

1 CORINTHIANS



Day 216

“Who Am I?”

August 4 - 1 Corinthians 1:1-17

According to the Westminster Confession of Faith, the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Jesus said, “And this is eternal life, that they might know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent,” (John 17:3). These lofty statements must be understood in the light of the way we, God’s people, behave in the church and in the world. The mistake some make is to think they can separate their relationship with God from the way they do life from day to day. The two are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are intertwined.

One of the major signs that you are growing spiritually is that you can rejoice when things go well for others. When your focus is on others, you are walking in love. For example, if you take the qualities of love enumerated in 1 Corinthians 13, you will see that they all apply to the way you treat others.

“Love is patient.” Usually, maybe not always, but for the most part, patience is practiced toward others.

“Kindness:” is an attitude you have toward others.

If you go down the list, you will see what I mean. They are all focused on others, not self. Plus, others will appreciate it when you think of them. I am always warmed when people sincerely ask me how I’m doing. They want to really know, and when I tell them I feel like something special has happened between us because of their sincerity.

The Corinthian church members thought of themselves as a very spiritual bunch. They were very active in practicing some of the outward manifestations of the Spirit. They were receiving “revelations” from the Lord. These were messages from God to His church.

The problem was that they were stepping on each other’s toes when they got together to worship. Their services were disorderly and self-serving some of the time, and they were neglecting the more important priority of loving one another. Their spiritual experiences were falling into a “me first” category. And so there was much confusion, especially among those who were brand new to the church and spiritual things in general.

Notice in the first chapter that Paul first commends them and then rebukes them. He says that they are actively using the gifts of the Holy Spirit and they are excited about the second coming of the Lord. After this praise, he slams them for having a party spirit. They were rallying behind various teachers rather than building up one another. They were, as a church, acting like kids instead of spiritually mature believers. They were not acting like Jesus showed them.

This is understandable because the culture in which most of them were raised was corrupt. They had lived with egotism for so long that their new faith became another expression of self. They were excited by the outpouring of spiritual manifestations they were receiving, and saw it as a way to inflate their own spiritual egos. Later, in his second letter to them, Paul writes: “Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God,” (7:1). Really, spiritual pride is just as bad if not worse than carnal pride. Paul would remind them that glory for all of the Christian life should be directed to God.

This brings me to an example in the Old Testament. A prayer of David is recorded in I Chronicles 17, in which he responds to the message of the prophet concerning God's workings in his family (Journaling your prayers is a good exercise, by the way). David's humility is exemplified by his response to the message of Nathan. Nathan has just told the king that he would not be the one to build a house for the Name of the Lord. Rather, it would be one of the sons who would have this commission. Of course, it was Solomon who would fulfill this prophecy. But think about it; this could have been devastating news for David. He had wanted so much the honor of building a place for worship of the God who had been with him from the pasturelands to the throne. But upon receiving this news, instead of complaining, he thanks God for what God has given him. In God's presence, he says, "Who am I?" No whining, no groveling, no pity party, no temper tantrum, no rundown of how he deserves this or that—only humility.

In Psalm 8, David says, "What is man that you are mindful of him or the son of man that you take thought of him?" David is saying that in the light of the bigness of God, man becomes insignificant. The upside of this is that once you find your life in God, you have significance beyond compare. God gives you purpose. God gives you worth. God is all and in all.

Who are you?

Have you spent too much time focusing on you? And do you need to spend a bit more time being thankful to God? David leads the way here, doesn't

he? He had so many personal accomplishments that it would have been not unusual for us to see him boasting in himself and complaining that he was unable to build God's house. He didn't; he gave thanks.

Who can you share your thankfulness with today?

Take time today to show thankfulness in some way.

Be generous.

Be worshipful.

Be loving for Christ's sake.

Pray very sincerely and tell God about how much you are thankful for.....

God owes me _____.

I owe God _____.

You fill in the blanks. The word "everything" goes in one blank and "nothing" goes in the other. This is a pass or fail test.

Rejoice in Jesus Always,

Pastor Steve

Good Questions to help us think about Scripture and live godly lives.

1. What does 1 Corinthians Chapter 1 say about hero worship?

a. In 1:26-30, Paul minimizes people in order to show what truth?

2. How would you explain that the "message of the cross" is "foolishness" and "weak"?

a. What does the cross mean to you? What aspect of Christ's suffering impacts you the most?

Great things are not accomplished overnight. It's just that most people do not have the kind of purpose in their lives that motivates them to sacrifice for the long run or the big picture.

How are you doing in this regard? Are you focused or scattered? Are you consistently looking for meaning in what you do, or do you know why you do what you do? Are you organizing yourself to accomplish your purpose? Is your time geared to focus on the big issues in your life? What are you going to do tomorrow that fits into the big picture? What step will you take tomorrow that will lead toward your bigger goals?

Depending on how we answer these questions, I think it might be time for many of us to sharpen our focus. Where do we begin? Let's pray.

"Lord, I believe that you love me and have a plan for my life. God, I apologize for focusing so much on what I want. Please show me what you want for my life. Where do you want me to spend my time and energy and money? Guide me, direct me, show me the way you want me to go. I want you to be the guiding force of my life. Fill me with you so that I will be energized with your power. I love you and want to find my life in you. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

Paul lived a focused life. God's purpose for him was to proclaim Christ. Remember back in Romans, when Paul said that he didn't want to intrude in another's work but wanted to share Christ where He hadn't been preached before? Paul spent most of his time, energy and treasure on this task. He says that his main aim in Corinth was to preach about the crucifixion of Jesus. Paul believed that the message of the cross was the focal point of a person's life. If a person was called by God, that person would come to God through the cross. Interestingly enough, Paul says that he was not the most gifted speaker, but that wasn't the issue at all in his eyes. He wasn't always confident either, but was still excited about the message of the cross. Paul's purpose was much bigger than himself. He daily trusted in the power of God to be with him as he traveled.

Once your purpose is established it will be challenged. We live in a world that rewards and persecutes the focused person. Those who are scattered will often attempt to distract the person who is on

task. Scattered people usually complain about how things are not working for them. They are always looking for the magic solution to their empty existence. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:33 that bad company corrupts good morals. People with little focus in life tend to pull down those who are going somewhere.

Paul knew what it was like to deal with distractions. I can imagine that Paul's presence in Corinth was not received by everyone with open arms. Corinth was a very corrupt city. Paganism and immorality were rampant. Paul was a bit intimidated by all that was going on around him. But that did not deter him from talking about Jesus and particularly the cross. The cross was Paul's focal point. He knew that the Jews were into miracles and the Greeks wisdom, but the cross was the message and Paul was going to stick with it.

What is the focus of your life? Once you are convinced of your focus, you will be able to weather many storms because your soul's anchor will see you through. In childbirth classes, the teachers instruct the couple to pick a focal point to use during the pre-birth process. The expectant mom is supposed to focus with an eagle eye on her focal point during contractions. This mental tool is meant to take the attention off of the pain and mentally release it to the object she is concentrating on. It really worked for my wife. When you have a focal point in your life it really works too. What is your focal point?

Does your job meet the expectations for a valid focal point?

Is it your family? Does your family occupy the majority of your thoughts?

Is it a hobby or recreational activity that you obsess about?

Is it retirement? Do you spend much of your time accumulating enough money to live "the good life"?

Is it a spiritual gift that you use to build up the Body of Christ?

It was for Paul.

If you are a believer, God has given you a spiritual gift to use in the church. Are you actively using the gift God has given you? Paul needed to tell his young protégé, Timothy, to fan into flame the gift God had given him. Could that be true for you too? I would encourage you to take a step in faith and get involved in



"Nothing Except..."

August 5 - 1 Corinthians 1:18 - 2:5

A focused person lives a meaningful life. I wonder what people thought about Michelangelo painting the Sistine Chapel.

Maybe, "Is this guy ever going to finish?" What did people think about Noah building the ark? It took him 120 years. Now that was quite a project!

the local church. First of all, pray for the church. Then see if there is an area of interest where you could get involved.

Encourage others in the church.

Give your time, talents, and treasure to the church.

You will feel God's pleasure when you serve Him.

God's blessings,

Pastor Steve

Good Questions (GQ's)

1. Read 2:5 carefully. What reason does Paul give for not wanting the Corinthians to be impressed by his wisdom and eloquence?

a. What do you believe it means when Paul says that his preaching was "in demonstration of the Spirit and power?"

2. What was the main subject of Paul's preaching?

a. Why is it important to focus our spiritual thinking on Jesus?



"Another Gift?"

August 6 - 1 Corinthians 2: 6-16

Good parents delight in giving good gifts to their children. That doesn't mean you will always get just what you want; good parents will give their child what is best for him. We have learned in Romans that God sometimes gives us the gift of suffering, which leads to Christian character (Romans 5).

I love to bless my kids. I love to do things for my kids. Not for their approval, but because I love them and want them to experience my love for them. The look in their eyes when they receive something special, especially something unexpected, is my pure delight. And if they say thanks, then the look in my eyes reflect the joy I have in my heart. Sometimes my kids will surprise me with a "thank you" that I did not expect and was not fishing for. Again, my heart is warmed.

Remember this verse in Luke: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (11:13). God is our Father and a generous Father at that. He has given us everything we need to be happy and fulfilled. Remember this verse in Romans: "He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not

with Him also freely give us all things?" (8:32). Obviously, God is a giving God. He is certainly a Father you can be proud of, can't you?

Paul says some pretty remarkable things in this section of I Corinthians. He says that God has revealed by the Spirit the secret things we need to know. Paul says, "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us," (2:12). It takes the work of the Spirit for us to understand and fathom the depth of the love of God. It is so easy to not buy into the love of God. How could God love me that much? Why would He go to all that trouble for me? I have trouble believing that the God who created all things would reach down and take part in my life. But He does. He has given us so much grace that it is almost too good to be true.

The Spirit of God is actively working in the life of a believer. He points to Jesus, putting the spotlight on Him. He reminds us that we are sons and daughters of God, and He shows us the things that are freely given to us by God. Oh, the depth of the love of God. No wonder Paul says, "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" (2:16). No one

knows the depths of God's mind. Just think, God was before anything else came into being. Who made God?? No one, God always was. Now, you explain that to me.

And then Paul goes on to say, "But we have the mind of Christ." Wait a minute, the mind of Christ? What in the world does that mean? With the way I think, it would be a mockery to say I had Christ's mind. What is the apostle saying?

Before you came to Christ you were unable to think God's thoughts. God's thoughts came through your mind like a complicated calculus problem, and you let the thought exit as soon as it knocked at the threshold of your mind. I can remember talking to people about God, but really I was just making up stuff, making excuses by saying the church was full of hypocrites. I had no clue about God's thoughts. But when God came into my life and I embraced Jesus, the light went on. All of a sudden God's thoughts became real and enjoyable to me. They come in the form of Scripture, because Scripture is God's Word. God's Word is a spiritual book—actually, 66 separate spiritual books combined into one—and can only be understood by spiritual people. "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned," (1 Corinthians 2:14).

If you have the Spirit, you can understand Scripture. No doubt, God uses gifted teachers in the church to make His Word clear, but only those with the Spirit inside can really make heads or tails of it.

Yesterday we read, "It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption," (1:30). Another aspect of having the mind of Christ is having the wisdom of Christ. As a believer, you will think differently, because Christ is your wisdom and He gives you practical insight into living well.

Do you have faith in Jesus? Then listen to the Spirit when He says you also have the mind of Christ. We need the Spirit's confirmation of this wonderful gift or we will not think it is for us.

Holy Spirit, speak to us today and give us the openness to accept all of the things that God has freely given us in Jesus. Come, Holy Spirit, speak to me today. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Expect to understand the Scripture. Before you read it, thank God that He has given you the mind of Jesus. Also ask Him to empower you to be a doer of His Word. Jesus said that He would send another comforter who would guide you into the truth.

"Come, Holy Spirit, and guide us into your truth."

Rejoice in Jesus Always,

God's blessings to God's Children,

Pastor Steve

GQ's

1. List two important truths that Paul reveals about the Holy Spirit in this section of Scripture.

a. What do you think it means to "have the mind of Christ"?

**“Hey, Name Dropper”**

August 7 - 1 Corinthians 3: 1-23

Dear Ones,
Do you feel important because of your connection with someone else? Do you feel superior to others because you know so-and-so? Are you a bit more spiritual than the other guy because you go to “that church?”

It is so easy to get caught up in the name-dropping game. When I was at Talbot Seminary in La Mirada, California, we often had some pretty famous teachers drop by to do chapel. Chuck Swindoll came every year, and another pretty well-known guy named John MacArthur came to impart his wisdom too. We were blessed to have these exceptional teachers speak to us.

There is nothing wrong with having Chuck and John over, is there? The wrong thing would be for me to use their names to try and gain a feeling of superiority over you. “Hey Steve, I heard the greatest message today on the radio by Charles Swindoll,” you might say. “Oh yeah? That’s nothing. I heard Chuck in chapel today at school and he spoke directly to me and my class!”

How does that make you feel? Inferior? Maybe not as up to spiritual par as me? Like somehow I rank a bit higher than you because of my privileges? This is all pride and prejudice. It makes no significant spiritual statement except to highlight how self-centered a person can become when he feels like he is one of the privileged few.

This is what happened to the Corinthian church. They began to feel like a spiritual Hercules because of the way the spiritual gifts were operating and because of their connection to the “super teachers.” They had become name-droppers. They felt like the spiritual elite, the invincible, the unreachable, the crème de crème. Spiritual pride is a deceptive beast and can disguise itself as superior spirituality.

There is no doubt that even Jesus’ earlier disciples

were harboring thoughts of gaining a position in the kingdom of prominence. The gospels describe them jostling for position at many points. They even looked down on others for doing it, while they were thinking about it at the same time. Pride not only affects us from a worldly point of view but we can also succumb to its allure in the spiritual arena. Paul will say a bit later in this same letter, “Let him who thinks he stands, take heed, lest he fall.” And in his second letter to this church he says that they need to be washed from spiritual pride (7:1).

Pride forms a barrier which keeps the unbeliever from surrendering to Jesus, and it creates a barrier that stunts spiritual growth in those who are already believers. Pride is a bad recipe and those that ingest its contents usually end up with a stomach ache. Pride comes before a fall, Paul will say in this same letter. This little emotion is the precipice from which many a well-intentioned person has crashed.

All of us want to feel important, don’t we? We want to think that we matter. Some people root for teams because they want to feel what it’s like to win at something. So you’ll ask them who their favorite team is, and they will tell you some team like the New York Yankees. Have they grown up in New York? No! Do they have relatives from New York? No! Then why in the world are they cheering for the Yankees? They want to be associated with a winner. I have never heard someone proudly state that they are going to be rooting for the Kansas City Royals this year. Why? They are losers.

Paul clears the air at the end of Chapter 3 by telling them to stop boasting about men. He tells them that this is a worldly way. That behavior is for those who do not have confidence in the truth of the Word. He essentially says that you do not need to gain your approval from men because of all of

the benefits God has given you. You can boast in the Lord instead and make Him your common goal. The Apostle says that believers are to build their lives on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ. They must believe that the—that is their bodies—are the temple of the Lord. As if that wasn’t enough, they also need to know that everything belongs to them (when he says everything, he means everything: the apostles and the world and all of life and death) because they belong to God.

People who value human recognition will always minimize the spiritual riches we have in Christ because they do not want to think that they are on an equal footing with others. They would rather believe that they are superior to others. But if the church shares the riches of Christ, then we ought not to haggle over who is the best or most spiritual. Rather, we must serve others, a theme Paul is big on; we must build up the church and try to glorify Christ by laying down our pride.

How can we apply this lesson to our lives?

Today, can you serve someone who would humble you?

Let’s not seek to be wise by the standards of this world.

God’s blessings are good enough,
Pastor Steve

GQ’s

- List the qualities of a “carnal” man.
 - Paul uses the pictures of a building to represent the church as a structure built on Christ, and a temple to highlight the importance of the church as a place where God dwells. What kinds of things can we build on Christ in a way that will last?
- What does it mean to “glory in men”?
 - The Bible says that all things belong to us. Isn’t that a strange idea? Look back at 2:12 to see the same idea. Could this be what Jesus meant when He said that we’d “inherit the earth”? Do you think that possibly we own all things because God does, and we are His?
 - What does it mean to you that you belong to God?

**“The Scum Of The Earth”**

August 8 - 1 Corinthians 4: 1-21

What should we do when relational problems enter into our lives? We all have them, don’t we? We cannot avoid them. They have been there in the past and they will be there in the future.

We usually try to avoid conflict. Some of us boil over and explode when we’re rubbed the wrong way. And others, like Jesus, and Paul in our reading today, respond appropriately. Make no mistake; conflict is part of life. We might as well learn to deal with it as constructively as possible.

Unfortunately, we tend to deal with conflict the

way our parents did. They were our models. If you had a passive father, the chances are you will be the same. If your parents swept disagreements under the carpet and didn’t talk about them much, then chances are you also have a lumpy carpet, making it hard to walk through your home. The lumps don’t go away. We just get used to tripping over them.

Paul is dealing with relational difficulties caused by the arrogance of some of the Corinthians. The Corinthian church had relational troubles in more ways than one. Remember, we have already commented

**“To Judge Or Not To Judge”**

August 9 - 1 Corinthians 5: 1-13

that the Corinthians considered themselves a very spiritual group. Because of this, a spiritual pride began to eat away at them. When you are in a group that is competitive for spiritual supremacy, conflicts are unavoidable. Some Corinthians were even browbeating the ministry of the apostle Paul.

Paul makes love the motive and aim of problem resolution. Don't get me wrong—he still calls a spade a spade—but he makes it clear that his intention is driven by love; love for God and love for them. Most marital and relational conflicts escalate because one or both parties do not make it clear that they truly love the other person and want the best for them no matter how the disagreement goes. Usually, the couple will come to a problem with both guns blazing, and before you know it both parties are full of holes. Selfishness is the culprit in most of these battles. We want it our way and that is that. Paul, and Jesus, make it clear that they are doing what they are doing because of the love of God. Love does not seek its own; that is a virtue when it comes to getting along with others. When we are walking in love we will do all that we can do for the benefit of others.

Sometimes that may mean being firm, because you do not want your friend or loved one to go down a road that would not be spiritually healthy for them. Needless to say, that kind of love is tested when others question your motives. That was going on in Corinth. Paul considered himself the Corinthians' spiritual father. He was protective of them. He saw that imposters had entered the fellowship and were leading them down a potentially dangerous road. So Paul's motive is not only to write of his love for them, but he also wants to exhort them to do all they do out of love. Thus, the famous 1 Corinthians 13, which is quoted more often than probably any Bible chapter.

Paul addresses the arrogance of the self-proclaimed “spiritual ones” in the church. Paul appeals to God's judgment and reminds these prideful folks that it isn't right for them to judge him. God would do a good job of that Himself. He emphasizes that we are all on a level playing field, because everything we have is a gift from God. No one could claim superiority because every gift, every talent was merely a gift from above.

Paul gets a bit sarcastic when he compares their

inflated attitude to the real life hardships that he and the other apostles had to endure. The bottom line is that love is worked out in the muck and mire of day-to-day ministry to others. And it was this kind of work that won the Corinthians to Christ. He says, “Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.” I think Paul is not speaking enviously, but is pointing out that true ministry is grimy.

Timothy is on his way to Corinth to set things straight, and if the Lord wills, Paul will not be far behind. Paul again compares himself with the “arrogant,” by letting the church know that he wants to be like Jesus and not come to them with a rod of discipline. He knows that you can change others by treating them with respect and love; that is the way all of us would like to be treated.

How about you? Do you need to spend a few minutes evaluating your motives toward others?

Do you struggle with selfishness? Do your conflicts usually involve demands for your rights? Do people feel like you are coming down hard on them, and that it is hard to talk to you? Do you bury your conflicts and let things continue as they are, out of fear of facing the conflict or dealing with your own shortcomings?

If you struggle here, ask God for agape love, His love, a 1 Corinthians 13 kind of love. See if He doesn't help you to be more selfless and more concerned about the welfare of others.

“Let all that you do be done in Love.”

Rejoice in Jesus Always,
God's blessings are experienced with friends,
Pastor Steve

GQs

1. Name two verses from this chapter in which it looks like Paul's relationship is strained with the Corinthians.

- a. How does Paul describe the life of an apostle?
2. What aspects of your life are tough? What advice do you think the apostle would give you about these issues?

How's it going,
People misquote and misapply the Bible on a regular basis. I would say that I have been guilty of this from time to time myself.

Probably the most misquoted verse in the Bible is Jesus' statement in the Sermon on the Mount, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you,” (Matthew 7: 1-2).

Is Jesus saying that we should suspend judgment on any matter at any time? Is He saying that if you even dare to challenge someone's thinking, then you are being “judgmental” and breaking the command? Should we never consider whether something or someone is right or wrong? After all, that would be judgment, wouldn't it?

Do you like judgmental people? Probably not. How about discerning people who show discretion? There is a big difference, isn't there? Let's look at a few important verses from Proverbs, which, of course, Jesus knew and lived by Himself. “My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck,” (3: 21-22). “I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who lacked judgment,” (7:7). Of wisdom it is said, “Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have understanding and power,” (8:14). In Proverbs 9 the adulteress is said to take advantage of the man who lacks judgment. “The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment,” (10:21).

Obviously, Jesus was not saying that we should kick judgment out the door. So what was He saying?

Do you remember what follows Matthew 7: 1-2? Jesus says that in the course of day to day living, you should not be a big-mouth, I'm-better-than-you, you-better-get-your-act-together-or-else, I'm-glad-I'm-not-

an-idiot-like-you kind of person. Maybe another way to say it is, “Don't act like a Judge Judy wannabe.” Or, don't have a judgmental attitude. Don't look for people to put down and treat with contempt. Jesus says that in the same way you treat others, you yourself will be treated.

The antidote to this attitude is given next. Judge yourself first before you go after the next guy. Your brother may have a splinter in his eye, but you actually have a log in yours. Pull yours out first and then go humbly to your neighbor and pull on his. Jesus is talking to those, probably the Pharisees, who act holier-than-thou and put down others with their self-righteous behavior. This is sometimes demonstrated verbally, sometimes non-verbally, but the message is the same: “You need to get your act together because you are sinful. You need to be righteous like me.”

Jesus and Paul lived under the same principal: let love be your guide. Don't criticize your brother, but believe in him and build him up. If there is a glaring problem, go to him gently and in the meekness of Christ. Don't rush in like a bull in a china shop and bowl the poor guy over. Handle the problem with kid gloves, not boxing gloves. Paul said in Galatians: “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself,” (6: 1-3).

I have brought all of this up because of Paul's problem in 1 Corinthians 5. He is dealing with a moral problem in the church that needed judgment. The Corinthians were sitting on their hands and letting the situation slide. That never works, does it? Paul concludes his thoughts after making a definite judgment about the matter, saying, “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not

to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. 'Expel the wicked man from among you,'" (5:12-13).

Recently someone came to my door with a small piece of paper in her hand. It was a note from her pastor stating that there would be a forum on the subject of gay marriage, but that the pastor wanted to let the congregation know that she was pro-gay marriage. The person sitting on my couch was in somewhat of a crisis. She didn't feel like she could support the direction of her church any longer because of this viewpoint. She wanted my input because she had been at the church for years and was feeling badly about making a move. I told her that she shouldn't be so judgmental. She needed to have an open mind and simply and naively trust the direction of the pastor. Don't apply Scripture, I said. That would be narrow-minded and judgmental. Remember, Jesus said, "Judge not."

If I really said all of that stuff, you can shoot me in the eye with a Red Rider BB gun. No one in his right mind would say that. The Bible doesn't. Remember, back in Romans 1, that God said directly through Paul that homosexuality was unnatural and a sin. So we take God's Word on the matter. We stand against what God is against and we stick up for what God is for. It's not rocket science. It's obedience.

For goodness sakes, there was a man in the Corinthian church who was shacking up with his own mother. It was probably his mother-in-law, but still, come on—that stinks. Paul even says that we are to mark out sexually immoral "believers" and not hang out with them as if there was nothing wrong. Judgmental? Yes. Why? So that the sinning person will repent and turn back to God and be restored. The mo-

tive is not to express a holier-than-thou attitude but, to bring the person back. Now that's Christ-like.

Is there someone in your life who is breaking your heart because of his blatant disregard for God's Word? Do you love him enough to intervene? Let your love for others guide you, and pray that God would open a door for you to talk with them. God will be with you because He wants these believers to turn around as well.

One of my favorite verses is in II Timothy. It says, "And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will," (2: 24-26).

God's blessings require that we be "judgmental,"
Pastor Steve

GQs

1. What impact does immorality have on the Church as a whole if it is tolerated? If the church disciplines a member who is sinning, isn't that the same as being judgmental, and didn't Jesus condemn judgmentalism?
2. Why do you think people get caught in explicit sexual sin?

What would help someone who wants to get out of a lifestyle of sin but is having difficulty stopping their behavior?



"Body Language"

August 10 - 1 Corinthians 6: 1-20

We live in a sexually driven society. The depths of lust-producing media are beyond our reach. What used to be considered depraved, trashy, unreasonable, and dirty is now on prime time. And like the unwary frog in the pot, many of us are oblivious to the way the heat keeps getting turned up.

Do you have a healthy view of sexuality and your body? I know that is a very personal question, but that's Paul's subject in today's reading. I told you the Bible covers it all. Many people have grown up in the school of Hugh Hefner, creating a very warped view of the opposite sex and sex in general. As a result, we have an entire generation of people who are looking for love in all the wrong places. Many see love as a physical and emotional high that must be maintained for personal fulfillment.

This philosophy leads to the use of people for personal gratification. It is the road to egotism at its height. Love is quenched, and lust becomes the banner held high. Remember what James says, "...but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death," (1:14).

When I taught Bible at a Christian high school I used to take a couple of weeks to talk about sex at the end of the school year. I never had one absence from those classes. Kids want to talk about it; they want to understand a healthy view of sex. I asked them to write down anonymous questions beforehand so that I could address them. Believe me, there was no aspect of the subject that we didn't talk about. In the final analysis, it was God's blueprint on sex that gave the balanced perspective we all needed.

I would hold up a picture of a prune-faced old lady from an obituary and ask them what they thought this woman was like when she was young-

er. After they made guesses in the dark, I'd tell them that she was actually the first Miss America. "No way! That's weird. I don't believe it," they'd say. Then I'd read them the obituary. Sure enough, she was the first beauty queen, and now she looked like an ad for prunes. "All flesh is like grass," Jesus said. It appears so green and pretty for a while, and then overnight it dies and looks ugly. This is the truth for all men and women. By the way, even J-Lo and her friends will have the same dilemma. "All flesh..."

Paul says to use your body for the Lord and not for sexual immorality. He says your body is a temple where God's Spirit lives. He says that we are no longer our own property but God's. Therefore, we must strive to glorify God in our bodies and not give our bodies over to lustful passions.

It's also in this section of scripture that Paul describes sexual sins as more harmful than other sins because of their effect on all involved. Today we see sexually transmitted disease run amuck, as a result of people using their bodies to fulfill ego needs and not the deepest needs. He says, "All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body." In other words, you ruin the temple by letting in foreign influences that break it down and corrupt it. Remember when Hezekiah let the Babylonians look around the temple to see the treasures? It wasn't long after that the treasures were transported away to Babylon. When the enemy comes in, he steals away from us what is precious; things that we can never take back.

No matter where you've been or whom you've been with, it is never too late to begin to do the right thing. It takes a lot of resolve and partnership with the Holy Spirit to pick up the pieces and go on. But you can do it. Today is a good day to honor God with our bodies.

We will no longer use our bodies for selfish rea-

sons but for the Lord. You are one with the Lord, so dedicate every member of your body today and don't let the flesh dominate your day.

How about a couple of practical helps:

Keep the Scripture nearby so that you can be reminded of these truths.

Consider writing an apology note to anyone you dishonored, or with whom you dishonored yourself, and let that person know that you are now dedicated to doing what God wants of you.

Turn the other way very intentionally from anything immoral or tempting today, and instead celebrate your new life in Christ.

Ask God for His wisdom. He will steer you in the right direction.

Write out the sins and situations that you have stumbled upon in the past, then, as a symbol of God's forgiveness, burn it in a fire in a can or shred it or somehow destroy it.

Remember what Paul said to the Corinthians after he lists the lifestyles that exclude a person from the

kingdom of God. He said, "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God," (6: 11).

Rejoice in Jesus Always,
God's blessings support a healthy view of sex,
Pastor Steve

GQs

1. Read 6: 9-11. Why would you say that these are key verses in the New Testament?
 - a. Look up the definitions of the sins that you do not know. What would you say to someone who was practicing one of these sins with no regret or repentance?
2. Read 6: 12-20. Compare the reasons why God made you, to the reasons he did not make you. What does this section of Scripture say about our bodies?
 - a. Does 6:18 imply that sexual sin is more harmful than other sins? Why or why not?



After Reviewing...

August 11 - 1 Corinthians 7:1-16

Friends, after I reviewed my writing on 1 Cor. 7, I realized that the content may be too mature for some of my readers. So let me simply give you the Bible verses to read and you can draw your own conclusions. I do not want to skip the subject of sexuality because the Bible doesn't, but I know that there are a

few readers who should hear what I have to say from their parents.

If you are curious just email me back and I'll send it to you personally. Thank you for understanding.
Pastor Steve



"It's Good To Be Single"

August 12 - 1 Corinthians 7: 17-35

I realize that we read about singleness yesterday, but I didn't want to zip past it because I think it is such an important subject these days. Let's look for a moment at the words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes. Bear with me, and in a few moments we'll tie Solomon's thoughts together with the subject of singleness.

Solomon says, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom," (9:10). Half-hearted work won't cut it. Half-hearted prayers won't do. Half-hearted love is no love at all. Half-hearted anything isn't anything. On the other hand, those who put their hand to the plow and work hard will reap the harvest for their efforts.

When I was growing up, my grandparents had an eight-acre walnut farm. I think there were only a little over 100 trees on the farm, but to me it seemed like a pretty big place. Whether we were irrigating, pruning, dragging the field, harvesting, or shelling nuts, life was busy on the farm; but if you worked hard a hot shower awaited you when you were done. I learned what a hard day's work meant working with grandpa and grandma.

It is easy to begin a task well, and quite another thing to finish it the same way. Some people see themselves as initiators, and others as finishers. Even if you think of yourself as the former, there is something to be said for seeing a task through to the end. Once you have accomplished your goal you can revel in your accomplishment and take pride in your work. What work have you done that you take pride in? Do you have to think back for awhile to remember something you enjoyed completing? Is it difficult for you to work with all of your might because your motivation has been waning recently? Take this Bible verse and apply it to your work. Put your hand to your tasks and

do it with all of your strength.

OK, let's take a look at singleness. Strength and singleness go together. Paul says that if you are single, you will have more strength to spend on doing the Lord's work. Compare that to the married person, who is distracted because he is devoted to the protection and welfare of his family. Paul even says that marriage will bring troubles.

At a wedding I recently attended the best man got up at the reception to encourage the bride and groom. He said that some people say you have to work on your relationship, but he thought that marriage was just fun. He said that he was an expert because he had been married a whole year. A friend and I, both of whom have been married for decades longer, laughed about that one all the way home.

I think singles get a bum rap today. Singleness is the gift of God, but our society makes the single person feel weird. From the time a kid reaches puberty they are made to feel out of place if they are not hooked up with someone. The "cool" kids are matched up with the other "cool" kids. If you are not matched up, then you are waiting to be. There is no encouragement to enjoy singleness and the benefits that go along with it.

The Bible says that singleness is a good thing. Paul says not to seek a wife if you are single. You are to let the Lord present your mate to you, if that is His will for you. So think about what Solomon just said about your strength, and match that with Paul's thoughts about singleness. While you are single, take the opportunity to use the time, treasure and talents you have for the Lord's work. Seek the Lord. Get to know Him and spend time in the Word of God. You will never regret giving your time to God. He is the one who loves you the most and has a plan for your life.

So many people try to find meaning in a relationship with the opposite sex, and later on they regret

it. Remember, it was the foreign women who led Solomon's heart away from the Lord. I'm sure he had a number of good times, but what did that matter if he ended up miles away from his Creator? Life like that would be meaningless; striving for the wind; it would be vain.

If you believe the guy at my friend's wedding, you will be in for a world of hurt later on. I hope he's prepared for the trials to come in his marriage. They will come. They will pull him away from his Maker and he will wonder why he ever got married. Marriage can pull you away from the greatest source of strength you could find. "God is our refuge and strength..." (Psalm 46:1).

Are you single? Maybe never married, or widowed or divorced? Use the time you have profitably before you think about marriage. Some of God's greatest warriors have been single, like Paul for example; Corrie Ten Boom was single, and so was C.S. Lewis for most of his life.

To practice these Bible verses will require faith. Most people believe that they could not survive without a partner. Some have not been single since the 5th grade. They don't even know how to act as a

single.

A single's prayer: "God, thank you for the gift of singleness. I trust that you have my future in your hand. Use me in your service and I will encourage others in the Body of Christ. Thank you for making me just the way I am and thanks for loving me too. I love knowing that you have my life in your hands."

God's Blessings are for singles as well as marrieds,

Pastor Steve

GQs

1. Paul indicates that he and his contemporaries were living in tough times, which would make it better not to take on a wife and have kids if they could be self-disciplined in that way. What would you guess was going on?

a. The Bible is straight about how difficult marriage can be.

Why do you think so many today get married and yet do not even consider that they will have problems later on?

situation of weakness to a position of strength? Doesn't it take experience and training to grow? Should a veteran expect a new recruit to be able to perform at the same level as someone who has been around for a long time?

When a person becomes a child of God, he goes through a process of growth that will take a lifetime. During that journey he will face many ups and downs and he will go through a series of changes in his grasp on how to live the Christian life. Just when he thinks he has a handle on things, his grip will weaken and he will feel like he never knew what he thought was so certain. Sometimes he will believe he has the walk of faith mastered, until he faces another situation that tests his ability to apply what he knows from his devotion to Jesus.

Fortunately, as he continues in the Word and gets older in the Lord, his confidence will grow and he will not waver so much in his convictions about the right thing to do. He will grow to accept his own weaknesses and will give and receive forgiveness more freely. Nevertheless, as he grows a new temptation will test his patience. He will have trouble putting up with the foibles of newer believers.

Usually, the more a person learns about God from His Word, he gains more distance from the issues that used to weigh him down. He becomes lighter because he realizes all of the ways in which Christ has set him free. This knowledge, though, is not as clear to some and so they develop scruples which become important to their way of life. The problem is that these scruples become their measuring stick for determining how they are doing spiritually. So if they see other believers doing the things that they have determined are prohibited, they may try, against their conscience, to do these things as well. Then they end up with a guilty conscience.

Unfortunately, this has caused some division in the church. The reason for this is that those with more knowledge of Christian liberty have looked down on those with less knowledge about it. In the early church it was the issue of the meat you ate. Meat that was sold in the market may have come from an animal that had been offered to an idol. It also sounds like Paul is saying that some believers thought nothing of going to an idol's temple for a good steak. To others,

this meat was forbidden food. To the first group, including Paul, it didn't really matter because meat was meat and the offering of it to an idol did not pollute it. But if another believer saw this differently, Paul taught that we ought to be sensitive to the scruples of the "weaker" brother whose conscience was bothered by the idolatry associated with the steak.

In the church today people are scrupulous about a variety of things: what kind of music should be listened to, what politician you should vote for, what translation of the Bible you should read, how often you should attend church, which people you should or shouldn't hang out with, what you drink or what you smoke, or whether your drink or smoke at all. Look around and you'll see as many styles of Christian practice as there are groups of Christians.

Paul's point is that love is the guiding principle, no matter how much liberty you have as a more mature Christian. We ought to keep our brothers and sisters in mind and make sure that we do not give another child of God reason to defile his weak conscience. Love is the greatest rule, and is even greater than liberty. He says that knowledge makes you proud and boastful. He doesn't mean here book knowledge, but knowledge of Christian liberty. You may have a freer conscience but that does not give you the liberty to ram-rod someone else who struggles with an area that is no big deal to you.

Let me go out on a limb and talk about an issue that has come up among several brothers with whom I fellowship regularly. Within about a four-month span, four separate guys told me about their struggle with chewing tobacco. Each of them was attempting to break the habit.

What if I took their desire lightly and told them they were silly for worrying about it? What if I pulled out a can of Copenhagen and put a pinch between my cheek and gum? And what if then I began to enjoy the soothing taste and spat a couple of times on the ground to remind them of the pleasure of the whole experience? What if I offered them a snuff and held out the open can so that they were just arms' length from the very thing that they had felt bound by for so long? Well, simply put, I would not be walking in love.

Of course I'm not advocating the use of tobacco, nor would I encourage someone to spend their lunch



"Smarty Pants"

August 13 - 1 Corinthians 7: 36 - 8:13

Let's All Walk in Love, Have you grown up with misconceptions? I think all of us have to some degree. Here are a few common ones:

- God will love you more the more you are in church
- If you have a guilty conscience it means you are far from God
- You can balance the scales of your sin by doing good works

- If you are busy for God you are automatically right with God
- If you associate with godless people, God will look down on you
- If I can't get the victory over a certain sin it means I must not really be a Christian

How does a rookie become a veteran? How does an apprentice become a journeyman? How does a boy become a man? How does a person go from a po-

hour at the bar. But if a person could do these things with a clear conscience, then he ought not to flaunt his liberty in front of someone who has a weaker conscience. This other person might stumble because he sees you doing the very thing that would stain his conscience if he were to do it. The rule is love. If you should give up one of your liberties for the sake of another, then your sacrifice will be well worth it.

It is too easy to get wrapped up in our Christian ethics, the way we live our Christian lives, and think only of how our actions affect ourselves. What we need to consider is how our behaviors affect those who are just beginning their service for Christ.

Someone might ask how new believers will grow if they continue to lean on their scruples rather than the Word of God. The answer is experience in the

Word of God. The more people realize what the Bible says about who they are in Christ, the more they will escape the tyranny of man made rules and regulations. They will follow God's law of liberty and not get caught up in the legalistic patterns that others foist upon them.

When we get to Galatians we will deal with this issue head-on. In the meantime, we ought to be careful how we walk, making the most of the time we have, not being swayed back and forth by issues that we could easily give up for the sake of a weaker brother.

God's blessings come in measure throughout our lives,

Pastor Steve



“Err On The Side Of People”

August 14 - 1 Corinthians 9: 1-18

A few years ago I buried a good friend of mine named Coolidge. With a name like that, you can probably tell that he was up there in age. He was in his 80s somewhere. Some people called him Cool, and he was cool. He was always a kick to be around, could make you grin from ear to ear, and looked at you with the kindest eyes. I really loved Coolidge.

After Coolidge died his family and I gathered at the mortuary to talk about the man. Some of his kids, grandkids and friends were there. The conversation really took off. First one person reflected on his life and then another. It was so easy to talk about him, even as he lay in his casket 40 feet from us, because he had had such a great impact on this circle of mourners.

One of the grandkids talked about the old doors of the house where their grandfather lived, a wood

door and screen door, which led into the modest home on Ninth Avenue. He said that these doors represented so much to him; any time he needed to, he could walk right through those unlocked doors into the safety of grandma (who died a few years earlier) and grandpa's home. There he would find complete acceptance and a place to recoup from the pressures of life. There he found love and a listening ear. Coolidge's place was a very good place.

Then somebody said something that became the theme of my memorial message. He said that Coolidge always erred on the side of people. Like a brick between the eyes, that statement really hit me. He erred on the side of people. Things were not as important to Coolidge as people. He was the kind of guy who'd go into town and see four people he knew and make two new friends. It was just so easy for him to make a new acquaintance.

This is what Paul has been getting at in the Corinthian letter. He is telling them to err on the side of people. Make people more important than your spiritual gifts or your money or your foibles. Make people your number one priority. People are important to God and they should be important to us as well. People also require us to take the focus off of the person in the mirror and begin to reach the other guy right where he is.

Paul too erred on the side of people. He had brought the good news to Corinth and he felt responsible for the progress of the church. Well, this particular group of people had problems. They had spiritual problems (Chapters 1 and 2 make this clear), they had moral problems (in Chapter 5 Paul has to lower the boom on a particular moral dilemma) and they had ethical problems (Chapter 6 deals with a legal matter that the apostle needed to correct). Boy, and you think you have it tough at work. The work of an apostle was never done. Later, in the second letter to them, Paul talks about having or carrying a daily burden for the church. Paul loved the people.

All of Paul's writings are full of references to people who were important to him. He was a man who believed in people and needed people. And so his writings are for the people and are intended to encourage them. He wanted them to grow in the grace of Jesus more than anything. He wanted them to continue on in the work of spreading the good news to others.

Because of Paul's love for people and the gospel he did not want anyone to say that he was doing what he was doing out of some inferior motive. If someone came along and accused him of being in it for the

money, they may have discredited his connection to the very people he loved. And as a matter of fact, this actually did happen. Some men came in and began to malign Paul's intent. Paul always had an answer though, because the truth was that he was in it for the Lord and for the people and not for personal gain. Even when he could have asserted his apostolic authority and demanded money for his work in the Lord, he would just go about his business of making tents in order to provide for his daily necessities. He did not want the gospel to be rejected because of something he did that might be perceived as self-serving.

Let's face it, when most of us first heard the gospel we were asking what was in it for us. And there was a great deal in it for us, wasn't there? But as we grew we realized that it wasn't just for us but for others as well. This knowledge heightened our awareness of the needs of others. In a few chapters Paul will begin to teach about spiritual gifts. He points out that the gifts are to be used not for selfish purposes but for the building up of others. The individual gifts only highlight the truth that we are all part of one spiritual body in Christ, and that each role is important no matter who you are. Your place in the Body of Christ is for the good of others, and it may from time to time require sacrifice. Therefore, if one member suffers, we all hurt; if one member is happy, we are all happy.

Listen to people.

Put others ahead of your own interests.

Give to others of your time, talent and treasure.

Build someone up today.

Service for Christ is spelled O-T-H-E-R-S

God's blessings flow through you to others,

Pastor Steve

**“Stand Up”**

August 15 - 1 Corinthians 9:19-10:13

Do you learn from the mistakes of others? For some reason it is so difficult to learn from someone else's failures. We usually have to feel the pain ourselves before we decide to give up what is bringing us down. Remember in Romans, how God warns us not to become conceited about the faith we have in Him? He knows our hearts, and our propensity to go our own way and fall. Here in I Corinthians Paul says, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall."

The reason the Romans used crucifixion was to teach others not to do what "that person" did. It's my understanding that even if the convicted people died at the stake from the beating, they would still nail them to a cross and display them before all. Why did the Jewish brass want the Romans to punish Jesus? They wanted him publicly humiliated. They wanted all men to know that He was a nothing and a religious imposter. The Jewish mode of capital punishment was stoning, a practice they wouldn't do at the time of Passover, which was the time of Jesus' execution. Sometimes people are punished unfairly.

We have already established that Christ's cross was no accident. Actually, it was His humiliation that paved the way for our eternal life. The cross is the bridge between sinful man and a perfect God who is holy in every way. Despite the fact that we have forgiveness for all our sins, it's still good to avoid going down the sinful road when we can. We can look back on history and learn from the evil that brought them down. God says, "Don't do it that way; look what it did to them and how it destroyed their lives." "Don't play with fire or you will be burned." "Don't play with immorality or you will pay the consequences." "Learn from those who have fallen and don't go down the same pathway or you will experience the same grief that followed their folly."

God loves us, and warns us against what will kill

us. He is a good Father who says to His kids, "Don't play in the street or you will get hit by a car. Don't play with razor blades or you will be cut. Don't throw mud or you will injure your neighbor." He is a good Father. In Paul's words, "And God is faithful." He Fathers us, as a good daddy would. He is not a neglectful parent who lets his kids go any which way they want; rather, He steps in, corrects us, and helps us back on to the good way.

I Corinthians 10:13 is a wonderful verse, very helpful, and will come in handy as you need it from time to time. Let's take a look at it and try to apply it to our lives.

First of all, temptations are no respecter of persons. Some people fret about the kinds of weird temptations that pull on them. They think that they must be the only person on the planet who thinks like they do. But that isn't true at all. Temptations come in all shapes and sizes. They are arrows in the enemy's quiver to turn us away from the Lord and from living a Spirit-filled life.

Then, God promises us that there will be a way for us to face each and every temptation. Sometimes temptations seem insurmountable. Have you ever heard yourself say, "I just couldn't help myself?" I have heard people say things like, "My mind was set on doing it; there was nothing I could do." This is one of the enemy's greatest schemes. It is like a flaming missile that hits us unaware and derails us from standing in the Lord. God promises that there is a way out. He will provide it so that you can stand up under the pressure of the temptation.

I encourage you not to be hasty. The book of Proverbs is chalked full of verses that emphasize the importance of not running swiftly to do evil. Too often, we get into temptation's tangled web because we have run fast and hard into it. Then pray. Pray short sincere prayers, crying out to God and pouring out

your soul to the One who has promised to help you when you are tempted. This verse we are looking at seems to imply that with God's help you will find the patience to deal with the upsetting circumstances of your temptation.

There is a way out. If you are dealing with a moral issue, make sure to not throw yourself into a situation where you will be like a sheep led to slaughter. If you are a former alcoholic, you cannot hang out down at the Watering Hole. If you are a former kleptomaniac, you cannot isolate yourself from a friend or small

group that can keep you accountable. If you are drawn to Internet porn, you cannot afford to keep your Internet server—shut it down!

God is with us and He will help us to deal with tough situations where we don't immediately see a way out. God promises that there will be one, so hang in there and He will direct you in the "paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

God's blessings give us strength,
Pastor Steve

**“Whatever You Do”**

August 16 - 1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1

Are you looking for a motto to live by? Would you like a rule of thumb, a paradigm, a litmus test for any and every situation you may be in? In our reading today we have a fine one. This nugget of wisdom is a good guide for life. It will carry you through some deep water and lead you to the celestial city.

I need easy-to-remember statements or ideas so that I can recall them when I need them. I forget much too easily. How about you? Are you thinking all of the time, so that you consider things before you speak or act? Or, are you like me and so quickly forget the very jewel of truth that you were so proud of just the day before? Over the past 40 years, I've only heard a handful of sermons that I can still recall the content of. The truth is that we retain very little of what we hear. Usually what we read has a bigger impact on us than what we hear. What we write down seems to stick even better. But what we do is the thing that turns into a habit and then to a destiny.

We learn from doing. That's why James reminds us to be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding ourselves. What we do will eventually impact

who we are and whom we will influence.

Remember that Paul is always mindful of the way we treat one another. He wants us to love one another because that is the will of God for us. That means that we will have to work through situations where there are disagreements.

Some people are surprised to find, after they have read the New Testament for a while, that there were such difficult times in Bible days. I have heard people say that they would like their church to be a first century type church. Oh, yeah? Well, many of the early churches dealt with some pretty serious disputes and divisions. This was true in Corinth where there was much pride and a history of paganism. Some people felt like they could eat meat that had been offered to idols; they would pray beforehand and then dig in. But there were others who just could not do this. Their conscience bugged them when they did. So if they followed their brothers and sisters with the stronger consciences, they were led into a situation where they felt like they had let the Lord down by eating that food. Paul says that it would be better to simply not eat the meat if you knew that you would be

jeopardizing the feelings of a brother or sister.

So here's the maxim: "So whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (10:31).

I can simply ask myself: Is what I am doing for the honor of God, or am I being selfish again? Would I be proud to do this thing before God and for God, or am I uncertain whether it would be a good thing or not? If in doubt, wait. Make sure before you venture off into something that may harm someone else's conscience or even your own.

Let's live for the reasons God made us to live. One of those reasons is to glorify God. Compare this with the child who wants to honor his father by living in such a way that he knows his father would be pleased. There is such a respect there that he is moved to

think about his decisions based on whether or not his actions would glorify the father.

Does this work for you?

Take it and run with it. How could you go wrong by making God's glory a priority in all of your decisions? I don't think you can.

And keep in mind that God's glory is for us to treat other believers with the kind of respect God has given to us through the sacrifice of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let God's glory lead you in the way you think about all things.

Rejoice in Jesus Always,

God's blessings are carried out in the Name of the Lord,
Pastor Steve



"Submission"

August 17 - 1 Corinthians 11:2-34

Let's focus today on one of the more cryptic sections of Scripture.

I want to do this in order to shed some light on what could be a very confusing passage for some. Let's face it, in our day and age when haircuts are so diverse for boys and girls and we do not have the traditions that indicated some important things in the first century, it is hard to see how this discussion about hair and head coverings applies to us.

It applies because what we're really talking about here is authority. It's about knowing your role. I think we get into more trouble than is necessary because we either don't know our place or we have forgotten it.

There are people who have authority over me. When I act as if I am unaccountable to anyone, I put myself in a precarious position. Think about people

who break the law every day, and when they are caught, they make excuses for their behavior rather than admitting the truth, in the hope that they might hear a warning and get out of the predicament. These people just can't admit that the law has authority over them and they are accountable if they've broken it.

The roles of husband and wife are also sometimes confused, and result is chaos. When the wife is leading the family and the dad is passive, the kids will often take advantage of the lack of authority in the home. The kids learn to play the parents against each other so that they can get their own way.

There is rebellion at every level of authority conceivable. There is rebellion against government, administrators, teachers, church leaders, job bosses, automobile drivers, police officers, guardians, etc. Challenging authority is acceptable today in many cir-

cles. I remember one bumper sticker that said "Question Authority." I guess that's OK, but it's the attitude behind it that really is the crux of the matter. If I take an autonomous, don't-tell-me-what-to-do attitude, then I am in rebellion against the authority God has placed in my life.

Why does authority exist? Paul told Timothy to pray for those in authority so that we could lead a peaceful life. Authority is God's protection mechanism against the tendency of man to seek anarchy, essentially to go his own way. This is so clear when there is a riot. I have lived in cities near a few riots in my lifetime. Each time, stores were smashed with rocks and bricks and make-shift bombs, and citizens then looted them. They thought that it was "OK" to steal because there was no authority in the store to get them into trouble. No authority translates to chaos.

Authority is Paul's point in chapter 11. He begins by giving a chain of authority: God - Christ - Man - Woman. He includes Christ because he wants to remind us that Jesus is our role model, Who submitted wholeheartedly to His Father's will. If the man is submitted to Christ he becomes a good leader for the woman, who was created from the man.

For a Christian wife In Paul's day, the practice of head covering was an indication of submission to God and your husband and the leadership of the church. I have heard some teach that it was the prostitutes who didn't wear a head covering. If that is true, it would give even more emphasis to Paul's teaching here. What Paul is saying is that all of us need to be in our God-ordained position of submission to the authority God has placed over us. Verse 11 is a key verse here: "In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God."

This is the main issue here—submission to God. For example, if I believe God sets up government then I will pay my taxes (see Romans 13 again). All authority is from God. To rebel against authority is to rebel against God. Are there exceptions? Yes. If government is asking you to disobey God, whom do you choose to obey? God. A situation like this came up in the early days recorded in Acts. Peter and his companions were

hauled before the authorities and were asked to stop speaking about Jesus. Peter said that it was more important to obey God than man. Then he went right on telling people about the Savior.

There is a verse in this section that I am not sure about. It's verse 10, where he mentions the angels along with the need for the woman to wear a head covering. Why the angels? I don't know, but it probably has something to do with _____; yes, you got it, authority.

2 Chronicles 7:14 talks about humbling ourselves before God so that He would heal our land. If you have been rebellious against God, your life will sooner or later self-destruct. Remember, we were made to run on God. In this famous verse, used by dignitaries and clergymen alike, God invites us to humble ourselves and turn to Him. If we do, He will hear us and heal us of our dislocated souls, weighted down by rebellious behavior. The verse is for the nation as a whole, but it certainly applies to us individually too.

I often think about the Lord's prayer, where Jesus told us to pray "give us this day our daily bread." In affluent America, how many Christians sincerely pray that prayer? Safeway or Roth's or Albertson's is right down the street. Why do I need to pray this prayer? But think about it. "Everything comes from God," and we need to acknowledge that every day.

It is an acknowledgement of God's authority when we acknowledge that all things come from Him. That means the 7-layer burrito I just bought at Taco Bell. God has blessed me with the money to buy that food.

How do you do with authority?

Do you have a rebellious spirit?

Do you tend to demand your way?

Do you find it hard to submit to those above you?

Do you talk about those over you when you are behind their backs?

Grab a head covering and be reminded that God has an order of authority that is for our good and will ultimately help us to submit to Him.

Rejoice in Jesus always,

God's blessings are under God's authority,
Pastor Steve



“Spiritual Gifts”

August 18 - 1 Corinthians 12: 1-36

There are a few basic principles about spiritual gifts that will help us to put into practice what God has designed for each one of us in Christ.

First of all, you have to believe that God has given you a spiritual gift. Some of us just can't believe that we would be gifted at all, let alone by God in some unique way. This is God's promise to us; He has given us a gift for His own purpose, and when we exercise our gift we will feel God's pleasure. Some don't believe they have a gift because theirs is in such an infant form; when they try to do it, they do not feel, right away, that they are really gifted.

Believe me, I know how this feels. I have never been a natural at anything. Anything I have excelled at, I have had to work at non-stop. I was slow in school and in sports. I had a good amount of drive but didn't feel like growth came quick. I admit it; I envied my friends who could pick something up and do well at it.

One example is golf. I worked my tail off to get good at it. I mean, I practiced seven days a week. By my senior year I was the No. 1 golfer on the team and was averaging a pretty low score. Then my friend came along. He had not ever picked up a club until his junior year, but he was a natural. He looked like he'd been playing golf for years. I could still beat him, but it took a Herculean effort to do it. I thought it was so unfair that I had to work so hard and he could make it look like a walk in the park.

I think that now I do not expect things to come my way so easily. If I don't see results right away, I don't tend to panic. When it comes to spiritual gifts, some give up too soon because they do not stick with an area of ministry long enough. Therefore, the first principle is: believe you have a gift and don't give up on your ministry too soon.

Second, know the purpose of all gifts. Paul says, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” Our gift is designed by God

to build up the church. So I need to be involved with a group of people who believe in the gifts as well. We need, together, to allow one another to reach out and touch all of the members. Are you involved with other believers who appreciate the spiritual gifts God has given to the church? Are you allowed opportunities to exercise different gifts so that you can identify which one is your special gift?

Let's make a couple of comments about the gifts listed here in I Corinthians 12.

The message of wisdom. You are able to give timely advice in matters that are facing your brothers and sisters in Christ.

The message of knowledge. You are thirsty to know God's word and communicate with others who want to know what God's will is for them.

Faith. You are consistently stepping out to follow the Lord in ways that require a risk.

Healing. You have a desire to pray for the sick. You look forward to praying for them because you have seen God work through your prayers.

Miraculous powers. God is working through you to do extraordinary things, like helping to change people's lives or hold back the forces of evil.

Prophecy. You want to declare God's Word. You look for opportunities to share God's Word with people in your life.

Distinguishing between spirits. You can quickly smell a rotten egg when it comes to knowing whether someone is right or wrong. You just know that “something ain't right here.”

Tongues. In believer's meetings you are able to speak in an unknown tongue to God in praise and thanksgiving.

Interpretation of tongues. The ability to know what the tongue speaker is saying to God. The interpretation delights everyone because of the joy of making God smile.

There are other gifts listed in Romans 12. It is important to note that the Corinthians, not unlike many fellowships in our day, were making too much of the more “flashy” gifts like tongues and their interpretation. Paul will correct them in chapter 14. When we get there I'll make a few comments. But remember, the gifts are not for personal gain; they are for the benefit of all. When a person highlights his gift to glorify himself, he is misusing what God intended for His own glory.

Paul goes on to emphasize that each and every member in the church is necessary. You and I are necessary. You are an important part of the Body of Christ. Jesus needs you to do your gift for the building up of His church. You will do your part and others will do their parts and the result is an orchestration of the Holy Spirit that glorifies Jesus. As a matter of fact, he says that those in the church who appear to be

less necessary are actually the ones who need to be encouraged and spurred on. They are to be honored as an important part of the church.

My prayer is that you will take your gift seriously. Pray about it and then step out in faith and grow your gift. God will give you the grace to move forward in the area in which He has gifted you.

By the way, God will sometimes give more than one gift. Or, He'll use a combination of gifts to accomplish His will. But the place for you to begin is with the area that interests you. Maybe it seems like God may be nudging you in a particular direction. Go for it! Get involved in the church and the ministry of small groups and a network of other believers. Or, maybe you will be able to use your gift at work. Wherever you are able to use your gift, don't hold back.

God's blessings bring gifts,
Pastor Steve



“Agape”

August 19 - 1 Corinthians 12:27 - 13:13

Warm Greetings,

“God is love.” He is also the author of love. To know love in its truest form is to know God. The Apostle John writes much about this in his short letters tucked in at the end of the New Testament. John said, “He who loves is born of God and knows God.” A few decades ago I was awestruck by the love of God. I thought I had experienced love, and then I was face to face with the love of God in Christ and learned what it truly meant.

Jesus even talked about this to his disciples when He said, “No greater love has a man than this, that he lays down his life for his friends,” (John 15:13). True love is sacrificial. True love goes the distance and pays the ultimate price for its object. “For God so loved the world that He gave...” How did He give? He gave Jesus,

who was raised up upon the cross. If you look closely at the context of John 3:16 you will see that God's love is connected to Christ's gruesome death.

Love was what the Corinthians needed desperately. They were breaking every rule of love. And so, like a lighthouse that towers above a cove to give light for the boats at sea, the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians shines out in this epistle of Paul. Its light gives direction and warning and help in all kinds of weather. It sheds light on the direction any church should go. Love, after all, is the main thing.

Paul makes it clear that you can be anybody; you can have great charisma and or have lots of stuff or even be a martyr, but if you don't have God's agape (the Greek word used here for love), then you are a nothing. That's a slap in the face for someone who is

a big shot. That's a cup of cold water in the face of a self-made man. That's a bummer for the religious man who is boastful about his knowledge but gives little consideration to others.

1 Corinthians 13 shines its bright searchlight on all of us and asks us what really motivates us to do what we do. For Jesus, and for Paul, love was the motivation. Jesus loved me and... Paul loved the church and people and...

Why do you do what you do? That's a loaded question, isn't it?

Do you feel like answering it today? If not, I don't blame you.

That spotlight is bright. Why? It usually shows just how selfish we truly are.

I admit that way too often I am driven by self-absorption. Selfishness is all too often nearby, pushing me along. Only by God's grace am I able to practice the qualities of love described in chapter 13.

By the way, the gifts of the Spirit need to be practiced in the love of the Spirit. We need God's love when we are using our gift. When you are full of love, you will exercise your gift for the right motive. You will want to build up others and encourage them.

Love is patient. I can put up with the idiosyncrasies of others because I love them. This means loving even the unlovely.

Love is kind. I can be nice to others because they are made in God's image and they need someone to encourage them.

Love envies not. I can let others succeed because I want their best. I do not need to be absorbed in my "wants."

Love boasts not. I can let those who love me say nice things about my accomplishments. I need not blow my own whistle.

Love's not proud. I can be full of Christ because I have enthroned Him in my heart. Self-promotion is valueless.

Love's not rude. I can consider the feelings of others and not draw unwarranted attention to myself. Others first.

Love's not self-seeking. I can be part of the church where we seek to promote Christ and build up one another. Christ, not self

Love's not easily angered. I can respond instead of react because I can believe that God is working somehow. Think, then act.

Love keeps no record of wrongs. I can forgive others because Christ forgave me. I am not a prosecutor looking to make others look bad.

Love delights not in evil. I can take a stand against those things that will hurt others. I will not join the crowd down sin's alley.

Love rejoices with the truth. I can make God's Word the object of my delight and not listen to contrary voices. I choose truth, I want love.

Love always protects. I can treat the feelings, opinions and circumstances of others with kid gloves.

Love always trusts. I can be a team player because Christ is the head of it all and trusting Him enables me to put trust in others.

Love always hopes. I can be flexible when the winds of change come into my life. My hope is in an unchanging God.

Love always perseveres. I can go to the finish because the love of Christ constrains me to keep on keeping on.

Love never fails. I can win in life because love will always prevail.

I can't go wrong if love is my driving force.

Love in Christ.

God's blessings flow from His agape love,

Pastor Steve



"I Speak In Tongues More Than All Of You"

August 20 - 1 Corinthians 14: 1-40

"Tongues: A Stickler Divine Gift"

August 21 - 1 Corinthians 14: 1-40

May You be Warmed Today with God's Love, Let's summarize before we get started:
1. Main purpose of this chapter: Building up other believers and not confusing unbelievers is paramount (Build Up: verses 3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 24, 25, 26, 31, 40; Reaching Unbelievers: 17, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28).

2. Spiritual gifts are under the control of the gifted person and should be used in a Spirit-led way.

3. Ministry in the church should be practiced in an understandable way, not with confusion, and when the tongues gift is used in the church assembly there must be a person handy with the spiritual gift of interpretation of tongues.

4. Tongues is a way to worship God. On the day of Pentecost the general public heard the disciples speaking in their own dialects and praising God. In the church, a person can give thanks in a mysterious language that can be understood only by a person with the gift of interpreting tongues.

5. It appears that Paul and others with the gift did benefit from its use in their private devotional lives. So there was a distinction between the use of the gift in public and its use in private.

Spiritual gifts in the church can certainly be misused. They were being exploited in the church at Corinth in Paul's day. They were being used for show, not to build up the body of Christ. It's quite possible that certain personalities in the church were highlighting their own ability to speak in another tongue, most likely an unintelligible one, which could only be understood by God unless made known through the spiritual gift of interpretation.

This same practice continues on in certain sectors of the church today. Some churches have even gone so far as to say that a person is not as spiritual if they do not speak in tongues. Of course, Jesus said that servanthood was the mark of the most spiritual, but these zealots blow their trumpet for the tongues gift as if it signified whether or not a person was close to God or not.

In my wife's grandfather's church they would not allow him to be a leader because he did not have the gift of tongues. He was probably the most spiritual man in the assembly, but because he did not utter words unknown to man he was excluded from this privilege.

It is no coincidence that 1 Corinthians 13 precedes this chapter on the ins and outs of the tongues gift. It had become such an issue in the church that the apostle needed to set the record straight about its proper use. He says that in all we do as believers, love is the greatest good. This love of God is also to be applied to the gifts in operation in the fellowships. If a gift is causing rivalry and egotism, it needs to be tempered so that the others in the church will be lifted up. The gifts are not intended for self-glorification. If God has given you the gift of tongues, He expects you to use it in a Christ-honoring way.

Paul's other concern is that the Corinthians would become a bad testimony to any unbelievers who were checking out the gospel. These seekers would think the church was full of crazy people if they made a bunch of noise that could not be understood. It would be better, Paul asserts, to speak a few words that

could be understood than thousands of words that had no meaning to the hearers. This led to his point that all things needed to be done in an orderly way, so that visitors could hear the Word, be convicted of their sin, and turn to the Lord.

Also, on top of the tongues problem, it is apparent that some of the ladies were taking a leadership role and asserting their authority over the men. Paul says that is not the way to go about business in the church. The leaders—the men with a mature and growing faith—were to be the ones directing the use

of the gifts in the church service.

Paul concludes with an emphasis on prophecy (or the declaration of the Word of God), but says that tongues should not be neglected as long as it is practiced in a Spirit-controlled way.

Remember, love, not self-glorification, is to be the rule of our lives; and order, not chaos, is to be the rule of the worship service.

God's blessings are experienced in an orderly way,

Pastor Steve



“Another Hallmark Chapter”

August 22 , 23 - 1 Corinthians 15: 1-49

Greetings in the Name of Jesus Christ, Is what we believe important? You better believe it! You and I will be shaped by what we believe. If truth is our passion, then we will grow into the image of the one who is the Truth (John 14:6). If we sink into error, we must try and keep a belief system built on shifting sand from wobbling.

To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free,” (John 8: 31-32).

Truth matters. Truth is not some cold and hard set of facts one must learn to impress the Sunday School teacher; truth is alive and active and life-changing. It reaches to the core of who a person is, and changes them from the inside out. Truth is not a list of dos and don'ts, but a treasure to be grasped and explored and valued all of our lives.

Let's pray: “Lord, like the Psalmist's prayer, let your Word be a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I want to know gospel grace like Paul did, and I want it to have an impact on my life. Make me come alive today, O God, so that I might behold wonderful

things from your law. Thank you for the peace I have when I am in your Word. Help me to understand it and grow in it as I read and think about it. Keep me from distractions that would derail me from my purpose to know You and Your Word. In Jesus' Name, Amen.”

The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the garden tomb in Jerusalem is the bedrock belief and claim of Christianity. Without the empty tomb there is no basis for faith in Jesus. You might believe Jesus was a good man, or even a prophet, or that He had God-like qualities, but if you do not believe in the resurrection then you have no basis for believing anything Jesus said. Why? Because Jesus, it is reported by those who walked with him, said that He would be raised from the dead three days after His gruesome death on the cross. If Jesus did not rise from the dead then all of His claims come under suspicion. Good men do not lie. True prophets are not incorrect in their predictions. It would not be God-like to say one thing and do the opposite.

Is it difficult for you to believe in a bodily resurrection? Obviously, for some in Corinth it was. But when

Paul answers their doubts, I can't help but consider what a powerful argument for the resurrection he makes. Paul says that there were hundreds of eye-witnesses. Hundreds. Just ask them—they saw Jesus alive from the dead. Some heard Him or talked with Him. I'm sure others just stared with an awkward look on their faces. Then Paul says that he himself saw and talked with the risen Jesus. Can you believe Paul? Remember, he was an ardent Jesus-hater until he met the Savior on the road to Damascus that high noon day. What would compel Paul to embrace Jesus and face the wrath of his contemporaries unless Jesus was truly alive and working in his life?

Ever since I heard of the resurrection of Jesus I have been intrigued. Why was I so interested? Because I also believed God was working in my life. Someone took a real interest in me getting to know God. I appreciated that effort, but it was more than that; it was like God was wooing me, pulling me to Himself, and in endearing terms letting me know that I was special to Him.

And I found myself saying, “Me? Are you sure God? I'm the most self-absorbed person I know. Why are you doing this?”

And the answer came, “Grace.”

“Well, I don't understand that, but I'm sure willing to learn,” I responded.

So I believed in a resurrection, but was still in a state of shock because of the hugeness of it all. As a kid and young teen, I just assumed that if there was a God He was a mystery and couldn't be known in any way. Boy, was I wrong!

The resurrection, to me, is one of two hallmark truths of the Christian faith. The cross establishes the fact that God loves us, and the resurrection that He is alive and at work in our lives.

Paul also says that the resurrection of Christ is our hope for resurrection. Simply put, if Christ isn't raised, then our hope for resurrection is spoiled. We might as well just party then, because this life and the hope for a life after death is meaningless. He reasons that if we only hope in Christ during this life, without the prospect of a future blissful life, then what is the use of putting up with all of the troubles here? Essentially, he's saying that all we do for Christ now is in the hope of a new resurrection body later on. Otherwise,

we would really be no better off than anyone else.

Another issue that comes up here, for whatever reason, is that some Corinthians were baptizing for the dead. Paul had already discussed baptism at the onset of the book and downplayed it in proportion to the message of the gospel. So here, he is by no means advocating baptism for the dead. He just puts it to them so that they will see the futility of not believing in resurrection. It does surprise me that Paul does not come back to the subject of baptism for the dead, but then again why should he? He downplays baptism anyway, and would not give a practice like this the value of his ink on parchment. He had more important fish to fry. His ambivalence to the subject and prior clear teachings on baptism refute any idea of legitimate baptism for dead people. (see the addendum below)

Our reading concludes with strong words about hanging out with people who do not speak the truth. They are the kind who like to dominate the thinking of others by teaching whatever comes to their minds, and with their corrupt words they lead others astray. Paul says it is a sin to hold to false teachings. Ignorance is no excuse for crummy thinking. If bogus thinking is allowed to circulate, then sooner or later many will be deceived. They, or we, cannot afford to be deceived in the things that are of first importance. These are the things that we need to get right, if we are to stay right with the Lord.

Elsewhere Paul says that we need to let the word of Christ dwell deeply in us. The more we think about God's Word, the more we will be kept from thinking with errant judgment. Remember, you have the mind of Christ.

Let's get excited about resurrection. “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.” Today, consider the truth that Jesus is alive and working in your life. “We are his workmanship,” Paul says in Ephesians 2. The more you think about these things, the more clearly you will be able to recognize them when they happen in your life. Keep looking for the risen Christ in your life.

The hope we have in resurrection also includes a glorious new body that will not be weak and perishable but “heavenly.” When you plant an old, dry bulb in the ground in the winter, there is no indica-

tion at that point of a future life for the flower. But spring comes and the beautiful flower comes forth and brightens our lives. So is the resurrection of our old dilapidated bodies; they are put in the ground or blown to the wind, but at the resurrection they will be transformed into a glorious heavenly body that will not even compare in magnificence with the body that was buried. What a hope!

Come Lord Jesus,
God's blessings apply the resurrection to our daily lives,
Pastor Steve

Addendum:

What did Paul mean when he said, "Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?" First, let's put this verse in the context in which it is found. Paul is talking about the hope of resurrection; first, he wants us to know that Christ was truly raised, and then he emphasizes that those who are in Christ will also be raised. He is emphasizing again and again that if there is no resurrection then all that is Christianity becomes vain.

As we have already pointed out, the Corinthians had all kinds of practical and theological problems in their practice of the faith. Some in the church were even teaching that there was no resurrection of the dead (verse 12). Therefore, this letter is meant, for the most part, to correct the faulty thinking of some of the church members, including the leadership. There is no doubt that Paul had already had some very deep discussions with them when he was in Corinth. After he left, some began to sow seeds of doubt about certain issues, including the all-important issue of resurrection.

There is also no doubt that the issue of baptism was already on the table before Paul left the city. The Corinthians were using baptism as a sign of superiority, depending on who baptized you. They were using baptism not to honor the death and resurrection of Jesus but to prove their own spiritual superiority. So Paul says in the opening chapter: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power;" (1:17). Obviously, in Corinth,

baptism was being misconstrued. Rather than set down rules and regulations about the practice of baptism, Paul downplays it. He would rather highlight the gospel than let baptism become the main issue.

We do know that Paul never teaches that a person should be baptized for someone else, and especially for someone who is dead. You will not be able to find one verse in either the Old or New Testaments that sanctions baptism for the dead. On top of that, if a person is baptized in proxy, what power would it work for the deceased? Does the Bible teach that my faith can save someone else? Nowhere, no how! The New Testament does not talk about after-life conversions. The Bible makes it clear that after death a person is then accountable immediately for sins committed while living on earth (Hebrews 9: 27). So why were some baptizing for the dead in Corinth?

Who knows? Why were the Corinthians doing the majority of the weird stuff they were doing? Well, their background was wild. They were uncultured, morally unbridled, and ethically suspect. Is it any doubt that they would fall into all kinds of self-serving practices? Every chapter in this first letter addresses a problem. The Corinthians were a dysfunctional family. They were fickle, emotionally driven, and given to self-aggrandizement. In the confusion of all their problems Paul is carefully picking the areas he needs to address in order to get their attention. So as he talks about resurrection he thinks about this quirky baptism practice there.

We also know what these two brief questions are not saying. They are not advocating a practice in the church of baptism for the dead. If they were, then Paul would have made it clear that this was God's will in one of his other correspondences related to baptism, for example, in Romans or Colossians or Ephesians. He does not address it, because he has already made clear that baptism is only for believers. He never teaches that a dead person can be saved by baptizing a live person. That is so goofy it's hard to even fathom. So why did Paul even mention it in chapter 15?

This is just what I think, so take it with a grain of salt. I think Paul had already addressed this in person and had put it to rest while he was in Corinth. It was an old issue, one that they were probably embar-

assed by once they understood that only a living person could be saved. It was probably a topic that everyone was aware of, since Paul didn't feel the need to introduce it with any qualifications. He just uses it as another stupid thing to do if there is no resurrection. Because he mentions it doesn't mean that he is endorsing it. Rather, he is rubbing their noses in their false beliefs and practices. I guess you could say he is killing two birds with one stone.

If they didn't believe in resurrection then why baptize for the dead? I think he was saying something like, "You guys are not thinking properly; the very thing you deny—namely, the resurrection—you belie with your actions. You acknowledged life after death when you were hoping to help dead people into heaven by baptizing them even after they had died." Remember, in chapter 14 he told them to be mature

in their understanding. This group was so gut-driven and emotionally unstable they would jump into anything that looked spiritual, then start to tell others that they too needed to get on the bandwagon.

So you can forget about getting wet on Uncle Charlie's behalf. Uncle Charlie will have to stand before God based on his own life. You can cancel your appointment with the Mormons to join them in baptism for the dead. They have an elaborate genealogical system, so that you can be baptized for long-lost relatives who were not baptized Mormon. The fact that they base this system on these obscure verses says much about their inability to interpret Scripture accurately. Right-thinking believers never go to a cloudy and obscure passage and then use it to contradict the crystal-clear revelation of the rest of the Bible. Yet, they do, and it is not right.



"O, Lucky Day"

August 24 - 1 Corinthians 15:50 - 16:4

Have you been tired lately? Are you on an anti-depressant, or do you feel like you may need to be? Do you struggle with your weight, or are you frustrated with your weight loss goals? Are you fed up with the ongoing tension you feel with some of the people you associate with at work or in your community? Are you tired of things breaking down; does it seem like as soon as you fix one thing, another breaks? Have you become a bit cynical after watching the news regularly? Do you miss a loved one who has not talked to you in a while, or has died?

This world is rigged for frustration. Joni Eareckson Tada said that in her talk on pain and suffering. She made the point that this world is not meant to be a cozy place for us; we are merely pilgrims passing through on our way to an eternal place. Those who spend their time trying to make earth into heaven, are

the ones who will be the most frustrated.

Life can be tough. Do you feel that way? When you sit and consider your life and others around you, do you feel weighed down by the way things are? My heart goes out to those who seem to go through more than the rest. But really, all of us at one time or another can say that life for us just isn't working right now. It's at times like those when the hearts of men are tested. Can I maintain when the going gets tough? Sometimes I wonder, don't you? If this life is all there is, then the common denominator for all men is futility. Sounds like Ecclesiastes, doesn't it?

The Bible offers a hope that should make us sit up and take notice. The Bible says that our real home will be occupied later, and that once we get there we will be different—we will be fit for that time and place. A trumpet will initiate the change, and in an instant, the

blink of an eye, we will be delivered, set free, changed, liberated. We will no longer be tied down by the things that have made this life a very frustrating journey.

At the time of change, the things I thought were so miserable on earth will be like a faded memory. They will seem such a light and momentary thing compared to the beauty of the new place. Have you ever felt the adrenaline high of a long run? You may be struggling along after five miles of running, and then somewhere in the sixth mile you feel this euphoric sensation as if you could run a hundred miles. It makes it all worth it and you think, "If I felt this every time I ran, I would sure be motivated to get out and run more." All of a sudden, the pain and sweat and discipline of it all is worth it.

Paul says that we will be changed. The mortal and the perishable will put on a new set of clothes. Have you ever put on a new outfit and felt like a new person? That is a poor illustration of what it will be like on that day. We will no longer have our earthly clothes on, and yet we will not be found naked. We will have our new spiritual clothes on, and they will then define

us forever and ever. Oh, what a day that will be. No more colds, flu, broken bones, divorce, war, accidents, hunger, worries, and any other disappointments you could think of. We will be fit for heaven. God will be there, and He will light the place up with His very own presence. Death will be no more. There will be no fear of death, or talk of death, or reality of death. Death will be dead.

Only life.

Only peace.

Only joy.

Only God glorified.

Is your spiritual blood flowing now? Oh, lucky day; oh, lucky day! I don't mean that the lucky will be the ones to enjoy it. It will be the abode of the chosen and redeemed and loved by God in Christ. I just look forward to it and I can't wait and I want to proclaim, Oh, lucky day!

God's blessings bring healing,

Pastor Steve



"Words Matter"

August 25 - 1 Corinthians 16: 5-24

As we finish up the book of 1 Corinthians, I would like to spend some time dwelling on the importance of communication and the words needed to accomplish it. The words we speak to one another make a huge difference in the outcome of our personal lives and our society. Harsh words stir up contention and kind words produce a much different result.

I just love words. For example, I love the Greek word "splanknizomai" because it embodies the love or compassion of Christ for the common man. Isn't the word "compassion" a cool word? Doesn't it do some-

thing inside of you when you consider acting toward others from a compassionate heart?

Words wound and words heal. Words have a big impact on the way we walk through our day. For those who have been attacked verbally, words haunt them and discourage them, causing a well-spring of emotion to rise up in them, which can be very overwhelming. If you have ever been told that you would not amount to anything then you have quite a hurdle to overcome. Kids today are often so put down by the time they get into high school that it is no wonder that they are doing alcohol and drugs to escape the echoes

in their minds.

What was it like to communicate in the first century? How did everyday citizens convey to one another the important messages of their time? They didn't have phones, faxes, pagers, email, newspapers, TV, magazines, or any of the other modern modes of communication. Were they worse off? I don't think so.

Let me explain. In the first century people were used to receiving and giving messages orally. Oral communication was so important that people were much more in-tune with one another. Most of us have played the game where we say a secret message to the first person and then they say the same message to the next person and so on. Usually, by the time the message reaches the last person, the true meaning is lost altogether. I don't think that would have happened in the days of fewer media. People were used to giving and receiving messages orally. They depended on spoken communication to make sure they had the true message.

Fortunately for us, the Words of Scripture were written by people who were sharp. Luke, for example, a doctor, was very careful to compile the facts about the things Jesus said and did. Luke was a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul. Luke would have had access to many valuable witnesses, including all of the apostles and the women who had traveled with Jesus. Especially helpful was Jesus' mother Mary. Can you imagine those interviews with Mary? Luke would have been riveted on every word as she described the pre-incarnation events, and then went on to share many other insights into His life. The other writers of the New Testament were eye-witnesses themselves or associates of eye-witnesses. How important is this? Huge! For example, think about one event in your life that impacted you, and then ask yourself who is most qualified to recount the circumstances of that event? You are.

The big difference with what the apostles wrote about is that the things they heard and saw happened over years and were not limited to one day. Years. People wonder why there are some variations in the teachings of Jesus. Is that because the apostles made mistakes and contradicted one another? Not at all. Jesus probably told the same stories in different settings to make the points he wanted to drive home. So when

the apostles re-told them in their gospels, they would have had a slightly different take on the same story. You can see this in Matthew and Luke's accounting of the Sermon on the Mount. Same material, put into different words at some points. No change in meaning, though the authors wrote with a different style. The authority of the Bible hinges on the truthfulness and reliability of the vessels—the human agents in God's plan to bring Words to the human race so that He could continue to clearly communicate with us.

Ink and parchment were not cheap in the first century, nor were they always readily available. Also, Paul had an eye problem and it wasn't easy for him to get the words on paper. But where there's a will, there's a way. The Holy Spirit was moving Paul along, watching over and inspiring and directing the very words of Scripture. It was His Word and God is jealous for His Words. Paul said, "All Scripture is God-breathed..." Peter said that some of Paul's words were hard to understand, and that some of his readers twisted them, like they did other Scripture. Peter thought Paul's written words were Scripture. That's good corroboration.

By the way, you may have noticed at the end of Romans that a man named Tertius actually wrote the book. Huh? Tertius was the man with ink and pen who took Paul's words and wrote them down. Paul needed help and leaned on this man to enable him to write the all-important letter of Romans. Other than Romans, we are not sure if Paul had anyone else write for him. In Galatians he made a reference to writing such big letters, as if he needed to write big so that he could see what he was writing.

Your words are important. When you speak, you make a difference.

Today, mark your words more closely. Think about what you are saying.

Are your words constructive?

Are your words compassionate?

Are you thinking about God's Words to you?

Personalize God's Words. Put your name in the text and make it more personal. "For God so loved Steve, that He gave his one and only Son, that if Steve believes in Him (and he does), Steve will not perish but have eternal life."

God's Words are meant for us, a love letter meant

to draw us close to Him.

God's blessings are often transmitted through
our words,

Pastor Steve