

PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY IN CORINTH^a

1 From Paul, called out as an apostle^b of Christ Jesus by the will of God—and from Sosthenes,^c my Christian brother.^d

2 To the community of God that's in Corinth. You've^e been set apart for God^f in Christ Jesus—you've been called out to be holy ones, together with all people in every place who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord^g and ours. 3 May grace and peace come to you, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Paul Thanks God for the Good Things about the Corinthians

4 I'm thanking my God all the time about you, because of the grace that's been given to you in Christ Jesus. 5 You've been made rich in every way in him, with all kinds of speech and knowledge. 6 And^h the testimony of Christ has been proven out with you—to the point that you're not short on any spiritual gift as you look forward to the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 He's the one who'll also strengthen you until you're completely without fault in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8 God is faithful! And it's through God that you've been called into the community of Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Lord.

^a My understanding is that, within the two documents known as 1 & 2 Corinthians, we have portions of at least three, and probably four, letters that Paul wrote to them. I'll point them out when they come up.

^b Or "emissary"; See "Bible Words" under "apostle".

^c Prn. *sooss-tha-nee-z*.

^d Chances are that Sosthenes is helping Paul write the letter by taking dictation. Notice that at the end Paul says, "This greeting is in my own handwriting: Paul" (16:21). Dictation was common practice in the ancient world, and perhaps the more necessary in Paul's case because he may have had eye problems (see Eph. 6:11 and Gal. 4:13-16).

^e Throughout this letter Paul is addressing the whole community, so "you" is always to be taken as plural.

^f "Set apart for God": or "made holy," "consecrated," "sanctified". This word is a live metaphor from Temple worship, not an abstract concept: they've been specially dedicated to God's service in Christ.

^g "Their Lord": possibly, "in their places".

^h Lit. "Just as".

A Challenge to Agree Together and Stop Competing

¹⁰Now, I want to ask you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, for you all to agree together. And please don't let there be divisions between you. Instead, be in harmony^a together, with the same mind and sense of purpose.

¹¹Because, my brothers and sisters, it's been made clear to me, in hearing about you from Chloe's people, that there are petty fights going on between you. ¹²And here's what I mean: Each of you is saying, either, "I'm with Paul!" or "I'm with Apollos!"^b or "I'm with Cephas!"^c or "I'm with Christ!" ¹³Has Christ gotten divided up? Since when was Paul crucified for you? And since when were you baptized in Paul's name? ¹⁴I'm thankful I didn't baptize any of you except for Crispus and Gaius!^d ¹⁵That way, nobody can say they were baptized in my name! ¹⁶Well, I did baptize Stephanas's^e family. Other than that, I don't know if I baptized anybody else.

¹⁷The point is,^f Christ didn't send me to baptize. No, he sent me to preach the good news—without wise arguments,^g so that Christ's cross wouldn't be drained of its power.^h ¹⁸After all, to people who are on the way to destruction, the message of the cross is foolishness. But to those of us who are being saved, it's the power of God. ¹⁹Because the scripture says,ⁱ

I'm going to destroy the wisdom of the wise,
And I'm going to disqualify the cleverness of the clever!^j

²⁰So where does that leave the wise person, the lawyer, the great debater of this world? Hasn't God shown^k that the wisdom of this world is foolishness? ²¹After all, in line with God's wisdom, the world hasn't known God through wisdom. So God's preference is to save people who believe through the foolishness of the message that's preached. ²²Because Jews ask for signs, and Greeks^l are after wisdom. ²³But we're preaching Christ hanging on a cross. For Jews that's offensive, and for Gentiles it's foolishness. ²⁴But to those of us who are called, both Jews and non-Jews, Christ is

^a Lit. "be in good order".

^b Prn. *a-poll-us*.

^c Prn. *seef-us*. He's referring to the senior apostle Peter. Cephas is the Aramaic version of his nickname, which means "rock".

^d Prn. *gay-us*.

^e Prn. *steff-an-us-z*.

^f Lit. "For".

^g Lit. "not with wisdom of speech/reason".

^h Lit. "so that Christ's cross wouldn't be emptied out".

ⁱ Lit. "For it is written".

^j Isa. 29:14.

^k Lit. "made".

^l "Greeks" is a standard way of referring to non-Jews in general, not Greeks in particular. However, Corinth is a city in Greece, and the Greeks were famous for their love of wisdom.

God's power and God's wisdom. ²⁵Because God's foolishness is wiser than all of humanity, and God's weakness is stronger than all of humanity.^a

²⁶After all, brothers and sisters, look at God's calling of you. Because in terms of outward appearances,^b not many of you were highly educated;^c not many were powerful, not many were from the upper classes. Just the opposite! ²⁷God has especially chosen^d the uneducated^e of this world, to completely shame the highly educated. And God has especially chosen the weak people of this world, to completely shame the powerful. ²⁸And God has especially chosen the people with no family name, the nobodies of this world, the nothings, to abolish the "somethings."^f ²⁹That way, no human being^g can brag in front of God. ³⁰And it's down to God that you're all in Christ Jesus. He's the one who has become wisdom from God for us, justice from God for us, dedication to God for us,^h and purchase out of captivity for us.ⁱ ³¹That way, just like the scripture says,^j

Whoever brags should brag about the Lord.^k

The Good News that Paul Preaches

2 And remember when I came to you, brothers and sisters. I didn't come and proclaim the secret of God to you using fancy words or wisdom. ²Because I'd decided: with you, I wasn't going to know anything except for Jesus Christ, and him hanging on a cross. ³And as for me, it was in weakness and fear, and a whole lot trembling, that I came to stay with you.¹ ⁴And as for my message and my preaching, those things weren't wrapped in wise, persuasive words. No, they were backed up by the Spirit and by power,^m so that your faith wouldn't be based on human wisdom, but on the power of God.

⁶Now, we do express wisdom when we're around mature people. But it's not this world's wisdom—and it's not from this world's rulersⁿ either—they're being abolished.^o ⁷No, we're talking

^a Lit. "than human beings," here and in the previous clause.

^b Lit. "according to the flesh".

^c Lit. "wise people," naturally connoting elite education. Today we might say, "Not many of you have doctorates".

^d Lit. "chosen out," here and in the following sentences.

^e Lit. "the foolish things," or "the stupid". But he means in the world's eyes—not that they are actually stupid.

^f Or "God has especially chosen the low born and the rejects—the things that don't exist—to do away with the things that exist."

^g Lit. "no flesh".

^h Or "our sanctification".

ⁱ More literally, "the price of release from captivity".

^j Lit. "just as it is written".

^k Jer. 9:24.

^l See Acts 18:9-11.

^m Lit. "they were with proof of the Spirit and of power."

ⁿ When he refers to "rulers," Paul could well have in mind not human beings, but powerful angelic beings, which he pictures as working behind the scenes to manipulate humanity's worldview. See e.g. Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 2:8; Gal. 4:3, 8-9; Eph. 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:6; 2:8, 10, 15, 20.

^o Lit. "who are getting disemployed," or, "who are being nullified by God".

about God's secret, hidden wisdom. It's the wisdom that God had already decided on before all the ages,^a for our glory. It's the wisdom that none of this world's rulers knew about. After all, if they had known it, they wouldn't have hung the Lord of Glory^b on a cross. But as scripture says,^c

Things that no eye has ever seen,
And no ear has ever heard,
And that never came up in any human heart,
God has prepared for those that love God.^d

¹⁰And God has uncovered them for us through the Spirit! Because the Spirit searches out everything, even the deepest things of God. ¹¹After all, who knows the real things about a person, except for the person's spirit, that's inside them? In the same way, nobody knows the real things about God except the Spirit of God. ¹²And we haven't received the spirit of the world. No, we've received the Spirit who is from God, so that we'll understand the things that have been given to us so freely by God.

¹³And the things we're talking about aren't things^e that can be taught by human wisdom. No, they're taught by the Spirit, as we put together spiritual things for spiritual people. ¹⁴Now, people operating on the natural principle^f don't accept the things of God's Spirit, because they're foolishness to them. And it's impossible for them to recognize them, because they have to be^g spiritually understood.^h ¹⁵And although spiritual people understand everything,ⁱ they themselves aren't understood by anyone.

¹⁶After all, who knows the Lord's mind?
Who is going to teach him?^j

Yet we have the mind of Christ!

Stop Competing and Bragging about Which Leader you Follow!

3 Now as for me, brothers and sisters, I didn't used to be able to talk to you as spiritual people. No, I had to treat you as people operating on the flesh principle,^a as babies in Christ. I gave

^a More literally, "that God foreordained before the worlds/ages".

^b For background to this title, see e.g. Ps. 24:8.

^c Lit. "On the contrary, just as it is written".

^d Isa. 64:4; 52:15.

^e Lit. "in words" or "by words," but the Greek word for "word" equally means "subject-matter".

^f Lit. "But a natural person," or "a soulish person". He means the person operating on the typical human life principle without the inspiration of the Spirit. I've pluralized this sentence and the following ones in order to make them gender-inclusive.

^g "Have to be": lit. "are".

^h For this and the next two instances of the verb "understand," the underlying verb means "understand deeply," or "search out," or "discern".

ⁱ Or "everyone".

^j Isa. 40:13.

you milk to drink, not solid food, because you couldn't handle it yet. In fact, you still can't handle it now, ³because you're still fleshy. After all, when there's jealousy and petty fighting among you, aren't you being fleshy? And aren't you living in line with the typical habits of humanity? ⁴Because when someone says, "I'm with Paul," and another person says, "I'm with Apollos," aren't you just acting like typical human beings? ⁵So what is Apollos? And what is Paul? We're servants, through whom you came to faith, as the Lord gave grace to each of us. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but it was God who made it grow. ⁷So it's neither the person who plants nor the person who waters who is anything, but it's God who makes things grow. ⁸Now, the person who plants and the person who waters are one team. And each person will get their own wages, in line with their own labor. ⁹Because we're co-workers with God! You're God's field, God's house.

¹⁰By the grace of God that was given to me, I laid a foundation, like a wise architect. And someone else builds on it. And each person is going to have to pay attention to how they build! ¹¹Because the other person can't lay down another foundation besides the one that's already been laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²But whether someone builds on that foundation with gold, or silver, or precious stones, or wood, or hay, or straw, ¹³each person's work is going to become visible. Because the Day of Judgment is going to make it obvious: it's going to be revealed by fire. And the fire itself is going to test the quality of each person's work. ¹⁴If someone's work, which they built, lasts, they'll get paid. ¹⁵If someone's work burns down, they'll lose everything. But they themselves will be saved—but it will be like coming out of a fire. ¹⁶Don't you know that you're God's temple, and that the Spirit of God lives in you? ¹⁷If someone tears down God's temple, God's going to tear them down. Because God's temple is holy, and that's just what you are.

¹⁸Nobody should deceive themselves. If one of you thinks they're wise in this world, they should learn to be foolish, so that they can learn to be wise.^b ¹⁹Because this world's wisdom is foolishness to God. After all, scripture says,^c

God's the one who traps the wise in their own craftiness.^d

²⁰And again,

The Sovereign One knows the thoughts of the wise—that they're useless.^e

²¹So no one should be bragging about human things.^a Because everything is yours. ²²Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things here now, or things that haven't happened yet, they're all yours! ²³And you're Christ's, and Christ is God's.

^a "As people operating on the flesh principle": lit. "as fleshy people". Paul explains this idea more fully in Rom. 8:3-17.

^b Lit. "become foolish so that they will become wise".

^c Lit. "For it is written".

^d Job 5:13.

^e Ps. 94:11.

4 People^b should consider us as servants of Christ, as caretakers^c of God's secrets. 2To take the idea further, a sought-after quality in caretakers is that they^d should be found faithful. 3Now, to me it's a small thing to be judged^e by you, or by any human court.^f Far from it—I don't even judge myself. 4After all, I'm not conscious of anything against myself, but that certainly doesn't mean I'm innocent.^g No, the one who judges me is the Lord. 5So you shouldn't be pre-judging things—wait until the Lord comes. Then he'll shine a light on the things hidden in the dark. He's also going to reveal the motivations of people's hearts. And then the praise each person gets will be from God.

6Now, brothers and sisters, I've applied these things to myself and Apollos for your sake. The point is for you to learn the principle: "Don't go beyond the scriptures,"^h in relation to us. That way you won't be all puffed up in favor of one person and against another.ⁱ

A Warning against Arrogance and Pride

7[[After all, who says you're different? What do you have that you didn't receive? And if you received it, why do you brag as though you didn't receive it? 8You've already gotten full; you've already gotten wealthy. You've started reigning like royalty without us. And it'd be better if you really did reign, so that we could have reigned with you too. 9You know,^j I think God has displayed us apostles last of all, like people just sentenced to death. Because we've become a spectacle in front of the world, and in front of angels, and in front of humanity. 10We're fools because of Christ, but you're wise in Christ. We're weak, but you're strong. You're highly regarded, but we're worthless. 11Right up to this very moment we're both hungry and thirsty; we go naked, we get beat up, we're

^a "About human things": or, "to people". I prefer the former because I think Paul is still talking about bragging that Paul or Apollos is one's spiritual mentor.

^b Lit. "A person".

^c Or "stewards". The analogy is to a person who manages a wealthy person's household.

^d Lit. "one".

^e I.e. evaluated.

^f Lit. "court date".

^g Lit. "but I certainly haven't been found innocent because of this".

^h Most versions: "not to go beyond what is written". But what is written (in the scriptures), according to Paul, is that God is the only judge, who will bring everything about people to light in the day of judgment. So, going around before then claiming that so-and-so is better than so-and-so "goes beyond the scriptures".

ⁱ Following this sentence there is a sudden change of tone, from quiet reasoning to almost hysterical upset. Paul refers in 2 Cor. 2:4-16 to a "painful letter" that he wrote to them, and he talks about having written it when he was almost out of his mind with the very pressures referred to in this section of 1 Corinthians (see 2 Cor. 2:5; 7:5). For that reason, I suspect that pages from the "painful letter" may have been inserted right here into 1 Corinthians. The theme of people being "puffed up" (see 1 Cor. 4:6, above) makes the opportunity for the transition. 1 Corinthians doesn't usually convey the same sense of deeply hurt feelings and desperate exasperation that we see in this section (with one exception: see the first section of Chapter 9, and the nt. on 9:1). Where the section from the painful letter ends is not as easy to decide as where it begins, but the double square brackets indicate my best guess. Notice that in this section, Paul appears to be sending the letter by the hand of Timothy, but in 1 Cor. 16:10-11, Paul seems to be saying that he thinks Timothy is on his way to Paul, and that Timothy may or may not go to Corinth on the way.

^j Lit. "For".

forced to keep moving. ¹²And we sweat,^a working with our own hands. When people throw insults at us, we bless. When we're persecuted, we put up with it. ¹³When people say nasty things about us,^b we answer back gently. It's as though we've become the trash of the world, everybody's dirt to be scraped off;^c right to this moment.

¹⁴I'm not writing these things to shame you. Far from it. I'm counseling you, as my children that I love. ¹⁵After all, you may have had ten thousand tutors in Christ, but not a lot of fathers! And^d in Christ, through the good news, I became your father. ¹⁶So I am pleading with you, learn to imitate me.^e ¹⁷To help you with this, I've sent Timothy to you. He's my child, whom I love, and who is faithful in the Lord. He'll remind you of the way^f that I live in Christ Jesus—just like I teach everywhere, in every community. ¹⁸Certain people are getting puffed up, as though I weren't coming to visit you. ¹⁹I'll be coming to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and then I'll know not just the words of the people who've gotten puffed up, but their power. ²⁰After all, the Reign of God isn't about words, but about power. ²¹What do you want? Do you want me to come to you with a switch?^g Or do you want me to come with a loving and gentle spirit?]]

A Case of Sexual Immorality

5 To put it bluntly,^h it's going aroundⁱ that there is sexual immorality going on among you. And it's a kind of sexual immorality that isn't even practiced by the Gentiles—to the point that someone is having sex with his father's wife. ²And you're puffed up about it! And shouldn't you have been appalled, instead? So appalled that the person who did it would be removed from the community?^j ³Well, I may be away in terms of my body, but I'm with you in spirit. I've already decided about^k the person who did such a thing, as though I were there with you. ⁴In the name of the^l Lord Jesus, you should get together, with my spirit there with you. With the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵hand over the person to Satan, for destruction of their body, so that their spirit might be saved on the Day of the Lord.^m ⁶Your bragging isn't good. Don't you know that “a little yeast

^a Or “do grueling labor”.

^b “When people say nasty things about us”: lit. “When we're slandered”.

^c “Dirt to be scraped off”: or, “scapegoats”.

^d Lit. “For”.

^e Lit. “become imitators of me”. He could have simply said, “imitate me,” but he is seeing it as a learning process, rather than something instantly achievable.

^f Lit. “ways”.

^g Traditionally: “a rod,” which, like a “switch,” is a flexible wood whip for administering corporal punishment. Paul is talking metaphorically here.

^h Or “on the whole,” “in brief,” “actually”. It's an unpleasant topic, and Paul just has to blurt it out.

ⁱ Lit. “it's being heard”.

^j Lit. “...appalled, to the point of removing the one who did this from the midst of you?”

^k Or “judged”.

^l Or “our”. Ancient mss. are evenly divided.

^m “The Day of the Lord” refers to the great day of divine judgment that Jews and Christians believed would bring this age to a close.

raises the whole batch of dough”^a Clean out the old yeast, so that you’ll be a fresh batch. Because you’re all supposed to be yeast-free. After all, Christ our Passover^b lamb has been sacrificed, so let’s celebrate the feast!^c And not with old yeast—in other words,^d not with the yeast of nastiness and sexual immorality. No, let’s celebrate it with the yeast-free breads of sincerity and truth.

9 I wrote in my letter to you not to get mixed up with sexually immoral people.^e 10 I was not saying you should totally avoid the sexually immoral people of this world, or the greedy ones, or the thieves, or the idol worshipers. After all, in that case you would have to leave the world altogether. 11 No, I wrote to you not to get mixed up with anyone calling themselves a brother or sister in Christ, if they were sexually immoral, or greedy, or an idol worshiper, or quick to curse people, or a drinker, or a thief. You shouldn’t even have a meal with that sort of person. 12 After all, what use is it for me to judge outsiders? Why don’t you judge those inside the community,^f 13 and God will judge those on the outside. Kick the immoral person out of your community.^g

Lawsuits between Members of the Community

6 If one of you has a dispute with somebody else, do they try to go to trial with the unjust,^h and not take it to the holy ones? 2 Or didn’t you know that the holy ones are going to judge the world? And if the world’s going to be judged by you, are you really unworthy of trying even the smallest cases? 3 Don’t you know that we’re going to judge angels—let alone everyday disputes? 4 So if you have everyday disputes, are you going give the job of deciding them to people who aren’t even anything in the community? 5 I say this to your shame. So, isn’t there one single person in the community who is wise enough to be capable of adjudicating between fellow members?ⁱ 6 Instead, one member goes to court against another—and in front of unbelievers, at that! 7 Frankly, it’s already a failure for you that you have lawsuits with one another at all. Why wouldn’t you sooner let yourselves be treated unjustly? Why wouldn’t you sooner let yourselves be cheated? 8 But no, you treat people unjustly, you cheat people, and you do it to your brothers and sisters, at that! 9 Or

^a A proverb, which Paul also quotes in Gal. 5:9. The idea is that one person’s actions may turn out to infect everyone. When a teaspoon of yeast is kneaded (mixed) into bread dough, it quickly multiplies. Compare: “one bad apple spoils the whole barrel”.

^b See “Bible Words”.

^c He’s talking metaphorically about the Jewish Feast of Unleavened (i.e. yeast-free) Bread, which celebrates God’s saving the Israelites from Egypt. It’s also the holiday during which Jesus was hung on a cross. In Christ’s death, Paul sees a new saving moment—this one not just for the Jews, but for the whole world.

^d “In other words”: lit. “nor with”.

^e I said earlier that we might actually have portions of as many as four of Paul’s Corinthian letters (see the first nt. on 1 Corinthians). Here is a reference to the fourth one, written before “First” Corinthians. I believe that you can see at least part of the letter Paul refers to in 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1 (notice how it jumps out of the context, as though a page from that letter was tucked into the pages of the main “2 Corinthians” letter).

^f Lit. “inside yourselves”. Just like in English, this has the form of a question, but it’s a command.

^g Lit. “from yourselves”. Deut. 17:7; 19:19; 22:21, 24; 24:7.

^h I.e. with a secular court.

ⁱ Or “Are you unworthy in relation to the smallest courts?”

^j Lit. “between his/her brother/sister”.

didn't you know that unjust people won't inherit the Reign of God? Don't be fooled.^a Neither sexually immoral people, nor idolaters,^b nor people who cheat on their spouses, nor men who play the woman, nor men who have sex with boys, nor thieves, nor people obsessed with getting more possessions,^c nor drinkers, nor people who verbally abuse others,^d nor people who rob others^e—none of these are going to inherit the Reign of God. 11 And some of you were these things. But you've been cleansed. You've been set apart as holy. You've been found innocent by the power of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Spirit of our God.

Use your Body for God's Glory—Not for Sexual Immorality

12 "Everything's allowed for me"^f—but everything's certainly not worth it. "Everything's allowed for me"—but I'm not going to be controlled by anything. 13 "Food is for the digestive tract, and the digestive tract is for food"^g—and yet God is going to do away with both. Your body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for your body. 14 And God not only raised the Lord—God will raise us up from among the dead by God's own power. 15 Don't you know that your bodies are Christ's body parts? So am I going to make Christ's body parts parts of a prostitute? Absolutely not!^h 16 Or maybe you didn't know that a person who comes together with a prostitute is being one body with her? After all, it says, "The two will be one flesh."ⁱ 17 And the person that comes together with the Lord is being one spirit with him. 18 Run away from sexual immorality! All sorts of sins that a person might do are outside the body. But people who are sexually immoral sin against^j their own bodies.^k

19 Or maybe you didn't know that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you—who was given to you^l from God. And so you're not your own. 20 You've been bought at a high price. So glorify God with your bodies.

^a Lit. "led astray".

^b I.e. people who worship idols. This can be taken both literally and figuratively (see, e.g., Eph. 5:5).

^c Lit. "greedy people".

^d Lit. "slanderers".

^e Lit. "looters," or "robbers". I think he is talking about a predatory dealings around money in general, not just about professional strong-arm robbers or thieves.

^f This and the following quotations, I believe, are slogans of people in the Corinthian community who assert that they can do anything they please because of grace.

^g This is probably a saying people used to justify having sex whenever and however they felt like it: "I get hungry; I eat. I feel the urge; I have sex. Each is as much a natural bodily function and bodily need as the other. What's the big deal?"

^h Or "I should hope not!" lit. "May it not be!" which implies, may God not strike me for even mentioning the thought of it.

ⁱ Gen. 2:24; see Matt. 19:5.

^j Lit. "into".

^k This is cast in the singular in the original.

^l Lit. "whom you have".

Marriage, Divorce, and the Benefits of Staying Single

7 Now, as for the things you wrote to me about: yes, it is a good thing for a man to abstain from sexual contact with women.^a 2But because of issues of sexual immorality,^b each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband. 3Husbands should give their wives the sexual attention they deserve,^c and wives should do the same for their husbands. 4The wife doesn't have authority over her own body, but her husband does; in the same way, the husband doesn't have authority over his own body, but his wife does. 5Don't deny each other—unless you're doing it by agreement for a certain amount of time, so that you can devote yourselves to prayer.^d But then come back together again. That way, Satan won't tempt you by playing on your lack of self-control. 6I'm saying this out of friendship,^e not as a command. 7I'd still like for everyone to be like I am. However, each person has their own gift from God, whether it be the one way of living or the other.

8But I want to say to those of you who are unmarried, and to the widows: it is a good thing for them to stay single like I am. 9But if they don't have the will-power for it, they should get married. After all, it's better to get married than to be hot and bothered.^f

10And I pass on this command to the married people (it's actually not me, but the Lord Jesus, who says this): that a woman shouldn't break up with her husband. 11And if she does break up with him, she should either stay unmarried or reconcile with her husband. And a man shouldn't divorce his wife.^g

12Now, to everyone else, I want to say (this is me, not the Lord): If a brother^h has a wife who doesn't believe, and she agrees to live with him, he shouldn't divorce her. 13And if one of the women has a husband who doesn't believe, and he agrees to live with her, she shouldn't divorce her husband. 14After all, the unbelieving husband is made holy by his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy by her Christian husband.ⁱ If that weren't true, your children would be unclean—but as it is, they're holy. 15Now,^j if the one who doesn't believe breaks up with their believing spouse, then let them break up. The brother or sister isn't bound in those sorts of cases. But God has called you to peace. 16After all—wives, how do you know that you won't save your husbands? And husbands, how do you know that you won't save your wives?^k

^a Lit. "not to touch a woman". He's not saying, never hug anyone—it's about sexual abstinence.

^b Lit. "the sexual immoralities".

^c Lit. "her due". This sentence is cast in the singular in the original: "The husband should..."

^d Paul seems to be describing a kind of fasting.

^e Or "out of regard for your feelings," or "as a concession".

^f Lit. "to be burning". The meaning is obvious.

^g See Mt. 5:22; 19:9; Mk 10:11-12; Lk. 16:18.

^h That is, one of the Christian believers.

ⁱ Lit. "by the brother".

^j Lit. "But".

^k Paul casts these two sentences in the singular: "Wife, what...Husband, what..."

¹⁷Unless the Lord has provided something different for a person, each person should keep living as they were when God called them. And that's the instruction I give in all the communities. ¹⁸Were you circumcised^a when you were called? Don't try to cover it up. Were you uncircumcised when you were called? Don't get circumcised. ¹⁹Circumcision isn't anything, and lack of circumcision isn't anything—keeping God's commands is what matters.^b ²⁰Each person should stay in the condition that they were in when they were called. ²¹Were you called as a slave? Don't let it get you down. However, if you can get free, definitely go for it! ²²After all, the slave who is called by the Lord is the Lord's^c freed slave—in the same way, the person who is free when they're called is Christ's slave. ²³You've been bought with a price. Don't let yourselves be slaves of human beings. ²⁴Whatever condition you were called in, brothers and sisters, stay that way, with God.^d

²⁵Now, as for people who are still virgins, I don't have any instructions from the Lord. But I will offer an opinion, as a person who is trustworthy by the Lord's mercy. ²⁶So, my sense is that virginity^e is a good way to be. Because of the bad state things are in right now,^f it's better for a person to stay the same. ²⁷Are you bound to a wife? Don't try to get released. Have you been released from your wife? Don't try to find a wife. ²⁸But even if you do marry, you're not sinning. And if a woman who is a virgin marries, she hasn't sinned. But people who get married^g are going to have troubles in life,^h and I'm trying to spare you that. ²⁹And I'll say this, brothers and sisters: the time is short! So from now on,

people who have wives should be as though they didn't have them,
³⁰people who cry should be as though they weren't crying,
 people who celebrate should be as though they weren't celebrating,
 people who buy things should be as though they didn't own them,
³¹and people who make use of this world should be as though they weren't spending it up.

Because the structure of this world is falling apartⁱ—³²and I want you to be free from worries. An unmarried man worries about the Lord's business: how to please the Lord. ³³But the married man worries about the world's business: how to please his wife. ³⁴And his attention^j has gotten divided. And a woman who is unmarried, or a woman who is a virgin, worries about the Lord's business: how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman worries about the world's business:

^a See "Bible Words".

^b Lit. "but keeping God's commands definitely is".

^c Notice that Paul usually means "the Lord Jesus" by "the Lord"; he doesn't just mean God.

^d I think the implication is, stay with God, and trust God to change your situation when it's the right time, and don't spend energy scheming to change it yourself.

^e Lit. "this".

^f Lit. "because of the current distress". He thinks that the world as a whole is in a bad place.

^g Lit. "such people".

^h Lit. "in the flesh"—referring to the flesh-and-blood practicalities of living.

ⁱ Lit. "passing away".

^j "His attention": lit. "he".

how to please her husband. ³⁵Now, I'm saying this for your own benefit—and not at all to constrict you:^a I'm just trying to provide for good order and undistracted devotion to the Lord.

³⁶Now, suppose one of you feels that he's not treating his virgin girlfriend right.^b If he's fully mature,^c and it has to be that way, let him do what he wants. He's not sinning—let them get married. ³⁷Another person stands firm in his heart, doesn't feel any pressure, and has control over his own will power. And this person has decided in his own heart to keep his girlfriend a virgin. He's going to do fine. ³⁸So in other words, the person who marries his virgin girlfriend does fine; and the person who doesn't marry her does even better.

³⁹A woman is bound by marriage as long as her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she's free to marry anyone she wants to, as long as it's in the Lord.^d ⁴⁰But in my opinion, she's more blessed if she stays as she is. And I also think that I have the Spirit of God.

Food Offered to Idols

8 You also asked me about things offered to idols. We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs people up, but love builds people up. ²If somebody thinks they know something, they still don't know all^e they need to know. ³But if someone loves God, they're known by God. ⁴So, we know this about food that's been offered to idols: an idol isn't anything real,^f and there's no god except the One God. ⁵Now, there may be so-called "gods"—whether in heaven or on earth. And so in a sense there are lots of gods and lots of lords. ⁶But for us, the Father is the *One* God. Everything *comes* from him, and *we exist for* him. And we have *one Lord*, Jesus Christ. Everything exists *through* him, and *we exist through* him. ⁷However—not everybody knows that!^g For example, some people are still under the influence of idol worship right now.^h They eat things offered to idols, and their conscience, which is weak, gets polluted. ⁸But food doesn't get us approval with God. If we don't eat something, we don't get points taken away—and if we do eat, we don't get more points.ⁱ ⁹But just make sure that your confidence^a in this doesn't become

^a Lit. "definitely not to throw a lasso around you".

^b This could be for a few reasons: e.g. there might be an unsustainable level of sexual tension in the relationship, or there might be some kind of family or social cost that she has to bear.

^c I think Paul is talking about a young man being old enough in years and in personal maturity to marry. But he might well mean, "if he's too full of the juice of life," i.e. having trouble controlling himself sexually.

^d That is, she should marry a Christian.

^e Lit. "as".

^f "Anything real": lit. "anything in the world".

^g Lit. "But this knowledge isn't in everyone!"

^h Lit. "are in the habit of idolatry up to now," or "are still in a relationship with idolatry up to now".

ⁱ In the Greco-Roman world in Paul's day, the average person probably regarded buying (and eating) food that had previously been placed in front of a god as a minor act of devotion to that god. It got you approval points, kind of like spiritual trading stamps. If a person were still tempted to appease the gods, they might find it hard to renounce the sense of security this practice had given them. To protect their conscience, such a person might well need to "go cold turkey": to make sure that nothing they ate had previously been offered to an idol.

something for weak people to trip over. ¹⁰After all, suppose someone sees you sitting^b down to eat in an idol temple. You know it's ok^c—but if that person has a weak conscience, won't they be encouraged to eat things offered to idols? ¹¹Now^d the weak person is getting ruined by your knowledge—your brother or sister, that Christ died for! ¹²And so when you sin against your brothers and sisters, and harm their consciences, you're sinning against Christ. ¹³The conclusion is, if that kind of food trips up my brother or sister, I will never, ever eat meat again, so that I will not make my brother or sister stumble.

Paul Defends his Apostleship and Explains his Choice to Support himself Financially

9 [[I'm a free person, right? I'm an apostle, right? Haven't I seen Jesus our Lord? Aren't you my work in the Lord?^e ²Maybe I don't count as^f an apostle to other people, but surely I am one to you! After all, you're the proof^g of my calling as an apostle^h in the Lord.

³This is my answer to the people who accuse me. ⁴Don't we even have the right to eat and drink? ⁵Don't we even have the right to keep company with a Christian wife—like the rest of the apostles, and the Lord's brothers, and Cephas?ⁱ ⁶Or is it just me and Barnabas that don't have the right not to work for money? ⁷Who ever served as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, but doesn't get to eat any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock of sheep and doesn't get to drink any of the flock's milk? ⁸Am I saying these things on my own authority,^j or does the Law say the same thing? ⁹After all, it's written in the Law of Moses,

Don't put a muzzle on the threshing ox.^k

Is God really worried about oxen here?^a ¹⁰Or is God really saying this on our behalf? After all, this was written for our sake:

^a Lit. "authority". I think he's particularly referring to the authoritativeness that you project when you're around other people.

^b Lit. "lying"—first-century people reclined to eat.

^c Lit. "You have the knowledge".

^d Lit. "For".

^e Here's another probable page from the "painful letter". Notice how (1) the text closes up perfectly if you take out this section between the double square brackets, and (2) how "I am a free man" (9:1, 19) creates the entry point for the insertion. Paul's tone completely changes here, and you can practically hear him crying and in tears, if you imagine that this is part of the painful letter.

^f "I don't count as": lit. "I'm not". He means that others deny his calling by Christ to be an apostle altogether, not that he wasn't a missionary (=apostle) to those others.

^g Lit. "seal"—which proves a document genuine.

^h "Traditionally: "my apostleship".

ⁱ I.e. Peter. Cephas is his Aramaic nickname.

^j Lit. "as a human being".

^k Deut. 25:4. The ox walks around and around on a pile of grain and breaks it up so that the inedible parts can be separated by winnowing. The ox is helping make the food—and it's cruel not to let it eat some while it works.

The person who plows has to plow in hope, and the person who threshes has to thresh in hope, of receiving their share.^b

¹¹If we've planted spiritual seeds in you, is it a big thing for us to harvest some material things with you? ¹²If others have that right with you, wouldn't we have even more right? But we've never made use of that right—just the opposite! We've covered all our own living costs,^c so that we wouldn't hinder the good news of Christ in any way.

¹³Don't you know that people who do the sacrifices eat some of the food from the Temple? That people who serve at the altar get a portion of what's sacrificed?^d ¹⁴That's also how the Lord instructed people who were going out to spread the good news: they should receive support from their evangelism work.^e

¹⁵Yet I haven't made use of any of these privileges! And I'm not writing all this so that I'll get them. Because I'd rather die than for anybody to make this an empty boast. ¹⁶After all, if I preach the good news, there's no boast for me in that. Because there's a pressure that lies on me, and it would be horrible for me^f if I didn't preach the good news! ¹⁷I mean, maybe if I were doing this because I wanted to, I'd deserve^g a reward. But if I don't have any choice, then I've been made responsible for an ongoing task.^h ¹⁸So, what's my reward? It's that, as I preach the good news, I put it out there for free, and that I don't make any use of my right in the good news to receive support.]]

Free in Christ to Put Others First for the Sake of the Good News

¹⁹Because even though I'm free, I've become a slave to everyone—to win more people to Christ.

²⁰I've lived like a Jewⁱ for the sake of Jews, in order to win Jews. For the sake of people who are under the Law, I've lived as though I'm under the Law—not that I'm under the Law myself, but so that I'll win people who are under the Law. ²¹For the sake of people who don't have the Law, I've lived as though I didn't have the Law—it's not that I don't have God's Law, but that I'm under Christ's law. But it's so that I'll win people who don't have the Law. ²²For the sake of people who are weak, I've become weak, so that I'll win people who are weak. I've become all these things to all

^a Paul is asserting—somewhat justifiably—that the statement, in the original context, is metaphorical for fair treatment of working people (see Deut. 24:17–25:4). I seriously doubt that he intends to assert that God doesn't care about the welfare of animals other than human beings.

^b Paul's source for this statement is unknown, but it reads just like a proverb.

^c Or "we've put up with everything," i.e. the hardships of working on top of starting a community.

^d Lit. "have a share in the altar". "The altar" is a metonymy for the sacrifices routinely offered on it. Metonymy is when you refer to something by using a concept that is always associated with it, e.g. talking about "the crown" to refer to the queen, or "Capitol Hill" to refer to the US Congress.

^e Lit. "they should live from the good news" (see Mt. 10:10; Lk 10:7). "The Lord" clearly means Jesus.

^f Lit. "For woe to me..."

^g Lit. "have".

^h Lit. "I've been entrusted with an administrative task".

ⁱ Lit. "I've become like a Jew," but he already is one, so that translation would be misleading.

these people, so that one way or another, I'll save some. ²³And I do everything for the sake of the good news, so that I'll get the benefit of it along with everyone else.^a

²⁴Don't you know that of all the people who run in the sports arena, only one wins^b the prize? Run to win!^c ²⁵And every athlete trains all out—they do it to get a perishable crown,^d but we're going for a permanent one. ²⁶So I'm running this race, and I'm not making any secret of it. And I'm boxing, and not just shadow boxing, either!^e ²⁷I toughen up^f my body and train it to serve me.^g Otherwise, after preaching to others, I might end up failing the test myself.

Warning: Your Baptism is Not Fire Insurance

10 After all, I don't want you to miss^h the fact that our ancestors were all under the cloud—and all of them had gone through the Red Sea.ⁱ ²And so all of them got^j baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³Also, all of them were eating the same spiritual food ⁴and drinking the same spiritual drink.^k Because they were drinking from the spiritual rock that followed them,^l and that rock was Christ. ⁵However, God wasn't happy with most of them, because their corpses ended up scattered in the desert.^m

⁶And these things happened as examples for us—so we won't crave bad things, as they did.ⁿ ⁷For example, don't be idolaters,^o like some of them. Just like the scripture says,^p

The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to play around.^q

⁸And don't be sexually immoral, like some of them were—and twenty-three thousand of them fell down dead in one day.^r ⁹And let's not be testing Christ^s out, like some of them did—and they

^a Lit. "so that I'll come to partake in it too".

^b Lit. "gets".

^c Lit. "Run to get it". But that suffers from an unwanted ambiguity in English.

^d In the games, a traditional prize was the "laurel wreath," a crown made of leafy sprigs of the bay tree.

^e Lit. "Likewise, I'm boxing, not as flailing the air".

^f Lit. "I bruise my body". But he's still in the metaphor of the boxer in training, and is not talking about hating, despising, or abusing his body.

^g Or "...and I make it my slave".

^h Lit. "be ignorant of".

ⁱ Exod. 13:21-22; 14:22-29.

^j Or, following a textual variant, "were".

^k Exod. 16:4, 35; Deut. 8:3; Ps. 78:24-29.

^l Exod. 17:6; Num. 20:11; Ps. 78:15.

^m Lit. "for they were scattered [or struck down] in the desert".

ⁿ Lit. "so we won't be cravers of bad things, just like those people also craved".

^o "For example, don't be idolaters": lit. "Neither be idolaters". The pattern will be, neither be this, nor that, nor the other. I've begun the "nor" clauses with "And don't". They're all examples of "craving bad things". On "idolaters," see the nt. on 1 Cor. 6:9 above.

^p Lit. "Just as it is written".

^q Exod. 32:6. "People" is singular, meaning the nation.

^r See Num. 25:1, 9.

^s Later mss have, "the Lord" or "God". But Paul has just mentioned (v. 4) that Christ was there with them.

were killed by the snakes.^a ¹⁰And don't grumble, the way some of them did, and got killed by the destroyer.^b

¹¹Now, these things happened to them as examples. And they got written down as a warning to us, because we're living at the end of the world.^c ¹²So, a person who thinks they're standing should be careful not to fall. ¹³There hasn't been any temptation pulling at you that isn't standard human experience. And God is faithful. God won't let you be tempted beyond your strength.^d No, along with the temptation, God will also provide the way out that you can bear.

You Can't be a Christian and Keep Serving Idols

¹⁴So, my dear friends—run away from idolatry. ¹⁵I'm talking to you as people who are smart. Test what I'm about to say. ¹⁶Think about the cup of blessing that we bless. Isn't that a way of participating in the blood of Christ? What about the bread that we break? Isn't that a way of participating in the body of Christ? ¹⁷Because there's one loaf, all of us^e are one body—because we all have a piece of the one loaf.

¹⁸Consider the nation of Israel.^f Aren't the people who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar of sacrifice? ¹⁹So what am I saying? That something sacrificed to an idol counts for^g anything? ²⁰No, I'm saying that the things the Gentiles sacrifice are offered to demons, not to God. And I don't want you to be participants in demonic beings. ²¹You can't drink the Lord's cup and also the cup of demons. You can't take part at the Lord's table and also at the table of demons. ²²Or shall we provoke the Lord's jealousy? We're not stronger than he is, are we?

Supporting Others in Breaking from Idolatry

²³“Everything's allowed,” but everything's certainly not worth it. “Everything's allowed,” but everything sure doesn't build people up. ²⁴No one should be looking for their own advantage—instead, they should be looking for the other person's. ²⁵Go ahead and eat^h everything sold at the butcher's shop.ⁱ Don't try to find out where it's been before you buy it because of conscience. ²⁶After all,

^a See Num. 21:5-6.

^b Or “avenging angel”. See Num. 14:2, 36; 16:41-49. The “grumbling” Paul refers to is not about voicing discomfort or unhappiness, but about ingratitude and cynical suspicion towards God and spiritual leaders.

^c Lit. “to us upon whom the ends of the ages have come”. At this time in his life, Paul thinks “the end” is about to come very shortly.

^d Or “beyond what you can endure”.

^e Lit. “we many”.

^f Lit. “Israel according to the flesh”. Paul has probably told the Corinthians that they, in Christ, are members of “Israel according to the Spirit,” so he automatically goes on to specify.

^g Lit. “is”.

^h Lit. “Eat,” which is in the plural, as will all the commands to the end of the chapter. He's talking to the group as a whole. I render permissively: “go ahead and eat,” because I doubt he's now telling those with conscience problems to ignore them.

ⁱ Or “the market”; but he's talking about meats.

The earth, and everything that fills it, belongs to the Sovereign One.^a

²⁷Suppose a non-believing person invites you to dinner, and you want to go. Eat everything that's put in front of you. Don't try to figure out where it's been before you eat it because of conscience.

²⁸But if someone says to you, "This is meat that's been offered to idols," don't eat it—for the sake of the person who told you, and for the sake of conscience. ²⁹I'm not talking about your own conscience now, but about the other persons'. After all, why should my freedom be judged^b by somebody else's conscience? ³⁰If I'm taking part with thankfulness, why should somebody be insulting me^c about what I give thanks for?

³¹So, whether you're eating, or drinking, or whatever you're doing, do everything for the glory of God. ³²Try not to^d cause offense to Jews, to non-Jews,^e or to the community of God. ³³That's just what I do too. I always^f try to put everyone at ease. I don't look for my own benefit, but for everyone's, so they'll be saved. Imitate me in this, just as I'm imitating Christ.^g

Instructions about Women's Participation in Worship

11 I want to commend you for the way^h you've been keeping all my teachings in mind. ²And you've held onto the traditions just as I handed them down to you.

³Now, I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, the husband is the head of the wife, and God is the head of Christ. ⁴Every man who prays or prophesies with a head covering disgraces his head. ⁵And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered disgraces her head. It's just the same as having her hair cut off, ⁶since "If she uncovers herself, a woman should be shorn."ⁱ But if it is a disgrace for a woman to be shaved or shorn, then she should have her head covered. ⁷A man doesn't have to cover up his head, because he's the image and glory of God. But a woman is the glory of her husband. ⁸After all, man doesn't come from woman, but

^a Ps. 24:1; 50:12; 89:11.

^b Lit. "Why is my freedom being judged".

^c Lit. "why should I be insulted," which suffers from ambiguity in English.

^d Lit. "Become those who do not".

^e Lit. "Greeks". It's a standard expression.

^f I.e. in the sense of "in all circumstances," more than "at all times".

^g This sentence is actually 11:1, but it wraps up the previous section rather than beginning the current section. Chapters were not a part of the New Testament until the 13th century, and verses were first added in the 16th century.

^h "For the way": lit. "because" or "that".

ⁱ I suspect Paul is quoting a proverb that comes out of an ancient patriarchal ideal of publicly harassing prostitutes. Prostitutes would signal their "availability" to potential clients by not wearing a veil in public, or in some other way not covering themselves up to the usual degree. In the patriarchal setting, an unmarried woman veiled herself out of "respect for her father's and her brothers' honor"—since it was considered their responsibility to protect her virginity until she was married. The veil, in other words, signaled the fact that she was sexually unavailable. If a man had any interest in her, he had to approach her father and brothers. In a similar way, a married woman is also veiled—this signals her unavailability because she is exclusively partnered with her husband. Thus, in the culture Paul was familiar with, any woman who wasn't veiled was disgracing herself by appearing like an immoral person.

woman from man.^a ⁹And also, man wasn't created because of woman, but woman because of man. ¹⁰That's why a woman ought to have an authority on her head—because of the angels.^b ¹¹Still, in the Lord, woman isn't independent^c from man, nor is man independent from woman. ¹²After all, just as woman comes from man, so man also comes through woman.^d And they all come from God. ¹³Decide for yourselves:^e is it appropriate for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴Doesn't nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it's a disgrace to him? ¹⁵But if a woman has long hair, it's her glory. Because her hair is given to her as^f a covering. ¹⁶But if somebody seems to like arguing about this,^g we don't have a custom like that,^h and neither do the communities of God.

The Lord's Supper

¹⁷Now, in the instructions that I'm about to give, I won't commend you. Because, far from being better off, you're actually worse off by meeting together. ¹⁸To start with, when you get together I hear that there are divisions between you. And I believe it to a certain extent. ¹⁹After all, there have to be opposing groupsⁱ among you, so that it'll become clear which of you pass the test. ²⁰Anyway,^j when you all get together, it's obviously not to eat the Lord's supper! ²¹Because each person is taking more than their share of the meal, and one person is hungry and another person is drunk. ²²I mean, don't you have things to eat and drink at home? Or are you going to despise the community of God, and make people who are in need feel ashamed?^k What can I say to you? Can I commend you? No, I can't commend you for this.

²³After all, it was the Lord who gave me the tradition that I passed on to you:

On the night he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took a loaf of bread.

²⁴And after he had given thanks, he broke it, and said,

“This is my body, which is for you. Do this to remember me.”

²⁵In the same way, he also took the cup after the meal. He said,

^a He's thinking of Gen. 2:18-23.

^b I think Paul worries that if women leave the patriarchal “protection” system, with its symbols of subjection to masculine authority, angels (who set it up) will either (1) be offended or (2) take an improper interest in them (see Gen. 6:1-2).

^c Lit. “apart,” in this and the following instance.

^d I.e. through birth.

^e I think he means, discuss it as a community and make a determination, rather than, everyone make their own individual decision.

^f Lit. “in place of”. He's saying it's a built-in veil.

^g Or, following Lattimore: “But if I seem to be arbitrary”.

^h I.e. the custom of women praying or prophesying in the community with heads uncovered, which appears to have been taking hold at Corinth.

ⁱ Lit. “factions”.

^j Lit. “So—” (he's getting back to the point).

^k Lit. “Or do you (pl.) despise the community of God and shame the needy?” I think I've captured Paul's intent.

^l Lit. “Shall”.

“This cup is the new covenant through my blood.

Do this every time you drink this cup of wine, to remember me.”^a

²⁶In other words,^b every time you all eat the bread and drink the cup of wine, you announce the Lord’s death, until he comes. ²⁷So if someone eats the bread or drinks the cup of wine in a way that’s unworthy, they’re sinning against^c the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸So people should be examining themselves—and that’s the way they should be eating from the bread and drinking from the cup.^d ²⁹Because people are eating and drinking judgment on themselves when they eat and drink without recognizing the Body. ³⁰That’s why lots of you are weak and sick, and certain ones have died. ³¹But if we had been sorting ourselves out, we wouldn’t have come under judgment. ³²But when we’re judged by the Lord, we’re being disciplined so that we won’t be condemned along with the world. ³³So, my brothers and sisters, when you get together to eat, wait for each other. ³⁴If somebody’s hungry, they should eat at home, so that you don’t get together and end up getting judged. And all the rest I’ll lay out when I come.

Gifts from the Holy Spirit

12 You also asked me about the spiritual gifts.^e Brothers and sisters, I don’t want you to be ignorant about this. ²You know how, back when you were Gentiles, you always used to get led astray to deaf and dumb idols.^f ³So I’m letting you know that no one speaking through^g the Spirit of God says, “A curse on Jesus!” And no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except through^h the Holy Spirit.

⁴Now, there are various kinds of gifts,
but the same Spirit,

⁵And various kinds of service,
but the same Lord,

⁶And various kinds of activities,ⁱ
but the same God, who activates all of them in everyone.

⁷But each person gets the outward sign of the Spirit that will be the most beneficial.^a ⁸For example: through the Spirit, a person is given wisdom about something. Another person is given knowledge

^a I think he’s saying, from now on, when you celebrate the Passover meal, with its bread and wine, let it be a memorial of me dying for you. See 1 Cor. 5:7-8, and also Mt. 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk. 22:14-20.

^b Lit. “For”.

^c Lit. “accountable for”.

^d Lit. “But let a person self-examine, and thus let them eat from the bread and drink from the cup.”

^e More literally, “spiritisms,” i.e. manifestations of spiritual power and presence. The Corinthians seem to have been confused because some manifestations of “spirit” in their gatherings were inconsistent with the character of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Paul explains what he thinks is going on.

^f Lit. “to the speechless idols”.

^g Or “by” or “in”.

^h Or “by” or “in”.

ⁱ Lit. “workings”.

about something, through the same Spirit. ⁹Somebody else is given faith by the same Spirit; another is given gifts of healings by the one Spirit.

¹⁰Someone else again is given displays of power;^b another person prophecy, somebody else abilities to discern spirits, another person various inspired languages, and another person the interpretation of inspired languages. ¹¹But one and the same Spirit activates all these things, giving gifts out to each individual person just as the Spirit pleases.^c

We are All One Body—the Body of Christ

¹²After all, we have one body^d and it has many parts, and the many parts form^e one body. And it's the same way with Christ. ¹³Because we've all been baptized into one body by one Spirit—whether we were Jews or non-Jews,^f slaves or free. And we've all been given one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴And our body, after all, isn't one part, but many! ¹⁵Suppose the foot says, "Because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body". Does that make it not belong to the body? ¹⁶Or^g suppose the ear says, "Because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body". Does that make it not belong to the body? ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were about hearing, then where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But in fact, God has placed each one of the parts of the body just where God wanted it to be. ¹⁹But if all the parts were one kind, what would become of the body?^h ²⁰But the fact is, there are many parts, but one body, ²¹and the eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²²No—in fact, the body parts that seem to be the weaker ones are by far the most indispensable! ²³And that goes for the parts of the body that we see as unpresentable. We treat those parts with extra respect by clothing them, and our unpresentable parts become the most presentable.ⁱ ²⁴But our presentable parts don't need any extra attention.^j

But God has knit the body together in a way that gives the weaker part the most respect. ²⁵That's so that there won't be any division within the body, but just the opposite: all the parts will have the same care for one another. ²⁶And if one part suffers, all the parts suffer along with it. If one part gets glory, all the parts celebrate with it. ²⁷You're the body of Christ, and you're all individual parts of it.

^a Lit. "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the good."

^b Lit. "workings of powers," or "doing miracles."

^c Lit. "wills".

^d Lit. "the body is one".

^e Lit. "are".

^f Lit. "Greeks," a Jewish term for all non-Jews.

^g Lit. "And".

^h Lit. "where would the body be?"

ⁱ Lit. "have the most presentability".

^j For example, hands and feet don't need to be covered with clothing. It's the reproductive organs—which are not considered proper to display in public—that are the most indispensable. (Without them the species would die.)

²⁸And God appoints people in the community: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers. Then displays of power, gifts of healings, acts of service, gifts of management,^a various inspired languages. ²⁹Surely you're not all apostles, are you? You're not all prophets, or teachers, or miracle workers,^b are you? ³⁰Does everyone have gifts of healings? Do you all speak inspired languages? Can^c everyone interpret them? Of course not. ³¹But keep on trying^d for the greater gifts. And now I'm going to show you the best way of all!

Love—the Greatest Value of All

13 Suppose I can speak human languages, and even angelic languages—but I don't have love. I've become a ringing gong or a crashing cymbal. ²And suppose I have the gift of prophecy, and I know all the secrets there are, and have all the knowledge there is, and if I even have all the faith in the world, so that I can move mountains from one place to another. But if I don't have love, I'm nothing. ³And suppose I give away all my possessions, and I even get myself arrested so that I can brag about it. But if I don't have love, I haven't gotten anything out of it.

⁴Love is patient; love is kind.

It isn't jealous, it doesn't brag.

It isn't arrogant or disruptive;

It doesn't insist on its own way.

It isn't easily provoked;

It doesn't keep a tab of wrongs.^e

⁶It doesn't gloat^f over injustice, but joins in celebrating with the truth.

⁷It protects all things,

It believes in all things,

It hopes for all things,

It holds true to all things.

⁸Love never fails.

If there are prophecies, they'll come to an end. If there are languages, they'll stop. If there's knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹After all, we can know about some parts and we can prophesy^g about some parts, ¹⁰but when the whole^h thing comes, everything partial will come to an end.

¹¹When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, and I reasoned like a child. Now that I've become an adult,^a I've finished with the things of my childhood.

^a Lit. "administrations" or "managements".

^b Lit. "powers".

^c Lit. "Does".

^d Lit. "But be seeking".

^e Or, more literally, "a record of what's bad".

^f Lit. "celebrate".

^g Prn. *prof-a-sye*.

^h Lit. "complete".

¹²After all, we are now seeing things dimly through a mirror. But then it'll be face to face! Now I know about some parts, but then I'll fully understand—just as I've been fully understood.

¹³So^b now there are these three things that last: faith, hope and love. And the greatest of the three^c is love.

Prophesying and Speaking in Inspired Languages in Meetings

14 Really go for love as you aspire to spiritual gifts—but especially aspire to the gift of prophecy.^d ²Because the person who speaks in an inspired language isn't speaking to other people, but to God. After all, no one understands it: they're saying secret things through the Spirit. ³But the person who prophesies speaks for people's edification, encouragement, and comfort. ⁴People who speak in an inspired language build themselves up,^e whereas a person who prophesies builds up the community. ⁵And I want you all to speak in inspired languages, but even more I want you to prophesy. And the person who prophesies is greater than the person who speaks in inspired languages—that is, unless the person interprets it, so that the community can be built up.^f

⁶But now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you speaking in inspired languages, what good am I going to do you? None, unless I'm going to tell you^g some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching. ⁷It's the same way with musical instruments,^h like flutes or harps. If the instrument doesn't make a distinction between the notes, how will the tune being played on the flute or the harp be recognized? ⁸And again, suppose the trumpet gives out an unclear call. Who's going to get ready for battle? ⁹It's the same with you. If you don't offer a recognizable message with your tongue, how is anybody going to know what's being said?ⁱ Won't you just be talking into the air?

¹⁰I suppose there's any number of different languages^j in the world—and none of them is without meaning. ¹¹But^k if I don't know the meaning of the language, I'm going to be a gibberish speaker^l to the one who's talking, and they're going to be a gibberish speaker to me. ¹²It's the same with you.

^a Lit. "a man".

^b Lit. "And". He's wrapping up the chapter.

^c Lit. "of these".

^d Lit. "Pursue love, and/but desire the spiritual [gifts], and/but more that you would prophesy." The word "pursue" is a strong word that can even mean "persecute". "Strive after love," if obsolescent in English, captures the sense.

^e This is cast in the singular in the Greek.

^f Lit. "can receive edification".

^g Lit. "unless I should speak to you with".

^h Lit. "inanimate things that give out a sound".

ⁱ Lit. "Similarly also yourselves: if you don't give an easily-interpreted message with the tongue, how will it be known what is being said?"

^j Or "There are possibly such a great number of kinds of languages".

^k Lit. "So," or "therefore". But the word is more flexible in Greek than in English.

^l Lit. "barbarian," i.e. a foreigner (who seems to talk gibberish).

Since you're excited about "spirits,"^a be trying to be building the community up more and more.^b
 13 So a person who speaks in an inspired language should pray that they'll be able to interpret it.
 14 Because if I'm praying in an inspired language, my spirit is praying, but my mind isn't contributing anything.^c 15 So what's the solution? I'm going to pray with my spirit, and I'm going to pray with my mind too. I'm going to sing praise with my spirit, and I'm going to sing praise with my mind too. 16 After all, if you bless with your spirit, think of the person who's in the position of a newcomer. How are they going to say "Amen" to your prayer of thanks, since they don't know what you're saying? 17 You're giving thanks just fine, but the other person isn't being built up. 18 I thank God that I speak in inspired languages more than all of you. 19 But in the community meeting, I'd rather say five words with my mind, so that I can teach others too, than ten thousand words in an inspired language.

20 Brothers and sisters, don't be childish^d in your thinking. Instead, "Lose your naiveté, not your innocence."^e 21 It's written in the Law:

In foreign languages
 And through the lips of foreigners
 I will speak to this people,
 And even so they won't listen to me,
 says the Sovereign One.^f

22 So inspired languages aren't supposed to be a sign from God for the believers, but for the unbelievers. And prophecy isn't for the unbelievers but for the believers. 23 So, say the whole community gets together, and everybody speaks in inspired languages. And now, in come some newcomers or unbelievers. Won't they think you're crazy?^g 24 But if you all prophesy, and an unbeliever or a newcomer comes in, they'll be challenged^h by all of you. 25 The secrets of their hearts will be revealed, and so they'll fall on their face and worship God. They'll say, "God is really with you!"ⁱ

26 So what's the result, brothers and sisters? Whenever you get together, each person has a song of praise, a teaching, a revelation, an inspired language, or an interpretation. Everything should be

^a "Spirits" is an odd way of talking about spiritual gifts. Some of the Corinthians appear to have had the idea that each special gifting was indicative of the presence of a "spirit". I follow R.H. Gundry, who thinks Paul is referring to this idea of theirs, which he doesn't like. He insists that there is only one Spirit who gives the gifts.

^b Lit. "be seeking that you will overflow towards the edification of the community".

^c Lit. "my mind is fruitless".

^d Lit. "children".

^e Lit. "be children in what's bad, but adults in thinking." It's a pithy proverb in Greek, which means, try to reach the wisdom of adulthood without firsthand experience in doing wrong.

^f Isa. 28:11-12; Deut. 28:49.

^g Lit. "Won't they say that you're raving?" But in Greek "say" pretty much means "think".

^h Or "confronted".

ⁱ Lit. "They'll declare, 'God is really among you!'"

edifying.^a ²⁷If someone speaks in an inspired language, it should be two, or at the most three, and one at a time. And somebody should interpret. ²⁸But suppose there isn't a person to interpret. They should be quiet in the community meeting, and speak to themselves and God.^b ²⁹And two or three prophets should speak, and let the others weigh up what they say.^c ³⁰And if something gets revealed to somebody else who's sitting down, the first person should be quiet. ³¹Because you can all take turns prophesying. That way you can all learn and be encouraged. ³²Also, "the spirits of the prophets are under the prophets' own control."^d ³³After all, God is not the God of confusion, but of peace.

The Role of Women (see also 1 Cor. 11:2-16)

As in all the communities of the holy ones, ³⁴the women should be quiet in the community meetings. Because they're not allowed to speak. Instead, they should be obedient to their husbands, just as the Law says. ³⁵And if they want to learn something, they should ask their own husbands at home. After all, it's shameful for a woman to speak in the community meeting. ³⁶Or did the word of God go out from you? Or did it only come to you? ³⁷If someone thinks they're a prophet or spiritually gifted, they should recognize that the things I'm writing to you are the Lord's command. ³⁸But if somebody doesn't know that, they're somebody unknown themselves.^e

³⁹In conclusion, brothers and sisters, try to prophesy, and don't stop people from speaking in inspired languages. ⁴⁰But everything should be done in a courteous and orderly way.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

15 Now, brothers and sisters, I want to tell you about the good news that I preached to you. It's the good news that you accepted, and in which you stand. ²You're being saved by this message, which I preached to you, if you hold on to it. That is, unless^f you've believed for nothing!

³Because I handed over to you, right at the beginning,^g what I received:

that Christ died for our sins in line with the scriptures, ⁴that he was buried,
and that he rose^h on the third day in line with the scriptures,
and that he was seen byⁱ Cephas,^j then by the twelve,
and then by more than five hundred brothers and sisters all at once.

^a Lit. "Let all be for edification".

^b This sentence was recast as plural for gender inclusivity.

^c Lit. "and let the others discern," i.e. evaluate.

^d Paul uses a maxim to assert that Holy Spirit-inspired prophets remain conscious and retain their agency. Prophecy isn't ecstatic spirit possession.

^e Some mss: "And if someone doesn't know that, let them not know it."

^f Lit. "except unless".

^g Or "as first priority," lit. "among the first things".

^h Or "he was raised".

ⁱ Or "he appeared to".

^j I.e. Peter. Cephas is his Aramaic nickname.

Of those, most are still around today, but some have passed away.^a ⁷Then he was seen by James, then by all the apostles. ⁸And last of all, almost in an emergency birth,^b he was seen by me too. ⁹After all, I'm the least of the apostles. I'm not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the community of God. ¹⁰But it's by God's grace that I am what I am. And God's grace in me hasn't turned out to be empty! No, I've worked harder than all of them. But it's definitely not me—it's the grace of God that's with me. ¹¹So whether it was me or them, that's how we preached, and that's how you believed.

Our Future Resurrection—and the Resurrection of All Humanity

¹²But if Christ is being preached as raised from among the dead, how is it that some of you say that there's no resurrection of the dead? ¹³But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ isn't raised either. ¹⁴And if Christ isn't raised, then our preaching is empty, and your faith is empty! ¹⁵And we are also shown up to be^c false witnesses against God! Because we've testified about God that God raised Christ. And God didn't raise Christ if the dead aren't raised. ¹⁶After all, if the dead aren't raised, Christ isn't raised either. ¹⁷And if Christ isn't raised, your faith is useless—you're all still in your sins. ¹⁸And also, people who've passed away^d in Christ are lost. ¹⁹If we've only been hoping in Christ in this life, we're about the most pitiful people in all of humanity.

²⁰But the fact is, Christ *has* risen from among the dead. He's the first harvest of those who've passed away.^e ²¹After all, since death came through a human being, resurrection of the dead also came through a human being. ²²Because just as in Adam everyone dies, so in Christ everyone will be brought to life—²³but each in their own proper order:^f Christ the first harvest, then those who belong to him, at his coming, ²⁴then the end. That's when he hands the kingdom over to God the Father.^g It's when he does away with all rule and authority and power. ²⁵Because he has to rule as king until he puts all his enemies under his feet.^h ²⁶The last enemy he'll overthrow is death, ²⁷because

God has subjected everything under his feet.ⁱ

And when it says that “everything's been subjected,” it obviously doesn't include the One who subjected everything to him. ²⁸So, when everything's subject to him, then the Son himself will be

^a Lit. “have fallen asleep,” a euphemism for “have died”.

^b Or “a miscarriage”. The idea is that Paul was born into the role of apostle and into the family of witnesses to Christ's resurrection in a traumatic birth.

^c Lit. “discovered to be”.

^d Lit. “fallen asleep”.

^e Paul's using a metaphor from Jewish worship. A gift was to be given to God from the best of the early summer harvest. That gift would “redeem” the rest of the crop and guarantee God's blessing on it.

^f Paul is using the analogy of a parade. The word “order” implies that each person has their proper place in the formation.

^g Lit. “to God, even the Father”.

^h See Ps. 8:6.

ⁱ See Ps. 8:6.

subjected to the One who subjected everything to him. That way God will be everything, in everyone.^a

²⁹Otherwise, what are they going to be doing when they're baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead aren't raised at all, why are people being baptized for them? ³⁰And why are we in danger all the time?^b ³¹I die every day! And you're my proof for that claim, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord.^c ³²If it was just for human reasons that I've fought wild animals in Ephesus,^d what have I gained? If the dead aren't raised,

Let's eat and drink—after all, we're going to die tomorrow!^e

³³Don't be fooled: "Bad relationship choices ruin good morals."^f ³⁴You need to really sober up and stop sinning, because some of you don't know God.^g I say this to your shame.

Our Resurrection Bodies—Will they be the Same, or Different?

³⁵However, somebody is going to say, "How are the dead raised? And what kind of body do they have?" ³⁶What ignorance!^h The seed you plant isn't brought to life unless it dies. ³⁷And what you plant isn't the body that is going to be, but just a bare seed—such as wheat, maybe, or some other grain. ³⁸And God gives it a body just as God wishes. In other words, God gives each seed its own body. ³⁹Bodies aren't all the same.ⁱ There's one flesh for human beings, another for wild animals, another for birds, and another for fish. ⁴⁰And there are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies—but the glory of the heavenly bodies is far different from that of the earthly ones. ⁴¹The sun has one glory, the moon has another, and the stars have another. And of course,^j one star differs in glory from another.

⁴²It's the same with the resurrection of the dead. The body is planted in a process of breaking down; it's raised invulnerable to breaking down.^k ⁴³It's planted in dishonor; it's raised in glory. It's

^a Or, more abstractly, "all in all".

^b Lit. "every hour".

^c Lit. "I swear by yourselves as the boast, brothers and sisters, that I have in Christ Jesus our Lord!" He's using them "to swear by," because they know firsthand the great risks he took to bring them the good news (see Acts 18:1-17). The mss disagree as to whether the words "brothers and sisters" belong, but the meaning is unaffected either way.

^d See Acts 19:21-41; 1 Cor. 16:8. He appears to be writing from Ephesus.

^e Isa. 22:13; 56:12.

^f This is a saying from Greek wisdom.

^g Lit. "For some have no knowledge of God".

^h Lit. "Ignoramus, the seed..." Contemporary English-speaking culture has a rule against such "name calling," but Paul's culture didn't.

ⁱ Lit. "Not all flesh is the same flesh".

^j Lit. "For," or "After all".

^k Lit. "It's planted in perishability, raised in imperishability," referring to the body.

planted in weakness; it's raised in power. ⁴⁴It's planted a soul-based body; it's raised a Spirit-based body.^a If there's a soul-based body, there's also a Spirit-based body. ⁴⁵Just like the scripture says,^b

The first human being, Adam, became a living soul.^c

But the last Adam became an enlivening Spirit. ⁴⁶But the Spirit-based human being isn't first, but rather the soul-based one. Afterwards comes the Spirit-based one. ⁴⁷The first human being comes from the soil, and is made of earth. The second human being comes from heaven. ⁴⁸Whatever the original earth-based human being is like, that's what we^d earth-based human beings are like, too. And whatever the heavenly one is like, that's what the heavenly ones are going to be like, too. ⁴⁹And just as we've borne the stamp of what's earthly, we're going to bear the stamp of what's heavenly, too.

⁵⁰And I'll say this, brothers and sisters: flesh and blood can't inherit Heaven's Reign. And what breaks down isn't going to inherit invulnerability to breaking down. ⁵¹Look, I'm going to tell you all a secret. We're not all going to pass away. But we'll all be transformed ⁵²in an instant—in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet.^e Because the trumpet is going to blow—and the dead are going to be raised, invulnerable to breaking down. And we're going to be transformed. ⁵³Because this body, which is vulnerable to breaking down, is going to be clothed with invulnerability to breaking down. And this mortal body of ours is going to be clothed with immortality. ⁵⁴And when this mortal body of ours is clothed with immortality, then the words of scripture^f will come true:

Death is swallowed in victory!^g

⁵⁵O Death, where is your victory?

Death, where's your stinger?^h

⁵⁶Death's stinger is sin, and sin's power is the law. ⁵⁷So thanks to God, who is giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸In conclusion, my brothers and sisters, be strong, be impossible to move. Always be overflowing in the Lord's work, because you know your hard work in the Lord isn't for nothing.ⁱ

^a Or: "It's planted a natural/soulish body; it's raised a spiritual body". Paul is not saying—as our use of such words might imply—that the resurrection body is a non-physical body. To him, "spiritual" means based on or powered by the Holy Spirit, not "immaterial".

^b Lit. "Just as it is written".

^c Gen. 2:7.

^d Lit. "the".

^e See Mt. 24:31.

^f Lit. "then the word that is written".

^g Isa. 25:8.

^h Hos. 13:14.

ⁱ Lit. "empty".

Instructions about a Collection for Famine Relief in the Land of Israel

16 Now, about the collection for the holy ones:^a I want you to do the same thing I told the communities in Galatia. ²On the first day of each week, each of you should put aside whatever amount you can afford. That way, when I come, there won't have to be a number of collections. ³Then, when I arrive, I'll send off the people you've recommended with letters,^b and they'll bring your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴And if it seems^c worthwhile for me to go too, they can go with me.

⁵Now, I'm going to come to you when I get through Macedonia^d—because I'm coming through Macedonia. ⁶And I might stay with you a while, or even stay the winter. That way, you can send me on my way to wherever I go next. ⁷After all, I don't just want to see you in passing this time. I'm hoping to spend some real time with you, if the Lord lets me. ⁸But I'm going to be staying in Ephesus until Pentecost. ⁹Because a big and effective door has opened up for me, and there are a lot of opponents.

¹⁰Now, if Timothy comes, make him feel at ease^e while he's with you. After all, he's doing the Lord's work just like I am—¹¹so no one should look down on him.^f Send him along in peace so that he can come to me. Because I'm looking forward to seeing him, and so are the brothers and sisters here.

¹²Now as for my brother Apollos,^g I had strongly encouraged him to come to you with the other brothers.^h And he really didn't want to come now,ⁱ but he'll come when there's a good opportunity.

Final Messages and Greetings

¹³Keep watch, stand firm in your faith. Be tough, be strong. ¹⁴Let everything you do be done in love.^j

¹⁵Now, I want to ask you a favor, brothers and sisters. You know about Stephanas's^k family—how they're the first harvest for Christ in Achaia,^l and how they've devoted themselves to serving the

^a This was a huge operation in response to a famine. See Acts 11:27-30; Rom. 15:25-26; 2 Cor. 8-9; Gal. 2:10.

^b It's not clear whether these letters are previous letters of recommendation from the Corinthians to Paul, or whether Paul is talking about sending people to Jerusalem with letters of introduction.

^c Lit. "is".

^d Prn. *mass-a-doe-nee-a*.

^e Or "see that he has nothing to fear".

^f Lit. "despise him".

^g Prn. *ap-paul-us*. He means his Christian brother.

^h Below, we'll see evidence that Paul is sending three men with this letter: Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, who have visited Paul from Corinth. I think they're the "other brothers".

ⁱ Or "But it definitely wasn't God's will for him to come now".

^j More literally: "Let all your interactions happen in love".

^k Prn. *stefan-us'z*.

^l Prn. *a-kay-a*.

holy ones. ¹⁶I want you to be of service to^a people like them—and to everyone who does the same hard work with them. ¹⁷I'm so happy that Stephanas and Fortunatus^b and Achaicus^c have come! They've made up for the fact that I miss all of you,^d ¹⁸because they've refreshed my spirit as well as yours. So really acknowledge people like them.

¹⁹The communities here in Asia^e say hello. Prisca and Aquila send you all a big hello in the Lord, along with the community that meets in their house. ²⁰All the brothers and sisters here say hello. Say hello to each other and give each other a holy kiss.^f

²¹This greeting is in my own handwriting: Paul.^g ²²If someone doesn't love the Lord, down with them! Lord come!^h ²³The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. ²⁴I love you allⁱ in Christ Jesus.

^a Or "subject yourselves to the authority of".

^b Prn. *for-choo-nayt-us*.

^c Prn. *a-kay-ik-us*.

^d Lit. "for your [pl.] absence". But obviously they couldn't all have come.

^e I.e. Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Ephesus, where Paul is staying, is one of its major cities.

^f Lit. "Greet one another with a holy kiss".

^g Sosthenes has actually put pen to paper for most of the letter, as Paul has dictated (1 Cor. 1:1).

^h Or "Our Lord, come!" Paul's writes this in his mother tongue, Aramaic: *marana tha*.

ⁱ Lit. "My love be with you all".