto all”* (1 Cor 9:19) so that he might *“by all means save some”* (1 Cor 9:22). Are you willing to be a servant unto all like Christ and Paul?

Charity *“is not easily provoked.”* Here, it refers to one who is not easily agitated or upset when placed under severe emotional stress. Love is “a bridle to repress quarrels, and this follows from the first two statements. For where there is gentleness and forbearance, persons in that case do not, on a sudden, become angry, and are not easily stirred up to disputes and contests” (Calvin).

We see this aspect being demonstrated in Paul’s life during his first imprisonment. Those who were jealous of Paul had begun to preach passionately thinking that now was their time to take over from Paul and add affliction to his bonds. Paul responded: *“What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice”* (Phil 1:18). He was not one that was easily provoked.

THOUGHT: The Christian must give his life to serve others.

PRAYER: Father, help me to be selfless in my conduct.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 29

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

PROVERBS 27:6

“Charity thinketh no evil.”

WHAT IS LOVE? (VII)

“Charity thinketh no evil.” This refers to a person who bears no ill-will or feeling to those who have done him wrong. He is not one who bears resentment or grievances, nor keeps records of injustices done against him.

Once again, the best example is Jesus. When we repent and come to Him for forgiveness, is He not faithful to forgive and cleanse us of all our unrighteousness? *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9).

Charity *“rejoiceth not in iniquity.”* “Love is saddened by all forms of unrighteousness. There is nothing to cheer about when a person sins. Sin should cause one to experience remorse, or regret, and an eager desire to repent (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:10-11)” (Khoo).

The Apostle Paul, in his love for God’s people, did not rejoice when there was sin in the camp. The very fact that he wrote this epistle to the Corinthian Christians was testimony that he *“rejoiceth not in iniquity.”* Otherwise, he might have just turned a blind eye and allowed the Corinthian Christians to wallow in their carnality.

Beloved, let us not mistake the sweeping of sin under the carpet as love. The Bible tells us that such conduct is not love but hatred. A true lover is one who will seek to help turn his friend away from sin. *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend (Hebrew: ‘the one who loves’); but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful”* (Prov 27:6).

THOUGHT: I must not sweep sin under the carpet.

PRAYER: Father, help me to love biblically, not as the world loves.

WHAT IS LOVE? (VIII)

“Charity rejoiceth in the truth.” The term *“truth”* in this expression refers to the objective truth, which is the Word of God. *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth”* (John 17:17).

Love rejoices in the promotion of truth and abhors the pursuit of evil. Sadly, the church today, caught up with the neo-evangelical and ecumenical movement, declares that truth can be set aside for unity. This is a false love that must be rejected. This is because true love does not promote falsehood or evil. It will never say that all religions lead to heaven, for God has clearly declared in His Word that salvation is only in Jesus Christ: *“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6).

A common motto quoted today is: *“Love unites, doctrine divides.”* But the Scripture teaches us differently: *“True doctrine unites, and true love divides.”* See what Christ says in Matthew 10:34-37:

“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

In the verses above, we see how division occurs even in the family because of love. Will we have the courage then to stand up for the truth because we love the Lord above all?

THOUGHT: The Christian must love Christ above all things.

PRAYER: Father, help me to love Thee with my all.

THE LOVE TEST (I)

Christians are commanded to love the LORD their God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their might (Deut 6:5). Christ called this “*the first and great commandment*” (Matt 22:38). A Christian’s love for God will be manifested in His obedience to the Holy Scriptures. Jesus taught this succinctly in John 14:15: “*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*” God at times may permit us to be subjected to testing so that we may know whether we truly love Him with all our heart. Do we have God’s Word first in our lives?

In Deuteronomy 13:1-5, when the children of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land, Moses warned that God would allow false prophets to come into their midst, who would seek to tear them away from God and His Word. This is the test for the children of Israel: “*for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*”

There would be two types of false prophets. The first type would be those whose word would not come to pass (Deut 18:22). The second type, however, is subtler. These false prophets would prophesy, and the signs and wonders would come to pass. Appealing to people’s experiences of the miracles, these false prophets would then attempt to draw them away from the LORD to worship and serve false gods.

If the signs and wonders do come to pass, how then can an Israelite know whether a prophet is true or false? The only way is to check what the prophet teaches against God’s Word. Herein is the test of love: if the children of Israel loved God, they would have to put their trust in God’s Word and not in their senses. The issue at hand is that of experience versus the Bible. When experience contradicts the Bible, the believer is to follow the Bible! Our love for God will lead us to His Word first of all.

THOUGHT: To love God is to love His Word.

PRAYER: Father, help me to love Thy Truth.

THE LOVE TEST (II)

In Deuteronomy 13:1-5, the love for God and His Word must triumph over all our experiences. However, how will we respond if the false prophet is one of our closest friends? What if he is one of our family? What will we do? Will we stand up for God's truth? Or will we compromise for the sake of relationships?

It is natural to have deeper affections for one's family and loved ones. A Christian ought to love his family in the Lord. No one should be cold or unsupportive towards his family (1 Tim 5:8). Neither should he be unthankful to his benefactors. Ungratefulness is the hallmark of an infidel.

Nevertheless, Satan, who is the crafty and deceitful one, may utilise relationships to entrap us, veering us from the Holy Scriptures. These enticements may at times be done *"secretly"* (Deut 13:6). However, there is no such thing as a secret sin, for soon it will manifest itself and be found out. When such "secret enticements" are permitted to continue, it will quickly result in idolatry, which is an abomination to the Lord. McIntire astutely restated the truth in this way: "The most subtle temptations come through our loved ones. Satan frequently approaches us through intimate friends in whom we have the utmost confidence. So, temptation becomes subtle and powerful."

How then should Israel deal with a false prophet who is a loved one? The Bible declares that they must never consent to the false prophet's ways, nor conceal him, but must be first to put him to death (Deut 13:8-9). Nothing must come between them and their love for God!

Dear brethren, our love for fellowmen must be in the truth. When our love for our loved ones exceeds that of God's Word, we fail the test of love. May the love of God truly reign in our hearts all our days. Let God be our all in all.

THOUGHT: Beware of the devices of Satan.

PRAYER: Father, help me to love Thy Truth above all.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 3

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

PROVERBS 10:12

“Charity ... Beareth all things.”

WHAT IS LOVE? (IX)

“Charity ... Beareth all things.” The verb “beareth” (*stegei*) has the idea of enduring or holding up against something which threatens (Thayer). In 1 Corinthians 9:12, this verb is used to describe how Paul and his fellow labourers were willing to forbear the threat of the loss of their rights to remuneration so that the work of the gospel might progress. *“If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ”* (1 Cor 9:12).

Considering 1 Corinthians 9:12, the expression “*beareth all things*” is best understood as the willingness of a person to forbear all things to help brethren who are spiritually weak or are in sin. He is one who bears in mind Proverbs 10:12: *“Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.”*

To “*cover*” all sins here does not mean that we should turn a blind eye and condone sin. Rather, it means that we are to forbear all the wrongs and injustices done against us, and patiently reach out to restore the brother that he may turn from sin. We are not to hold a grudge against personal offences but endure the wrong. Thus, Proverbs 17:9 says, *“He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.”* Proverbs 19:11 adds, *“The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.”* The wise man forbears the faults of others.

May the Lord help us to exercise patience and forbearance in our relationships, for charity “*beareth all things.*”

THOUGHT: Love covers a multitude of sins.

PRAYER: Father, teach me what it means to love my brethren.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

JAMES 5:7-12

*“Charity... believeth all things, hopeth
all things, endureth all things.”*

WHAT IS LOVE? (X)

The last three qualities of love are closely connected.

“Charity ... believeth all things” points to a man who will consider true all things as revealed in the Word of God (Khoo). He does not doubt God’s Word, nor will he criticise the Scriptures, but will humbly receive all that he has been taught from the Bible. He will not have the forked tongue of the serpent who casted doubt on God’s Word in the Garden of Eden: *“Yea, hath God said?”* (Gen 3:1). Instead, he will gladly proclaim, “God says it. That settles it. I believe it.”

“Charity ... hopeth all things.” Because the one who loves believes in God’s every word and is firmly grounded on His Word, he is assured of the heavenly hope he has in Christ Jesus. And therefore he looks forward expectantly to the return of his Lord and Saviour.

A Christian who *“hopeth all things”* will not be spiritually sleepy, but is sober and constantly watching (1 Thess 5:6; 1 Pet 4:7). He will set his affections on things above, and not on things of this earth (Col 3:1-2). He will long for Christ to come quickly, for he loves his Saviour (Rev 22:20). What about you?

“Charity ... endureth all things.” Because the Christian knows that Christ is coming soon, he is most willing to endure sufferings for Christ’s sake. The verb *“endureth”* (*hupomonē*) refers to super-endurance under difficult circumstances. We must expect trials and tribulations in this sin-sick world, but our hope in our Saviour will help us to be *“stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord”* (1 Cor 15:58).

“Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (James 5:8).

THOUGHT: God says it. That settles it. I believe it.

PRAYER: Father, grant me a faith that always looks to Thee.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 5

1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-13

2 PETER 1:16-21

“Charity never faileth ...”

LOVE IS ETERNAL (I)

Paul wanted to demonstrate why love is “*a more excellent way*” (1 Cor 12:31) compared to the Corinthian Christians’ tongue-speaking. He did so in this section by pointing out that love is eternal, whereas spiritual gifts will one day cease to exist.

First, let us note the three gifts that will come to an end: “*prophecies*,” “*tongues*” and “*knowledge*.” These three gifts are revelatory sign gifts.

In 1 Corinthians 13:8, Paul stated that “*prophecies*” will “*fail*” and “*knowledge*” will “*vanish away*.” The terms “*fail*” and “*vanish away*” are rendered from the same verb *katargeō*, which means to destroy, obliterate or abolish. These two verbs are written in the passive voice, indicating that an external agent will cause prophecies and knowledge to be destroyed.

What is that which will cause prophecies and knowledge to be obliterated? 1 Corinthians 13:9-10 tells us that “*that which is perfect*” (*to teleion*) will come. Since the context deals with revelatory gifts, “*that which is perfect*” that will come must be the perfect revelation that negates all need for these revelatory sign gifts. What then is this perfect revelation? It is the completed canon of sixty-six books, i.e. the Bible that we hold in our hands today!

In the days of the Corinthian Christians, the congregation still needed prophecies and knowledge as revelatory gifts. They were just like a child who still understood and spoke like a child, or a man who was looking into the mirror dimly (1 Cor 13:11-12). However, when the “*more sure word of prophecy*” (2 Pet 1:19) comes, it is time to put away the “*childish things*” (i.e. prophecies and knowledge). Thus, prophecies and knowledge ceased when the canon of Scripture was completed.

THOUGHT: God’s Word is the “*more sure word of prophecy*.”

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for giving us Thy perfect Word.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6

1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-13

1 CORINTHIANS 14:22

“Charity never faileth ...”

LOVE IS ETERNAL (II)

What then about tongues? Paul wrote that tongues “*shall cease*” (1 Cor 13:8). The verb “*cease*” is *pauō* from which we get the English word “*pause*.” It is in the middle voice, thus indicating that tongues will stop on their own. Thus, tongues will stop on their own over the course of time once they have served their purpose. Paul later elaborated on the purpose of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:22.

Many church fathers, eg. Augustine, attested to the cessation of tongues after the time of the early church. The Sixteenth Century Reformation is widely regarded as the greatest revival since Pentecost (Schaeffer). Yet, there was an absence of tongue-speaking. There was instead much powerful biblical preaching by the Reformers. True revivals in the church are always characterised by much preaching and a passionate dedication to God’s Word (Neh 8).

The sign gifts were temporary. They were only meant for the apostolic age. With the completion of biblical Canon, these sign gifts were withdrawn. Today, we must not look for such signs and wonders. May we not be deceived by the Charismatic Movement.

Instead of these sign gifts, Paul told the Corinthian Christians to pursue the virtues of faith, hope and love. These virtues are superior to the sign gifts because they will abide throughout the age of the Church. Of these three virtues, love is superior because it is eternal. While faith and hope will be realised in eternity, love continues to abide because it is a divine virtue. It will continue to be our motive for service in eternity. We will never cease to love God and His saints in the new heavens and the new earth. Therefore, while we are walking our pilgrim journey in this world, let us continue to pursue love (1 Cor 14:1)!

THOUGHT: The Charismatic Movement is unbiblical.

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to exercise love in everything that I do.

WHAT IS AN UNKNOWN TONGUE?

One emphasis of the Charismatic Movement is tongue-speaking. But much of it takes the form of ecstatic utterances which cannot be understood. Practitioners of such ecstatic utterances will often point to the expression “*an unknown tongue*” in 1 Corinthians 14:2 for validation. Are these unknown tongues ecstatic utterances or real foreign languages? To answer this question, let us go back to the event of Pentecost in Acts 2. Acts 2:4 tells us that when the disciples were filled with the Holy Ghost, they “*began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*” The word for “*tongues*” in this case is the Greek word *glossais* from which we get the English word “*glossary*.” Thus, these “*tongues*” that were spoken were real foreign languages that had proper morphology, vocabulary and syntax. This can be seen in the reaction of the people who testified in Acts 2:6-8 that they heard the Apostles in their own languages (Greek: *dialektos*, i.e. dialect). “*Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God*” (Acts 2:9-11).

Another claim by practitioners of ecstatic utterances is that the tongues which they speak are angelic tongues (cf. 1 Cor 13:1). Closer examination of that verse would reveal that Paul was employing a hyperbole. He was not saying that he was able to speak any angelic tongue, but that even if he could and had not love, he would be nothing. Moreover, whenever angels spoke in the Scriptures, they did so in the languages used by men (i.e. Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic). These were not ecstatic languages but known languages! Thus, from the evidence of the Holy Scriptures, the Charismatic practice of ecstatic utterances has no basis and must be rejected.

THOUGHT: All practices must be examined carefully in the light of Scripture.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me a good grounding in biblical doctrines.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8

1 CORINTHIANS 14:1-5

EPHESIANS 4:7-16

“... I will pray with the spirit ...”

EDIFICATION IS THE GOAL

In the earlier chapters, Paul taught the Corinthian Christians that they should seek to edify one another (1 Cor 10:23-24). He had also established that spiritual gifts were given for the growth of the church (1 Cor 12:7-11). Therefore, whatsoever we do, we must consider carefully how it will benefit the spiritual welfare of the brethren.

The same principle is applied in 1 Corinthians 14:1-5 by the Apostle Paul to argue for the superiority of prophesying over tongue-speaking. When a person speaks in an unknown tongue (i.e. a foreign language) which is not understood by the congregation, he is speaking to God because only God can understand what he is saying. The rest will be clueless concerning the message. Thus, unless there is someone to interpret the message, only the tongue-speaker will be edified. What use will that be?

On the other hand, a person who prophesies is one who serves as a spokesman of God to foretell and forthtell the will of God. When he speaks, he speaks directly to the congregation in the vernacular. As the people are able to understand the speech, they can be built up in the most holy faith by the preached Word of God.

“But whatever is done in the Church, ought to be for the common benefit. Away, then, with that misdirected ambition, which gives occasion for the advantage of the people generally being hindered! Besides, Paul speaks by way of concession: for when ambition makes use of such empty vauntings, there is inwardly no desire of doing good; but Paul does, in effect, order away from the common society of believers those men of mere show, who look only to themselves” (Calvin).

THOUGHT: Seek to edify!

PRAYER: Father, use me to be a channel of blessing to others.

LORD'S DAY, DECEMBER 9

1 CORINTHIANS 14:6-12

1 CORINTHIANS 12:7-12

*“Seek that ye may excel
to the edifying of the church.”*

UNDERSTANDING IS THE KEY (I)

In 1 Corinthians 14:1-5, Paul stated that he would rather have the Corinthian Christians prophesy than speak in tongues. This was because the message of the one who prophesies would be understood. However, Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to understand that this did not mean that he disapproved of tongue-speaking. In fact, he would be glad if they could speak in tongues, provided they used their spiritual gift properly and wisely.

The gift of tongues could be very useful in a metropolitan and international city like Corinth. Having the ability to speak different languages would make it easier to communicate with foreigners and to share the gospel with them. The gift of tongues would also allow one to prophesy to others who did not speak the local language.

Paul then used music to illustrate the importance of understanding. Music is only intelligible when there is a distinct tune or melody. It is impossible to appreciate what is being played if it consists of just a single note, or just a cacophonous arrangement of notes. Similarly, a Roman soldier will find it hard to know when to go to war if the trumpet does not sound a tune which the Romans associated with war. Thus, it is important to speak to be understood, otherwise it will be as vain as one speaking into empty air. *“I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me”* (1 Cor 14:11b). In those days, Greek was the lingua franca. A person who spoke in a tongue unknown to another would thus be like a non-Greek speaking to a native Greek. They would not understand each other.

The problem of the Corinthian Church lay not with their zeal but with their motive and purpose of using spiritual gifts. They were using their spiritual gifts to show off rather than to edify one another in love. If they sought to edify one another, they must be understood!

THOUGHT: What is the application for teachers of God's Word?

PRAYER: Lord, help me use my spiritual gifts appropriately.

UNDERSTANDING IS THE KEY (II)

When a person speaks in an unknown tongue, the whole exercise is unprofitable because the congregation cannot understand (1 Cor 14:14-15). Thus, it is imperative for the tongue-speaker to interpret his message (1 Cor 14:13), otherwise all will be in vain.

Paul's directive in these verses is full of wisdom. He knew that many of the Corinthian Christians were speaking in tongues not because they had the gift, but rather to exalt themselves among the congregation. By insisting that the tongue-speaker interpret the message, he was teaching them that true tongue-speaking requires the speaker to understand his own message. Otherwise, their “tongue-speaking” is counterfeit. Their “tongues” are nothing more than self-induced ecstatic utterances.

Paul then rebuked the Corinthian Christians for their pride. *“I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue”* (1 Cor 14:18-19). Here, Paul was not boasting that he could speak many languages. He was simply pointing out that a tongue-speaker must use his gift responsibly. There was no point in Paul parading his skill in languages if it did not promote understanding among the congregation. He would rather speak in their native tongue so that he might minister more effectively among God's people.

Herein is a lesson for all teachers and preachers of God's Word. Each Bible lesson is meant to help the students grow in their understanding of God's Word. Do not teach to boast of your oratorical skill or knowledge. What use is your demonstration of theological sophistry if your students do not understand what you are saying? If your students do not grow in their understanding of God's Word, you have failed. Therefore, teach simply and seek to be understood!

THOUGHT: Never pretend to have spiritual gifts.

PRAYER: Father, use me to help others grow in true wisdom.

BE WISE IN THE RIGHT THINGS

The Corinthian Christians thought that they were knowledgeable. However, their abuse of counterfeit tongue-speaking, as well as other issues, revealed that they still had much to learn.

Thus, the Apostle Paul exhorted them not to be *“children in understanding”* (1 Cor 14:20), but to be mature in their spiritual thinking and understanding. Mature understanding begets godly practice. In the case of 1 Corinthians 14, a well-grounded understanding of the purpose of tongues would have led them to use their gifts wisely and appropriately. *“But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil”* (Heb 5:14).

Sadly, the Corinthian Christians were PhDs in the wrong things. They were well-versed in carnality and sin. They were not interested in learning the things of God but were focused in exalting themselves over others. They also did not bother to check whether their practices were in line with the Holy Scriptures. Their partisan spirit and presumptuous ways made them very much like the children of Israel in the day of Judges when *“every man did that which was right in his own eyes”* (Judg 21:25).

Similarly, we must strive also to be wise in the right things. As Christians, we must not be steeped in malicious things. Neither should we seek to be wise in wicked imaginations or the things of the world. We must instead seek to be wise in the Scriptures and things pertaining to heaven.

Are you therefore wise in evil or righteousness? May it be the latter!

THOUGHT: Am I wise in righteousness?

PRAYER: Father, use me to help others grow in true wisdom.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12

1 CORINTHIANS 14:20-25

ISAIAH 28:11-12

“Tongues are for a sign ...

to them that believe not.”

THE PURPOSE OF TONGUES

In 1 Corinthians 14:22, Paul taught that tongues were meant to be a sign for those who did not believe. This principle is drawn from Isaiah 28:11-12: *“For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing; yet they would not hear.”* Because of the unbelief of the children of Israel, God caused them to be evicted out of their land by the Assyrians. After their eviction, they had to learn the Word of God in the foreign Assyrian tongue. Everything had to be learnt *“precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little”* (Isa 28:13). The speaking of tongues was thus a sign of judgment for the unbelieving Israelites.

The sign of tongues was also used in Acts 10. The Jews in those days did not believe that God would extend His salvation to the Gentiles. When God sent Peter to minister to the Gentile Cornelius, Peter was initially hesitant because the Jews in those days did not want to have anything to do with a Gentile. Nevertheless, Peter went in obedience to minister to Cornelius. After Peter preached to Cornelius, the Gentile believers spoke in tongues and magnified God (Acts 10:44-46). This was later used by Peter to vindicate his ministry towards the Gentiles when he was asked to testify before the council in Jerusalem (Acts 11:15). The sign of tongues was thus given to the unbelieving Jews to confirm that the Holy Spirit did indeed indwell the Gentile believers, and that the gospel door was open to them.

In closing, Paul once again warned against the uncontrolled and indiscriminate use of tongues. If everyone was to speak in tongues, would not the church be full of chaos and confusion? On the other hand, prophesying would lead the unbelievers to glorify God. Therefore, everything was to be done decently and in order (1 Cor 14:40).

THOUGHT: The sign of tongues is for the unbelieving.

PRAYER: Father, grant me good discernment to know what is right.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13

1 CORINTHIANS 14:26-33

1 CORINTHIANS 14:40

*“For God is not the author of
confusion, but of peace.”*

AN ORDERLY WORSHIP SERVICE

A worship service must not be chaotic, for God is not the author of confusion but of peace (1 Cor 14:33). A chaotic worship service will cause unbelievers to accuse believers of being mad (1 Cor 14:23), but an orderly worship will show others that God is indeed in the midst of His congregation (1 Cor 14:25). Therefore, a worship service must be conducted decently and in order according to biblical principles.

With regard to tongues and prophecies in the worship service, Paul established the principle that they must be understood so that believers can be built up in the most holy faith. Based on this principle, Paul gave the following regulations for tongue-speaking and prophesying (as summarised by Khoo):

Rules for Tongue-Speaking (1 Cor 14:26-28):

- No more than three persons may speak in tongues at any time.
- The tongue-speakers are to take turns to speak (i.e. they must not speak spontaneously at the same time for that would be chaotic).
- A person must interpret the message.
- There must be no public tongue-speaking if there is no interpreter. However, the tongue-speaker may speak privately to himself and to God.

Rules for Prophesying (1 Cor 14:29-33):

- Not more than two to three prophets to speak in a service.
- Only one prophet to speak at a time.
- Those with the gift of discernment are to judge what was prophesied. This judgment is to be made according to God’s Word.

Do you know the biblical basis for your church’s order of worship?

THOUGHT: Worship must not be chaotic but orderly.

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to know the biblical basis for all that I do.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14

1 CORINTHIANS 14:26-33

1 CORINTHIANS 14:40

“Let all things be done
decently and in order.”

BIBLICAL TONGUES VS CHARISMATIC TONGUES

(From *Charismatic Tongues Examined* by Jeffrey Khoo)

Biblical Tongues	Charismatic Tongues
Spirit-empowered, and supernaturally given (1 Cor 12:11)	Self-induced and humanly taught
Foreign languages or dialects (Acts 2:6)	Ecstatic utterances or gibberish
Involves both spirit and mind (1 Cor 14:15)	Involves the spirit but not the mind
There is order (1 Cor 14:40)	There is confusion and chaos
Provides edification (1 Cor 14:15)	Promotes ecumenism (<i>Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement</i> , s.v. “Charismatic Movement,” by Peter Hocken)
Given only to some according to the will of God (1 Cor 12:30)	Given to all according to the will of man
Temporary gift of the Apostolic Age (1 Cor 13:8)	Permanent gift of the Church Age
Comes with the gift of interpretation (1 Cor 14:13)	Does not necessarily come with the gift of interpretation
Given only to Christians (Mark 16:17; Acts 8:13, 17)	Given to professing Christians and Roman Catholics (<i>Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements</i> , s.v. “Catholic Charismatic Renewal,” by F.A. Sullivan)
Always controlled (1 Cor 14:27-28)	Often wild, and hysterical
Least of the spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14:5)	Best of the spiritual gifts
Sign to unbelieving Jews (1 Cor 14:22)	Sign of personal spirituality or holiness

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15

1 CORINTHIANS 14:34-36

TITUS 2:3-5

*“Let your women keep silence
in the churches.”*

LET THE WOMEN BE SILENT (I)

When Paul commanded to “*keep silence in the churches,*” he was not forbidding the women to be involved in teaching at all. In Titus 2:3-5, Paul exhorted the aged women to teach the younger women the principles of biblical womanhood. *“The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.”* There is certainly a role for spiritual women in the church to instruct women and children.

In 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, we saw that some women in the Corinthian church were prophesying in public worship without head coverings. Paul showed why the women had to cover their heads in those verses. Now in 1 Corinthians 14:34-36, he made it clear that women were not to teach authoritatively during public worship.

The reason lies in the principle of man’s headship. Recall the two reasons given in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 for the woman’s submission to male leadership: (1) Eve was formed after Adam, proving that her function was to be a help meet for Adam. (2) Eve was the first to be deceived. When Eve decided to usurp the leadership of the Adam, it eventually led to the fall of mankind.

Thus, Paul set the following rules so that worship may be orderly: (1) No woman should be involved in authoritative teaching in public worship. (2) Wives are to obey their husbands in the Lord. (3) If the women have any questions of what was preached, they should ask their husbands in private. The husbands as heads of their home should be responsible in instructing their wives in spiritual things.

THOUGHT: Spiritually mature women should guide the younger women.

PRAYER: Father, raise up women of faith in my church.

LET THE WOMEN BE SILENT (II)

Some may raise objections to the forbidding of women to teach authoritatively in public worship. One common objection raised is that of the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8-9). However, note that the daughters were prophesying in the house of Philip and not publicly. Hence, this is not a suitable example to use as an objection.

What then about Deborah the prophetess in Judges 4? We must understand that Deborah ministered in a time when Israel was in the spiritual doldrums when every man did what was right in his own eyes. The fact that God raised a woman to judge Israel was a strong rebuke to the men in those days for their lack of spirituality. Thus, when Deborah met up with Barak, she quickly exhorted Barak to take charge of the entire situation. *“And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?”* (Judg 4:6).

Let us also observe that Sisera was finally killed by a woman and not by Barak. The LORD permitted this to be a spiritual wake-up call for the men! Nevertheless, amid the lack of male leadership, God can still use women to accomplish His will.

Similarly, there may be special circumstances where a woman may need to preach for a period. For example, a woman may be the forerunner to a place that has not heard of the gospel. For this period, that lady may be the most suitable person to teach and preach God's Word as there is no one else more spiritual than her. In this case, surely no one should forbid her to speak! Nevertheless, once the believing community matures and grows in the faith, suitable men should be raised from their midst to take up leadership within the church.

THOUGHT: Am I submitting to God's instruction?

PRAYER: Father, raise up men of leadership in the church.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 17

1 CORINTHIANS 14:37-40

1 CORINTHIANS 14:33

“... we have the mind of Christ.”

REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE OF WORSHIP

(Adapted from *Theology for Every Christian* by Tow and Khoo)

God requires us to worship Him in His way. Any worship not instituted by God will not be accepted. For example, Nadab and Abihu were punished by God because they “*offered strange fire ... which he commanded them not*” (Lev 10:1). God does not allow us to worship Him according to our whims and fancies. He requires us to worship Him according to the principles of worship He has set forth in the Scriptures.

The regulative principle involves two vital doctrines of the Christian faith. The first is the doctrine of God’s nature. 1 Corinthians 14:33 and 40 tells us that the God we worship is a God of decency and order, and not confusion. God is not pleased with any form of worship that is chaotic, wild, and uncontrolled.

Spiritual maturity is an important element. The more spiritually-minded we are, the more sensitive we will be to the holiness of God. It is not so much a matter of rules and regulations, but of spirituality. If our hearts and minds are biblically tuned to God and His Word, we would not need anyone to give us a list of “dos and don’ts,” we would automatically know what God wants us to be and what He wants us to do. We would naturally desire what God desires. 1 Corinthians 2:15-16 says, “*But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*”

The regulative principle also involves the doctrine of separation. This principle is taught in Romans 12:1-2. Although the Church is in the world, she must not be of the world, and that includes her form of worship. Say “no” to Contemporary Christian Music (CCM).

THOUGHT: Memorise 1 Corinthians 14:40.

PRAYER: Father, help me to worship Thee in Spirit and in Truth.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 18

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-2

MATTHEW 13:24-30

*“I declare unto you the gospel
which I preached unto you.”*

THE GOSPEL MUST BE PREACHED

1 Corinthians 15 is Paul's *magnus opus* on the doctrine of the resurrection. The Corinthian Christians were confused by this doctrine and its implications. Thus, Paul had to address this topic for the resurrection is a cornerstone of the Christian faith.

Paul began this section by pouring out his burden to declare the gospel again to the Corinthian Christians. Why was there this need? It was because of Paul's concern that some might *“have believed in vain”* (1 Cor 15:2). According to the parable of the wheat and the tares, there is every possibility of a mixed multitude in the local church (Matt 13:24-30). In fact, one of the common problems Paul had to face among the churches was contention with false brethren (2 Cor 11:26; Gal 2:4).

It seemed that there were some among the Corinthians who doubted and even denied the truth of the resurrection. *“Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?”* (1 Cor 15:12). True saving faith is based on a right understanding of gospel truth. If these men continued in their denial of the resurrection, then they would have indeed *“believed in vain”*!

Similarly, we must never stop preaching the gospel in our churches. We must never assume that all are true believers. There may be some who profess faith and have been attending church services for years, but they may never have truly believed in the gospel. It is to such that we must endeavour to preach the gospel, for only the gospel of Christ has the power to save. There is no other way. *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek”* (Rom 1:16).

THOUGHT: The Gospel of Christ is the power to save.

PRAYER: Father, may my church continue to preach the gospel.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19

1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-4

ISAIAH 53

*“That he rose the third day
according to the scriptures.”*

THE GOSPEL IN A NUTSHELL

The term “gospel” comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, which means “good news.” The gospel is thus the good news of the salvation of mankind from sin through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The content of the gospel is summarised in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: *“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”*

First, the gospel is said to be “*according to the scriptures.*” It is thus not a figment of men’s imagination, but a true declaration from God. It is not fake news, but 100% true and reliable. This expression also tells us that the gospel of Christ can be found in the Old Testament. For example, Isaiah 53 tells us about Christ as the suffering Messiah in His first coming. Thus, Luke 24:25-27 records for us what Christ said to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: *“Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”* The New Testament is in the Old concealed, and the Old Testament is in the New revealed.

Secondly, the elements of the gospel are (1) the death of Christ, (2) the burial of Christ, and (3) the resurrection of Christ. It is the resurrection of Christ that is the focus of 1 Corinthians 15. The gospels record many instances of Christ talking about His death and resurrection (cf. Matt 20:19; Mark 9:31; 10:34; Luke 18:33; 24:7; 24:46). The resurrection of Christ is essential to the gospel. No resurrection, no gospel! Let us not forget to preach the resurrection of Christ when we share the gospel with our loved ones and friends.

THOUGHT: No resurrection, no gospel.

PRAYER: Father, help me not to be ashamed of the gospel.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20

1 CORINTHIANS 15:5-11

MATTHEW 28:9-15

“... he was seen ...”

THE EYEWITNESSES OF CHRIST’S RESURRECTION

Not only did the Scriptures testify of Christ’s resurrection, there were also numerous appearances of Christ after His resurrection. The Scriptures gave us twelve such appearances:

- First appearance: To Mary Magdalene alone at the tomb (John 20:11-18; Mark 16:9-11)
- Second appearance: To the women leaving the empty tomb (Matt 28:1-10)
- Third appearance: To Peter (Luke 24:33-35; 1 Cor 15:5)
- Fourth appearance: To the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-57; Mark 16:12)
- Fifth appearance: To the Apostles, except Thomas, behind closed doors (John 20:19-25; Luke 24:36-49; Mark 16:14-18)
- Sixth appearance: To the Apostles with Thomas present (John 20:26-29)
- Seventh appearance: To the disciples who went fishing in Galilee. Jesus restored Peter (John 21:1-24).
- Eighth appearance: To 500 disciples at once (1 Cor 15:6)
- Ninth appearance: To the eleven disciples at Galilee (Matt 28:16-20)
- Tenth appearance: To James the Lord’s brother (1 Cor 15:7)
- Eleventh appearance: To the Eleven on the Mount of Olives forty days after the Passover (Acts 1:3-12; Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-53)
- Twelfth appearance: To Paul (Acts 9; 1 Cor 15:8)

The resurrection is a historical fact that cannot be denied. Yet many with hardened hearts reject this truth till today (cf. Matt 28:9-15).

THOUGHT: Jesus is alive today!

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, that I have a living Saviour.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 21

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-18

ROMANS 5:12-21

“But if there be no resurrection ...”

THE NECESSITY OF THE RESURRECTION

Paul now sought to establish the necessity of the resurrection with a series of conditional clauses. Each one dealt with a serious implication that would arise if there was no resurrection.

1. Some claimed that there would be no future resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:13). If that was true, it would mean that Christ had not risen from the dead. However, this does not square with the evidences presented by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.
2. If Christ indeed be not risen from the dead, the implication is that all preaching is but a useless and futile exercise (1 Cor 15:14a).
3. If Christ be not risen from the dead, the gospel would be an empty message, and our faith in it is vain (1 Cor 15:14b).
4. If Christ be not risen from the dead, it would mean that God did not accept the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. That would make all Apostles and preachers of the gospel liars (1 Cor 15:15).
5. If Christ be not risen from the dead, it would mean that all men would still be in their sins (1 Cor 15:17). All who had died believing in the gospel would also be eternally condemned (i.e. there is no eternal life).

Thus, we see that the resurrection is a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith. Take the doctrine of the resurrection away and our faith would collapse like a pack of cards! This is the reason why the Fundamentalists contended zealously against the Modernists in the late nineteenth century. Many of the Modernists denied the reality of miracles and the resurrection. With such Modernistic teachings, there would be no true saving faith in the churches. No resurrection, no gospel. No gospel, no salvation.

THOUGHT: The resurrection is fundamental to the Christian faith.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee that Christ has risen from the dead.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 22

1 CORINTHIANS 15:19-34

GALATIANS 2:20

"I die daily."

MOTIVATED BY THE RESURRECTION

What did Paul mean when he said that there were those who were *"baptized for the dead"* (1 Cor 15:29)? 1 Corinthians 15:30 gives us the clue that these who were baptised for the dead were also willing to constantly jeopardise their lives for the sake of the gospel. Thus, it is the opinion of this writer that the expression *"baptized for the dead"* refers to those who believed and were baptised on the account of the testimonies of those who had died and were martyred for the faith. If Christ be not risen, then such martyrdom would be foolhardy and vanity. But Christ is now risen from the dead, and thus we know that those who died in the faith will one day rise from the dead. The deaths of these saints are not in vain.

It was Paul's assurance in the gospel that caused him to say, *"I die daily"* (1 Cor 15:31). Paul was most willing to follow and serve Christ even if it meant he had to give up his life. For Paul knew that if he were to be absent from the body, he would be present with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8). No one would be able to take away his hope. Thus, Paul would make sure that he would make every minute of his life count for Christ. *"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom"* (Ps 90:12).

Sadly, because of the denial of the resurrection, some of the Corinthian Christians lapsed into an epicurean lifestyle. Their motto was *"eat and drink; for to morrow we die"* (1 Cor 15:32). This is the logical conclusion of one who has no sure hope. Thus, Paul warned them not to be taken in by such an ungodly attitude. *"Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners"* (1 Cor 15:33). Instead, they should wake up and pursue after righteousness, and stop their sinful and carnal ways (1 Cor 15:34).

Are you making your life count for Christ, or are you whiling your life away? Awake to the reality of the resurrection!

THOUGHT: Read and memorise Galatians 2:20.

PRAYER: Father, I am willing to die daily!

THE RESURRECTED BODY

1 John 3:2 says, *“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”* We shall enter the world to come not in this earthly body but in a resurrected body.

Paul drew an illustration from nature to explain why a resurrected body was necessary. He explained that animals in this world have different bodies. The body of the fish is especially suited for it to live in the water. The body of the bird is suitably designed for it to fly in the air. Our earthly body is not suitable for the world to come. We need the resurrected body.

What are the differences between the earthly body and the resurrected body?

Earthly Body	Resurrected Body
Sown in corruption. Our outward man is perishing every day (2 Cor 4:16). It can suffer pain and sickness.	Raised in incorruption. The glorified body is incorruptible. No pain, no sickness.
Sown in dishonour. It is made from the dust.	Raised in glory. The resurrected body will be glorious.
Sown in weakness. The body is subject to tiredness, hunger and thirst. It needs to rest.	Raised in power. No more hunger, thirst and tiredness. Eating will be purely for enjoyment.
Natural. It is suitable only for the present earth as it is made of the earth.	Spiritual. This means that the body is suitable for heaven as Christ's body is of heaven.

THOUGHT: Do I look forward to the resurrected body?

PRAYER: Father, I look forward to the world to come.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 24

MATTHEW 2:1-12

LUKE 1:26-38

*“Where is he that is born
King of the Jews?”*

WHY SEEK YE JESUS? (I)

In Matthew 2:1-12, we find two types of seekers.

The first type of seeker is exemplified by King Herod. He was known as Herod the Great and reigned over the Judean region from 37 to 4 BC. He was a great builder, who prided himself in his many magnificent projects and monuments. This included renovating and beautifying the Temple to win the favour of the Jews. He was also renowned as a ruthless man, who killed even his own family members in order to consolidate his power on the throne.

Herod became troubled when he heard that the wise men from the east were come to Jerusalem to seek for Jesus. These wise men were magi from Persia who probably learned about the Messiah from the writings and testimonies of Daniel some five hundred years ago. Their description of Jesus as *“King of the Jews”* troubled Herod. Herein was another threat to his political power. To find the location of Jesus, Herod commanded the Jewish religious leaders to tell him where Christ would be born. They pointed to the Old Testament Scriptures which declared that Christ would be born in Bethlehem. This very Christ would also be the Governor of His people Israel.

Having established where Christ was to be born, Herod told the wise men to seek for Jesus diligently. He deceitfully declared that he was an earnest seeker just like them who wanted to worship Christ. But the truth was that he wanted Christ dead. His true motives were revealed when he later ordered all the children (under two years old) in Bethlehem to be killed. The wise men sought Jesus, Herod too sought Him. But this king sought to destroy Jesus, not to worship Him! He was determined to eliminate Jesus at all cost.

Herod died shortly after the killing of the children of Bethlehem in 4 BC. No man can escape the divine judgment of God.

THOUGHT: Am I a true seeker of Jesus?

PRAYER: Father, I rejoice in Christ as my Saviour.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 25

MATTHEW 2:1-12

LUKE 2:1-20

“Where is he that is born
King of the Jews?”

WHY SEEK YE JESUS? (II)

Just like Herod, the wise men from the east also sought Jesus diligently. But their motive was not to kill but to worship. The sincerity of their worship was displayed in the gifts which they brought before baby Jesus. Not only was there gold, but also frankincense and myrrh, two of the most precious perfumes in the east. Consider also how they had to travel about 1,600 miles just to worship Christ. Remember, there were no motor vehicles, trains or planes then!

We must also consider the significance of the worship of the magi. In those days, it was not uncommon for the people to worship their own king. Some kings such as the Roman emperor were worshipped as gods. But these magi came all the way from Persia to worship a Jewish king. They not only acknowledged Jesus as fully God and man, their visit also indicated their understanding of Jesus as the ONLY living and true God. Here was the *theanthropos* (God-man) who was born to take away the sins of the world. Salvation is only through Him. Christ is worthy of worship. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Dear reader, which type of seeker are you? Are you one who seeks Jesus just to oppose Him? Or will you seek Jesus humbly to worship Him? Know you not that “*all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*” (Rom 3:23)? But God sent His only begotten Son into the world to suffer and to die for our sins. Christ died on the cross and shed His precious blood to cleanse away our sins. He was buried, and then rose again on the third day for the justification of our sins. Will you not then repent of your sins and believe in Him? May you be a true seeker of Jesus! Amen.

THOUGHT: Who is Jesus to me?

PRAYER: Father, may my life truly show that Jesus is my Lord and Saviour.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 26

1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-58

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

“... be ye stedfast, unmoveable ...”

A VICTORIOUS TRANSFORMATION

Christ has saved not just our souls but also our bodies. We will receive a glorious resurrection body. But how will we receive it, and what will happen to those who are alive when Christ returns? Will they still not be in their physical earthly bodies? This is the “mystery” which Paul explicitly revealed in 1 Corinthians 15:50-58.

At the coming of Christ, those who are dead in Christ shall rise first, followed by those who are alive. This event will occur in an “atomic” second (atomoι, 1 Cor 15:52), and we shall be forever with our Lord (1 Thess 4:17). What a comfort to our souls!

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

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

THOUGHT: Am I living for Jesus?

PRAYER: Father, help me look forward to the life that is to come.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 27

1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-4

2 CORINTHIANS 9

*“Now concerning the collection
for the saints ...”*

DESIGNATED GIFTS

When fellow brethren are in need, it is important that we not only pray for them but also offer practical help when it is in our power to do so. Paul was concerned for the saints in Jerusalem who were suffering in poverty due to persecution. The other churches of God were not to be apathetic to their plight. Remember, no man is an island in the work of the Lord!

Paul was moved to initiate a relief fund for the saints in Jerusalem. Let us observe how this collection was done.

First, it was Paul who set the spiritual direction for the collection. He made sure that the Christians in Corinth understood the purpose and basis of the collection. When we designate gifts, we must understand why we are giving and how this gift will help the recipients. A gift which is inappropriate or untimely may end up ruining the life of the recipient.

Second, the collection was done on the first day of the week, that is, the Lord's Day. This gives us the basis for presenting our tithes and offerings before the Lord when we come to His house every Lord's Day. Note that this giving was done cheerfully, not of compulsion, for the Christian is to give *“as God hath prospered him”* (1 Cor 16:2). He is to give according to what God has given him and not beyond his means.

Third, note the carefulness in which the Apostle Paul approached the collection of the relief fund. He made sure letters of authority were written so that everything would be transparent, leaving no grounds for him to be accused of corruption or the misappropriation of funds. Great care must be taken in handling the funds of the church, for it belongs to the Lord, and must be used for His work.

THOUGHT: *“...God loveth a cheerful giver”* (2 Cor 9:7).

PRAYER: Father, help me to give cheerfully to Thy work.

THE COOPERATIVE WILL OF GOD

When we obey God’s commandments and follow His specific will for us in our lives, God will help us and bless us with good success in our work for Him. This is known as the cooperative will of God.

The cooperative will of God can be seen in Paul’s call to Macedonia. Paul had initially determined to preach the gospel in Asia, but the Holy Spirit forbade him to go (Acts 16:6-7). Paul then received a vision of a man beseeching him to go over to Macedonia (Acts 16:9). Being assured that it was the Lord’s will and direction, Paul hastened to Philippi, which was a chief city of the region of Macedonia. There the Lord led him to Lydia, a seller of purple, and opened her heart to the teachings of Paul (Acts 16:14). The Lord had opened a great and effectual door for Paul.

However, being in the cooperative will of God does not guarantee an absence of difficulties, trials and persecutions. Paul was soon thrown into jail for driving out a spirit of divination from a girl. Nevertheless, in the midst of such trials, God will make a way and turn it for good. While Paul and Silas were in prison, God caused a great earthquake to shake the foundations of the prison. These events caused the Philippian jailor to ask Paul, *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”* (Acts 16:30). Paul replied, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house”* (Acts 16:31). The Philippian jailor and household were gloriously saved.

After Paul left the church, God continued to work in the church. When Paul wrote the Epistle to the Philippians ten years later, the church had grown to have elders and deacons (Phil 1:1).

The cooperative will of God can thus be summed up in 1 Corinthians 16:9. When we abide in God’s will, He will help us to complete His task even though there may be adversaries around.

THOUGHT: God will always bless those who follow His will.

PRAYER: Father, here am I, send me.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29

1 CORINTHIANS 16:10-24

2 PETER 3:18

“Stand fast in the faith.”

WATCH AND STAND FAST

The key exhortation of Paul’s ending words is in 1 Corinthians 16:13: *“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.”* These imperatives are a good way to summarise Paul’s desire for the Corinthian church as she wades through her growing pains.

“Watch ye”: This command comes from the Greek word *grēgoreite*, where we get the English name “Gregory.” It refers to someone who is awake and vigilant. The Corinthian Christians often seemed to be in a spiritual slumber. They were carnal in their ways and had permitted worldly philosophy and practices to enter the church. They had to come out of such drowsiness, for they lived in a perilous world where Satan was like a roaring lion (1 Pet 5:8-9). They had to watch unto the coming of Christ Jesus.

“Stand fast in the faith”: This describes one who is well-grounded and firm in the faith. He will not be swayed easily by every wind of doctrine that blows (Eph 4:14). Note that they are to stand firm on nothing but the faith. The faith here refers to the objective faith, which is the whole body of doctrine in God’s Word.

“Quit you like men”: The word “quit” here does not mean to give up but rather to acquit or conduct oneself like a man (as seen in the Greek word *andrizesthe*). This brings us back to Paul’s exhortation in 1 Corinthians 14:20: *“Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.”* Paul did not want the Corinthian Christians to be presumptuous in their ways, but to be truly mature in the Scriptures. This is very much related to the next command.

“Be strong”: This refers to a moral backbone. When the world beckons us to compromise, we must be brave and have the courage to stand on the Lord’s side.

THOUGHT: Be strong in the Lord.

PRAYER: Father, strengthen me that I may never leave Thy side.

LORD'S DAY, DECEMBER 30

HEBREWS 11:36-38

HEBREWS 11:13

*"Of whom the world was
not worthy ..."*

OF WHOM THE WORLD WAS NOT WORTHY (I)

As we approach the end of the year, we want to meditate on one clause that is found in Hebrews 11:38: *"of whom the world was not worthy."* The author of Hebrews (whom I believe to be the Apostle Paul) was discussing how the saints of the Old Testament were persecuted for the faith. Some were killed. Others were imprisoned and tortured. Still others had to experience mockings, slanders, ostracism, loneliness and exile for their stand for the Christian faith.

The same is true of the New Testament saints. Paul himself testified that as an Apostle of Jesus Christ, he was *"in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches"* (2 Cor 11:23-28).

Similarly, in the book of Revelation, we see how the world during the Great Tribulation will hate the two witnesses that God will send to prophesy and judge the world. Instead of repenting, the men of the world will kill the two witnesses and leave their bodies in the streets. In the eyes of sinful men, the saints have no worth to the world.

We are indeed strangers and pilgrims in this world (Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 2:11). This world is not our home.

THOUGHT: This world is not my home, I am just passing through.

PRAYER: Father, help me not to love the things of the world.

OF WHOM THE WORLD WAS NOT WORTHY (II)

God's perspective is different from the world's. The saints are precious in His sight. They are God's children, and also His messengers and witnesses to the world in darkness. The presence of believers in the world is proof of God's mercy and longsuffering to wicked and sinful men (2 Pet 3:9). In fact, the proclamation of God's Word through God's servants is a privilege that the world does not deserve. The reverse is true: the world is not worthy of the saints!

Hebrews 11:38a is thus a wonderful encouragement to anyone who is suffering for the sake of Christ. The incessant insults, scorn and persecutions can at times be extremely discouraging to believers. Though we know that the world may look down on us, all our labours that are done for Christ are not in vain (1 Cor 15:58). Calvin astutely noted that “though the world may cast Christians out as offscourings,” they can be comforted “that the same things happened to the prophets, who found more clemency in wild animals than in men.” The Christian knows that it will be worth it all when life's journey is over for he will be in the presence of Christ and find eternal rest in his Saviour.

On the other hand, these words also serve as a warning to Christians who are mired in worldliness. Why seek the world when the world is not worthy of the saints! A Christian ought to be characterised by love for God's Word instead of the world (1 John 2:15-17). He must set his affections on things above and not the things of the earth (Col 3:2). How about you?

A believer ought to reject worldly philosophies and ideas, and pursue after godliness. However, the Scripture warns us that “*all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*” (2 Tim 3:12), for we live in a world that hates Christ and His Word. In such times, recall Hebrews 11:38a. The world is not worthy of the saints!

THOUGHT: A Christian must set his affection on things above.

PRAYER: Father, may I not be attracted by the things of the world.
