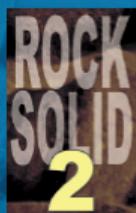


THE FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS



An Explanation of This Letter
Especially for You

Ger de Koning



The First Letter to the Corinthians

The First Letter to the Corinthians

An Explanation of This Letter
Especially for You

Rock Solid #2

Ger de Koning

The original Dutch version is available at

Webshop: www.uitgeverijdaniel.nl

Orders: info@uitgeverijdaniel.nl

Cover design: Jan Paul Spoor

Layout: Jan Noordhoek

© 2016 by Ger de Koning. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be – other than for personal use – reproduced in any form without written permission of the author.

New American Standard Bible Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation La Habra, Calif. All rights reserved. For Permission to Quote Information visit <http://www.lockman.org>.

Contents

Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible	8
Old Testament	8
New Testament	9
Explanation of general format	10
Preface	11
The First Letter to the Corinthians	13
Introduction	13
1 Corinthians 1	14
1Cor 1:1-3 To the Church of God Which Is At ...	14
1Cor 1:4-9 Enriched in Him	17
1Cor 1:10-17 Divisions in the Church	21
1Cor 1:18-25 Christ – the Power and Wisdom of God	26
1Cor 1:26-31 Let Him Who Boasts, Boast in the Lord	30
1 Corinthians 2	34
1Cor 2:1-7 Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified	34
1Cor 2:8-16 What God Has Prepared	38
1 Corinthians 3	42
1Cor 3:1-7 Spiritual and Fleshly	42
1Cor 3:8-15 To Build On the Foundation	45
1Cor 3:16-23 All Things Are Yours	49
1 Corinthians 4	53
1Cor 4:1-7 A Steward of God	53
1Cor 4:8-13 Fools for Christ's Sake	57
1Cor 4:14-21 What Paul Taught	61
1 Corinthians 5	65
1Cor 5:1-5 Sin in the Church	65

Contents

1Cor 5:6-13 Remove the Wicked Man From Among Yourselves	69
1 Corinthians 6	73
1Cor 6:1-6 Judgments and Settling Matters	73
1Cor 6:7-13 Be Wronged – All Things Are Lawful	77
1Cor 6:14-20 Glorify God in Your Body	82
1 Corinthians 7	86
1Cor 7:1-7 Husband and Wife	86
1Cor 7:8-14 Three Groups	90
1Cor 7:15-20 God Has Called Us to Peace	94
1Cor 7:21-28 Remain With God	98
1Cor 7:29-35 The Time Is Short	102
1Cor 7:36-40 Free to Be Married, Only in the Lord	106
1 Corinthians 8	110
1Cor 8:1-6 Love Edifies	110
1Cor 8:7-13 Don't Be a Stumbling Block	114
1 Corinthians 9	118
1Cor 9:1-7 Am I Not Free?	118
1Cor 9:8-14 God's Concern for His Servants	122
1Cor 9:15-21 Win More	126
1Cor 9:22-27 All Things for the Sake of the Gospel	130
1 Corinthians 10	134
1Cor 10:1-6 Things That Happened As Examples for Us	134
1Cor 10:7-13 Who Thinks He Stands...	138
1Cor 10:14-17 One Bread, One Body	142
1Cor 10:18-22 The Lord's Table	146
1Cor 10:23-33 Do All Things to the Glory of God	150
1 Corinthians 11	155
1Cor 11:1-6 Head Covering and Hair (I)	155
1Cor 11:7-16 Head Covering and Hair (II)	159
1Cor 11:17-22 How to Gather At One Place	164
1Cor 11:23-26 The Lord's Supper	168
1Cor 11:27-34 How to Participate in the Lord's Supper	173

1 Corinthians 12	177
1Cor 12:1-7 The Holy Spirit	177
1Cor 12:8-13 The Gifts of the Spirit	181
1Cor 12:14-23 The Members of the Body	185
1Cor 12:24-31 God Composed the Body	189
1 Corinthians 13	193
1Cor 13:1-7 Love	193
1Cor 13:8-13 Love Never Fails	198
1 Corinthians 14	202
1Cor 14:1-6 That the Church May Receive Edification	202
1Cor 14:7-19 To Pray and Sing With Understanding	206
1Cor 14:20-25 Tongues Are for a Sign to Unbelievers	210
1Cor 14:26-33 When You Assemble	214
1Cor 14:34-40 Properly and in an Orderly Manner	218
1 Corinthians 15	223
1Cor 15:1-4 The Gospel of Salvation	223
1Cor 15:5-19 The Resurrection of Christ	227
1Cor 15:20-28 The Government of Christ	231
1Cor 15:29-34 I Die Daily	235
1Cor 15:35-44 How the Dead Are Raised	239
1Cor 15:45-52 A Mystery Revealed	244
1Cor 15:53-58 Labor Is Not in Vain In the Lord	248
1 Corinthians 16	252
1Cor 16:1-9 Collection and Travelling Plans	252
1Cor 16:10-14 Timothy and Apollos	257
1Cor 16:15-24 Final Exhortations and Greetings	261
Other Publications	265

Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen – Genesis
Exo – Exodus
Lev – Leviticus
Num – Numbers
Deu – Deuteronomy
Jos – Joshua
Jdg – Judges
Rth – Ruth
1Sam – First Samuel
2Sam – Second Samuel
1Kgs – First Kings
2Kgs – Second Kings
1Chr – First Chronicles
2Chr – Second Chronicles
Ezra – Ezra
Neh – Nehemiah
Est – Esther
Job – Job
Psa – Psalms
Pro – Proverbs
Ecc – Ecclesiastes
Song – Song of Songs
Isa – Isaiah
Jer – Jeremiah
Lam – Lamentations
Eze – Ezekiel
Dan – Daniel
Hos – Hosea
Joel – Joel
Amos – Amos
Oba – Obadiah
Jona – Jonah

Mic – Micah
Nah – Nahum
Hab – Habakkuk
Zep – Zephaniah
Hag – Haggai
Zec – Zechariah
Mal – Malachi

New Testament

Mt – Gospel of Matthew
Mk – Gospel of Mark
Lk – Gospel of Luke
Jn – Gospel of John
Acts – Acts of the Apostles
Rom – Letter to the Romans
1Cor – First Letter to the Corinthians
2Cor – Second Letter to the Corinthians
Gal – Letter to the Galatians
Eph – Letter to the Ephesians
Phil – Letter to the Philippians
Col – Letter to the Colossians
1Thes – First Letter to the Thessalonians
2Thes – Second Letter to the Thessalonians
1Tim – First Letter to Timothy
2Tim – Second Letter to Timothy
Tit – Letter to Titus
Phlm – Letter to Philemon
Heb – Letter to the Hebrews
Jam – Letter of James
1Pet – First Letter of Peter
2Pet – Second Letter of Peter
1Jn – First Letter of John
2Jn – Second Letter of John
3Jn – Third Letter of John
Jude – Letter of Jude
Rev – Revelation

Explanation of general format

PERSONAL PRONOUNS are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

BRACKETS [] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

SHARP BRACKETS < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS *** are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

ALL CAPS in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

Preface

Dear friend,

I am very glad I can offer you this second volume of the 'Rock Solid series'. Someone who read the first volume (about the letter to the Romans), put his impression of it as follows: 'At times a bit difficult, then again comforting, and always encouraging.' My prayer is that this book, which lies in front of you, may have a similar result.

I wrote this book for you. While writing it, I tried to put myself in your shoes. I thought of you as someone who

- either just got to know the Lord Jesus,
- or has known Him longer,

but in either case someone who wants to become better acquainted with the Savior who died for you to give you life.

Until now, you may not have been interested in getting to know Him better. I also had this attitude in the past. But a tremendous change occurred in your life – as it did in mine – and that is fantastic.

In the first place it pleases the Lord Jesus. He loves He has become important to you. He will also reward such an attitude change. That's why it is fantastic in the second place for you. Having the desire to know Him better will help you discover the enormous riches you have in your hands through the Bible. The more you read it, the more you will find your love for the Lord Jesus increasing.

It doesn't matter how old or young you are. What matters is the change in your feelings towards the Lord Jesus and what He now means to you. This is why you now want to start reading the Bible. With this book, I want to help you read and study the Bible. Here are a few practical tips that might help you:

1. Provide yourself with a good translation of the Bible. Some good translations are the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the New King James Version (NKJV), the New Translation by J.N.

Darby (JND) and the King James Version (KJV), preferably with the New Scofield word updates. I will be using the NASB, with permission granted by The Lockman Foundation on February 10, 2016 when referencing and quoting Scripture unless I note otherwise.

2. I tried to write this book in a way that encourages you to use the Bible. At the beginning and end of each section, I have listed the Bible verses pertaining to that section. I encourage you to read those verses before and after reading the section. It would be a good idea to keep your Bible open to those verses so you can easily refer to them.
3. Self-discipline is very important. You have to be willing to discipline yourself to take time to understand the Bible better. I suggest that you read the Bible at a set time that's best for you.

To help you with this, I have divided this book into sixty-one sections. Every section covers, on average, about six or seven verses. You could read one section every day. If you read at a relaxed pace, you will need about ten or fifteen minutes for one section and the Bible verses. I suppose you spend more time to feed your body every day, but *spiritual food* is at least as important. If you can be self-disciplined in this, you will have gained some insight into a splendid letter of the Bible after two months.

The whole Bible is a wonderful book and it is my prayer that you will be convinced of that time after time.

I wish you God's blessing!

Middelburg, Netherlands, English version 2016

The First Letter to the Corinthians

Introduction

In the first letter of the New Testament, the letter to the Romans, you have seen that it is foremost about your personal relationship with God. If you have not read that letter yet, I advise you to read it quietly first. In the first letter to the Corinthians you will see that the church and your place in it receive the most attention. That is why this letter connects very well to the letter to the Romans. As a believer you are not supposed to search your way apart from other believers. It is important to discover that believers belong together. At least, that is how God sees it. This letter shows clearly what it should look like in practice.

1 Corinthians 1

1Cor 1:1-3 | To the Church of God Which Is At ...

1 Paul, called [as] an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their [Lord] and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this letter you will find a wide variety of topics. Most of them are about how the church should function in practice, in other words how everything should happen in the church. And because you are a member of the church of God, everything that is written in this letter is also important for you.

Outwardly, the church is no longer a unity. Sadly, this has been true for a long time. There are numerous groups and churches. I suppose you are asking yourself now the great question: 'Where can I find the place where the church gathers?' It is not that I am going to name a place for you where that happens, but I would like to examine together with you what this letter says about the gathering of the believers, for together they form the church. When you have discovered what the Bible, God's Word, says about all this, it will be much easier to find that place.

Let us therefore first take a look at what the Bible tells us about it. Attending a Christian meeting is something you cannot do without. You cannot be a Christian on your own. The choice you have to make is not easy. In many places you might find good things, but also bad things because in all those places fallible people come together.

When I started looking for this place, I asked myself a few questions:

1. Is the Lord Jesus in the center there?
2. Can the Holy Spirit work freely there?
3. Is it the Word of God that has authority there?

4. Is it the church that gathers there or is it a group of people who maintain their own rules, which you first should agree to before you can join them?

Some other important questions are:

1. Do those coming together love each other?
2. Do they have the desire to preach the gospel to those who are still lost that they may be saved?

By the grace of God I have found this place. Yet I do have to keep these questions in mind because there is always a chance that something happens which can cause that the gathering of the believers is not in accordance anymore with what God has said about it. God does not change His thoughts, but we can change and deviate from His Word.

Unfortunately, the latter has been happening time after time throughout church history; hence the great divisions in the church that you see all around. It is sad that the world sees it and also that the Lord Jesus Himself sees it. Even when you meet believers who want to gather just as believers, nothing more and nothing less, yet you can still come across things that are not in accordance with the Bible. You will not find the perfect church on earth. Although that is true, it is vital that in the church the Bible has authority, which means that when mistakes have slipped in, the believers should be willing to be corrected by God's Word. That is what Paul is doing here in his first letter to the Corinthians.

If you think that the church in Corinth is the perfect example to which Paul can point and say: 'People, behave like the Corinthians', you are mistaken. In the church in Corinth, things were far from perfect. The brothers and sisters of Corinth are not the ideal example of how a church should gather and live together. It was all pretty unseemly and disorderly. Marriage and the Lord's Supper, just to mention two things, were issues which they certainly did not deal with in a Christian way. Paul shows this very clearly in this first letter he writes to them.

Still, even though it may sound strange, in a way we should be thankful that the believers in Corinth behaved so badly. Do you know why? Because we are no better and we now have a letter in the Bible in which we can read how to deal appropriately with each other and with issues like

marriage and the Lord's Supper. Fortunately, we can see from the second letter Paul wrote to them, that the Corinthians listened to him.

That is how it still works today. Everything that is written in this first letter is as relevant as it was back then. Many Christians think that it is no longer possible to gather in the way Paul tells and prescribes here. And what is more: they think that this letter only applied to the Corinthians and that we are free to do things our own way. But God's Word is clear about this. If you believe that God's Word is for all times – and why wouldn't you believe it? –, it will be a challenge for you to experience that it is really still possible to gather in the way this letter tells us.

V1-3. The first three verses show immediately how far-reaching the contents of this letter are. It is written “to the church of God ..., with *all*, in *every* place ...”. So, what is written to the believers in Corinth, applies to every local church on earth where believer call on the Name of the Lord Jesus.

Furthermore, it is the church of *God* and not of some person. If it is the church of *God*, it is logical that He determines the way things should go, right? If people in the church of *God* set their own rules, confusion is inevitable. That is what you clearly see around you in professing Christianity.

But there is another reason why things were going so badly in the church in Corinth. They did not keep themselves separated from the world. In verse 2 they are being called “sanctified” and “saints by calling”. That is what you are as well. And the result should be that you behave like one as well. If you forget that God sees you as a saint, there is a strong chance that you will allow worldly things into your life again. This also applies to a local church. If it forgets that it is a church which belongs to *God* and that it does not belong to the world anymore, all kinds of influences of this world have opportunity to enter. We have plenty of examples of it in this letter.

Now read 1 Corinthians 1:1-3 again.

Reflection: How do you know for certain that you are in a place where the church gathers?

1Cor 1:4-9 | Enriched in Him

4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

V4. Before Paul addresses the Corinthians about the wrong things that were found among them, he first thanks God for the good things that were found among them. He does that in almost all of his letters. That is an important lesson for us. Often, when we notice incorrect things in others, we tend to focus our attention only on that. The danger is that we no longer see the good things that this person has as well. When we are convinced that we have to talk to someone about a mistake, let us start with telling him about the good things he has. Then the atmosphere of the conversation will be such, that talking about mistakes will get through in a good way.

It is quite something what Paul says here about the believers in Corinth. But do notice how he thanks God for what He had *given* them. He does not thank God for the way they *were dealing with* these gifts from God because they were not using them in a proper way. In the course of the letter this will become clear. Addressing them this way should make them feel ashamed.

In front is “the grace of God” which was “given to you in Christ Jesus”. All blessings and riches that we have received come forth from it. After all there is nothing that we have deserved. When God gives something, it is always connected with the Lord Jesus. God never gives something that is apart from Him. To God, the Lord Jesus is the Center of His thinking and acting. God wants to glorify Him through everything and He wants us to cooperate in this glorification. You should start paying attention to that because you will find it everywhere in the Bible. You will notice this immediately in the following verses.

V5. They were “in everything ... enriched”, but only “in Him”. Are you a little bit familiar with these riches? A few of them are listed. The first rich-

ness is “in all speech”. Paul had preached the gospel to them by speaking words that came from God. They had accepted these words. This is how they acquired the words of God. Is it not an enormous richness to be able to hold the entire Word of God in your hands? God has not kept anything back from you that was useful for you to know.

But holding it in your hands is something different from really knowing it. Well, the Corinthians were also rich in “all knowledge”. That is the second richness. They knew a lot.

V6. This knowledge is, however, not primarily a matter of the intellect, but of the heart. It is not about how many Bible verses you can say by heart (even though that is important!), but about a Person. In “all speech” and also in “all knowledge” it is about “the testimony concerning Christ”. Christ has to be the Center in studying the Word and the increasing of your knowledge.

V7. What God gives, He gives that you may get more understanding of Who the Lord Jesus is. That is why the Corinthians were lacking “in no gift”, as a third richness. Each gift is meant for honoring Christ. But when believers start using a gift to show off themselves and to receive honor themselves, it is used in a wrong way, and God will have to punish them. He will not give His glory to another (Isa 42:8).

A fourth richness is the expecting of “the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ”. “Revelation” means: to come out from the hiddenness, so that it becomes visible. The Lord Jesus is not visible to our human eye at the moment. But that will change in time. He will once again appear in this world “and every eye will see Him” (Rev 1:7). He will not come as a Baby, like the first time, but He will come in power and great glory.

There is another aspect to the revelation of the Lord Jesus. Just before He publicly appears to the world, the believers must appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2Cor 5:10). Everything that the Corinthians have done, said and thought will then be revealed. They surely will have changed their lifestyles immediately if they allowed this to penetrate their hearts. Their conscience will surely have been appealed to about the way they were dealing with the spiritual riches they had received.

You will understand that this aspect of the revelation of the Lord Jesus is also important for you. How do you deal with the things you have received from the Lord?

V8. Fortunately, it also says, and that is the fifth richness, that the Lord Jesus will "confirm you to the end". The word "confirm" means that He takes care of you and holds you and does not let you go. He has shown His care for you by bearing the judgment of God on the cross, which you deserved. He also shows His care by listening to you every day when you speak to Him and by speaking to you when you read His Word. He also shows His care in many things in your daily life.

All this care is to make sure that on this day, when He appears, you will be "blameless", the sixth richness. This means that there will be nothing to be found fault with you for which you should be punished yet. Of course this does not mean that you can now live life the way that suits you best because everything will be fine anyway. No, it is just the other way around. If you know that He will make sure that there is nothing to blame you in the future, you will want to be blameless now already, in the present.

V9. Paul ends his introductory words by pointing at the faithfulness of God. It is always a great encouragement to be reminded of the faithfulness of God when we are unfaithful. But that should not justify our unfaithfulness. This becomes clear from the following words. The faithful God could never approve of His children being unfaithful to the calling to which He has called them. It is written very clearly that we are "called into fellowship with [better: of] His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord".

In the past we lived in different forms of fellowship. Maybe you lived your own life in a circle of sports fanatics with whom you discussed and/or exercised your favorite sport on every level. Or you belonged to those motorcycle maniacs who can't talk about nothing else but motorcycles. Or you joined the world of gamers and shared your passion with other club members. Or maybe the pub was the place where you would meet other people. It were certain forms of fellowship where you would meet people who took the same pleasure in this entertainment as you did.

1 Corinthians 1

But this has changed radically when you got to know the Lord Jesus. Now you belong to a fellowship where everything ‘revolves’ around the Lord Jesus. Everything you do, should point to that. The more you will love Him, the more you will start with doing away wrong things. You will enjoy the fellowship with Him more and more, a fellowship that you will experience in heaven in a perfect way for all eternity.

Now read 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 again.

Reflection: Name some more riches that you have received in the Lord Jesus. Thank God for them.

1Cor 1:10-17 | Divisions in the Church

10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's [people], that there are quarrels among you. 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. 16 Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

V10. What Paul says in verse 9 about the fellowship of Jesus Christ, is a starting point for the verses you have just read. He has to admonish the Corinthians because they have forgotten that there is only one Person through Whom they belong together. Paul underlines his admonition by adding: "By the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Thereby he says that his admonition is completely supported by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

You can imagine that the Corinthians should be impressed by this. That was necessary because the name of the Lord Jesus was no longer the only Name for them. Other names had become important to them as well: Paul, Apollos, Cephas (verse 12). As a result, they did not "all agree" or "all speak the same thing" [literal translation] anymore. "Speak the same thing" does not mean that things are being said in the same tone or with the same words. It refers to the content of the conversations. That should be the same. The conversations should be about the same Person. The Lord Jesus wants to be unique for His own. He cannot be satisfied with a shared interest of the church.

The result of a shared interest is the start of divisions. If the believers do not turn their eyes on Him only, it will cause division. They do not really form a unity anymore. From the outside, it might still look like a unity. The believers still come together in the same building, but inwardly there are

'cracks'. A building that starts getting cracks in the inner wall has to be repaired because otherwise these cracks will become wider and the building will collapse. So, Paul continues with an appeal to 'repair': they have to be "made complete". This can be accomplished by being "in the same mind and in the same judgment" again. All the things that brought division had to be put away and they had to start focusing on the One again.

V11. Fortunately, there were also believers in Corinth who were sad about the division, like those of Chloe's household. They were wondering what they should do about it. They must have prayed a lot. I think the Lord made it clear to them that they should write Paul about it.

That is the best thing for us to do as well. When wrong things happen in the church, we should 'ask Paul'. He has received special announcements from the Lord about the church. If you have certain questions about the church, you should read in the Bible the letters of Paul in particular. The Corinthians received an answer and you will get one as well. To act as if there are no problems or beat about the bush, is not the answer for the problems. If you run into problems, tell the Lord about it first and listen to what He has to say.

I do not think that the believers of Chloe's household wrote to Paul behind the back of their fellow believers because Paul mentions their name openly and says that he had heard from them about what is going on in Corinth. They were not gossips. They must have been reliable people, of whom Paul could expect that they depict a truthful image of the situation in Corinth. If not, Paul would never have reacted this way toward the Corinthians. It is great that there were people like them then and that they still are now, because such people are invaluable for the church. Often they are not appreciated in the church and they are seen as troublesome because they point out the wrong things. However, it is of great importance that it happens. At least something will be done about the wrongs.

V12. There were conflicts among the Corinthians. The believers were flatly quarreling. The reason for this was the different groups that had come into being, each of which had a favorite preacher. One group felt drawn to Paul, he was their man. What mysteries he could reveal! Another group followed Cephas, that is Peter. What an ardent man he was! Another group

stuck to Apollos. What a speaker he was! And then there were also those who said they belonged to Christ. These were the worst.

It may sound strange to you, but it is the truth. Paul sums up four parties with each their own party leader. Imagine that Christ was one of them! How could He ever be put on a level with any human being? That was exactly what the Corinthians did. Christ was made a party leader, next to Paul, Peter and Apollos. What this party was saying by this was: 'We are the only good ones. Those who have joined Paul, or Peter, or Apollos, do not belong to our group.' But every believer belongs to Christ, even though he might (unfortunately) have joined some group that is called after a certain servant.

Christ cannot be compartmentalized – like also His servants didn't want to be a party leader. When Paul says that Christ is not divided, he indicates that Christ cannot be claimed by some group to be their party leader. You will surely recognize this picture in professing Christianity around you. What a dissension! One group is called after Luther, another after Calvin. There are also groups and churches where people come together, just because they agree on certain passages or subjects from the Bible, for example baptism, whilst others, who do not agree on this, cannot join this group. That the Lord Jesus is the only One through Whom Christians belong together has been pushed into the background more and more.

With the foregoing I do not mean to say that we should ignore the church walls and groups. What you certainly should not be doing, is letting yourself be pigeon-holed. Show the people that you only want to belong to the Lord Jesus and that you feel united with all fellow believers, whatever church or group with a certain name they might belong to.

V13. This division absolutely conflicts with Christ. How could He be "divided", as if His work would have brought division and not unity (Jn 11:52)? Paul also did not want to be a party leader – it was not *him* who was crucified for the Corinthians. They did not owe their salvation to *him*. He only had to bring them the message of salvation.

Verse 13 is the first time in this chapter that the cross is mentioned. This will be found more often. When you are reminded of the cross, you think

back on the judgment that God executed on man. And if man has been judged, there is no more room for division because division is something made by man. They were not baptized in Paul's name, were they?

V14-16. If that were the case, there would only be a few people who belonged to him because he had only baptized a few. They could be counted on the fingers of one hand, so to speak. He can remember two cases. Oh yes, he also baptized the household of Stephanas. It is as if this name suddenly occurred to him. He does not boast with a lot of names as if they are trophies that magnify him.

Paul does not say this to belittle the meaning of baptism, but he finds himself to be insignificant. Only Christ is important to him. On the other hand some people find it important by whom they are baptized. But it is totally insignificant who is baptizing or who you are baptized by. With baptism, someone is joined with Christ in His death. It is about *Him* and not about the one who is baptizing.

V17. Paul did not receive an order from Christ to baptize. The twelve disciples, who had followed the Lord Jesus on earth, had received this order. The assignment that Paul got from Christ was to spread the gospel. This should not be done with wisdom of words because then the person of Paul would come to the foreground again and the cross of Christ would become powerless.

It is all about the cross of Christ. There is much more related to it than your salvation as a sinner. When you look at the cross, you will see on the one hand how the holy God hates sin and you will see His adamant judgment on sin. On the other hand you will see His great love for you through the cross because there you see how the Savior in His endless grace did everything for you in His infinite suffering and His deep humiliation. On the one hand you will also see the demonic teamwork of the limitless evil of satan with man who has fallen into sin. On the other hand you see there how man in his pride is wiped out, how sin is done away and how satan is defeated and conquered.

The cross is the place where the judgment has raged and is carried and where God is glorified in Christ. Yes, on the cross, the foundation has been

laid for a new heaven and a new earth, where the glory of God shall shine in all eternity.

Now read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 again.

Reflection: Reflect on the miracle of the cross. (Do it often!)

1Cor 1:18-25 | Christ – the Power and Wisdom of God

18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, “I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE.” 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not [come to] know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

V18. In these verses Paul depicts the contrast between the old and the new life. To him there is no way in between. The cross doesn't allow such a way. It is about perishing or being saved. Between these two ways there is the cross.

The “word of the cross” is not popular. At least, how it is presented by God in His Word. I call that the old cross. It often occurs that in preaching the gospel the edges of the “word of the cross” are being smoothed to make it more pleasant and to make it less radical. I call that the new cross. With the new cross one can go on with his life without having gone through a radical change in his motives. He goes on with his own pleasures. The only difference is that many things in his life now have a Christian ‘color’. But with the old cross nothing is left of the old man, he is disappeared completely. The old cross is the symbol of scorn and shame.

During the time the Lord Jesus lived in Israel, the people were dominated by the Romans. The Roman way of executing a criminal was by crucifixion. That is the most horrible sentence of death you can imagine. Anyone who was sentenced to this death in that time, walked with the cross on his back through the streets of the city to the place of execution. He had said goodbye to family, friends and acquaintances. He would not come

back anymore. There was no compromise with the cross; it was hard and merciless and it killed a man once and for all.

The Corinthians had forgotten the real meaning of the cross. You can see that immediately from their quarreling and divisions. But how do *you* deal with the cross? For it is one thing to know that you are saved through the cross, but to live in accordance with the cross is a completely different thing. To the world, “to those who are perishing”, the message of the cross is foolishness. That the Son of God voluntarily took that place in order to reconcile a hostile man with God, is foolishness for men who are blind to their own sinfulness and to God Who is holy. But to you the cross was the “power of God” through which you were saved.

V19-20. All the wisdom and philosophy of the world, hasn’t ever been able to save anyone. Much fantasy and philosophy have been going on (and still are) about what man is and what would lead him to happiness. Many of these theories have been constructed and are still being constructed, the one more impressive than the other. But in the Old Testament God already said that He would destroy the wisdom of the wise men and the understanding of their prudent men He would bring to nothing (Isa 29:14).

The wisdom of man is something that comes from man. In Ephesians 4 you can read what man is without God (Eph 4:17-19). How could such man ever come up with something meaningful about the origin, the existence and the future of man? All thoughts of man about himself and from himself and all his searching after the truth about himself apart from God, is meaningless. He who yet does that and even admires that – and that was the case with the Corinthians – doesn’t understand anything about the wisdom of God.

V21. The wisdom of God has a totally different approach. God really cannot use anything at all of fallen man to restore him but has to start all over again with him. Somebody we might consider the wisest person will never be able to grasp anything of God with his understanding, his intelligence. God does not primarily address the understanding of man, but his conscience. He who begins reasoning about God with his understanding, is judging Him. As if man can grasp God within his own mind!

He, who makes God speak to his conscience, acknowledges that it is quite the opposite: God judges *him*. Such a person becomes aware of the wisdom of God as demonstrated in “the foolishness of the message”. Isn’t it foolish to listen to something that approaches you through words that you cannot see or touch or reason with your understanding? No, it certainly is not, for if you once have believed the truth of those words, you are really saved indeed.

V22. The Jews wanted to see a sign first or concrete evidence before they believed. The Greek people wanted to be able to reason with understanding first before they believed. But that of course is not believing. Believing is the confidence that is focused on God. You trust that God has good purposes toward you, although He yet has to judge you.

V23. Such contradictions cannot be proved by signs or to be reasoned with the understanding, but to faith it is all to be found in Christ, the Crucified One. The Jews did not want such a Savior. Just imagine what they were thinking: their pride, their Messiah, Who would chase away the enemy (the Romans) out of the land, died on a cross. The Greeks had profound thoughts about the essence of man and believed in their own ideas about it. Just imagine again: such a distinguished being as a man should be saved by something abject as a crucified Man.

V24. However, he who is called by God, as you also are now, whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, knows for sure: only through the cross there is salvation. On the cross you see Christ. In Him the power of God and the wisdom of God have become apparent. The power of God is not comparable to the muscular power of a man. The power of God is seen in the triumph that was achieved over sin, satan and death by the Son of God. The enemy has been defeated, not by might, but by the submission of the Lord Jesus to God all the way to death. It is a final victory. It is the power of God’s love that has reached out to you in His Son and Who gained you for Him.

V25. God in His wisdom was the only One Who could have invented such a way for the salvation of sinners. Never ever could a man think in such a way. As long as a person has not been touched in his conscience, he will continually try to make his life meaningful by his own power and

understanding. Until now it appears that all human ingenuity has not lead to a happy world. We are sure that it will never happen.

Every day we have enough evidence that the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. You have understood and experienced that the ‘foolishness of God’ has brought deliverance in your hopeless situation and that the ‘weakness of God’ was the power that lifted you up from your misery and brought you close to His heart.

Now read 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 again.

Reflection: Compare the foolishness of men to the foolishness of God.

1Cor 1:26-31 | Let Him Who Boasts, Boast in the Lord

26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29 so that no man may boast before God. 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

V26. Apparently the Corinthians were still sensitive to wisdom, power and honor. Those are the three things to which Paul refers in verse 26. He reminds them of the moment when they were called by God. Did they belong to the higher society class when they heard the voice of God when the gospel was preached to them? Were there many wise, powerful and highly esteemed people among them? It is exactly these people, who think that they do not need the gospel, who ignore the calling voice of God.

Human *wisdom*, the intelligence of man, is being overestimated. Philosophers are giving the impression to be able to penetrate into the invisible, the intangible part of creation, while disregarding God. And if they involve God at all, He is not allowed to determine His place, but they determine the place He is allowed to occupy. In human wisdom man is being overestimated and the only wise God is underestimated.

Many people are impressed by *might*. They actually would love to exert a certain form of might. In the world might always is being exerted by money and by force. Submission to might is always for its own benefit. If you do not give in to it, you will suffer. If you do give in, you will benefit from it. The eye of man is focused on that. That's why he doesn't see God; he rules his own life; he doesn't need God and therefore declares the might of God to be something that is not might.

To be *noble*, or being of esteem, is also something many people strive for. People with a high position, or who have received a special distinction, are

looked upon with jealousy. Esteem makes man great, but God, Who is the only One Who is worthy of all honor, is being forgotten.

Most people who are saved through the gospel do not belong to the wise, mighty and noble people. Fortunately there are also people among the wise, mighty and noble people, who acknowledge their guilt before God and who are saved. In the Bible there is an example of such a person: Joseph of Arimathea. Of him it is said that he was “a prominent member of the Council”, who expected the kingdom of God (Mk 15:43). But in general, the people who take refuge in the Lord Jesus are people whose lives have been broken down, who are the losers (cf. 1Sam 22:2). That was actually the case with the Corinthians.

V27-28. Paul speaks of the “the foolish things of the world” and of “the weak things of the world” and of “the base things of the world and the despised” as the kind of people that God has chosen. With such expressions there is nothing left of your own self-importance. In this way God also wants to shame the wise and the strong, who never have succeeded to save a person for eternity and to give him happiness and peace in life.

Finally there is still one more thing said that completely wipes out the arrogance of man: God has chosen “the things that are not”. Have you ever felt like that? The more you get aware of that, the more you will be grateful to God that He has accepted you.

V29. As long as we honor ‘something’ of ourselves, we haven’t understood that God cannot possibly accept anything of the flesh – that is the old man. He had to judge that in Christ on the cross. We need to be reminded of these things again and again because we constantly are at risk honoring something of the flesh, so the old man. There is really not one thing in which a man could boast.

V30. God has condemned the old man thoroughly. Even though something of that old man comes forward again in the Christian, it doesn’t change God’s judgment on that. God cannot tolerate that. As a Christian you are to deal with that the way God deals with it. The only way to be able to condemn the old definitely, is to be aware of what you have become now.

"By His doing you are in Christ Jesus." It all came from God. He was the One Who gave you a new position, a position that the wisest philosopher couldn't give to you. This is how He sees you now. He doesn't see you in relation to your old life anymore, but He sees you in Christ. This is the way you also should see yourself. Christ has made it possible that you would receive this wonderful place.

What the Lord means to us now, is indicated by four words. These four words give a complete description of what you are as a Christian.

In the first place "wisdom from God". In Christ you have acknowledged that wisdom is only to be found in God. He was the initiator of the salvation of man, which no person could have thought of. On the one hand God was glorified by that plan and on the other hand it has appeared how useless everything is that is invented by man.

Second "righteousness". That was the first thing a sinner needed to stand before God. The Lord Jesus made it possible through His death and resurrection. This subject is exhaustively set out in the letter to the Romans.

Third "sanctification". Sanctification means that you have been set apart with a purpose. You are not anymore someone who belongs to the world, but someone who belongs to God now. God wants you for Himself so that you can glorify Him. That's how the Lord Jesus went through this world, as the Holy One and that's how He is in heaven now. And because you are in Him, God sees you like that now also.

Fourth "redemption". Here it is not meant redemption from the power of sin. That redemption has already happened when you were justified. The redemption that is meant here has to do with the redemption of your body, as it is said in Romans 8 (Rom 8:23). That happens when the Lord Jesus returns, so that is yet to come.

V31. So now you see that *God* has kept you safe and secure in Christ from the beginning till the end. *He* has done everything. Man remains completely out of sight in this. The only thing man could and can do, is showing his incapacity in his way of dealing with problems which affect so many people. Your very own efforts also did not bring any perspective, but led only to a desperately seeking for rest and peace that was increasing more

and more. Now you have acknowledged that, there is nothing more left than to have joy in Him, is there? So give Him all honor and glory!

Now read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 again.

Reflection: Tell somebody else what it means to you that you ‘are of God in Christ Jesus’.

1 Corinthians 2

1Cor 2:1-7 | Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified

1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. 6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden [wisdom] which God predestined before the ages to our glory;

V1. It would not have been difficult for a man like Paul to win the Corinthians for the gospel through an impressive speech. He was an experienced speaker, who also knew how people in his time were thinking. He easily could have adapted himself to that way of thinking. With his talent he could have presented the gospel in an attractive and pleasant way. He then would have, however, not preached the testimony of God, but something they would have loved to hear. In that way he himself would have been honored. Paul refused that. The important thing for him was the testimony of God and not something of himself or of any other man.

V2. Paul knew well whom he was dealing with when he went to the Corinthians. He knew that there was only one way to win them for Christ and that was by presenting Him as the crucified One. Do you see that he did not preach redemption in the first place, but the cross? Christ was the content of his preaching, but he preached Christ in His most humiliated condition. He presented Him as the crucified One. There is not much credit to be gained by that, is there? Indeed, there is no credit to be gained by that at all. The cross is the most disgraceful death you could ever think of. In such a way Paul is telling them they became believers at that time. That was not due to his excellence in argumentation, but because he preached Christ as the crucified One to them.

They had somewhat forgotten that and that's why they got impressed again by different things that honor people. You came across those things in chapter 1, things like wisdom, esteem and might. Paul didn't want to have anything to do with those things because for him those things were already judged in the cross of Christ.

V3. He didn't come to them as a hero, as somebody in whom they could glory or be proud of. Weakness, fear and much trembling were the feelings he had when he was with them. Those are not feelings that make you to be admired in this world. In the world you have to be tough and make yourself important and above all, not letting people walk all over you.

V4. Because Paul did not seek his own interests or stand up for his own rights, he could be used by the Holy Spirit, Who could empower his words. For that reason, their faith was not in human power, but in God's power. If your faith is supported by any human source, it will definitely fail some time.

V5. Nobody, no matter how well-educated or wise he may be and how excellent his speech may be, could ever put the necessary strength to his words so that you can live. Only God's power can keep you going and keep you on the right way and bring you safely to the final goal of your life. You can and should hold on to that.

V6. Now the Corinthians should not think that Paul couldn't speak with wisdom. He definitely could! But Paul also knew *where* he could do that. That was not with them, but among the mature or perfect. You might now say: 'Oh, then he can't speak to me either, for neither am I perfect.' That is yet the question. Actually in the Bible the word 'perfect' is used in different ways.

Like in Hebrews 10 for example, "for by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb 10:14). There it is about your position before God. Through the offering of the Lord Jesus, His atoning death, God sees you as perfect because He imputes the perfect work of the Lord Jesus to you. Nobody can detract from the value of that offering before God. Therefore nobody can detract something from your position

before God. You are and remain perfect because God sees you in the perfect offering of Christ.

In Philippians 3 you read about a perfectness you do not have yet, but that lies in the future (Phil 3:12). That has to do with your life on earth, where you may suffer and have pain. In heaven it will not be like that. There everything is perfect.

In Philippians 3 you also read about perfectness in a third way (Phil 3:15) and this is also the way it is meant here. The perfect or mature ones who are meant here, are Christians who want to give Christ the first and only place in their lives. They don't want to give room in their lives anymore to things concerning the world, such as wisdom, esteem and might. Because the Corinthians still gave room to those things, they couldn't be considered "mature" or "perfect".

Does this mean that you will not be interested in anything of the world anymore? That is not what it means, for your old nature, the flesh, will continually try to draw your attention to wisdom, esteem and might. Should you notice this in yourself – or if maybe somebody else points that out to you – just confess that immediately to the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus loves to give you far more than just that as the Crucified One, He has put everything right with God for you. He loves you to enjoy what He is now in heaven as the glorified Man at God's right hand. You can read about that in the letter to the Colossians and in the letter to the Ephesians. There you read about Christ, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3) and about "the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph 3:10). Do you think that you would understand anything of that when you were still occupied with the wisdom of the world, or when you were still impressed by the rulers of this world? All of that will be totally put away; nothing will be left of that.

V7. Although Paul cannot elaborate on it here, he does mention a few important things related to the wisdom of God.

First, this wisdom is "in a mystery". That means that this wisdom is not visible. You cannot observe it in the world around you. But this wisdom is not only a mystery to the unbelievers; it is also a mystery to the believers

who think and live worldly, or who still value the wisdom of the world in a way. The wisdom of God is a “hidden [wisdom]” for the intellect of man. He cannot understand that.

Second, this wisdom of God is an eternal matter. You cannot refer to a certain time in the past that God has received wisdom. It is a wisdom as eternal as He Himself.

Third, God has predestined this wisdom for us. Therefore He intentionally thought of you as somebody to whom He wanted to give this wisdom. Could you imagine that without being mind-boggled and praising Him in your heart?

Fourth, it is a wisdom that serves to your glory. Of your own you did not have and have not any glory, nothing that is pleasant or attractive. That has changed through the wisdom of God. In God’s eye you now have glory. This glory is nothing else than God’s own glory with which He clothed you in the Lord Jesus. Therein His wisdom is being exposed.

How God has given you glory is to be read in John 17. There the Lord Jesus says to His Father: “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them” (Jn 17:22a). The more you are occupied with the Lord Jesus, the more the glory of God’s wisdom will radiate from your life. And that is what God would love to see.

Now read 1 Corinthians 2:1-7 again.

Reflection: What attracts you more: the wisdom of the world or God’s wisdom in a mystery? Why?

1Cor 2:8-16 | What God Has Prepared

8 [the wisdom] which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; 9 but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND [which] HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." 10 For to us God revealed [them] through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11 For who among men knows the [thoughts] of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the [thoughts] of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual [thoughts] with spiritual [words]. 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. 16 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

V8. The rulers of this world, mainly the religious leaders of Israel, were completely blind. Because their eyes and mind were set on their own concern, their own honor and fame among the people, they were blind for the wisdom of God in the Person of the Lord Jesus Who stood there before them and Who could be seen and touched. Therefore it is inconceivable that they would have crucified "the Lord of glory" if they would have had the slightest notion of Who He was and why He had come. You may have such a good knowledge of everything and know the Bible well, just as the pharisees and scribes did, but if you are filled with your own personal importance, you become blind for the glory of the Lord Jesus!

V9. Then you will also lose sight of "what God has prepared for those who love Him". The things that God has prepared for those who love Him, are not things you are able to observe with the natural eyes or to be heard with your ears. Neither are they things that have come out of man's heart. Every

input of the natural man, that is the man without God, is excluded here. It is about things that *God* had prepared.

V10. If you read verse 9 superficially, you might think: ‘This is too lofty and too incomprehensible for us. It’s better not to be occupied with “what God has prepared”, it is after all, a hopeless task.’ But that is the result of reading superficially. For Verse 10 says that “to us God revealed [them] through the Spirit”. Therefore there is no excuse for not immersing yourself in the things that God had prepared. The Spirit loves to tell you all about them. The point is that your heart is focused on God, whether you love Him, for He has prepared them “for those who love Him”. It is a fact that if you really love somebody, you want to know him or her better. That is also the case with our love for God.

You wouldn’t know anything of the things that God has prepared for you if God did not reveal them. God could have kept them all to Himself and show them only to you when you would be with Him in heaven. But God did not do that. He revealed or made them known now already. He did that through the Spirit.

V11. Here the Spirit is called “the Spirit of God”. To clarify what he means, Paul makes a comparison with the spirit of the man. The truth is that nobody knows the inner being of a man than his own spirit. Only you know by your own spirit what is happening inwardly. You are the only one who is aware of the questions and problems you are pondering on or why you are joyful and happy. All other people have no idea of that and are not able to know that. The only way that they could know is when you tell them.

In this same way God works to tell you what He has given to you. Only the Spirit of God knows what is going on in the depth of God’s heart, regarding His thoughts about and feelings for you personally.

V12. That Spirit you have received! Therefore you are able to discover what the things are that God has given to you. You have received the precise ability to search those things. The spirit of the world – which you did not receive – you find back in what men have invented or what the devil has whispered in their ear. With that spirit you will absolutely not understand one bit of the things of God. The spirit of the world doesn’t know anything

about it and is in no way related to the things of God. In fact the spirit of the world is in flat contradiction with the things of God.

V13. From this verse you read about the means God uses to reveal to you what He has in His heart. To do that God doesn't use human wisdom, for no man should receive glory for that. So no man could say: 'How clever those people are, who can pass on such lofty things.' What again is the issue here? It is about spiritual things. Who is the One Who could tell about them? Only the Spirit.

To tell us what is given to us by God, the Spirit uses spiritual words. What words are they? Are they unintelligible sounds? No, they are normal, ordinary words, but to which the Spirit gives a spiritual meaning.

V14. Those are words that are foolishness to the natural man. He cannot understand it at all. Think about it. Does an unbeliever understand what you're talking about when you tell him about your relationship with God and how your life has been changed since you've known the Lord Jesus? No, he does not, does he? Why not? You speak your mother's tongue, the same language as the other one and yet you're not being understood. That's because the things of God's Spirit are foolishness to him. He cannot understand them, for they are spiritually appraised, and to appraise something spiritually you need to have the Spirit of God.

It's about two totally different worlds. In the one world, the spiritual world, the Lord Jesus is centered and the language of the Spirit is being spoken. In the other world, the natural world, where man and his own concern are centered, the language of the flesh is being spoken. These two worlds have nothing in common.

V15. Now you have become a believer, you can understand the way of living and thinking of people from the natural world, for you used to belong there. Now you are able to appraise all things, but he who does not have the Spirit, can neither appraise nor understand you. It is only possible through the Spirit to appraise all things.

To summarize this important teaching of the apostle about the revelation of the wisdom of God, we can say this:

1. First there is the revelation by the Spirit (verse 10).

2. Then it is followed by the message, the way it reaches us: that happens through spiritual words (verse 13).
3. Finally it is being accepted by spiritual people (verse 14).

V16. The previous seems to sound rather proud. You would almost think that you have become equal to God. The last verse of this chapter brings clarity. There is nobody who has ever known the mind or thinking of the Lord so that he would be able to teach the Lord about something. That would sound very impudent. There are people who think that God did it all wrong. Once I heard somebody say: 'If I were God, then everything would have looked different.' Such a person thinks that he could teach God something, but in fact he, of course, does not have the slightest notion of God.

But you as a believer have received the new life, a new nature. Christ is your life and therefore you have the mind of Christ. You are able now to see and appraise things as Jesus Christ always did and still does. It is important to know that therefore you are able to appraise everything because you have now received Christ as your life. You surely understand that you are to live close to the Lord Jesus in the practice of your faith life, in order to also give room for 'His mind'. That was what the Corinthians failed to do, as you will see in chapter 3.

Now read 1 Corinthians 2:8-16 again.

Reflection: Which things do you read here about the Spirit?

1 Corinthians 3

1Cor 3:1-7 | Spiritual and Fleshly

1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able [to receive it]. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, 3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not [mere] men? 5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave [opportunity] to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.

V1. What Paul wanted very much to do with the Corinthians, he could not do unfortunately. He would have wanted to speak to the Corinthians as to "spiritual men". The expression "spiritual men" has nothing to do with a religious job. Sometimes people speak about 'clergymen and laymen'. The clergymen are people like pastors and priests. They have received a training for which they have passed an exam in order to be appointed by their own church as a 'clergyman'. All other members of that church are 'laymen'. Those are people who have had no training in theology. God has never meant such a distinction. Just to be not misunderstood: I don't say that all pastors and priests are unbelievers. I know that some of them really love the Lord Jesus sincerely. But to me it is about their 'profession' as a clergyman. That is something that you can't find in the Bible.

Now you read in verse 1 about "spiritual men" and "men of flesh". In both cases believers are meant. In the previous chapter we read of "natural men" (1Cor 2:14). Those are unbelievers. We have not only to do with a distinction between believers and unbelievers, but also with a distinction between believers. The latter is the issue here. You might have noticed this distinction already. You might also have the opinion that all believers are people who of course love the Lord Jesus and serve Him. What you possibly still have to discover is that you too from one moment to another

can change from a spiritual person into a fleshly person. Therefore it is important to be fully aware of what Paul is saying here.

Whether you are spiritual or fleshly depends on your attitude of mind as a believer. You are spiritual when the Holy Spirit can lead your life and when He can focus your heart and ‘mind’ (do you remember 1Cor 2:16?) on the Lord Jesus. Then you are willing to do all things in your life to the honor of God. You will possibly make mistakes, but you will be willing to quickly put things right again. When you are fleshly however, you find yourself important or you are too occupied with how other people think of you. You yourself are in the center of your life and not Christ.

You really don’t have to live in sin to be fleshly. To be fleshly easily creeps into your life. The follow-up of this chapter makes that clear.

He who is fleshly looks like an infant, a little child. A little child is limited in his ability to understand. When adults talk with each other, he hears the words, but doesn’t understand what it is all about.

V2. Little children are to be approached on their own level. Therefore Paul couldn’t tell them more about the Person of Christ than that He was crucified (1Cor 2:2). He couldn’t talk with them about God’s wisdom, for they didn’t belong to the perfect or mature (i.e. full-grown or mature Christians). Just look up the section of chapter 2:6. They could only receive milk. Milk is indeed baby food. The solid food is for the mature or perfect.

In Hebrew 5 you find the same issue (Heb 5:11-14). There the believers were actually converted for a longer period of time, but they had not made progress in their faith life. The author of the letter to the Hebrews has to admonish them regarding that. That can easily happen to you. You may have a good start, you’re very enthusiastic and you love to read the Bible. But after a while you may notice that your impetus is weakening. Then you need to be nourished with the simple things of the Bible, for you cannot recognize the deeper truths.

V3-4. In the case of the Corinthians, the deeper truths of the Bible couldn’t be told to them, because they were still “fleshly”. As a proof of that they are reprimanded for being jealous and for having division among them. Paul even adds to it that they behaved like “mere men”. He just means

that they were behaving like the people in the world. That is serious. Their division in small groups, each with a favorite leader, is really walking like mere men.

That's how it works in the world. In politics and in sport as well, everyone can decide which club or faction he wants to join. They criticize all other factions. Jealousy and dissension are the order of the day. Supporters of soccer clubs are attacking each other with chains, bats and knives. Politicians criticize each other in public debates in order to present themselves and assure themselves that their voters will continue to support them. This is not how it should be in God's church. Everyone has his own place and task there.

V5-7. Paul calls himself and Apollos just "servants" through whom the Corinthians became believers. Thankfully, they didn't come to faith in Apollos or Paul. It was faith in God. Every servant had his own part in the work that *God* had done in the hearts of the Corinthians.

I don't know how you became a believer. Apparently God has used some believers for that. You will always be grateful to those people and that is a good thing. But be careful not to honor them or run after them. The real servant of God doesn't like it when people honor him. He will want to give all tribute, honor and glory to God alone, for He finally has given the increase. That's how Paul talks here. That's how Peter talks in Acts 10:25-26. In Revelation 19 you even read that an angel should not receive worship from us (Rev 19:10). He even rejects it. The only One Who is worthy of worship is God!

Now read 1 Corinthians 3:1-7 again.

Reflection: How do you recognize in yourself whether your conduct is spiritual or fleshly?

1Cor 3:8-15 | To Build On the Foundation

8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. 11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is [to be] revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

V8. Every believer, including you, is a servant. A servant is somebody who receives orders from a person in charge. There is somebody above him. God is above all His servants and He orders each servant what he has got to do. It is all about His work and all servants are to be aware of that. If everyone is focused on his own concern, nothing of God's work will be done. The servants must be one. They should not work against one another nor should they have their own audience, but they should rather cooperate with each other, work together.

V9. The unity in the service for God is important. God knows how to reward everyone according to his conduct therein. When it says that we are "God's" fellow workers, it means that we are fellow workers with one another and that we together are servants of God. It doesn't mean that you are doing a certain task together with God. No, He is above you and together with other servants you can be busy for Him. That means that you should not focus on what people or groups expect from you or command you to do. Then you're not concerned about God's interests and His work, but the interests of people, which cause dissension with your fellow workers. In this way the unity disappears very soon.

In this verse you read about a "field" and a "building" right next to each other. Those are two very different things that you cannot interchange, can you? Yes, that's right. But Paul moves over from one picture to the other

picture. Both pictures actually present an area on which or in which God's fellow workers work.

A 'field' is an area on which the worker is busy with the intention to harvest fruit from it. God very much wants to receive fruit. What Paul is saying here, is that the believers in Corinth together are the field. This also applies to all places where believers gather (just think of 1Cor 1:2). God wants to receive the glory He is worthy of from the lives of all believers together.

God's building is also about the believers as one whole. They form together God's building. When you think of a building, you think of dwelling. God dwells in the church. In verse 16 of this chapter it is said like that. Also other things that have to do with a building are mentioned. You need a foundation, and also building materials and builders are needed.

V10-11. First the foundation. That is laid by Paul. He doesn't boast of that. He says that he has laid the foundation "according to the grace of God which was given to him". The honor of this goes to God. The foundation is therefore not something he himself has invented. The foundation "is Jesus Christ". As "a wise master builder" Paul has presented Him to the Corinthians and nothing else in his preaching. There is no other foundation.

V12. Now the building can start. 'But', Paul warns, 'take heed with what kind of material you build.' The six building materials he mentions are divided into two groups. The first group contains three precious materials. They can pass the fire test. The second group contains three materials that are consumed by the fire and therefore are worthless for a good building. The mentality of the builder will determine with which material he is satisfied.

I already said: it is a picture. These pictures present something from which we can draw a spiritual lesson. As you know, the believers together form the church of God. In the Bible, the church of God is being compared with a bride, a body, and also with a house. The comparison with the bride we will talk about later. Here it is about the church as a house. That is a rather more difficult picture than a body or bride, because you can see the church as a house from two points of view.

Actually, you read in the Bible about the church as a house that is being built by God and also as a house that is being built by people. When it is about a house that is being built by God, do you think that God will use materials that will be consumed by fire? That is impossible. When God is building a house, He uses only good materials. You can read about God building the church as a house for example in Matthew 16, Ephesians 2 and 1 Peter 2 (Mt 16:18; Eph 2:20-22; 1Pet 2:4-5).

But you read also in the Bible about the church as a house that is being built by people. This is how it is presented here: "But each man must be careful how he builds on it." And then it is possible that wrong materials, which are not fire proof, are being used.

You might somewhat sense what the materials present. Believers are presented as gold, silver and precious stones; wood, hay and straw are a picture of unbelievers.

How do you have to imagine the building? It may be as follows. You preach the gospel. People are attracted. There are people who acknowledge their guilt before God. You yourself are convinced that they are sincere and honest and you accept them as Christians. You baptize them and at that time they confess that they step out from the world (baptism is a funeral), while they then enter Christianity. Through your action of baptizing them, they enter the area of the house of God to which Christianity is also being compared. In this way you contribute to the construction of the house of God. However, you may be mistaken, what is impossible with God. Therefore you should take heed how you build.

I realize that my explanation is rather brief, but I hope that the general intention and also the issue of this section are clear to you.

There is another way you can build. The way you pass on something from the Bible can be right or wrong. Do you pass on God's thoughts or do you pass on your own thoughts? That is something that also applies to me immediately by writing all this to you. I continually have to ask myself whether I clarify God's Word to you in the correct way. The same applies to our way of life. What example do we give? Do we also apply to ourselves what the Bible says about how God wants us to behave and look like? If we

are willing to do all things according to God's will, we will surely make God's building stronger. Anywhere we do not do so, we weaken it.

V13-15. There comes a day that everything we have learnt and done will be revealed. Your and my work will be tested in the fire. That means that God's holiness will test everything that we have done and said. And He does not make mistakes in His judgments. What remains, He shall reward. We suffer loss by what will be consumed and will therefore not be rewarded.

Thankfully, we ourselves shall be saved. Our work can be wrong, but our salvation is assured in Christ. Let us make efforts to be builders who are building with good materials in the construction of God's house.

Now read 1 Corinthians 3:8-15 again.

Reflection: How are you building?

1Cor 3:16-23 | All Things Are Yours

16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and [that] the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. 18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, “[He is] THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS”; 20 and again, “THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS.” 21 So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.

V16. Paul proceeds with his explanation about building God's house, the temple. As it is indicated here, the temple is not a visible stone building, as was the case in Jerusalem. You may hear the mention of a church building as 'the house of God', but in the New Testament – that means, from the beginning of the church – we do not hear about an earthly building as a house of God anymore. The house of God now consists of all true believers in whom the Holy Spirit dwells.

V17. As it is said, building the house in this chapter is something that is done by people. In the previous verses you saw two groups of builders. Now you come across a third group of builders on God's house. Those are people who want to destroy God's temple. That is very serious. It is about people who deliberately set out to destroy the work of God. In the previous verses the possibility was left open that a person was building with wrong materials. That can happen, but in that case it is not deliberately. Such a person himself will remain saved, even as through fire. He loses everything, but he escapes, as it were. But of people that deliberately destroy the temple of God, is said that God will destroy them.

How should you imagine that the temple of God is being destroyed? Does God permit that to happen? First you should remember that the believers together form the temple of God. The Corinthians also had to be reminded of that: "Do you not know that you are a temple of God?" They were the

temple of God, in whom the Spirit of God dwelled. If you are fully aware of that, you will come to the conclusion that the only Person Who has a right to speak in the temple of God, is the Holy Spirit.

Just imagine that in the temple of God, so in the church, people come forward who teach things that contradict the Word of God. In this way the church of God becomes a place where the Holy Spirit and the Word of God are being put aside and where people come forward with their own ideas about God and His Word. The cunning thing of their way in presenting these things is that they present themselves as people who have knowledge of these things. They are often well-educated and wonderful speakers who do not want to trouble the conscience.

You can recognize them clearly in their way of talking about the Lord Jesus. Sometimes they speak very crudely about Him, as Somebody Who stands very close to you and Who is just like you, with the same desires and lusts. There you have that cunning talk: He indeed stands very close to you. The Bible says that He “has been tempted in all things as [we are]”. But what is important, is that this phrase is followed by “[yet] without sin”. Just read that yourself in Hebrews 4 (Heb 4:15).

Sometimes they also talk very respectfully and loftily about Him, as Somebody Who stands far above you. In this case He is presented as a kind of angel, through whom you can get to know a lot about God. Here also it is so cunning. For indeed through Him you can get to know a lot about God. But the truth about Him goes much further. You can get to know *everything* about God *through Him alone*, for He is God Himself. Therefore He is above the angels. You can read that in Hebrews 1 (Heb 1:1-14).

By talking about the Lord Jesus in this cunning way, the temple of God is being destroyed. The house of God is here called “a temple”, in order to emphasize the honor that is due to God in His house. God is being honored when the Lord Jesus is being honored and He is being dishonored when the Lord Jesus is being dishonored. The temple of God is also called “holy”. It is a building in which nothing from the world and its wisdom may be found.

V18. In the church “no man” should “deceive himself” by thinking that he has the wisdom in lease. The wisdom that is ruling the world must not enter the church. This kind of wisdom is deadly for the church of God. It makes you forget that true wisdom is only to be found with God and with Christ. Once more Paul is saying that the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God (verse 19). He must necessarily repeat it, for he had already said that in chapter 1.

We are evidently quickly impressed by the wisdom of the world. One more time: do not forget that this wisdom is foolishness with God. In order to become really wise you need to become foolish first. To become foolish does not mean: to act like an idiot. To become foolish means that you do not want to trust anymore on the capacities of the wise people of the world or on your own understanding.

V19-21. You want to focus on the wisdom of God, which you have discovered in Christ. That is foolishness to the world, but God calls you wise. Furthermore you read that God “catches the wise in their craftiness”. All those people who are sidelining God or reasoning Him away, will be unmasked by Him. He will show them who they are by revealing to them how they walked and what the results of their work are. Everything they had ever considered has not had any effect. On the contrary, the chaos has become bigger. Everything that men have invented appears to be empty. This emptiness of human wisdom must be a sufficient reason not to boast in men.

V22-23. But there is another reason why it is foolish to boast in men. Boasting in men enormously limits the riches that the believer possesses. If Paul was the great man, then it was to the detriment of Apollos. The supporter of Paul had discovered something in Paul that Apollos lacked. Therefore he felt attracted to Paul and was of the opinion that he didn’t need Apollos. In this way they compared the servants and after that they made a choice. That still happens today. If you take part in that, you live beneath your privileges, for you need *every* servant and not only the one who is your favorite.

And not only the servants are given to you, but also all other things. The whole area you live in, the “world”, is yours. That is because you are

Christ's. That is also with "life" and "death". Life is yours because Christ is your life. Death is yours because Christ has conquered death. The "things present" and the "things to come" are all yours because you "belong to Christ". Christ oversees the present and the future. Nothing will get out of His hand and become uncontrollable for Him, neither in your life nor in the whole world stage. He shall rule everything in such a way that God is glorified in everything.

"Christ belongs to God" means that God will finish everything that he had purposed to do, through Christ. The final result will be seen when Christ will give all things to God the Father and God will be all in all (1Cor 15:28). You belong to that Christ. Isn't that great wealth?

Now read 1 Corinthians 3:16-23 again.

Reflection: If all things are yours, are you then supposed to do with it whatever you want? How do you use what is yours?

1 Corinthians 4

1Cor 4:1-7 | A Steward of God

1 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. 3 But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by [any] human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. 5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, [but wait] until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of [men's] hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. 6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. 7 For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

V1. In the previous chapter Paul strongly emphasized the responsibility of the believers in Corinth. That doesn't mean, however, that he ignores his own responsibility. He also had a task to fulfill. He was, together with others, a servant of Christ. That means that they were appointed by Him to His service. Therefore they didn't take that position on their own initiative. He also was, again together with others, a steward of the mysteries of God. A steward is a person who manages a property or affairs of another person. He has to deal with it in a way that the other person will benefit from it.

So the property he received is not his own. He has, as it were, borrowed this property. At a certain moment he will have to account to the owner for what he has done with the property that was entrusted to him. And a lot was entrusted to the apostles, namely "the mysteries of God".

V2. You understand that "trustworthy" is mainly required for somebody to whom such particular things are entrusted. "The mysteries of God" are

things that were not known in the Old Testament. They were hidden in God, which means that only God had knowledge of them. But now, after the Lord Jesus had been on earth and had sent the Holy Spirit from heaven to earth, those mysteries are being made known. God has chosen His instruments to make these things known here on earth.

V3-4. Paul dealt seriously with this order. To him there was only one thing important and that was how God thought about his work. It was not important to him how the believers in Corinth or some human institution thought about his ministry. He knew that he was not subject to their control or to any person. It was even so much so that he did not even examine himself. He was so much aware of the thought that only God knew his heart, that he did not form his own judgment on his own ministry. He left the whole judgment to God. If you are able to think like that about your own service, you are free from the influence of people, whether they are believers or unbelievers.

You might think that Paul set himself above other people by this attitude. Couldn't he make a mistake? Didn't he need correction? Certainly, he could make mistakes and he certainly needed correction at times, as we all do. He doesn't mean that others shouldn't examine his ministry. The issue is that in his ministry he was not guided by the judgment of others. To him the only One Who was in control, was the Lord.

That is also important to you in your own service to the Lord, for to you also a 'stewardship' has been entrusted. In 1 Peter 4 you read that you should serve others as a good steward, with the special gift you have received by grace (1Pet 4:10). When others criticize or comment on that, you should not ignore that. But you should neither adapt yourself just like that, in order to match with those comments. It is important for you to go to the Lord with it. That also goes for your own judgment you have about your own ministry. Leave it to the Lord to judge that.

That doesn't mean that we must think that we make a mess of everything and do everything wrong. Normally speaking, we are not aware that we are doing anything wrong. When we are aware of that or become aware of doing something wrong, we should correct ourselves. But even if we are

not aware of anything, it doesn't mean that it is good by definition. Once more: leave the judgment to the Lord.

V5. There comes a time that everything we have done, will be brought to light. That has not only to do with *what* we have done, but especially *why* we did the things we have done. The motives, the deliberations of our hearts, that lead us to do a certain work, will then be revealed.

Is that something to fear for? Yes, if you seek your own honor and if you find it important what people (believers or unbelievers) think and say about your service. No, if you seek the honor of God and if you seek to be faithful in serving Him. Paul saw his whole service against the background of the coming of the Lord. When He would come, only then everything would become really clear, for only He can make a perfect judgment. Before that time, every judgment of the motives that lead someone to serve God, is not a proper issue. "Then each man's praise will come to him from God." What is important is that *God* is the One Who gives the praise.

V6. Paul doesn't teach the Corinthians a lesson from above. What he has said, he applied to himself and to Apollos. Again this is an important issue. If we want to exhort others through something from the Scripture, we can only expect a good effect, if we ourselves live up to it. Otherwise an exhortation will make no sense. It will not get through. It goes without saying that what we say should really be written in the Scripture. Please note it says: "That in us you may learn not to exceed what is written." Paul and Apollos showed in their lives what they reprimanded in others. But what they reprimanded was "what is written". The standard for our own life and the life of fellow believers must be Scripture. We must not teach others to think as we think, but others should be able to learn in us not to think beyond "what is written".

V7. When we subject ourselves to the Scripture, we all have the same place. There is no reason to play servants against each other or to find oneself more important than the other. Every distinction that exists between believers – and that distinction certainly exists! – is made by God Himself. God has made distinctions in the gifts. Each person has received his gift from God. God's purpose with the distinctions is that we complement one another. When we play these distinctions against each other, we use the

1 Corinthians 4

gifts for ourselves and we forget that we received the gifts to minister to one another.

Now read 1 Corinthians 4:1-7 again.

Reflection: Do you already have an idea about which ‘stewardship’ God has entrusted you with?

1Cor 4:8-13 | Fools for Christ's Sake

8 You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, [I] wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you. 9 For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. 10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. 11 To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; 12 and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; 13 when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, [even] until now.

V8. The believers in Corinth made themselves comfortable. Corinth was in those days a prosperous trade city. Also the believers took advantage of that prosperity. They were full and rich. They lacked for nothing. They even had exerted political influence, because Paul says that they had become kings, which means that they had reigned. It seems logical to have a profit when you have a vote in the city government. Then you are at least able to defend your own concern and your own prosperity.

'But', Paul says, 'you have reigned "without us"'. By that he means that they were too early with reigning. It was not the time yet. The believers will be able to reign when the Lord Jesus returns to establish His millennial reign. Paul was looking forward to that. He would have been very happy if that was already a reality. Then he and the other apostles, together with the Corinthians, would be able to reign with the Lord Jesus.

V9. Now it has not yet reached that point. The Lord Jesus is still a rejected Savior. To everyone who belongs to Him it means that they too are rejected. He has said it: "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (Jn 15:20). Paul and the other apostles were consistent. They wanted to reign with Christ soon, but they were also ready to suffer with Christ on earth (Rom 8:17). That may not be pleasant, but that goes hand in hand with being a Christian.

You can run away from it, as the Corinthians did. You can make yourself comfortable by not showing too clearly that you belong to the Lord Jesus,

but then you do not walk in the footsteps of Paul who walked right behind the Lord Jesus. He and the other apostles had chosen for Christ. That meant shame and rejection for life on earth. God gave to those, who had received such a high position in the church – the apostleship was after all the highest gift – the lowest position in the world. In this world they have nothing more to expect from life; they were as men condemned to death. They accepted this place because God gave them that place.

They “have become a spectacle to the world”. Just imagine that for a while. A spectacle is for the entertainment of spectators. In former days thousands of people filled the tribunes of the Roman arenas to see how those who were condemned to death, perish in unequal combat. In the days of Emperor Nero, Christians were thrown in the arena where hungry lions tore them up, while the tribunes were full of people who were eager for sensationalism.

In the Old Testament we find a history that is an example of a spectacle. It is about the history of Samson. Maybe you have once heard about him, that gigantic strong fellow. Many times he had defeated the archenemies of Israel, the Philistines. Unfortunately, he told the secret of his power, which caused him to lose his power and therefore could be captured (Jdg 16:15-21). Then he had to be present on a celebration party of the Philistines to entertain them (Jdg 16:25). In this way they could ridicule him as much as they wanted, for their pleasure.

It is true that Samson had been made a spectacle through his own mistake, but nevertheless it indicates of how little account someone is, who belongs to God’s people. I once heard about a young Christian from another country, who was called to come forward in the classroom at school. The fellow students were encouraged by the teacher to boo him, because of his faith. Such a boy was made a spectacle that others watched with malicious delight. Have you ever been in such a situation that you experienced to be a spectacle?

V10. To be a fool for Christ’s sake is not easy. It certainly is not, when you see other Christians dealing very easily with certain things. Paul makes a comparison between the lives of the apostles and the lives of the Corinthians. He does this to make them feel and become aware of them taking

a distance from the true Christian life. He calls himself a fool for Christ's sake. He calls them wise and strong. After all they had reigned, hadn't they? When you reign you take the place of someone who is strong, a place above other people. They also had received honor from people. The apostles were despised, however. The apostles wanted very much to remain close to the Lord Jesus. How and Who He was in this world you can read in Isaiah 53 (Isa 53:1-12).

V11. To explain to them what it really means to be a Christian, he describes something about the hardships the apostles had gone through. What he tells them and you and me is not something that would immediately make us envious. It did not happen just only once, just accidentally. No, he writes that they were experiencing those things "to this present hour". Through their whole life they had to deal with these things.

They had been without food, drink and clothes. This must have made the Corinthians, who were well-fed and well dressed, reflect on that. They were in good condition and the servants of the Lord were in bad condition. Why? Did they supply others, who had much less, out of their prosperity? We may also ask ourselves: Is it possible that a servant of God, who surely has a caring and loving Father in heaven, has to go through such things? Yes! When you live close to the Lord Jesus, that doesn't mean that you will have a life in which you can live luxuriously. Sometimes you experience the opposite. The care of our Father becomes apparent exactly in the darkest hour. At His time He gives precisely what we need. Such experiences make you express your gratitude even more to the Giver.

Also physical hardships belonged to being a Christian in the view of the apostles. Paul knew from experience how it felt to be beaten up. In his second letter to the Corinthians he summarizes in the eleventh chapter all kinds of hardships he went through. There he says that he was "beaten times without number" or "beaten more abundant". For that you must really love your Lord and Savior very much!

They did not have a permanent residence. They were literally pilgrims, transmigrates. We may have a literal residence, but let's realize that we do not belong on earth.

V12-13. They were neither unwilling nor too spiritual to work, and not just a bit. They worked so hard that they became very tired. In following Christ we should also be zealous in our daily work. In your daily activities you can expose what it is to be a Christian.

Look at the attitude of the apostles toward the dishonor and evil people did to them. Don't you see a striking similarity with the reaction of the Lord Jesus toward the dishonor and evil that was done to Him? We often react otherwise. That's because we are not yet well aware of which position we have in the world. It is a position of "scum" and "dregs". Worthless material, nothing you can do with, it's better to throw it away. This makes the high ideals to become somebody of importance in the world to nothing. But to Whom do you really belong?

Now read 1 Corinthians 4:8-13 again.

Reflection: What is the difference in the spectacle as Samson was and as the apostles were? See also 1Pet 4:14-16.

1Cor 4:14-21 | What Paul Taught

14 I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. 15 For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet [you would] not [have] many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16 Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me. 17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church. 18 Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power. 20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power. 21 What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?

V14-15. The Corinthians must have been very embarrassed at reading the previous verses. There the great contrast is shown to them between the way they are Christians and the way the apostles are. That contrast should not be there. It was not the purpose of Paul to shame them. He had written to them as a father who sees things in his children which he did not teach them. To them, he was their father, wasn't he? After all, he had begotten them through the gospel, hadn't he?

He calls them "my beloved children". This means that they heard the gospel from him and accepted it. In that way he became their father and they became his children. Therein we see a family relation. In Paul's love for the believers in Corinth we see the love of a parent for his children. You may also have somebody like that to whom you are precious, because through his service you became a Christian. Somebody who takes care of you and ensures that you are doing well spiritually. It is wonderful when there are fathers in faith who are willing to support young believers in their way of faith.

There were many believers in Corinth who didn't like the ministry of Paul at all. Paul speaks somewhat mockingly of "countless tutors". By that he means people who were pretending to be teachers for the Corinthians. They thought they were much better than Paul. Their ministry was also quickly accepted by the believers, because they presented a comfortable

Christian life to them. Wasn't what Paul presented to them too much to ask?

V16. No, it was not too much to ask. He did not preach them a dry theory. He really lived up to what he preached. Therefore he could exhort them, both out of his 'fatherhood' and out of his own life: "Be imitators of me."

In chapter 11 he says the same, while he adds to it, "just as I also am of Christ" (1Cor 11:1). Paul only asked to imitate him as far as he himself imitated Christ. In that sense you can also imitate somebody who is supporting you spiritually. Therefore the example of older believers is important. Keep looking at them if they imitate Christ. By reading the Bible yourself you will be able to see if the example that they give, is a good example. A good example is given when it is similar to Jesus.

V17. What Paul writes here goes for all local churches. It was not so that what he taught in the church in Ephesus was different from what he taught in the church in Colossae. Indeed he had spoken about different things in different places. But what he taught in Ephesus and Colossae was not in contradiction with what he had taught in Corinth. He is a man you can rely on. He doesn't teach one time this and another time that.

The reason of divisions in professing Christianity is exactly because the Bible is continually explained differently. All of Paul's letters and actually the whole Bible, form a unity. The explanation of the Bible is not subject to changes.

Again Paul could point at his example. His ways were "ways which are in Christ", which means that his words and deeds were as Christ meant them to be. To show them that it is not just a personal view, he has sent Timothy to them. From him they would hear exactly the same things. The way Paul operated, matched thoroughly with Christ. Not only his teachings were in accordance with Christ, but also the way he walked to make known these teachings. He didn't use nice words or craftiness to win the believers to his view. To him it was all because of Christ and His honor in the church. And because there is just one church, he taught the same everywhere.

It is important for you to understand this well. You may hear the complaint sometimes, that everyone interprets the Bible differently. This is

often used as a reason not to be occupied with the Bible. And if you do not read the Bible, you can just go on living without listening to any reason or command of the Bible. Do not tolerate such arguments in yourself. The only condition to be able to understand what the Bible says is: to be ready to do what the Bible says.

Just read what is said in John 7. There the Lord Jesus says: "If anyone is willing to do His [i.e. God's] will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or [whether] I speak from Myself" (Jn 7:17). Just learn this verse by heart. This verse means that obeying the will of God is the condition to understand God's Word. Only if you are willing to obey, you will be able to discover if a certain explanation of a Bible section is an explanation of man or that the explanation reflects God's intention.

You should realize well that Paul says these things with the view to the churches, for he speaks about "every church". There is only one church that consists of all true believers. But, as you saw in the first verses of chapter 1, there is also a church in every place on earth where believers live (1Cor 1:1-3). That church consists of all the believers who dwell in that place. What Paul writes now to the believers of a certain place, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, therefore also applies to the believers who dwell in other places. He ignores that believers are separated from each other by all kinds of walls that they themselves have built. In those days, the walls were not there yet, but they are now. He who wants to listen to this word of Paul, which is from God Himself, will have to take down that wall or leave.

V18-19. Some people thought that Paul didn't dare to come personally and therefore sent Timothy. That was not true. If the Lord wanted that, he would come. And then he wouldn't listen to those braggarts. Their words had no content; they missed the power of God and therefore had no effect. You live in a world where a lot is being said, but how many words really have power and have an effect? The reality is that many promises are being made and nothing or only a little is being given of what is promised.

V20. "The kingdom of God" is not in words. In the kingdom of God the issue is life, wherein the power of God becomes visible. It is a realm where you now belong and wherein you can show that the Lord Jesus is your

Lord. By just simply listening to Him and doing what He says, His power will become visible in your life.

V21. How did Paul have to come to them? They are allowed to say how they want it. Should he come with a rod? That would have happened if they didn't listen to his exhortation to imitate him. Yes, at times it is necessary to use firm talk. That is absolutely not in contrast with love. This is also how God deals with His children. In Hebrews 12 chastisement by the Lord is called a proof of love (Heb 12:6).

Or will he be able to come with love and a spirit of gentleness? That he hoped, for that would mean that they regretted their wrong attitude. His letter would then have had the effect that he was longing for. They would then be focused on Christ again, both in their personal lives and in their life as a church. If he would then come, he would keep on helping them in love and gentleness.

Now read 1 Corinthians 4:14-21 again.

Reflection: You must know Christians who are an example for you. Just examine why they are your example. Besides, think of what Paul has said.

1 Corinthians 5

1Cor 5:1-5 | Sin in the Church

1 It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. 2 You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. 3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 [I have decided] to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

It is not that easy to comment on this important chapter in a simple way. This chapter is of great importance indeed. Here you have one of the principal sections from the New Testament, where you can read what the local church should do when it appears that there is sin in their midst.

There is no local church that can prevent that someone sins. The church consists of believers who are unfortunately still able to sin. Only, the big question is: how does the church respond in a case when somebody's sin has become known? The answer on this question is also important in order to identify whether a faith community can truly be called a church. If the members take the presence of sin lightly and do not heed the call to put it away, then you do not have to do with a church of God.

Before you continue to read this chapter, you should first see that there is a difference between *falling into sin* and *living in sin*. The difference is this: Falling into sin means that we do something that is sinful; we are committing a wrong deed. But living in sin is not something you do just once; it is having a sinful practice in everyday life. It is terrible if somebody commits adultery once, but it is most terrible if he is living in adultery. That is the point in this chapter.

There is something else that you should know and that is that we should not deal in the same way with all sins. For example: You see a brother or

sister committing a sin. He or she is doing something that is against the will of God. What should you do? Should you tell it to the church right away, meaning all brothers and sisters? No, you should not! What you should do, is to be read in Matthew 18 (Mt 18:15-17). In short, it says that you should first go to the person to try to win him. If you do not succeed, you should try it once more with someone else (one or two) to win the other person. If you still do not succeed to make that person confess his or her sin, only then you should tell the church. Then the church is going to deal with him or her.

Imagine the case that you could have convinced the other person of what is wrong in a personal conversation. He or she would have then confessed that to God and – if the sin were done against another person – to the one to whom the sin was done. Nobody else would have then known about it. Just realize what would have happened if you had gone right away to the church and had told the others what you'd seen. That really might have damaged the other person, who is a brother or sister.

V1. Here in Corinth it is about a terrible sin. It is about a case of sexual immorality that does not exist even among the Gentiles. The Gentiles, who lived without God, lived in all kinds of lusts and debauchery. But what was found here in the church of God, was unacceptable, even to the Gentiles. You may ask yourself if something like that is really possible with a believer. Yes, such a thing is possible. Never think that you, now you are a believer, are not able to do something like that. He who thinks so, has not learnt the lesson from Romans 7, where it says: "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh" (Rom 7:18). That shouldn't be a lesson you've learnt by heart, but it should be a deep inner conviction. The more you are aware of that, the more you will be kept from falling into sin.

V2. How did the believers in Corinth respond to this sin? They actually acted as if there was nothing wrong. They were really not worried at all. On the contrary, they had "become arrogant", which means that they pretended to be greater than they were; they were proud of themselves. After all, they had so many gifts, hadn't they? Paul sees through that. He says that mourning, being sad about what had happened, would have been more appropriate to them. Then he who had sinned, would have been

removed from their midst. For it is inconceivable that sin within the church can remain present, isn't it? We cannot connect God to sin, can we? It is impossible to God and the Lord Jesus to remain in a church where sin remains present.

Thus the point was that the Corinthians had not become sad for what had happened among them. They were insensitive about the fact that somebody among them lived in such a sinful way. On top of that, this deed was everywhere reported (verse 1)! What a dishonor to the Lord Jesus. If they would have had any sense of the holiness of God, wouldn't they have bowed deeply to the Lord and confessed before Him that such a thing had happened among them? You can be sure about it that the Lord then would have made clear what had to be done.

For us that is also important. Imagine that sin in the church has become public and it is about a sin that is even reported as a disgrace in the (civilized) world. Wasn't that the case in Corinth? What would we do? Do we react as if there is nothing wrong? Do we just go on with our gatherings as if nothing has happened and become arrogant that we have received so many blessings? Or do we mourn about it? Do we feel ashamed of ourselves? Do we take it to the Lord and ask Him what we should do? I hope we do the latter.

V3-5. To Paul the case was clear. To him long stories with a thousand apologies were needless. He had already delivered the evildoer to satan. What Paul is doing here is a personal deed. As an apostle he had the authority to do that. We cannot do something like this.

You see that he does that with a view to the salvation of the evildoer. The flesh had to be destracted, but the spirit to be saved. The evildoer was following the desires of his flesh. By delivering him to satan, an unlimited freedom was given to satan in order to make him feel what the flesh actually is. Thus satan is an instrument here in the hand of God in order to make one of His children feel how foolish it is to seek his own pleasure. That it is about a believer here appears from the second letter to the Corinthians. In chapter 2 and chapter 7 of that letter you read about the good effect of the measures applied.

Even though it is a personal deed of Paul as an apostle, he does not do it apart from the Corinthians. He feels connected to them in spirit. He expects the Corinthians to feel one with him. Then they will connect with what Paul did to the evildoer. For it is important that a disciplinary measure, applied to a believer, is acknowledged by everyone. That means that when a person is to be removed from the church, everyone should cooperate in carrying out the disciplinary measure. Such a person must then really be left alone.

This measure seems rigid. It can also give the impression that the believers, who have to do this, feel better themselves. But is obedience to God's Word something that we do because we are better, or to make us feel better? Is it not our duty? In addition to that, we need to admit that, in essence, the evildoer is not worse than we are. We are exactly like him. If we realize that, it will keep us from a rigid attitude.

In a family you see the same. Parents have to discipline their children if they do bad things. Parents don't do that because they are better, but they want to obey God's Word and they also want to protect their children against worse things. Parents should not punish their children in a fit of anger and rage. Parents who really love their children, shall discipline them in love, because they know that (a right) punishment shall have a good effect.

One more thing: the church has received the power and authority for taking the measure from the Lord Jesus. The church is the church of Jesus Christ. Thus, the disciplinary measures taken by one local church, regarding a person among them, applies also to all local churches in the whole world (cf. 1Cor 4:17). This means, that a person who has been removed from the church in A, is not supposed to be accepted as a believer by the church in B.

Now read 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 again.

Reflection: What should you do, when it appears that there is sin in the local church?

1Cor 5:6-13 | Remove the Wicked Man From Among Yourselves

6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump [of dough]? 7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are [in fact] unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 9 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; 10 I [did] not at all [mean] with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. 11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within [the church]? 13 But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.

Things were not right in Corinth. In spite of that, Paul started this letter by addressing them as “the church of God which is at Corinth”. Because that was the case, Paul could and had to correct them. When they would not heed to what he wrote to them, only then would they not be a church of God anymore. That still applies to us nowadays. Only when a group of believers pay heed to what Paul has written in his letters, under the guidance of God’s Spirit, you can recognize such a group as a ‘church’ of God.

Needless to say we should pay heed to the *entire* Bible, because the whole Bible is the Word of God. Nevertheless, it is primarily the letters of Paul, from which many Christians have deviated. And from the letters of Paul it is mainly the first letter to the Corinthians to which many Christians have given their own explanation. That’s the reason why so many churches and denominations have arisen. If you want to know about what and how a church should be in our time, you should read the first letter to the Corinthians.

V6. As it is said, it was far from ideal there in Corinth. They boasted in their blessings, while the rudest evil happened among them, without them taking any notice of it at all. This attitude is being rebuked by Paul clearly in verses 1-5.

In verse 6 he clarifies one more thing. That too is important. He compares the evil, the sin, with leaven. To understand why he makes this comparison, you should first know what leaven is. Leaven is a piece of dough taken from a lump of bread dough and put aside. Gradually that piece sours completely. When this small piece of leavened dough is now put into new bread dough, this piece permeates the entire dough, it completely leavens the bread dough. This picture of the leavening effect of just a bit of leaven is being used by Paul here. In fact, this word is mentioned more often in the Bible. And everywhere you read about leaven in the Bible, it is a picture of the evil, of sin.

As it appears from the example of leaven, sin is not only something that concerns the person who sins, but it is also something that affects other people. If sin is not removed from among the church, the consequence is that God sees the whole church as a sinful church. It does not necessarily mean that the other people live in the same sin. Paul doesn't say that everyone at Corinth has now become sexually immoral people. Because of the fact that they, however, did not deal with the sin that was found among them, he had to tell them that they made themselves one with the sin.

V7. What did they have to do now? What should we do when sin has become apparent? The order is to "clean out the old leaven". This means that sin has to be removed. If the person who has committed the sin doesn't want to confess that sin, he has to be removed. If that happens, the church becomes a new lump again. After all, the church is an unleavened dough, isn't it? That means: the church consists of believers who know that God has taken away their sins, which are judged in the work of the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus is presented here as "our Passover". By this Paul reminds the Corinthians of Exodus 12. There they could (and you can) read that the Passover was a feast that was celebrated by the Israelites, right before they were delivered from Egypt. The father of the family took a lamb and killed it. The blood of that lamb was put on the doorposts and on the lintel. This was done by God's command. God had said that He would send an angel throughout the land to kill all the firstborn. However, when he saw the blood on the doorposts, he would then pass by. There, as it were, death

had already been. The lamb had died instead of the firstborn. In that way we know that “Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed”.

But Paul doesn't stop there. After Exodus 12 he also reminds the Corinthians of Exodus 13. After keeping the Passover, the Feast of unleavened bread followed. That was a feast which lasted seven days. Those seven days are a picture of the whole life of the believers. Can you somewhat see the connection? It is a fact that with Israel the Feast of unleavened bread came after the Passover. The application for us, the church, is that the death of Christ should have the effect that we do not give room to sin anymore in our entire life.

But yet, when sin does enter the life of a believer, he or she is supposed to deal with it immediately and clean it out i.e. remove it. That means that sin has to be confessed before God and, if necessary, before the persons affected, and it has to be forsaken. Only then does their practice harmonize with their position. What I tried to make clear to you can be summarized in a couple of words: Christ and sin cannot go together.

And what to do when a local church doesn't deal with it in this way and doesn't clean out evil? In 2 Timothy 2 we find the command for each believer of that local church, who wants to deal with it according to the will of God (2Tim 2:21). There it is said that such person himself should depart from there. He should ‘cleanse himself from’ it. Afterward he should seek others who also did that, in order to call on the Lord together from a pure heart (2Tim 2:19-22).

V8. After the appeal to clean out sin, the appeal in verse 8 comes to keep the feast. By this feast is not meant what I once saw on a T-shirt: a couple of large foaming beer glasses and below it says: ‘Life is one big party.’ That kind of feast belongs to the old leaven. We are really keeping the feast if we live for the Lord Jesus. He truly is the unleavened bread. In His life there was nothing of sin. In everything He lived for His Father and that was His pleasure.

V9-10. The world around us is full of people who live in the most terrible sins. It is not possible to avoid those contacts in everyday life. You deal with them at school, at your working place, in your neighborhood.

Therefore when Paul says that we shouldn't associate with sexual immoral people, he doesn't mean the people in the world around us.

V11. No, by that he means "any so-called brother", while such a person is living in sin. He calls himself a believer, and he indeed might be a believer too, but he doesn't live accordingly. On the contrary, his life is in contrast with the Bible. (By the way, the list of sins in this verse 11, is not meant to give a complete overview of possible sins with which the church should deal. In this list you do not find for example the murderer and the thief.)

We should not associate with "any so-called brother" but who lives in sin. We shouldn't even have supper with him just like that. Therefore it is totally inconceivable that such a person should still participate in the Lord's Supper.

V12-13. We have nothing to do with the people of the world in this respect. Those people will be judged by God in His time, and in the meantime we still have the opportunity to preach the gospel to them so they can escape from that judgment. But the church does have the responsibility to judge those who are within the church. Evil has to be removed from among the church.

Sometimes it is said that discipline is not to be practiced in the church. People refer to Matthew 13 to prove that (Mt 13:29). However, if you read that section carefully, you see that it doesn't concern the church, but it concerns the kingdom of heaven. You don't have to be deceived by that.

When there is real love for the Lord Jesus and for His church, we will never ever allow something in the church that dishonors Him. The important thing is that we choose God's side toward sin.

Now read 1 Corinthians 5:6-13 again.

Reflection: Why is it that important that evil should be removed from among the church?

1 Corinthians 6

1Cor 6:1-6 | Judgments and Settling Matters

1 Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? 2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent [to constitute] the smallest law courts? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? 4 So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? 5 I say [this] to your shame. [Is it so, that] there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, 6 but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?

V1. Quarreling happens to the best of us. But this expression cannot be applied to the family of God. In God's family quarrels should not happen. And yet that happens. Why? Somebody might have cheated you once. I will give you an example. Suppose you have a car and lend this car to a brother. You get your property back clean and undamaged. But yet, in course of time you receive in your letterbox a fine for driving too fast. Fortunately, you could recall that on the day the fine is dated, you lent the car to this brother. Then, with this fine you go to him.

To your astonishment, he doesn't know what you're talking about; at least, that is how he responds. But you know for sure that he borrowed your car on the day in question. This matter becomes so intense that you sue him. Of course you don't give up, do you? And of course you want to get to the bottom of the situation, don't you? This turns into a situation of two brothers standing before the court to enforce their right. What a bad thing for the testimony of God on earth.

Something like this was reported to Paul by the believers at Corinth. He found it very sad. How dared they? And they actually battled their conflicts out before the unrighteous! It doesn't say what case it really was about. Therefore you may apply my example to many other cases, whatever believers can quarrel about. As it is said, it is not supposed to happen

among children of God. But in case it does, how do you respond? That is the issue here. Paul rebukes them, because they went to the worldly-wise judge with their conflicts, instead of consulting the saints, the brothers and sisters.

V2. Do you know why he says this? It's because the saints, the believers, will judge the world. What is he saying? Shall we judge the world? Yes, that's what he is saying. Judgment here must be understood in the sense of governing, not of condemning. And if the saints shall judge the world, wouldn't they then be competent to constitute the smallest law courts?

Just make yourself fully aware of this. You will be competent to – soon, when the Lord will rule the world – reign together with Him. Then you will be competent to know exactly how to deal with all kinds of situations properly. Will you be different then from what you are now? No, you will be the same. There will only be one change and that is the fact, that you don't have the flesh, your old nature, anymore. And that is just exactly the thing that is still keeping you from responding properly when somebody else cheats you.

V3. There is no better advice than what Paul is giving here: Be aware of your future! In future you will even judge angels. Once again, the meaning of this judging is: reigning over angels, thus, telling them what to do. That is quite something, isn't it? Angels are mighty creatures. Once, one angel killed 185,000 people in one night (Isa 37:36). At present, angels are creatures that are being used by God to help believers and to protect them (Heb 1:14). Soon you will tell angels where they should go and what they should do.

What should these mighty creatures think then if you cannot control yourself in the matters of this life, which will be meaningless in future? For that is the issue here: the everyday matters. It is about matters that have no significance at all in themselves, in the future. The question is: how important are they for you? Do you want to, at all costs, claim the part you're entitled to and what you haven't received? The angels are watching how you respond to these matters. The best way to determine the value of "matters of this life" is to consider them in the light of the future. That is

what Paul is doing here. If you do so, you will get rid of the pain of loss and you will have joy in what you will receive in future, instead.

V4. This section is very practical. It deals with the common things of life. When problems arise between believers about every day things, other believers ought to be able to give solutions. You don't need to have a special gift or an extraordinary spiritual insight for that. The simplest believer is capable, with the wisdom of God, to deal with such situations.

V5. Paul says that they should be ashamed of themselves. Weren't they glorying in their many gifts? But in spite of those many gifts, brothers have law courts with each other. In that way they aired out the dirty laundry of the church and it became known to the world. What an embarrassing spectacle. Are the people of the world made jealous to become Christians too by hearing these things? They only speak contemptuously and with gloating about those arguing Christians.

The fact that there are many different churches and denominations is still something that should embarrass us. But it hurts me more when I sometimes read about matters from which it becomes apparent that Christians are also quarreling within their own church or denomination. And in this case, it makes no difference to me in which church or denomination Christians are quarreling.

Where was the brother, who would be capable of judging between his brethren? It must have been a great church at Corinth, for God says to Paul about it: "I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:10). But a large number of believers in a local church is not a guarantee for a healthy spiritual life in that church.

If you think you are a simple brother or sister, then you might have the tendency to follow the crowd easily. But on the other hand, if you have received a certain gift, you might be easily tempted to raise yourself above the crowd, or you might be raised by fellow believers. Neither of them is right. In the church everybody should know his place and task. Paul returns to this at length in 1 Corinthians 12 (1Cor 12:4-30). But the lesson here is that we should not ignore the responsibility to keep a watchful eye for matters that could bring the church into disrepute.

V6. Conflicts between believers are not to be resolved by a worldly judge, but ought to be resolved in the church. So, how simple you might consider yourself – after all, you cannot possibly consider yourself too simple –, you have received the command to help to seek for solutions when there are conflicts in the church about miscellaneous ordinary matters. To be able to do that, the important thing is not the need of having common sense or to have much sensitivity in the first place, but the daily fellowship with the Lord Jesus. Then you will receive the wisdom you need for any case you have to deal with.

Suggestion: This wisdom will, when you're still young, lead you to consult older and wiser brothers first for a certain matter.

Now read 1 Corinthians 6:1-6 again.

Reflection: Have you ever had a conflict with a brother or sister? How was that resolved? Or do you have a conflict with somebody at this moment? How do you think you will resolve that? Or do you know of other believers who are in conflict with each other? What could your task possibly be?

1Cor 6:7-13 | Be Wronged – All Things Are Lawful

7 Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? 8 On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. [You do] this even to [your] brethren. 9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor [the] covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. 12 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. 13 Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.

V7. Actually, it was a bad thing that there was no one at Corinth, who could judge in an insignificant dispute. Had there been somebody, then the conflict would have been resolved. Unfortunately, there was not such a person and because both brothers who were in conflict, wanted their right, they seek that by consulting an unbelieving judge. What a mess! Still there was another way for the brothers to resolve their conflict and that was if one of them would be willing to be the least. In fact, it is very foolish that believers quarrel about miscellaneous silly things. Why is it that we do not rather want to suffer injustice? We should be willing to allow the other to enjoy his benefits. We should wish him luck!

To be able to do that, you should conquer yourself first, for it is hard to respond like that. We are all eager to have the things we think to be entitled to. It is not our nature to be willing to be the least. However, we have a great example in the Lord Jesus. He never demanded His rights, but endured injustice and let Himself be wronged. He knew that it was not the time to claim His own rights. And He knew exactly what His rights were. Yet He waited – and He is still waiting – on the time of His Father. It is really true: every injustice you suffer here voluntarily will be compensated by the Father at His time.

V8. If you can work up the courage to suffer injustice or to rather be defrauded, you will also be kept from defrauding another person. Paul had to blame the Corinthians that they themselves were wronging and defrauding others and even their brothers. This is how we believers are by nature. Our sense of righteousness can be strong if our own interest is at stake. We then, so-called, fight for our rights, which we after all have, while in fact we are wronging our brother or are defrauding him.

V9-10. Paul takes it seriously. When you are doing wrong it means that you are like the unrighteous. And an unrighteous person cannot enter the kingdom of God, just as little as fornicators can and all other doers of awful sins, which Paul summarizes in verse 10. That's quite something Paul is saying here. He ranks a person, who wrongs his brother, with the doers of those awful sins. He empowers his words by saying: "Do not be deceived!"

It is about inheriting the kingdom of God. In that kingdom there is no room for any sinner. Only people who have broken with their sinful past and now want to live for God, belong there. In case you drop back in old sins, you should immediately confess it and break with it again.

V11. It is necessary for you to be reminded occasionally of what you were in the past. At the same time you're also being reminded of everything that happened to you, namely, you are:

1. "washed",
2. "sanctified" and
3. "justified".

First: Your sins are *washed away* through the blood of the Lord Jesus. All that was wrong has disappeared.

Second: You are *sanctified*, which means that God has separated you for Himself to live for Him. You had to be washed, for when you were living in sin, God couldn't use you.

But there is yet one more thing. You are, third, also *justified*. God not only separated you from the world to live for Him, but He also connected you to Himself. You may and can be very close to Him.

You understand that these wonderful things didn't happen because you are so great. God could do that "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God". Only because of Who the Lord Jesus is to God and because of the work He has accomplished, could God deal with us like that. And the Spirit of God, Who dwells in you, assures you that God has dealt with you like that.

V12. The connection between verse 11 and verse 12 is as follows. In verse 11 you see that God has delivered you from the chains of sin in which you were imprisoned. When you were not yet washed etcetera, you were not free. You might have thought you were, but now you can see that you were a slave of sin then. You were living under obligations that you imposed on yourself or that others imposed on you.

That belongs to the past now. You can do everything now. That's what is said, even twice: "All things are lawful for me." That is true. Only, both times something is added. That is not to limit your freedom, but to practice it properly. The first addition is: "But not all things are profitable." Just examine yourself if it's helpful if you want to do something that is in fact not sinful or wrong in itself. When I think of our children or of other young people, it is possible that, because of something I do, I give a bad example to them, even though it is something that's not wrong for me. Pay attention that Paul is speaking in the 'I' form here. It's about how you and I practice Christian freedom in our daily life.

The second addition is: "I will not be mastered by anything." If you don't practice this freedom properly, you will fall back under a law. You will notice that things that are quite helpful, will take control over you. Could I really do something without becoming addicted to it? For when I become addicted to something, I am not in control anymore, but I am being controlled.

V13a. Here Paul speaks about food. Many people let their stomach lead them. Food, delicious and much, is very important to many people. Food is something that is lawful. God supplies us with food to nurture our body. You may enjoy your food with thanksgiving to God (1Tim 4:3). But here the application is also: how do you practice it and how important is it in your life?

With Isaac and Esau for example, their ‘appetite for something delicious’ did not turn out well. They didn’t deal with food properly. Esau sold his birthright for one plate of lentil stew (Gen 25:29-34). Of Isaac you read that “he had a taste for game”. Because of his love for savory food, he decided to, against the will of God, grant Esau the blessing of the firstborn (Gen 25:28; 27:3-4). Here you have some examples of people who couldn’t say: ‘I will not be mastered by anything.’ They had no self-control anymore and they did things they later regretted.

Food is for the stomach and the stomach for the food, but God will do away with both of them. That hasn’t got anything to do with the annihilation of man. Everyone will always exist, whether in heaven or in hell. The issue here is that in heaven food and stomach will be of no use anymore.

V13b. The Corinthians draw the wrong conclusion that it wouldn’t be important to take care of the body. It seems they use their body for immorality. In the world around us, everything is about sex. What Paul is saying here to the Corinthians, is also topical for us. Because of the influence of Christendom, matters like fornication were clearly considered as something bad. But the influence thereof is now disappearing at a very fast pace in the West. With a lot of young people and also among older people, sexuality has been degraded to a consumption product. In our Western world, the truth of God, also regarding marriage and sexuality, has been generally jettisoned.

We are dealing with a generation that doesn’t know anything at all about what the Bible says about marriage and sexuality. Their thoughts and talk about it and what they’ve often already done with it in practice, prove that as to these things they have often completely gotten off track. It is necessary that young people (and of course also older people) who are converted and have become believers in the Lord Jesus, are being taught from the Bible about the functioning of their body.

The Corinthians hadn’t been converted for very long. Some of them had been living in all kinds of awful sexual immoralities (verses 9-11). They lived in the midst of their compatriots, who were and still are in the habit of living like that. Therefore they were in danger of losing the awareness of the impact of certain sins. This applies to us as well. The world around

you is living its own dissolute life. Values and standards are fading. If you don't watch out, you may slowly be dragged along and you will also gradually lose the right view of matters. The only way to continually have a right view of good and evil is by listening to God's Word. Then you will have the right view of God's purpose with your body.

You cannot do whatever you want with your body. Regarding food and drink, you may gratefully receive them in order to nurture your body. And you may certainly enjoy it. But your body is not for sexual immorality (or fornication)! By sexual immorality is not meant prostitution in the first place. Sexual immorality is a collective term for all unlawful sex, thus for sexuality outside marriage.

Your body and the Lord belong together. Your body is for the Lord and the Lord takes care for your body. That's why you should never enter into a relationship with your body with someone whom the Lord has not purposed for you, that means your own wife with whom you are legally bound by marriage.

Now read 1 Corinthians 6:7-13 again.

Reflection: Do you sometimes explore, when doing things, if they are useful? Just also explore which things you are mastered by.

1Cor 6:14-20 | Glorify God in Your Body

14 Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! 16 Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body [with her]? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH." 17 But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit [with Him]. 18 Flee immorality. Every [other] sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

V14. Your body and the Lord belong together, not only at present, but also in future. Just like the Lord was raised up, just like that your body will be raised up. Your body is – and will remain in future – a member of Christ.

V15. Do you not know that your body is a member of Christ? Just as you use a member of your own body, your arm, head, hand, foot, etcetera, Christ wants to use your body with all its members and capacities. If that stands out clearly in your mind, you will be able to immediately see why you cannot possibly make your body a member of a prostitute.

V16. To be joined to a prostitute or harlot means that you are one body with her. The proof of that comes from Genesis 2, where God instituted marriage (Gen 2:24). The being one flesh that comes about through sexual intercourse, is something that belongs within marriage. He who has sexual intercourse outside marriage – so in harlotry – with somebody else, becomes by doing so one body with the other person. The Bible calls a person, who is married and commits this sin, an 'adulterer'. Only repentance and forgiveness can restore the damaged relationships.

I will not elaborate now on the terrible consequences, but you can imagine the pain and sorrow that fills the hearts of the persons involved. The worst consequences come out of this sin.

In an earlier comment I wrote as follows about this verse:

'When somebody who is not married commits this sin, then he or she is obligated to marry the other person, because, to my personal conviction, God sees this physical being one as a marriage, even though this being one still has to be confirmed publicly.'

Now I have reread this commentary I must confess to the reader that I had to revise 'my personal conviction'. That has been a while ago, but with this new version I now have the opportunity to tell it. My revision appeared to be necessary after I reread carefully what is written in the Bible. Also others have pointed that out to me.

It is written that two *married* people become one *flesh* through sexual intercourse. That it is about a man and his wife, so about a married couple, appears from the fact that "becoming one flesh" does not stand on itself, but it is the third aspect that makes a marriage a real marriage.

Read again what is written in Genesis 2, where God introduces marriage (Gen 2:24). You read there, that there are two steps that precede the "becoming one flesh". Those steps are

1. that "a man shall leave his father and his mother" (a process) and
2. then will "be joined to his wife" (the official wedding).

Subsequently, after these two steps, follows that "they shall become one flesh". This third step or this third aspect expresses the whole and total unity.

When *unmarried* people have sexual intercourse, there is no mention of the first two steps. Therefore Paul doesn't say here – and that is what has opened my eyes – that he who joins a harlot is one *flesh* with her, but that he is "one *body*" with her. The reason why Paul refers to marriage is because of God's purpose with it and that's why he speaks about "one flesh". Because of the fact that Paul speaks about cases regarding sexual intercourse outside marriage, he says that in those cases there is a mention of 'one *body*' and not of 'one *flesh*'.

When I became aware of that important distinction, I also understood that it is not right to speak about a marriage when unmarried people commit this sin.

That doesn't mean that sexual intercourse before marriage because of the mentioned reasons doesn't have consequences in the sense of obligations. This change of vision is mainly important on how pastoral care is given in such cases. God will grant power to persons who are willing to receive pastoral care, so that they will be able to bear the consequences and even to be instruments in a way that God will be glorified. I would like you to consider exploring in the Old Testament and in the New Testament as well, how God thinks about marriage.

Now I will not elaborate on problems that occur in a case that the other person is married. One cannot but expect that sin always has chaotic consequences. God will surely make a way for the persons involved, when they confess their sins sincerely and wholeheartedly. The same goes for people, young and old, who are converted and have come to faith in the Lord Jesus and who do not have any religious background. The number of newly converts that are free from sexual immorality is decreasing more and more. It is often the case that they haven't 'had sex' with only one person, but with more than one. What should you advise in such cases? That is not that simple. We should look at them on a case-by-case basis.

One thing is clear: before someone is converted, everything he does, is sin. Confession toward God and forgiveness by God are necessary. The more someone speaks light-heartedly about his past, the less profound his confession will be. The awareness of the gravity of this sin should be made clear to such a person. The deeper someone is convinced of his former sins, the more he can be pointed to the forgiveness that God has granted him. When that repentance is clearly apparent, God will surely show a way to get through.

V17. The believer belongs to the Lord, he is one spirit with Him. That is the unity that has been accomplished at conversion. This spiritual unity may not be damaged by a wrong physical unity.

V18. The call is: "Flee immorality." Do not ever trifle with your sexual feelings. Avoid places where you can easily be tempted to fulfill your sexual desires – which are not wrong on itself; they are given by God, after all – in an erroneous way. Sexual immorality has, among all sins one can commit,

a particular place, because your body is, in an extraordinarily negative way, involved in this.

V19. Your body has received such an extraordinarily positive function from God. It is a house in which the Holy Spirit dwells. A Divine Guest has taken up residence in your body. Then surely your body must be special. At the same time it means that you are not your own anymore. When God the Holy Spirit dwells in you, He surely has all rights in and over the house of your body, hasn't He?

V20. Do you still remember how He received the ownership of your body? Not by squatting or by breaking into 'the house' of your body. The full price has been paid by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, which He shed after His awful sufferings on the cross. Make yourself fully aware of that again; think once more about what the Lord really did for you. It is only through His love that He made your body His own, isn't it? If you put your body in the hands of the Holy Spirit, Who dwells in you, He will use every member of it to glorify God. Therefore glorify God in your body!

Now read 1 Corinthians 6:14-20 again.

Reflection: Explore how you can glorify God with your body (thus with your ears, eyes, hands, feet etcetera.).

1 Corinthians 7

1Cor 7:1-7 | Husband and Wife

1 Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. 2 But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. 3 The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband [does]; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife [does]. 5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 But this I say by way of concession, not of command. 7 Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.

V1. This chapter is directly connected with the last verses of chapter 6. There it is clarified that sexual intercourse outside marriage is fornication. But how are you supposed to practice marriage then? The Corinthians had put their questions in writing to the apostle Paul. In this chapter he responds to these questions in detail.

Sometimes people say that Paul had no right to speak about that, because he was unmarried. Such people understand nothing of the special function Paul received from God. Paul was the man whom God entrusted with a special service. Especially the unity that exists between Christ and the church is something that he had gotten as a task to pass on to the church. This unity is compared with marriage. The husband is supposed to present Christ and the wife is supposed to present the church. In Ephesians 5 you can read about that (Eph 5:22-33).

The comparison with Christ and the church in relation to husband and wife is not presented in 1 Corinthians. Nevertheless it will be clear that Paul is exactly the one who could make practical remarks about the relation between husband and wife because he knew the relationship between

Christ and the church so well. That's why he wanted to make sure that the intercourse in marriages between the spouses becomes more and more like the great example.

Before he starts to write about it, he first says in verse 1 that it is good for a man not to touch a woman. By saying it in this way, it seems that he is against marriage.

V2. And when he says in this verse that because of sexual immoralities each man should have his own wife, that seems not quite a lofty motive. It looks like a necessary evil. However, when you read this chapter to the end, you see that he fully recognizes marriage and that he underlines how important marital faithfulness is.

Why then does he speak like that? It is because in this chapter he sees marriage as something temporary. In heaven there is no marriage and no one will be given in marriage. This is what the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 22 (Mt 22:30). Its validity is only for the time that someone lives on earth. In order to experience it properly, you ought not only to know the *privileges* of marriage, but also the *responsibilities*. It is quite a big responsibility to be married. When you are married, there is a lot expected from you by your spouse. You need to spend time on your marriage. When you are not married, you can spend your time in another way. Not of course for yourself, but for the Lord. Well then, from this side Paul looks at marriage here.

I want to emphasize one more time that marriage is a beautiful picture of Christ and the church. When God introduced marriage, He thought of this. Nevertheless, as it is said, the side which this chapter shows, is the side of spending time. Paul is not outbalanced in his presentation of marriage. You will see that there is a balance in the way he presents the responsibilities that are involved in a marriage.

When he says that it is good for a man not to touch a woman, he means that it is good to remain unmarried in order to be totally free to work for the Lord (verses 26,32). He doesn't mean that you shouldn't shake hands with a woman.

Nonetheless, it is appropriate to warn against being too intimate with somebody of the opposite sex. Be careful with hugging and kissing of, or

to be hugged or kissed by, somebody of the opposite sex. Marital problems can arise from that. Jealousy quickly plays a role when being too amicable. After all, the apostle himself is saying here that because of the danger of fornications each man should have his own wife, and the other way around, each woman should have her own husband.

V3-4. Being married means that a husband has obligations toward his wife and a wife toward her husband. It is about rendering affection that is due to each other. In a marriage, husband and wife have surrendered themselves to each other. Neither of them has authority over their own body. It is not a matter of giving and taking, but of giving. The context makes it clear here that the main issue is to fulfill the sexual needs of the other person.

Sexual needs are nothing to be ashamed of; they are given by God in the creation. Only, they are to be satisfied in the area God gave for them and that is within marriage. In marriage husband and wife may enjoy each other's body. The sexual intercourse is the crowning of it. God also gave sexual intercourse with a view to beget children. So it has a double function. Because of the random use of all kinds of artificial contraceptives, a separation is being made in this double function.

In 1 Peter 3 it is written that husbands should live with understanding with their wives (1Pet 3:7). That embraces the total intercourse with the wife of course, including the sexual intercourse. A husband should get understanding of his wife. She is actually created much differently by God. How much understanding he has of his wife in this view, appears from the fact of how much self-control he has. Because of the fact that people can get certain preventive products easily, the exercises to practice self-control have been reduced.

And one more thing: if we have put everything regarding our life in the hand of the Lord, wouldn't we then entrust Him with this matter as well? He, who wants to learn to know the will of the Lord in this, will not be disappointed by Him. You can find His instructions in many sections in the Bible, like the chapter you have before you right now.

V5. Does a husband or wife always have to give in to the other? No. Under three conditions it is permitted to deprive each other:

1. when they both agree,
2. the time of abstinence is not too long and
3. the purpose is to devote oneself to prayer.

There are things that could happen in the life of believers, for which they see no solution. The only way that remains open, is to entirely focus on God and to ask Him for a way out. In such cases it is good to voluntarily say ‘no’ for a certain time, regarding the satisfaction of the bodily needs. The apostle is very down-to-earth and says that after that they should come together again, otherwise satan could seize the opportunity to tempt them to commit fornication. After all, the needs are there.

V6. What Paul is saying here, is no command. He is proposing it, as it were, as an advice. It is not good to assume without thinking and praying about it, that God will just lead our way. Then there will be no exercise anymore in the presence of the Lord about how to discern what to do in certain cases. You see how practical the instructions are.

V7. Paul wished that all men were even as himself, so unmarried. He says that because he sees how much work there is to be done for the Lord. At the same time he acknowledges that a special gift is needed from God to remain unmarried. Normally it happens that a man receives a wife and a woman receives a husband. After all, God Himself said: “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). And that is a gift from God as well, for “each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner [to remain unmarried] and another in that [to marry]”.

Now read 1 Corinthians 7:1-7 again.

Reflection: Are you married? Explore how far your marriage could be more enriched by these verses.

Are you not married? What about your desires for a wife/husband:

Is it dominating everything; or

is it a healthy desire, you bring in prayer to the Lord, while you serve the Lord heartily; or

do you think you are able to remain unmarried, in order to live fully for the Lord, without having any worries regarding a husband/wife?

1Cor 7:8-14 | Three Groups

8 But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. 9 But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn [with passion]. 10 But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband 11 (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. 12 But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

Three groups of people are brought to your attention here:

1. “The unmarried and … widows” (verse 8),
2. “the married” (verse 10) and
3. “the rest” (verse 12), those are the mixed marriages, of which only the husband or the wife is a believer.

Paul addresses each of these three groups.

V8. It is good for the unmarried and for the widows to remain unmarried, even as he himself. In this way you don't have anything to do with taking care of a well running marriage. The time you would have had to spend for that, you could use for the service of the Lord.

V9. Paul, however, really has an eye for the practice. He is aware of the fact that a person may not be able to afford to remain unmarried because of the desires this person might have. You yourself might be wondering whether the Lord wants you to marry or that He wants you to be alone. I also had that question. In my case, the answer came when somebody said: ‘If you wish to have a life partner, you can be sure that the Lord wants you to marry. He has put that desire in you.’ This simple answer was the reason for me to stop wondering whether or not to marry. In my view you don't have to deal with it frenetically.

Then, of course, comes the problem of how to know whom the Lord wants you to marry. For that you ought to continue praying. It might happen that despite your desire for a life partner, you still remain single. That can cause such a big struggle that you even could start to doubt the love of God. I can really understand that, certainly when other people make it pitiable. A chapter like this could be a great encouragement. To God your life has not missed His goal, when a life partner does not appear in your life. Do not let emotions concerning the absence of a partner fill your life, but give all room to Him to fill your life.

I do not want to give the impression to simply set this problem aside with some phrases. That would be very cheap. I only want to indicate a direction in which support for this lack can be found.

V10-11. For the second group, the married, it is said that only death can separate them. Every separation that comes earlier than death, is not permitted. In Malachi 2 it is written that God “hates divorce” (Mal 2:16). There is no reason to think why husband and wife would want to divorce each other. Yes, you may hear about unendurable situations of continuous fights, yelling, drunkenness or extramarital relationship and adultery. And, humanly speaking, it is understandable that the person that has to suffer all this, initiates divorce proceedings. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus said – and Paul refers to that when he remarks “not I, but the Lord” –: “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (Mt 19:6). This is a clear command: do not divorce!

Is there really no exception to divorce someone? No, there is not, although some people find an exception in Matthew 19 which, according to them, gives the asked condition (Mt 19:9). That is when one of the spouses has committed fornication. People say that the partner who has committed fornication, has actually broken the marital bond by committing fornication, which means by having sexual intercourse with another person (1Cor 6:16). That argument is not applicable, for sexual intercourse outside marriage doesn't break a legal marriage any the less as a marriage originates by having sexual intercourse outside marriage.

In case anybody sees Matthew 19:9 as an exception after all, and thinks that he/she could derive a right from that verse, he/she ought to question him/

herself if this right is really to be made use of. If somebody can work up the courage (I want to express myself as careful as possible in this matter) to drop this right, it would be a triumph of grace to remain faithful to the marital bond wherein both of them are connected and which is indissoluble till death.

In some particular cases of divorce, sometimes the excuse is made that in this certain case the marriage was not such that husband and wife were joined by God. Indeed, there are enough cases of people who got married without asking and praying for the will of God. If this is the case and they become aware of that, they ought to confess that to the Lord; but that should never be an excuse to get divorced. It is written '*what* God has joined', and not '*whom* God has joined'. The "what" refers to the *institution* of marriage as such. The two persons who are joined through the bond of marriage, cannot ever get rid of that bond. It is a bond that God has put around them both together and which never should be broken. You need to think about that too when you think about marriage.

In case the divorce has taken place, then the commandment is clear as well: to remain unmarried or to be reconciled with each other.

V12-13. "The rest." Who could that be? From the continuation of this chapter, you can conclude that here it is about mixed marriages. These are marriages of which one of the spouses is converted and the other one is still an unbeliever. Of course it is about someone who repented and believed, when they were already married. It is not about somebody who knows the Lord Jesus and is getting married to an unbeliever. That is really in contrast with the Bible (2Cor 6:14). The Lord will never bless that.

You can imagine that in such a heathen city as Corinth, where the gospel was accepted, a separation in many families happened from the unbelieving family members, because of faith. How should they have to deal with that? Here Paul speaks as an apostle, without referring to an announcement of the Lord Jesus Himself. Therefore he says: "I say, not the Lord." That doesn't mean, of course, that you may ignore what Paul says here. He is still an apostle, who has received authority from God to tell us as believers how we should act in all kinds of situations. In cases of mixed marriages, the one who became a believer should never take actions for divorce.

When you read Ezra 10 and Nehemiah 13, you could get the idea that in case of mixed marriages the unbeliever should be sent away (Ezra 10:1-4,10-16; Neh 13:23-27). But in those sections it is about marriages between members of God's earthly people and the Gentiles. Those marriages were legally forbidden by God. In spite of that the Israelites connected themselves with the Gentiles who lived around them. In that way they defiled themselves and made themselves guilty of transgression of the law (Deut 7:1-6). The only way to cleanse themselves from that sin was through confession and by sending away the foreign wives together with the children born of them. That is how God ordained it when His people were living under the law.

V14. In the time we are living, we are not under the law, but under grace. When one of the parents of an unbelieving family becomes a believer, it certainly has an impact on the whole family. The unbelieving husband or wife is sanctified through the believer. This being sanctified has got nothing to do with their relation to God. There is no change in that. For without conversion they remain lost and unsaved. It has to do with their place in this world. Through the connection with the believer, the unbeliever has now a specific place in this world. He or she has come under the direct influence of Christendom.

In former days, that whole family was in the darkness of paganism. But through the conversion of husband or wife, light has entered the family. Since then, whether he or she wants it or not, the unbeliever cannot possibly avoid coming into contact with it every day. Everyone knew it: the influence of the Christian faith is there in that family. Whether he or she liked it or not: from the moment of the conversion of his or her partner, the unbeliever has been connected to someone who doesn't participate anymore with the pagan way of living. The same applied to their children.

You see how such a blessing enters families through the gospel. Not only for the converted one, but also for his or her housemates.

Now read 1 Corinthians 7:8-14 again.

Reflection: What arguments can you put forward for not starting a relationship with an unbeliever?

1Cor 7:15-20 | God Has Called Us to Peace

15 Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such [cases], but God has called us to peace. 16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? 17 Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches. 18 Was any man called [when he was already] circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but [what matters is] the keeping of the commandments of God. 20 Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called.

V15. When in a marriage one of the partners has become converted, an enormous gap arises at the same time between husband and wife. The believer wants to consider the will of God from that moment, while the unbeliever doesn't want to. That can trigger tensions in the marriage. Those tensions can run so high that the unbeliever might want to leave. In such cases the believer doesn't have to strain every nerve to prevent the unbelieving partner from leaving.

In such cases the believer may often think that he/she has failed in his/her testimony. Who can say to have always been a perfect witness? I don't say that to diminish our responsibility. When mistakes have been made, they ought to be confessed, also when mistakes have been made toward the unbeliever. But when, despite a sincere confession of mistakes, the unbeliever still wants to leave, let him leave. The only thing what is left for the believer, is to pray perseveringly for the unbeliever.

How should the believer go on now? Paul says here that the brother or sister is not under bondage. Could it be that it means that another marriage is possible? In that way the opportunity for reunification would be wiped out, in case the unbeliever still would have been saved. Therefore an addition is written: "But God has called us to peace." Through the conversion of a family member this peace can be taken away. This is how the Lord Jesus speaks about it when He says that He hasn't come to bring peace, but to bring division (Lk 12:51-53).

V16. When in a family, one of the family members has accepted the Lord Jesus, division has arisen between the believer and the other unbelieving members. As I already said at the beginning of this section: this may cause tensions in certain cases, which may work out in such a way that in the relationship between husband and wife, the unbeliever may want to leave. Let him/her then leave, for God has called us to peace. The believer doesn't need to do his/her utmost to keep the other, at the expense of peace. After all, it cannot be said with assurance that he or she will repent.

V17. I think that for everyone who has ended up in such circumstances because of his/her conversion, peace can be found in this verse 17. This verse does make it easier for you to fit in with the situation and not to rebel against it. You find two reasons for that. The first reason has to do with the circumstances of your life. Whatever situation you may find yourself in, it doesn't come as a surprise to God. The moment you accepted the Lord Jesus, He knew the situation in which you would find yourself. What He now would want you to do, is that you show in your surrounding the change that He has worked in your life.

The second reason has to do with you personally. God has called you as you are. What that means is clarified in verse 18 and the verses that follow. But the clarification is preceded by something significant: "And so I direct in all the churches." Everything that Paul has to say here about marriage is not to be applied to everyone's own pleasure. Neither is it restricted in terms of time. It doesn't only concern the Corinthians, but it concerns all churches and for all times. It is good to think about that, especially in our time, when marital morality is going down more and more and when divorce is being accepted as a common thing.

V18-19. But now the question is how somebody could be called. In other words: where did someone stand personally and what was his situation at the moment that God called him to accept the gospel? A person could have been circumcised or uncircumcised; he could have been called as a slave or as a free man, that is, not as a slave (verse 21).

Did it matter to God whether someone was circumcised or uncircumcised? In former days it did, for in those days circumcision was the outer mark of the covenant that God had made with His people. But since the death of

the Lord Jesus on the cross, an outer mark has no additional value to God. Therefore the absence of such an outer mark doesn't make a person lesser to God. The outer aspects have – as a basis of the relation to God – lost their meaning. The outer aspects don't determine the relation to God anymore.

What matters now is “the keeping of the commandments of God”. The point is the mind of your heart. Your love for God will become apparent from the obedience to what God has said. The result will be that you will be willing to put your life in order according to His will. And when God gives His commandments about outward things as well, you will be willing to satisfy Him as well, out of love for Him.

The ‘circumcised’ and the ‘uncircumcised’ may be applied by us as in the following comparison. The circumcised was someone who outwardly belonged to Israel, God’s earthly people. But if he really wanted to belong to God, he had to repent. In that way you might have been raised in a Christian family, but to really belong to God, you had to repent. Then the calling voice of God came and you repented. In that way you could say you have been called as a circumcised.

The uncircumcised didn’t belong to the people of God in former days. Yet through repentance it was possible for him to belong to God. In that way you might be someone who has not been brought up with the Bible, but when you heard God’s calling voice, you repented and now you also belong to God. In that way you could say you are called as an uncircumcised.

V20. It is not God’s purpose for you to change anything about that. I sometimes hear that it would be a disadvantage if someone is raised in a Christian family, because you wouldn’t know so well what the world and sin are. Actually, you should – this is what people therefore say – live in sin for a while and forget about your Christian upbringing. But this is a wrong statement. Paul himself, for example, was a man who had been brought up with utterly religious standards. He hadn’t lived, as it is called ‘in the world’, but when he was converted, he later called himself the “foremost” of all sinners (1Tim 1:15).

In the same way, the awareness of sin is growing in you too as you make your way with God. Then it is no longer important from which background

you have been converted. In your relationship with Him He will show you Who He Himself is and who you are. The point is whether you are willing to keep God's commandments. Therefore it is not about your origin, but about your attitude, your obedience to God.

Now read 1 Corinthians 7:15-20 again.

Reflection: What are, in your view, the advantages of a Christian upbringing or of an unchristian upbringing? And what are the disadvantages?

1Cor 7:21-28 | Remain With God

21 Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. 22 For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. 24 Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that [condition] in which he was called. 25 Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. 26 I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28 But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.

V21. Being circumcised or uncircumcised in verse 19 is about whether you've had or haven't had a *religious* background when you are converted. But there is one more aspect that plays a role at your conversion: your social background. In the time Paul was living, slavery was a common thing. How the slave felt about this depended on the master he had, but in general it was a very inferior position. You could've been treated any way they wanted to. You were not more than a piece of equipment. In some of the letters Paul wrote, he also addresses the slaves. At first sight they found themselves in anything but an enviable position. Therefore history mentions many slave revolts.

If you explore what Paul has to say to the slaves in his several letters, you will discover that a Christian slave had a special opportunity to testify of his Lord and Savior (Tit 2:10-11). He could show through his behavior that he was a follower of the Lord Jesus, Who also became a Slave. Therefore he didn't have to worry about being called as a slave. The important thing was that he behaved himself as a Christian and didn't participate (any more) in revolting against his master. Joseph is a wonderful example of a faithful slave. You read several times that God was with him (Gen 39:2,21). Isn't that encouraging when you find yourself in a subordinate position?

Paul continues by saying something about the opportunity to become free. When the slave had the opportunity for that, he could make use of it. Here he presents that a freedman has other opportunities to serve the Lord.

V22. In any case, both the Christian slave and the Christian freedman were not supposed to decide on their own how to live their life. He who was called as a slave, was called “in the Lord” and therefore free from the power of sin. But take note: he was a freedman of the *Lord*. The same applied to the one who was called as a freedman, for he was a slave of Christ. Christ paid the ransom for both. And what price! He paid the price of His life to redeem them from the power of satan. They now belonged to Him. They were His property now and therefore He received the right over their life.

V23. Therefore they were not to worry about what people demanded from them. That doesn't mean that they shouldn't listen to their superiors, but they knew that they had to be obedient to God above all.

V24. In this verse Paul ends the section with something that applies to everything that preceded that verse. The point is that each person had to remain with God in the condition or position where he was when he was called. To you as well it is something you can ask yourself. A change is only allowed when you have been involved with an obscure job or with bad matters before your conversion. A clear example is when a harlot has been converted. It goes without saying that she cannot remain ‘with God’ by continuing to do this ‘job’. In general, it is God's purpose, however, that a person doesn't change from work or matters he used to do, but that he testifies in his old environment that he has changed.

In Luke 3 you find examples of persons who came with repentance to John the baptist and asked him what they should do (Lk 3:10-14). He didn't say to the tax collectors and soldiers to quit their jobs, but that they should do their work appropriately. They could show in their jobs that they had been changed. In the society we live it is almost a normal thing that in some industrial branches the workers declare more hours than they have worked and so get paid for those hours. He who has accepted the Lord Jesus as Savior and Lord will not want to participate anymore in such practices.

V25. In the section of verses 25-39 Paul clarifies with more detail what he already mentioned briefly in verses 8-9. For the unmarried and widows, he sees an important task ahead. If you read the whole section, you notice that he addresses both the unmarried man and the unmarried woman. His advice to the unmarried is to remain alone. He doesn't just say so because it is that easy, free and without obligations. No, he does that from a certain point of view, namely keeping "the present distress" (verse 26) in mind. How big that distress is, you can see in the world around you. Paul had that in mind and wanted others to have that in mind also.

It can touch you deeply when you imagine how many people around you are desperate and see no way out of their problems. Thoughts of committing suicide or attempts of committing suicide are no exception anymore. Statistics prove that with hard figures. If you imagine that one out of five young people has thought of committing suicide, it can really shock you. Considering the opportunity to be able to tell as many people as possible about the Lord Jesus, maybe especially to young people, Paul approaches the state of being unmarried from this point of view. He doesn't do that because he received a commandment from the Lord to do so, but he gives his judgment "as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy".

If you read superficially, it seems like it is just an opinion of Paul which you might as well ignore. After all, he says that he hasn't received a commandment from the Lord to do so, right? Of other matters he indeed says that he directly received them from the Lord, such as in chapter 11, regarding the Lord's Supper (1Cor 11:23). But even if it is not added, it doesn't mean that we shouldn't take that seriously. Paul was a man who gave himself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Certainly, regarding the letters he wrote and which we find in the Bible, it is good to realize and accept it as such that the Spirit made him write it down this way. Such is the case here as well, about the unmarried. At the same time you see how carefully he writes. He is aware of the mercy he received to be faithful to the calling of the Lord. Remaining alone, in order to dedicate your life to the Lord and to fulfill your ministry faithfully, is something you cannot do without the mercy of the Lord, for it is not an easy thing to do. To do it by your own strength is not possible.

V26-27. Therefore it is good to remain unmarried with the special purpose to devote all your efforts to the Lord. But who is bound to a husband or wife, so who is married, is not supposed to change that. And who is not bound to a husband or wife is neither supposed to change that.

V28. "But", as Paul adds immediately to it "if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned." He is constantly careful not to throw a slur on being married, as if that would be something sinful. He is aware that his way of presenting matters, could make somebody feel guilty when he or she got married. That is not his purpose at all.

What he wants is to spare the unmarried something and that is "trouble in this life" [literally "tribulation in the flesh"]. Tribulation in this life or the flesh means that marriage goes together with the obligation to be occupied with your husband or wife, and your family, which means that time cannot be used for directly proclaiming the gospel. Of course the Lord also gives opportunities to serve Him when you are married. But, as already said, Paul looks at everything here with in view of the present distress.

Now read 1 Corinthians 7:21-28 again.

Reflection: In which way do you recognize the 'present distress' around you? Tell that to God and ask Him how He wants to use you for that.

1Cor 7:29-35 | The Time Is Short

29 But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; 30 and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; 31 and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away. 32 But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; 33 but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, 34 and [his interests] are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. 35 This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and [to secure] undistracted devotion to the Lord.

V29. Time is pressing. The Lord Jesus can return any moment and then the opportunities to preach the gospel will be over. Then the curtain, so to speak, will go down for the millions of people and they perish forever. Against this background Paul presents some situations. Those are situations which are not wrong, but they may cause that the work of the Lord will not be done anymore.

When he says "those who have wives should be as though they had none" he doesn't mean to say anything to the detriment of marriage. Needless to say, you should not leave your wife just like that. In verse 3 he already said that husband and wife must meet what they owe to each other. No, it is that wife and children should not have priority at the expense of the work of the Lord. Even when you are married, the work of the Lord has priority. It is necessary to be reminded of this. Promising young believers have become unfit for the Lord, after getting married, because they got completely wrapped up with their husband or wife.

V30. Sorrow and joy are expressions of emotions that are given to you by God. They occur because of several circumstances or occurrences in your life. It is common to life on earth and you may express yourself like that.

But it is a fact that emotions of sorrow or joy can engage your attention in such a way that you may forget the work of the Lord.

If you are in the fortunate condition of having your own income, you are able to buy things. Then you become the owner of the purchased. But you should be careful not to fill your heart with it. If you have bought a smartphone, a pc or a car, then it could be that you easily spend a lot of leisure time on it (how much time do you spend on internet and social media for example?), while the work of the Lord is not being done. Others are sensitive to nice clothes and are occupied with it for a great deal of their leisure time. The work of the Lord is then also not being done. You don't even think of buying gospel literature and distributing it or signing up to participate in an evangelical campaign, or to help in a children's camp.

V31. The same is applicable also to "the world". You are allowed to use everything you want in this world, but of course it concerns the lawful use. In case you have money, you are able to do all kinds of things with it, such as treat yourself to a nice vacation. You can also collect curiosities you like to have. As long as you keep on realizing that these things are outward things which are of temporary nature, you will remain useful for the Lord and His work.

V32. Paul writes these things because he wants you to be free from concern. From what follows, he seems to mean: without having to take care of husband or wife. The unmarried is able to devote him/herself to the matters of the Lord completely and to please Him. He who is unmarried simply has more time to do so. Some do not like to get married because of the obligations toward another person. They want to remain free to be able to do what they want to. But that should be no reason to remain unmarried. He who is unmarried, can spend his life in an amazing way. Your life is then not only complete when you are married, but your life is then complete when you see what task the Lord has given you.

V33. Of course this also applies to the one who is married, but yet, then comes another concern, namely how he should please his wife. She needs time, attention and care. It wouldn't be a good thing if a husband neglects his responsibilities. The consequences will be disastrous for the marriage and for the work of the Lord as well.

V34. In verses 32-33 the distinction between the unmarried and the married man is made clear. That same distinction is made clear in verse 34 between the unmarried and married woman. With Paul there is no question of discrimination. Regarding the unmarried woman he even gets more into detail about the opportunities to live for the Lord than what concerns the unmarried man. The care, concerning the matters of the Lord, can be expressed by being holy to the Lord both in body and spirit. She can focus exclusively on the Lord.

A woman has the special opportunity to show through her body that she lives holy (that means: apart from the world and devoted to the Lord). Through the properness of her clothing (1Tim 2:9) and through her long hair (1Cor 11:15) she exposes a characteristic of her own through which she can distinguish herself from the women of the world.

It is not an easy thing to practice for a female Christian. The distinction is fading more and more. This distinction should not be an outward matter alone of course. Therefore in "spirit" is connected to it. You need to have a clear motive to be able to live holy for the Lord "in body". A person who doesn't have that, falls into a wrong kind of holiness. That kind of holiness is only formal and is empty. It will not make one able to go against the tide. If someone also wants to be holy 'in spirit' for the Lord, it means that such person has thought about doing what pleases the Lord and acts with discretion and not because others say so.

Here you see the balance between the outer and inner man. Living outwardly as the Lord is pleased to see – in the Bible you can read how He likes to see it – is only valuable to the Lord if it is a reflection of the inner devotion. Of course this holiness in body and spirit doesn't apply only to the unmarried women, but applies to the married women as well.

You could compare this to the conditions that are mentioned in 1 Timothy 3 for someone who wants to be an overseer (1Tim 3:1-7). These conditions apply in a special way to the overseer, but of course you cannot say that someone who doesn't want to be an overseer doesn't have to consider this. Every Christian is supposed to strive for reflecting the attributes mentioned in that chapter in his life. In 1 Corinthians 7, where the unmarried woman

is directly concerned, it is exactly because of her being unmarried, she has the special opportunity to live holy in body and spirit, devoted to the Lord.

V35. Paul very well senses what reactions could arise after the previous comments. Therefore he adds that he says these things to the “own benefit” of the Corinthians. He doesn’t want to make it difficult or put a restraint upon them. He doesn’t want to create false contradictions between marriage and being occupied with the matters of the Lord. What he wants is that they, and we, think about these things.

He puts the state of being married and the state of being unmarried in the light of the Lord and the work for Him. Then being unmarried is not something inferior, but it rather gives the possibility to spend all time and attention to the Lord and the service for Him.

Now read 1 Corinthians 7:29-35 again.

Reflection: Name some ‘things of the Lord’ and name some ‘things of the world’.

1Cor 7:36-40 | Free to Be Married, Only in the Lord

36 But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin [daughter], if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. 37 But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin [daughter], he will do well. 38 So then both he who gives his own virgin [daughter] in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better. 39 A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. 40 But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.

It is still about marriage. This chapter does not bring up this important issue from the point of view that God had in mind when instituting marriage, namely, as the image of Christ and the church. This chapter is about the Christian's point of view, the way he/she looks at it and that in connection with all the work that is to be done for the Lord. This means that you are allowed to make your own decisions in this respect. You are allowed to make your own choice.

Of course you will make this choice by consulting the Lord in prayer, but it is about your own responsibility that you have in this respect.

Making a choice is only a real choice if you have carefully weighed the advantages and disadvantages of a certain matter. These are presented to you by Paul in this chapter – under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, do not forget that! In verses 36-37 the two possibilities are once more presented concretely and practically, while in verse 38 the conclusion is given.

V36. This verse is a bit difficult to translate, but what it says, is quite clear. In practical terms it means that a person, who thinks that for him it is better to marry than to remain unmarried, is free to marry. You can actually conclude from the word "thinks" that this choice is made after having thought about it. That a person is completely free to make such a decision, you can conclude from the sentence "let him do what he wishes". There is no need to feel guilty, for there is no mention of sin. It goes without saying that he who considers this matter seriously, will make it a matter of prayer. All his

personal thoughts which will lead him to make a certain choice, will be in the presence of the Lord.

V37. The application for verse 36 also goes for verse 37 and yet to a stronger degree. There you read four conditions if you want to remain unmarried. You ought to

1. stand firm in your heart,
2. being under no constraint,
3. have authority over your own will,
4. and have decided this in your own heart.

Paul does not talk about the decision to remain unmarried as if it were something you just simply do. Without holding back anything he gives the terms for it. If you neglect one of them, you will make a wrong decision.

The 'heart' is mentioned twice, at the beginning and at the end. In between, something is said about emotions (point 2) and about your will (point 3).

First of all, you must stand firm in your heart. You're not supposed to be persuaded easily to change your mind. Second, you should have no necessity. That refers to verses 2,9. When there is a desire (which is not wrong) for a life partner, there is a necessity to be married. It is better to marry than to burn with passion. Then the question is whether you have authority over your own will. Do you really want to live totally for the Lord without having to be occupied with the things of the world, of course not the wrong ones. If you have taken all these things into consideration carefully, then you are able to take a responsible decision in your heart to remain unmarried.

V38. As a sort of conclusion Paul repeats the alternatives. He doesn't do that with words like good or wrong. That contrast is not found here. In both cases it is about something good. Only one of the two cases is better.

V39. Marriage is a lifelong bond. In Romans 7 marriage is also mentioned as a bond for life (Rom 7:2). The only way a marriage can be annulled is by death. Only then someone is free to marry another person. This freedom has two sides. On the one side, the person is free because the life partner

has died. Through death the marital bond has ended, after all. Now it has become possible to marry another person. On the other side, there is freedom in choosing another life partner.

It says: "To whom she wishes." Yet there follows the significant addition "only in the Lord". That may seem to be a limitation of the freedom, but that is not the case. The addition indicates a good direction wherein the freedom 'to marry to whom one wishes' is to be searched. He/she who wants to acknowledge the rights of the Lord in his/her life will not want otherwise than to marry somebody who also wants that.

Here in this verse the main thing is about someone who was married and has become a widow due to the death of her husband. But the addition "in the Lord" is too significant to apply that only to the remarriage of a widow. It is good for each person, who thinks that he/she should marry, to make sure that his/her desires are 'in the Lord'. 'In the Lord' goes further than only both being believers. It goes without saying that to marry 'in the Lord' cannot possibly be with an unbeliever. Even if the other person is a believer, it is important to be convinced that both of you are willing to do the will of the Lord in all things.

For the practice of faith it is essential that you join the gatherings of believers. For the growth of your faith it is essential as well that you have fellowship with believers who live and gather according to the Bible. If in this respect you and your spouse have separate ways, you ask for troubles. Still, it is no unequal yoke if you would marry someone from another denomination than yours, but yet, it is a poignant yoke. When you're sure that where you are, is the place that God assures you to be and where the gatherings are according to His Word, as you have discovered (that means, where the members are willing to do so), that will play an important role in choosing of your marital partner.

You might think, by making agreements with each other that separate denominations might work out well for both of you. But when you both are really involved with your own congregation, you will notice that you both live in two different 'worlds'. This difficulty will become stronger when children are born. It will not be an easy thing to explain clearly to the children that both convictions are right. You will not be able to talk about

the unity of believers, for example, will not really be proven by your own marriage. Children especially, are very sensitive for a life that is in line with the conviction of their parents.

However, reality shows that, in almost all cases of such situations, not much comes of the children spiritually. You see that the question about visiting a local church is not a side issue, but it should be an important issue. It is important that you heartily agree with each other about this.

V40. In the closing verse of this chapter Paul gives his opinion once more. He doesn't do so from on high, appealing to his authority as an apostle. He does that as someone who knows himself to be guided by the Spirit of God at clarifying this particular issue. He speaks like someone who has had his own exercises in this respect.

It is not just a theoretical explanation, without any feelings of his own. His aim is the happiness of the widow. In his view she is happier when she remains unmarried than when she would remarry. She has experienced the support and care of the Lord when she lost her husband.

With this experience she can also be of consolation in her turn, to others who also suffer losses. In that way she can find a meaningful way to compensate the loss of her husband.

Now read 1 Corinthians 7:36-40 again.

Reflection: How important is it for you to share the same idea with your (future) partner, regarding going together to a church where people gather according to the Bible?

1 Corinthians 8

1Cor 8:1-6 | Love Edifies

1 Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. 2 If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; 3 but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. 4 Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, 6 yet for us there is [but] one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we [exist] for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we [exist] through Him.

V1-2. A new topic: things sacrificed to idols. Obviously, the Corinthians have asked Paul questions about that, for he starts with: "Now concerning things sacrificed to idols." You might not be literally involved with offerings to idols, but yet you can learn a lot from this section, for it is about the relation to your fellow brothers and sisters whom you are involved with.

One thing a Christian may know, is that an idol – that is an idol image – doesn't mean anything on itself. To "know" is just about knowledge: it is something you know with your intellect. The danger of knowledge though, including the knowledge of Biblical truths, is that you may exalt yourself by it. He who has knowledge of something, can easily ignore others who do not know about a certain matter. In this way knowledge is used in a wrong way.

By ignoring others, overlooking them, you come short in love for them. In this way knowledge stands against love, for love does indeed consider the other person. Therefore you ought to let knowledge serve love. If you let knowledge serve love, you will not make your knowledge a lofty thing. For what do you know after all? In chapter 13 it is said that all our knowledge is in part, which means that it consists of bits and parts only.

V3. If you love God, your heart will be focused on Him. And when your heart is focused on Him, you consciously live in His presence, and being in His presence means that you are known by Him. He sees right through you. In Psalms 139 it is written: "O LORD, You have searched me and known me" (Psa 139:1). That is not a terrifying thought, but rather a feeling of security and protection. If you are close to Him, you no longer think highly of your own knowledge, but you will be more impressed by the knowledge He has about you. With that attitude you may now continue listening to what Paul further has to say about the idols and the sacrifices to idols.

V4. You know now that an idol doesn't mean anything. After all, it is no more than a piece of wood or stone. You also know that there is no God but one. That doesn't only mean that there is only one God and no one else. In Deuteronomy 4 God has made Himself known to Israel as the only true God (Deu 4:35). There it is written that "the Lord, He is God; there is no other besides Him". In the Old Testament it wasn't yet made known that God is a triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That was only made known in the New Testament through the coming of the Lord Jesus. God is One, because the Father is God, the Son is God and also the Holy Spirit is God. It is not three Gods. "That there is no God but one" means, that although there are three Persons in the Godhead, They are together one God. This cannot be understood with your intellect, but you can simply accept that in faith.

V5. There are many gods in the world and many lords, created by man. Therefore there are nations that idolize the sun or the moon. Other nations idolize trees or animals. All of those gods have been created for several reasons. The one idol is a piece of stone that ought to be used for health reasons, the other, a piece of wood, is used for the weather, a third one may be a celestial that can be used for conquering enemies.

Of course it is absurd that such things in itself could mean something for man, whether in a good or in an evil way. Later, in chapter 10, Paul elaborates even further on this issue of idols and makes clear that behind these idols there are demons.

V6. For a Christian there is only one God, and that is the Father. You came to know God as Someone to Whom you are related personally. He is your Father. You know Him as a child knows its father. You know yourself safe with Him.

You also know the Father as Someone from Whom are all things. You know that everything you see around you and everything that will happen in future, are from Him. He is the source of the whole creation and of everything that happens. He is, as it were, the Architect of them.

I'm not talking about man and what he has done with the creation because of sin. Attention will soon be paid to that. The thing is that creation and what is going to happen with it are not linked together through coincidences. The Father has made wonderful plans. Creation is a part of God's plans and is meant to serve as an area where other and higher plans of God are being accomplished.

What goes for this whole goes also for you as an individual. You are not a product of time and coincidence. You were born according to a special plan of the Father. You were chosen to be in that plan and therefore a special place was given to you. You are actually there for God, the Father! That you've received this place before Him, is a pleasure to the heart of God. And because God is the eternal God, this place for you is not temporary, but for eternity. You shall be in the house of the Father throughout all eternity. Isn't that great?

Not only were plans needed however, and not only an architect was needed, but the plans also had to be executed. There had to be, said with reverence, a Contractor and an Executor. The latter is what you see in the Lord Jesus. He is the one Lord, "by whom are all things, and we through Him".

In John 1 it is written: "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (Jn 1:3; cf. Col 1:16-17). The whole creation is the work of the Son. But after the Lord Jesus had created all things, something happened that seemed to cause that all the Father's plans couldn't go on. You know what happened to creation and what happened to man. Sin entered the world. Then the Lord

Jesus started again to work. That was a completely different work than when He created the world.

The creation was established through His Word: "For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Psa 33:9a). But sin could not be removed from creation through a word of power. Therefore the Lord Jesus said: "Behold, I have come to do Your will" (Heb 10:9a). John the baptist testified of Him: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29).

On the cross the Lord Jesus abolished sin, because God made Him sin and He suffered God's judgment on sin. After He accomplished this work, He returned to heaven and "God has made Him both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). To Him God has given all authority. Only in that way God could carry on His plan. You have been allowed to know that Lord and the work He has accomplished. You are allowed to know that you are there through Him and through Him you have become a partaker of the plans of God the Father. What an amazing knowledge!

Now read 1 Corinthians 8:1-6 again.

Reflection: What is the difference between knowledge and love? How can you combine knowledge with love in the right way?

1Cor 8:7-13 | Don't Be a Stumbling Block

7 However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat [food] as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. 8 But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. 9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? 11 For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. 12 And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.

V7. Because of the preaching of Paul the Corinthians knew that there was only one God and only one Lord. Idols didn't mean anything to them anymore. Yet, there were some among them to whom that was not yet that clear. Realize that these people had lived all their life in idolatry. It is not surprising that, after their conversion, some of them haven't been freed yet from everything that had kept them in captivity for a long time, before their conversion.

Eating a piece of meat for example, could still bother their conscience because they still connected it to the idols. In their minds they stood in the idol's temple again bringing meat offerings to a certain god and to eat these offerings themselves afterward. They had been maintaining this ritual for many years. Now they had become Christians they knew that an idol meant nothing and that meat was just meat, but still they were not free inwardly.

V8. He who is free from former influences, knows that food is not something by which we have some advantage in our relationship with God. Eating or not eating doesn't make any difference, regarding our place before God. He doesn't judge us on the base of our eating habits. In Acts 15:29 it is said that you are allowed to eat anything you want, except things with blood and things strangled. The prohibition of eating things with blood also concerns meat products mixed with blood, for example blood

sausage. The ‘strangled’ is meat of an animal of which the blood hasn’t flown out, for example a rabbit that has been caught in a noose.

V9. In Acts 15 it is also mentioned “things sacrificed to idols” – even before the prohibition of eating blood or things strangled – and that is what this section is about. If to somebody who eats meat, that meat is connected to an idol, he is not to eat it. That applies to both the strong and the weak. The weak will get a defiled conscience when he eats that meat. He will be reminded of some idol. To the evil spirit that is hidden behind this idol image, room is given again in such a person’s spiritual life. This may turn out in such a way that a person completely falls back to idolatry. Therefore the strong, who knows that an idol means nothing and neither that meat sacrificed to idols means anything, is being admonished to consider the weak.

V10. You can imagine that the strong had no difficulties in going to an idol’s temple and eat meat there. After all, to a strong person that temple didn’t mean anything more than a building where you can get meat. You also can imagine that a weak person might have seen his strong brother entering that temple. Now the weak brother could have thought: ‘I am also allowed to do what he is doing.’ Then the weak brother enters the temple, orders his meat and eats it.

But now the point is that he doesn’t eat it as ‘regular’ meat, but as meat sacrificed to idols. He is actually not free in his conscience to enter such places and eat such meat. This meat, to him, is still connected to the idols. You might say: he must not imitate the strong brother just like that. Yet here this matter is not viewed from the side of the weak brother, but from the side of the strong brother. The latter might actually be making use of his right in a wrong way, so that he is a stumbling block for the weak.

The question here is this: Is the strong brother so strong that he is willing to consider the conscience of his weak brother? The power to consider the other is only to be found in love. When there is true love for the other person who is weak, you will not do anything that could cause the other to fall into conscience.

It is not about things that are sinful in themselves. In this case, about eating meat, it is a completely lawful thing to do. God Himself has given meat as food. There is nothing wrong about it at all. The point is, how you make use of your liberty. Do you use it for your own concern or do you also think of the weakness of your brother or sister in a certain matter?

V11. A wrong way of using these rights can even work out in such a way that a brother for whom Christ has died, is ruined that means perishes! Just imagine the following case, which is not fictional. A drunk comes to conversion. Alcohol had been very destructive in his life. Because of that his body and family have been ruined. Don't think that after his conversion the urge for alcohol always has disappeared completely.

Actually, for a Christian, the use of "a little wine" (1Tim 5:23) is allowed. Yet, when the ex-drunk pays you a visit, would you offer him a glass of wine? If you do that and he accepts it, that might cause him to get back the taste of alcohol and completely fall back into his former life. The result is that because of your knowledge such a person perishes.

The reaction of people is often: If anyone is converted and has received a new life, he cannot possibly perish eternally, can he? Paul also knows that very well. He even speaks about "for whose sake Christ died". Therefore the doubt, that this brother would perish, is excluded. Nevertheless, this reaction may distort these verses. For the point is causing a brother to sin. That is by no means insignificant!

The wages of sin is always and inevitably death. God will never let somebody, who has come to Him with repentance of his sins and who has accepted the work of the Lord Jesus, ever perish. God will bring such a person to his senses. In John 10 it is written very clearly that it is impossible for a believer to still perish (Jn 10:28-29). However, here it is not about all the things that God will do, but about our own attitude.

V12. In order to point out the gravity of the situation, Paul uses these strong expressions, and you should not interpret them as if he is exaggerating. He who doesn't consider his weak brother, sins against him and against Christ. He who loves Christ, also loves his brother, also the one who is weak.

V13. Paul's attitude in the last verse can be of an example to us. He also says this very strongly: he would never again eat meat, lest he make his brother stumble.

Don't think that all these words are exaggerated. If Paul says all these things that strongly, it must be very important. Do we really consider our weak brother in all things that are not wrong to us, but that could be a stumbling block to our weak brother? If we don't do that, we sin and we must confess that.

A lot of spiritual weakness occurs, because we have made use of liberty, without having asked ourselves what the consequences could be for others who imitate us and in that way stain their conscience. You can think about a computer game. Let's assume that you occasionally play a game on the computer, for your relaxation. You also know how to keep control of the time you spend on it. Yet, when someone, who is a former game addict who has been converted, pays you a visit, it is not wise to suggest to him to play games on the computer. Playing a game could easily cause him to fall back into his former addiction. By choosing another kind of recreation for the sake of your brother, you take his weakness into consideration.

These verses involve an important message for all who know their position in Christ and who know that their God is their Father and that the Lord Jesus is their Lord. Nevertheless practice proves whether this knowledge is real knowledge, or if it is also in the heart and not only in the head.

Christian liberty is too often seen as an untouchable right. You might feel very violated in your liberty as a Christian, if you think that you should consider others and yet even those who think of themselves that they are not allowed to do certain things. This 'thinking of *themselves* not to be allowed to do certain things' is indeed important, of course. When a weak person would forbid you to make use of your liberty, he would be going too far. Your liberty remains indisputable and you shouldn't let anyone take that away from you. Yet, as it is said, here the issue is not the attitude of the weak toward the strong, but the attitude of the strong toward the weak.

Now read 1 Corinthians 8:7-13 again.

Reflection: Just name a case wherein you should consider a weak brother.

1 Corinthians 9

1Cor 9:1-7 | Am I Not Free?

1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2 If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. 3 My defense to those who examine me is this: 4 Do we not have a right to eat and drink? 5 Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? 6 Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? 7 Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?

You shouldn't delude yourself that Paul just only preached some theory in the previous chapter. In this chapter, it will become apparent that he has lived accordingly. In his whole ministry among the Corinthians that has become clear. He showed that he had voluntarily abandoned things to which he was entitled as a servant and an apostle and of which he could have had expected from the Corinthians. They had to become aware of that. That's why he asked some questions. Not difficult questions which you have to think through. The answer, actually, is already embedded in the question.

V1. He starts with the question: "Am I not free?" Of course he was free. The law had no say over him anymore. He was not responsible to anyone, for Jesus Christ was his Lord.

The next question is: "Am I not an apostle?" In the salutation of this letter he calls himself "an apostle of Jesus Christ". The word apostle means: messenger. Such a person has to carry out the order of his sender.

Could Paul call himself an apostle just like that? There was bad talk of Paul going on among the Corinthians that he pretended to be an apostle. To be an apostle someone should fulfill the condition that he had seen the Lord Jesus after His resurrection. In Acts 1 you read about choosing another apostle to replace Judas. Peter speaks there about someone who "[must]

become a witness with us of His resurrection" (Acts 1:22). Paul fulfilled this condition. Therefore his third question: "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" It is not that he was one the twelve apostles who travelled through Israel with the Lord Jesus, but he saw the Lord Jesus on his way to Damascus when he persecuted the church. In Acts 9 you find this history (Acts 9:1-7). So he really was an apostle.

The people who contradicted that, wanted to limit his influence among the Corinthians. Those were people who wanted to take advantage of the Corinthians themselves and therefore they accused Paul of doing so. It is remarkable how quick they (and we too) are inclined to believe such gossip.

Paul can refute these accusations easily. He just points at the Corinthians and asks them: "Are you not my work in the Lord?" He says, as it were: 'Just look at yourselves. How have you become converted?' Therein lies the gentle reproach that they should have known better.

V2. They even should have been aware that they were "the seal", that is the confirmation, of his apostleship. Certainly, they in particular, should not have doubted his apostleship. Do you see how he justifies himself to the Corinthians? He asked his questions in such a way, that there was only one possible answer to them. Obviously, no multiple choice questions.

The Bible is a book in which many questions are being asked. The questions are often not that difficult. Also the answer is often simple. Yet, we may want to avoid the good answer because we sense that otherwise something has to be changed in our life. We see a striking example of that in Matthew 21 (Mt 21:24-27). When the chief priests and the elders had given the right answer (and they knew the good answer!), they also had to accept the Lord Jesus, but they didn't want that. Here you see that the answer to a question depends on the condition of your heart. The point is whether you are willing to accept the consequences of your answer.

V3. The next questions of Paul are addressed to the people who wanted to put Paul in a bad light with the Corinthians. But the Corinthians (and you) hear these questions too. Those are the questions that indicate how Paul had behaved himself among the Corinthians.

V4-6. In the first place he asks questions that are connected to the rights he had. He assuredly had the right to get food and drink from the Corinthians, had he not? Wasn't he allowed to live from the gifts that the churches sent him? And in case he had been married, wouldn't he then be allowed, like many others, to take along his wife on his journeys? His wife would then also have had the right to get a loving care from the church. And concerning his social occupations (he was a tentmaker by profession; that is said in Acts 18:3), he was, just like Barnabas, certainly not obliged to work to earn his own living, was he? They were entitled to be supported by the churches for their living.

V7. Later, in verse 12, he clarifies why he did not make use of this right. Here he only points out his right to be provided by the church with food and drink.

To reinforce this right, he gives three examples from daily life, which confirm what he said. To the commander of an army this is not a question, but a clear case. Just take a soldier as an example. The only thing he has to focus on is the war. For this he is employed (2Tim 2:4). He has to fight, he has to win. Nothing of that would have happened if he also had had to care for his food. Somebody had to bring him that food, even if he is engaged in the fiercest battle. In this way the soldier gets power to continue the battle.

The two other examples come from agriculture and cattle farming. He who has a vineyard, wants it to bear much fruit, for the more fruit, the more wine to be sold and the bigger the returns and profits. Does that mean that he who has worked in the vineyard for another person, he himself will not profit from the fruit? Of course he himself will also make use of it. The same goes for tending a flock. He who is occupied with that flock the whole day and takes care of it, is also allowed to take some of the milk of that flock for his own use.

In some companies it does work the same. The products they deliver are allowed to be taken home by the employees, for free or for a low price.

Why has Paul chosen these three examples of a soldier, a vine dresser and a shepherd? It is because these examples are also meaningful to you. You could recognize yourself in these examples. In his second letter to Timo-

thy, Paul calls Timothy “a soldier of Christ Jesus” (2Tim 2:3). You will have experienced that you find yourself on a hostile territory. You are surrounded by many enemies. But the Lord Jesus is your Commander in the battle. He assures you that you’re able to withstand as long as you trust in Him.

The second example also applies to you. In Matthew 20 the Lord Jesus uses a parable about workers who are sent into a vineyard (Mt 20:1-16). You also are such a worker who is allowed to work in the vineyard. You can be sure that the Lord Jesus reward your work with “whatever is right” (Mt 20:4). But isn’t it the case that you already enjoy now the things you can do for Him?

The third example, from the flock, has to do with taking care of believers. In John 10 the Lord Jesus talks about the one flock of which He is the one Shepherd (Jn 10:16). That flock consists of all sheep that belong to Him and which He calls “My sheep” (Jn 10:27). You belong to those sheep too.

Therefore when you see a believer going astray, you might pay him a visit. You can try to bring him back to the flock on the basis of the Bible. Try to feed him from the Bible and by that way have him get the taste for the Bible again. In 1 Peter 2 the Bible is called “the pure milk” (1Pet 2:2). When you let your brother get the taste of it, you yourself will also be strengthened.

In this way you see how you are provided by God Himself with everything you need in the ministry of God, and every believer has received a ministry from God.

Now read 1 Corinthians 9:1-7 again.

Reflection: What is the connection between chapter 8 and chapter 9?

1Cor 9:8-14 | God's Concern for His Servants

8 I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? 10 Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher [to thresh] in hope of sharing [the crops]. 11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 12 If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the [food] of the temple, [and] those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? 14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

V8. Paul is still busy to prove his right to support by the churches. In verse 7 he has given three examples from daily living. By doing so he has, as he says here, spoken “according to human judgment”, thus according to what is common in society.

V9. He doesn't stop there. He even goes a step higher and quotes something from “the Law of Moses”. He uses an example from the Word of God and of course that is more powerful than what is common with people in society.

The instruction he quotes, regards “the ox while he is threshing”. An ox that was threshing the grain was not to be muzzled. That was an instruction from God, because He knows the heart of man. A relentless and greedy boss could have muzzled such an animal to prevent it from eating the grain. He would then have had more grain to sell on the market and therefore earn more money. Nevertheless, God had determined that an ox was allowed to eat from the grain he was threshing.

So God cares for the oxen. God is concerned about the well-being of all animals (Psa 104:27-28). In Jonah 4 God also considers the many animals when He decides to have compassion on Nineveh (Jona 4:11).

V10. Behind this instruction of God's concern for the oxen, a higher instruction is hidden, namely God's concern for His servants. It has been written for them in the first place. Very directly Paul wants to say here that he, as a sower and plowman, i.e. as an evangelist, and as the one who is permitted to see the fruit of this work, certainly can expect that food is given to him. Whether a servant is plowing or threshing, he can be sure that his work will be fruitful.

The plowman is preparing the soil so that the seed can be sown in it. The thresher processes the harvest after the seed has grown and has ripened. A person may be standing at the beginning of the work of God, when he, for example, preaches the gospel to another person. Even so a person may also be standing at the end of that work when he, for example, can bring another person to the Lord Jesus. In both cases he is sowing something spiritual.

V11. God shall provide for the means that are needed for the work. You can also provide other servants who have served you spiritually, with something material. Actually it is something you ought to do. Yet it is more beautiful to look at it as a privilege. When brothers have to travel often, you might provide them with money for those journeys. Or others who distribute much literature, you can provide those with money for literature. But even if they don't have that much expense, you might also support them financially, so that they are able to buy food and drink and pay their housing costs.

Here it is about people who have resigned from their job in society in order to spend their time henceforth on spiritual sowing-work. They are entitled to be provided by us in their living. This is how God has ordained it.

V12. Paul once again brings out the right that he has with the Corinthians in this regard. He says that if others shared this right over them, he even does more. After all, they owed to nobody as much as to him, did they? Nevertheless he had not used this right. To him the gospel of Christ was more important than all the rights he owned. He would have abandoned anything that would have been a hindrance for preaching the gospel.

He preferred the endurance of being falsely accused by other people rather than that the progress of the gospel would be stopped. Imagine what would have had happened if he had insisted on his rights toward the Corinthians. Then they would have provided him with money and goods, but at the same time they would have boasted about that, as if the great apostle owed it to them that he could do his work. They could have even thought that they had bought the gospel. Paul made every effort to prevent that.

V13. Before he continues on this, he remembers something else. There is one more example in the Old Testament from which it appears that a person who is in the service for God, receives something through that same service to support his life. It is about the priests and Levites. In the Old Testament the priests and Levites were a special class of people among Israel. They had to do tasks in the tabernacle, when the people were still in the wilderness, and later in the temple, when the people lived in the promised land.

When an Israelite wanted or had to bring an offering, he gave that to the priest. The latter slaughtered it and put it as an offering on the altar. But God had ordained that the priest was allowed to keep a part of some offerings for himself to eat. In Leviticus 6 for example you read that the priest received a portion of the grain offering (Lev 6:16). In the same chapter it is written that the priest who brought the sin offering had to eat of the sin offering (Lev 6:26). The priests put the offerings on the altar and the Levites helped them thereby. In Numbers 18 you find something like that. The priests receive the breast and the right thigh as food (Num 18:18). With the Levites it was something different. Also in Numbers 18 the Israelite received the order to give their tithes to the Levites as an inheritance in return for the work which they performed (Num 18:21).

In Deuteronomy 18 you read once more the way God had ordained how the tribe of Levi had to be provided for. The whole tribe of Levi, so all priests and Levites, had no inheritance in the land while all the other tribes had. The other tribes were able to farm on the land they received as an inheritance and provide themselves with the crop of their land. But the tribe of Levi had no piece of land to receive an income from. Concerning them, the Lord was their inheritance (Deu 18:2). Therefore the Lord en-

sured them – through the means of instructions to the people – that the tribe of Levi would receive what they were entitled to.

V14. The conclusion Paul draws from this, is as follows: “So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.” Therefore do not shirk your responsibility to support brothers and sisters who go forth for the work of the Lord without receiving a permanent salary.

In the third letter of John you find a nice example of someone who acted that way. Gaius supported brothers, whom he didn’t even know, because they “went forth for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles” (3Jn 1:7).

If you would look at your involvement in the Lord’s work in that way, you will also be blessed. Just read what is written in Malachi 3 (Mal 3:10). If you start to give for the work of the Lord, God will open the windows of heaven and pour out blessings abundantly over you. Herein lies, as it were, a real challenge from God’s side. Do you dare to accept this challenge?

Now read 1 Corinthians 9:8-14 again.

Reflection: The law says that you should give your tithes. What do you think ‘mercy’ says?

1Cor 9:15-21 | Win More

15 But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one. 16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. 17 For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. 18 What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. 19 For though I am free from all [men], I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.

V15. Paul has proven his right for support by believers clearly and extensively. Now he senses the danger that the Corinthians would be thinking that he had written all those things to get money from them. That was certainly not his intention! In the past he never accepted anything from the Corinthians and that was still the case.

Some of the Corinthians thought that Paul only preached for his own benefit. To nip this thought in the bud, he says that he would rather die than want to give that impression. He would like to have his boast, not for himself, but for the gospel. He didn't want to be obstructed by anything at preaching the gospel (verse 12). The gospel had to be brought in all its clearness and without any restriction.

Money can play an obstructing role in preaching the Word. There is a saying that sounds: 'Who pays the piper calls the tune.' That indicates that you are inclined to say what people like to hear who give you a lot of money. You might become fully dependent on them. It is a danger that threatens each preacher who preaches on demand to people who also pay him. You may think on what is written in 2 Timothy 4: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but [wanting] to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accor-

dance to their own desires" (2Tim 4:3). But a servant of the Lord must speak the Word of *the Lord*, without having thoughts about whether or not he will receive a reward from anyone.

V16. When Paul was preaching the gospel, it wasn't something he could boast in. He owed that to the Lord, for He was the One Who commanded him to do it. He talks about the necessity that was laid upon him, not by people or by an organization, but by the Lord. He even speaks the "woe" over himself if he doesn't preach the gospel.

V17. To him preaching the gospel was not a kind of voluntary work. In general voluntary work is being appreciated well in our society. Such an appreciation would also be his reward, in case he worked as a volunteer for the Lord. But Paul was not willingly or voluntarily a preacher of the gospel. "A stewardship" was "entrusted" to him by the Lord. Paul was aware of his responsibility. Therefore he did not want to connect the gospel with money nor goods in any way.

V18. His "reward" consisted of the assurance that his Master approved what he was doing. That 'reward' was sufficient for him. He didn't need a reward from the Corinthians. He wanted to preach the gospel for free and did not want to make use of his right for support. In that way he remained free from all men.

V19. That freedom concerned only his work. Concerning himself, he wanted to be a servant to all men, in order to win through the gospel as many men as he possibly could for the Lord Jesus. How much, in that respect, does he resemble the Lord Jesus Himself, Who also did everything without asserting His right for compensation. Who was as free as He was? He did not allow anyone to tell Him what He should do. Though, who was a servant like Him? He came, not to do His own will, but the will of His Father.

V20. Paul made himself a servant to all men willingly. His desire was to serve every man with the gospel. He adjusted himself as much as he possibly could to meet his listeners. When he was preaching to the Jews, he adjusted himself to the habits of the Jews. That implies that he wouldn't eat pork when having a meal with a Jew. He wanted to use every oppor-

tunity to win the heart of the Jew by fulfilling, as much as possible, all outward demands that were of importance to the Jews. He considered the commandments from the law if he could win the heart of a Jew for the gospel.

That didn't mean, however, that he was willing to preach the law again. He himself was free from the law and he wouldn't permit to be brought back under the yoke of the law again. Only if the situation demanded that it would serve the advancement of the gospel, he adjusted himself to it.

When he preached the gospel to the Gentiles, thus to people to whom God had not given the law, he operated differently. Then he descended to their level of thinking. In Acts 17 you read about a speech of Paul that hooks up to the thinking of the people from Athens (Acts 17:22-34).

In our days other ways of adjustment are also possible. Just think about the missionaries who go to the inlands of Africa or who travel to other countries with totally different cultures to preach the gospel. They get the best entrance to the gospel when they start living in the same way as the native people.

V21. The fact that he was "without law" did not mean that he behaved himself lawlessly. At approaching the Gentiles he remained subject to Christ. He would have never acted in a way that was not in accordance with his Commander.

Some nice examples of the way to approach people, you find in John 3 and 4. In John 3 the Lord Jesus speaks with a high-placed spiritual leader of Israel. In John 4 He speaks with a woman who was through and through sinful. It is wonderful to see how the approach of the Lord is adjusted exactly for each person (Jn 3:1-12; 4:7-26).

The lesson is clear. Adjust yourself as much as possible to your conversation partner, whom you want to win for the gospel's sake, but keep your eye fixed on the purpose. Toward somebody who has placed himself under the law, as many reformed Christians do, admit the good things of the law. In that way you can keep the conversation going on with them. Try to demonstrate what effect the law has had, death and judgment (2Cor 3:7,9), and what God's solution is for this problem, Christ, Who suffered

the curse of the law (Gal 3:13). During the conversation, remain aware that you are free from the law and do not give the other person any room to bring you under the influence of the law.

In your conversations with worldly people who have nothing to do with religion and who waste their lives with hunting for money, drink, drugs and sex, you act differently. Stand beside them and tell them that you can understand them in their desire for happiness. Make yourself a friend of them; the Lord Jesus is called “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Mt 11:19). You can tell them about the happiness you have found in the Lord Jesus. During the conversation, remain aware that you are legally subject-ed to Christ and don’t let yourself be tempted to a worldly way of thinking and living.

Now read 1 Corinthians 9:15-21 again.

Reflection: Do you also have the desire to win people for Christ?

1Cor 9:22-27 | All Things for the Sake of the Gospel

22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. 23 I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it. 24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but [only] one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. 25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then [do it] to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

V22. You understand now that Paul's life was fully dedicated to the gospel. He subordinated everything to it. In order to succeed he was willing to serve all men. There was one person whom he did not serve and that was himself. Additionally he considered every man as a creature that has a soul to lose and who has to be won for Christ. He meets to the other person as far as he could in the situation this one found himself. Even so he approached the weak as if he himself was weak. He considered the conscience of the weak and was careful not to do anything that might cause the weak to turn away from the message of the gospel.

You might say that he did all he could to win one person. He did that, because every man is invaluable to God. The more you are aware of that, the more you will be engaged with preaching the gospel to your fellow men. "Save some", that's what it was all about to Paul. An important condition to do that is self-denial, not to think of your own concern or to be occupied with yourself.

V23. Paul made every effort for the gospel's sake, in order to be a fellow partaker of it. He presented the gospel as a person whom you know. When someone is important to you, you would do everything for him or her. The gospel was such an important 'person' to him, for whom he did everything.

V24-25. To illustrate that, Paul uses some examples from the world of sports. He more often takes examples from the world of sports because from them there is a clear comparison to the life of a Christian. Some matters that are at issue with both the athlete and the Christian, are:

1. the training,
2. the competition or match and
3. the prize.

To be able to participate in a competition or match, you first need to train. The more important the competition or match is, the more intensive the training will be. The more intensive the training is, the better the preparation. There are clubs of all kinds of sports where the only important thing is recreation. Especially older people are trying to stay in good health in this way. Then the training is very sociable and is not focused on achievements. The competition or match is also for fun and it is very nice when the game is won. There is nothing wrong with this, but Paul is not looking at the race of the Christian in this way.

The picture Paul has in his mind here and what he also presents to you, is the picture of an athlete who is fully in control of his body. The athletes, who in his time, participated with the Isthmian games (later called the Olympic Games) that were regularly held in all big cities of Asia Minor, needed a period of ten months for preparation. During this time of preparation the athlete freely subjected himself to a hard training. Great trainers from that time always taught their pupils: 'You need to have an orderly life; with little food and the abstention of sweets; training on a steady time, whether it is hot or ice cold weather'.

Horatius has said: 'The youngster who wins the race has suffered a lot and has done a lot. He sweated and suffered cold. He has abstained from love and wine.' The period of training was for the Greek athlete a time of living in isolation. It was a time of abstention from things that were good in themselves, but would be a hindrance for him to achieve optimal results. He abstained from everything that could be harmful for his achievements.

When Tertullian applies the example of the athletes to the persecuted Christians, he says: 'They are tormented, exhausted, worn-out.' Would you be able to apply this picture to nowadays Christians? I venture to say that we as Christians in the Western world live a flabby and easy-going life.

Just take a careful look at such a Greek athlete, and at many of the nowadays top athletes: a long period of intensive training, a great deal of self-denial and suffering much inconvenience for a competition or match that will last for only some minutes or even seconds to a couple of hours, dependent on which kind of sports, with as the highest result a perishable wreath.

Ask yourself now: if they could yield to that, shouldn't I submit myself freely to such a similar severe discipline and self-denial to serve the Lord Jesus in a way He is worthy of? If we Christians would surrender ourselves with as many efforts as the Greek athlete, to a life of separation, how much power and blessing would our life reflect to the honor and glory of God?

A competition also means that there are competitors, opponents. Paul was aware of the opposition in his race. In his letter to the Philippians he also writes about that (Phil 3:14). You see it clearly before you: Paul flashes across the racetrack there. He forgets everything behind him because looking back for a moment can be fatal. In that way he runs toward the goal.

Paul doesn't mean here that we should not think about the sins we committed formerly, although they are forgiven now. The sins from the past have to keep us humble. He thinks here about his service for Christ. Therefore he certainly does not lean back complacently in an easy chair and praise himself for all he has done. He hasn't reached the goal yet and therefore he runs toward it.

The first verses of Hebrews 12 show the same picture (Heb 12:1-2). The writer of the letter to the Hebrews sees the mobs that populate the stadium, while the athletes prepare themselves for the race. Everything that could prevent maximum effort has to be put aside. The Christian also has to "lay aside every encumbrance and the sin". You still might have things in your life of which you know that you should settle. They trouble your conscience like a burden. Make sure that you get rid of this burden. You should confess certain sins you might still have in your life and which you haven't abandoned yet. Confess them! Then you will be able to continue the race unhindered. And thereby look unto Jesus continuously.

V26. The latter brings us back to this verse in 1 Corinthians 9. What is mentioned here is also important to bear in mind. I hope the final goal of the

race is clear to you. You know, to speak once again in terms of Philippians 3, in which direction you are pressing (Phil 3:14). Otherwise you look like a racing cyclist who got disjoined from the platoon and because of that lost his way. He cycles as fast he could to join the platoon again, but in the wrong direction. That is a waste of energy!

Like the one who is boxing Paul talks about, who beats the air. He pulls out to deal a hard blow, but the opponent avoids him nimbly. The blow becomes a wasted effort and the power behind it dissolves in the void without any effect on the opponent. A Christian should be directed on his goal and should be conscious of that goal.

Finally the prize, because that is what it is all about. The Lord Jesus has crowns ready for Christians who have dedicated themselves fully to Him. He will give those crowns when we will be with Him. Can you imagine a more precious reward than that He would say to us: "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master" (Mt 25:21)?

V27. There is another thing why Paul is that fully committed to preaching the gospel: he doesn't want to be disqualified himself after having preached to others. He would have become disqualified if he would have only preached, without having lived himself according to what he preached. He didn't want to be someone who could just tell a nice story with a message for others to sacrifice everything, while he himself lives an easy-going life. Therefore he applies to himself what he just said about the athletes.

Literally it says that he beats his body. With that he refers to the heavy training as a preparation for the Games. Paul submitted himself to a tremendous self-discipline. The word 'disqualified' doesn't mean that Paul could perish. It indicates that a person, who truly loves the Lord Jesus and sincerely wants to live for his Lord, is aware of his responsibility. Such a person will do anything to show in his life for Whom he lives. A person who is only a Christian by name, or formally, will not be able to do that. That will be paid attention to in the first part of the next chapter.

Now read 1 Corinthians 9:22-27 again.

Reflection: How is your training schedule?

1 Corinthians 10

1Cor 10:1-6 | Things That Happened As Examples for Us

1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. 6 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.

Paul directly connects verses 1-13 of this chapter to the end of the previous chapter. There it is about somebody who preaches, a person who does a certain service for God. What now follows is about people who outwardly belong to God's people, but who inwardly are not partakers of it. The history of the people of Israel serves as an illustration. There you see people who partook in many privileges that God had given to His people. Yet they did not enter the promised land, but were laid down and died in the wilderness.

That says a lot to us as Christians. Many call themselves Christians. They are baptized and they even partake of the Lord's Supper, but still will perish eternally. Why? Because they lack the new life inwardly. They were never truly converted and have never really repented of their sins before God.

Those people think that God is satisfied with them keeping certain statutes, like baptism and the Lord's Supper. In professing Christianity they are called sacraments. In the protestant churches they have two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper; in the roman-catholic church they have five more sacraments. These so-called sacraments have in common that they are only outward signs.

Just take a look at baptism and the Lord's Supper. What do they consist of? With baptism common water is being used. The Lord's Supper is being

celebrated with common bread and common wine. But just look at what these outward matters, as baptism and the Lord's Supper, mean to a greater part of professing Christianity. People sometimes say that you receive new life through baptism or that by partaking of the Lord's Supper you become a partaker of eternal life. It is said that an *inward* renewal appears through participation of these *outward* signs. Many people in professing Christianity believe this and base the assurance of their salvation on that. That is a gross error that will lead many of these people into destruction.

V1. In order to stop this error, Paul refers to the history of Israel. He starts with "I do not want you to be unaware". This phrase makes you see that he finds it important that the Corinthians should know this. Then he summarizes the privileges of Israel. First, there is "the cloud". In Exodus 13 you read that the Lord dwelled in this cloud and in that way showed His people the way, after they departed from Egypt (Exo 13:21-22). In Exodus 14 the cloud stands in between the Egyptians and Israelites in such a way that the Egyptians couldn't come near the Israelites (Exo 14:19-20). The cloud, as a symbol of the Lord Himself, presents guidance and protection. Next they "all passed through the sea".

V2. How that happened is to be read in Exodus 14 (Exo 14:21-22). The going through the sea resembles baptism, like what is said here that "all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea". To be baptized means 'to be added to'. Moses was their leader. He was appointed by the Lord. They had to listen to him; otherwise they couldn't stay with the people.

V3-4. The following privileges mentioned, concern food and drink. After all, they needed food for life and strength for their journey through the wilderness. In Exodus 16 and 17 God provides His people with manna from heaven to eat and water from the rock to drink (Exo 16:13-15; 17:6).

But do you notice how this food is referred to in our chapter? There is mention of *spiritual* food and *spiritual* drink. Wasn't that plain manna that they ate and wasn't it literal water that came from the rock? Yes, it was, but what Paul means to say is that the literal manna and the literal water have a spiritual meaning. The Israelites weren't aware of that then and that's why it isn't mentioned in that sense in the book of Exodus. We can

be aware now that these things have a spiritual meaning, because we have the whole Bible.

In the Gospel according to John, in chapters 6 and 7, the Lord Jesus also speaks about the manna and the water. He says, after He has spoken about the manna: "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven" (Jn 6:49-51,31-35). In chapter 7 of that Gospel the Lord Jesus speaks about "rivers of living water" (Jn 7:38). The following verse is clarifies it: "But this He spoke of the Spirit" (Jn 7:39).

Now you may ask yourself: 'If the Israelites didn't know that, why is it written like that here?' I think, because they were not to take it for granted that they were so well taken care of. It was the care of God that was apparent again and again when the manna was there each morning for the taking.

The same applies to the "spiritual rock". Of course it was literally a rock to the Israelites. The fact that they always had water to drink was due to God's care for them. God could give them that care, because He was anticipating the coming of His Son, Jesus Christ. Therefore here it is said: "The rock was Christ." Whatever blessing God gave to His people, it was only because Christ would become the Redeemer of the people. The same applies to us, who live in the time after the coming of Christ. We too owe each blessing to Christ and to the work that He has accomplished.

V5. After Paul had summarized various privileges, to which all partook – the word 'all' is mentioned at least five times in verses 1-4 –, it is shocking to read in verse 5: "Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness." How could that have happened: so many privileges and still die? It cannot be otherwise than that the people dealt with those privileges in a wrong way. And that can happen to us as well! We are no better at all.

V6. Therefore we should be willing to learn from the things that happened to Israel. These things are examples that should impress us, because God uses them in order to warn us.

Do you know how the people started to have troubles, which caused them to be laid down in the wilderness? This is how: they started to hate the manna. That made them "crave evil things". They started to long back for

Egypt and reminded themselves, ‘how well they were doing there’ (Num 11:4-7). Out of convenience sake they forgot how they groaned under the yoke of slavery.

Why is this history our example now? Only when the Lord Jesus – He is the real manna, as you know – remains everything for our heart and life, we shall not long again for the things from the world. You have been freed from the world through the work of the Lord Jesus. You owe Him everything.

However, if you start to get bored with reading the Bible in order to know Him better, if you get bored to pray and to testify to Him, briefly, when your taste changes, then you will surely think back about the time when you were living in the world. What a fun you had back then! You did everything you liked to do. You conveniently forget how miserable you were then. Then, before you know it, whether you are aware of it or not, you will do things again that belong to your former life. Really, this is how it works.

Therefore we ought to take these examples seriously. Stay close to the Lord Jesus. He really is sufficient. You don’t need more than Him.

Now read 1 Corinthians 10:1-6 again.

Reflection: Think about how you may apply this section in your own life.

1Cor 10:7-13 | Who Thinks He Stands...

7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY."

8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. 9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

At the end of the last part I wrote: Remain close to the Lord Jesus. If you do that, you have no pleasure in doing bad things. If you don't do that, the same will happen to you as happened to the Israelites. In verse 6 you actually find the root, the first cause of all other sins that the people of Israel committed. When the desire for a life with and for Christ weakens, then other desires or cravings come instead. You will be dragged into an intoxication of food and drink and having fun.

V7. Paul refers here to the 'festivities' around the golden calf (Exo 32:1-6). Moses had been away already so long; that's why they wanted a visible god. In that way they lost sight of the LORD and sink into a pool of debauchery. They became idolaters. Idolatry means: to replace God and Christ for something else. That can easily happen. It doesn't necessarily have to be things which you know are sinful and wrong. You see that with the people of Israel.

What was their idolatry? The answer is directly given: food and drink and play. Are those wrong occupations? Not really, but regarding Israel it was wrong. The people lost connection with Moses, their great leader. He was gone for a long time. The people didn't see him anymore and they didn't hear him anymore. Therefore they then said to Aaron that he should *make* a god. Aaron did that and the golden calf rose on its pedestal. Afterward they

ate, drank and feasted. What was then the cause of them eating, drinking and playing? It was because Moses had been away for such a long time.

How is this an example for us? The Lord Jesus has been away for such a long time already. It seems like He will never come back. Okay guys, let us make ourselves comfortable in this world and let's have fun. We will also make ourselves a god, one we can really be friends with, a good one. Life will be one big party! Only, it will be a party without the true God. These kinds of sounds are to be heard with people who confess to be Christians, but do not consider the coming of Christ.

In Matthew 24 the Lord Jesus speaks about the attitude of Christians who confess Him but lose the sight of His return (Mt 24:48-51). To not become an idolater it is important to remain focused on the coming of the Lord Jesus. Of the believers in Thessalonica is said that they "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven" (1Thes 1:9-10).

V8. The next warning is not to act immorally, i.e. not to commit fornication. In popular language fornication is called 'to cheat', i.e. have *strange* sexual intercourse. In Biblical language it is not otherwise. The history that is being referred to is written in Numbers 25. The fornication or the playing the harlot was that men from Israel married Moabite women (Num 25:1-2). They married *strange* women who didn't belong to God's people. They fell in love with people of whom God said that they should not love them (Deu 23:3-6).

This history is an example for us as well. When we love and have friendship with people who don't want to have anything to do with God, we 'cheat' also. This is of course not about the love of Christ that should inspire us to preach the gospel to sinners so that they may be redeemed. It wouldn't be a good thing if we would not love lost people. No, it is about expressions of love in practice, whereby God's involvement is not asked for.

James is straight to the point when he says: "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?" (Jam 4:4). Adultery is a form of fornication. You should be aware of it that in the world there was, and there still is, no place for Christ. The world rejected

Him and still rejects Him. Everyone who hasn't chosen Christ belongs to the world and lives in hostility toward Him. This is the way God looks at it and we ought to do the same.

They might speak friendly and appreciative about Him, but that doesn't change the fact that God sees them like that. He who commits fornication like that and goes on with living in fornication, will finally have nothing left of being a Christian. The testimony of such a person will finally disappear totally.

V9. Here we are being warned not to try or to tempt Christ. Doubt enters the heart of the people about which way God wants them to go. They wonder if God means well with them and express their suspicion about it. This sowing of doubt is the work of satan. This is how he came to Eve in the garden of Eden, in the guise of a serpent, and whispered to her: "Indeed, has God said?" (Gen 3:1). This is how he injected her heart with the poison of suspicion.

Since then he always operates in this way, and with much success. If thoughts of doubt arise in you about God, be assured that this is from satan. Do not give in to these thoughts. Keep on trusting God, in spite of all appearances which may give the impression that God doesn't care about you. Otherwise the poison of the serpent will slowly affect you deeper and deeper and will let you perish with the world.

V10. Paul also warns against grumbling. Grumbling is one of the sins that was very often committed by the people in the wilderness journey. Time and again they found something to express their dissatisfaction about God. Does that also bother you sometimes? Make sure that you will not be infected by the spirit of dissatisfaction. It will absorb out of you all joy and gratitude that you normally have toward God. You will lose the experience of a joyful life with God. Grumbling spoils your life and makes you become a sourpuss without testimony.

V11. Actually the whole history of Israel is one big illustration. Everything that had happened to them happened to be as a warning for us. You may wonder: Was that necessary? Absolutely! If you're not alert, you can easily follow the world and easily join the grumblers with complaining; you will

like to join humanitarians or environmentalists and will want to put your trust in macrobiotics to keep your body healthy, etcetera. You will also fall into the trap of handsome guys or attractive looking girls. You may pray and give thanks for your food and join a church or gathering and then? Exactly, you will get under the spell of worldly temptations. So do not do what Israel did. You have been warned.

We live in “the ends of the ages”. There is nothing left but judgment, for there is no hope anymore that man will yet fulfill what God asks of him. Total corruption of man has become apparent in every which way. The history of Israel is a striking illustration of that.

V12. He who still has any confidence in himself, despite this extensive argumentation of the apostle, can be sure that he is close to a fall. You and I do not have any assurance in ourselves that we will not fall. He who thinks that he stands, only because he calls himself a Christian and because he thinks he acts as a Christian, will surely fall from faith, for his faith is only a lip confession. A confession is important, but only when it comes from a living and personal relationship with God and with Christ, it is valuable.

V13. Fortunately, everyone who has such a relationship with God can count on the faithfulness of God. Whatever the temptations may be that could have caused you to fall into a trap, God is still there. He is above the circumstances and He will surely help you to get through, if you do not trust yourself but Him. Then He will also make a way of escape with the temptation, that you may be able to endure it. Everything that can happen to you has been weighed by God. He will not allow you to be tested beyond what you are able, although sometimes it might seem so. Always trust on God’s faithfulness, despite all appearances and despite your emotions in such situations. He never disappoints anyone who puts his trust in Him!

Now read 1 Corinthians 10:7-13 again.

Reflection: What lessons do you learn about yourself in these verses and what do you learn about God?

1Cor 10:14-17 | One Bread, One Body

14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. 16 Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? 17 Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.

Here Paul starts with a new issue. Up until now he has spoken about the church as a house where God dwells. Because God dwells there, He has the right to say how believers should behave there. It is His house after all, isn't it? When things happen in the church that do not please Him, He points out how to deal with them. In chapter 5 you have read about a clear example regarding such a case. There it is written that the evil person has to be removed (1Cor 5:13b).

The issue Paul starts with now is still connected to the church. But here the church is no longer presented as a house, but as a body. In verse 17 you read about "one body". We will see what that means soon.

V14. First another thing about verse 14: This verse connects to the previous part. Actually it is a kind of summary of verses 1-13. In the previous verses it is made clear that idolatry is something that takes your eyes off of God and Christ. It is something that takes Their place. The meaning of that 'something' is often different for each child of God. Apparently you know for yourself which things can so easily bring a distance between you and God. But the call "flee" is the same for each child of God. He who lets himself be dragged down in any way by idolatry, cannot partake in the blessings which are the result of "a sharing in" or better "the communion of" the blood of Christ.

V15. In the case of the Corinthians, it was the tendency of going back to the idol temples. Besides, they also could fool themselves, now they were Christians, that an idol was nothing. That, however, was a mistake. You cannot participate in religious, idolatrous rituals without denying your position as a Christian. That was something the Corinthians had to think about very carefully. Paul addressed them as "wise men", which means people who were able to judge what they were doing.

V16. The absurdity of their participation in the service of idols is most visible in the presentation of their communion, which they have as Christians. As Christians they celebrated the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. Thereby they made use of a cup and bread, as the Lord Jesus told them. You can read about the institution of the Lord's Supper by the Lord Jesus in the Gospels (Mt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lk 22:19-20). Also in the next chapter of this letter you read about it (1Cor 11:23-26). The emphasis there is that the Lord's Supper is a meal of remembrance.

When we eat of the bread and drink of the wine, we do that in remembrance of what the Lord has done on earth. We think of *Him* and we do that in remembrance of *Him*. In the study of chapter 11 I will tell you more about this special event.

In chapter 10 that lies before you, another aspect is highlighted. The issue here is that by partaking of the Lord's Supper, you have communion of the blood and the body of Christ. Of course I don't know whether you already partake of the Lord's Supper. In case you don't yet partake, I do hope you soon will. Of course the reason should not be just 'to belong to the fellowship', but out of love for the Lord Jesus, because He invites you.

It is important to examine where you should do that. To be able to do that you should discover if the place where you want to partake of the Lord's Supper, is a place where the practice is according to what is written here.

In the first place it is: Do you recognize if they gather there, it is to express the communion of Christ's blood and of Christ's body? That is what verse 16 says.

Second: Do you recognize that they gather there as a unity, as it is expressed in 'the one bread'? That is what verse 17 says.

You might find it difficult, which is understandable. You ought to make some efforts to become aware of these aspects. Therefore it is not for nothing that Paul addresses them as wise men. These are not things you talk about with little children. The partaking of the Lord's Supper by little children is therefore not according to God's thoughts. He who partakes of the Lord's Supper, needs to have some awareness of what he is doing.

I will try to clarify that a little bit more. The word ‘share’ or better ‘communion’ that occurs often in this part, means ‘to be partakers of something together’. You share something with others. Before you knew the Lord Jesus, you shared the things in the world with your friends. You partook of their pleasures, you feasted with them. Now you have other people, your brothers and sisters in Christ, with whom you share in blessings that have become your share also because you know the Lord Jesus.

That communion has been made possible through the blood of Christ. It is the communion of His blood. Through the blood you have been reconciled with God. Your sins have been taken away forever. All who hide behind the blood (Exo 12:13), which means whose sins are covered before God through faith in the blood, partake of that communion. All who have no share in the blood of Christ are outside of that communion. The blood is mentioned here first, because it is the basis of the communion.

When subsequently the bread is spoken about, you see there the communion of the body of Christ. The expression “the body of Christ” has two meanings. The first meaning is the physical body of Christ, which is His body in which He was on earth and in which He bore our sins. The second meaning is the figurative body of Christ, which is the church, to which all true believers belong.

When we break the bread we first think of His body that He surrendered into death. We admire collectively, that is together or with one another, that precious body with which He glorified God. That means that we admire His Person. Christ has come in the body that God had prepared for Him when He came into the world (Heb 10:5). That is also in remembrance of the fact that the church has come into being, because He gave His body into death.

A beautiful picture of that you find in Genesis 2 (Gen 2:21-23). God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, a death sleep so to speak. Then God took one of Adam’s ribs and built him a woman out of that rib. When He brought Eve to Adam, Adam says: “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.”

This is how you can recognize in the church the body of Christ. Therefore we break the bread in remembrance of both the body that Christ gave into death and of the church that has come into being through His death.

V17. In this verse the issue is obviously the church. It is about us, “we who are many”. All who belong to the church are allowed to show that by partaking of the one bread. Thereby you may say that it is ‘inclusive’, which means they who are included, who belong to the body. You may also say that it is ‘exclusive’, which means that it excludes everyone who doesn’t belong to the body. It is inclusive, because it is for all who really belong to the church. It is exclusive, because the Lord’s Supper has no room for unbelievers and for believers who live in sin or don’t exercise discipline on it.

Now read 1 Corinthians 10:14-17 again.

Reflection: Do you already partake of that one bread?

1Cor 10:18-22 | The Lord's Table

18 Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? 19 What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 [No], but [I say] that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. 22 Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?

V18. To clarify what he means by ‘share’ or, better, ‘communion’, Paul presents the example of the worship service of Israel. What was that like? In the book of Leviticus you can read about different kinds of sacrifices that could be brought, and sometimes had to be brought. All those sacrifices show something about the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus. He is the true Sacrifice. Those sacrifices were put on the altar that stood in the court of the tabernacle. That altar was called ‘the bronze altar of burnt offering’.

The sacrifice Paul is thinking of here in particular, is the peace offering. That is the offering that you could call a meal offering or a fellowship offering. Of the peace offering God received a portion, the priest received a portion and for the rest each member of the people who was clean could eat from this offering. You can find this in Leviticus 3 and Leviticus 7. That means that God had fellowship with His people and this fellowship consisted of eating the peace offering together. The place where this fellowship, this communion, this sharing together of the offering happened, was the altar. The altar was the meeting place where God and the people came together.

When you think of the altar to be a place where the offering was consumed in the fire, you may think of the cross of the Lord Jesus. Then it is clear that the altar is a meeting place between God and the people. After all, the Lord Jesus has reconciled sinful and repentant people with God by bearing and taking away their sins in the fire of God’s judgment. He has fulfilled God’s holy demands with a view to the sins.

You may remember at the same time that the altar is a picture of the Lord Jesus Himself. Just like the altar, as it were, offered the true offering to

God, the Lord Jesus offered Himself to God. This is what you read in Hebrews 9: "Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God" (Heb 9:14a) Therefore, when you think of "sharers in the altar" or "communion with the altar" as it is said here, it means that we may, together with God, enjoy the Lord Jesus. Isn't that fellowship or communion after all: enjoying together the same portion?

Don't you think that God enjoys His Son unspeakably? And don't you enjoy Him very much also? Of course Israel didn't understand that in this way. But you remember from verse 6 and verse 11 of this chapter that everything that happened to Israel has happened as examples for us. We now may know what God really has meant by that when He gave all these statutes to Israel. Therefore Paul can say: "Look at the nation Israel" or "See Israel according to flesh".

V19-20. Because of this example, it also becomes clear that any other way of fellowship is excluded. To Israel it was absolutely forbidden to partake of pagan offering feasts of the nations around them. The same applied to the believers at Corinth. Not that Paul wanted to withdraw what he said before, in chapter 8, about the offerings to idols and about the idols (1Cor 8:1,4). The meat that was offered to an idol was and still remained plain meat. And an idol was and still remained just a piece of wood or stone. That is not the point.

The real point is that – and he wants to make that very clear to the Corinthians – the offerings that are offered by the pagans in fact are offered to demons, evil spirits. Behind the idols of wood and stone demons are hidden. The reverence and worship with which the pagans offer their sacrifices and kneel down before an idol are received by these demons.

Demons really exist and they are a reality. They are creatures that are aimed to destroy man and to keep him far from the fellowship with God. The demons respond to the imagination and fear of man. In this way man is forced to bring sacrifices to an idol, in order to please him, while the demons are the real recipient of those sacrifices. In this way the true and only God is being excluded. Everyone who partakes of these sacrificial festivals will not be aware of that, but that is actually the case in reality.

V21. Therefore there needs to be a radical separation between the Christian worship service and the pagan worship service. Fellowship with demons and fellowship with God cannot go together. The cup of the Lord and the cup of demons exclude one another. It really is unimaginable that we for one moment drink the cup of the Lord, whereby we remember the blood that He shed to be able to bless us and we then for another moment drink from a cup that is dedicated to demons and we thereby are connected to the big opponent of Christ.

It is remarkable that in Ezekiel 41 and in Malachi 1 the Table of the Lord is mentioned as well (Eze 41:22; Mal 1:7,12). There the bronze altar of the burnt offering is indicated this way. So here Paul again connects to the picture of the Old Testament. And what again was presented by the altar? Indeed fellowship. What is presented by the Table of the Lord? Fellowship.

A normally functioning family sits down to eat together at regular times. To the family members, parents and children, that is the time to have fellowship with one another. During the whole day they have been at several places: in the house, at school, at the working place, but at meal time they are together and share their experiences of the whole day with one another. That is also the thought of the Table of the Lord. To the Table of the Lord every believer partakes with what he has enjoyed of the Lord Jesus during the week, in order to tell that, collectively together with others, to God the Father and to the Lord Jesus.

But just like the table of the family, the Table of the Lord should be no place for things that do not belong there. Children, who do or say bad things, spoil the atmosphere at the table. Then they should be dismissed for a certain time from the table, till they understand what they did wrong. This every-day example shows something of what also applies to the Table of the Lord. There is a place for each member of the church at the Lord's Table. But he who teaches wrong doctrines about the Lord or who allows things in his life that do not suit a believer, has to be removed from the Lord's Table. The Lord Jesus cannot tolerate any connection with demons with His own people.

The Table of the Lord and the table of demons are about two extremes which cannot be related to each other. A person who partakes of the Lord's

Supper should only partake of the Lord's Table and not of the table of demons. In many places of professing Christianity the Supper is celebrated, but it cannot be said that it is celebrated at the Lord's Table. This does not mean however that it is the table of demons.

It's not about just a table, it is the Table of the Lord! That means that you can speak with certainty of the Table of the Lord only if it is clear that people practice it according to the will of the Lord. In His Word we can read what His will is. Therein we read that the circle of fellowship is not to be made smaller or larger than the body of Christ.

In case we get in touch with Christians who gather in a certain way and also celebrate the Supper with one another, we need to examine on the basis of the Bible, if these Christians are willing to obey God's Word. Obedience to God's Word will become apparent from a life to God's honor, and that any sin is being judged. In that case we may recognize them as believers who only want to do what the Lord says and together with them we can express the unity of the church as the body of Christ by the breaking of bread.

V22. Professing Christianity is split into a lot of churches and denominations. Therefore we are exclusively dependent on the Bible as our guide. We do not want to tempt the Lord to jealousy by connecting His Name to miscellaneous restrictions that are created by men in many parts of professing Christianity, do we? He cannot approve that we let ourselves be guided by our own ideas. When we do that He will have to admonish us and if we do not listen, He will have to chastise us. He is strong enough to do that.

Now read 1 Corinthians 10:18-22 again.

Reflection: Is there only one Table of the Lord or are there more?

1Cor 10:23-33 | Do All Things to the Glory of God

23 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his own [good], but that of his neighbor. 25 Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake; 26 FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS. 27 If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake. 28 But if anyone says to you, "This is meat sacrificed to idols," do not eat [it], for the sake of the one who informed [you], and for conscience' sake; 29 I mean not your own conscience, but the other [man's]; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? 30 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks? 31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; 33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the [profit] of the many, so that they may be saved.

V23-24. A Christian is a free man; all things are permitted for him. Then he is allowed to do a lot of things; though, a Christian is actually also a man with a sense of responsibility. Therefore he asks himself: 'Is it profitable (for other people) and is it edifying (for other people)?' In all his doings he wants to consider other people.

In chapter 6 you have already read about such issues (1Cor 6:12). There the word "me" is added. There it is about your personal attitude regarding the use of food and about not being brought under the power of it. Here it is more general; the word 'me' is not added and it is about eating meat sacrificed to idols. In that way it connects directly to the previous part, where it is about communion with Christ or communion with demons. That has to do with the practice of our religion.

V25-26. The Corinthians now knew that they couldn't partake of the pagan offering services without having communion with the demons that were hiding behind the idols. Did that mean that they had to examine, in their daily life, whether the meat they bought might have been related to idols? No, that was not the case. All food that creation produces comes from God and belongs to Him (Psa 24:1). In 1 Timothy 4 is written: "For everything

created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude" (1Tim 4:4). You are allowed to enjoy with full freedom from all the food that God gives you. [There are two exceptions: blood and things strangled (Acts 15:20,29)].

V27. In fact, you are allowed to accept freely the invitation of an unbeliever to have supper with him. You neither need to worry about the origin of the meat he sets before you. If you accept the invitation of the unbeliever, it is your own decision.

It says: "And you want to go." That means that you have made a considered decision to accept this invitation before the Lord and you have got the conviction that it is a good thing to do that. Then the Lord will also give you the opportunity to testify of Him. Thus you will surely start the meal by prayer.

V28. It is another thing when somebody says to you that the piece of meat, set before you, has first been offered to an idol. Then you shouldn't eat it. Not, because the meat has suddenly changed, but because of the other person who has said that to you. The other person, actually, has no free conscience. Just don't eat the meat, in order to meet the other in his weakness. This is how you practice love. For if you would have eaten of that meat despite his remark, it would have appeared as if you agreed with him and also honored the idols.

V29-30. Of course that is not the case with you. Your freedom cannot be judged by the conscience of another person. After all you give thanks to God for your food and do not have idols in mind, right? Many questions about whether anything is allowed or not, can be answered by asking yourself if you can thank God for it.

V31. You may call this verse the golden rule of the Christian life. When all things in our life are focused on God's glory, they will also be visible in the most common things of our life. Whether it concerns food or drink or whatever, it should be "all to the glory of God" in the life of the Christian. Then there is no room anymore for the 'I'.

Actually it is very nice to look at the Christian life in this way. Being a Christian is not a negative matter, what not to do, but rather a positive

matter. Your life may be to the glory of God in every detail. What is more common than to eat and to drink? You can do that to His glory. You may enjoy it. God has even equipped you with a ‘taste’ to be able to enjoy, although we should not always give in to that, so that we only eat what we like. Even things we do not like that much, but nevertheless received from God, we can use to His glory and thank Him for that.

Whatever it is, we can do that in a way that glorifies Him. Your work or study, leisure time, friendship, relationship, in all these things you may involve Him. If you live in such a way, your life will only then make really sense. Then you’re allowed to go and do everything. All things are lawful, right?

I once heard from a youngster who wondered if he could go to a football stadium to watch a match. This match would take place at a moment that he had no other commitments. Would the Lord approve of that? He went to an older brother to ask him for advice. That brother gave him the next advice: ‘You can go easily to the stadium, but don’t forget to take a lot of gospel pamphlets with you, for you will surely meet a lot of people who do not know the Lord Jesus yet.’

In former days I once in a while went to a pub to get a little bit of entertainment. When I surrendered my life to the Lord Jesus, I went back several times, but then with a bunch of gospel material to hand out to the youth.

V32. In all cases it is important that you give no offense to other people, not to Jews or Greek and neither to the church of God. The whole human race consists of these three groups. Each person belongs to one of these groups. A person is a Jew or a Greek, i.e. a Gentile, or a member of the church of God. Each of these groups has its own characteristics. That is what you should take into consideration; otherwise you give offense to somebody. To give offense means that you do something that hurts another person and push him away from you, while in case you would have acted more carefully you could have prevented it.

In case you have a real Jewish visitor, do not serve him pork. To the Jew it may be an implication that you want to tempt him to do something that

he is legally forbidden to do. You could defile his conscience and therefore disqualify yourself as a Christian.

With Gentiles you have contact on a daily basis. Let your light shine as a Christian in your whole conduct. Be an example in the way you're doing your work, in the way you spend your leisure time, your way of dealing with others, in your talk and silence. Daniel is a nice example of a person who was noticed in a wicked environment. Of him is this testimony in God's Word: "But they could find no ground of accusation or [evidence of] corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was [to be] found in him" (Dan 6:4).

And then the church of God. That is the group where you belong to. You are surrounded by its other members. Everything you do has an influence on the whole church. Nothing in your whole life, not even in your thinking, is excluded from it. There is not a moment that you are separated from the church. This doesn't apply to the Jew and Gentile toward their group. You only have to do with them when you have contact with them. With the church it is different. You yourself take part in it.

Let your conduct be edifying. Seek the best for the other members. Be willing to serve the other. Do not give destructive criticism. The spirit of destructive criticism within the church has already been an offense to a lot of people. You may be critical, but let the criticism you give, be edifying (take a look at verse 23b).

V33. Verse 32 served as a warning, something we should not do; verse 33 is meant to be an encouragement, something we should do. To please all people in all things goes very far. Yes, but the purpose is nothing less than "that they may be saved". Do you keep that purpose in mind? Then you will not seek your own interest.

Are you then supposed to always go along with the other and do what he says or wants? Yes, within the boundaries that God has ordained, which you can find in the Bible and in your walk with the Lord. Just remember the invitation that comes from an unbeliever, asking you to eat with him. Of the Lord Jesus people said: "This man receives sinners and eats with

them" (Lk 15:2). Do you think that the Lord adjusted Himself to them in a way that would dishonor the Name of His Father?

Now read 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 again.

Reflection: Examine if you can thank God for everything you do or plan to do.

1 Corinthians 11

1Cor 11:1-6 | Head Covering and Hair (I)

1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. 2 Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. 3 But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. 4 Every man who has [something] on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. 5 But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. 6 For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.

V1. Paul says that we should imitate him, just as he also imitated Christ. How he did that, he said in the last verse of the previous chapter. His aim was to win many people for Christ. In no way he wanted to be a hindrance for people to accept the gospel. In this way Paul imitated his Lord and you can imitate Paul in your turn.

V2. Paul already had given a lot of exhortations. That was necessary. We also need to be exhorted. But yet there is also something for which he praises them. The Corinthians have not forgotten him, they even remembered him in everything. That has pleased him. Besides that, they kept the traditions just as he delivered them to them. He really appreciated that.

You can also look positively at the fact that he had to correct them in their way of dealing with these traditions, like the Lord's Supper, about which he speaks later in this chapter. The positive thing is not to justify the wrong, but it is the fact that they were approachable. He could correct them in their wrong doings and trust that they would listen to him. Anyway, Paul saw good things with the Corinthians.

V3. Then he speaks about an issue that currently is one of the most widely discussed matters, namely the role of man and woman in everyday life. In the world around you, things are dealt with quite differently than what

you read in the first part of this chapter. You may even have to reread it several times before you get a clear mind on that. The ranking which is indicated in verse 3 has been totally done away with in the world around you. God and Christ, people do not believe in. And the thought of the man as the head of the woman is totally out of fashion and wrong so that people make every effort to destroy this thought.

I said that verse 3 indicates a ranking. I mean this: God is at the head, then Christ, then the man and then the woman. To many people the impression arises because of this ranking – and that is what people vehemently oppose – as if the woman is just dangling at the bottom of this list and therefore has the position of being neglected totally. But that is absolutely not the case! Paul actually refers to the creation of man and woman. There you see that the man is created first and that the woman originates from him. She came out of his side, which means as one who is placed at his side.

The man is the head of creation, but he himself also has a Head above him and that is Christ. He is responsible to Him. In all things he needs to ask his Head how to behave himself toward his wife, in the family, in society and in the church.

Christ is not only his Head, but also his Example, for you read that the Head of Christ is God. That of course doesn't refer to Christ as the eternal Son, but to Him as Man. As Man the Lord Jesus has fully subjected Himself to the will of God. 'To be subjected to' may sound quite subservient, but it is about a position of submission toward another person. By paying attention to his Head, Christ, a man can be 'head' of the woman in a right way. In that way he will not manage her, but he will instruct her in a way that makes her heed easily.

V4. How can this ranking be made visible? How can it be made visible that people observe the order of creation? Christ is not on earth anymore as Man, but the creature 'man' is. Man is the image of God. Therefore he is also called to represent this ranking. The best expression is to be seen at praying and prophesying. At praying man addresses himself to God and at prophesying God addresses Himself to man. In both cases that happens through the mouth of man. If we compare praying with prophesying, then

it is clear that it is about praying out loud in the presence of other people. After all, prophesying is not useful when there are no listeners.

If a man prays to God or prophesies to people, he ought to consider the place God gave him as a visible head of this creation. Therefore he is not allowed to pray or prophesy with his head covered. In the visible creation there is no creature he is submitted to, for that is what the head covering indicates, as it is indicated in the following verses. In case he has his head covered, he would then dishonor his invisible Head, Christ in heaven. Do you know why? Because by covering his head he would give the impression that he is submitted to another head besides Christ.

V5. Regarding woman it is quite something else. She ought to have her head covered in case she prays or prophesies in the presence of others. In that way she declares that she doesn't abandon her position of being submitted to man when she does something a man is supposed to do. This regards cases when there are no men. When men are present, it is their responsibility to pray or to prophesy. When it regards praying, the instruction for men is written in 1 Timothy 2 that they should pray everywhere (1Tim 2:8).

It is important to always remember that it concerns everybody's official place in creation. The place for public performance is for the man. The woman has a more modest place. In case she comes forward by praying or prophesying, than she is supposed to cover her head, in order not to give the impression that she takes the position of the man. Otherwise she would dishonor her head, the man. By the way: this praying or prophesying by the woman is somewhere else than in the church. In 1 Corinthians 14 it is said in an unmistakable way, that women are not allowed to speak in the church (1Cor 14:34).

It may seem to you that this is all going a bit too far to relate so many things to whether or not to cover the head. Nevertheless it is really important, simply because God says so. To the visible and invisible world He wants a testimony of His order in the creation. It is like the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in paradise. What was the reason that Adam and Eve were not allowed to eat from that? Its fruit was not worse than that of the other trees, was it? But it was simply because God said that. That must have been

sufficient not to eat from it. God wants us to accept what He says; He connects a blessing to it. We lose that blessing by doing things willfully and do not listen to Him, like Adam and Eve acted willfully and lost the blessing.

V6. There is one more thing related to the head covering of woman and that is her hair. If she doesn't want to cover her head, let her have her hair cut off. Why is that? Because her long hair is her glory (verse 15). If she prays or prophesies with her head uncovered, she places herself in the position of the man. In that way she doesn't honor him as her head.

The Old Testament deals with the hair of the woman in two verses. Both verses are in a section dealing with the relationship between husband and wife. The first verse is in Numbers 5 where you read that "the priest shall then ... let [the hair of] the woman's head go loose" (Num 5:18). It is about a case in which a man suspects his wife is unfaithful to him. The second verse is in Deuteronomy 21 where you read that her head has to be shaved (Deu 21:12). There it is about a woman who is taken captive. In both cases the hair of the woman is related to dishonor and shame.

Do you know that right after the Second World War (1939-1945) women, who were suspected of having had a relationship with German soldiers, were shorn also? With this in mind the first part of verse 6 also becomes clearer.

Nevertheless Paul wants to assume that a woman is aware of the shame when she has her hair cut off or even her head shaved. He reverts the terms in the second part of verse 6 directly and says that if it is a shame for a woman to cut her hair off, she should therefore cover her head. You see here how closely head covering and hair are connected to each other.

Now read 1 Corinthians 11:1-6 again.

Reflection: Why is it important that each person stands in his own place and also takes up his position?

1Cor 11:7-16 | Head Covering and Hair (II)

7 For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. 8 For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; 9 for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. 10 Therefore the woman ought to have [a symbol of] authority on her head, because of the angels. 11 However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. 12 For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man [has his birth] through the woman; and all things originate from God. 13 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God [with her head] uncovered? 14 Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, 15 but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. 16 But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.

V7. Man is “the image and glory of God”. The significance of this is far from small. It means as much as: man ought to be the visible representative of God on earth. God also expects from man that he shows, as it were, expresses, the features and attributes of His Being. Therefore he ought not to cover his head. Woman in her turn is the glory of man. She can show something of him by showing some of his characteristics in her action. These matters are the result of the way God created both of them. “For it was Adam who was first formed, [and] then Eve” (1Tim 2:13). When Adam was created, God took one of his ribs and made Eve from it (Gen 2:21).

V8-9. Besides *the order* of creation of man and woman, there is also *the reason* of the creation of woman. Woman was created *for Adam's sake* and not Adam for Eve's sake. Eve was given to Adam as a suitable helper for him. That doesn't mean that a man doesn't ever have to help his wife. On the contrary, man should help his wife as much as and whenever he can because he loves her. But that doesn't change anything in the verses here.

We must persistently adhere to what is written here because there are powers that are making every effort to reverse God's creation order . In the world around you the movement of emancipation is gaining ground more and more. In this fight for emancipation people break with these

verses. Feminism is promoting to let woman be the head of man. The fact that this is happening in the world is not something strange, but it also affects the believers.

V10. That “the woman ought to have [a symbol of] authority on her head”, is more often experienced as a burden than a privilege. The head covering is here called “[a symbol of] authority” because it is a sign of the authority to which she is submitted. Man is after all her head. Surely, God always looks at the heart first and what the thoughts of the heart are. For it makes a difference whether a person does something only because ‘people’ say so, or he does it from a conscious obedience and love for Him. But God has also given us visible signs. By these signs angels are able to see whether a person does or does not consider the order that God has put in creation.

The head covering at praying and prophesying is the visible proof that a woman by no means wants to take the place of man toward God or men. Here it is also written that it is “because of the angels”. That appears to be a strange reason for the head covering. Nevertheless it is rather significant that they are mentioned here.

Angels are spectators. They were there when God laid the foundation of the earth (Job 38:4,7). They observe the world and are interested in how God deals with it. They saw man’s failings in the time which is written in the Old Testament. After that they saw the perfect life of the Lord Jesus: they were there when He was born, when He was tempted in the wilderness, when He was in agony in Gethsemane, when He rose from the grave and when He went back to heaven. You can read all this in the Gospels.

The redemption work that the Lord Jesus accomplished, He did not accomplish for angels, but for guilty people (Heb 2:13-16). Now the angels are observing whether the believing woman above all, through whom sin came into the world, is considering the order God has ordained. Therefore it is not about something that is culture specific. That is not what the angels are interested in. Their concern is God’s creation order, which remains to exist as long as this earth remains to exist. Believers have the privilege *and* the responsibility to show the order of God, while the world, led by the devil, takes a course that is right against it.

Angels are also called spectators with regard to the church (Eph 3:10). Now the question is asked whether the woman ought to cover her head when the church gathers. After all she is not allowed to pray or prophesy out loud there, as we shall see in chapter 14. Nevertheless the woman is to cover her head when the church gathers, because she is a picture of the church (Eph 5:22-24).

When the church gathers there are men and women. During the gathering they do things out loud together, such as singing and saying amen. By covering their head they make it clear to the angels that they are aware of their position as woman. It is an impressive testimony to the invisible and intelligent world when they see that believers act according to God's order in a world that totally rejects this order.

V11. Here it is said that man and woman have their place together "in the Lord". 'In the Lord' there is no distinction. 'In the Lord' means that they both stand before Him and they can serve Him together as their Lord in harmony. He is Lord for both man and woman. When they both are aware of that and consider that in all things, then the right balance in their relationship will not cause any problems.

V12. This balance is also reflected in this verse. It is true that woman originates from the man, but after Adam the only way for a man to enter the world was through the woman. That is to the woman's honor. Of course nothing will ever change the fact that God is the origin of every life. He is the Creator of each man and each woman.

V13. Paul pointed out different reasons for the woman to be convinced that when she prays or prophesies, she ought to have her head covered. He pointed at the order of creation in verses 3-9. After that he brought in the angels as spectators (verse 10). In verses 13-14 he gives another reason, which is the natural sense. He appeals to the discernment ability of the believers, for that is the meaning of "judge for yourselves".

They had to examine this matter spiritually and make a conclusion; then they finally had to make a decision. To be able to make a conclusion they needed a measure. For you cannot consider such a matter on your own initiative because then you will have a purely emotional conclusion. The

only way to come to a right judgment or conclusion is to bow your knees before the Lord, asking Him for light and insight, in order to explore the Scripture in this respect and to willingly subject yourself heartily to the outcome.

V14. The question whether it is proper for a woman to pray to God without a head covering easily introduces the lesson of nature in connection with the hair of man and woman. Head covering and hair are closely connected to one another. In the Bible long hair is connected to subjection: to relinquish certain rights and be committed to another person. Because God has given man a position at the forefront, he is ought not to have long hair, while long hair is a glory for the woman. That's the teaching of nature.

It is unnatural when a man has long hair and a woman has short hair. Some people may disagree with that, but that doesn't change the fact that nature does teach us this, for that is what God says in His Word here. So it might be that many people say that homosexuality is normal and natural, and yet nature teaches the opposite. In Romans 1 homosexual relations are called "unnatural" or 'against nature' (Rom 1:26).

V15. The long hair of a woman is given to her for a covering, whereby she shows her modesty and commitment toward the man. Of course her long hair is only useful when she reflects this modesty and commitment in her conduct. Then the glory, which is related to having long hair, will be fully her portion.

I do not concern myself with the discussion of what the standard length of long hair should be. In Luke 7 and in John 12 you find an indication (Lk 7:38,44; Jn 12:3). In the histories described there, we see that the hair of each of the women who came to the Lord was long enough to dry His feet with. Further on in Revelation 9 there is another indication. There you read about "hair like the hair of women" (Rev 9:8). Since there is no difference in the substance of the hair, the indication "hair of women" must have to do with the length. Therefore a clear difference should be visible between the hair length of man and of woman.

V16. Whoever wants to argue that is his business. Anyway, the apostle has no such practice, nor has any local church. All of this can be equally

clear to all people. Too often it is made confusing, complex and difficult because we do not simply adhere anymore to what God's Word says. Also in this respect the world has got a great influence on the mind of believers. This influence also comes out in the appearances. God says here: long hair is a glory to the woman. Which woman dares to take that glory without compromise?

Please note that the point in these verses is the normal standard. There are women, who due to illness or other causes cannot help that they do not have long hair.

Now read 1 Corinthians 11:7-16 again.

Reflection: Why is this section so important for the practice of the Christian life?

1Cor 11:17-22 | How to Gather At One Place

17 But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. 19 For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. 20 Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, 21 for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.

V17. Paul is giving an instruction. It is possible that he is referring to the previous verses, but it is also possible that he is referring to the following verses. There is surely a connection with the previous verses. Imagine that man or woman doesn't take the right place in God's creation order – for that's the point in the verses 1-16 –, do you think that each of them would take the right place in the church of God? I don't think so.

Apparently the believers at Corinth did not gather to have a good time with one another. They gathered for the worse. Of course they were not intending to, but that appeared to be the result in the practice of their gathering.

V18. How did it become apparent that they did not experience their gatherings for the good, but for the worse? First of all, that was expressed in the fact that there were divisions among them. In the first chapter Paul has to admonish them for that. There were divisions among them. Read that again in chapter 1 (1Cor 1:10-12).

A division causes dissension within a local church. Outwardly it seems that all believers still belong together. They all still come together to the same place at the same time, but they do not come together with the same desire. They fall apart in different groups. In the case of the Corinthians the spirit of division revealed itself during the celebration of the Lord's Supper because there was a distinction between poor and rich. In our time it can be an equally big danger. It is possible that believers with a high

social position quickly get a leading role in church exactly because they have such an important function in society. That should not be allowed.

The cause of divisions is also due to other human factors. A good speaker for instance, may impress some people, but to others it can be good manners. These aspects should not play a role in the gatherings of the church. When the church comes together, only one thing is important and that is that each believer takes his place as a member of the church.

Taking that place has nothing to do with one's place in society or with one's natural capacities, but with the work of the Lord Jesus at the cross. That is the origin of the church. Each person who knows that the Lord Jesus has accomplished that work for him also, is a member of the church. And each member of the church has his own unique place in that church and also the responsibility to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

V19. Nevertheless it can happen that when the believers come together as a church, things happen that are not from the Holy Spirit, but are invented by the believers themselves. It is about matters that are condemned by the Word of God. Factions in a local church for example, is inexcusable. That should be confessed as sin. If such situations happen, God uses them to reveal "those who are approved". The 'approved' are they who bow to God's Word and sense that such a situation is not to His glory. They shall confess the wrong and not participate in the factions.

There is a mention here of "factions" (or: sects). A faction goes a step further than a division. A division is something *within* a still existing whole. In case of a faction, the division has separated them in such a way that they go separate ways *openly*.

It is important to understand the meaning of a faction or sect. A faction or sect is not what it is normally taken to mean. Normally people speak of a sect when it is about a religious community that has separated itself from the big churches. Sometimes it is indeed a sect, but it doesn't have to be. Biblically, a sect is each religious community that believes that another unity, besides the unity of the believers, is also important with which you must agree to be a member of it.

Let me repeat for the record: the believers at Corinth are divided; there are factions because some people are attracted to Paul, others to Peter and still others to Apollos. If this is not judged, it can reach such a point that believers get separated from each other. Then factions become reality. Church history provides the shameful proofs.

The true unity on the contrary, is the unity of the church. That unity is presented by a body. Each believer is a member of it. There is a mention of a faction when people have to endorse a doctrine or confession, defined by people (how biblical that may be, however) to be able to belong to that certain religious community. The Word of God doesn't acknowledge the membership of a church community, but speaks only of the body of Christ.

V20. The gathering of a church, whereby the believers gather as believers, nothing more and nothing less, is a special occasion. Is it not wonderful that that can happen at several occasions? In Acts 2:42 you can read on which occasion the church right after its beginning gathered, and what we still can do again and again.

We can still as the church, as they did in those days, gather to break bread. That is the main topic in the section you have before you. We can also gather to pray and also to examine "the apostles' teaching", which means: to collectively study the Word of God and also act accordingly. To continue in the teaching of the apostles is not only examining their teaching with perseverance, but also continue in what they have taught. For the healthy growth of a local church, the latter is essential. In 1 Corinthians 14 you will see more matters that concern the gathering of a church.

Matthew 18 speaks about a wonderful promise in connection with the gathering of the church. The Lord Jesus says there: "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst" (Mt 18:20). You cannot apply this verse at any occasion where two or three believers meet one another. From the context of Matthew 18 it becomes clear that it is about the gathering of the church (Mt 18:15-20). And where does the church gather? There, where believers come together in the Name of the Lord Jesus. That means, where they consider His glory and His authority, according to the Bible, for that is what's embedded in the 'Name' of the Lord Jesus.

V21. The Corinthians gathered together to celebrate the Lord's Supper, but they certainly did not do it reverentially. They were used to have a fellowship meal preceding the Lord's Supper. Everybody brought food and drink of their own, i.e. only the ones who could afford it. There were also believers who couldn't afford anything. Instead of sharing their riches with the poor ones, the rich people were eating and drinking as if they were at a feast. The contrasts are expressed in such a way that some of them are hungry, while others indulge in wine and get drunk.

V22. Although they gathered at one place and were willing to eat the Lord's Supper, Paul says here that that was out of the question because of their shameless conduct toward the other members. Their excessive behavior, whereby they did not consider their fellow brothers and sisters, their fellow members of the body, is in fact also a contempt for the church of God. They embarrass those who have nothing. No, the apostle can't praise them in this.

Another thing: It is about the Supper of the *Lord*. It is *His* meal. That means that is about the Supper that belongs to Him. Therefore He alone has the right to invite to partake of His Supper. No man or group can do that. The essence of the Lord's Supper is described in a special way in the next verses.

Now read 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 again.

Reflection: When do the believers come together as a church?

1Cor 11:23-26 | The Lord's Supper

23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same way [He took] the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink [it], in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

The impressive thing of these verses lies in the contrast with the previous verses. There the chaotic situation of the Corinthians is pictured, as it became apparent when they celebrated the Lord's Supper. It was just a mess. They dealt in a very unholy way with holy things. How do you respond to that? Does Paul put the church at Corinth aside? No, first he points out the wrong and then he tells them what the real and special meaning of the Lord's Supper is.

It is significant that Paul could address the Corinthians in that way. So the situation was not totally hopeless. They could still be corrected and restoration was still possible. That is different from nowadays Christianity. Due to human institutions that have slipped into many churches and groups, it is not possible anymore to celebrate the Lord's Supper according to how the Lord Jesus introduced it in the last night of His life on earth before the cross. The whole ecclesiastical structure should be abandoned in order to have room for what Paul says here in all simplicity and in a very moving way.

V23. Paul takes you to "the night in which He [the Lord Jesus] was betrayed". That is the moment in the life of the Lord that He certainly had the right to be occupied with Himself and with everything that awaited Him. That was the moment when Judas, one of His disciples, betrayed Him with a kiss. It was right before that moment that the Lord Jesus introduced His Supper with a view for His disciples to remember Him when He would not be on earth anymore.

Paul had directly "received from the Lord" because the Lord's Supper fits totally in his ministry. After all, Paul is the man who is used by the Lord to make everything known about the church, which is originated through the

death, the resurrection and the glorification of the Lord Jesus. In his conversion he was already given to understand that the church on the earth and the Lord Jesus in heaven are one. When he persecuted the church he heard from heaven: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4).

That Paul is exactly the one who receives the order to pass on this institution, proves that the Lord's Supper is a part of the Christian's life, thus also yours. It is a remembrance meal whereby you always remember a Savior Who was willing to die for you and all people who have accepted Him in faith.

If you ponder on the Lord's Supper, do you then realize that His lips asked: "Do this in remembrance of Me"? Therefore the Lord Jesus took bread while celebrating the Passover. The Passover, which He was celebrating with His disciples, was a remembrance of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. The institution of the Passover is described in Exodus 12 (Exo 12:1-14). But what the Lord Jesus instituted during the celebration of the Passover is not related to Israel in the first place, but to the church. As long as the church dwells on earth, she can express her intimate and indissoluble alliance with the Lord Jesus through the celebration of His Supper. When you join a gathering where the Lord's Supper is celebrated, your heart will be filled with a great gratitude.

The Lord Jesus took bread. It says it so simply. Yet it is so exceptional. The exceptional thing about it is not the bread. The bread is just plain bread. It does not go through an uncommon change by pronouncing an extraordinary prayer of blessing, as the roman-catholic church teaches. It remains plain bread. The exceptional thing about it is what the bread represents.

You can compare it to a photo of somebody who you love very much. The material of the photo is plain paper. The point is who is on that photo. If somebody spat on that photo, you would be very offended, not because of the paper, but because of their contempt for the person who is on the photo. It is the same idea with the bread during the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The Lord Jesus said about the bread: "This is My body, which is for you." It is an awful thing to deal with that inappropriately.

V24. When you join the gathering and you see the bread, you can remember that the Lord Jesus, the eternal Son, has become Man and has taken on a body, without ever giving it up again. In that body he lived thirty-three years on earth. In His body He has glorified God in a perfect way. In that body He suffered as well.

Try to realize: He became captured, while He could call twelve legions of angels with one sigh to heaven to consume all (Mt 26:53). Such capture did not happen gently at all. Evil people laid their violent hands upon His holy body and hauled Him before the courts. In spite of the declaration that had to be given again and again, that He hadn't done anything for which He should be punished, they spat in His holy face, tore His clothes off from His body and tore His holy back open by scourging Him terribly.

Beaten up like that, He had to walk with the cross on His back to the place of execution. At that place brutal hands of soldiers grabbed His holy hands, with which He did nothing but bless, and hurried to hit them cruelly with nails on the cross.

Then they raised the cross. The Savior was hanging there on the cross! He was mocked and provoked to come down from the cross. Still He remained hanging on the cross. Imagine what would have happened if He had come down from the cross. Then you and I would have been perished forever. His love for you and me kept Him on that cross, yet the worst still had to happen.

The suffering He underwent till then was done to Him by people. That suffering could not take away sins. It just only increased the guilt of man. What still had to happen and the only thing through which we could be redeemed from our sins, was that He would bear "our sins in His body" on the cross (1Pet 2:24). In the three hours of darkness His holy body was burdened with our sins and was struck by God. This is how He died. It is poignant to be continually aware of that, when you see the broken bread before you.

V25. Also the cup represents something. It represents the blood of the Lord Jesus, which He shed. The blood is of such great value, that God can therefore forgive sins. That forgiveness is a great thing, something you can be

amazed of again and again and for which you can express your gratitude toward God again and again.

How often would you like to celebrate the Lord's Supper? It is written: "As often as." From the beginning of Acts you can understand that the first Christians daily came together to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Further on in Acts the first day of the week is mentioned as a day on which the bread was broken (Acts 20:7). This first day of the week is called in Revelation 1 "the Lord's day" (Rev 1:10). Do you remember that the Supper is called "the Lord's Supper" in verse 20? So there is a clear connection between 'the Lord's day' and 'the Lord's Supper'. Therefore the first day of the week seems to be the most suitable day to celebrate it.

Another indication is that the Lord Jesus came on that day, the first day of the week, after His resurrection in the midst of His disciples (Jn 20:19,26). On that day He likes to meet with His own, so that they may worship Him. Is there a more suitable way than through the celebration of that remembrance meal?

V26. Therefore when you eat the bread and drink from the cup, you proclaim "the Lord's death". Can you imagine two words that are so contradictory and yet are made so closely related here than 'death' and 'Lord'? Nevertheless your hopeless situation cannot possibly be brought forward in a more striking way. In order to save you, no less than the death of the Prince of life was necessary.

Therefore you say, though without words, so much when you partake of the Lord's Supper. It is a proclamation to whoever wants to see it, whether it is people or angels, that you owe everything to a Lord Who died. When that is a reality for you, then the result will be that you will not allow anything anymore in your life the Lord had to die for. That should be really out of the question.

By impressing upon them the amazing thing about the Lord's death again, Paul wanted to persuade the Corinthians to confess their wrong practices and to put them away. Isn't that a wonderful way to get believers on the right track?

We must realize that every time we have proclaimed the death of the Lord, it could have been the last time. With the celebration of the Lord's Supper we remember His death, while we know that He lives. For we proclaim His death "until He comes". What an amazing prospect!

Now read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 again.

Reflection: What does the Lord's Supper represent?

1Cor 11:27-34 | How to Participate in the Lord's Supper

27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world. 33 So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. 34 If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment. The remaining matters I will arrange when I come.

V27. I hope that you are impressed by the Lord's Supper; that is to say by what it represents: Christ and His reconciling death. Then you can imagine that God is very displeased when Christians trivialize the Lord's Supper. God tolerates ignorance, but He does not tolerate it when this holy institution is being abused.

In most cases when believers are of the opinion that the Lord's Supper serves to strengthen faith, it is a matter of ignorance. The Lord's Supper is not to strengthen faith, but to remember a Savior Who died. It is not that believers receive something, like a word of encouragement, when they partake of the Lord's Supper, but they come to do something and to bring something. They proclaim the death of a Beloved and thank Him that He wanted to enter death. It is possible to remember His death and at the same time thank Him because He is the living One in their midst.

It is another thing when, as at Corinth, the believers deal with the Lord's Supper in a wrong way. Then they do not realize anymore what the bread and wine represent. It can easily happen that you eat the bread and drink the cup totally thoughtlessly. You do it unconsciously. Suddenly you realize what you have done. Then you confess to God that you were absent in your thoughts again. Fortunately, He knows that such a thing can happen.

It is another thing when the Lord's Supper becomes just routine, meaningless again and again. With the Corinthians the point was that they used bread and wine "in an unworthy manner". So the wrong thing was the

way they dealt with the bread and the wine. They ate the bread to satisfy their hunger and they drank the wine to quench their thirst. They forgot the real essence.

This “unworthy manner” has got nothing to do with being worthy or unworthy of the person who partakes of the Lord’s Supper. Each true member of the church has been made worthy through the work of the Lord Jesus to partake of it. Therefore you should not cease from partaking of the Lord’s Supper because you feel unworthy to do that.

The only reason for the believer not to be worthy of partaking is, when there is a sin in the believer’s life that is not confessed. In chapter 5 this was extensively paid attention to. The warning here is not to partake of the Lord’s Supper inconsiderately, for you would make yourself guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

V28. Each person who takes the Lord’s Supper seriously, will recoil from that and therefore examine himself. This self-examination, this “examine” yourself, is essential. Do you want to know how that works? When you ponder on meeting the Lord in the gathering, you also directly become aware of His holiness, that He knows everything about you. Do you have any fear by that thought? Can you frankly look Him in the eyes?

Self-examination always has its effect. It may have the result that you’re reminded of things that are wrong; then you can put them away. The result can also be that you are sincerely not aware of anything wrong; in that case you may frankly partake of the Lord’s Supper. In Matthew 5 you find how the Lord Jesus says what I have just said with my own words (Mt 5:23-24).

Staying away from the Lord’s Supper or not partaking when bread and wine are being passed on, are in no case a solution. In that way you let sin conquer over your love for the Lord Jesus. No, examine yourself, take away the hindrance or the wrong and eat in such a way the bread and drink in such a way the cup.

V29. He who is not willing to examine and judge himself, easily eats and drinks judgment to himself, which God shall execute over him or her. God guards the honor of His Son. He cannot possibly act as if He is not interested in how we deal with the remembrance of His Son. He also loves

His own that much that He will not allow them to continue in that way. He loves them to enjoy the full value of this institution. Therefore He is obliged to chasten all who do not take into account this which they hold in their hands, as sanctified, and which is represented by the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper.

'Not discerning the Lord's body' means that the believers do not relate an exceptional meaning to the bread of the Lord's Supper. Their hearts are cold and aren't touched by it anymore. Then God has to speak clearly to them.

V30. Therefore many believers at Corinth were weak and sick, and quite a few of them have even already passed away. These things must have said a lot to the Corinthians. It is not the purpose of Paul here to say that each weakness or sickness of the body or each death is a cause of sin. God could have had other plans with it. At Corinth, however, all this was the cause of that.

Nowadays it can also be the case that a local church is being addressed by God explicitly, when suddenly several believers show weakness and sickness and that even believers are being taken away by death. Of course it is a good thing that the believers of that church pray at prayer meetings for the weak, the sick and the relatives of the dead, but it should also be the idea that they ask the Lord why these things happen, what the cause of that is.

It is certainly not meant that weakness, sickness and death only happen to the ones who are to blame. That may be the case, but at Corinth the whole church had to be addressed because the state of the whole was not good. It is also possible that God took away some faithful believers to bring the unfaithful to their senses. So we have no certain indications which we could relate to God's ways of acting, except that, through such occurrences, God wants to point us to situations that are not good.

V31. We can prevent that God has to judge us, by judging ourselves. You are able and even called to judge yourself. Judging yourself implies that you yourself can discern whether you do or do not walk in the path of the Lord. If you have done something wrong, you will judge what you've

done wrong. You will not only judge the deed, but also yourself and the condition of your heart because you could only do that wrong deed because you were not close to the Lord.

V32. If we do not judge ourselves, then the Lord will chasten us. As said already: He loves us so much that He will not allow us to continue to live in sin. If He doesn't chasten us, we would then perish together with the world under God's judgment when He will judge this world.

V33-34. After these serious verses about the judgment and discipline of the Lord, Paul appeals to the Corinthians to consider one another. He who eats his usual meal at home, will not risk misusing the Lord's Supper by satisfying his hunger with the bread of it, which would cause a judgment to the gathering. When the believers prepare themselves well at home for the gathering, then the gathering will be a blessing and not a judgment to all who are present.

The preparation for the gathering is important. You do not just take a few minutes on Saturday evening, and surely not just an hour before the gathering begins. However it is also important to be occupied with the things of the Lord as a family as well as personally then. The preparation for the gathering is a matter you should be involved with during the whole week, your whole life. The death of the Lord you (maybe?) proclaim influences every aspect of your life, right?

By saying all this Paul didn't say all that was on his mind regarding this issue. There are things he wanted to save till he would be with them. Those things are not written in the Bible. It would not be a good thing to have records of everything formally. The Word of God as we have it now is enough for all times and all circumstances. We have received the Holy Spirit to be able to cope with our circumstances at any time by the means of what Paul did pass on to us. He who submits to God's Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, shall experience the blessing thereof.

Now read 1 Corinthians 11:27-34 again.

Reflection: How do you judge yourself?

1 Corinthians 12

1Cor 12:1-7 | The Holy Spirit

1 Now concerning spiritual [gifts], brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. 2 You know that when you were pagans, [you were] led astray to the mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all [persons]. 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

This new chapter deals with a new and again important issue. It is about the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit and the task each believer has. In His wisdom God first spoke about the Table of the Lord and the Lord's Supper in the previous chapters. You have seen how each believer can take his place at the Table of the Lord and how he can partake of the Lord's Supper, at least, if there is no mention of a sin that is not judged in the believer's life.

The gifts of the Spirit have got nothing to do with that. That means: it is not important at all what gift you have if you want to partake of the Lord's Supper. Nevertheless, the gifts of the Spirit are important. Only you should see them in the right place and that is what Paul will make clear in this chapter.

V1. He starts to point the Corinthians to the spiritual gifts. They were familiar with them. When they were unconverted they saw many spiritual manifestations and also experienced them. Now they are converted they also have got to do with spiritual manifestations. What they should learn is that the spiritual manifestations in the church of God are from a totally different source and that they are for other purposes than the spiritual manifestations from the past. What they needed, was to learn to see the difference between, on the one hand, the Holy Spirit Who now dwells in

them and Who works in the church, and on the other hand the evil spirits or demons by whom they were guided in their unawareness and ignorance in the past.

V2. In the past they went to “the mute idols”. That’s where they brought their sacrifices and in the service that went together with that, they went into a trance, out of self-control. Indeed the idols were mute, they could not speak, but, as you remember from chapter 10: behind these idols evil spirits, demons, are hidden. These demons use the imagination of the ones who bring the sacrifices and take possession of their spirit. The more people surrender themselves to these demons the more they get into a trance.

When they were pagans, when they were unconverted, they “[were] led astray” to these mute or dumb idols. Then they were will-less people, who were led by their own impulses. They were not aware of that then. They thought that they were free to choose how to live their own life, without being aware that they were led by the prince of the world, satan.

It is still like that today. Each person who is unconverted is a person who is being led by the devil. He thinks he is free and that he can decide how to live his life, but he is not aware that satan leads him to the cinema, the disco, the gambling house or the stadium. It happens often enough in a conversation with an unconverted, that he even denies the existence of the devil. You see how subtle the devil is. His biggest trick is to let people believe that he does not exist. Then he can deceive them most easily.

A striking example of being carried away to the mute idols and to get into a trance you find in 1 Kings 18. You get impressed by how the idol priests excite and torment themselves to get their god, Baal, to act (1Kgs 18:26-30). After that you get impressed far more when Elijah calls to God only once and He proves Himself to be the living God (1Kgs 18:36-38).

V3. To demonstrate to the Corinthians the difference between the past and now, Paul uses the Name of the Lord Jesus as the touchstone. In the church it is impossible that the Spirit of God would do something that dishonors the Lord Jesus. The demons will make every effort to make the Name of the Lord Jesus despicable. They want nothing more than to curse that Name. They succeed if they can cause believers to live a sinful life.

The Holy Spirit on the contrary will do everything to honor the Lord Jesus and to give Him the glory He is worthy of. He will make it possible for the believers to surrender their lives to the Lord Jesus in full obedience.

Demons do not acknowledge the Lord Jesus as Lord. In the Gospels we come across several confrontations between demons and the Lord Jesus. It is striking that they never address Him as 'Lord'. When He shall reign in the millennial kingdom of peace over the universe, they will be constrained to acknowledge Him as Lord. You can read that in Philippians 2 where those who are "under the earth" mean the demons (Phil 2:9-11).

Also unbelievers do not acknowledge Him as Lord. They do not consider His authority, but they live their own life. In Matthew 7 you read that there are people who say "Lord, Lord" (Mt 7:21), but have not considered His will in their life. They only want to be named Christian, but control their own life. Where this is to be seen, you haven't got to do with the work of the Holy Spirit, but with the work of demons.

A born-again Christian will speak respectfully about Jesus and therefore would prefer to call Him 'Lord' Jesus. From his life it will be apparent that his faith is not only a lip-confession, but he considers the authority of the Lord Jesus in every aspect of his life. Where this is to be seen you haven't got to do with the work of demons, but with the work of the Holy Spirit.

V4. The next difference between the manifestations of demons and the manifestations of the Holy Spirit, is that the varieties of gifts is not the work of different spirits, but of one and "the same Spirit". With the demons there are more spirits. In Mark 5 a legion of demons took possession of a man (Mk 5:9). In Mark 16 there is a mention of seven demons that have resided in Mary, but they were cast out by the Lord Jesus (Mk 16:9).

In paganism each idol has, whether it is the sun, the moon or a tree, its own demon or a multitude of demons. What the Corinthians absolutely should not think when they see the diversities of gifts, is that those diversities are inspired by different spirits. They are all from the same Spirit.

V5. It is also one and "the same Lord" Who gives orders for using the different gifts. Therefore every person needs to practice his gift in dependency on Him and is not allowed to work with the gift as it pleases himself.

V6. Finally it is one and “the same God” Who works through the gift. He works in him who practices the gift and He works in those who are being served through the gift.

V7. Each member of the church has received a gift. Nobody has received all the gifts and there is no one who has received no gift. That means that we all need one another, just as the members of a body need each other. Further on in this chapter you will see how this works. You too have received a gift. You have not received it for yourself, but to serve others with it, for “to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good”.

The particular thing about this section is that the Holy Spirit is present and works in the church. That is something that always will amaze you and you can profit by it to the honor of the Lord Jesus, for you want to live to His honor, right? God the Holy Spirit dwells now on earth in the church. He has not come to glorify Himself, but the Lord Jesus (Jn 16:13). How wonderful that would be when the believers in the local church let Him direct everything to the glory of God and His Son!

Now read 1 Corinthians 12:1-7 again.

Reflection: What are you used to: saying ‘Jesus’ or ‘Lord Jesus’? Why?

1Cor 12:8-13 | The Gifts of the Spirit

8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another [various] kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. 12 For even as the body is one and [yet] has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

V8. There is no man who can convey a certain gift to another person. The source, the origin of all the gifts is not found in a man, but in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives and distributes. The gifts come from Him. Thereby the Holy Spirit considers the natural abilities of the believer.

A beautiful illustration of that you find in Matthew 25 (Mt 25:15). In the parable of the talents the Lord Jesus is telling there, He compares Himself with a man who went abroad and gives talents to his slaves. These talents represent the gifts each person receives to work with. You see that there is a distinction in the number of talents that each person receives, just as there is a distinction in the gift that each person receives from the Spirit.

Then you read further that these talents are given “each according to his own ability”. That refers to the natural abilities that each person is born with. As long as a person is not converted, he uses that natural ability for himself, to his own glory. After his conversion he can use that natural ability to serve the Lord, while he constantly ought to be alert not to take the credit for using his abilities.

A person, who is naturally capable to put something well into words, might receive the gift from the Spirit to serve others with the Word. A person who is caring and considerate will receive in many cases a pastoral gift from the Spirit. There are many examples like that, whereby the spiritual gift is related to the natural ability. In most cases it happens like that.

I can hardly imagine that, if you have no ability to work with children, you will receive a task to do children's work. Nevertheless, in this respect we should not try to control the freedom of the Spirit in distributing to whom He wants. I believe that you might have a gift, which, according to your feeling, doesn't directly connect to your natural capabilities. I know of somebody who thought that he had no ability to work among children. However, once he began this work, it became apparent that he, on the contrary, could deal very well with children. By opening up yourself to His guidance you will discover which gift you have.

The gifts that are mentioned in verses 8-10, are not a complete list of all gifts. It is important to pay attention to the sequence of these gifts. Paul summarizes the gifts according to their importance for the edification of the church. The Corinthians were proud of the so-called miracle [literally: works of power] gifts, especially speaking in tongues, which they held in high esteem. However, Paul doesn't start with the gifts that impress people, but puts speaking in tongues and their interpretation at the bottom of the list. In chapter 14 he will deal with speaking in tongues in great detail and will clarify that this gift is not that important as the Corinthians thought it was.

The first gift that he mentions is "the word of wisdom". In the church there may be situations, where it is not always clear what ought to be done. Wisdom is then the only way to deal with it. The definition of wisdom is the capability to discern between good and evil and then to choose the good. Someone with this gift will then be able to tell the church what to do.

Another person has "the word of knowledge". The believers of the church need to learn God's thoughts, otherwise they will operate on their own understanding and the church will lose its character as a church of God. You can gain knowledge by being zealous in studying God's Word.

V9-10. "Faith" is another gift. It is about a gift to a believer here; thus it cannot possibly refer to the saving faith. The saving faith is not a gift that is given to only a few. A believer who has the gift of faith, will always firmly trust in what God has said in relation to a certain task He has given, in spite of how many obstacles may come his way, while others have long since dropped out.

The “gifts of healings” and the “effecting of miracles [literally: works of power]” served to confirm the Word of God (Mk 16:20; Heb 2:3-4).

“Prophecy” is the gift to pass on God’s thoughts concerning the church, with regard to the present and the future. The basis of prophecy will always be the Word of God and will never contradict it. Therefore prophecy will never be based on speculation or imagination, but will always be testable to the Bible. In chapter 14 this gift is compared with the gift of speaking in tongues.

Another person may have the gift of “distinguishing of spirits”. You may relate this to what happens in the church. A person with this gift will be able to discern whether something comes from the Holy Spirit or comes from demons. In the last section you have seen that it is often quite difficult to determine from which source a certain message comes.

Speaking in “tongues” was important in case a stranger joins the gathering of the church. When such a person would suddenly hear a person speaking about God and the Lord Jesus in his own language, that could be his salvation for eternity, when he may be converted. The “interpretation of tongues” was necessary with a view to the church because otherwise people would not understand anything about what is said. After all, the gifts were given to the profit of the whole. As it is said, in chapter 14 Paul deals in great detail with speaking in tongues in church.

V11. You see that there are many various gifts and yet there is still a unity. That’s because one and the same Spirit works all these things. He distributes to each one individually as He wills. He determines which place each person has in the body. No theological training can work this. Only the Holy Spirit determines that.

One more thing. You can learn from the last three words of verse 11 that the Holy Spirit is God, for in verse 18 the same thing is said about God. Thus He is a Person, and surely a Divine Person, and not just an influence or a power, for only a person has a will.

V12. In this verse an example of a body is given to clarify what is previously said about the diversities of the gifts. A body has a couple of character-

istics. Two of them are brought forward here. First, a body forms a unity. Second, a body consists of a number of different members.

You might then expect it to be written: so also is the church. After all it is about the church. However, it is said “so also is Christ”. This makes it clear that Christ and the church are one. What goes for the church also goes for Christ.

This is what Saul, who is later called Paul, has already faced when he is still a persecutor of the church. In Acts 9 is told that, while he is on his journey to Damascus in order to bring the disciples of the Lord bound to Jerusalem, a voice from heaven says to him: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4). By persecuting the church he, in fact, persecuted Christ in heaven. In such a unity Christ is with His own on earth.

V13. All members of the church form together the one church. Each member of the body has its own function. It is about the unity of the body and about the many members, wherein Christ is seen on earth. As a member of the body your origins or social status are insignificant, “for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body”.

From that same Spirit you may now drink in order to properly perform your function in the body. From your own you have no power to function. Only when you allow the Holy Spirit to drench your life, so to speak, that He infuses you completely, you will be able to function in your own place in the church.

Now read 1 Corinthians 12:8-13 again.

Reflection: Who is the Holy Spirit to you? How do you experience His presence in the church?

1Cor 12:14-23 | The Members of the Body

14 For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not [a part] of the body," it is not for this reason any the less [a part] of the body. 16 And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not [a part] of the body," it is not for this reason any the less [a part] of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 19 If they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now there are many members, but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 23 and those [members] of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable,

V14. In an appealing way, Paul is now going to use the body of man as an example to make it clear that the body of Christ, the church, is also made up of different members. By this example it also becomes clear that there are two risks to which the members of the church are exposed. One danger is that of laziness: I am nothing and not capable of doing anything; somebody else have do it. Another danger is that of pride: I alone am important and can do something, I don't need anybody. Of course these are the extremes, but I think they are quite recognizable.

The starting point for this example is: "The body is not one member, but many." So it is about the multitude of different members that the body consists of. Perhaps needless to say: the members of the body are the individual believers, that are you personally and me personally. In fact, the thought has been expressed that the members are the different *denominations* but that is, of course, absolutely out of the question.

V15-16. Now about the first danger: laziness. Just imagine, Paul says here, that a foot and an ear would say, that they are not of the body. Just look at the reason they mention for this foolish statement. They say respectively: "Because I am not a hand, ... because I am not an eye." What does this saying imply actually? That they envy another member for having that

place and that they are not satisfied with their own place. That's why they feel like they are "not [a part] of the body". They feel like outsiders.

As absurd as this reasoning is for the human body, in that way it is absurd for the body of Christ. You cannot deny the function you have in the body, only because of the fact that you are not satisfied with the place you take in the body, can you?

Despite that, there are believers to whom this applies. They are often critical, regarding many things, but in their life you cannot find anything that is for the profit of the church. They shirk their responsibilities and live their own easy life.

They resemble the man from the parable of Matthew 25. That's the parable I referred you to at the beginning of the previous section. The servant who received five talents, traded with those and earned five more. He made one hundred percent profit. The servant with two talents made a profit of one hundred percent as well. However, what do you read about the servant who received one talent? "I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground" (Mt 25:25). It is apparent here that he dealt in a wrong way with his talent because he did not know his lord; he was afraid of him.

In fact he did not find it worthy to trade with and hid his talent in the ground. After all it was 'just' one talent, while the others had more. His lord calls him a "wicked, lazy slave" (Mt 25:26). He was wicked and lazy. He was wicked because he called his lord a hard man and he was lazy because he did not do anything with his talent.

Do you recognize the similarity with our verses from 1 Corinthians 12? Therefore bear in mind: whatever function you may have, be satisfied with it and trade with it. You are only useful and needed for the other members of the body if you take the place God has given you. You had no influence on that.

V17-20. "God" has given the members, each of them, a place in the body "just as He desired". His will is always the best and the wisest. He knows exactly where someone fits best. What a monster a body would be if it would be all eye or all ear! That is not a body at all. No, each member has

been put on the right place by God in the body with the purpose to serve each of the other members.

V21. The second danger is pride. A believer who as we say ‘has a great gift’ is in danger to think that he does not need other believers. That may not happen consciously, but unconsciously. Because of the ‘great gift’ he might exalt himself. He alone knows it; he can put it into words very well. It can also happen that the other members of the church because of their laziness, love to give him that position.

Therefore, where situations are destabilized, the wrong positions strengthen each other. The lazy ones like to delegate to others, while the others like to have people who depend on them. But let this be clear: they who have a greater gift (at least what they think themselves) in order to function well, are dependent on those with a smaller gift (at least what they think themselves). If there is a piece of dirt in the eye, the little finger is an especially suited member to remove it.

What we consider great or small, is not the same as how God considers great and small. We often consider a gift from what we can see of it and how it impresses us. We are often more impressed by someone who is proclaiming the gospel to a full hall, than by someone who is testifying to his or her Savior with a highly blushed face toward a neighbor, a colleague or a fellow-student.

To God one thing is important and that is that we faithfully fulfill the order He gives us. He doesn’t reward to the size of the gift, but to the faithfulness with which the gift has been practiced. In Matthew 25 the reward for the man who received two talents, was as great as for the man with five talents: “Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master” (Mt 25:21,23). Do you also notice that it is said here: “You were faithful with a few things”? Even the greatest gift is just few in comparison to what the Lord Jesus possesses and distributes.

V22-23. In a human body you have members that are hidden, like the heart, kidneys and lungs. Although you do not see them, they are of crucial im-

portance for the proper functioning of your body. In the body of Christ it is also exactly like that.

There is a story of Spurgeon, a great preacher from the nineteenth century. He always had full halls and many have become believers due to his ministry. One evening when the building was full of people again, he was asked why he was that successful. He replied to this question by suggesting the questioner follow him to another room where he would show him the 'central heating'. When he opened the door of that room, his companion saw a number of people who were kneeling down in prayer for the sake of the gathering.

All the work that may be done for the Lord Jesus and His own is done well through prayer. Eternity will tell what has mattered more: the eloquence of a speaker or the intensive prayers that an unknown believer prayed to God on behalf of the speaker as well as the sermon and also the audience.

In the meantime you must have figured out what the importance is of this section. The members of the body are given to one another to complement each other and support one another and not to fight against each other. If one of your legs wants to go left and the other leg wants to go right, you will not move one step forward. Just try how far you can spread your legs from each other. If you're not limber, you might end up in a painful posture. Take your own place and pay attention to where you can be of profit for others.

Now read 1 Corinthians 12:14-23 again.

Reflection: Do you recognize one of the two risks to yourself? What should you do about that?

1Cor 12:24-31 | God Composed the Body

24 whereas our more presentable members have no need [of it]. But God has [so] composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that [member] which lacked, 25 so that there may be no division in the body, but [that] the members may have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if [one] member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. 27 Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, [various] kinds of tongues. 29 All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not [workers of] miracles, are they? 30 All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? 31 But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

V24-25. Division in the body is one of the worst things that can happen. You have learnt that this can be caused by laziness, also by jealousy, and also by pride. It is as if God has taken that into consideration. He gives more honor to the members of the body who do not attract attention than the members who do. God operates differently than we often do. We often look on the outward appearance and what is impressive, but with God that is not the case. Therefore we ought to look at the gifts with the eyes of God.

When God gives more honor to those who (in our eyes) have smaller gifts it would be good if we do that too. That is not to belittle the greater gifts, but that there should be no division in the body. By giving the greater gifts more honor – and how easily that happens – the balance in the body gets lost.

You find that explicitly in many parts of professing Christianity, where all gifts seem to be concentrated in one person. He is the one who prays, the one who addresses the ‘church’, who leads the service of the Supper, who proclaims the gospel, who gives pastoral care to the flock. But even within denominations where there is not a ‘one-man-service’, where there is freedom in practicing the gifts, there is a great danger that the believers put their trust in the ones who have ‘greater’ gifts.

God's purpose is that all members have the same care for one another. So it is about what you can do for another.

V26. How much the members are connected with one another, is shown in this verse. What is written here is not an order for the members to suffer with one another or to rejoice with one another. It is not something they should do, but it is something that happens. What is written here is a fact. Just compare it to your own body. If somebody gives you a big kick to the shin, your whole body suffers from it. Therefore when one member of the church cannot function, it affects the whole church.

The reason why a member is not able to function can be very different. A member who is involved with a church where all the gifts are assumed to be present in only one person, the clergyman or the pastor, has no room to develop in his function because of the church doctrine. Neither a church member, who had to be disciplined because of sin, can practice his function. In both cases all other members of the church are affected because they lack the practical effect of that function.

Conversely the fact is that if a member of a church takes the right place and functions rightly, all members rejoice in that. If you exercise your function, despite your feelings of weakness, then that is truly a joy for all members of the body.

You see how closely the members of the church are connected with one another. Keep that in mind in everything you do. Everything you do, affects the other members of the body. The good things you do, edifies the church. The wrong things you do, has a negative impact on the church.

V27. Then something important follows. To all the members of the church at Corinth Paul says: "Now you are Christ's body." Before I clarify the importance of this verse to you, I need to tell you some other things about the body of Christ first. The body of Christ can be examined from different angles.

First, through the ages. The body of Christ came into existence on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out. This event is described in Acts 2. In our chapter, verse 13, this event is being referred to. Everyone who has converted to God and has accepted the Lord Jesus since the day

of Pentecost belongs to the church. In this light the church is not complete yet, for happily it happens that daily people convert to God and are added to the church. The church is only complete when the Lord Jesus comes to take the believers to Himself. You can read about that event in 1 Thessalonians 4 (1Thes 4:15-18).

Second, you can see the church as it is at this moment on earth. In that way the church comprises all the believers who are still alive at this moment and who are, so to speak, actively a part of the church. This way of describing the church you can read in Ephesians 4 (Eph 4:16).

Third, the body of Christ is also used to indicate the church as a whole of all believers in a certain city. That is the way it is used in our verse. The church at Corinth is addressed like that, in spite of many things that were not good. What is meant here by the expression "Christ's body", is, as it is sometimes said, the local reflection of the worldwide or universal church. A local church is a kind of miniature of the whole. What applies to the whole church on earth becomes visible in the local church.

The division, at the moment that Paul wrote this, was not that great as we are dealing with today. Nevertheless this verse gives an important indication which applies for our time as well. It actually indicates that there is a church in every place where believers live. Unfortunately, due to divisions that is often not visible at all on the outside. Yet, just as at Corinth, nowadays it can become visible too.

Even if there are only two or three believers at a certain place who do want to gather as nothing more and nothing less than as members of the body, they form the 'miniature' body. It is not their purpose to be a new denomination next to the other denominations, but they simply take what Paul says here as a starting point for their gatherings. If all Christians would do that, then division would soon be finished.

V28. Do the believers, who gather like that, have all the gifts that are mentioned in this verse 28? No, certainly not. Due to divisions the gifts are also scattered. But God surely gives what's needed, even when there are only two or three believers who truly want to express what the body of Christ is. I say this consciously: 'want to express', to prevent the misconception

that all other believers would not belong to the body of Christ. They are certainly included, but the point is that it ought to be expressed also.

The gifts mentioned, are gifts that God has given to the whole church. If you look carefully at the order in which the gifts are summarized, it seems to me that they are summarized according to the measure of importance that they have for the edification of the church.

V29-30. The questions that Paul is asking about the gifts emphasize once more that the gifts are not all united in one member or that all members have the same gift. In this case the questions give the answers at the same time. Of course not all are apostles, not all are prophets, etcetera. Each member has his own gift, but each is encouraged to strive using the gift optimally. To possess the gift is one thing, to really practice the gift and that in the best way, is another thing.

V31. If you look at your gift like that and you want to practice it with all your strength, you will discover in the next chapter “a still more excellent way”, namely, the way of love.

Now read 1 Corinthians 12:24-31 again.

Reflection: How do you experience the suffering and the joy of verse 26?

1 Corinthians 13

1Cor 13:1-7 | Love

1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have [the gift of] prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed [the poor], and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind [and] is not jealous; love does not brag [and] is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong [suffered], 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

This chapter seems to be out of place as it is placed between chapter 12 and chapter 14, where Paul is dealing with the one body and gifts. But in the Bible nothing is out of place. Of course it cannot be otherwise because the real Author of the Bible is the Holy Spirit. And when you wonder why such a section, which at first glance seems to be in the wrong place, is nevertheless in that place, your faith in the inspiration of the Bible only increases. That is also the case here.

In chapter 12 Paul showed the variety of the gifts. In chapter 14 he shows how these gifts should work in practice. In chapter 13 we see that love is like an axle, on which the chapters 12 and 14 revolve. For if you want to practice your gift properly and if you want to have the proper effect also, then love is the only way to make it happen.

Love exceeds every gift. That's why it is the "still more excellent way" as it is written in the last verse of the previous chapter. Love, as it is meant here, is not just a feeling of affection. It is not the cheap love that is found in the world, where love is in fact self-love. No, here it is about the nature of God Himself. "God is love" (1Jn 4:8,16).

The great feature of Divine love, thus from which you can recognize the Divine love, is that it is a perfectly selfless love. It is the giving love that is

focused on the other. Was not that the purpose of the gift? Isn't the gift focused on the other to be of profit for the other? Love gives you the strength to be able to do that, for you have received the Divine nature (2Pet 1:4).

In the life of the Lord Jesus, Who is God Himself, everything that is said about love in our chapter is found in a perfect way. You may put this chapter, so to speak, right next to the Gospels and you will find the practice or application of it on every page. Then you will also see that Divine love goes much further than sympathy or human affection. You probably have no difficulty to practice your gift toward a brother or sister who is kind to you, but love goes much further than that.

Love, as it is presented here, gets to work, even if there is nothing attractive to be found with the other person. You may be annoyed by a brother or sister. But Divine, unselfish love is not offended by anything. Love gets to work, because it is love. To love, it makes no difference how the opposite is or responds.

The great example is God. I already pointed that out: God is love. Well, in 1 John 4 is written how God showed that (1Jn 4:9-10). He gave His only begotten Son. Even though God surely knew that man did not want Him and even though He knew what they would do to Him, He nevertheless gave Him! That is love. It is the same love that is needed to be able to practice your gift. Without this love everything means nothing. Without love, things you want to impress others with, have no value at all.

V1. Paul applies a lot of this chapter to himself. He often uses the word 'I'. If you read this part, you might apply this to yourself as well. He starts with 'speaking in tongues'. That was in high esteem with the Corinthians. They were proud of this gift. Just imagine that you were able to speak all the languages of the world without having learned them, and that you could even speak the language of the angels. That would be quite something! However, if you would not let yourself be guided by love in practicing them, it would be nothing more than hollow sounds that fade away after a short while and have no permanent effect.

V2. With the other gifts it is the same thing. Even if you would be able to, on the basis of the Bible, tell everything about the future ("prophesy") and

were introduced to the “mysteries”, the secrets of God and knew the Bible by heart (“all knowledge”) and do impressive acts of faith (“all faith”), you would be nothing; you would be zero point zero, zero and void indeed, if love has not been your inner motive to practice those gifts.

V3. And what about bestowing all your goods to feed the poor? Is that not a generous aim? It would still be entirely useless if love were not the reason that motivated you. People could give away all they possess to ease their conscience. They might have dishonestly gained many of their goods. They think to cleanse their conscience by giving away everything. But that will not profit them at all, because they lack love.

There were also people who even gave their body to be burned. They might have poured gasoline over themselves and set themselves on fire to draw people’s attention to something they sacrificed themselves for. They might have succeeded to appear in the media, but that did not profit themselves, because their dedication was without the Divine love. To God it meant nothing.

V4. Then in verses 4-7 a description follows of the way love manifests itself. In fact it says more about what love is not, than what love is. It is like the description of the new heaven and the new earth in Revelation 21, where you read about things that will not be there anymore (Rev 21:4). You live in a world wherein you have to do with the consequences of sin in every possible way. Divine love is not disturbed by that, but on the contrary sees that as a chance to prove itself. That is perfectly seen in the life of the Lord Jesus. This chapter is therefore, as it has already been said, a description of Him.

Because sin is still in you, the best proof of love you can give is by abandoning a number of things. However, the first two things that are mentioned have a positive effect. Be “patient” is not a favorite characteristic to the world we live in. It means that you can control yourself if you see things that are wrong, or if you yourself are cheated. Instead of demanding your rights you are patient with the other person. You even go further. You are “kind” (good) to all the people around you. Is that not what the Lord Jesus was?

Then the characteristics follow that are not present in the Divine love. Who is never “jealous”? “Does not brag” you can compare most with not ‘acting like a braggart’ or showing how beautiful you are, or not displaying and promoting your latest purchase (whatever that may be). To be “arrogant” is wanting to be more than you are. Hasn’t that ever happened?

V5. Haven’t you ever behaved “unbecomingly”? This means, haven’t you ever blatantly ignored somebody’s feelings? Have you always considered the other person’s concern only, without seeking your “own” interest? Has somebody wronged you by doing something against you? Are you willing to abandon all evil thoughts about that person and “not take into account” the wrong done to you? Isn’t it more usual that you are often more inclined to repay evil with evil? We rather wish evil on a person than not to impute it.

V6. Are there times you remember when you had pleasure in watching other people make a big mistake? Of course that was to ease your own conscience. Back then you did not like to hear the truth, while love on the contrary rejoices with that.

All these things were not found with the Lord Jesus. Neither are they found in the love, the Divine nature, the new life you received, for that is the life of the Lord Jesus. If you give love priority, you will experience that with you the same wrong things are missing and the same good things are found as with the Lord Jesus.

V7. Some good things are written in this verse. Love “bears all things”. That goes far. Tolerate everything and accept that people ignore you? If love demands it: yes!

Love “believes all things”. That is not the naive gullibility that takes everything that is said to be true. It means that love is not suspicious. You might say this: love trusts the other until the contrary shows otherwise.

Love “hopes all things”. Love knows that evil will not have the last word and it continues to hope – the biblical hope means: knowing for sure – that good will always conquer.

Love “endures all things”. That means it can take a beating. She remains active right through all trials.

Now read 1 Corinthians 13:1-7 again.

Reflection: Which positive features of love do you encounter here and which negative features? What are your weak points? How can you change them?

1Cor 13:8-13 | Love Never Fails

8 Love never fails; but if [there are gifts of] prophecy, they will be done away; if [there are] tongues, they will cease; if [there is] knowledge, it will be done away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part; 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. 11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. 13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

V8. If it is said that love never fails, it cannot be otherwise than that it is about Divine love. It can never be said of human or natural love. That love can grow cold and even change into hatred.

In the practice of life it is no exception, unfortunately, when husband and wife separate, because they no longer have feelings toward each other. When they got married it all seemed so wonderful, but in a course of a short or longer time, the love they first had toward each other grew cold. That is because this love is based on what the other is or does.

Divine love on the contrary always loves no matter how the other person behaves. The cause of this is that God is the source of this Divine love. Therefore that love never fails. It has always been and will always abide. That cannot be said of the gifts. "Prophecy" and "knowledge" will be "done away" and "tongues" will "cease".

We need prophecies as long as we live on earth. Two things are meant by prophecies. In the first place it is about predicting the future, things that are to happen. You find them through the whole Bible. Your expectation of the future determines your life on earth. If you for example know what will happen to the world, you will consider that in the way you live in the world and in the way you deal with it.

Second, prophecy in the sense of chapter 14 (1Cor 14:3), where it is about preaching in the church. There it is not about a prediction about the future, but about an encouragement or exhortation that you need for your faith life.

In contrast to love, prophecies will be done away. When a prediction of the future has been fulfilled then the prophecy has been done away. That will happen to all prophecies, for God will surely do what He has said. Even the prophecy in the sense of encouragement or exhortation will be done away, namely when we shall be taken up to heaven. Then we will be in no need of any encouraging or exhorting word anymore.

The same goes for knowledge: it will be done away. Gaining knowledge is something that belongs to the imperfect life on earth. You go to school and after that you might follow some training to enrich your knowledge in order to do your job better. Gaining knowledge goes on as long as you live on earth. That also applies to the things of God. But in heaven that will not be necessary anymore; then knowledge will be done away, for we will know fully.

The tongues “will cease”. That will not only be in heaven, but, in my opinion, already on earth. To clarify why I think so, I would like to point at the word used here. That, at least, has helped me when I pondered on the gift of speaking in tongues and whether this gift still occurs. Of prophecies and of knowledge it is said that “they will be done away”, while of tongues it is said that “they will cease”. This distinction is important.

‘Will be done away’ refers to an event, an action, through which both prophecies and knowledge will come to an end. This event or action is the coming of the Lord Jesus to pick up the church and to bring it into heaven. Then the perfect situation has come and therefore prophecy and knowledge will not be needed anymore.

Regarding the tongues it is different. ‘They will cease’ means that they will naturally cease after a course of time, namely, when they have fulfilled their function. Ceasing does not happen by a one-time action, but happens gradually. This gift slowly dies away, so to speak.

What was the function of the tongues? That was to make clear at the beginning of the church that God was in action. In the book of Acts, where the early days of the church are described, you read several times in the first chapters about speaking in tongues. But the further you read in this Bible book, the less you encounter this gift, until it entirely vanishes. The

meaning of speaking in tongues will be commented on in detail in chapter 14, but here you already find an indication, which you ought not to ignore.

V9. Then Paul will speak further only about prophecy and knowledge. Both are “in part”, that means that prophesying and knowing happens little by little. With God perfect knowledge is present, but with us there is partial knowledge. You might compare this to getting to know a city. You can only know a city well by walking through all its streets. After you’ve been in each street, you’ve got to know the city little by little. That is meant by ‘in part’, thus partially.

V10. Only when you fly in an airplane above the city, you can get the big picture and you see how each street is connected to the other. The truth of God is like that. You can be occupied with your blessings as a Christian at one moment and at the other moment with the future of Israel, but not with both of them at the same time. Of course you will see more of the wonderful unity of the Bible if you are more and more occupied with the Bible. Nevertheless you will only be able to see the big picture of God’s plan when the perfect situation has come, that is when we are glorified.

V11. That there is also growth in spiritual terms, appears from what Paul says about a child and about a man. What applies to nature also applies spiritually. I do not know how long you’ve already known the Lord. I surely know that, in a course of time, you will find some things more important than you did in the past. You will get to know the value of certain things better.

A little child loves to play with all kinds of things. It is not conscious of the value of those things and it is not even interested in that. To have fun with it, is the only thing that counts. A toy-car is fun and sitting behind the wheel of a real car is also fun. But he who has become a man will surely have discovered in the meantime the big difference between the value and the use of it. That’s how it is in spiritual view. The Corinthians loved to speak in tongues in the ‘childhood’ of the church. They were not aware yet of the real value of the church.

V12. The reason why we still see everything “dimly” is because of the limitations we have as humans. This doesn’t mean that we do not need to learn

to know God's Word, as if it is, after all, difficult and inconceivable. No, he who really loves God and the Lord Jesus will make every effort to learn to know Them better. And the Bible is the only way to do that. Haven't you ever experienced that by reading the Bible certain things suddenly become clear? It is the desire of the Lord Jesus that we grow in insight.

Seeing "dimly", as if you "see in a mirror" that does not reflect your face entirely clearly, you should compare to the perfection of heaven. When we are there, each limitation and dimness we experience here on earth will disappear. I will then know in the same way as God has always known me.

V13. But as long as I am on earth, "faith, hope, love" abide available to me. To each Christian these are the three pillars on which his life rests and the power through which he lives in a world that lies in the power of the evil one (1Jn 5:19).

"Faith" is the same as trust. A Christian trusts in God and in the Lord Jesus in the present, despite the resistance and difficulties he experiences.

"Hope" looks forward to the time when we will be perfect. In Hebrews 6 hope is called "an anchor of the soul" (Heb 6:19). An anchor is important for a ship to be kept in the right place and that it will not be dragged by the stream. A captain once told me that not all anchors are equally reliable. When he doesn't trust his anchor he has no rest. When he can trust his anchor he can sleep quietly. If you rely on the Lord Jesus like that and continue to look forward to His coming, nothing will turn you upside down.

Finally "love". It is the "greatest" of the three. Love is 'the greatest' because it does not only consider God and the Lord Jesus, as it is the case with faith and hope, but also here on earth it considers other people to do them well. Love is also 'the greatest', because it abides in eternity, while faith is changed into seeing and hope is fulfilled.

Now read 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 again.

Reflection: Faith, hope and love together occur approximately ten times in the New Testament, for example in 1Thes 1:3. Try to find other examples yourself.

1 Corinthians 14

1Cor 14:1-6 | That the Church May Receive Edification

1 Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual [gifts], but especially that you may prophesy. 2 For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in [his] spirit he speaks mysteries. 3 But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. 4 One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. 5 Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but [even] more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying. 6 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?

In the chapter you start with now, a comparison is made between two gifts: prophesying and speaking in tongues or languages. You may have heard about speaking in tongues (which is the same as speaking in languages). The way people talk about it may confuse you. It is often spoken about as a ‘second blessing’. People mean by that, that you are indeed converted and you have also received the Holy Spirit, though you ought to, in order to be a fully-fledged Christian, also be able to speak in tongues. This reasoning is not true at all.

Speaking in tongues is explained clearly in the Bible, as you will see in this chapter. In this chapter it is about the comparison between prophesying and speaking in tongues. You will see that the scales will obviously be tipped to the side of prophesying. That is because prophesying is for the edification of the church. Therefore the Corinthians, and you too, are called to strive most for this gift.

V1. You have seen in chapter 13 that love should be the motive to practice a gift, whatever gift that may be. However, if you want to be guided by love – and it is even said here that you should pursue it, you ought to make

a determined effort to achieve this – then you will be willing to serve the church with your gift sincerely. Love is to serve others and not yourself.

Service to the church will be manifested best with prophesying and you can pursue that, but you should know what prophesying is. In 1 Peter 4 you find a good definition of it. It says: “Whoever speaks, [is to do so] as one who is speaking the utterances of God” (1Pet 4:11). That means that when somebody passes on something, it should be something that comes directly from the mouth of God.

In order to be able to pass on the utterances or oracles of God, a person should be living closely to God in his daily life. That is not a privilege of just a single person, but that should be the desire of each child of God. Actually, it should go without saying that each believer has that desire. However, there are many things that can hinder you to live closely to God. Therefore it says that you should pursue it.

V2. Speaking in tongues is totally different than prophesying. This gift does not address people, but God. That seems much higher, and that's what the Corinthians thought too and that's also what many Christians are still thinking, but that is not true. At least, that appears to me to be the honest result of the detailed comparison that Paul makes in this chapter between these two gifts.

V3. A widely spread misconception, is that prophesying in the church as it is spoken of here, is in connection with predicting the future. You hear regularly about people who present themselves as prophets. In several denominations of professing Christianity they stand up to say things that will happen to others in the future. Sometimes these things come true. This performance is in contrast to God's Word. Only God knows how your life will develop further and He will show you personally everything you should know step by step if you live with Him.

It is another thing when you are on the wrong track and somebody warns you that you will end up badly if you go on like that. But that is nothing new, for that is written in God's Word. The brother or sister who is warning you, actually is prophesying, but in an exhorting sense.

According to verse 3 “exhortation” is a part of prophesying. He who deals with his or her fellow-believers like that, is concerned to serve the other person. Exhortation is therefore one way to manifest prophesying. But there are still two more elements mentioned, namely speaking to men for edification and consolation.

“Edification” is about giving firmness to the faith life of church members. By showing the believers, based on the Bible, which place they have received before God and in the world through the work of the Lord Jesus, they will be more capable to live in a way that pleases God.

“Consolation” is also a crucial element of prophesying. As long as the believers live on earth, they have to deal with sad things. God and the Lord Jesus know that and give consolation where it is needed.

Do you see that it is necessary to live closely to God in order to be capable of prophesying? Only He knows what the hearts of His own need. Therefore the excellent thing in a meeting where “two or three prophets speak” (verse 29) is that each person present hears something he needs, though the speaker doesn’t know what each person is occupied with. Has it ever happened to you that something has been said in a meeting which seemed as if it was meant only for you? You might have been worrying about something and suddenly the word that was spoken seemed to be exactly the answer to your problem. That is what prophesying is like. You experience to be in the direct presence of God.

That’s what happened to the Samaritan woman, when the Lord Jesus was talking to her in John 4. She was a woman of loose morals. The Lord says to her that she has had five husbands and that the man whom she now has, is not her husband, but she is living together with him. The woman then says: “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet” (Jn 4:19). She sensed that she was standing in God’s light where you cannot hide anything.

Many people have experienced such an awareness when they heard somebody preaching the gospel about the depravation of man. Many have said of the one who preached the Word: ‘It seems like that man knows my life.’ To many it has become a blessing, as to the Samaritan woman, when they acknowledged that it was God’s voice they heard.

That is still the God's goal with prophesying. He wants to speak to the hearts and consciences of both believers and unbelievers in order to bless them at last. He mainly wants to use the meetings of the church for that purpose, for that is the issue of this chapter.

V4. The point is, that a gift is meant to edify others. What happens when somebody speaks in a tongue? He edifies himself alone. It is of no use to others, for nobody understands him. Therefore Paul prefers prophesying far above speaking in a tongue.

V5. He even says that he who prophesies is more than he who speaks in a tongue. That was quite a sharp lesson for the Corinthians. They were really fond of speaking in tongues. There is only one circumstance to profit the church through speaking in tongues and that is when what is spoken is interpreted into the local language.

V6. In any case, Paul wanted to profit the believers at Corinth, and at all places in the world. That would not be the case if he came there and spoke "in tongues". In fact, that would have made him very admired. Those people would have said: 'That man is good!' But the church would not have been edified by that.

No, when he visited the believers, he loved to do that with a "revelation". He wanted to tell them something about God and the Lord Jesus, what they did not know yet. The Word of God was not complete at that time and that is why God still gave revelations. We now have the complete Word of God. Therefore we do not need new revelations anymore (Col 1:25).

He also wanted to come to them with "knowledge". He had great knowledge of the Old Testament. In chapter 10 he demonstrated what value this knowledge has for the believers and he still could have added a lot more (1Cor 10:1-13).

Or he wanted to serve them by "prophesy". What an edification, exhortation and consolation he could have given to them!

The "teaching" is also important; the whole letter to the Romans is a proof of that.

Those are things that are of real profit to believers, which they can absorb with their hearts. That is something they can get down to work with.

Now read 1 Corinthians 14:1-6 again.

Reflection: What is (are) the condition(s) to be able to prophesy?

1Cor 14:7-19 | To Pray and Sing With Understanding

7 Yet [even] lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? 8 For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? 9 So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. 10 There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no [kind] is without meaning. 11 If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me. 12 So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual [gifts], seek to abound for the edification of the church. 13 Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. 15 What is [the outcome] then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. 16 Otherwise if you bless in the spirit [only], how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? 17 For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified. 18 I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; 19 however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.

V7. Now Paul will demonstrate by means of some examples what happens when speaking in tongues is not being interpreted. He uses a flute, a harp and a bugle as references to make a comparison. First the flute and the harp. Only by the melody you can know which song is being piped. When children get hold of a flute, they can blow the same sound/tone for a long time. To their imagination they pipe a song, but they still have to explain to me which song, as I can't recognize the melody, because there was no melody. When they get hold of a guitar they do the same: they just hammer on the strings back and forth, and again I need to ask them what song they were playing if I want to know what they have played.

V8. The second example has to do with war. In order to be ready to fight in the war, the soldier has to be alert to the sound of the bugle. In former days, when there were no sound amplifiers, broadcasting equipment or the internet, the bugle was used to pass on messages. Each signal that

was transmitted through the bugle had a distinctive meaning. In that way there was also a signal for the warriors to prepare themselves for the war. Therefore the man with the bugle had a great responsibility. In the case of war he could not risk blowing just a sigh, or into the air, for that could only result in frowning eyebrows, confusion and irritation, while nobody would prepare himself for the war.

V9. This is what happens when somebody speaks in tongues. Because nobody understands anything of it, it produces no reaction among those present. It is just some words, spoken into the air, and it doesn't profit anybody.

V10. Try to listen carefully to the sounds in the world around you. In nature each animal has its characteristic sound. We teach children at an early stage: 'What does a dog say?' 'What does a cat say?' Also the different birds you can distinguish from the way they hum or sing (or whatever they do). If you work in a factory or a working place, you hear other sounds there. Every sound has its own tone. To recognize a sound, you should be accustomed to it.

V11-12. Paul applies this again to speaking in tongues. You should know the foreign language that is spoken in order to understand what is being said, otherwise you are outside it. You have no part in it, you are strangers to each other.

I once was on a Russian ship with some other people to preach the gospel. The captain of the ship translated what we had sung and said, otherwise it was no use for anyone, of course. I do not speak a word of Russian; neither do I understand anything of it. You feel totally incapable to tell those people something and to make anything clear to them. There it was about preaching the gospel to unbelievers. In the church it is about believers and for them it is about receiving edification.

Paul doesn't get tired to repeat again and again what the standard of practicing the gifts is: the edification of the church. Edifying the church is something that happens consciously, with understanding. A person who edifies the church knows what he is doing and can be questioned on that. Other people can judge that (verse 29).

V13. In pursuing to practice their gift the Corinthians had to remember this well. If somebody still necessarily wanted to speak in tongues, he ought to have a prayer in his heart at the same time to be able to interpret what he had said, for only then it profits the church.

V14. Praying in tongues happens without understanding. It happens with the spirit, not with the understanding. He who speaks in tongues doesn't even know for himself what he is saying. It happens without his understanding. In verse 2 you read that he who speaks in tongues, speaks in mysteries in the spirit. What he is saying is not verifiable by others.

V15-16. How should it be? Praying and singing happen with the spirit. It is a spiritual activity in which you address God. It is not something in which your understanding doesn't partake. When you speak out a prayer or when you sing a song, you also do that with your full understanding. You know what you are saying and you know what you are singing. You are not put at the mercy of a whim or some feeling that suddenly arises. A Christian is somebody who acts with his full understanding and with insight.

It indeed is a renewed understanding. Formerly your understanding was darkened (Eph 4:18). You might have been thinking that you understood a lot of things, but you were missing the right conception of things, and you were not able to understand the meaning and purpose of your life and of the things of God and the church. Only after you received the Lord Jesus you could use your understanding rightly (Mk 5:15; Lk 24:45; 1Jn 5:20).

Your understanding is not the measure of your intelligence. It is your spiritual ability for judgment. Even if you have not been highly educated after worldly measures, you still have the ability to judge everything through the new life and the Holy Spirit Who dwells in you now. In order to be fully aware of that you ought to have the right mind, which means that your goal is the honor of the Lord Jesus in all things. He who doesn't use his understanding in what he is saying or doing at the meeting, cannot expect the consent, the 'amen', of the others. After all, they do not know what has been said, do they?

V17. This is the case of speaking in tongues whereby the understanding remains unfruitful, thus out of order. It may be quite a good giving of

thanks, but nobody can understand it and therefore nobody can say ‘amen’. Giving thanks should also be for edification. That doesn’t mean that in a thanksgiving all truths of faith are to be presented to God that others will notice how much a person knows of the Bible. That also will be a performance, a presenting of oneself. We do not have to tell God how much we know of the Bible. He knows that better than we do. After all He has written the Bible.

A good giving of thanks will surely be in accordance with the Bible, but will mainly be a sincere expression of gratitude toward God and the Lord Jesus. Haven’t you ever had such an experience that a thanksgiving of a brother made God and the Lord Jesus grow in your heart? In your heart also the feelings of gratitude arose and you could say heartily ‘amen’. (Just a note in passing: it is a good thing giving thanks loudly and clearly and not too softly. When this giving of thanks is spoken too softly, the other believers might not hear it and neither do they know what has been prayed and they cannot possibly say ‘amen’.)

V18-19. Paul was grateful to God that he spoke in tongues more than all of them. God gave him this gift for the purpose of his ministry in the gospel in order to spread the good news in many countries. However, when it is about his ministry in the church, he had only one desire, and that was to instruct others.

Just pay attention to how strongly he expresses himself here: rather five words with his understanding than ten thousand words in a tongue. Of course that is by way of comparison. Nevertheless, as you notice here, having a ministry in the church has nothing to do with the length of giving thanks or of a sermon. Do not think that you have first got to know a lot of the Bible and to have developed a large vocabulary before you can express yourself at the meeting. A giving of thanks in just a few phrases from a newly converted person has often been a large contribution to the spiritual growth of a local church. And that is what still matters: the edification of the church.

Now read 1 Corinthians 14:7-19 again.

Reflection: Why is edification of the church so important?

1Cor 14:20-25 | Tongues Are for a Sign to Unbelievers

20 Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature. 21 In the Law it is written, "BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME," says the Lord. 22 So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy [is for a sign], not to unbelievers but to those who believe. 23 Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? 24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; 25 the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

The gift of speaking in tongues is about two issues:

1. The language spoken is a language in existence.
2. The person who speaks the language, has not learned this language.

That speaking in tongues is about existing languages, appears from Acts 2. There speaking in tongues happens for the first time in the New Testament. There you read that there were Jews who lived in Jerusalem "from every nation under heaven" and that everyone heard the apostles speak "in his own language" (Acts 2:5-12). The apostles had not learned these languages. That can be derived from the fact that most of the apostles were "uneducated and untrained men" (Acts 4:13). Mention is also made of the 'gift' of speaking in tongues (1Cor 12:10,28). If you have learned a language it is rather strange to speak about a gift.

V20. The big question that then comes up for discussion is this: When should this gift be practiced? You may also pose the question differently and ask yourself why God has actually given this gift. Paul does not give a pat answer to this question. That would be too easy. He wants the Corinthians, and us, to start thinking first. By thinking about something, you consciously come to a certain conclusion.

This "thinking" must not happen in the way children do. Children do not think but they immediately make conclusions without having any knowl-

edge of the matter itself. When they see something they like or when they enjoy doing something, they do not think further about the meaning or profit of it. The only thing they think of is the fun that goes with it.

It is important to understand why you do or do not do something. I already said before: A Christian is somebody who does things consciously. He does things deliberately. You don't need to think about bad and sinful things. It is even forbidden to think about that consciously. Regarding that, you should be as a child. The evil and bad things you should reject directly, without any consideration.

With the things that come from God, you should deal differently. You ought to think about them. You need to become aware of what God wants in every particular case. This is the way you should respond when you encounter a case of speaking in tongues. You prove to have spiritual maturity if you think about what Paul is presenting here and if you try to understand what he means.

V21. 'Look what is written in the Law', Paul says. By 'the Law' he means the entire Old Testament. As an introductory phrase for his argumentation, he quotes from Isaiah 28 (Isa 28:11-12). A verse that is similar to that verse you find in Deuteronomy 28 (Deu 28:49). What is the issue in these two sections? Now an appeal is made to your ability to understand, that is your spiritual ability for judgment. You should really read these verses and also read the verses that precede and follow them. Then you will understand the context of these verses. You see in both sections that the LORD announces judgment on His people Israel because of their unfaithfulness and unbelief. He indeed executed that judgment. God used the people of the Chaldea, which are the Babylonians, led by Nebuchadnezzar, for this purpose.

Of course these people spoke another language. When they invaded Jerusalem the Jews had to realize that it was a punishment from God because of their unbelief. In that way God abandoned the connection with His people and delivered them to a strange ruler. He did that because they first abandoned Him. The fact that they were addressed in a strange, incomprehensive language, should have stimulated them to be put in a thoughtful frame of mind. They should have asked themselves why God had allowed

it that strange people invaded His land and was ruling it. When you see these verses from Isaiah 28 and Deuteronomy 28 in this context, it becomes clear that the languages, first of all, were given for a sign to the unbelieving Jews.

That also appears from what I quoted from Acts 2. It became clear that through all the different languages that were spoken on the day of Pentecost, the people of Israel were not the only ones with whom God was connected. They lost that right because they rejected their Messiah, the Lord Jesus. From then, the salvation of God was announced to all nations. In order to be able to reach all these nations, God gave the disciples the ability to speak all those different languages.

V22. The conclusion is that the languages are for a sign, not to believers, but to unbelievers. Prophesying is exactly the other way around. Prophesying is for a sign not to unbelievers but to believers. By this approach, the distinction between speaking in tongues and prophesying has become even clearer.

V23. What Paul had previously said, he is applying here to the meeting of the church. That is also what you should do. I hope that you are at a place where believers gather together as a church. You could have already learned from the previous chapters how to discover whether you gather at the right place and in the right way. In the verses 26-40 some more aspects are added. It is a good thing to examine, based on the verses you have in front of you, whether you are (still) at the right place.

Paul presents for our attention the case that the whole church was gathered together at one place, not split in numerous churches and denominations, and that everyone was speaking in tongues. Obviously, the door was not locked, for ungifted men and unbelievers, people from the street, were allowed to enter the meeting. If they entered and heard the different languages spoken of which they couldn't understand anything, then you can imagine their doubt and wonder about the chaotic club of people with whom they found themselves. They wouldn't be able to make head or tail of it. There really was no message in it for them, for they would not understand what was said.

V24. Again we encounter the contrast with prophesying. Paul states further the case that all should prophesy. That did not happen by all at the same time, but according to verse 31 it happened "one by one". When in such a case an unbeliever or an ungifted man entered the meeting, the impact was totally different. You still remember what prophesying is, do you? It is speaking the utterances or oracles of God (1Pet 4:11).

V25. When that happens, it will become absolutely apparent that the visitor feels the presence of God and feels himself personally addressed. I already referred to John 4 in the previous section, regarding the conversation of the Lord Jesus with the Samaritan woman.

How great it would be when believers gathered in such a way that things like that happened. It is only possible when we are spiritually minded and have a living relationship with God and the Lord Jesus. Prophesying is, after all, speaking from the presence of God. Then, first of all, we will show in our lives that we take into account His will. We will be willing to obey Him in every aspect of our daily life.

It goes without saying that it is unimaginable that we live decadently in our daily life, without considering God and His will and then suddenly become spiritual in the meeting. One cannot be more in the meeting than he is in his daily life. Still nobody is perfect, but he who really wants to live with the Lord, will acknowledge his stumbles so that fellowship with the Father and the Son is quickly restored.

A company of Christians who live like that with God and the Lord Jesus, will be able to experience things in their lives that are described here. If it is your desire to experience this, you cannot do any better than to make sure that you remain closely to the Lord Jesus yourself and to be filled by Him.

Now read 1 Corinthians 14:20-25 again.

Reflection: How do you experience the meeting where believers prophesy?

1Cor 14:26-33 | When You Assemble

26 What is [the outcome] then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, [it should be] by two or at the most three, and [each] in turn, and one must interpret; 28 but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. 30 But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; 33 for God is not [a God] of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

V26. Now Paul is going to tell us how the meeting of believers should happen. He starts with the question: “What is [the outcome] then?” It is a good thing to make it a habit to ask yourself this question and listen to the answer that is written in the following verses. The importance of these verses to you personally, is, of course, determined by the way you approach the meeting. How and why do you attend the meeting? Is it because you have to or do you really like to be there? I can well imagine that you sometimes feel less likely to go than you generally do, but if you love the Lord, you will generally love to be with others who also love Him. Then the question follows with which verse 26 starts: “What is [the outcome] then?”

When it further says “each one has a ...” then it applies to you too. The point is that you go to the meeting with ‘something’ and that you do not go there empty-handed (Deu 16:16) i.e. with an empty heart. Therefore it is important to prepare yourself for the meeting. That preparation is not just looking up a song or reading a Bible section just before you go. It is a matter of your life with the Lord as you experience it daily. Actually, your whole life is a preparation for the meeting. Meetings are the highlights in the life of a believer.

In Deuteronomy 26 you find a nice example of how the Lord wanted the Israelites to approach Him at the place He dwelt. When the Israelites were going to dwell in the land and bring in the harvest of the land, then the Lord would love to receive the first fruits of the land (Deu 26:1-11). Spiritu-

ally it is like that too. When in your daily life you get more and more aware of what the Lord Jesus has given to you, then He as the First loves to hear out of your mouth what you enjoyed that much. Every time you can thank Him for what you have read.

He loves to hear from you what has touched you in His Word. Make it a habit to tell Him what you have discovered in the Bible. And when you go to the meeting you will notice that your heart is filled with Him. This is how God wants to meet you, together with other believers who have also been occupied with the Lord Jesus in this way.

In Deuteronomy 16 it is written that we ought not to appear empty-handed before the Lord (Deu 16:16). Does it then mean that, in case you did not manage to be occupied with the things of the Lord Jesus because of much work or due to illness, you should not go to the meeting? No, absolutely not. It also happens to me sometimes that I feel quite 'empty'. It is wonderful that in such moments there are other brothers and sisters who are praising and worshiping the Lord out of the fullness of their heart. Then I, as it were, am being taken by that and still experience admiration for the Lord. But, after all, the point is that each person has something.

Nevertheless, if everyone has something, it does not mean that the meeting indeed happens in a way that is pleasing to God. At Corinth all did have something. But it appears that the meeting happened quite disorderly, for Paul is giving instructions to bring all things in order. When everyone has something and everyone wants to bring that forward as well, there is a great risk that it becomes a mess.

Even though everyone does have something, it doesn't mean that everyone should then just audibly express it. The question whether something is edifying is important for every meeting. The issue is always about the edification of the other. When in "a psalm", "a teaching", "a revelation" etcetera the interest of the other is being sought, then it is clearly the work of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 12:7-10). Then there is no disorder in speaking and neither will anybody put himself forward, but everybody waits his turn.

V27-28. For speaking in tongues there is a limitation: not more than three persons may do that. To the Corinthians, who loved to speak in tongues,

it was quite hard to accept this. Speaking in tongues in the church was also connected to a restriction: it ought to happen only if there was an interpreter. If there was no interpreter they had to be silent. Next to the question whether speaking in tongues still occurs and the question why the gift of speaking in tongues was given, you find here some conditions that may be useful to you in some cases. Based on these conditions you yourself can test whether speaking in tongues is being dealt with properly.

V29. Regarding the prophets, the limitation was the same: not more than three prophets were to speak. The importance of this gift has been dealt with in detail already. Now something is said to the listeners. They are to judge what the prophet is saying (verse 29b). In 1 Thessalonians 5 you read the same command: "Do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything [carefully]" (1Thes 5:20-21a). In both cases it must be judged whether the message that is passed on is in accordance with the Bible. It is important that your judgment is not based on whether the message pleases you or not, or whether you like the speaker or not, nor whether he can speak nicely or not.

V30. Also something is expected of the prophet. He should be aware that the Holy Spirit may also want to use another person to pass on something. Therefore, he who prophesies in the church must not think that he is the only one to pass something on.

V31. Who actually are the ones who may prophesy? Is it an elected group of people? With the gift of a prophet it is the same as with the gift of an evangelist. Not everybody has the gift of an evangelist. In Ephesians 4 it is written that the Lord Jesus gave "some [as] evangelists" (Eph 4:11). Yet everyone is called to do the work of an evangelist (2Tim 4:5). That also applies to the gift of the prophet. The gift to prophesy is not given to all, but still each of us can prophesy.

Do you remember what prophesying is? It is speaking for the edification, exhortation and consolation (verse 3) of others. Well, that is something each brother ought to be aware of. Each brother who lives with the Lord and who loves His Word, can be used to pass on a word of comfort or exhortation (although of course there may be exceptions). The first time may be quite difficult. The speech doesn't need to last for an hour. Paul talks

about five words in verse 19 of this chapter. Those are quickly spoken. That is, of course, in a manner of speaking.

I believe that too many brothers leave this service to others, because they think that those others can do it (much) better. It is true that often a certain fear has to be conquered in order to speak in public. On the other hand it is not the intention that a newly converted person addresses the church. He first has to build up a life with the Lord. However, that doesn't mean that you should wait until you are completely mature. Then you can wait a very long time, for here on earth we shall never stop learning. I hope you can sense what I mean. Be open to the Lord and you will see that the Lord will use you.

V32. There is another significant aspect in this service and that is self-control. Do not think that in the meeting you should express immediately each thought that crosses your mind. You really cannot hide behind the excuse: 'But the Spirit urged me to.' It is written: "And the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets." That means that each person who thinks that he should pass on something in the meeting, does that consciously, with consideration and not because of an impulse he cannot control. This is not how the Spirit of God works. For instance you think of something from the Bible. How do you know whether the Lord wants you to say something about it? The important question you could ask yourself is this: Do I want to edify the church and do I want to glorify the Lord Jesus, or do I still seek my own honor?

V33. If we all come together in this way, while the sisters also pray that the Lord points out the right brother and the right section from His Word, there will be no disorder, but peace. God is the God of peace and this peace ought to be noticeable in all the churches. In this way the meetings of believers will be an oasis in the midst of a restless world.

Now read 1 Corinthians 14:26-33 again.

Reflection: How do you prepare yourself for the meeting?

1Cor 14:34-40 | Properly and in an Orderly Manner

34 The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. 35 If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. 36 Was it from you that the word of God [first] went forth? Or has it come to you only? 37 If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. 38 But if anyone does not recognize [this], he is not recognized. 39 Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. 40 But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.

V34. Things happened in a disorderly way at Corinth. You will come to this conclusion from everything Paul has already written to them. He had to correct many things. One disorder is women speaking in the meetings of the church.

A woman has many capabilities with which she can serve the Lord. There are many examples of women in the Bible who have served the Lord, sometimes with more dedication and insight than men. The Lord notices that and appreciates that.

God makes no difference between sinners. Men and women have sinned and can be saved without any difference. When they are saved there is still no difference to God. In Christ man and woman are equal (Gal 3:28). But that still doesn't mean that women have the same position as men in the meetings of the church. It is written clearly that they are not to speak in the meeting.

It has been mentioned once that the issue here would be their gossiping with one another. That is not true of course, for gossiping is also a wrong thing to do for men. Speaking as it is mentioned here, is speaking as a prophet in the meeting and that is not suitable for a woman. The reason for this is written thereafter: it does not fit with the submissive attitude she ought to have toward the man.

This submissiveness is not an invention of Paul. At the very beginning of the Bible, God Himself gave the woman this position. The expression

“as the Law also says”, refers to what is told in Genesis 3. You read there about the fall. Due to the independent action of the woman, sin entered the world.

This event is the reason for God to clearly establish the place of man and woman. The man is the head and the woman ought to acknowledge him in that position, for he will rule over her (Gen 3:16). This doesn't at all mean that Adam did not do anything wrong. In fact, his guilt was greater, because he heard the prohibition against eating from that tree directly from God Himself. For him, sin also has consequences (Gen 3:17-19). So there are no excuses for Adam.

Because Eve entered, without Adam, into a discussion with the devil, which caused sin entering the world, God determined that she became subject to the authority of man. And this relationship is still valid. Just look at what it says in 1 Timothy 2 (1Tim 2:11-14). Of course that doesn't mean that the man can exploit the woman. He ought to treat her with respect. This commandment is clearly defined in 1 Peter 3 (1Pet 3:7). It rather emphasizes the responsibility of the man more to guide the woman rightly, that she is not tempted to take actions without him anymore.

V35. Therefore, when these things are general, then they should certainly be applied when the church meets. It is even shameful for a woman to speak there, even if it were only to ask a question. If she wants to have an answer on a question about a subject or a verse from the Bible, she ought to ask her own husband at home about that. This implies that the husband is expected to be able to answer the questions of his wife.

It is true that nobody knows the right answer to all questions. In fact a man has enough questions of his own. But I think that some men neglect this responsibility by saying that they are not able to do it. Each person who is aware of this task will make every effort to find an answer. There are resources in the form of books about the Bible that are helpful in this regard. Efforts sometimes ought to be made for that. But who doesn't want to do that for his wife? It is a great blessing to speak with your wife about the Bible.

All kinds of issues in the domestic sphere you will want to look at using the Bible. Thereby you can think for example of how to spend your money correctly or how to make wise decisions concerning your children. By the way, these issues can also be spoken of in the meeting of the church. New questions can arise after what is said about that. People can talk about this further later at home.

Then there is still another question: ‘But what happens if a woman doesn’t have a husband or when her husband is an unbeliever?’ It is too simplistic to say that she can find answers in the books about the Bible. That might be helpful if it is about an interpretation of a certain verse. However, most questions have to do with the practice of life: how to deal with a certain situation. There are no standard answers to that. A possibility is for her to consult a married couple of whom she knows that the husband has an open ear for his wife and who also makes an effort to answer his wife’s questions.

He who dares to proclaim loudly in these days what is previously said, will find no favor with those who think that these verses are outdated. There are a lot of such people and their number is increasing. More and more Christians become victim of modern thinking, which gradually erases the difference between men and women. Not only worldly people, the unbelievers, do that. You cannot expect from them that they do differently. The most dangerous are people who pretend to be Christians and tell you that you should see everything differently, more in accordance with the time in which we live. Do not be deceived! Hold on to the trustworthy Word of God.

V36. Paul says to the Corinthians: “Was it from you that the Word of God [first] went forth?” By that he means: ‘The Word of God originated from God Himself and not from you, right? You are not possibly able to determine what should happen in church, as if God has not said the necessary things about that, are you?’ When God speaks, you cannot do better than surrender yourself unconditionally to that, even though it means that you do things against the tide and even if the crowd is against you.

There is another thing to be added. They were not the only ones who were reached by the Word of God. What God has to say, He speaks to all

churches. They could look around and see how things happened in other churches that took into account what God had said. They would do well if they accepted that as an example.

V37. What Paul has written about the order in the church, was not invented by him. It neither is a friendly request to do it that way. It is “the Lord’s commandment”. This commandment is also, whether it is consciously or unconsciously, being flouted in professing Christianity. He who thinks himself to be a prophet, someone who passes on a message he has received from God, or he who thinks himself to be spiritual, someone who is guided by the Spirit of God, will have no difficulty with this commandment.

V38. He who does not recognize this commandment, is not to be recognized. Let him go. It is no use trying to convince such a person of this commandment.

V39. Paul concludes his explanation of prophesying and speaking in tongues with a kind of summary. On the one hand he exhorts the believers at Corinth to prophesy; you have seen in this chapter that all the emphasis is on this gift. On the other hand they did not have to hinder the practice of speaking in tongues; you have seen in which cases this gift can have been practiced in church.

V40. You notice that the way Paul phrased his comments here is the same as he does through the whole chapter. It is all about prophesying, while speaking in tongues is of secondary importance. In any case, everything, whatever happens in the church, it should happen in the right way and in the right order. To accomplish that, there is no need to record the service of the church, as it happens too often in professing Christianity. If we let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit in the meeting, He will surely show us the way of how to gather and He will protect the order.

It is striking that in this chapter there is no mention of the guidance of the Spirit in the meeting. Here it is made clear that it is most important that each believer has his own responsibility in the meeting. You are not suddenly overwhelmed by a certain feeling. God assumes that you are consciously present and that you consciously partake of the meeting. You

will have to make efforts to experience it that way. And that is what the Holy Spirit wants to strengthen you for (cf. Phil 3:3).

Now read 1 Corinthians 14:34-40 again.

Reflection: Where does ‘the commandment of the Lord’ (verse 37) refer to?

1 Corinthians 15

1Cor 15:1-4 | The Gospel of Salvation

1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

The chapter you now have before you is the longest of the letter. Just like the previous chapters, Paul deals here with something that had to be corrected with the Corinthians. What we have here however is not a wrong practice, but a wrong doctrine. Not that practice and doctrine can be separated. You will see that a wrong doctrine always goes together with a wrong practice. In a positive respect it is also like that. If you are occupied with the sound doctrine of the Bible, it will result in a sound balanced Christian life.

The wrong doctrine here has to do with the resurrection of the dead. There are people who say that there is no resurrection of the dead (verse 12). Paul is explaining here what the effects are of this error. As is often the case, he also uses the wrong doctrine that was preached to tell you a lot of things about Christ. He shows what effect a certain deceitful doctrine has for the Person of Christ.

That is something you can learn from. If you happen to deal with people who want to teach you and who want to make you believe something which you do not know whether it is in accordance with the Bible, then the best thing you can do is ask yourself what effect that teaching has on the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus.

What Paul also does, is showing what the truth of God is, thus how you should really see it. He uses the opportunity to teach the believers further about the subject that is being attacked by the enemy. With regard to the resurrection, he even makes known a mystery (verses 51-55). In that way this chapter becomes an extraordinarily beautiful and important chapter.

V1. In the first verses, before he speaks in details about the resurrection, he once more presents the gospel to the Corinthians, in a simple manner and intently. He had already preached it to them, but it was necessary to do it once more. They seemed to have forgotten about that, which was possibly caused by the influences of false teachers who took them on a wrong path about the truth of resurrection. Therefore he shows them right at the beginning, that if they believe this error, they jeopardize their salvation. He deliberately says that in that way, in order to indicate the gravity of the error and what is jeopardized by following this error.

There is the assurance that believers cannot perish. The Lord Jesus gives the absolute guarantee for that (Jn 10:28-29). This assurance is from God. *He* is the One Who guarantees that. However, here Paul is not talking about what God does, but about the responsibility of the believer. That is something you should distinguish well. There are more verses that make that distinction.

It may be helpful if you read two verses in Colossians 1 (Col 1:22-23). There you read what God does (Col 1:22) and what the believer should do (Col 1:23). Do you notice that the last verse (Col 1:23) starts with "if"? Phrases that start with this word "if", are often about the responsibility of the believer. Another example you read in Hebrews 3 (Heb 3:6).

V2. You also find the word "if" here in verse 2. It is not meant to make you doubt about your salvation. It is meant to talk to you about your confession. Have you really been converted and did you really accept the good news of God? Are you really sure about that, without doubts? Are you sure that you will be saved by that, which means: that you will definitely enter heaven? This is how Paul approaches the Corinthians.

He had preached the gospel, the good news from God, to these profoundly lost sinners. He had seen that they accepted that good news. He knew that they made that choice; they had gained a certainty that kept them from being driven back and forth by their desires. He knew that they would reach the final goal safely. But ... they have to prove that it is true by holding fast what they had learned from Paul.

That also applies to you and me. There is only one way to show that your confession is true and pure and that is by showing that you hold fast the Word of God. Otherwise "you believed in vain". "In vain" means that your faith is empty, meaningless.

V3. In order to make them well aware again of the content and the value of the gospel, he first of all points them at how he brought it to them. He had not told them anything different than what he himself had directly received from the Lord. He did not hear it from anyone else, so they could not possibly have misunderstood him. Second, they could verify the content of the gospel, for it was "according to the Scriptures". In the Scripture you can read about the work of Christ.

So Paul makes every effort to affirm the accuracy of the gospel they had heard. I am glad that he says it that clearly. There is no doubt about the content of the gospel. It is about Christ and about what happened to Him. Because it is written twice "according to the Scriptures", you may say that the gospel is resting on two pillars. Should you take one of them away, then there is no gospel left.

The first pillar is "that Christ died for our sins". The death of Christ was necessary, because we sinned. To be able to redeem us from our sins, He had to die in our place, bearing our sins. God judged our sins in Him.

V4. But if this would have been all that Christ did for us, we would have never known whether God was really satisfied with what the Lord Jesus had done. Therefore it was necessary that He raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, as a proof that His work was fully accomplished and was accepted by Him.

The second time that "according to the Scriptures" is mentioned, it is preceded by "that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day". The burial and the resurrection are mentioned in one breath. Therein lies a tremendous consolation with the burial of a believer. The burial takes place with a view to the resurrection! One who had to bury somebody whom he loved, may know that there will be a reunion. That will happen in the resurrection. Things will be far more beautiful than they were on earth. How things will be, is made clear from verse 42.

This whole chapter makes clear how important it is to believe in the physical resurrection. The book of Acts also testifies to this. When in Acts 1 a new apostle has to be appointed in Judas' place, the apostle to be chosen had to be able to witness of "His resurrection" (Acts 1:21-23), which is the resurrection of Christ. In the speeches of Peter and also in one of Paul's speeches, the resurrection is mentioned again and again (Acts 2:31; 3:15; 4:2,10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30; 17:31). Believing in the resurrection is a crucial part of the Christian faith. He who does not believe in the resurrection, may call himself a Christian, but he is not a child of God.

There is a chance that you hear people talking about the resurrection, but that they mean something totally different than what you learn from this chapter. They mean by that what is called reincarnation. That is: returning to this world after death, but then in another form. There are more and more people who believe this lie. You can only counter this with one thing and that is to put before them what Paul says here about the resurrection. That is the truth through which deceit is being unmasked.

Now read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 again.

Reflection: Why is resurrection important?

1Cor 15:5-19 | The Resurrection of Christ

5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. 11 Whether then [it was] I or they, so we preach and so you believed. 12 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. 15 Moreover we are even found [to be] false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

V5-6. In order to support the fact of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, Paul summarizes a number of witnesses, of whom some even were still alive when he wrote this letter. So it was a fact which could be verified by the Corinthians! After His resurrection Christ was never seen by unbelievers, at least, we cannot find this in the Bible. Wherever His appearance is mentioned in the Bible after His resurrection, it is to believers.

The Holy Spirit does not let Paul mention all witnesses. So Mary Magdalene is passed by (Jn 20:11-18) as are the two going to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). The witnesses that are mentioned, are, so to speak, chosen because of their personal reputation (Cephas, i.e. Peter) or because of their number (the twelve, five hundred at the same time) or because of their special position (James, all apostles). In that way all doubts about the physical resurrection of Christ are removed.

V7-8. At last Paul mentions himself. To him the Lord appeared in an exceptional way. The other witnesses saw the Lord during His forty days on earth after His resurrection (Acts 1:3), but to Paul the Lord appeared after His return to heaven. In Acts 9 you read about this event (Acts 9:1-9). His conversion also happened at that moment. That's why he was too late born again to be able to see the Lord on earth as the Risen One. Therefore Paul calls himself here "one untimely born".

V9. While he is writing about that and looks back to the circumstances wherein he found himself then, he again is impressed of God's grace. It's not possible for him only to talk about God's truth intellectually. His heart is in it. And when he sees again what he was occupied with, he deeply humbles himself before God. He has not forgotten about his past. He was a persecutor of the church of God. He calls himself the "foremost" of all sinners (1Tim 1:15). He does not try to talk his way out of it, but he frankly admits how terrible his crimes were. He doesn't do that out of some pride to show how bad he was. No, he does that to emphasize the grace of God even more.

It is no humble pride when he calls himself "the least of the apostles". It is no disguised form of self-praise when he talks about himself to be "not fit" of being called "an apostle". He means what he says from his heart, because he is impressed of God's grace.

You can learn here in which wonderful way you may be occupied with the truth of God. Whatever truth you read about in the Bible, God's purpose has always been that the Lord Jesus becomes more important and that we get less important. John the baptist understood that well when he said: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn 3:30). That's something you cannot pass on to each other; that must be the desire of your heart. When that is in your heart, then that admiration for God's grace comes forward more and more every time you read something in His Word. You then take the right position before God so that He can use you, for in this way you are of value to Him.

V10. Therefore Paul could say that the grace of God made him who he was. It is really wonderful to see how, on the one hand he is aware that everything is grace and that man is nothing, and on the other hand how exactly

that awareness motivated him to great activity. He made every endeavor for God's work that he could say without any form of self-praise that he had labored more than all of them. But even that he does not ascribe to himself, but ascribes that totally to the grace of God that was with him.

So he says successively:

1. I am nothing;
2. what I am, I am by grace;
3. therefore I have labored more than whoever;
4. but even that abundant working I could only do, because God's grace gave me the power to.

God wants to teach you to repeat these things. Not as a lesson you've learned by heart, but by practicing it in your daily life.

V11. The result will be that He receives all honor from the 'preaching' that is reflected in your life. That is what Paul is presenting the Corinthians in verse 11. He himself was thoroughly aware of the grace that was shown to him at his conversion and during his life afterward, just like the other apostles. This is how they preached the gospel and this is how the Corinthians have believed it.

When we are thoroughly aware of the grace that God proved to us at our conversion and which He still proves daily, we shall be able to preach like Paul and the other apostles have done. Not that we can emulate Paul, but the content and power of our preaching then comes from the Source from which Paul also drew.

V12-19. In these verses it is proved in a simple way how far-reaching the denial of the resurrection is. When you read these verses carefully, you can sense the power of the apostle's argumentation. It is clear and unambiguous.

Paul says, as it were: 'Beloved Corinthians, you should think it through what it actually means, if you do not believe in the resurrection of the dead anymore. Listen carefully: If no dead are raised, then neither Christ has been raised; if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless, for you

are then still in your sins. And that makes us false witnesses, for we have then just been pulling the wool over your eyes in our preaching. And those who are dead already, are perished.

We would be no more than a bunch of fools, if only in this life our hope is in Christ. That would mean that we take distance from the fun and the pleasures of the world and experiencing trials instead, with nothing in return in the afterlife. Then we are the most pitiable of all people. Now we have nothing and in future we have nothing. It is all for nothing.'

Of course that was not the intention of the Corinthians, but Paul shows that these are the consequences of what some of them said. The raising of the Lord Jesus by God is exactly the conclusive proof that all sins of all believers are taken away.

Here you see also how inseparable Christ is connected to the believers. What applies to Christ also applies to the believers. Are the believers not raised? Then neither Christ has been raised!

I already indicated in the introduction to this chapter, and it is good to repeat it once again, that Paul is offering us a good method here to unmask a wrong teaching. That method is: Explore what the consequences of a certain doctrine are for Christ and His work.

Now read 1 Corinthians 15:5-19 again.

Reflection: What does the grace of God mean to you?

1Cor 15:20-28 | The Government of Christ

20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a man [came] death, by a man also [came] the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24 then [comes] the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death. 27 For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. 28 When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

The verses you just read actually form a sort of parenthesis. Some translations indicate that by putting this section in brackets. The verse next to this section, verse 29, is connected to the verse preceded by this section, verse 19. I will get back to that when we get to it. A parenthesis runs the risk to be overlooked, as if it is not that important. That is not the case with the Bible.

The parenthesis here, for example, gives an excellent overview of the course of history from the resurrection of Christ to the eternal glory, when time will have ceased. Though this parenthesis is brief, you feel how the radiation of the future encounters you. It is as if Paul has to stop for a moment from summarizing more arguments to demonstrate the foolishness of the error because he must first present the excellent and positive consequences of the resurrection of Christ.

V20. After he had made the desperate conclusion, in the case that Christ had not been raised, the first verse you have read sounds like a cheer: "Christ has been raised"! He has been raised from the dead. That is quite different than if He had been raised out of the *power* of death. The latter means that He couldn't be detained by death and that He was made alive again. This is how both the believers in the Old Testament and also the disciples believed in the resurrection of the dead. They believed that the dead, who died in faith, would be made alive again.

But when the Lord at a certain moment spoke about His resurrection *from the dead*, His disciples did not understand what He meant by that (Mk 9:9-10). What does it mean then that He has been raised *from the dead*? It means that He, of all the dead, was the only One Who has been raised, while all others have remained at the grave. He is called the First fruits, for He is the first Who has been raised with a resurrection body. Later others will follow. In verse 23 Paul continues his explanation. Those who will follow later are the believers, for there it is spoken of 'those who are asleep', and the word 'asleep' is only used for believers. That will also be made clear in verse 23.

V21-22. But Paul, first of all, indicates what God means by the resurrection. The impressive thing about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is that death has been conquered by a Man! Death also entered the world by a man, Adam. God said to Adam: 'The day you eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you will die.' Adam was disobedient and that's why death entered the world.

But now through another Man the resurrection of the dead has become a reality. It looked like death had the final say and that God's plans could not be executed. Nobody has ever escaped the consequences of Adams deed, for all have died. [That, through the power of God, Enoch and Elijah went to heaven without dying (Heb 11:5; 2Kgs 2:11), is not included here, but it only confirms that God's power is necessary to escape from death.] Opposite to Adam is Christ. Because Christ rose from death, all who belong to Him will be made alive.

V23. Here you see that there is an order in the resurrection. There is no such thing like a general resurrection. The First fruits, Christ, has already been raised. All who, from Abel, the first believer who died, have died in faith, are still in the graves. That will be changed when Christ returns. Then He will call all up who are in the graves and belong to Him, from the graves, as He did with Lazarus (Jn 11:43).

V24-25. Then He will establish His kingdom in this world and rule over it for a thousand years. That is not specifically mentioned in this section, but you can derive it from verse 24 and the verses that follow. What a wonderful time of peace and righteousness that will be. This period is compreh-

hensively mentioned in the prophecies of the Old Testament. You also find sections in the New Testament that are about the public government of the Lord Jesus. After that wonderful time He will hand this kingdom over to God the Father. Then the end of all temporary things comes, and eternity starts.

With Him things have not happened like they did with all other rulers over the kingdoms of the earth, from whom the government was taken away by enemies or who handed their government over to other (failing) rulers. He will hand His kingdom over in an undamaged condition, purified from all evil, to God. His government is a fully righteous government that has no room for wrong. It is not possible for His enemies to enter into power anymore. They will be fully controlled by Him and they will never be able to revolt again. That is embedded in the expression "has put ... under His feet".

V26. This doesn't only apply to the earthly powers, but also to the last enemy, death, that will be abolished. Job called death "the king of terrors" (Job 18:14). Through death satan is still exerting his terror over all whom he keeps in bondage (Heb 2:14-15). Death will be entirely removed from creation at the very end of time only. Thus, also through the power of the Lord Jesus the dead unbelievers will be called up from the graves, wherever they may be, and be judged according to their works. That moment is poignantly described in Revelation 20 (Rev 20:11-15).

V27. Therefore there is not the slightest doubt about the predominating and eternal government of Christ: everything is put, without exception, under His feet. Still, it is obvious that when God has "put all things in subjection under His feet", God Himself is not included. Therefore God is excepted from "all things".

But still there is another exception from 'all things', which is a great wonder, and that is the church. This exception is mentioned in Ephesians 1 (Eph 1:22-23). There it is also said that God has subjected all things to the Lord Jesus, which makes the Lord Jesus "head over all things". And, as you read there, it is in this position as 'Head over all things' that He is given to the church, "which is His body". The church forms one body with the Lord Jesus. You have seen that already in an earlier section of this letter.

Therefore, when the Lord Jesus reigns, He will do that together with the church, for a head and a body are connected inseparably with each other.

After the period that the Lord Jesus has ruled His kingdom perfectly and has handed the kingdom over to God the Father, then eternity can begin. In His millennial kingdom He, as Man, has fulfilled all the desires of God, without any mistake. The first man failed when he received the government over creation, but the Lord Jesus will show as the second Man how God purposed everything.

In all things He gives God the glory. He always did that and He will always do it. He did that when He was on earth in weakness as Man, from His birth till His death. He will do that when He, still as Man, will reign in glory and power during His millennial reign, when God subjects all things to Him. He will still do that when there is no mention of ruling anymore when eternity has started.

V28. When it is written that the Son Himself also will be subject to God, then that is meant in relation to eternity. How should you imagine that? The Son is God, isn't He? Is God subjected to God? This is an inconceivable mystery. The wonder of the Person of the Son consists of the fact that He is God and Man in one Person: He is fully God and fully Man. He was eternally God and became Man, without ceasing to be God (Jn 1:1-3,14). The Son became Man and therein subject to the will of God. He fully accomplished that will. He became Man in order to remain that forever. As Man He also will eternally execute everything according to God's will.

He, the eternal Son, became Man forever, "so that God may be all in all". When that moment has become a reality, all plans of God are accomplished. The eternal rest for God has begun. The love and power of God have conquered in every respect on all areas. God may rest in His love. Everything that surrounds Him will be for Him and everything that is, will rejoice in Him. God will be seen everywhere and in everything and nothing else. All the desires of His heart will then be perfectly fulfilled....

Now read 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 again.

Reflection: What impresses you most when you think about eternity?

1Cor 15:29-34 | I Die Daily

29 Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them? 30 Why are we also in danger every hour? 31 I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. 32 If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE. 33 Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." 34 Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak [this] to your shame.

V29. After he had spoken from the fullness of his heart about the future government of Christ, Paul returns to his argument in verse 29, which he left off in verse 19. He puts forward a new argument in order to emphasize further the importance of the resurrection. That argument is baptism. It may seem far-fetched to you, but you will see how much baptism is related to resurrection.

Now, do you remember what baptism means? In Romans 6 you read that baptism represents a burial (Rom 6:3-4). Through baptism you show that you are buried with Christ, Who died for you. Somebody who is buried, does not exist anymore to this world. By being baptized you make known that you want to follow the Lord Jesus right through a world that has rejected Christ. Baptism makes you a follower of Him.

If you want to do that consistently, you will be treated by the world just as the world has treated Him. The Lord Jesus has said that the people of the world have persecuted Him and that they will persecute His disciples as well (Jn 15:20). From the moment you are baptized, you do not want to live for yourself anymore, but for Him Who died and was buried for you.

You are not the first who has been baptized. I assume that you are baptized; if not, what is keeping you from being baptized? If you are baptized you're standing in a long, long line of people who preceded you. All who have been baptized, form, as it were, an army that is in a hostile area. They all want to follow the Lord Jesus right through oppression and enmity. The world is still the area wherein satan has authority.

That will change when the Lord Jesus comes, as you have seen in verses 20-28. But in this time you can be sure that you are a nobody, which means that you are despised and rejected. This enmity can even reach the point that believers get killed. This causes empty places in the army. How wonderful it is then when new followers of Christ are baptized and added in order to fill up the places and to join the army. You understand that I make this comparison with the army only from a spiritual point of view.

What does this all have to do with the resurrection? I suggest you read verse 29 carefully. There it is about believers who have died and about others who are still alive and are baptized. The believers who died, have ceased to follow a rejected Christ and to live a life of contempt and despising. Others, of whom you are one, have got to know the Lord Jesus, were baptized and filled the empty places. They now walk behind Him, while they take part in the contempt and the despising involved.

What advantage does that all have, however, when there is no resurrection? The prospect of resurrection persuades people to abandon an easy-going and pleasant life, and to choose freely for a way of humiliation and mockery. At the resurrection there will be a reward for all deprivation suffered. Then God will restore everything we have abandoned for His sake.

You can look at the Lord Jesus. He has, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross and despised the shame (Heb 12:1-2). In Hebrews 11 believers are mentioned who “were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection” (Heb 11:35). I would suggest you read the whole of chapter (Hebrews 11) in that light.

V30-31. Paul was familiar with that too! He was talking about others in verse 29. In verses 30-31 he talks about himself. The conditions he lived in were far from rosy. He was “in danger every hour”, and said: “I die daily.”

That is not exaggerated. It was maybe in the eyes of the Corinthians and therefore he empowered his words by pointing at their boast. What did their boast consist of? What was it they were boasting of? Whatever they were boasting of it was something they surely received through the preaching of the gospel. Therefore their boast was his boast and which he

had in Christ. In addition to that, he says “our Lord”. Here he connects the Corinthians to himself as submitted to a common Lord.

V32. Paul had to face death very often. This is the daily pattern of life for one who follows his Lord and Master closely. To him who makes efforts to declare Christ in every way and at every occasion, there is no ‘end of work time’, no entertainment program with appetizers. Paul was constantly aware on which ground he found himself. To him this world was a temporary place. He had to go through it and he did that with a clear mission.

He expected to receive his rest and reward at the resurrection. As long as he had no part in that yet, his life was a struggle and a battle. The people who threatened him, he compared with wild beasts. They were cruel and rude people who wanted to see blood. What happened to him in Ephesus is written in the book of Acts (Acts 19:23-41). What you read there is absolutely not a small thing. Just imagine the case that thousands of people are revolting against you, because you preached the gospel to them! Would it be a strange thing for you to fear for your life? People become like beasts when whipped up as a mass. Wars past and present prove it to be true.

But what is the advantage of jeopardizing your life like that when dead are not raised? Then you’d better enjoy life today, for tomorrow you may be dead. Even people who grasp out of life all they could, are quite aware that there will be a moment for them to die. The thing is, that they think that it will only be tomorrow and not today. They always think they can postpone this fatal moment. They think: ‘I may die tomorrow, therefore I want to get the most out of life today.’

V33. That seems quite logical and it is when you do not believe that resurrection is a reality. But because there is a resurrection for sure, this argument is a deception. Do not be deceived! Do not listen to people who think and live like that. Do not associate with them! He who does, will fall into the same pattern of life like them.

V34. The apostle warns the Corinthians to “become sober-minded”, which means not influenced by a certain spirit of thinking. More often Christians are called to be sober (1Pet 4:7). People who live without God, fool themselves and others that they are sober. They keep both feet on the ground

and they only deal with the things they can see, they think. If you believe, you are not sober, but vague, they argue.

Don't believe a word they say. Those are people who "have no knowledge of God" and therefore do not consider Him. The reality is the other way around. He who is sober listens to what God has to say in the Bible and acts accordingly. Then you live how you supposed to and do not sin.

Having no knowledge of God is common to unbelievers. Here, however, believers are addressed. If this had to be said about us, we should be deeply ashamed of ourselves. This ignorance is no lack of knowledge of God due to the fact that you have only known Him for a short time. A child of God has an anointing from the Holy One and knows all (1Jn 2:20). That means that such a person has received the Holy Spirit and therefore is able to sense whether something is according to the will of God or not, without the necessity of quoting a certain verse from the Bible. Of course you will read a lot in the Bible to learn more about God. The ignorance that is meant here, regards believers who should have known better, but who have gone astray due to associating with wrong people.

Take note of this word and do not associate with people, whether unbelievers or 'believers', who want you to believe things that are in contrast with what God has said. That will also keep you from a life that dishonors God.

Now read 1 Corinthians 15:29-34 again.

Reflection: Do you think that a life with the Lord is worthy of all the hardships that are described in these verses?

1Cor 15:35-44 | How the Dead Are Raised

35 But someone will say, “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?” 36 You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; 37 and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38 But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. 39 All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one [flesh] of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. 40 There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the [glory] of the earthly is another. 41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. 42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable [body], it is raised an imperishable [body]; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual [body].

V35. It is not very pleasant to ask a question about resurrection, when the person who replies to that, calls you “fool” (verse 36). Who doesn’t have questions about the resurrection!? Though, you should keep in mind that Paul is still talking about people who do not take the resurrection seriously, which is the very case these days with so-called Christians. The question of verse 35 should be seen in that light. It is asked by a person who is not willing to be convinced that there is a resurrection. The question is only asked to satisfy his curiosity and not from an inner desire to know more of God’s dealings.

V36. Therefore Paul rebukes the questioner by pointing out examples from nature. From those examples he could have learned some things about the resurrection. I heard about a man who was dying and who had been thinking a lot about death and thereafter. He did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. He had had a long sickbed. Out of his bed he could see the plants and the trees outside. He then noticed that in the autumn everything was, as it were, dying. Almost all colors were changing brown and the leaves fell off until there was nothing more left than bare branches. In winter everything seemed to be even dead. But what happened in the

springtime? Then new life began! Buds appeared on the branches, which later became leaves and flowers. There was life after death!

This was the eye opener in his own situation. It led him to conversion and faith in the Lord Jesus. When he died, he knew that that was not the end, but that he went to his Savior and that he would even receive a new body one day.

V37. What this man saw and noticed can be connected with what Paul is saying here. He points at the seed that is sown. That has to die first before it germinates and grows. And what is it that grows? Does it still look like a grain that has been sown? It absolutely does not look like that anymore. The grain that was sown in the ground is not the same as what comes out above the ground after a course of time. What comes out above the ground though, comes out from the grain that has been sown.

V38. The kind of seed that is sown, determines what will come out of it. You would be very surprised when you plough up the ground, then sow grass seed into it to get a nice lawn, but instead of that get a flowing wheat field, after a course of time, wouldn't you? That is not possible, of course. Each seed has its own body and its own inflorescence that becomes visible above the ground. This is how God has ordained it in nature. He has given everything its own body, its own shape. It is said in Genesis 1 that God made everything "after their kind" (Gen 1:11,21,24,25).

V39. If you look around you in nature, this time not regarding the vegetation, but regarding men and the animal world, then you notice the same distinction. Man and animal are made from the same substance, namely flesh. Nevertheless, there is a huge variety of this matter. What an immense distinction God has made between men, animals, birds and fish! The examples that Paul mentions, come from the first creation, as it is originated in Genesis 1. But through the way he uses these examples, you learn that Genesis 1 has also something to say about the distinction that will be in the new creation.

V40-41. In order to add more details in the distinctions, Paul now introduces the difference between the celestial and terrestrial bodies. In the previous verses he talked about the terrestrial bodies, while in verses 40-41

he goes a step higher and points at celestial bodies, as the sun, the moon and the stars. Each planet in the universe has its own special glory, which is given by God.

I just read in Psalm 19: "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Psa 19:1). All glorious things that are seen in creation are the radiation of God Himself. He Himself is the Author and Executor of everything. He wants us to see that and praise Him for that. If that applies to the first creation, how much more it applies to the new creation. The new creation consists of a new heaven and a new earth. In the new heaven and on the new earth new people will dwell. How the new heaven and the new earth will be established, is to be read in 2 Peter 3 (2Pet 3:10-13).

We return now to 1 Corinthians 15. There it is about new people, as they will appear in the resurrection. Of these people there will be people who dwell on the new earth in a body with a terrestrial glory and there will be people who dwell in the new heaven in a body with a celestial glory. Jealousy will be no issue there, for sin does not exist anymore. Everyone will praise the wisdom of God, for He will give a body to all things as is fitting for everybody.

In summary, you can learn three things from the foregoing:

1. There is talk of seed that must die first, after which a body sprouts from what looks totally different than the seed (verses 37-38).
2. There is talk of the differences between the bodies that are sprouted from the seeds (verse 39).
3. There is talk of the difference between celestial and terrestrial bodies (verses 40-41).

V42a. These three things are taken from the first creation in which we live and prove that there is a resurrection. The conclusion is: "So also is the resurrection of the dead."

V42b-44. It has been proven that there is a resurrection and that the resurrection will happen in a way that is comparable with examples from nature. Still, what we will exactly be like, is not clarified by this proof.

Neither does it become directly clear in the following verses. What has become clear is that everything will be far more wonderful, without any remembrance of weakness and the corruption of an earth where sin has done its destructing work.

You may compare this with a caterpillar and a butterfly. A caterpillar pupates. It spins silk all around itself and after a course of time a beautiful butterfly comes out of it. This transformation is really unimaginable. If you compare your earthly life with the caterpillar and your resurrected body with the butterfly, you then may have some idea of the transformation that will take place in the resurrection.

Paul uses for our ‘caterpillar life’ the words “perishable”, “dishonor”, “weakness” and “natural body”. These words indicate how terribly the consequences of sin have left its scars in our terrestrial body. When we die, this is the last and clearest proof of the decay our body has suffered from birth. Then our body is put into the ground: it is “sown”.

But to the believer that is not the end! Actually there is sown because there is a resurrection. And that resurrection shows a totally different and much more glorious body. The body is raised “imperishable”, “in glory”, “in power”, and as a “spiritual body”. The words that are used here, have to do with the Lord Jesus and His work, with heaven, with God and with the Holy Spirit.

Through His work on the cross the Lord Jesus has “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light” (2Tim 1:10). Heaven is the place where glory is seen and experienced and where we first were not able to come (Rom 3:23-24; 5:2). It is the power of God that will make the resurrection possible (Eph 1:19-20).

We then will have a body that does not have any natural needs anymore. It doesn’t need food and drink anymore to remain alive. The life of the resurrected body is a spiritual life, which means that the Holy Spirit provides everything that body needs and that is fellowship with the Father and the Son. From that fellowship each activity takes place, both in the millennial kingdom and in eternity, in the Father’s house.

It seems wonderful to me to be occupied undistracted with everything the Father prepared for us based on the work of His Son in a realm where there is nothing that can disturb that anymore.

Now read 1 Corinthians 15:35-44 again.

Reflection: What characteristics of the resurrected do you find in the section?

1Cor 15:45-52 | A Mystery Revealed

45 So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam [became] a life-giving spirit. 46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. 47 The first man is from the earth, earthly; the second man is from heaven. 48 As is the earthly, so also are those who are earthly; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the earthly, we will also bear the image of the heavenly. 50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

V45. To make clear the difference between the natural and the spiritual body, Paul quotes what is written about the creation of the first man. As you see, this is another “so … it is written”. The answer to each question, regarding the existence of man and the here-after, you ought to look for in the Bible.

How did the first man become a living soul? That happened when God breathed the breath of life in his nostrils. This is how man, who was formed by God from the dust of the earth, became a higher being than an animal. Through the breath of God man was able to start his existence on earth and was able to have fellowship with God. This is not the way God gave life to the animals. God could approach Adam and speak with him and vice versa. This is not the way God dealt with animals. God created man in such a way that he, to remain alive, had to eat. God provided man with that food.

So you see by the way God created Adam, he was somebody who was dependent on God. He received everything, his life and livelihood, from God.

He received life through the soul. What the soul exactly is, I cannot explain that to you. Many people have tried to do that by writing books about it, but nobody seems to have the final say about that. I certainly do not have the final say, but I would like you to consider the following. The word ‘soul’ in the Bible is used to indicate several things. One of the things is to indicate the incorporeal side of man, thus something else than his

physical body, which you could call the corporeal side of man. When the word ‘soul’ is used in this way, it usually refers to man in relation to the terrestrial conditions, the way he feels and behaves on earth.

What had happened to the first man is now compared to what took place with the last Adam. The Lord Jesus is called here “the last Adam” to indicate that after Him there never will be a next Adam. Well, what is the character of the last Adam? That He became “a life-giving spirit”. So, the last Adam, the Lord Jesus, *did not receive* something from God, but *He Himself gave* life to others. The Lord Jesus did that, after He has been raised from the dead.

In John 20 you read about that (Jn 20:22). He breathed on the disciples and by doing that, He gave them a life wherein the Holy Spirit could work. This seems similar to what happened to Adam in Genesis 2 (Gen 2:7), but still it is different. Through what happened to Adam, he was able to live *on earth* as a living soul. Through what happened through the last Adam, the disciples received a new life, which enabled them to approach God *in heaven*.

V46. You also see the ranking here: first comes the natural and then the spiritual. This ranking you encounter every day. A baby only needs milk. You cannot talk about spiritual matters with a baby. That is only possible if a person has reached a certain age.

V47. There is not only a difference in what Adam and the Lord Jesus became, they also differ in origin, where they come from. This is a huge difference. The first man owes his existence to the dust of the earth. After the fall of man God said: “For you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen 3:19). Man with his self-importance is nothing more than that. Without a powerful work of God there was no hope that a change would take place.

Then came the Second Man. Where did He come from? A new man from the dust of the earth? No. He came from heaven. He surely became Man, but His origin is heaven.

V48. These two Adams both have their ‘offspring’. He who belongs to the first man – Adam – is therefore made from dust. He who belongs to the last Adam – Who is here called “the heavenly” – is heavenly. So you are

heavenly, exactly like the Lord Jesus. That is quite something! Though you are on earth and still participate in what is from dust, your inner man belongs to heaven. Inwardly a tremendous change has already happened.

V49. We are waiting for the great change that will take place at the resurrection. Then we shall bear the image of the Heavenly. Some wonderful verses that speak of that, are found in Romans 8 and 1 John 3 (Rom 8:29; 1Jn 3:2).

V50. "Flesh and blood" do not partake in the issues that are dealt with here. The expression 'flesh and blood' regards man as a creature with limitations, in whom sin dwells since the fall of man. That's why he is "perishable". God cannot disclose His kingdom for those men. He did not make them heirs. The inheritance of His kingdom is only made possible for those who are connected with *the* Heir, the Lord Jesus. Outside this connection there is no inheritance.

V51. When Paul has come at this point of his teaching, he reveals a mystery. All the time he had talked about the resurrection of the dead. That is something that was also known in the Old Testament. All the believers of the Old Testament died in the faith that there will be a resurrection one day and that they will receive what God has promised. Through the whole chapter of Hebrews 11 you encounter such believers. To partake of the resurrection you ought to be dead first.

The exceptional thing of the mystery that is revealed here, is that when Christ comes to fulfill God's promises, not all will be dead. This is because there will also be believers on earth who are still alive when Christ returns. Paul even says this in a way as if he is sure that he will not die. He speaks about "we will not all sleep". How much more could we, who are now still alive, say that.

What then will happen to those who are alive? They will be changed. That is necessary, for you have read in verse 50 that flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom. To be with God in heaven, we need a body that is able to be there. In Philippians 3 it is said that when the Lord Jesus returns He "will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory" (Phil 3:21).

V52. The moment that will happen, cannot be expressed in a time unit. We use all kinds of words if we want to indicate the fastness of an event, for example: a flash, swift as an arrow, a part of a second. Still each description fails to describe the fastness in which this transformation will take place. It is in “the twinkling of an eye”.

The signal that heralds this event is the sound of the trumpet, the last trumpet of course. By that Paul alludes to the traditions of the Roman army, where the trumpet was sounded three times. The first time was the sign to break up; the second time means to line up; the third time was the command to march. That is how they used to do it in the Roman armies: breaking up, line up, march.

This is what we ought to do as Christians. Have you already broken up and are you lined up yet? Breaking up means: disconnect everything that still connects you to the world. To line up means: to be ready to go.

We have to wait for the last trumpet. When that sounds, two things happen in that twinkling of an eye. First the dead are raised. They have priority over the living, although it is just a moment of that twinkling of an eye. They do not remain longer in the grave than necessary. What happens further is to be read in 1 Thessalonians 4 (1Thes 4:15-18). That section is about the same event. The emphasis there is on those who are asleep, while here the change of the living is put more in the forefront. Anyhow, the result is that we shall always be with the Lord. A wonderful perspective!

Now read 1 Corinthians 15:45-52 again.

Reflection: Which great changes will be effected by the return of the Lord Jesus? Do you look forward to that?

1Cor 15:53-58 | Labor Is Not in Vain In the Lord

53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 55 O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not [in] vain in the Lord.

V53. So a great change must happen before we are able to enter heaven and dwell in the place where God and the Lord Jesus dwell. Our body is, as a result of sin, perishable and must therefore “put on the imperishable”.

‘Perishable’ means that our body is constantly deteriorating. How many efforts you make to keep your body in good condition and do a lot of physical training, it will stop one day. Even if you remain healthy (you cannot claim health), you will notice at a certain moment that you can no more do everything that you formerly were able to. Therein you can see that perishableness. Our body will get rid of that process of deterioration when it is raised imperishable and has put on the imperishable.

Additionally, our current body is mortal. That is not suited for heaven. Therefore our body must “put on immortality” – we shall receive that with the return of Christ. The ageing process and death will no longer have a hold over our body. So it is not only a body that cannot possibly die anymore and will remain to live in all eternity, but death will never ever get a chance to rule anymore.

V54. When will be the moment that the word “death is swallowed up in victory” comes true? That is when all the redeemed will have been raised from the graves. The resurrection will actually take place in some stages.

The first stage becomes a reality with the coming of the Lord Jesus to gather the church. He will not then return to earth. He shall raise all believers

who have ever lived on earth and catch them up together to meet Him in the air. The proof of this is written in 1 Thessalonians 4 (1Thes 4:17).

After the rapture of these believers, there will still be believers who will die. Those are the believers who came to faith after the rapture. Many of them will have to pay for their confession of faith with their life. That will mainly happen during the great tribulation that will take place after the first stage of the resurrection. In Revelation 6 and 13 you read about these believers (Rev 6:9; 13:15-17). Nevertheless they participate in the millennial government of Christ. This is what is written in Revelation 20 where they are mentioned (Rev 20:4). Thus they are raised before Christ accepts His government. That is the second stage and then the first resurrection has been completed (Rev 20:5).

Then perishableness and mortality belong to the past. They are replaced by imperishableness and immortality. The victory over death is complete. That death as the last enemy still has to be abolished, does not make any difference to the victory. That is only the execution of the verdict, as it is described in sober words in Revelation 20 (Rev 20:14). Death cannot exert its terror anymore. It will never happen again that a believer is being laid in a grave.

V55. Therefore the words of this verse sound as a triumphant cry of victory, whereby death is being challenged, as it were, to show its victory and its sting. But death does not have an answer anymore. When all believers are withdrawn from the realm of death through the resurrection from the dead and the 'metamorphosis' (transformation) of the living , then death has lost its control over the bodies of the dead and living believers forever.

V56. Previously death had a strong weapon with which it could defeat people and that was sin. Sin is called here the sting of death. Death and sin have made an obscure alliance together. Through sin death entered the world and sin drags all men into death.

The law makes it worse, because it brings the sinful and rebellious will of man to light. After all, the law proposes nothing more than a number of rules for man to obey them. And what becomes clear? That man doesn't keep the rules, but breaks them. He is not able to keep the law, because sin

works in such a powerful way. The law proves the power of sin. The letter to the Romans has made clear that there is nothing wrong with the law. It is man who is wrong.

V57. Fortunately, God did not let us continue to struggle forth in this unequal fight. We were the losers, but God gave us the victory in the gift of His beloved Son. Yes indeed, He gave! It is a gift that we were able to accept through grace. We did not have to do anything for it. Every effort we made to escape the fear of death and to win the battle against sin, resulted again and again in failure and defeat. Praise God! He gave the victory.

On the cross at Golgotha the Lord Jesus abolished sin; when He rose from the grave He abolished death. Although we do not see the entire result of it yet, we know by faith that He has achieved a complete and eternal victory. God already sees the final result and we can see that too by faith. What else can you do than to thank God?

V58. Thus, everything is prepared for the future. But how do you reflect on your further life here on earth? You still live in a world where death is exerting its power. The Lord Jesus still has not come yet to transform your body. That means that you still have a task to fulfill. The final verse of this chapter starts with “therefore” and thus refers to the previous verses. If you have understood something of those verses, you will be able to find a great motive to commit yourself totally “in the work of the Lord”. Looking forward to that great transformation is quite an exhortation to “abound” in the work of the Lord and not just give a little bit of your time and energy for it.

You are called to be “steadfast” and “immovable”. That is necessary, for there will surely be much resistance if you decide to live for the Lord Jesus. Be sure that there will always be voices that are trying to convince you that you can slow down a bit. That voice can be from yourself or others can tell you for example that you surely need some rest. Of course you should not deal recklessly with your health, but your commitment is important. Perhaps you may also have to deal with much hostility that might discourage you. Therefore: be steadfast and immovable; keep going and be persistent. From the previous you are sure of one thing: your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

It would have been in vain and useless if there was no resurrection. But the resurrection is a fact and when that happens, the reward will be handed out. Everything you do or abandon for the Lord's sake, He will reward.

I want to point at a mistake. Some people think that a person can only do 'work for the Lord', if he or she doesn't have a job in the society anymore and can dedicate all his time to spiritual matters. That is a misconception. Each Christian is called here to abound in the work of the Lord. Your work in society, whether you go to school or your occupation with housekeeping, are included. You may do everything for the Lord (Col 3:17). That gives luster to the most common occupations.

'Abound in the work of the Lord' does not mean that you should lose yourself in all kinds of earthly activities. It means that you are focused to do the will of the Lord, even in the simplest activities.

Now read 1 Corinthians 15:53-58 again.

Reflection: What is the best motivation to always abound in the work of the Lord?

1 Corinthians 16

1Cor 16:1-9 | Collection and Travelling Plans

1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 2 On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. 3 When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; 4 and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me. 5 But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; 6 and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go. 7 For I do not wish to see you now [just] in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits. 8 But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; 9 for a wide door for effective [service] has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

V1. Paul concludes his letter with some practical instructions about a collection of money. It seems to be a side issue in which he still wants to say something that is not that important. However, that is not the case. What he says here you feel in your wallet. It is said about the Dutchman that the last thing which is converted, is his wallet. Therefore the jokes that our southern neighbors (Belgians) make about the stinginess of the Dutchman are not totally unfounded. Everybody wants as much as he can have of it. The lotteries and other games of chance prove that the phenomenon is not the exclusive preserve of the Dutch population.

We also need the exhortation that the Corinthians received, to keep a collection for the poor believers. It is quite human to, when you yourself prosper, to forget the other. You possibly have just enough to get by. What do you have left for the other? Nevertheless, it is not a question of politeness to lay something aside for the other. Paul had already told the churches of Galatia the same thing and now he also points out to the Corinthians their responsibility. He wants to be sure that they will do what he says.

In 2 Corinthians 8-9, so two entire chapters, he gives more instructions about the collection of money for impoverished fellow believers. That makes clear how important this issue is to Paul. In those chapters you read among others that it pleases God to see you give *freely*, not under compulsion.

V2. In our chapter he gives an instruction about how to put money aside for poor believers in the most proper way. Of course there are many ways how you can let others have a share in your prosperity, but the way, concerned in this verse, is closely related to the first day of the week. That is nice. The first day of the week was especially the day that the believers gathered to celebrate the Lord's Supper and to listen to God's Word (Acts 20:7). Isn't this the automatic consequence of our connection in the Lord, which we experience during the meetings that we also show our connection in a practical way?

The Bible speaks about a "sacrifice of praise" that we can bring to God as the "fruit of lips". The purpose of that is that we tell God how grateful we are to Him that He has redeemed us. But directly connected to that, the Bible speaks about the sacrifices of "doing good and sharing" which pleases God (Heb 13:15-16). The collections are not a manner to take money out of people's pocket, but they are a logical result of our gratitude to God.

After connecting the collections to the first day of the week, Paul passes on a practical suggestion: let them put aside a certain amount weekly. That amount can be different every week. It is dependent on their prosperity. To people with a fixed income, it will often be the same amount. They always have to consider: 'How much can I put aside this week?'

I hope that you are used to giving money in the meeting regularly. Do you also consider regularly if you can give more than you give regularly? The suggestion that Paul made, had the benefit that quite a nice amount would have been collected when he arrived there. If the collection was only made at the moment he came, the benefits would surely not be that big. A single gift is often smaller than the sum of an amount that is saved.

V3-4. Paul planned to give the amount, collected like that, to brothers whom the church entrusted. These brothers would bring the gift of love to

Jerusalem with an accompanying letter. He did not know yet whether he would go along with them. In that case they could have gone along with him. The brothers who were entrusted with this order, were not just random brothers. They were brothers who have proven their capabilities and commitment in their service for the Lord. The church at Corinth would want to recommend these brothers on the basis of their reliability. They had to be people who would not give in to the temptation to run off with the money.

In Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3 you find some characteristics of brothers to whom people could entrust such a service (Acts 6:3; 1Tim 3:8-13). Of course the characteristics described there, should adorn each Christian. If that is already the case, then certainly it is, concerning those brothers, who are given the task to provide for the material needs of the believers. These characteristics are still valid as a condition to be able to serve in material matters. The fact that we can do digital payment transactions nowadays does not weaken the qualities of a person who is entrusted with such a service.

V5. So it was Paul's purpose to visit the believers at Corinth. He writes to them about which way he was considering to come. From Ephesus (the place from where he writes this letter), he would travel first through Macedonia. There he could pass through the cities of Philippi and Thessalonica, where he also would love to visit the believers there. Then he would come to Corinth.

V6-7. He wanted to stay quite a while with them, possibly the whole wintertime. When it was cold outside, he could then enjoy the warm love of the Corinthians. That would be a wonderful opportunity to teach them further about the issues on which they had questioned him. When he departed from there, they would be able to help him also. In fact he was counting on that. After all, that is the language of love. He had to tell them a lot in the letter about what is not right with them. Nevertheless he trusts that they would not dislike him because of that. A relationship will surely not cool off if you reprimand a person in love. As it has already been said, his visit would not be a short one.

He concludes his plans with “if the Lord permits”. This shows that Paul considered the will of the Lord in everything. You surely are allowed to make plans. There is nothing wrong with that, but they, in the first place, should please the Lord. It is a normal thing for a Christian to submit his plans to the Lord in prayer, whether it concerns a vacation or a business trip or a service for the Lord.

The Lord Jesus has said: “Apart from Me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). I think that you also have done certain things without submitting them to the Lord. You did it out of your own desire. It doesn’t matter whether you succeeded or failed; it is wrong to do anything without the Lord, anyhow. It is wonderfully comforting to know that the Lord is guiding your life and that you can consciously put your life in His hands. Therefore, submit your plans to Him and you will experience the blessing of it.

V8-9. On the other hand, a life with the Lord is not a smooth road. Paul has had that experience too. He wanted to remain in Ephesus until Pentecost because the Lord had a great task for him there. That became apparent because of two things:

1. “A wide door for effective [service]” had opened to him. That means that the Lord had opened the hearts of a great number of people through the gospel in a mighty and impressive way.

2. A proof that the Lord was in action there, was also that there were “many adversaries”. There is nothing that can activate the devil more, than a work for the Lord. The more adversaries you meet in a work that you want to do for the Lord, the surer you can be that it is indeed a work of Him.

The devil does not care about people who live only for themselves. He has nothing to fear from that. Such people are doing what pleases him and he enjoys everything that is not done for the Lord’s sake.

If you love to be occupied for the Lord, you will often meet these two things:

1. The Lord opens a door for you. That means: you see possibilities to do a work for the Lord. He puts you in circumstances that you recognize as His guidance to do a work for Him.

2. You meet adversaries. Not only you recognize a work for the Lord, but the devil also recognizes that. Therefore he will make every effort to hinder you to do that. In his efforts he uses people, who, as adversaries of the gospel, try to prevent you to do your work for the Lord. Therefore, do not be discouraged, but be encouraged!

Now read 1 Corinthians 16:1-9 again.

Reflection: Are you saving money? What for/ for whom?

1Cor 16:10-14 | Timothy and Apollos

10 Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am. 11 So let no one despise him. But send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren. 12 But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all [his] desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity. 13 Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. 14 Let all that you do be done in love.

V10. I think that the Corinthian believers were rather difficult people; they were certainly not 'tame lambs' of the good Shepherd. Paul had already said that he was with them in weakness and in fear and in much trembling (1Cor 2:3). He had every reason to do so, for he had to bring them a message they would not accept with cheers. On the contrary, his word would evoke a lot of resistance. Now he admonishes the Corinthians to make sure that this will not happen to Timothy also.

In chapter 4 he has already informed them about the coming of Timothy and about the purpose of his mission (1Cor 4:17). That makes it clear that Timothy was thoroughly aware of that too, like Paul. He would teach them the same doctrines that they had received from Paul, teachings that judge their arrogance. There was a reasonable chance for resistance again. Therefore he points out to them how they should receive him.

Timothy was doing the work of the Lord, just like Paul. It is possible that here "the Lord's work" doesn't have the general meaning of the last verse from the previous chapter (1Cor 15:58). There we are told that we all ought to be occupied in the work of the Lord, while here it may be about a more specific work of the Lord. Timothy had, like Paul, a ministry among the believers, which took up all his attention. He was an exceptional young man, with whom Paul had a unique relationship. In some of his letters he calls Timothy the co-sender or he writes something about him. He even has written two separate letters to him. You find them in the Bible also.

Everything shows how much Paul appreciated him. If you have a friend with whom you share everything and who senses things like you do, you may have an idea about the relationship of these two servants.

In addition to that, Paul was the older person and Timothy the young man. It is a beneficial effect to see how two generations go together here, without generation gap. It is also a beneficial effect when there are young people in a local church who are developing positively in spiritual matters. Where youngsters are interested in the Bible there is also a good relationship with older believers who also live a life that is guided by the Lord.

Timothy had come that far in his spiritual development that Paul could entrust him with an independent order. He could send him to a difficult church like Corinth. That is a proof of Paul's confidence in Timothy. Here we find a lesson for the older believers to give the young believers the confidence they are worthy of. He knew that Timothy would not teach otherwise than he had taught. His work would not be demolished by this young man, but rather underlined by him.

V11. In fact Timothy was definitely not a spiritual powerhouse, someone who went to the Corinthians with a great deal of boldness to serve them. You rather get the impression that he is a somewhat shy young man who needs some encouragement and exhortation (2Tim 1:6-8). That could be a reason for the Corinthians to treat him with contempt. They were more impressed by fascinating lecturers. The content is not that important, if only the performance is impressive.

In our days people are still focused on the way a person performs. What he has to say is a side issue. Do not be deceived by that. It is important to judge everything you hear on the basis of God's Word and not on the basis of how it is said. That is enormously misleading.

This is certainly not how Timothy worked. The Corinthians were not to concentrate on his performance, but they were to listen to and obey the message he was passing on. They could express their acceptance of Timothy by receiving him, by obeying his teachings and subsequently by sending him on his way in peace when he would return to the apostle.

Paul was looking forward to see him back and he was very curious about everything he had experienced. By the way, Timothy would not come alone, but he would be accompanied by some brothers. It would be a

wonderful occasion to exchange experiences and to praise the Lord for everything He had worked.

That is the beautiful thing about meeting other brothers and sisters. Especially during holidays, the meetings with believers whom you would not have met otherwise, can be of great blessing. You hear from them how they live with the Lord and what the Lord has done in their life and you can tell them Who the Lord is to you and what He has done in your life.

V12. Another servant Paul mentions here is Apollos. Paul had also seen in Apollos wonderful characteristics with which he could serve others. You see here though, that Apollos was related differently toward Paul than Timothy was toward Paul. Timothy was somebody to whom Paul could give orders which were then executed by Timothy. Some more of such men you find in Paul's letter to Titus 3 (Tit 3:12). When they visited a place, they did that in the name of Paul and they could therefore act with his authority.

In the case of Apollos it is different, as it becomes apparent by what you read here. Paul wanted very much that Apollos too would go to Corinth to serve the believers there. He really urged him to. Many times he used all his persuasive power to convince Apollos to go, but he did not succeed. Was that just a human reaction of Paul by acting like that? I do not think so. His love for the Corinthians sought every opportunity to serve them, even through the means of others.

Nevertheless, Apollos was of the opinion not to respond positively to Paul's request. Not that he disregarded Paul's request. He considered before the Lord whether he should go and came to the conclusion that he would go another time when he had opportunity. Anyhow, he did not go immediately.

An important reason for him not to go directly could have been, on the contrary, his love for Paul, not to be played off against him. You may recall from chapter 9 that there were some people at Corinth, who doubted the apostleship of Paul. If Apollos decided to go, maybe the mistrusting people would conclude from that, that Paul himself did not dare to come. In Apollos you see a servant who receives a request from another servant to

do something, who subsequently submitted the request before the Lord and then takes an independent decision.

That is also an important development in your spiritual growth. At the beginning other brothers will take you along in their work for the Lord. At least, I hope that there are such brothers in your environment through whom you get involved in a work of the Lord, so that you can gain experience. The more you grow spiritually, the more you will notice in your own relationship with the Lord that He is going to use you independently. You, in your turn and in due time, can offer to other persons the opportunity to gain spiritual experience in the work of the Lord.

V13. Timothy was on his way to the Corinthians. Apollos and Paul also planned to visit them once. Meanwhile they had to be on the alert, which means that they had to keep their eyes wide open to see where people were running the risk of wrong teachings. They had to cope with enemies who were attacking their faith, by standing firmly on the foundation of the faith as they had received from Paul and through the letter they now had received. They ought to be like men who did not fear the fight, but who were courageous. Weakness and slowness are not appropriate when we should hold on to what we have received from God in the Bible.

V14. To end up in being strong together they ought to love one another and there should be no envy. Love is the interdependence that gives the most power to repel any attack from the enemy.

Now read 1 Corinthians 16:10-14 again.

Reflection: Write down the differences between Paul, Timothy and Apollos. In what way could you compare yourself with each of them?

1Cor 16:15-24 | Final Exhortations and Greetings

15 Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), 16 that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors. 17 I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. 18 For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men. 19 The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. 20 All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. 21 The greeting is in my own hand – Paul. 22 If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha. 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. 24 My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

V15. At the end of his letter Paul puts forward again some people of a household. That's how he started his letter. In chapter 1 he makes clear that the reason of his writing was that he had heard certain things from persons who belonged to the household of Chloe (1Cor 1:11) and in that chapter he also mentions the household of Stephanas (1Cor 1:16). He had baptized that whole family. He now refers again to that family. He mentions this family as one that is fruitful in their ministry to other believers.

In the previous verses you met Paul, Timothy and Apollos, who fulfilled their tasks as individual servants. Here you find a brother, Stephanas, who serves the Lord with his whole family. To serve the Lord means to serve the brothers and sisters. That is well worth the effort. I am convinced that there is an urgent need of such families. The greater part of all miseries in the world and in the church is caused by failing family relationships. Fathers and mothers do not take their place that God has appointed in the family anymore. Children do not obey their parents anymore. Those are developments that are extremely damaging. Families like that of Stephanas are a real blessing to the society and the church.

This brother was the first in Achaia who had been converted, together with his family. There were abundant proofs that it was a real conversion. One of those proofs is their willingness to serve fellow believers. Serving means

taking the lowest place. By taking that place Stephanas and his household radiate something.

V16. Stephanas had no official appointment as an elder or anything like that. Neither did he claim such a function. But through his way of life Paul could exhort the Corinthians to be in subjection to him. It is a good thing to be in subjection to believers who show with their household that they take the Word of God seriously. They have something to offer you that will enrich your own life with the Lord.

That does not only apply to families, but we must be in subjection to all who are fully dedicated to the Lord. You learn from their lives and it leads you closer to the Lord. This being in subjection is something that is hardly tolerated in our time. The general opinion is we should all be assertive; to adopt a 'slavish' behavior is not appropriate and doesn't go hand in hand with the rights you have. It is, however, an attitude of respect toward another and the compliance of the other person's rights. It is the attitude that the Lord Jesus had during His life on earth toward His God and Father and toward His earthly parents as well (Lk 2:51).

V17. Stephanas was a man who dearly loved Paul. Together with two others he traveled to Paul. That made Paul very happy. Are you also that happy when brothers come to share the Lord's things with you?

Paul needed such visits, especially since he was not treated very gratefully by the Corinthians. He had made great efforts for them, but they appeared not to be grateful. Of course a servant should not be concerned with thanks or pats on the back. What a true servant must be sensitive to is that his teaching has an effect among believers.

When a person has accepted a ministry, it results in a hearty relationship between the servants and the believers, which was not the case with the Corinthians. But now there came some brothers from Corinth who did accept and honor his ministry. It was not because of Paul, but because he preached Christ. When Christ is the object of the service and hearts are being opened for that, there will always be fellowship. It appeared that these brothers had their heart in the right place. They compensated the omission of the Corinthians.

V18. They refreshed Paul's spirit. Paul might have been worrying a lot about how he had to deal further with the believers at Corinth. It could have almost depressed him. You can imagine that if you saw your own lifework get stuck like that. Then those brothers came. That was very encouraging. And if the Corinthians were honest, they had to admit that these three brothers who refreshed Paul like that, had also refreshed them often with their ministry. They had to deal carefully with such brothers, because they were of great value. I hope that you also know such brothers and that you acknowledge them as well, which means that you also listen to them.

V19. Then we have the greetings. Some names are being mentioned, but first the churches in Asia. In those days, the local churches were closely related to each other. They knew each other and kept in touch with one another. Passing on greetings is a proof of interconnectedness. In this way local churches can experience, also in the time of confusion wherein we live today, their interconnectedness. It is something very simple and yet very beautiful and valuable.

Aquila and Prisca are the only ones who are called by their names, together with the church that is gathering in their house. In the first verses of Acts 18 you can read that Paul got acquainted to this married couple at Corinth (Acts 18:1-3). This married couple loved the Lord. Paul mentions their names several times in his letters. You should explore what is actually written about them. Here it is mentioned that they opened their house for the brothers and sisters, to God's glory. Because they had lived for a couple of years in Corinth, they must have built up a relationship with the believers there, which they still felt.

V20. Furthermore Paul passes on the greetings of "all the brethren". Through faith in the Lord Jesus there is a bond between all who know and love Him.

In a way, passing on greetings at a distance can be easier than to greet believers with whom you deal with on a regular basis. By knowing the weaknesses and bad habits of the latter well, it may be quite difficult sometimes to greet such a brother or sister heartily. Therefore the appeal is to greet *one another* with a *holy* kiss. It is not necessarily to greet one another

by the means of a kiss, but it is more about the sincerity of the greeting. It should not be a hypocritical greeting.

V21. Finally we have the greetings of Paul, written by his own hand. He normally did not write his letters by his own hand, but there are a few exceptions. Most of the times he dictated his letters and another person wrote them down, which he then closed with a kind of signature by writing his greetings with his own hand. You can verify that at the end of several letters. There is a possibility that Paul had an eye disease, which disabled him to write by himself, or made it difficult for him to write (Gal 4:14-15).

V22. Then he still has a serious and penetrating word for “anyone” who “does not love the Lord”. Would there possibly be some people among the Corinthians who did not love the Lord? Could there be people among us who do not love the Lord? The love for the Lord can be shown only in one way and that is from the love a person has for what He has said. In John 14 two wonderful statements are written (Jn 14:21,23).

The Corinthians can show their love for the Lord by obeying what Paul has written in this letter. That goes for us as well regarding the whole Bible. It is not about our failures in that, but about really be willing to do what the Lord says, out of love for Him, whatever it may cost. He who doesn't have that desire, is accursed.

“Maranatha!” That means: ‘The Lord is coming’ or: ‘Lord, come!’ It refers to the coming of the Lord. He who loves the Lord, is looking forward to Him. For him who does not love the Lord, His coming is a judgment.

V23. Until that moment Paul wishes them “the grace of the Lord Jesus”. If we often feel weak there is fortunately still that grace that helps us to be persistent.

V24. Finally he expresses his love to them, which he has for “all in Christ Jesus”. Love has urged him to write this letter. It was love for his Lord and love for His own. Only through love are we able to serve one another and to bring each other closer to the Lord and to glorify Him as local churches.

“Amen.”

Now read 1 Corinthians 16:15-24 again.

Reflection: Do you love the Lord?

Other Publications

On my website www.kingcomments.com commentaries on all Bible books and publications on topics can be read digitally. See 'Information' on the website.

An app for Android and Apple you can download by clicking on the badges that are at the bottom of each page of the website.

On the website www.oudesporen.nl all comments on the Bible books can be downloaded for free as PDF, EPUB and MOBI file. Go to <https://www.oudesporen.nl/artikelen.php?aut=1&l=EN>

