

**Thank you to Pr. RCB.
H.O. Women in Leadership/Ministry**

ANY QUESTION/COMMENTS from this past week's readings?

August 1

2 Chronicles 30:1-31:21

Vs 4b – Hezekiah did what “seemed right” Doing his best with what he knew to do.

Vs 12 – God giving the people one heart to obey the orders of king and leaders who were following the word of the Lord. HOW?

Vs 15 – People stepped in to do the work of the Priests/Levites in worship (slaughtering the lambs) because they wouldn't do it until they felt shame that the people were ready for repentance that leads towards intimacy...

31:1 – response to true worship...Holy living by removal of evil and evil influences from their life and conduct.

30:1-27 In this account of Hezekiah's Passover celebration, the Chronicler focuses on the themes of return and redemption. In the wake of Assyria's victory over the northern kingdom of Israel, Hezekiah invites the remaining Israelites—those who were not dead or deported—to join the people of Judah in celebrating Passover at the temple (2 Chron 30:5). Hezekiah calls the Israelites to return to the God of their fathers (v. 6). If they do, God will be compassionate and merciful (v. 9). Those who respond to Hezekiah's message are pardoned, even though they are not ritually clean (v. 18). Throughout the passage, the Chronicler also highlights the joy associated with worship (vv. 21, 23, 26).

30:1 Ephraim and Manasseh These tribes represent the northern kingdom as a whole. See note on Hos 4:17.

to make a Passover feast Passover regulations are recorded in Exod 12:3–20 and Deut 16:1–8.

30:2 in the second month Passover normally took place in the first month (see Exod 12:2 and note).

Israelite Calendar Table

Israelite Festivals Table

30:3 they were not able to make it at that time Because the temple was still being consecrated, Hezekiah delayed the Passover celebration from the first month to the second (see 2 Chron 29:17). There was precedent for this in the law (Num 9:10–11; see note on Num 9:1–14).

30:5 from Beersheba to Dan A figurative way of referring to all of Israel, including the southern and northern extents.

30:6 return to Yahweh Hezekiah reminds the remaining Israelites of God's promise at the temple's original dedication: If the people humble themselves and return to Yahweh, then He will forgive them and heal their land (see 2 Chron 7:14 and note).

30:7 he made them as a desolation A fulfillment of God's promise at the temple's original dedication (see 7:19–22).

30:8 his fierce anger See 28:11 and note.

30:9 Yahweh your God is gracious and compassionate Hezekiah's message would surely resonate with the chronicler's audience of returned exiles (see note on 7:14). The emphasis on God's compassion and mercy would have encouraged them to stay faithful as they reestablished temple worship.

30:11 men from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun Only three of the 10 tribes responded positively to Hezekiah's invitation.

30:13 the Feast of Unleavened Bread See note on Lev 23:6.

30:14 the Wadi Kidron See note on 2 Chr 29:16.

30:16 according to the law of Moses The Chronicler emphasizes that the people acted faithfully to the Law (see 8:13 and note).

30:18 from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun While only three tribes responded positively to Hezekiah's invitation (v. 11), it appears that individuals from other tribes (e.g., Ephraim and Issachar) also came.

May the good Yahweh make atonement The Hebrew word used here, *kipper*, often translated "pardon," is the same word used for atonement (see note on Lev 4:20).

Atonement

30:19 whose heart is set to seek God Emphasizes the inner purity of the participants. Even though some of the participants were not ritually pure, they received atonement (2 Chron 30:18). For the theme of seeking God, see note on 11:16.

30:20 and he healed the people The Hebrew word used here, *rapha*, can refer to a physical healing (Lev 13:18). It also carries the sense of "to make whole" or "to restore." This represents a fulfillment of Yahweh's promise at the temple's dedication (see 2 Chron 7:14 and note).

30:22 seven days The same length as Solomon's celebration when the temple was dedicated (2 Chron 7:8–10).

30:23 Then the whole assembly Includes the people of Judah, priests, Levites, the people who came from Israel, and foreigners who were living in Judah and Israel (v. 25).

seven more days This celebration lasts twice as long as the one at the temple's original dedication.

30:26 nothing such as this in Jerusalem After Solomon's reign, the kingdom was divided into Israel in the north and Judah in the south. No celebration since had included both kingdoms.

30:27 and blessed the people Most likely a reference to the priestly blessing. See Num 6:23–27 and note.

and their prayer came The Chronicler often emphasizes that God hears and answers prayers (see 1 Chr 4:10 and note).

his holy dwelling place in the heavens See note on 2 Chron 6:21.

31:1 all Israel who were found Like other faithful kings, Hezekiah removed all the high places and Asherim (see 14:3 and note). However, this case is unique in that all the people participated in the destruction of the pagan altars.

Ephraim, and Manasseh See note on 30:1. For the first time, the destruction of the high places includes the tribes of the northern kingdom.

31:2–21 Hezekiah's reforms conclude with his organization of the priests and Levites, following the example of David (see note on 1 Chr 23:1–26:32).

31:3 out of his own possessions Hezekiah follows David's example by giving his own wealth to support the temple work (see 1 Chr 29:2–5).

the burnt offerings for the morning and the evening See note on Exod 29:36–42.

Sabbaths, new moon festivals See note on Isa 1:13.

31:4 a gift for the priests Hezekiah restores support for the priests and Levites. See Num 18:9–19 and note.

31:5 And they brought tithes of everything in abundance Just as David completed his temple preparations by taking an offering for the temple (see 1 Chr 29:6 and note), Hezekiah commands the people to give to the priests and Levites. The offering is great, just as it was with David (1 Chr 29:9).

31:7 In the third month Around the time of the Feast of Weeks (see Lev 23:15–22 and note).

Israelite Calendar Table

Israelite Festivals Table

in the seventh month Around the time of the Feast of Booths (see Lev 23:33–44 and note).

31:8 they blessed Yahweh and his people Israel Hezekiah again follows the examples of David and Solomon by blessing the people (1 Chr 16:2; 2 Chr 6:3).

31:10 Yahweh has blessed his people The Chronicler draws a specific connection between the faithfulness of the people and the blessing of God.

31:14 gatekeeper of the east A position of responsibility. In David's original division, the east gate had the most gatekeepers (see 1 Chr 26:14 and note).

31:20 good and what is right and what is faithful Just as in 2 Kings, Hezekiah is portrayed as an example of faithfulness (e.g., 2 Kgs 18:5–7).

31:21 to seek his God See note on 2 Chron 11:16.

and he prospered The Chronicler again shows that those who seek God are blessed and prosperous (13:18; 14:7; 20:20; 26:5).¹

Romans 15:1-22

Vs 1 - The Spiritually mature watching out for their conduct amongst those who are not. (see Romans 14 for background)

PRAY for one another:

Romans 15:13

“I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in Him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

S/G ?????

Vs 19a – **Where are these in my life? What are these? Can I explain any of His power working in my life? How about in other Christians' lives? These are my testimony.**

¹⁹ They were convinced by the power of miraculous signs and wonders and by the power of God's Spirit. In this way, I have fully presented the Good News of Christ from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum.

The Relationship between the Weak and the Strong (Rom 14:1–15:13). The Roman community was experiencing tension between the “weak” and the “strong.” The “weak” observed the distinction between clean (kosher) and unclean food as well as a presumably Jewish calendar (14:2–3, 5, 6, 20–21). This does not necessarily mean that the “weak” of the letter must refer to Jews, however, as these customs were popular among non-Christ-believing Roman Gentiles. Many former godfearers within the Roman synagogues would have continued their Jewish practices in the churches. The “strong,” on the other hand, neither observed such customs nor saw any need for them, and this difference in practice and opinion apparently led to conflict.

Love, which fulfills the law (13:7–10), should express itself in the relationship between the weak and the strong. The weak are not to judge the strong for their exercise of freedom, and the strong are not to judge the weak for their convictions. When they come together, the strong ought to forego their liberty for the sake of the weak so that they do not cause the weak to stumble by enticing them to eat certain foods. The strong could harm the faith of the weak, rather than build them up (15:2). Christ's own self-sacrifice should be the model for the behavior they are to express toward each other (15:3). As Christ welcomed them, they should welcome each other (15:7). Paul closes with a catena of biblical quotations that stresses the full inclusion of the Gentiles among God's people (15:9–12), which he then applies to the Romans (15:13).

¹ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (2 Ch 30:1–31:21). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Conclusion and Final Greetings (Rom 15:14–16:27)

After stressing the full inclusion of the Gentiles among God's people (15:7–13), Paul explains that he can boldly write to the Romans since he is a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles; thus, they are the recipients of his apostolic ministry (15:14–16). Paul even *boasts* in Christ Jesus of his ministry to win the obedience of the Gentiles (15:17–18). Because of that ministry, Paul has proclaimed the gospel all the way from Jerusalem to Illyricum (northwest of Macedonia, along the northeastern shore of the Adriatic). He plans, after taking the collection to Jerusalem, to continue his ministry westward to Spain (15:22–29). He solicits the Romans' prayers that the dangerous trip to Jerusalem may succeed and that he may eventually enjoy their company (15:30–33). The final chapter of the letter requests that the Romans greet several individuals, many of whom have been assisting Paul in his missionary labors, especially Phoebe (16:1–16). Perhaps many of these individuals had gone to Rome to prepare for Paul's travels to Spain. The letter concludes with a warning against those who teach contrary to the doctrine the Romans have learned (16:17–20), along with final greetings (16:21–23) and a closing doxology (16:25–27).²

14:1 These are guidelines with respect to things that are neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture.

14:2 Among Christians there is room for toleration and differences of strictness regarding such issues as eating habits (vv. 2-4) and observing special days in the Christian life (vv. 5, 6). Since both parties do it to honor the Lord (v. 6), neither should look down on the other. Yet Paul does say that the Christian who refuses to eat certain things is **weak** (immature) in the faith since eating is really morally relative. (v. 1; see 1 Tim. 4:3-5).

14:6 See note on vv. 2, 3.

14:10 Christians are not to **judge** each other with reference to the practice of morally neutral issues (see vv. 3, 4), since each individual is responsible to God (see v. 12). As Lord (v. 9), the right of such judgment belongs to Christ. Weak and strong Christians alike **shall all stand**, not at each other's judgment seats, but **before the judgment seat of Christ**. That judgment will be based on what we have done in this life (2 Cor. 5:10). It will not determine whether or not we enter heaven, but will determine degrees of reward in heaven (see note on 2:6).

14:13 Paul directs this counsel primarily to the mature, urging them to practice self-limitation in exercising their liberty lest they offend others (see vv. 20, 21).

14:14 Christians can eat all foods and need not follow the dietary laws of the OT. See marginal note on Mark 7:19; Acts 10:9-16; Col. 2:16, 17; 1 Tim. 4:3-5.

14:17 Dietary laws are relatively trivial, and their fulfillment is not essential to God's reign. Of far more importance is the fruit of **the Holy Spirit** (see Gal. 5:22, 23).

14:22 Faith here is one's conviction that he is free from all unnecessary scruples. He must not, however, flaunt his liberty recklessly over the weak in faith.

² Das, A. A. (2016). [Romans, Letter to the](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

14:23 A person who has scruples about matters not wrong in and of themselves should not act contrary to his conscience, because to violate the conscience is not acting in **faith** but is **sin**.

15:1 Christ is the model of conduct in relationships between weak and strong Christians. His example demands mutual forbearance and love, and if followed will result in a unity of harmonious praise to God (v. 6).

15:1 See section 1 of Truth-In-Action at the end of Rom.

15:4 See section 2 of Truth-In-Action at the end of Rom.

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

15:5 Receiving One Another Is the Way to Oneness, FAMILY ORDER. It has been said that most teaching on family life is simply an application of what it means to live as a Christian. These verses in Rom. are directed to the Christian community at large, yet they are a frequently used wedding text, for they present a beautiful and fitting description of Christian marriage.

The key word is “receive” (Greek *proslambano*), which means “to take to oneself.” Its root indicates strong action toward us—that in Christ, God literally came to us and took hold of us “while we were still sinners” (5:8). By that act of acceptance He released the grace of God and set in motion the powers of redemption.

When that power is allowed to work in a family, it will transform the lives of two imperfect people into one life, lived to the praise of God’s glory. Therefore, the Lord sets this word like a banner over marriage from the first day until the last, “Receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.”

15:7 Not only are the “strong” to adjust to the “weak” (see note on 14:13), but the matter of acceptance is to be two-way (v. 7). This was modeled by **Christ**, the *Jewish* Messiah who accepted **Gentiles**. This mutual acceptance of Jew and Gentile by Christ is then supported by a catena of OT scriptures.

15:13 The Holy Spirit imparts not only spiritual gifts to the believer, but also **joy** and **peace** and **hope** (see 14:17).

15:14 Admonish: Exhort, counsel. Christians are often the best counselors for one another, especially when they understand the will of God as taught in Scripture, and are able to apply Scripture rightly to life.

15:18 Not accomplished: This apparently means that Paul will speak of things that Christ *has* accomplished through him, **in word and deed**, that is, by the proclamation of the truth, by its demonstration in miracles and powerful answers to prayer, and in his own example of a Christlike life.

15:19 Signs and wonders accompanied Paul’s preaching to authenticate it in the eyes of those who heard. This was the NT pattern (see Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 14:3; 15:12; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4). Based on that pattern and the gifts described in 1 Cor. 12:9, 10, 28, it seems appropriate to expect miracles today as well. **Illyricum:** A Roman province located in modern day Yugoslavia and Albania, on the east coast of the Adriatic Sea.

15:23 Place: Probably “place to preach the gospel” (see v. 20). **These parts:** Paul was writing from Corinth, but perhaps his meaning was that he had preached in all God’s commissioned places for him in Asia Minor and Greece and he was therefore ready to move further west.

15:24 To Spain: Paul was hoping to visit Rome, minister there (1:11), be encouraged and supported by the church in Rome, and then continue westward to preach in Spain. He probably did this after his imprisonment at the end of Acts.

15:25 Paul was **going to Jerusalem** with an offering to help poor Christians there (see Acts 19:21; 20:1-21:16; 2 Cor. 8; 9).

15:26 Macedonia: Northern Greece, including Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. **Achaia:** Southern Greece, including Corinth.

15:27 Though Christians in Greece were separated from the poor Christians in Jerusalem by many days in terms of communication and transportation, Paul nonetheless said that they had a **duty** to send aid to meet the needs of those distant believers—a principle the church would do well to heed today, also (see 1 John 3:17).

15:30 Paul knew that even the **prayers** of those whom he had never met could be very effective before God, so he asked that they pray for him.³

Psalm 25:1-15

Proverbs 20:13-15

³ Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Ro 14:1–15:30). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

August 2

2 Chronicles 32:1-33:13

32:6b-8 – There is a power far greater on our side!

32:1-23 Sennacherib's invasion of Judah also is recorded in 2 Kgs 18:13–19:37 and Isa 36:1–37:38. The Chronicler provides fewer details than those accounts.

32:1 After these things and these acts of faithfulness The chronicler emphasizes the connection between Hezekiah's faithful restoration of temple worship and God's protection of Judah from Sennacherib's attack. Second Kings and Isaiah set these events in the 14th year of Hezekiah's reign. See Isa 36:1 and note.

Sennacherib the king of Assyria Sennacherib ruled Assyria around 705–681 BC.

Date	Event
725–722 BC	Assyrians besiege Samaria. The Israelites are defeated and sent into exile.
705 BC	Sennacherib becomes king.
701 BC	Sennacherib invades Judah.
681 BC	Sennacherib is assassinated by two of his sons.

32:2 and that his face was set for battle against Jerusalem The Chronicler does not include details of Hezekiah's attempt to buy peace from Assyria (2 Kgs 18:14–16).

32:3-6 Hezekiah takes several measures to protect Jerusalem. He cuts off the water supply outside the city, in order to hinder the Assyrians. He also repairs the wall and constructs fortifications. Finally, he builds more weapons and organizes the army.

32:7 Be strong! Be courageous Hezekiah's speech echoes Yahweh's encouragement to Joshua (Josh 1:6–9), as well as David's charge to Solomon (1 Chr 22:13).

32:8 to help us and to fight our battles Hezekiah focuses not on his own preparations, but on Yahweh's help. He contrasts the human power of the Assyrian army with the divine power on Judah's side.

32:9-19 Sennacherib's speech in 2 Chronicles combines several separate speeches (see 2 Kgs 18:19–25, 28–35; 19:9–13). A parallel account of this episode appears in Isa 36.

32:9 Lachish A fortified city about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem.

32:10 On what are you relying that you are dwelling in siege works in Jerusalem? Sennacherib's message focuses on trust as he disparages Hezekiah's trust in God (see note on Isa 36:5). This is a theme throughout Chronicles as those who trust or rely on God are rewarded with victory (compare 2 Chron 13:18 and note; 14:11 and note; 16:7–9).

32:11 to die by starvation and thirst The language in 2 Kings is more graphic, as the Assyrian commander warns that the people will have to eat their own dung and drink their own urine (2 Kgs 18:27). Blockades such as this often led to desperate measures, as the enemy cut off a city's food and water supply (compare 2 Kgs 6:24–29).

32:12 his high places and his altars Sennacherib wrongly assumes that the high places were devoted to Yahweh, and that their removal would turn Him against Hezekiah (2 Chron 31:1).

32:13 the gods of the nations of Sennacherib equates Yahweh with the deities of nations that he already had defeated. See 2 Kgs 18:34; Isa 36:19.

32:16 And still more his servants said See note on 2 Chron 32:9–19.

32:17 to treat Yahweh the God of Israel with contempt The Hebrew word used here, *chereph*, means “to taunt.” Goliath used it when he defied the Israelite army (1 Sam 17:10). It often is used in the Psalms to describe the psalmist's enemies (e.g., Pss 42:10; 44:16; 89:51).

32:18 in Judean Rather than in Aramaic, the common international language during this period. See note on Isa 36:11.

to frighten them and terrify them Sennacherib's intention was to cause panic in Jerusalem.

32:20–23 The Chronicler gives a very short account of God's protection of Jerusalem. Unlike the parallel accounts in 2 Kgs 19 and Isa 37, the 2 Chronicles passage does not provide the prayers of Hezekiah and Isaiah, focusing instead on God's response.

32:21 Yahweh sent an angel Elsewhere described as the “angel of Yahweh” (2 Kgs 19:35; Isa 37:36). See note on Psa 34:7.

and he destroyed every mighty warrior of strength See Isa 37:36.

And he returned with shamed face Sennacherib describes his siege of Jerusalem in his official annals, stating that he trapped Hezekiah “like a bird in a cage.” However, he does not include any information about his defeat.

the house of his god Elsewhere identified as the god Nisroch (2 Kgs 19:37; Isa 37:38).

32:22 and gave them rest all around The Chronicler again emphasizes peace and prosperity as a result of faithfulness. This is seen throughout Chronicles (compare 2 Chron 14:7 and note; 15:15; 20:30; 1 Chr 22:9).

32:23 so that he was exalted Not only did God deliver Hezekiah and Judah from Assyria, but He also provided wealth and honor (see note on 2 Chron 32:27).

32:24 Hezekiah fell ill See Isa 38:1–22 and note.

and gave him a sign The sign was the sun turning back (see Isa 38:8 and note).

32:25 his heart became proud Hezekiah's pride led him to show a Babylonian envoy all his treasuries and storehouses (compare 2 Kgs 20:12–21 and note; Isa 39:1–8 and note).

32:26 in the days of Hezekiah See Isa 39:8 and note.

32:27 very much wealth and honor A sign of God's blessing and Hezekiah's faithfulness. Similar statements are made regarding David (1 Chr 29:28), Solomon (2 Chron 1:14–17 and note; 9:22), and Jehoshaphat (17:5; 18:1).

32:30 the waters of the upper Gihon See 2 Kgs 20:20 and note.

32:32 his loyal love This epitaph for Hezekiah focuses on his good deeds (compare 2 Chron 13:22; 26:22; 27:7).

the visions of Isaiah Appears to refer to a section or smaller work included in the larger work called the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah. For a similar situation, compare the chronicles of Jehu (20:34 and note). The vision of Isaiah mentioned here may be the same as the work attributed to Isaiah in 26:22.

the scroll of the kings of Judah and Israel See note on 16:11.

32:33 slept with his ancestors See note on 9:31.

33:1–20 Second Chronicles and 2 Kings both focus on Manasseh's wickedness, portraying him as the worst of Judah's kings (vv. 2–9; compare 2 Kgs 21:1–18). However, 2 Kings does not record Manasseh's imprisonment and subsequent repentance (2 Chr 33:10–13), which are central to the Chronicler's account. This emphasis shows God fulfilling His promise to restore those who humble themselves (see 7:14)—a lesson that would resonate with the Chronicler's audience of returned exiles.

33:1 Manasseh The longest-reigning king of either Israel or Judah—as well as one of the most wicked. Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah (through Hephzibah) and the grandfather of Josiah, reigned circa 697–642 BC.

Manasseh

Manasseh's reputation for wickedness was based on his devotion to Canaanite idols. He rebuilt the high places that his father, Hezekiah, had torn down. He also constructed altars for Baal and made Asherah poles. The king sacrificed his own son to a god and practiced witchcraft and divination. The Chronicler records that Manasseh's wickedness led to his deportation to Babylon by Ashurbanipal, the king of Assyria. While in Babylon, Manasseh repented, humbled himself before Yahweh, and prayed for mercy (vv. 12–13). Yahweh responded favorably to Manasseh's prayer and returned him to power in Jerusalem. Manasseh removed the foreign idols and destroyed their altars. He restored the temple, offered sacrifices to Yahweh, and commanded the people to worship Yahweh.

33:2 And he did evil The Chronicler also makes this judgment of Jehoram (21:6) and Ahaziah (22:4). Manasseh, however, is portrayed as more evil than these two or any of Judah's other kings (see note on 2 Kgs 21:1–18).

the detestable things of the nations Manasseh's sins (especially in 2 Chron 33:6) closely follow the list of abominable practices in Deuteronomy. See Deut 18:9–14 and note.

33:3 he rebuilt the high places Manasseh reverses the reforms made by Hezekiah (2 Chron 31:1).
, made Asherahs See note on 14:3.

and bowed down to the host of heaven Refers to worshiping celestial objects. See note on Jer 8:2.

33:4 altars in the house of Yahweh Manasseh continues to reverse Hezekiah's reforms. He defiles the temple Hezekiah had cleansed by setting up altars to foreign gods inside it (compare 2 Chron 29:16).

33:6 he himself burned his sons in the fire Manasseh follows the example of his grandfather, Ahaz (compare 28:3; see note on 2 Kgs 16:3). The list of evil practices here closely parallels Deut 18:10–11.

in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom See note on Jer 7:31.

33:7 In this house The Chronicler contrasts Manasseh's violations of the covenant with this reiteration of it. By placing an idol in the temple, Manasseh defiled the place where God had chosen to put His name.

33:9 the nations that Yahweh destroyed Refers to the prior inhabitants of the promised land, who were driven out because of their idolatry.

33:10 but they would not listen Indicates that Manasseh had opportunity to repent.

33:12 and greatly humbled himself Manasseh, who had violated God's covenant by defiling the temple (2 Chron 33:7), now humbles himself in the manner described by God at the temple's dedication (see 7:14 and note).

33:13 and heard his plea The Chronicler again emphasizes that God hears and answers prayers (see note on 30:27).

And Manasseh knew that Yahweh was God The story of Manasseh's repentance and restoration undoubtedly would have resonated with the Chronicler's audience of returned exiles. Just like Manasseh, they had been taken captive to Babylon and then restored to the land of promise.

33:15 he removed the foreign gods and the carved image Manasseh reverses his earlier practices (2 Chron 33:4–5).

33:18 his prayer to his God This epitaph focuses on Manasseh's prayer of repentance rather than his evil (compare 2 Kgs 21:17).

the words of the kings of Israel See note on 2 Chr 16:11.

33:19 the words of the seers This is the only reference to the Chronicles of the Seers (or “of Hozai”)—the specific seer or seers referenced seem to be among those who spoke to Manasseh (v. 18), although this could be a reference to a larger collection of information from, or about, seers of Israel and Judah (compare 1 Chr 29:29).

33:20 slept with his ancestors See note on 2 Chr 9:31.

and they buried him in his house The account in Kings adds that he was buried in the garden of Uzza (see 2 Kgs 21:18 and note).

33:21–25 The reign of Amon (ca. 642–640 BC) is given very little treatment in 2 Chronicles and 2 Kings (see 2 Kgs 21:19–26 and note). He is wicked like his father, Manasseh, but he does not humble himself (2 Chron 33:23). He is killed by his servants, just as Joash was (24:25), although neither 2 Chronicles nor 2 Kings provides details of the conspiracy.

33:25 the people of the land See note on 2 Kgs 11:14.⁴

Romans 15:23-16:9

15:30b – “Do this because of your love for me. Given to you by the Holy Spirit.”
Holy Spirit gives us love for one another. Have I ever prayed and asked for this?

16: Women in Paul’s life/ministry. (Handout?)

Phoebe...Junia...

Conclusion and Final Greetings (Rom 15:14–16:27)

After stressing the full inclusion of the Gentiles among God’s people (15:7–13), Paul explains that he can boldly write to the Romans since he is a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles; thus, they are the recipients of his apostolic ministry (15:14–16). Paul even *boasts* in Christ Jesus of his ministry to win the obedience of the Gentiles (15:17–18). Because of that ministry, Paul has proclaimed the gospel all the way from Jerusalem to Illyricum (northwest of Macedonia, along the northeastern shore of the Adriatic). He plans, after taking the collection to Jerusalem, to continue his ministry westward to Spain (15:22–29). He solicits the Romans’ prayers that the dangerous trip to Jerusalem may succeed and that he may eventually enjoy their company (15:30–33). The final chapter of the letter requests that the Romans greet several individuals, many of whom have been assisting Paul in his missionary labors, especially Phoebe (16:1–16). Perhaps many of these individuals had gone to Rome to prepare for Paul’s travels to Spain. The letter concludes with a warning against those who teach contrary to the doctrine the Romans have learned (16:17–20), along with final greetings (16:21–23) and a closing doxology (16:25–27).⁵

⁴ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (2 Ch 32:1–33:25). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁵ Das, A. A. (2016). *Romans, Letter to the*. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Romans 14

Romans 14:1–12

Paul begins the chapter with a clear command for us to accept those who are weak in faith, but he adds an interesting caveat: We are to accept these weaker believers without quarreling over opinions. Why did Paul think it important to include this warning? Those who are called to accept a weaker brother or sister are, by implication, stronger in regard to their faith. In 14:2 Paul provides a practical example of the stronger having faith to eat anything (including meat sacrificed to idols) without raising issues of conscience, whereas the weaker (perhaps still wary of the law) eats only vegetables. In 14:3 he provides the rationale for his caveat. People have a tendency to look down on—literally, “despise”—those who behave differently than they do, whether eating or refraining from eating.

The picture Paul paints is not one of people who are unwilling to accept others into fellowship, but one where the stronger believer judges or despises the weaker based on the restrictions of their conscience. The “quarreling about opinions” that Paul mentions in verse 1 suggests that the stronger believer has ulterior motives for accepting the weaker—like changing their view on a matter. If the stronger ones are convinced their position is more godly and righteous, they might think it reasonable to correct the weaker ones, to offer proper guidance on the matter in order to help them be strong too. Think of the effect such behavior would have on a church fellowship—or perhaps you have already experienced it.

Debating the Debatable: Paul’s exhortation to accept those who are weak in faith comes with a caveat: “but not for the sake of quarreling about opinions.” It is not enough to accept someone conditionally, with the view to changing them. If this is the motive for acceptance, then the acceptance is not genuine.

So why should we accept weaker believers without quarreling over their opinions—even if we think their faith should be stronger like ours? Paul tells us in the last part of verse 3 that we should accept them because God accepts them—He accepts the weak and the strong. Paul poses a rhetorical question in verse 4, essentially asking “Who are you to judge?” The principle he offers is that each person is accountable to their master. In this case, our master happens to be the creator of the universe. No human being—living or dead—has or can fulfill this role. Only God can judge, and everyone will stand or fall on the basis of His judgment alone.

Debating the Debatable: Why is it that we should accept those who are weaker in faith, without disputing with them over debatable matters? Because God has accepted them. There may be issues that need to be addressed, but our acceptance of fellow believers must not be based on the level of one’s faith.

As a new believer in my 20s, I came into the church with a fair amount of baggage—lingering sin issues that needed to be addressed. I was doing my best to spend time with God daily, to get involved in ministry, and to share my newfound faith with others, but I still had rough edges that needed smoothing out. Not surprisingly, the folks at church figured this out as well, and it was interesting to see the differences in how various people addressed my “weaknesses.” Some boldly pointed out the areas they believed I needed to change. Others brought me under their wings,

invited me into their homes, and spent time with me. The first group *told* me about their faith and what they thought of mine, whereas the second *modeled* their faith by sharing their lives with me. Over time, issue after issue, God continued the process He had begun the day I confessed my sin and accepted Jesus as my savior. And you can guess which group of folks proved most helpful as I sorted through these issues.

Paul believes this matter of not judging others to be so significant that he moves beyond food to another issue by which weaker believers might be judged: the sanctity of days of the week. In contrast to eating, he makes no judgment about which view represents the weaker or stronger, nor does he judge the legitimacy of such distinctions. He says the merit of any distinction should be based on each person's conscience in regard to the Lord, not on some exterior criteria. Maintaining distinctions should also be based on thankfulness to God rather than some other motivation like showing the superiority of your faith.

But, to apply these principles, even if I make some distinction that I feel compelled by God to obey, and even if it is derived from my thankfulness to God, I have no right to require this distinction of others or to judge them for not adopting my practice. Remember, God has accepted the other person and that is reason enough for me to do the same (14:3). Still, Paul provides another reason in verse 7: who we belong to in life or death. As redeemed followers of Christ, our lives are no longer driven by our interests or desires, but by the Lord's, whether in life or death (14:8a). Paul shifts back to a main exhortation in 14:8b, outlining the principle that is to govern our decisions in such matters. We are the Lord's, and we answer to Him. The same holds true for every believer, weak or strong.

Therefore when we have differences of opinion about matters of faith, we must filter our views through the criteria Paul provides for us here. If Paul could point to some objective metric like the dietary laws or feast calendar that would provide a "correct" answer to such questions, it seems reasonable that he would have done so. Instead of laws, he says a person's conscience before God is the basis for weighing such matters.

The Clash: What happens when two believers disagree over a debatable matter when each is firmly convinced of their own opinion? They should accept each other without judgment or efforts to change each other.

In 14:10 Paul returns to the matter of judging a brother or sister. God is the judge, and He alone will judge us for how we receive other believers. Just as Paul directs believers to God's sovereignty in his discussion of election in 9:19–21, he appeals in 14:11 to God's role as final judge and arbiter: Each of us will give an accounting for our behavior (14:12). Paul seems more focused here on being judged for judging others rather than being judged for a matter of conscience.

When new believers come into our lives—whether new in the faith or new to us—Paul's command and caveat in 14:1 provide clear direction against receiving them with ulterior motives. If God has accepted that person, then that should be good enough for us. Yes, Scripture gives clear warnings, like those Paul gives in Acts 20:28–29, to be wary of false believers who will deceive the flock; we need to exercise prudence and discernment. Yet we also need to leave judgment to God and His Spirit. We are not forbidden from judging, but we are warned that the same measure we use on others will be used on us (Luke 6:37–38).

Romans 14:13–23

Paul's big idea of the preceding section is receiving those who were weak—without judging or despising them. In this section, he shifts his focus from receiving to judging. He also shifts from the specific matter of judging a weaker believer to a more general focus on judging one another without taking faith into consideration. In 14:13 Paul provides a negative and a positive exhortation. This pairing gives us insight into his specific concerns.

His negative prohibition is the same as in 14:3, exhorting believers not to judge others. Paul repeats the same Greek root word used in this part about not judging others in a second exhortation in 14:13. However, the parallelism is lost in translation, since the object in the first exhortation is a person, whereas the object in the second is a thing that we purpose or decide to do. In the second exhortation, Paul also includes a rhetorical device, a forward-pointing reference to draw attention to this new idea even though he uses the same verb in both. At the end of verse 13, he uses “this” to point ahead to something we are *not* to do: We are not to be or to place a stumbling block or temptation before a fellow believer.

In the first part of the chapter, Paul portrays judging as a hindrance to fully receiving believers into fellowship. Here the repercussions are much more severe. Paul uses the same term Jesus uses in Luke 17:1–2 as a dire warning to those who are a stumbling block or trap for others. The Lord declares it would be better to have a millstone tied on one's neck and be thrown into the sea than to cause another to stumble. Thus, Paul moves beyond the call to leave judgment to God and points to the direct condemnation of this behavior.

Stumbling over Opinions: When we hold different opinions, we can easily place more value on our own ideas than on those held by the person with whom we disagree. Instead of judging or despising those with whom we differ, we need be wary not to cause them to stumble and keep in mind that we will all give an accounting before God for our actions.

Paul lays down a principle in 14:14 as if it represents conventional wisdom with which all of his readers should be familiar and that all would accept. Paul structures his argument as an untrue statement, until you reach the caveat at the end. Some things are unclean in and of themselves, but the basis for this determination is not some external, objective criteria. Instead the basis is an individual's conscience before God. This principle restricts my personal rights and freedoms and links the exercise of my freedom in Christ to its impact on believers around me.

Although I may have the faith to do something in clear conscience, there is another factor I must take into consideration. In Christ there is nothing unclean in and of itself. However, if a member of our fellowship believes his or her conscience forbids eating this or drinking that, everyone in our fellowship is called to place a higher value on not negatively impacting that brother or sister than on exercising our own freedom.

A Clean Perspective: In Christ nothing is considered unclean in and of itself. However, this does not mean that everything is considered clean by all believers. If someone's conscience leads them to consider something unclean, then it is unclean for them. In such cases, we need to be careful that our exercise of freedom does not grieve or cause believers to stumble.

Paul reminds us in verse 15 what the Christian life is really about. We have been set free from bondage to sin so we are able to love others as God has always intended, based on His Spirit's work in our lives. But if we place a higher value on our eating and drinking than on our love for others, what kind of faith is that? How strong is my faith if I put my own interests first?

Jesus had already declared that nothing is inherently unclean (Mark 7:14–23). The Spirit impressed the same lesson on Peter in Acts 10:9–33, in anticipation of Gentile believers receiving the Holy Spirit in the same manner as the apostles—without the laying on of hands. These passages outline one-half of the equation—that there is no person or food that can somehow harm our standing with God. But Paul provides a balancing principle in Romans 14 that restricts the extent to which this freedom can be enjoyed.

Weighing the Importance: While it is true that we have freedom in Christ, that freedom was given to enable us to fully serve God, not our appetites. If we love exercising our freedom more than we love our fellow believer, then what is the point?

Paul frames the issue to highlight what our decisions say about our priorities. In 14:15, he poignantly highlights the issues at stake. Do we really place a higher priority on the food we eat than on how our eating habits may affect fellow believers? If so, then Paul says we are choosing to destroy a person—a person for whom Christ died—for the sake of exercising our freedom. In 14:17 he introduces things that should tilt the scales in favor of strong faith: righteousness, peace, and joy.

Weighing the Importance: Although all things are clean, nothing is important enough to cause another believer to stumble. If we place greater value on food than on people, then we are no longer living in according to love.

Freedom from dietary restrictions for the sake of religious purity opens the door for us to enjoy most anything God has created. Furthermore, our country's laws also guarantee certain rights and freedoms. Nevertheless, believers face a higher calling: placing the needs of others before their own. If we focus on our freedoms at the expense of others, Paul says in verse 16 that we run the risk of undermining any positive testimony of our faith. He counters this negative picture with a positive one in verse 18. Honoring others serves Christ, which wins God's pleasure and people's approval. No food or freedom is worth these.

In the final paragraph of the chapter, Paul introduces closing exhortations that are logical consequences of his earlier remarks. The exhortation to pursue behavior that brings peace and edification provides a positive corollary to the prohibitions against judging and despising fellow believers for their stand on debatable matters (14:19). Paul supports this corollary in verse 20, where he reiterates that the pursuit of Christian freedom at another believer's expense destroys the work of God for the sake of food.

So although there is freedom in Christ, its effect on others becomes a very practical limit on that freedom. In 14:21 Paul shows us what this looks like in practice: Since it is better to abstain from what is permitted than to offend, weaken, or cause another to stumble, having the stronger faith cuts both ways. Although it might enable me to eat or drink things others could not, it also obligates me to willingly opt out of partaking in what is permissible for me. In 1 Corinthians 6:12–13, Paul

describes the same principle in a slightly different way. All things may be permissible, but they may also be unprofitable based on how my actions affect others. This principle now overrides specific rules and laws for judgments about Christian liberty. Unfortunately, principles are hazier than rules, and they can vary from context to context. These factors demand us to be both vigilant and considerate.

The final verse is one that has caused me trouble over the years. This is a natural consequence of it being a principle instead of a rule. When I was a new believer, I knew there were things I should abstain from based on the negative impact they had on me before. But over time, as I gained more self-control and maturity, I began reconsidering whether it was really necessary to give up those things. I saw other believers doing them, and most of them had been following Jesus for a lot longer than I had. If all things are lawful and permissible, why shouldn't I enjoy the same kind of freedom as the others? Here is where conscience comes in. It is not a matter of needing more faith to do something less advisable; it is a matter of how God has wired each of us. Some are able to do something without any twinge of conscience, without any doubt about its permissibility. Others, like me, know the doubts and questions in my heart that will condemn me. So if I choose to partake in something on the basis of seeing others do so, then for me it is not an exercise of faith, but an exercise in sin. And having been set free from bondage to sin, I have no desire to reclaim it in the name of "freedom."

Romans 15

Romans 15:1-13

In this next chapter, Paul continues his discussion contrasting how the weak and strong are to treat one another. He no longer mentions the basis for the distinction—like eating, drinking, or observing special days. Paul has given more than enough examples of things that might cause tension in the Christian community. These principles may have derived from disputes over foods or holidays, but they apply much more broadly. Thus, in this section, the breadth of application for Paul's exhortations has no stated bounds.

In Romans 14:1, he exhorts us to accept the weaker believer without quarreling over debatable matters. He follows with commands not to judge or despise others for the exercise of their faith, be it weak or strong (14:3, 13). He also gives commands not to destroy or tear others down based on what they do or do not do (14:17, 20). God has accepted them, which is the only criterion for us to accept them as well (14:3).

Paul's exhortations in this section shift away from a focus on corrective prohibitions to positive corollaries that should guide our judgments on these matters. In 15:1, he calls us to do two things: to bear with the weaknesses of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Pairing these two actions suggests that bearing with one another's weaknesses will not be all fun and games. Instead, it may mean abstaining from pleasurable and otherwise permissible things for the sole purpose of helping a weaker believer.

In 15:2, Paul discusses shifting our goal from pleasing ourselves to pleasing others for their good and for the purpose of their edification. Paul is not calling us all to let other believers take advantage of us. He gives us qualifications that tell us that the basis for pleasing them is what is in

their best interest—things that would lead to their edification. These qualifiers serve as a safeguard. Paul holds Christ Jesus up in verse 3 as our model of one who made the ultimate choice to edify others over pleasing Himself. We find a parallel picture in Ephesians 5:25–26, where Paul portrays Christ’s sacrifice for the church as based on the goal of sanctifying and cleansing it—the very type of edification he is commanding here.

If we pause to think about weak and strong, we realize Paul has never explicitly labeled either the Gentiles or the Jews with these terms. He has referred to issues of conscience that might be a matter of derision for either group, but he wisely opted not to use labels. By being less specific about whom he has in mind as weak or strong, Paul can more broadly apply his principles.

Think back to our discussion of the human tendency to think more highly of ourselves than we should. Most of us would prefer to consider ourselves strong in faith. Instead Paul declares that strength does not entitle us to pursue our freedoms—it obligates us to use this strength for the edification of others, even to our own hurt and at the sacrifice of our own pleasure.

How does all of this relate to the church in Rome? If those who believe their faith is strong have been causing dissension by accepting weaker brothers for the purpose of correcting, judging, or despising them, then Paul’s exhortations have turned the tables on them. Although they might identify themselves as strong, their self-centered and judgmental behavior toward other believers will reveal their hypocrisy.

Showing Your Strength: What makes us strong, the ability to act or the discipline not to act? We may have the strength of faith to do something with a clear conscience, but Paul provides another consideration we must take into account.

As Paul declares in 6:1, God did not give us strong faith so we could fulfill our own desires any more than He set us free from sin so that we could continue sinning. He gave us freedom and spiritual gifts so that we could be instruments of His righteousness (6:13) for the building up of fellow believers. Paul sees this self-centered, self-serving view of strong faith as “conformist” thinking that must be transformed by the renewing of our minds (12:3). Such faith will not impress God. Paul says believers focused on their own pleasure at the expense of edifying those around them are themselves weak and in need of edification.

The way Paul structures this section, including his lack of identification of the weak and the strong, allows him to extend these principles far beyond dietary laws or calendars. They present an aspirational description of a strong believer.

Showing Your Strength: Those who consider themselves strong demonstrate their strength by bearing with the weaknesses of the weak—not by exercising their freedom in Christ without consideration for others. From Paul’s perspective, strength is shown by pleasing our neighbor instead of ourselves.

If we claim to be strong and yet fail to edify those around us, our actions belie our words. To receive God’s affirmation of our faith—and that of believers around us—we must bear with the weaknesses of others and seek their edification rather than seeking our own pleasure.

We already learned that bearing with the weaknesses of others will likely entail unpleasantness, and Jesus' experience confirms this. God never promised a faithful life would be easy. Quite often the opposite turns out to be the case—thus we are called to patient endurance. And for those discouraging times when we wonder if our efforts are worth the cost, Paul reminds us in verse 4 that Scripture serves as the foundation of our encouragement. We cannot rely on our reasoning or experience alone.

Bearing with Weakness: Paul ties together several seemingly unrelated things to show the role each plays in achieving a larger goal.

When we choose to rely on the promises of Scripture, instead of our own understanding, as the foundation for our decisions, we find encouragement and increased hope that God is indeed working all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (8:28).

Paul affirms this idea by essentially renaming God in 15:5. By calling Him the God of patient endurance and encouragement, Paul is not narrowing our view of God—just the opposite. This thematically loaded expression casts Him in a very specific light, shaping our confidence in His character and motivating us to live in agreement with one another, as God desires us to do (see 12:18).

This progression leads to the fulfillment of many goals: As we seek to edify others through patient endurance, we find encouragement in Scripture, which leads us to greater hope and a sense of like-mindedness for all involved. These attitudes, in turn, lead to the end of judging and despising others—and ultimately to believers standing together, glorifying God as one body. Whatever discouragements we may face as we seek to edify others, we cannot allow those pitfalls to undermine our confidence in the joy that comes from obeying God's commands. In 15:7 Paul summarizes this call to look to Christ as our model for sacrificing for each other, with the ultimate goal of glorifying God.

As we progress through the chapter, we see Paul returning to his opening themes. Recall from the "Structure of Romans" section that Paul repeatedly digresses from the stated objective of the letter: announcing his intention to visit the church in Rome. His primary goal, of course, is to use these digressions to address key issues he intends to cover—but to do so less directly and thus avoid potentially alienating his audience. His exposition of the gospel, solidly grounded in both the Old Testament and a common-sense understanding of humanity's fallen state, establishes his rapport with this church he has likely never visited.

Paul describes God's plan of redemption as having natural consequences. Christ's death and resurrection atone for the consequences of sin. Creation should respond by patiently awaiting the final redemption that is coming (8:20–23). Likewise, as those who have received the gospel message await final redemption, they should give up their attempt to conform to this age, instead being transformed through the renewing of their minds (12:3). Freedom from slavery to sin demands us to respond by leading our lives in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (Phil 1:27).

As we know, Paul has other reasons for writing. Here he begins to tie the strings of his argument together as he refers to specific implications of points he raised earlier in the letter. The remainder of this section acts as a hinge, connecting his exposition and exhortations to his specific apostolic

calling to reach Gentiles—from Jerusalem to the northern reaches of the Roman Empire, namely Spain.

In 15:8–12 Paul once again digresses, in this case to strengthen his assertion in verse 7. He makes two points about Christ—one concerning Jews, one Gentiles. He grounds his call to accept one another in Christ’s acceptance of us, but then he segues from believers accepting one another within the church to Christ’s ministry to those outside the church. Christ came to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 15:24), as servant of the circumcision (see Rom 15:8), confirming God’s promises to the patriarchs. At the same time Christ also came to open the way for Gentile believers to glorify God—an outcome expected from the patriarchal promises.

In connecting the Gentile mission to God’s promises to Israel, Paul prepares his audience to shift gears with him, from exposition of the gospel to his hopes for spreading the gospel, in verse 14. He has just finished making the case that Jew and Gentile alike are under judgment for sin and need to respond in faith to God’s righteousness as revealed in Christ Jesus. In Romans 9–11, he highlights some important realities: The hardening of a portion of Israel to God’s message of salvation provides a window of opportunity for the Gentiles (11:25). The Gentiles’ response to the gospel will provoke jealousy in some of Paul’s countrymen. Thus by following his calling as apostle to the Gentiles, Paul has helped reach both Jews and Gentiles with the gospel (11:13–14).

In 15:9b–12, Paul quotes the Old Testament to demonstrate broader application of his claim that there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. The quotations remind us that God’s plan is intended for all of humanity—that was His goal from the very beginning. The covenant was never intended to shut some out; it was meant instead as the means to bring them in. The one in whom all—both Jews and Gentiles—could put their hope would come from Israel (Rom 15:12 from Isa 11:10). In Romans 15:13, Paul provides a benediction for this section, painting a complementary portrait of God as the God of hope (compare with 15:5) and reinforcing the themes of hope and encouragement we find as we seek to edify others. The key to abounding in hope, Paul says, is being filled with joy and peace made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit (see 8:26–30).

Romans 15:14–21

Paul tackles a wide range of topics in this letter, many of which may have seemed like new information to his readers. The same likely holds true for many of us as well. I have known for years that God promised to bless all the nations through Abraham (Gen 12:2–3). I have also read the many Old Testament promises to Israel about a remnant being preserved (as in Isa 10:22–23) or of God restoring His relationship with His people (Hos 1:10). But I never reconciled all of this divergent information into a unified picture of God’s plan for humanity. This complex letter is filled with details!

Paul presents us with a holistic view of many (not all) pieces of the puzzle, showing us how they all fit into the larger plan. Although it’s good to have our incorrect or incomplete notions set straight, such revelations can lead to unintended consequences. Faced with bigger changes and corrections, we can feel unsettled and lose some of our confidence in what we know. If I was wrong about all these things, how many *other* things about God and His plan have I misunderstood?

In this section, Paul provides some much-needed reassurance for his shaken readers. In 15:14, his declaration that he is fully convinced grabs his readers' attention and spotlights what it is he's convinced about. The "I myself" statement fulfills the same attention-getting role, interrupting the flow of the sentence in Greek. Paul uses a device I call "thematic addition" to connect the "you yourselves" back to the preceding context. Thus far, Paul has demonstrated his knowledge and goodness to the Roman believers, along with his ability to instruct them. The sentence about his full confidence draws attention to his assurance that *they too* are filled with goodness and all knowledge, and that *they too* are able to instruct one another. In other words, as much as his instruction—filling in gaps of knowledge or correcting misinformation—may have shaken their confidence in their knowledge of God, they should trust that God will use their knowledge and their goodwill toward one another to keep moving forward. They should not stand still and wait for his next letter to tell them what to think and do.

Full but Forgetting: The Romans, like us, may hold to a number of facts about God and His plan for humanity, but they may still need to sort them into a unified picture of the whole.

Paul acknowledges in verse 15 that he has been quite blunt in delivering his message, but that his purpose in writing has been to remind them of things they should have already known. Now, with this deeper understanding of the gospel and God's intention for it, they should be filled with confidence that God will continue to lead them forward.

Paul justifies his direct approach, not on the basis of his apostolic authority, but on the measure of grace God has given him. God extended His grace to Paul so that he could serve as a minister of Jesus Christ to reach the Gentiles with the gospel. Paul's goal is to lift up those who believe as an offering to God, like the one described in 12:1.

Full but Forgetting: In Paul's exposition of the gospel, he has taken seemingly unrelated facts and ideas from Scripture and shown how they all fit together into a unified plan for redeeming all of God's creation. Instead of presenting this as a brand new plan, Paul demonstrates the gospel has been God's plan from the beginning.

In 15:17, Paul closes with confidence in God's ability to bring about His plans. He spotlights God in verse 18 as the one who will accomplish these plans and declares that he will speak of nothing but what Christ has accomplished through him in leading the Gentiles to obedience to God. Paul can confidently boast that he has fully proclaimed the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum, attesting God's faithfulness in every city and town. His declaration raises an obvious question: What's next for Paul?

To Illyricum and Beyond: By describing how fully he has preached the gospel in Jerusalem, Illyricum, and the surrounding areas, Paul paves the way for mentioning his intent to take the gospel to Spain.

But before discussing his next geographic objective, Paul outlines in 15:20 the principle that guides his ministry of proclaiming the gospel: He preaches where Christ has not yet been named. Paul feels called to establish new congregations in areas the gospel has not yet reached, not for his own glory but for the spreading of the gospel. We know that he didn't simply plant a church and walk

away. As he says in Acts 15:36, he desires to visit and encourage the churches he and Barnabas planted. Nor has he been seeking to avoid addressing problems another preacher left behind: His letters to the Galatians and the Corinthians make clear that churches Paul planted are not immune to problems or dissention.

To Spain and Beyond: After fully preaching the gospel in Palestine and Asia, Paul felt called to preach where others had not yet gone: Spain. Part of Paul's desire to visit the church in Rome is his hope that they would support his mission efforts to Spain.

But having begun a new work in a place, Paul would train up leaders before moving on to new territory. His letters to Titus and Timothy illustrate how he delegated some of his leadership tasks, such as appointing qualified elders and ensuring sound doctrine was being taught (Titus 1:5; 1 Tim 1:3–4).

Paul bolsters his calling to boldly proclaim the gospel where it had not yet been heard by citing a passage from Isa 52:15 in which the Suffering Servant has been exalted and lifted up, his influence reaching many nations. Through this revelation of the Lord, kings are silenced because they have seen something they were never told, and they understand what they had not heard. Paul quotes this passage to present the image of the gospel—a new message—being revealed to and understood by a new audience.

Romans 15:22–33

As Paul explains his faithful proclamation of the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum and his call to preach where others have not, he sets the stage for circling back to the beginning of his letter: his stated intention to visit Rome. Remember how Paul opens his letter, describing his desire to come and visit the believers in Rome? Now, however, he discloses in greater detail exactly what is bringing him to Rome. He has something more in mind than just mutual encouragement and edification. The great city is a stopover on a much longer missionary journey to unreached parts of the known world.

In Romans 1:10, Paul tells us he hopes to succeed “at last” in visiting the church in Rome. He picks up this same idea in 15:22, where we learn that Paul has been hindered many times from visiting. One of the reasons he wishes to travel now is that he is looking for new places to preach the gospel. In 15:24, Paul states another reason for visiting: his hope that the Roman church will support him in going to Spain. But before he can visit, he must deliver the offering from Gentile believers in Macedonia and Achaia to the poor believers in Jerusalem.

As I Was Saying: The letter to the Romans began with a clearly stated purpose: Paul's desire to visit the church in Rome. But Paul carefully structured his letter around this formal purpose so he could go on to address important issues regarding how these believers understood the gospel. Finished with his exposition of the gospel and all its implications, Paul resumes the formal purpose of the letter by reiterating his desire to visit.

Why does Paul mention the Gentile origins of the gift? He is offering a practical implication of the principle outlined in 11:17–18. Since the Gentiles have shared in the spiritual blessings bestowed on them through Israel, they ought to share their financial blessings with the believers in Jerusalem (15:27). Why does Paul mention this offering here? By providing a rationale for believers in one area to financially support believers elsewhere, based on their shared spiritual bond in Christ, it would be natural for the Roman believers to practice this principle by sending Paul on his way to Spain with their own gift of support.

Paul closes this section by exhorting the Romans to pray on his behalf, that he would be rescued from “those who are disobedient” in Judaea, and that the offering he is delivering to Jerusalem would be acceptable to the saints (15:30–31). “The disobedient ones” may be a cryptic reference to Jews who oppose Paul’s proclamation of the gospel. Remember from Romans 11:28 that although the Jews are loved based on God’s promises, their opposition to the gospel makes them seem like enemies. Paul requests prayer for a safe and successful completion of his mission to Jerusalem so that he might come to Rome and rest (15:30).⁶

Romans 16

Romans 16:1–16

As we reach the end of Romans, we hit that dreaded part of the book: the personal greetings. Paul has finished his theological exposition, with his eminently preachable corrections and exhortations. Suddenly we feel like eavesdroppers, as he extends personal greetings to people we know nothing about except for their names. What is there to learn from Paul’s mention of them in this passage? Perhaps a lot more than you might think.

At face value, it may seem that Paul is sending shouts-out to specific people in the congregation, more specific than those in the greeting of Romans 1:7, “those in Rome who are beloved of God.” Although there are many greetings in Romans 16, Paul takes the time to provide more information than necessary to identify the intended recipient—in some cases a *lot* more information. Why is this a big deal? People have expectations about communication that are not just based on how things are done in Greek or English, but on how God has wired us to process language.

The first expectation is that we would be brief, that we would not say more than necessary to convey our point. Some of us are better at this than others, but we all tend to follow this guideline. Let’s say I start tell you a story about “Ed, my friend with a disability.” After I had introduced him it would be most natural to call him “Ed” after that. Much like the old line from Dragnet, “Just the facts, ma’am,” we tend to drop out information after it has served its purpose.

Our second expectation is related to the first. If we say more than expected, then we must have a reason for it. Whatever we say must have added meaning or information—the speaker must intend to accomplish something. Sticking with the example of “Ed, my friend with a disability,” what would you think if I kept using that full expression every time I referred to him in the story? You might think I figured you would forget his name or that you missed it the first time—but that’s not likely. You would probably expect that I wanted to reinforce the information, that it was important for some reason.

⁶ Runge, S. E. (2014). *High Definition Commentary: Romans* (pp. 239–270). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

The same principle even applies with people we know really well. What if I walked up to you and said “How’s my best friend in the whole world doing?” Your reply might be something like “What do you want?” because that is not what you are usually called. The nature of the title makes it sound like I’m being especially kind in preparation for asking you a favor.

This extra information affects our concept of the person or thing being described. If we use a standard expression, it doesn’t provide us with any information to shape how we think about the person. But when we add that extra information, it changes how we think about them—even if we use sarcasm or irony.

We can see how these principles apply to Romans 16. Paul’s descriptions of people go beyond what is needed to distinguish the person he has in mind. Think about it: How many Priscillas and Aquilas do you think there were (16:3)? Is Paul trying to distinguish this pair, who risked their lives for him, from *another* Priscilla and Aquila who did not? No way! The extra information serves a different purpose.

Although Paul is sending greetings to specific people associated with the church in Rome, he is also shaping how we—and those in Rome—view these people. The longer expressions give insight into how Paul thought of them and how he wanted others to view them. Rather than feeling like we are listening in on a private conversation, we should learn how to celebrate and honor those who have helped the church and might otherwise go unrecognized for their service.

One other thing to note: This list is selective and likely ordered in terms of importance. The greetings at the beginning of the chapter tend to be longer and more individualized, whereas the ones toward the end greet groups of people. Lists like this tend to begin with more noteworthy folks, providing less and less individuality and detail toward the end of the list. We can reasonably conclude that those mentioned at the beginning of the list were more noteworthy to Paul.

Paul first commends Phoebe, who many believe sent Paul’s letter. His comments about her metaphorically represent Paul raising a banner over her, signaling others that she is honorable. The church may not have known much about her, so Paul’s commendation highlights what he deems most noteworthy about her. His remarks spell out what he would have written on a literal banner had there been one.

Calling someone “our brother” or “our sister” (16:1) was a standard way of identifying that person as a Christian; thus, the added phrase is not narrowing down the pool of potential Phoebes, but providing significant information to the audience. The fact that she is “our” sister and not “your sister” links her to Paul and with those whom he is writing. But apparently she is more than a sister to them. The Greek text includes a word usually translated “also/even” to connect Phoebe’s service as a deacon/servant to what precedes. No major English version of the Bible includes this, but instead “a servant/deacon of the church at Cenchreae” is used.

Commendations for Service: Phoebe is praised by Paul for her good service to those close to her, including the church at Cenchrea and even Paul himself.

Paul's phrasing denotes her relationship to him and the others as the more relevant piece of information, to which is added the bit about her also/even serving the church in Cenchreae. Why does Paul commend Phoebe, this sister and servant? To request that the church receive her in a manner worthy of God's people and to give her whatever help she might need. Phoebe deserved such help because she was a helper or patron of others, including Paul. He celebrates her noteworthy service and implies that it deserves reciprocation, essentially challenging the church to extend to Phoebe the very kind of patronage that she provided for others. By including himself as a recipient of Phoebe's service, he implies that those who help her are essentially repaying the kindness he received from her (see Philemon 17–19).

Now imagine hearing those words read aloud about you in front of your church. Imagine having Paul hold you up as a commendable example of what it means to serve the Lord. Although Paul may not have a personal relationship with the church in Rome, they certainly know him by reputation. Cenchreae is located in Greece near Corinth, quite a way from Rome. So why mention Phoebe? If she did indeed carry the letter to Rome, Paul's commendation of her would have served as a personal request for the church to give her the red carpet treatment when she arrived. And it likely would have had a corollary effect within the congregation of celebrating her as an example of faith and service. Paul's commendation of role models can foster a dissatisfaction with our own service—in a good way. It prompts us to wonder whether our work for the church would warrant such an honor. So while Paul is clearly celebrating Phoebe, the same words simultaneously compel the listeners to reflect on their own level of service.

Paul then moves on to greetings that carry on the spirit of commending the recipients for their Christian service. Priscilla and Aquila were Paul's coworkers in Ephesus. He practiced the trade of tent-making with them for more than a year (Acts 18:2–3). We find a curious variation from the ordering of their names where they are mentioned in the New Testament. When they are introduced in Acts 18:2 and then mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16:19, Aquila is mentioned first. In the remainder of the passages—including where they correct Apollos—Priscilla is mentioned first (Acts 18:18, 26; Rom 16:3; 2 Tim 4:19). The order of names is generally meaningful, especially where the ancient (and even modern) convention is to mention the male first. Paul (and Luke as writer of Acts) bucks this convention, essentially ascribing a more prominent role to Priscilla.

Commendations for Service: Priscilla and Aquila put their lives in danger in order to help Paul.

The relationship between Priscilla, Aquila, and Paul stretched back years before their return to Rome. Some in the Roman church may not have fully appreciated their connection. When Paul refers to them as “fellow workers,” he puts them on par with himself, as his peers in ministry. I have served in ministry over the years with retired missionaries, or had them in classes I taught. These missionary couples would rarely speak about their ministry other than to say where they had served. But when visitors would arrive—often younger missionaries whom they had trained—we heard countless stories about the impact the couple had had. While I had respected them all along, I found myself saying things like “I had *no* idea.” In the same way, we cannot know the exact context in which Paul delivered his commendation of Priscilla and Aquila, but we can imagine that it increased the respect others showed them.

Although Paul provides no specific anecdote for these two, he does state that they risked their necks for him. This risk-taking engendered not only Paul's thanks, but also that of every Gentile

church. Readers are left to imagine the situations Paul had in mind, but his words convey a powerful image of his deep respect and appreciation. Paul closes with a greeting to the church that meets in their home, adding yet another pennant to their metaphorical banner. All of this extra information about Priscilla and Aquila serves an important thematic function. It defines and shapes our image of them, and of those who actually knew them in Rome.

The greeting of Epenetus is much briefer and to the point. Paul describes him as the first convert of Asia, the capital of which is Ephesus. Scholars have speculated that Priscilla and Aquila may have played a role in his conversion or discipleship if the speculative connection to Ephesus is correct. Paul's greeting of Epenetus right after that for Priscilla and Aquila strengthens the likelihood of a connection between them.

Commendations for Service: Paul briefly greets Epenetus, the very first convert in Asia.

Paul's characterization of him as "my dear friend" quite likely would have shaped how others in the church viewed Epenetus. It is one thing to drop a name, to claim that you are a personal friend of a well-known celebrity; it is quite another to have that person call out your name or greet you from the stage. Paul's statement here probably affected Epenetus himself, reminding him of the informal responsibility that comes with the designation as "first convert in Asia." Another greeting, another banner lifted up to celebrate one of Paul's connections to the church in Rome.

Paul very briefly mentions Mary in verse 6, commending her for working hard for the believers in Rome. Since he says nothing more, we can't determine if this is one of the other Marys mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. Whoever she was, her diligent service was more important to Paul than any position she may have held. By recognizing her service like this, Paul creates the corollary effect of challenging those listening to follow her example.

Paul's next greeting pays tribute to two apostles with whom he served in ministry: Andronicus and Junia. Scholars have argued over how best to translate one word in this verse. If you compare translations, you'll find some like ESV and NET translate the phrase to mean that Andronicus and Junia are well-known *to* the apostles, rather than *among* the apostles as in NRSV, NIV, NASB and NKJV. The first group reads the verse as Paul acknowledging the respect the apostles have for them, whereas the second group sees Paul counting Andronicus and Junia among the apostles. The plainest reading of the troublesome preposition is option two, where Paul commends them as outstanding apostles.

Commendations for Service: Paul greets Andronicus and Junia, who were imprisoned with Paul.

Andronicus and Junia did more than serve with Paul. They even went to prison with him, though we have no idea exactly when or where this happened. Sharing Paul's imprisonment indicates their extraordinary commitment to proclaiming the gospel. And Paul provides another reason for recognizing the pair—namely that they both came to faith before Paul did. More time walking with the Lord means more time to grow and mature.

Paul's comment conveys his respect for them and encourages others to hold them in the same regard. As with Epenetus, the status Paul attributes to Andronicus and Junia challenges them to continue to faithfully live up to their reputation. Paul's high praise edifies them and spurs them on.

After verse 7, Paul's greetings become briefer and often include more than one person at a time. Although these changes may imply that these people play a less significant role in Paul's life, he still mentions each by name. The shorter greetings addressed to multiple people also create the sense that Paul is nearing the end of his letter.

Paul highlights one notable attribute about each person in his next three greetings. He calls Ampliatus and Stachys both dear friends, without providing any context for his comment. He refers to Urbanus as "our fellow worker in Christ," connecting his service to the church with the likes of Pricilla and Aquila, to whom he also refers as fellow workers. Scholars believe these three were likely Gentiles based on their names and Paul not explicitly labeling them as fellow Jews.

Commendations for Service: Paul greets Ampilatus, Urbanus, and Stachys.

Despite Paul mentioning only one trait about each of these three believers, by giving them explicit mention, he calls them out from the rest of the congregation.

Commendations for Service: Paul greets Apelles, the household of Aristobulus, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Herodion, the household of Narcissus, and Persis.

Paul's next greetings include references to households rather than churches meeting in a house (see 16:5). By mentioning the whole household instead of the head of the house, Paul makes sure no one is left out. We know nothing about Aristobulus, though according to tradition he was the brother of Barnabas, Paul's fellow missionary (see Acts 9:26–15:41). Paul's greeting to the household of Narcissus (16:11b) adds the caveat "those who are in the Lord," implying that not every member or servant was a believer in this household as they were in the house of Aristobulus. Commending households or house-churches is a much more prototypical greeting based on the absence of any other thematic information to characterize those being endorsed. In contrast, Paul's greetings of individuals in these verses all include personal information.

In his greeting of Apelles, Paul characterizes him as approved in Christ. This doesn't mean the others aren't approved, but it singles out Apelles as exceptionally noteworthy. Women figure prominently in Paul's greetings, and he commends Tryphena and Tryphosa for their hard work in the Lord, ostensibly based on their service to the church. Paul's characterization of Herodion can be taken at least two ways. The New English Translation interprets the expression as "my compatriot," focusing on the role as a minister alongside Paul. Most versions translate the expression with an ethnic connotation, "my fellow Jew" (NIV, LEB) or "my kinsman/relative" (NASB, ESV, NRSV). Depending on how one understands the term, Paul is either highlighting their shared Jewish roots or shared ministry responsibilities.

Paul then commends Persis, a woman he characterizes as beloved or dear to him. Scholars believe her name is taken from her regional origins in Persia. Such geographically oriented names were customarily given to slaves. Based on such speculations, Persis likely immigrated to Rome from the east, and thus knew Paul from before her days in Rome. As with the others, Paul celebrates her service and friendship. With only six known references to a Persis in Rome, we do not have enough thematic information to determine which woman Paul refers to.

Paul's final greetings are extended to families or house-churches, beginning with Rufus and his unnamed mother. Paul characterizes Rufus as chosen in the Lord, perhaps to remind him and others

of God's sovereign call on our lives to accomplish His purposes. Paul describes Rufus' mother as having been a mother to him too. Most scholars understand this description as referring to a time when Rufus and his mother housed and cared for Paul while he was ministering in their area. People in ancient times placed a much higher value on hospitality than we do in the West today. Such hospitality meant more than offering a meal and a place to sleep. It meant embracing this person as a member of your home. The closest I have come to this kind of hospitality was when my family housed missionaries during a visit. Our meals were longer and our evenings later than normal as we shared stories of what God has been doing. Imagine having Paul as a house guest—the stories he could tell, the questions he could answer. No wonder he felt a special bond with Rufus and his mother.

In 16:14 Paul's greeting addresses a group of men. He does not indicate the nature of their relationship to one another, but by commending them all in one statement, we know he must have perceived some kind of connection. Paul then adds "and the brothers with them." He is likely greeting a house church by naming its leaders rather than addressing a large family of brothers. There are very few references made to individuals in Rome with these names, leading scholars to conclude that Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobus and Hermas had immigrated to Rome from elsewhere in the Roman Empire. Scholars believe Paul knew Rufus and the others from his ministry in eastern parts of the empire.

Commendations for Service: Paul greets the house churches and their leaders.

Paul directs his final greetings to pairs of men and women, who may have been related by birth or marriage—we simply have no way of knowing. He pairs Philologus and Julia without specifying the relationship. He greets Nereus along with his sister before greeting Olympas and all the saints/holy ones with them. By grouping these individuals in one greeting, Paul implies some kind of relationship between them—an idea strengthened by Paul saying to greet the saints/holy ones with *them* instead of with *him*. "Him" would have limited their association to Olympas. Using "them" expands the reference to also include at Nereus and his sister, if not also Philologus and Julia. Paul's language here points to him greeting yet another house church.

The apostle closes out his greeting section in verse 16 by directing the Roman church to greet one another with a holy kiss. He also conveys greetings from the other churches in Christ to the believers in Rome. And now we see how much we can learn from the closing remarks of Paul's letters.⁷

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

16:1 A Radiant Woman Minister (Phoebe), WOMEN. The name "Phoebe" means "Pure or Radiant as the Moon." It is clear that through Phoebe the light of Jesus Christ shone brightly, for Paul calls her not only a servant of the church, but a helper of many

⁷ Runge, S. E. (2014). *High Definition Commentary: Romans* (pp. 271–285). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

(vv. 1, 2). Other versions translate the word “servant” as “deaconess.” Still others have called her “minister”—inasmuch as in other scriptures where the Greek word *diakoneo* is used, it is translated “minister.” According to many scholars it was Phoebe who carried the written book of Romans to the congregation. This is consonant to Ps. 68:11, which declares the place of women in the spread of God’s Word: “The Lord gave the word; great *was* the company (or host of women) . . . who proclaimed it.” The inserted words are justified by the Hebrew, and most translators acknowledge this fact. Today multitudes of laywomen and Christian women leaders—licensed or ordained—and prophetesses are helping carry the gospel to the world.

16:1 Phoebe probably carried Paul’s letter from Corinth to the church in Rome. **Servant:** This word may be translated “servant” or “minister” (as in Mark 9:35; John 2:5, 9; Rom. 13:4; 15:8), or “deacon” (as in Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 12), depending on whether one thinks that Phoebe held a formally recognized office in the church at **Cenchrea**, a port city very near Corinth. Those who translate servant think that the requirements in 1 Tim. 3:12 make it unlikely that Phoebe would be in the office of deacon. There does not appear to be a consistent NT disposition against women in leading ministry roles.

16:2 The Greek word for **helper** is found nowhere else in the NT. Outside the NT, it is sometimes used of a “patroness,” a woman who supplied support and funding for worthy causes.

16:3 Greetings to Christians whom Paul knows in Rome. The purposes are: 1) to give Phoebe a list of people on whom to call when she arrives; 2) to ensure she knows who is to receive the letter; 3) to show God’s awareness of each individual’s import in the work of the gospel. The list interestingly contains a number of significant women and numerous names common to slaves and freedmen.

16:3 See note on 1 Cor. 16:19.

16:7 Junia: Sometimes also translated “Junias,” indicating a man. It is impossible to tell whether this name refers to a man or a woman. The name could be a feminine name “Junia,” or it could be a regularly shortened form of a common man’s name, “Junianus,” like Silvanus (Silas) and many other names that took long and short forms. **Apostles** may be understood either in the narrow sense of those who could rule the church and write scripture or in the broader sense of the word (see note on 1:1). See also John 13:16; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25.

16:16 Holy kiss: A kiss was a common greeting in the first century (see 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14). See note on 1 Cor. 16:20. In western culture, the embrace seems to be the equivalent expression.

16:19 Simple concerning evil: Christians should not try to become experts about all the details of evil deeds.

16:20 Paul proclaims the ultimate triumph of Christ and His church over all evil in fulfillment of Gen. 3:15. **Shortly** does not mean “soon,” but “swiftly.” In circumstances of life, as at the end of this age, we may expect God’s conquest of **Satan**’s workings to be short and sharp.

16:22 Tertius was the secretary (or amanuensis) who wrote while Paul dictated (see Gal. 6:11).

16:26 Prophetic scriptures refers to the OT (see 1:2).

TRUTH-IN-ACTION through **ROMANS**

Letting the LIFE of the Holy Spirit Bring Faith's Works Alive in You!

Truth Romans Teaches

Key Lessons in Faith

Faith is choosing boldly and unswervingly to believe what God has said. Twentieth-century faith must learn again to believe totally the testimony of Scripture! Among the keys to faithful living is the truth of our conversion. Faith frees us to live as never before for the good of others.

Steps to Dynamic Devotion

The Word of God illuminated by the Holy Spirit is the only true means for transforming the human heart. Salvation by faith is a specific occasion, while the renewing of the mind by the Word is a continuing process. The disciple devotes himself to God's Word to be transformed into a holy person, radiantly Christ-like and radically different from the world. Spiritual disciples devour God's Word because in it is the key to a more dynamic relationship with their living Lord and a greater availability to the Holy Spirit.

Keys to Wise Living

The believer's two natures often baffle and confuse him or her. The wisdom found in Rom. will help in managing this conflict by identifying which aspects of behavior result from the Holy Spirit's life and which result from the fleshly nature's activity. Thus, we can navigate our new life with Spirit-engendered wisdom and understanding.

Steps to Dealing with Sin

Rom. reveals a new, victorious method for our dealing with sin. Living free of sin's rule is now possible because we are no longer slaves of sin, but have become slaves of God, able to choose righteousness rather than being bound to the old

Action Romans Invites

1:16 *Proclaim* the gospel boldly.

4:17, 18 *Release* the creative power of God's Word by believing it in the face of challenging circumstances.

4:20-25 *Stand* when tempted by unbelief, knowing that God can do what He promises.

6:1-10 *Understand* that through baptism, you have been crucified with Christ. *Choose to believe* that you were also united with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection.

15:1-3 *Live* in a manner that strengthens the weak in faith. *Commit* to the upbuilding of your neighbor.

10:17 *Be constant* in your reading and study of God's Word. *Recognize* that your faith will grow only as much as you feed on God's Word.

12:1, 2 *Let* God's Word and His Holy Spirit radically transform your way of thinking. *Renew your mind* to know and do the will of God, giving your body a living sacrifice.

15:4 *Recognize* that the OT was written through the Spirit for the church. *Incorporate* the OT into your daily Bible study.

1:18-23 *Understand* that judgment is self-induced. *Know* that men choose to reject God.

2:24 *Be sensitive* to the fact that how you live can bring honor and glory to God, or it can bring reproach and blasphemy against His name.

8:7, 8 *Be clear* that any hostile or disobedient tendency toward God's Word comes out of your fleshly nature.

13:8-10 *Recognize* that love is binding and obligatory on believers. *Understand* that any lack of love is lawlessness and rebellion.

6:11-14 *Say "No!" to sin* whenever it confronts you. *Recognize* that you are really free from its demands.

6:16-23 *Obey Christ*, your new Master, not sin, your old master.

nature. Obedience to the Word of God gains a new **7:17, 20** *Believe with conviction* that it is your old, nature of holiness. sinful nature, not your new nature in Christ that manifests itself in acts of sin.

Guidelines for Growth in the Spirit Through the **8:1-11** *Recognize* that the Law is fulfilled by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, the very life Holy Spirit in us. *Know* that His presence in you is of Jesus Christ is brought into effect in our mortal the very life of Jesus Christ. bodies. As we yield ourselves to Him, Jesus **8:13-17** *Choose* to live by the Spirit. *Put to death* becomes in and through us the very fulfillment of fleshly attitudes and actions. *Acknowledge* your the Law and Word of God. adoption as a child of God, calling Him “Father.”

8

Psalm 25:16-22
Proverbs 20:16-18

August 3

2 Chronicles 33:14-34:33

18 yr old King Josiah – 34:19-21
His response upon hearing the Words of the Lord

34:1-35:27 Josiah, Judah’s last good king, was similar to several of his predecessors. He re-established proper temple worship and celebrated the Passover, much like Hezekiah (2 Chron 29:1-32:33). He came to the throne at a young age, just like Joash (24:1). And just as Joash had done (24:4-14), Josiah restored the temple and destroyed idols (vv. 3-7). The most significant event in Josiah’s reign is the discovery of the book of the law (vv. 8-21), which led him to renew the covenant (vv. 29-33) and celebrate Passover (35:1-19). A parallel account of Josiah appears in 2 Kgs 22-23.

The Reforms of Josiah

34:1 eight years old See 2 Kgs 22:1 and note.

34:2 did not deviate The Chronicler emphasizes Josiah’s faithfulness. Even the best kings—like Asa (2 Chron 16:10-12), Joash (24:18), Uzziah (26:16), and Hezekiah (32:25)—turned aside at some point. Josiah, however, remained faithful.

34:3 to seek the God of David his ancestor See note on 11:16.

34:4 Asherahs See note on 14:3.

⁸ Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Ro 15:30-16:26). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

34:5 And he burned the bones of the priests Second Kings 23:20 explains that Josiah sacrificed these priests on their altars. Burning their bones accords with the earlier prophecy about Josiah (see 1 Kgs 13:2).

34:6 as far as Naphtali The geographical references here indicate that Josiah extended his reforms to the territories of the northern tribes, just as Hezekiah did (see 2 Chron 30:1–27 and note).

34:7 Then he returned to Jerusalem Josiah first cleaned the land, then returned to Jerusalem to focus on repairing and cleansing the temple.

34:8 the eighteenth year of his reign See note on 35:19.

the recorder See note on 1 Chr 18:15.

repair the house of Yahweh See 2 Kgs 22:3–7 and note.

34:9 Hilkiyah the high priest See note on 2 Kgs 22:4.

the guardians of the threshold Refers to Levites who collected funds for repairs to the temple—the same approach employed during Joash’s repairs (2 Chron 24:5–6).

34:11 had destroyed The temple needed more than just a cleansing. Apparently, the previous kings—Manasseh and Amon—had allowed it to become run down.

34:12–13 Josiah appoints Levites from the families of Merari and Kohath to supervise the temple’s repairs. The musicians mentioned here were most likely from the families of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun. All of these families were part of David’s divisions of temple personnel (1 Chr 23:6–23; 25:1–8), and they played leading roles in Hezekiah’s reforms (2 Chron 29:12–14 and note).

34:14–21 The book of the law that Hilkiyah found was probably some form of Deuteronomy, an identification based on several factors. First, Josiah’s reaction would be a natural response to some of the sections of curses in Deuteronomy (e.g., Deut 27:9–26; 28:15–68). The words of Huldah (2 Chron 34:24–25) also are consistent with these curses. In addition, Josiah’s observation of the Passover (35:1–19) is consistent with the Passover stipulations in Deut 16:1–8.

34:14 a scroll of the law of Yahweh See note on 2 Kgs 22:8.

34:19 he tore his garments A typical gesture of mourning.

34:21 Seek Yahweh In times of distress, people often inquired of prophets to discern Yahweh’s will (e.g., 1 Kgs 14:1–18; Jer 21:1–7).

34:22 Huldah the prophetess See 2 Kgs 22:14 and note.

34:27 you humbled yourself before God Reminiscent of God’s promise at the temple’s dedication (see 2 Chr 7:14). Humbling oneself is an important theme throughout 1–2 Chronicles. Rehoboam humbled himself, preventing the complete destruction of Jerusalem (12:12). Hezekiah humbled

himself and delayed the judgment of God (32:26). Manasseh humbled himself and was able to return from captivity in Babylon (33:12–13).

34:28 I will gather you to your ancestors See 2 Kgs 22:20 and note.

any of the disaster The Hebrew word *ra'ah* means “disaster” or “evil” (see Job 2:10 and note).

34:29–33 Josiah responds to Huldah’s message of God’s judgment by gathering all the people to renew the covenant. He reads aloud the book of the law, just as Ezra does later with the postexilic community (Neh 8:1–8). The renewal of the covenant included keeping the law (2 Chron 34:31), as well as removing any items used in idol-worship (v. 33).

The Reforms of Josiah

34:29 all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem Refers to the heads of the leading families—those responsible for administering justice and managing the affairs of the community.

34:31 his commands and statutes and regulations Three different terms for the law (see note on Psa 19:7–9; note on 2 Chr 19:10).

34:33 they did not turn aside The people as a whole remained faithful, just as Josiah did (v. 2).⁹

Romans 16:10-27

S/G

16:17-20

¹⁷ And now I make one more appeal, my dear brothers and sisters. Watch out for people who cause divisions and upset people’s faith by teaching things contrary to what you have been taught. Stay away from them. ¹⁸ Such people are not serving Christ our Lord; they are serving their own personal interests. By smooth talk and glowing words they deceive innocent people. ¹⁹ But everyone knows that you are obedient to the Lord. This makes me very happy. I want you to be wise in doing right and to stay innocent of any wrong. ²⁰ The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. May the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

Is there a relationship between refusing to be a part of these smooth talking people and stain in the body of Christ and the Lord crushing the enemy under your feet? What does crushing the enemy under yr feet mean?

This is the end of Paul’s letter to the Romans. Why these words?

Romans 16:17–24

Paul begins his final exhortations by calling his readers to beware of those who cause dissention and create obstacles to the faith, contrary to what they have learned. Paul has labored to correct the Romans’ practical understanding of the gospel at various points throughout the letter. He has

⁹ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (2 Ch 34:1–33). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

carefully characterized his teaching as the way things always should have been understood, not as some new teaching. His frequent use of Old Testament quotations to support his claims adds to this understanding. For these reasons, we should pay close attention to how he characterizes opponents to the faith.

Since Paul does not explicitly identify them, he leaves the command open to broader application. He may be thinking of the Judaizers, those who demand that Gentile converts to Christianity must be circumcised. But he could just as easily be referring to Gentiles who denigrate Jewish believers for continuing to observe dietary customs and holy days that were no longer required under the new covenant. By using an ambiguous label, Paul addresses more potential troublemakers than if he had explicitly named a few.

Paul provides criteria for identifying dissensions and temptations: They are contrary to what the Romans have learned. Learned from whom, Paul or someone else? Paul doesn't specify, which once again broadens the potential application of his exhortation. How can we discern between a prophetic voice and a dissenting/tempting one? We must consider the direction the voice is trying to lead us. If it leads us back to the truth, we would consider it prophetic, but if it calls us away from the truth we have been taught, we must consider it heretical or divisive. Paul has undoubtedly redirected the Romans on many matters, whether about the process of salvation or how our new life in Christ should affect our relationship with others. Thus Paul's teaching should be included in their canon for determining either prophecy or heresy. At the end of verse 17, he shifts to a direct command: Stay away from them!

Paul devotes verses 18–20 to reasons the Romans should follow his commands. He continues to avoid specifying the opponents he has in mind by referring to them as “such people.” He characterizes them by what they do rather than what they stand for—that is, how to see beyond their deception. In 16:18 he portrays them as driven by their appetites rather than loyalty to Christ. When they speak, they are devoted to self-serving ends rather than to preaching the gospel.

Who do these people deceive? Again Paul uses a caricature rather than naming an explicit audience. Those with unsuspecting hearts are the ones who get taken in. This characterization essentially implies that anyone who pauses to listen to them is susceptible to deceit. Paul contrasts these easily deceived people with the Roman believers, who are renowned for their obedience. Commending their obedience in contrast to the others' weak mindedness reinforces the positive example Paul wants the believers to follow.

Midway through 16:19, Paul returns to the theme he set aside in verse 17. Despite the deceptive opposition Roman believers may face, he rejoices because he is confident of their continued obedience. From a practical standpoint, Paul means that members of the Roman church are wise and knowledgeable when it comes to what is good, and quite the opposite when it comes to evil. And they should continue to study and invest in anything that is good. Although we could argue that there is value in knowing your enemy, Paul guides us in the other direction. There is an old anecdote about the U.S. Treasury Department training Secret Service agents to spot counterfeit bills—not by examining the fake bills, but by concentrating on the characteristics of true bills. The same principle is applied when Paul says the more the Roman believers know what is good, the easier it will be for them to stay away from what is wrong.

Paul has a compelling basis for commanding the believers to be wise in what is good: the nearness of the Lord's return (16:20). He reminds us that this struggle against evil will not last forever, even if we may feel that way at times. Paul describes the Lord as "the God of peace" to remind the Romans that His peace will see them through whatever trials may lie ahead.

Final Reflections

Paul's letter to the Romans is probably the most enigmatic of his writings. The theological concepts he outlines within it provided a basis for the Protestant Reformation. The structure and organization of the book have proven a mystery to many. With the help of linguistics and discourse grammar, the preceding commentary helps overcome some of the hurdles to understanding this letter. These tools help us recognize and properly interpret Paul's grammatical signals and better follow his argument.

The biggest of these grammatical signals is the Greek conjunction *gar*, generally translated "for." In the introduction, we saw how our understanding of this little word dramatically impacts our grasp of the letter's structure. Instead of looking for a single, simple purpose that can explain the entire letter, we find that there are different levels of argument nested within others. From a formal standpoint, Paul's desire to announce an upcoming visit is indeed an overarching purpose for writing; however, it cannot be neatly separated from the other purposes, such as building rapport for winning the Romans' support for Paul's mission to Spain, or that little section between Romans 1:16 and 15:22 about Paul's gospel. Understanding the transformational power of the gospel does more than improve our theology. It provides the very basis for our own transformation and that of those around us. It has the power to fundamentally change our relationships with God and others, both inside and outside the church.

Despite questions that might remain about certain passages or theological concepts, we must apply the things that we already understand. Paul's objective for presenting his gospel to the Romans is made clear in 12:1–2: "Therefore I exhort you, brothers, through the mercies of God, to present your bodies *as* a living sacrifice, holy *and* pleasing to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may approve what *is* the good and well-pleasing and perfect will of God." With these verses, Paul challenges us to move from understanding to acting. This transformation is the very reason God sent His Son.

As Paul says in Philippians 1:27, let us live in "a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ ... standing firm in one spirit, with one soul contending side by side for the faith of the gospel." It is my prayer that this study has instilled in you a greater desire and ability to pursue this goal.¹⁰

Psalm 26:1-12
Proverbs 20:19

¹⁰ Runge, S. E. (2014). [High Definition Commentary: Romans](#) (pp. 287–291). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

August 4

2 Chronicles 35:1-36:23

35:1-19 The Chronicler's account of Josiah's Passover is much more detailed than the account found in 2 Kings (2 Kgs 23:21-23). It focuses on the role of the priests and Levites, noting that they were used according to David's divisions (2 Chron 35:4, 15). It also emphasizes that Josiah acted according to the law of Moses (vv. 6, 12).

35:1 Josiah kept the Passover to Yahweh Most likely following the regulations from Deut 16:1-8 (see note on 2 Chr 34:14-21).

on the fourteenth day of the first month Unlike Hezekiah's Passover (30:2-3), Josiah was able to celebrate the Passover at its appointed time (see Exod 12:6).

Israelite Calendar Table

Israelite Festivals Table

35:3 Put the holy ark in the house Since there is no record of the ark of the covenant's removal from the temple, it could be that the Hebrew text here is referring back to the ark's original placement in the temple (1 Kgs 8:6).

There is no need to carry it on your shoulders The Levites were instructed to carry the ark with poles; 1 Chr 15:15 notes that these poles were placed on their shoulders (Exod 25:13–15). Josiah's point seems to be that with the ark deposited safely in the temple, the Levites may devote themselves to other religious duties.

35:4 according to the decree of David king of Israel Josiah insists that they follow David's divisions of the Levites (1 Chr 23).

35:6 the word of Yahweh by the hand of Moses By emphasizing the instructions of David and Moses, the Chronicler likens Josiah to Solomon (compare 2 Chron 8:13–14).

The Reforms of Josiah

35:7 These were the possession of the king By giving of his own possessions, Josiah follows the examples of Hezekiah (31:3) and David (1 Chr 29:2–5).

35:13 they roasted the Passover lamb in the fire See note on Deut 16:7.

35:15 at their stations according to the decree of David Just as he does with the priests and Levites (2 Chron 35:4), Josiah ensures that the temple singers are organized according to the divisions established by David (1 Chr 25:1–31 and note).

the gatekeepers were at each gate David also organized the gatekeepers (1 Chr 26:1–19 and note). The gatekeepers' duties included guarding the temple and collecting money.

35:17 the Feast of Unleavened Bread Begins the day after Passover (see Lev 23:6 and note).

35:18 there was no Passover like it kept Perhaps because Hezekiah's Passover was observed later than prescribed (2 Chron 30:2–3), the Chronicler apparently upholds Josiah's as superior (see note on 30:3).

since the days of Samuel The parallel statement in 2 Kings refers to the days of the judges (2 Kgs 23:22). Most likely, the Chronicler's reference to Samuel (Israel's last judge) is intended to indicate the entire period of the judges.

35:19 the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah The reference to the 18th year of Josiah's reign here and in 2 Chron 34:8 forms a literary structure called an inclusio (a bracketing by repetition) around Josiah's reforms.

35:20–27 This account of Josiah's death expands on the shorter version in 2 Kgs 23:28–30.

35:20 Neco the king of Egypt Reigned ca. 609–595 BC. See note on Jer 46:2. In addition to killing Josiah, Pharaoh Neco also deposed Josiah's son and successor, Jehoahaz (2 Chron 36:3–4).

Carchemish on the Euphrates Egypt eventually was defeated by Babylon at Carchemish (see note on Jer 2:15).

35:21 not against you yourself this day Neco was joining forces with Assyria to quell the rising Babylonian kingdom.

35:22 he disguised himself to fight with him Josiah's actions mirror the wicked northern king, Ahab, who also was killed in battle after disguising himself (2 Chron 18:29–34). It is ironic that one of Judah's best kings suffers the same fate as Israel's worst king.

Megiddo See 2 Kgs 23:29 and note.

35:24 And he died Since Josiah was killed in battle, his death is not described in terms of resting with his ancestors, which indicates a peaceful death (see 1 Kgs 2:10 and note).

35:25 And Jeremiah uttered a lament for Josiah The book of Lamentations is traditionally attributed to Jeremiah (see note on Lam 1:1–5:22); however, it includes no laments about Josiah. Jeremiah most likely uttered a lament similar to David's lament for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:17–27 and note).

35:26 his loyal love As with Hezekiah (2 Chron 32:32), the epitaph for Josiah focuses on his faithfulness.

35:27 the scroll of the kings of Israel and Judah See note on 16:11.

36:1–16 The Chronicler presents Judah's final four kings in quick succession, leaving out many of the details found in 2 Kings (2 Kgs 23:31–25:30). The focus in 2 Chronicles is less on the reigns of these kings and more on the sequence of events that led to the exile of all of Judah (2 Chron 36:20–21).

Southern King	Date
Jehoahaz	609 BC
Jehoiakim	609–597 BC
Jehoiachin	597 BC
Zedekiah	597–586 BC

36:1 Jehoahaz the son of Josiah Also known as Shallum (see 1 Chr 3:15 and note).

36:2 he reigned three months Although the Chronicler does not assess Jehoahaz's brief reign (circa 609 BC), 2 Kgs 23:32 states that he was an evil king.

36:3 the king of Egypt Refers to Pharaoh Neco.

one hundred talents of A talent was about 75 pounds (34 kilograms).

36:4 Neco took Jehoahaz his brother It is unclear why Neco deposed Jehoahaz and installed Jehoiakim as king. Most likely, Jehoiakim was a stronger supporter of Egypt's efforts against Babylon (see note on Jer 22:10).

36:6 Nebuchadnezzar The second king of the Chaldean dynasty, who reigned circa 605–562 BC. His father, Nabopolassar, had rebelled against Assyrian rule, defeating Assyria about six years before Nebuchadnezzar's reign. See note on Jer 21:2.

to bring him to Babylon The beginning of Judah's exile to Babylon (2 Chron 36:17–21).

36:7 and put them into the temple in Babylon A later Babylonian ruler, Belshazzar, would use these vessels for a feast (see Dan 5:2).

36:8 the scroll of the kings of See note on 2 Chr 16:11.

36:9 he reigned three months and ten days Like the reign of Jehoahaz (vv. 1–4), Jehoiachin's tenure was cut short by an enemy nation.

36:10 at the turn of the year Elsewhere described as the season when kings go out to battle (see note on 2 Sam 11:1).

brought him to Babylon The account in 2 Kings describes Nebuchadnezzar's siege and plunder of Jerusalem in greater detail (2 Kgs 24:10–17 and note).

36:12 He did not humble himself Unlike many of his predecessors—including Rehoboam (2 Chron 12:12), Hezekiah (32:26), Manasseh (33:12–13), and Josiah (34:27)—Zedekiah does not humble himself. See note on 34:27.

36:13 he also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar See 2 Kgs 24:20 and note.

and hardened his heart The same phrase is used of Pharaoh before the exodus (see note on Exod 4:21).

36:14 increased in unfaithfulness The Hebrew term used here, *ma'al*, indicates a violation of covenant trust. First Chronicles 5:25 cites unfaithfulness to Yahweh as the reason for the northern kingdom's exile.

36:15 had repeatedly and persistently sent to them The Chronicler makes it clear that people of Judah had plenty of opportunities to humble themselves and repent.

36:17–21 After roughly 10 years of hostilities, Judah's conflict with Babylon comes to a fiery conclusion. More extensive accounts of Jerusalem's fall are provided in 2 Kgs 25:1–21 and Jer 39:1–10; 52:1–30.

36:17 Therefore he brought against them The Chronicler emphasizes God's role in Judah's collapse and exile (compare 2 Kgs 25:1).

36:21 by the mouth of Jeremiah Jeremiah had warned repeatedly about the coming Babylonian exile (see Jer 37:1–10 and note; 38:14–28 and note).

to fulfill seventy years See Jer 25:11 and note. Jeremiah prophesied twice that Judah would serve Babylon for 70 years (Jer 25:11–12; 29:10).

36:22–23 The Chronicler ends his account the same way that the book of Ezra begins—with Cyrus’ decree that the Jewish exiles should return to Judah and build the temple (Ezra 1:1–4).

36:22 in the first year of Cyrus Refers to the first year after Cyrus II (the Great) conquered Babylon (539 BC). See note on Ezra 1:1.

Date	Event
Cyrus becomes king of Persia	559 BC
Cyrus conquers Babylon	539 BC
Cyrus allows Jews to return to Jerusalem	538 BC

Yahweh stirred up As he does throughout 2 Chronicles (2 Chron 10:15; 22:7; 25:20; 36:17), the chronicler emphasizes God’s involvement in human events.

36:23 Yahweh the God of heaven A title for God rarely used prior to the exile (see note on Ezra 1:2).

to build a house for him at Jerusalem The collective work of 1–2 Chronicles ends with Cyrus’ proclamation authorizing the rebuilding of the temple.

may Yahweh his God go up The Hebrew term for “go up” is used throughout the OT to designate a trip to Jerusalem (e.g., 2 Sam 19:34; 1 Kgs 12:27; Zech 14:17). Since Jerusalem is situated at the top of a mountain, travelers literally climb up to the city.¹¹

INTRO TO CORINTHIANS

Introduction to 1 Corinthians

First Corinthians is all about living like followers of Christ. A couple of years after Paul established a group of believers in Corinth, he received word that they were losing their way. In 1 Corinthians, Paul gives them practical advice on how to live as Christians in the midst of a culture that pressures them to compromise.

Background

Paul founded the church in Corinth around AD 51 (Acts 18:1–11). As he moved on with his missionary activity, he spent three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31). While he was there (1 Cor 16:8), he heard that things were not going well in Corinth—believers were quarrelling (1:11; 5:1). Paul wrote at least one letter to try to straighten things out (5:9), but it did not solve the problem—so

¹¹ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (2 Ch 35:1–36:23). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

he wrote what we call 1 Corinthians and sent it with his associate Timothy (4:17). The letter probably was written toward the end of Paul's stay in Ephesus, around AD 54–55.

Corinth was in Greece, but during Paul's time the city was part of the Roman Empire. It was a major commercial center, had a bustling port, and as the third largest city in the Roman Empire, was a cosmopolitan city; it also was known for its sexual permissiveness. Many of the problems Paul addresses come from the Corinthian Christians' tendency to reflect the values of their city rather than those of the body of Christ (6:15).

Structure

Like a typical Graeco-Roman letter, 1 Corinthians has an opening (1:1–9), a body (1:10–15:58), and a closing (16:1–24). Paul begins the letter by greeting the Corinthians as saints—people made holy by Jesus—and giving thanks for them. In the first part of the letter's body (1:10–6:20), Paul responds to things that he has heard in Ephesus about the Corinthians. They didn't report these things themselves. They have acted divisively, assessing their leaders based on their own definition of what it means to be wise and spiritual. Paul responds that their views don't fit with the gospel he preached to them (1:10–4:21). Then he addresses other issues he has heard about: incest, lawsuits, and sexual immorality (5:1–6:20).

The second part of the letter's body (7:1–15:58) discusses issues raised in the Corinthians' letter to Paul. He responds to them about marriage (7:1–40), food sacrificed to idols (8:1–11:1), conduct in worship (11:2–34), the practice of spiritual gifts (12:1–14:40), and resurrection (15:1–58). Paul concludes the letter by going over some personal items, including his travel plans and the offering he was collecting for the impoverished church in Jerusalem (16:1–24).

Outline

- Introduction (1:1–9)
- Paul responds to reports of the Corinthians' conduct (1:10–6:20)
- Paul responds to the Corinthians' letter (7:1–15:58)
- Concluding matters (16:1–24)

Themes

In 1 Corinthians, Paul emphasizes how to live as a Christian community, which differs from the values of secular culture. The Corinthians had heard the story of Jesus and embraced it with enthusiasm, but over time it had been twisted. Their culture's stories were distorting their views about following Jesus.

Paul strongly criticizes the believers' misguided attempts to live according to Christian values, pointing them instead to life in the Spirit of God, based on the work of the Lord Jesus Christ (6:11). The Corinthians think they know what wisdom is, but their wisdom looks no different from their culture's. They think they know what being spiritual means, but their spirituality leads them to be divisive, immoral, and selfish. By contrast, truly living in the Spirit leads to unity, to putting others

first, and to living a holy life. Paul tells the believers to see themselves as a community, and as individuals, as God's temple—as members of Christ's body (3:16; 6:15).

Like the Corinthians, we live in a world filled with ideas and practices that are at odds with the gospel. Every day, we hear stories about what it means to be wise and spiritual based on our secular culture, and these often cause us to misunderstand our place in the world or distort the gospel for our own purposes (compare chs. 8; 10). Paul challenges our desires to be sophisticated and powerful and shows them to be empty counterfeits. We are challenged to walk away from immorality and live as God's people, empowered by the Holy Spirit (chs. 5; 12–14). We are to embrace the power of the resurrection and work for the Lord (1:2, 9; 7:17; 15).¹²

THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS

Introduction

“A fragment of ecclesiastical history like no other.”

—Weizäcker

I. Unique Place in the Canon

First Corinthians is the “problem book” in the sense that Paul handles the problems (“Now concerning . . .”) that faced the congregation in the wicked city of Corinth. As such it is most needed by today's problem-racked churches. The divisions, hero-worship of leaders, immorality, legal battles, marital problems, doubtful practices, and regulation of spiritual gifts, are all handled here.

It would be wrong, however, to think it was all problems! This is the Epistle that contains 1 Corinthians 13, the most beautiful essay on love, not just in the Bible, but in *all* literature. The remarkable teaching on the resurrection—both Christ's and ours (chap. 15), the regulation of the Lord's Supper (chap. 11), the command to take part in the collection (chap. 16), are all here.

We would be very much the poorer without 1 Corinthians. It is a treasure trove of practical Christian teaching.

II. Authorship

All scholars agree that what we call 1 Corinthians is an authentic product of Paul's pen. Some (chiefly liberal) writers think they see some “interpolations” in the letter, but these are subjective conjectures with no supporting manuscript evidence. 1 Corinthians 5:9 apparently implies a previous (uncanonical) letter from Paul that the Corinthians misunderstood.

The *external evidence* for 1 Corinthians is very early, the book being specifically referred to by Clement of Rome (c. A.D. 95) as “the Epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul.” Other early church writers quoting the book are Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian. It is listed in the Muratorian Canon and comes after Galatians in the heretic Marcion's own “canon,” the *Apostolicon*.

¹² Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., . . . Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

The *internal evidence* is very strong as well. Besides the author's references to himself as Paul in 1:1 and 16:21, the argument in 1:12–17; 3:4, 6, 22 also supports Pauline authorship. Coincidences with Acts and with other letters of Paul, plus the strong flavor of genuine apostolic concern rule out a forgery and make the arguments for authenticity overwhelming.

III. Date

Paul tells us he is writing from Ephesus (16:8, 9, cf. v. 19). Since he ministered there for three years, 1 Corinthians was most likely written in the latter half of that extended ministry, or about a.d. 55 or 56. Some scholars date it even earlier.

IV. Background and Theme

Ancient Corinth was (and is) in southern Greece, west of Athens, strategically situated on the trade routes in Paul's day. It became a great center for international commerce, and immense quantities of traffic came to this city. Because of the depraved religion of the people, it soon became the center also for the grossest forms of immorality, so that the name Corinth was a byword for all that was impure and sensual. So lewd was the city's reputation, there was even a verb coined, *korinthiazomai*, which meant *to lead a debased life*.

The Apostle Paul first visited Corinth on his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 18). At first he labored among the Jewish people, together with Priscilla and Aquila, his fellow tentmakers. When most Jews rejected his message, he turned to the Gentiles in Corinth. Souls were saved through the preaching of the gospel, and a church was formed.

About three years later, when Paul was preaching in Ephesus, he received a letter from Corinth, telling of serious difficulties in the assembly there and also asking various questions as to matters of Christian practice. It was in answer to this letter that the First Epistle to the Corinthians was written.

The theme of the Epistle is how to set right a worldly and carnal church that regards lightly the attitudes, errors, and actions that the Apostle Paul viewed with such alarm. As Moffatt put it so succinctly, "The Church was in the world, as it had to be, but the world was in the Church, as it ought not to be."

Since such a situation is still common in many congregations, the relevance of 1 Corinthians is lasting.¹³

Historical Background and Purpose of the Corinthian Epistles

There is a significant historical background that informs the reading of 2 Corinthians. The history between Paul and the Corinthians is largely deduced from information within 1 & 2 Corinthians. Most of this history is constructed from what is contained in the letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians. Consequently the reconstruction of the letter's background is an uncertain enterprise about which there is not complete agreement.

Graeco-Roman Corinth

The city of Corinth is located in modern-day Greece on the northeast corner of the Peloponnesian Peninsula. The religious, political, and philosophical background of the city are

¹³ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (pp. 1745–1746). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

essential for understanding the correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian church. For more on ancient Corinth, see the section on “Graeco-Roman Corinth” in the article on First Corinthians.

Paul’s History with the Corinthians prior to 2 Corinthians

Paul first visited Corinth in AD 49 during his second missionary journey. Upon his arrival, he attached himself quickly to Aquila and Priscilla. His activities as a tentmaker and preacher are recorded in Acts 18:1–18. The first part of Paul’s ministry in Corinth was both to those who were Jewish, and also to Gentiles who feared God. He was opposed by the Jews in the synagogue and expelled. Still, there was fruit from this activity. Titius Justus and Crispus, the synagogue ruler, believed the message (Acts 18:8). The first church meeting may also have met in Titius Justus’ house, also known as Gaius (1 Cor 1:14).

The second phase of Paul’s ministry in Corinth was directed to the Gentiles. Despite his fear, the Lord spoke to him in a vision, encouraging him to continue on preaching in Corinth (Acts 18:9–10). He stayed about 18 months in the city. As a result of his efforts, Paul was the founder of the church in Corinth (1 Cor 4:14–15). Within that church were notable people mentioned within the Bible elsewhere, such as: Chloe, Erastus, Tertius, and Stephanas. After the church was founded in AD 51, Paul left for Ephesus.

After Paul left Corinth, he began writing letters to the church that he founded. The first letter that he wrote is lost, but we see evidence of it in 1 Cor 5:9–13. That letter chided the Corinthians for their sexually immoral behavior and forbade them from associating with immoral people.

After he wrote this letter, Paul received a report from Chloe’s household at Corinth. They reported that there was quarreling and factions in the church (1 Cor 1:11). At about the same time, Paul also received a letter from the Corinthians asking for him to give answers concerning marriage and divorce, weak and strong brothers, spiritual gifts, and collections. As a result of this report and these questions, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in AD 55 from Ephesus.

Paul’s Painful Visit

Paul returned to his work in Ephesus with the expectation that he would travel to Corinth with the collection (1 Cor 16:5–8) and sent Timothy to visit the Corinthians in the meantime (1 Cor 16:10–11; compare Acts 19:22). When Timothy arrived in Corinth, he found that the problems were much greater than anticipated. These likely came from Paul’s opponents outside of Corinth. As a result, Paul decided to visit Corinth immediately. He would then go on to Macedonia and return for a second visit on his way to Jerusalem (2 Cor 1:15–16). He was expecting that his arrival at Corinth would provide a “second experience of grace” and his sincere conduct would be proved.

Instead of exonerating Paul, this visit turned into what scholars call the “painful visit” (2 Cor 2:1). A group of leaders had infiltrated the church and caused many problems. These people are known as “super apostles.” They were of Jewish origin, liked to boast, and carried with them letters of recommendation (3:1; 11:13–15). They were not apostles in the way that Paul was, proclaiming the death and resurrection of Christ, but were more likely agents of others who commissioned them. These super apostles likely were influenced by the surrounding Hellenistic culture. Due to their influence, Paul’s gospel message and authority were called into question.

One of the leaders severely criticized Paul himself (2:5–8; 7:8–13; 11:4). It was evident that the gospel ministry in Corinth was in jeopardy.

The “Severe Letter”

Paul left Corinth for Ephesus while the Corinthians revolted against his apostolic authority (1:23–2:5; 7:12). He chose not to retaliate, but instead extended mercy to the Corinthians (1:23–24). This left him open to criticism (1:16–17). Paul decided to send Titus back to Corinth with his next letter. This letter is known as the “severe letter” since it was written “out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears” (2:4 NIV). It has also been called the “letter of tears,” the “tearful letter,” the “sorrowful letter,” or the “painful letter.”

The aim of the severe letter was to embolden the Corinthians to discipline the ones who did wrong, and thus vindicate Paul, the one who suffered the wrong (2:6, 9; 7:12). Another purpose of the letter was to spare the Corinthians and himself from another painful visit (1:23–2:4). The letter also displayed his care for the Corinthians and was designed to test the Corinthians’ obedience to his apostolic ministry (2:4; 2:9). It also was a reminder that Paul was their spiritual father (7:12). After the Corinthians received it, most were repentant (2:5–11; 7:5–16).

There have been six identifications of the severe letter. Three unlikely possibilities include: a letter written before 1 Corinthians and the letter mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9–13; the “previous letter” mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9, 11; 2 Corinthians (Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, 55–56). Other possibilities that demand more attention are: the severe letter is 1 Corinthians, a letter incorporating 2 Cor 10–13, or a lost intermediate letter following the sending of 2 Cor 1–9.

Those who support 1 Corinthians as the “severe letter” do so for three reasons. With all of the great problems within 1 Corinthians, namely, division, immorality, litigation, profaning of the Lord’s Supper, and challenges to Paul’s ministry, it is possible that it caused him much distress. Additionally, the pain expressed in 2 Cor 2:5–11 could be seen from Paul’s discipline of the man caught in incest (1 Cor 5:1–8). Further, the identity of the “one who did wrong” in 2 Cor 7:12 could be connected with the man caught in incest in 1 Cor 5:1 (Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*; Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*; Hughes, *Second Corinthians*; Hyldahl, *Einheit des Zweiten Korintherbriefes*).

However, passages such as 2 Cor 2:6 and 7:12 suggest that the “severe letter” dealt specifically with the punishment of the wrong-doer instead of questions surrounding the entire Corinthian church, which is the concern of 1 Corinthians. Further, 1 Corinthians does not seem to be written in place of another painful visit (compare 1 Cor 4:18–19; 11:34; 16:2–7) as 2 Cor 1:23; 2:1–3 demands. Additionally, in 2 Cor 2:10 Paul offers his personal forgiveness to the individual whom the Corinthians are to forgive, but it is highly doubtful that he would have seen this as a personal injury. Moreover, the passages in 2 Corinthians show no rebuking of sexual immorality but rather a direct confrontation with Paul’s authority (2 Cor 7:12).

Rather than seeing 1 Corinthians as the severe letter, others divide 2 Corinthians into two parts—chapters 1–9 and chapters 10–13. In this scenario, 2 Cor 10–13 is called the severe letter, and was written before 2 Cor 1–9 (Hausrath, *Der Vier-Capitelbrief*; Plummer, *Second Corinthians*, Dodd, *New Testament Studies*, Welborn, *Politics and Rhetoric*). Some believe that 1–9 intentionally allude to portions of 10–13. However, it is just as likely that 10–13 passage are alluding to 1–9. Furthermore, it is unlikely that 2 Cor 10–13 is the severe letter since there is nothing within these chapters about the punishment of the troublemaker—a key aspect of the severe letter (compare 2 Cor 2:5–9). Finally, the contents of 10–13 do not seem to fit the description of the severe letter, which stemmed from many tears. On the whole, 2 Cor 10–13 is a

vigorous self-defense, filled with irony and warnings. Thus, this popular suggestion is unlikely (Harris, *Second Corinthians*).

It is best to see the severe letter as a lost letter; there are other letters from Paul that we do not have (compare 1 Cor 5:9, 11; Col 4:16). If this is the case, the severe letter was written after 1 Corinthians and Paul's painful visit but before the writing of 2 Corinthians (Semler, *Paraphrasis*; Harris, *Second Corinthians*; Barnett, *Second Corinthians*; Barrett, *Second Corinthians*; Martin, *2 Corinthians*; Murphy-O'Connor, *Second Corinthians*; deSilva, "Measuring Penultimate and Ultimate Reality"; Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*; Thrall, *Second Corinthians*).

The "Deadly Peril" and Reunion with Titus

After he sent this letter, several things happened to Paul. He experienced a "deadly peril" such that "he despaired of life." He felt a "sentence of death" upon him (2 Cor 1:8–10). While some might see this as his encounter with wild beasts or opposition in Ephesus, imprisonment in Asia, or the Demetrius riot of Acts 19:23–41, it was most likely a severe physical illness. Harris sees this from the association of the distress in 2 Cor 1:8 with the thorn of 2 Cor 12:7, as well as factors which would identify the three prayers for removal with distresses in Cilicia (AD 43), Perga (Acts 13:13–14 in AD 47), and in Troas (2 Cor 1:8; 2:12; 7:5 in AD 56; Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 164–82; compare Alexander, "St. Paul's Infirmary"). Whether it was a physical illness or something else, this affliction did cause him to abandon self-sufficiency and trust in God's power. It also forced him to consider the significance of death for the Christian believer.

Following this severe illness, Paul continued with his gospel ministry. He traveled to Troas, where there was a door open to him, but he found no peace as Titus was not present there (Acts 20:1–11; 2 Cor 2:12–13). So, he left Troas and headed for Macedonia. While in Macedonia, he helped to organize the collection for the Christians in Jerusalem as well his gospel ministry (Acts 20:1–2; 2 Cor 8:1–4; 9:2). While his ministry was successful in Macedonia, it took him longer than expected to connect with Titus. Thus, it took him longer to hear how his severe letter had been received in Corinth (2 Cor 7:5).

Titus finally arrived with good news for Paul, which led Paul to rejoice (2 Cor 7:6–9). Paul had worried about the effects of his severe letter, fearing that he had been too harsh. Hearing Titus' report comforted Paul greatly—the Corinthians had deep sorrow for their behavior, and were longing to see Paul. Paul was overjoyed, perhaps greater than ever with their response. If his severe letter had wounded them, it was only for a while (2 Cor 7:8).

At this point, in AD 56, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians. Chapters 1–9 exhibit grace and relief while chapters 10–13 display a noticeably harsher tone. There are also several places within the letter in which the transition is less clear. This has led to the main difficulty in studies of 2 Corinthians—the issue of integrity.¹⁴

CORINTHIANS, FIRST LETTER TO THE One of the letters that Paul wrote to the church at Corinth. Addresses many ethical problems, including: division and unity, the role of Christian workers, church discipline, incest, civil litigation, sexual immorality, divorce and remarriage, weak and strong Christians, and spiritual gifts. First Corinthians integrates doctrinal concerns—like the cross of Christ, the resurrection, and the nature of the Church—with practical issues.

¹⁴ Williams, D. (2016). *Corinthians, Second Letter to the*. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Outline of 1 Corinthians

The book can be outlined in the following manner:

- 1:1–9—Paul’s greeting
 - 1:1–3—Salutation
 - 1:4–9—Thanksgiving
- 1:10–4:21—Corinthian division and the cross of Christ
 - 1:10–17—Party factions and the cross
 - 1:18–25—Condemning false wisdom
 - 1:26–31—Reminder of true calling
 - 2:1–5—True preaching of the cross
 - 2:6–16—Paul’s wisdom in a mystery
 - 2:6–10—What human senses cannot grasp
 - 2:12–16—The mind and Spirit of Christ
 - 3:1–4—Paul’s rebuke for people of the flesh
 - 3:5–17—The role of the Christian servant in God’s work
 - 3:6–9—Laborer in God’s field
 - 3:10–15—Builder in God’s building
 - 3:16–17—Servant in God’s temple
 - 3:18–23—Summary: No more boasting in human leaders
 - 4:1–6—True attitudes for the Christian servant
 - 4:7–15—The Corinthians’ pride versus Paul’s conduct in the cross
 - 4:16–21—Imitate Paul, their father in the faith
- 5:1–6:20—Discipline your bodies properly
 - 5:1–6:20—Purify yourselves from immorality
 - 5:1–13—Discipline the man with the incestuous relationship
 - 6:1–11—Do not take your brothers to court
 - 6:12–20—Flee immorality
 - 7:1–40—Marriage and celibacy
 - 7:1–5—Spouses wholly devoted to each other
 - 7:6–16—Do not divorce
 - 7:17–38—Remain in your calling
 - 7:39–40—Remarriage guidelines
- 8:1–14:40—Idolatry and true worship
 - 8:1–11:1—Weak and Strong brothers
 - 8:1–13—Take care of the weak
 - 9:1–27—Paul as the exemplary strong brother
 - 9:1–14—Workers are worthy of their wages
 - 9:15–27—Paul willingly renounces these rights
 - 10:1–11:1—Warning to the strong
 - 10:1–13—From Israel’s history
 - 10:14–11:1—Flee idolatry
 - 11:1–16—Head coverings in worship
 - 11:17–34—Unity in taking the Lord’s Supper
 - 12:1–14:34—Spiritual gifts
 - 12:1–7—Unity and diversity
 - 12:11–21—Diversity amongst the gifts like the body
 - 12:22–25—Importance of least visible gifts
 - 12:27–31—Everyone does not have every gift
 - 13:1–13—Use of gifts in love
 - 14:1–28—Gift of Tongues
 - 14:29–40—Gift of Prophecy
- 15:1–58—The resurrection and consummation
 - 15:1–11—Things of first importance
 - 15:12–19—Consequences of denying the resurrection
 - 15:20–28—Significance of the resurrection
 - 15:29–34—Exhortations in light of the resurrection
 - 15:35–49—Answers to objections
 - 15:50–57—The resurrection secures victory
 - 15:58—Be steadfast
- 16:1–24—Letter conclusion
 - 16:1–4—Collection for church in Jerusalem
 - 16:5–9—Travel plans
 - 16:10–20—Coworkers’ news
 - 16:21–24—Farewell

Graeco-Roman Corinth

The city of Corinth is located in modern day Greece on the northeast corner of the Peloponnesian Peninsula. It is about 90 kilometers (48 miles) west of Athens. Its location on the narrow isthmus between the Peloponnesian Peninsula and mainland Greece made it a great place for commerce. Corinth controlled the land route between Italy and Asia and also between two ports: Lechaemum just to the north and Cencrea to the east.

Near Corinth was a road called the *diolkos*. This road was made in the sixth century BC with large paving stones and was 6 kilometers long (3.7 miles), running from the Saronic Gulf in the east to the Gulf of Corinth in the west. Due to the dangers of sailing around the Peloponnesian Peninsula, ships would unload at Corinth, then haul the cargo in carts along this road to the other side. Many ships used the *diolkos*, and the nearby city of Corinth became a thriving metropolis from charging tariffs on cargo. In Paul’s day, there may have been as many as 800,000 inhabitants in Corinth. Ships today use the Corinth canal, which was dug in the 19th century to take the place of the ancient road.

The Corinth that Paul knew was not only wealthy but thoroughly influenced by Graeco-Roman culture. While the history of the city can be dated to the eighth century BC and prospered

as a Greek-city state, Rome destroyed it in 146 BC. Julius Caesar then established Corinth as a Roman colony in 44 BC. He also settled his veteran Roman soldiers and their families in the city. Entrepreneurs, traders, freedmen, and slaves swelled the population. Though located in Greece, Corinth was also thoroughly Roman.

Corinth also contained a significant Jewish community. Archaeologists have found a lintel inscribed with the words “Synagogue of the Hebrews” (Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, 79). The city of Corinth has also been listed as one of the cities of the Jewish Diaspora (Philo, *On the Embassy to Gaius*, 281–82) (Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 23).

In ancient Corinth, worldly values like honor, prestige, and self-promotion were desired. Traveling bands of speakers called Sophists made their way through Corinth, persuading followers with their rhetoric. The city contained many wealthy benefactors who used their money to advance their reputation. These influences can be seen in 1 Corinthians (Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*; Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation*; Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*).

Ancient Corinthians worshiped a wide range of deities. There was a large temple dedicated to Apollo, the sun god. Corinthians would seek healing from Asclepius, the god of healing and medicine. There were also temples to Roman imperial personalities, such as a temple to Octavia, the sister of the Roman emperor Augustus. People also worshiped Dionysius, Neptune, Pan, Artemis, Zeus, Athena, Poseidon, and Aphrodite.

The Graeco-Roman society in Corinth valued status and power. Wealth was a key to social standing, and many Corinthians worshiped it like a god. The citizens competed for honor, and each promoted his own accomplishments and possessions in order to win praise from others (Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 19–53).

Paul’s History with the Corinthians until the Writing of 1 Corinthians

Paul first visited Corinth in AD 49 during his second missionary journey. He lived with Aquila and Priscilla and worked with them as tentmakers (Acts 18:1–18). The first part of Paul’s ministry in Corinth was to those who were Jewish—but also to Gentiles who feared God. He was opposed by the Jews in the synagogue and then expelled. However, Titius Justus and Crispus—the synagogue ruler—believed the message (Acts 18:8). The first church meeting may also have met in Titius Justus’ house; he was also known as Gaius (1 Cor 1:14).

The second phase of Paul’s ministry in Corinth was directed to the Gentiles. The Lord spoke to him in a vision and encouraged him to continue preaching in Corinth. He stayed about 18 months in the city. As a result of his efforts, Paul was the founder of the church in Corinth (1 Cor 4:14–15). Within that church were notable people mentioned within the Bible elsewhere, such as Chloe, Erastus, Tertius, and Stephanas. In AD 51, after the church was founded, Paul left for Ephesus.

After Paul left Corinth, he began writing letters to the church that he founded there. The first letter that he wrote is lost, but we see evidence of it from 1 Cor 5:9–13. That letter chided the Corinthians for their sexually immoral behavior and forbade them from associating with immoral believers who refused to repent.

After he wrote this letter, Paul received a report from Chloe’s household at Corinth and learned that there was quarreling and factions in the church (1 Cor 1:11). At about the same time, it seems that Paul also received a letter from the Corinthians asking for him to give answers concerning marriage and divorce, weak and strong brothers, spiritual gifts, and collections. As a result of this report and these questions, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in AD 55 while in Ephesus.

The Message of 1 Corinthians

(This section is adapted from Brown and Twist, *Lexham Bible Guide: 1 Corinthians*, 2013.)

First Corinthians represents Paul's response to the report from Chloe's household and the letter from the Corinthian church (1:11; 7:1). Yet Paul does not write to the Corinthians as an unknown authority figure, but rather as the apostle who founded the church and whose apostolic leadership had been challenged by rival leaders. Paul's main goal in the letter is to teach the Corinthians to think according to true wisdom—which comes only from the Spirit of God—so that they can live holy lives until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:4–8).

Paul communicates this overarching message throughout two main sections of the letter. In the first part of the letter he addresses problems mentioned by Chloe's household (1:10–6:20). In particular, Paul writes about divisions within the Corinthian church and reminds them of their status as the holy temple of God's Spirit (3:16–17). He also condemns the church's deplorable tolerance of sexual immorality (5:1–11) and lawsuits between believers that further fragmented the community (6:1–11). In the second part of the letter, Paul responds to questions raised by the Corinthian believers (7:1–15:58). These questions touch on various issues concerning singleness, marriage, sexual relationships (7:1–40); food sacrificed to idols and challenges to Paul's apostleship (8:1–11:1); the importance of orderliness and intelligibility in worship including the proper use of spiritual gifts (11:2–14:40); and questions about the resurrection of the dead (15:1–58).

Unity of 1 Corinthians

Most scholars view the letter of 1 Corinthians as a unified work. Some, however, view the letter as partitioned for various reasons. One of these is the length of 1 Corinthians; at 16 chapters, it is significantly longer than most of Paul's other letters. It is also lengthier than many other letters written at that time.

Helpful in this matter is the possession of the entire letter in the Papyrus Chester Beatty (P46). This papyrus is dated to AD 200—approximately 150 years after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. This is significantly earlier than any full manuscripts that we have on the canonical Gospels. Also significant is that in this manuscript, only 1 Cor 9:3; 14:15; and 15:16 are missing.

While the majority of scholars currently favor 1 Corinthians being viewed as a unity, earlier in the 1900s several scholars proposed a variety of partition theories. These individuals offered various opinions on the points of division within 1 Corinthians. The main problematic issues include:

- supposed tensions between 1:10–20 and 11:18–19;
- supposed tensions within 1 Cor 8–10;
- supposed differing sources of information (Schrage, *Brief*).

J. Weiss viewed 1 Corinthians as a composite of two letters but later changed his mind, arguing that the letter was composed of three separate letters (Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*). Weiss' revised theory sees one letter as being 10:1–23; 6:12–20; 10:23–30; and 11:2–4. A second letter would be 7–8; 9:1–23; 12–16. A third letter would include 1:1–6:11. W. Schmithals proposes nine letters that then formed 1 Corinthians. These divisions differed significantly from Weiss' proposal. G. Sellin viewed the letter as composed of three letters; Khiok-kng Yeo, four separate documents; and R. Jewett, six separate letters (Yeo, *Rhetorical*).

Of the partition theories, M. C. de Boer provides the most plausible alternative. He postulates that Paul stopped writing and then resumed twice following the visit of Chloe's people. By de Boer's thinking, Paul addressed the envy and jealousy at Corinth in 1 Cor 1–4. Then Stephanas arrived with the Corinthians' letter, which led to Paul's responses in chapters 7, 8, and 12 with the greetings in chapter 16. Chapters 5–6 were then initiated from conversations that were held by the Stephanas delegation (de Boer, "Composition").

Several aspects of these theories are striking. Weiss and Schmithals have changed their minds on the identity of the various portions that make up 1 Corinthians, indicating uncertainty on their parts. Also, these scholars cannot come to agreement as to the various portions that make up the letter. When compared with recent studies that examine thematic coherence within 1 Corinthians, it is more likely that the letter is a unified whole. There are many scholars who advocate for the integrity of 1 Corinthians, including G. Fee, J. C. Hurd, H. Merklein, J. Murphy-O'Connor, F. Lang, R. F. Collins, W. Schrage, and M. Mitchell.

Mitchell's study is significant on this matter. In her work *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, Mitchell depicts 1 Corinthians as a single letter that is united by the theme of promoting unity within a divided Corinthian church. Against the background of Greek deliberative rhetoric, she examines 1 Corinthians in relation to Graeco-Roman deliberative rhetoric, using 1:10 as the thesis statement in the epistle. In her view, 1:11–17 contains the facts of disunity at Corinth. The majority of the remaining text provides arguments for unity. In 1 Corinthians 1:18–4:20, she finds Paul censuring Corinthian factionalism. The next section, 5:1–11:1, encourages the unity of the Corinthian community against outside defilement. The following section, 11:2–14:40, details manifestations of Corinthian disunity when coming together. The last section points to the resurrection as a common rallying point for unity (15:1–58). Her overall analysis concludes decidedly on the epistle's overall unity.

Several recent commentaries on 1 Corinthians identify various thematic ideas that would unite the entire letter:

- Thiselton's early work identified the problem in Corinth as an over-realized eschatology and a hyper spirituality (Thiselton, "Eschatology"). He later revised this, suggesting instead that the Corinthians misunderstood grace and the proclamation of the cross and resurrection within a secular Graeco-Roman society (Thiselton, *Corinthians*).
- Dale Martin and A. R. Brown also see the letter as Paul's gospel confronting the secularity of Graeco-Roman society. For them, 1 Corinthians is a reproclamation of the different values of the cross and resurrection. The virtues of love and respect for the less esteemed are important counters in a society focused on status and wealth (Martin, *Body*; Brown, *Cross*).
- Ciampa and Rosner understand Paul as addressing immorality and idolatry. Rather than seeing the letter partitioned, they see it organized around encouragements to purity and exhortations against two vices—immorality and idolatry.

These recent studies and commentaries all favor seeing 1 Corinthians as one letter rather than separate ones that were sewn together. Current scholarship clearly favors viewing 1 Corinthians as a unity.

Major Interpretive Issues within the Letter

Paul mentions many topics in his letter—human wisdom, food sacrificed to idols, head coverings, and others—but gives little explanation. His readers would have understood these

matters, but 2,000 years later, they are not as clear. There are many conflicting interpretations of this letter. It is widely accepted that Paul was the author and that he wrote the letter from Ephesus between AD 55–56. There is also widespread agreement that it was accepted into the canon quite early. The two contested points concern the nature of Paul’s opposition at Corinth and the unity of the letter.

Paul’s Opposition at Corinth at the Time of Writing 1 Corinthians

Due to the varied history of the Corinthian letters, it is necessary to be clear about the opponents within each letter (see extended history of Paul and the Corinthians in “Second Letter to the Corinthians”). Within 1 Corinthians, the opposition is internal (compare 1 Cor 4:18; 15:12). There is no mention of specific opponents—unlike 2 Corinthians, in which Paul addresses certain men who had slipped into the community (2 Cor 3:1; 11:13–15).

Some believe that the problem is false teaching within the Corinthian church (Goulder, *Paul*; Baur, *Paul*). They see the mention of party factions in 1 Cor 1:12 and 3:22 as showing that different teachings from Peter and Paul are the cause of the conflict. However, this assertion does not make sense of the rest of the letter, as Peter is not mentioned.

Others have proposed different false teachings within the Corinthian community; Schmithals and Winter have proposed Gnosticism as the source. However, this is unlikely because Gnosticism originated in the second century (Schmithals, *Gnosticism*; Winter, *Pneumatiker*, Wilckens, *Weisheit*). Some have assumed that the false teaching originated from charismatics or from a misunderstanding of the resurrection (Baumann, *Mitte und Norm*; Käsemann, *Jesus*). Although it is likely that the Corinthians misunderstood many of these issues, none of them seems to be the prime element that Paul refutes throughout 1 Corinthians.

J.C. Hurd and J. Drane have claimed that Paul is correcting his own previous teaching (Hurd, *Origin*; Drane, *Paul*). However, this is unlikely—Paul does not draw attention in 1 Corinthians to any previous errors of his that needed fixing. Others have assumed that those with Jewish viewpoints are the ones causing difficulties (Davis, *Wisdom and Spirit*; Pearson, *Terminology*; Horsley, “Wisdom of Words”). However, Paul does not mention Jewish opposition (2 Cor 11:13–15). Furthermore, Paul would not address concerns about idolatry if his opposition had only been encouraging a more “Jewish” outlook (compare 1 Cor 10).

Others have found the source of Paul’s opposition to be a misunderstanding of eschatology within the Corinthian church. In 1978, Anthony Thiselton proposed that the Corinthians had an over-realized eschatology (Thiselton, “Realized Eschatology”). In other words, they were living as if the end of time had already come. This triumphalism of the Christians in Corinth distorted their view of ethics and worship. They were believing that the kingdom of God had come and thus were acting rich, powerful, and wise (1 Cor 4:8–10) (Barrett, *First Corinthians*).

Another suggestion is that the source of the opposition was a personal conflict between Paul and the Corinthians. Gordon Fee sees the opposition between Paul and the Corinthians as evident from 1 Cor 4 and 9, in which Paul defends his apostolic ministry. His demands that the Corinthians submit to his apostolic authority supports this viewpoint further (14:37–38; Fee, *First Corinthians*, 5ff). However, the Corinthians did seek Paul’s opinion on several matters, and he feels that he can ask the Corinthians to contribute to the collection for saints in Jerusalem (16:1–4). Thus, while certain passages exhibit conflict with Paul, this is not the main opponent in his writing of 1 Corinthians.

A better proposal for the source of the opposition comes from those who have read the letter in relation to the Graeco-Roman background of 1 Corinthians, including Bruce Winter, Duane

Litfin, and Stephen Pogoloff. They have drawn connections with the Sophistic movement that was active in cities like Corinth. The Sophists were traveling speakers who would use rhetoric to draw people away to follow their wisdom. They were divisive—they made disciples, boasted of their own abilities, and demanded respect. If they had any influence on the church at Corinth, this probably would have led to division amongst the Christian community (Winter, *Paul and Philo*; Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology*; Pogoloff, *Logos*). In this case, it would make sense for Paul to preach the cross rather than human wisdom (compare 1 Cor 1:17–2:5).

Further connections to first-century Graeco-Roman culture infiltrating the Corinthian church have been noticed. Clarke sees that secular leadership practice has been evident within the Corinthian community from his reading of 1 Cor 1–6 (Clarke, *Secular*). Chow sees Graeco-Roman patronage significantly influencing the life of the church. Basing his view that there were at least a few influential people within the Corinthian church on 1:26, he finds the problems at Corinth were due to a network of patrons within the church. These used their status or riches to exercise influence over a group who depended on them for some favors (Chow, *Patronage*, 87–93). In *Enmity in Corinth*, Peter Marshall finds Graeco-Roman social conventions throughout Paul's address to the Corinthians. Ben Witherington has also examined 1 Corinthians to find many other Graeco-Roman ideas infiltrating the community at Corinth (Witherington, *Conflict*).

Another likely solution is that worldly Graeco-Roman values were the source of opposition. This solution has led Thiselton to modify his view on over-realized eschatology and admit secular influence within the Corinthian church (Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 40). This viewpoint is reflected in major commentaries on the letter—even those that are not directly concerned with examining the Graeco-Roman background (compare Ciampa, *First Corinthians*).

Theological Unity of the Letter

A second important issue for understanding 1 Corinthians is the letter's unity. Those who propose a unified letter describe a variety of unifying themes.

Rhetorical studies on 1 Corinthians effectively argue that the letter was originally a single whole. These studies affirm that Paul's appeal for unity in 1:10 not only influences the immediate chapters, but can be seen to extend throughout the entire letter. For example, Paul shows concern for unity in chapter 1, but also in his statements on church discipline in chapter 5; on civil litigation in chapter 6; on weak and strong brothers in chapters 8–10; on the Lord's Supper in chapter 10; and on the proper use of spiritual gifts in chapters 12–14. This viewpoint agrees with the understanding of the earliest interpreters of the letter—the writer of *First Clement* and Ignatius of Antioch. Several scholars see 1 Corinthians as an example of deliberative rhetoric—an ancient Greek means of arguing that addressed both the heart and the intellect and compelled an audience to come to a decision. These scholars have seen the influence of this rhetoric in 1 Corinthians and view the entire letter as an appeal for unity (Mitchell, *Rhetoric*; Wuellner, “Greek”; Kennedy, *Interpretation*).

Others see the theological themes of 1 Corinthians as proof of its original unity. Instead of being a series of unconnected ethical instructions, 1 Corinthians is a letter in which the role of the cross and resurrection are everywhere at the center. Paul appeals to the death of Jesus in order to promote a community ethic consistent with the values shown by His death (Pickett, *Cross*). The cross plays a clear role in Paul's instruction for unity in chapter 1, Christian stewardship in chapter 4, community exclusion in chapter 5, civil litigation in chapter 6, weak and strong brothers in chapters 8–10, and the Lord's Supper in chapter 11 (Williams, “Living”). First Corinthians is about the reproclamation of a different value set based on grace, the cross,

and the resurrection (Brown, *Cross*; compare Martin, *Body*). W. Schrage sees Paul's proclamation of the cross as "ground and criterion of church and apostle" (Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 1:165).

Another newer approach to proving the letter's original unity is that of Ciampa and Rosner. Rather than seeing the letter partitioned or organized around the theme of unity or the reproclamation of the cross and resurrection, they see the composition of the letter organized around purity and vices: immorality and idolatry. These are the two main Gentile vices, and they consume the majority of the letter. Paul argues against immorality in chapters 5–6. In chapter 7, he promotes sexual purity through the proper use of the body in both marriage and celibacy. In chapters 8–10—in the context of weak and strong brothers and food offered to idols—Paul encourages the Corinthians to flee idolatry (compare 6:18; 10:14). He then discusses how proper traditions of worship and use of spiritual gifts in love foster right worship of God (1 Cor 11; 12–14; Ciampa, *Corinthians*).

Ciampa and Rosner also discuss the role of the Old Testament in 1 Corinthians. There are 18 citations from or allusions to Old Testament material found within the letter. Many of these come from the books of Deuteronomy and Isaiah. Other less explicit references to Scripture have also been noted within the book, and thus, a greater amount of Jewish influence may be seen than previously acknowledged (compare Hays, *Echoes and Corinthians*; Rosner, *Paul*; Kuck, *Judgment*, Tomson, *Paul*; Williams, *Wisdom*). Further attempts to show the letter's unity will likely involve an examination of the influence of the letter's Graeco-Roman setting, the Jewish Scripture Paul quotes, and the role of the cross of Christ.

Theology of 1 Corinthians

First Corinthians is filled with many ethical injunctions. While Paul could have simply declared "do this" or "do not do this," appealed to community dynamics to resolve issues, or forcefully used his own authority, he instead employed theological arguments to convince his audience. Theological ideas are found multiple places throughout the letter; three of the most important are:

1. the cross;
2. the Christian recapitulation of Old Testament theology;
3. the lordship of Christ.

The Cross

The role of the cross of Christ is the most significant theological idea within 1 Corinthians, just as the cross is pivotal to understanding much of the ethics of the New Testament (Hays, *Moral Vision*). Paul appealed to the death of Jesus in order to promote a community ethos and ethic consistent with the ideals and values it symbolized (R. Pickett, *Cross*; Williams, "Living"). As Paul begins to address party strife and division at Corinth, he ties these ideas directly to the cross in 1 Cor 1:17. Surprisingly, the gospel message of the cross is the first theological item he uses to encourage unity—he could have simply urged the Corinthians to be united without referring to Jesus' death at all.

The cross is found throughout Paul's arguments for unity. In 1 Cor 1:26–31, Paul shows how all of the Corinthians—regardless of their wisdom, power, and wealth—are saved by the message of the cross and can boast only in it. Thus, the cross draws the divided Corinthians' attention to the one calling that they share in Christ (1:24, 26). The message of the cross cuts

across divisions based on worldly claims of wisdom, power, and wealth and treats everyone the same in saving them.

In 1 Cor 2:1–5, when Paul speaks about his manner of preaching, the cross functions as a unifying factor. It helps to unify the Corinthians by causing them to focus on the one message that Paul, their founding father, preached (compare 2:1–5; 4:14–15). He claims only to know Christ crucified and preach the cross. In these ways, Paul uses the cross to create unity amid a divided situation.

While the cross is not explicit in 1 Cor 4 (as it is in 1 Cor 1), it exerts influence there as well (see Fee, *Corinthians*; Fitzgerald, *Vessel*; Marxsen, *Foundations*; Schrage, “Leid”). As Paul describes his apostleship, he declares himself to be weak, in disrepute, reviled, and persecuted. He declares that he has “the sentence of death” and perceives himself to be a “spectacle to the world” and the “scum of the earth” (4:10–13). All these are aspects of the cross, and the effect of these descriptions is to connect Paul’s leadership directly with the cross—the message that he preached (1:17; 2:1–5). While other leaders in Corinth were fascinated with human wisdom, riches, power, and honor, Paul’s leadership style has a theological basis in his theology of the cross.

Paul will also apply the cross to the problem of exclusion in 1 Cor 5. In this chapter, Paul rebukes the Corinthians because they have done nothing about a man in their midst who was caught in incest. In the midst of this argument, Paul writes, “Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (5:7 NIV). As in previous situations, the cross works as theological support in a section that could have been argued solely sociologically.

Cross-related ideas are also found within Paul’s next ethical injunction in 1 Cor 6. In the midst of arguing against civil litigation between Christian brothers, Paul states in 6:7, “The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?” (NIV) These questions recall Paul’s example of disregarding himself in 4:11–13—a passage that concerned Christian leadership in light of the cross (Rosner, *Paul*). In this case of civil litigation, Christ’s death functions as the basis for self-sacrifice. Rather than choosing the ways of Graeco-Roman secular society and flaunting their status or social privilege, the Corinthians should look to Christ crucified as a model for sacrificing their rights for one another.

In 1 Corinthians 10:32–11:1, Paul writes, “Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (NIV). These are the final verses from Paul’s discussion about weak and strong brothers. Throughout much of 1 Corinthians, Paul has been advocating for the protection of the weak brothers. As he concludes this three-chapter section, he refers again to the cross. This passage contains the matter of self-sacrifice—a theme linked with the cross earlier. He also repeats the imitation idea that was found in chapter 4, a section with influence from the cross. As imitation is now clearly linked with Christ, who went to the cross, it thus recalls the theological foundation of the cross within 1 Corinthians.

A direct reference to the cross appears in 11:17–34, where Paul passes along a tradition that he received from the Lord regarding the Lord’s Supper—the body and blood of Christ. The cross can also be seen here in that Paul recognizes that the tradition he is delivering to the Corinthians is from the night that the Lord was betrayed before His crucifixion (11:23). Furthermore,

according to Paul, the remembrance of this tradition results in the Corinthians proclaiming Christ's death on the cross until He comes again (11:26). This section then encourages self-sacrifice by waiting for others before eating together.

Sacrificial love that is found within 1 Cor 13 also carries with it cross-related ideas. This chapter, which is found between discussions on spiritual gifts, provides a model for how these gifts are to be practiced (Ciampa, *First Corinthians*). Rather than using a gift like tongues or prophecy for one's own benefit, Paul encourages the Corinthians to forego their rights (see especially 13:4–7). His words echo ideas about the cross that have been found prominently within other passages in 1 Corinthians.

One final appearance of the cross indicates its theological importance. At the end of 1 Corinthians, following many chapters of correction, Paul mentions the things of first importance. In 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 he writes, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.” Of first importance is the cross of Christ. Thus, it makes sense that this is of influence within the rest of 1 Corinthians.

Old Testament Ideas

First Corinthians draws a significant amount of its theology from the Old Testament Scriptures. There are 18 quotations from or allusions to the Old Testament within 1 Corinthians that have been identified in major studies on Paul's use of Scripture (Koch, *Schrift*; Stanley, *Paul*). These come from books including Genesis, Job, Psalms, Jeremiah, and Hosea (Williams, *Sources*). Of particular interest are the large number of references from Deuteronomy and Isaiah.

Deuteronomy. Within the Pentateuch, the book of Deuteronomy explains the response to God's calling His people out of bondage in Egypt. The book calls God's people to worship Him at a particular place and in a particular way (Deut 12; 14:23–24; 16:1–11). God's people are to be careful especially to avoid idolatry (6:14–15; 12:1–6) and immorality (22:13–30; 23:2, 17–18; 31:16). As a result, Moses appoints judges (1), urges the people to heed his instruction (particularly the Ten Commandments; 6:1–13), to celebrate the Passover (Deut 16), and to inaugurate the covenant (Deut 29).

Deuteronomy as a whole has a sense of warning to it—God's people are in danger of failing. In Deuteronomy 2, God's people are compared with the pagan nations. Deuteronomy 31:16–18 already anticipates the Israelites' failure to keep the covenant. Throughout the book, there are repeated appeals to remember, pay attention, and heed Moses' words (5:1; 6:1–14; 7:12–15). Other sections also anticipate Israel's inability to keep God's laws (12:28–32; 13:18; 31:16–18; 32:19–26). There is, however, a sense of promise within Deuteronomy on the condition that God's people respond obediently (11:13–15, 22–25; 15:5–6; 28:1–14).

The book of 1 Corinthians continues many of the ethical principles that Deuteronomy encouraged. For example, Paul promotes the appointing of judges (1 Cor 6:1–6) and gives exhortations for the keeping of the Passover meal (5:7; 10:16–21; 11:23–26). Particularly striking is the emphasis on fleeing immorality and idolatry (6:18; 10:14). These are the only two vices discussed in 1 Corinthians that are “to be fled.” Other sections within 1 Corinthians urge the Corinthians to clean out impure elements amongst them—such as immorality (1 Cor 5). Sexual purity is the concern of several other sections of 1 Corinthians (6:16–19; 7:1–40).

Idolatry is the focus of 1 Cor 8–10. Paul begins his discussion in 8:7–13 with warnings about food sacrificed to idols. The subtleties of idolatry are the concern of 10:12–33. Instead of repeating the failures of God’s people from the time of the Pentateuch, the Corinthians are to “do all to the glory of God” (10:31). In 1 Corinthians 11–14, to prevent the Corinthians from falling into idolatrous practices, Paul promotes the proper worship of God (Ciampa, *First Corinthians*).

Isaiah. As with the book of Deuteronomy, the book of Isaiah contributes significant influence to 1 Corinthians. The opening two chapters in 1 Corinthians contain several references to Isaiah, providing an explanation of the two types of salvation-wisdom that Paul opposes and endorses (Williams, *Wisdom*).

The first type of salvation-wisdom—one that Paul opposes (1 Cor 1)—is human wisdom that derives from the nations of this world and their rulers (1 Cor 1:23; 2:6). Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14 in 1 Corinthians 1:19 to argue that human wisdom is the opposite of the plan of God and will be brought to nothing. The larger passage of Isaiah 29 depicts those who follow human wisdom as following the path to destruction. By referring to human wisdom with reference to Isaiah, Paul explains why he opposes mixing the message of the cross with human wisdom: Following human wisdom leads to destruction, for it rejects the cross of Christ.

The second type of salvation-wisdom in 1 Corinthians is true wisdom, which triumphs and which comes from God (1 Cor 2). In 1 Corinthians 2:9, Paul refers to Isa 64:3 in conjunction with Isa 65:17. In both Isaiah’s original context and Paul’s use of the quotation, God’s plan will be a dramatic one that surprises those with a worldly mindset. The context of Isa 64:3 concerns the hidden nature of God’s revelation among people. This overlaps with Paul’s thoughts in 1 Cor 2:7–8, where he describes a secret and hidden wisdom that none of the rulers of this age understood. That wisdom is hidden from some, but it is revealed to those whom the Lord calls to Him. The context of Isa 65:17 suggests a similar idea, as the redeemed are able to see and appreciate God’s revelation with the new creation of the heavens and the earth.

Isaiah’s influence continues into Paul’s discussion about the mind in 1 Cor 2, where he refers to Isa 40:13. Here Paul speaks of the mind that is able to understand the ways of the Lord within history. Those without the Spirit cannot comprehend it, but those to whom the Spirit is given are able to understand (1 Cor 2:12–16). When read in the context of Isa 40:13, the understanding mind is found in a series of questions that indicate that God alone is able to reveal His mind and His ways (Isa 40:12, 14). Seen in context of Isaiah, the “mind” refers to the salvation plan of God, which is also an overlap with the wise plan of God in 1 Cor 2.

Isaiah’s theological influence regarding wisdom can also be seen in 1 Cor 14, where Paul quotes Isa 28:11–12 in his discussion concerning tongues. In this section, Paul challenges the Corinthians about using indiscernible tongues during worship. Rather than simply saying not to use them, he refers to Isa 28, in which the inability to understand language referred to being captured by God’s opponents.

When Paul concludes his discussion in 1 Corinthians 15 regarding the resurrection, he also refers directly to Isaiah. Paul quotes from Isa 22:13 in 1 Cor 15:32 when he writes, “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’ ” The main ideas from the context of Isaiah fit with a world without a resurrection. Isaiah 22 concerns a siege that is due to occur upon the people of Jerusalem. Rather than repenting, they decide to “party like there is no tomorrow” since there is no hope (Hays, *Corinthians*). This context of Isa 22 fits the hopeless existence without a resurrection that Paul is describing in 1 Cor 15. Hopelessness leads to indulgence.

One final explicit reference to Isaiah is found within the section that speaks of the believer's resurrection body in 1 Cor 15. Paul quotes from Isa 25:8 when he states, "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory' " (1 Cor 15:54 NIV). In this section there is a sense of victory, thanksgiving, and celebration. Overtones from the Isaianic banquet from Isa 25:8–9 can also be detected.

Lordship of Christ

The lordship of Christ is the final significant theological theme. Paul encourages his readers to acknowledge this lordship from the beginning of his letter: "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours" (1:2). He then stresses Christ's lordship repeatedly throughout 1 Corinthians. The word "Lord" occurs 56 times in the letter, and the phrase "Lord Jesus Christ" occurs eight times. Jesus is referred to as "Lord Jesus" four times. Within the first 10 verses of 1 Cor, Jesus is explicitly referred to as "Lord" five times. The epistle concludes with a blessing in the name of the "Lord Jesus" (16:23).

Throughout the letter, Paul asks the Corinthians to change their behavior so that it might be in line with Christ's lordship:

- The church must be unified so that it reflects the mind of Christ (1:10; 2:16).
- The church be cleansed from the man caught in incest so that it might reflect the sacrifice of Christ (5:7).
- It is improper to have relations with a prostitute as that violates the body of Christ (6:18–20).
- The Corinthians should not eat food sacrificed to idols, since it can harm the conscience of some for whom Christ died (8:11).
- When the Corinthians are worshipping corporately, head coverings or the lack of wearing head coverings reflects the headship of Christ (11:3).
- The Lord's Supper is to be observed by discerning the body of Christ (11:29).
- Spiritual gifts are to be practiced by using them in relation to the Christian body, of which Christ is the head (12:27).

Paul even stresses that all of history is about the subjection of all things under Christ's feet (15:24–28).

Reception of 1 Corinthians

First Corinthians is one of the best received documents from the New Testament within early church history. In the writings that can be dated to the late first century and early second century, there are many places in which references from 1 Corinthians can be found. Quotations are found within *First Clement*, the *Letters of Ignatius*, and the *Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians*. It is also likely that 1 Corinthians can be recognized within the *Shepherd of Hermas*. Portions of 1 Corinthians may possibly be found within the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Didache*, and *Second Clement* (Oxford Historical Society, *Reception*). Later church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine all referred to 1 Corinthians. The church fathers John Chrysostom and Origen wrote a series of homilies on 1 Corinthians (Kovacs, *Corinthians*). Additionally, Cyril of Alexandria and Theodoret wrote commentaries on this epistle. In his *Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love*, Augustine uses 1 Corinthians as the foundational text for his treatise.

The reception within *First Clement* is especially significant, as it is one of the earliest books written following the New Testament (AD 95–97) and was highly respected within the early church. Some even placed it on par with other New Testament writings. Not only does *First Clement* quote portions of 1 Corinthians, but it reveals that the letter is to be considered as authoritative. Clement writes in *1 Clement* 47:1, “Take up the epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul. What did he write to you at the time when the Gospel first began to be preached? Truly, under the inspiration of the Spirit, he wrote to you concerning himself, and Cephas, and Apollos, because even then parties had been formed among you” (Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene*).

This quotation indicates that Paul’s exhortation for unity found in 1 Cor 1–3, and other portions of 1 Corinthians, was still seen to be authoritative some 40 years after the time that Paul wrote. This is particularly striking since Paul’s relationship with the Corinthians was evidently one that fluctuated, as is clear from sections within 2 Corinthians (compare 2 Cor 2:1–5; 7:2–4; 10:1–5, 10; 13:1–10).

Besides being cited within early Christian literature, 1 Corinthians was received into the earliest lists of the New Testament canon. In fact, it is found in all significant canon listings within the early church. Even when the heretic Marcion composed his shortened list of canonical books in AD 140, he included 1 Corinthians. The following early canon lists include 1 Corinthians:

- the Muratorian Canon (AD 180);
- the listing of canonical books in the Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae (AD 206);
- Eusebius’ canonical listing (AD 325–40);
- the Canon of Cyril of Jerusalem (AD 350);
- the Cheltenham Canon (AD 360);
- Athanasius’ canon listing in his *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter* (AD 367).

One of the most significant receptions of a portion of 1 Corinthians can be found in the early Christian creeds. The Nicene Creed borrows wording from 1 Cor 15:4 when it reads, “On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.” The words “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried” may have come from 15:3. It is also possible that 8:4–6 influenced, “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty.” The phrase “resurrection of the body” may have been influenced by 15:49–58. The Apostles’ Creed can claim influence from the same texts.

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DRAKE WILLIAMS¹⁵

The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the CORINTHIANS

Author: Paul

Date: A.D. 56

Theme: Resolving Doctrinal and Practical Church Problems and Growth of a Church in Christ

Key Words: The Cross, Sexual Sins, Spiritual Gifts, Love, the Resurrection

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Author. The authenticity of 1 Corinthians has never seriously been challenged. In style, language, and theology, the letter belongs to Paul.

Occasion and Date. Paul established the church at Corinth about A.D. 50–51, when he spent eighteen months there on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–17). He continued to carry on correspondence and exercise care for the church after his departure (see 1 Cor. 5:9; 2 Cor. 12:14). During his three-year ministry in Ephesus, on his third missionary journey (Acts 19), he had received disturbing reports concerning moral laxity among believers in Corinth. To remedy the situation, he sent the church a letter (1 Cor. 5:9–11), which has since been lost. Shortly afterward, a delegation sent by Chloe, a member of the church in Corinth, reported to Paul concerning the existence of divisive factions in the church. Before he could write a corrective letter, another delegation from Corinth arrived with a letter asking him certain questions (1 Cor. 7:1; 16:17). Paul immediately sent Timothy to Corinth to help correct conditions there (1 Cor. 4:17). He then wrote the letter that we know as 1 Corinthians, expecting it to reach Corinth before Timothy (16:10). Since Paul apparently wrote the letter near the end of his Ephesian ministry (16:8), it may be dated about A.D. 56.

Purpose. 1 Corinthians is a pastoral letter, written to resolve doctrinal and practical problems within the local church. Paul’s authorship gives the letter apostolic application to all “the churches of God” (11:16).

Background. The letter reveals some of the typical Greek cultural problems of Paul’s day, including the gross sexual immorality of the city of Corinth. The Greeks were known for their idolatry, divisive philosophies, spirit of litigation, and rejection of a bodily resurrection. Corinth was one of the most important commercial cities of the day and controlled much of the shipping between the East and the West. It was located on the narrow neck of land which served as a land-bridge between the mainland of Greece and the Peloponnesian peninsula. The city was infamous for its sensuality and sacred prostitution. Even its name became a notorious proverb: “to Corinthianize” meant to practice prostitution. The city’s chief deity was Aphrodite (Venus), the goddess of licentious love, and a thousand professional prostitutes served in the temple dedicated to her worship. The spirit of the city showed up in the church and explains the kind of problems the people faced.

It also reveals some of the problems the former pagans had in not transferring previous religious experiences to the ministry experience of the Holy Spirit. They may have associated some of the frenzied antics of paganism with the exercise of spiritual gifts (see 12:2).

Content. The letter consists of Paul’s response to ten separate problems: a sectarian spirit, incest, lawsuits, fornication, marriage and divorce, eating food offered to idols, wearing of the veil, the Lord’s Supper, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection of the body.

Personal Application. No epistle in the New Testament gives a clearer insight into the life of the first-century church than 1 Corinthians. In it Paul provides straightforward instructions for such moral and theological problems as sectarianism, spiritual immaturity, church discipline, ethical differences, the role of the sexes and the proper use of spiritual gifts. Where these same problems exist in the modern church, the remedies are the same. Those from non-Pentecostal or

non-charismatic churches may receive a fresh challenge from the vitality and spiritual gifts evident in the Corinthian church, and may lay aside traditional prejudices against such things. Those from charismatic and Pentecostal churches, where worship is less structured and spiritual gifts are prominent, may reexamine their own practices in the light of Paul's guidelines for congregational services.

Christ Revealed. The letter contains an unmatched revelation of the Cross of Christ as a counter to all human boasting (chs. 1–4). Paul cites Christ as our example in all behavior (11:1) and describes the church as His body (ch. 12). Especially important are the powerful consequences of Christ's resurrection for the whole of creation (ch. 15).

The Holy Spirit at Work. The manifestations or the gifts of the Spirit make up the best known passages about the Holy Spirit (chs. 2–14). But we should not overlook the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing the things of God to the human spirit in a way that prevents all grounds for pride (2:1–13). Perhaps most illuminating amid current debate in the church at large is the way the apostle leads the Corinthians into a balanced employment of speaking with tongues, affirming this practice and refusing any the right to prohibit it (ch. 14).

Outline of 1 Corinthians *Introduction with greetings and thanksgiving 1:1–9*

- I. The problem of a sectarian spirit which arose from a preference for religious leaders because of their supposed superior wisdom 1:0–4:21
 - A. The contrast between human and divine wisdom over the Cross shows the fallacy of a sectarian spirit which stems from human wisdom 1:0–3:4
 - B. The role of religious leaders show they are important but never the cause for boasting 3:5–4:5
 - C. An open rebuke by ironic comparison of the Corinthians' pride with Paul's foolishness 4:6–21
- II. The problem of internal church discipline brought on by a case of incest 5:1–13
- III. The problem of lawsuits between Christians before public courts 6:1–11
- IV. The problem of a sexual misuse of the body from a misapplication of Paul's ethical teaching 6:12–20
- V. The problem of the relationship between the secular sphere and the believer's spiritual life, especially in the areas of sex, marriage, and slavery 7:1–40
- VI. The problem of ethical differences between brethren caused by the eating of food offered to idols 8:1–11:1
 - A. The basic principle of love versus knowledge 8:1–13
 - B. Paul's personal example in foregoing his rights 9:1–27
 - C. The application of the principle in attitude and action 10:1–11:1
- VII. The problem of the role of the sexes in light of the removal of the veil 11:2–16
- VIII. The problem of desecrating the Lord's Supper 11:17–34
- IX. The problem of spiritual manifestations which arose from a misuse of the gift of tongues 12:1–14:40
 - A. The need for variety 12:1–31
 - B. The need for love 13:1–13

- C. The need for control 14:1–40
- X. The problem of the resurrection of the dead 15:1–58
- XI. Concluding personal remarks 16:1–24¹⁶

1 Corinthians 1:1-17

Vs 17 – Mandate for leaders? What does this say to every one of us?

“For Christ didn’t send me to baptize but to preach the good News – and not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power.” (See 1 Cor. 2:4-5)

I. INTRODUCTION (1:1–9)

A. Salutation (1:1–3)

1:1 Paul was called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ on the Damascus road. This call did not come from or through men, but directly from the Lord Jesus. **An apostle** is literally “a sent one.” The first apostles were witnesses of Christ in resurrection. They also could perform miracles to confirm that the message they preached was divine. Paul could truly say in the language of Gerhard Tersteegen:

Christ the Son of God has sent me
To the midnight lands;
Mine the mighty ordination
Of the pierced hands.

When Paul wrote, a **brother** named **Sosthenes** was with him, so Paul includes his name in the salutation. It cannot be known for sure whether this is the same Sosthenes as in Acts 18:17, the ruler of the synagogue who was publicly beaten by the Greeks. Possibly this leader had been saved through Paul’s preaching and was now helping him in the work of the gospel.

1:2 The letter is addressed first of all **to the church of God which is at Corinth**. It is encouraging that there is no place on earth too immoral for an assembly belonging to God to be established. The Corinthian congregation is further described as **those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called ... saints**. **Sanctified** here means set apart to God from the world, and describes the *position* of all who belong to Christ. As to their *practical condition*, they should set themselves apart day by day in holy living.

Some people contend that sanctification is a distinct work of grace whereby a person obtains the eradication of the sin nature. Such a teaching is contradicted in this verse. The Corinthian Christians were far from what they should have been in practical holiness, but the fact remains that they were positionally **sanctified** by God.

As saints they were members of a great fellowship: **called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours**. Although the teachings of this Epistle were first addressed to the saints in Corinth, they are also intended for all those of the worldwide fellowship who acknowledge the lordship of Christ.

¹⁶ Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Ro 16:26). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

1:3 First Corinthians is in a very special way the letter of His lordship. In discussing the many problems of assembly and personal life, the apostle constantly reminds his readers that Jesus Christ is Lord and that all we do should be done in acknowledgment of this great truth.

Paul's characteristic greeting is given in verse 3. **Grace and peace** summarize his entire gospel. **Grace** is the source of every blessing, and **peace** is the result in the life of a man who accepts the grace of God. These great blessings come **from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. Paul does not hesitate to mention **the Lord Jesus** in the same breath with **God our Father**. This is one of hundreds of similar expressions in the NT implying the equality of the Lord Jesus with God the Father.

B. Thanksgiving (1:4–9)

1:4 Having concluded his salutation, the apostle now turns to thanksgiving for the Corinthians and for the wonderful work of God in their lives (vv. 4–9). It was a noble trait in Paul's life that always sought to find something thankworthy in the lives of his fellow believers. If their practical lives were not very commendable, then he would at least **thank his God** for what He had done for them. This is exactly the case here. The Corinthians were not what we would call spiritual Christians. But Paul can at least give thanks **for the grace of God which was given to them by Christ Jesus**.

1:5 The particular way in which God's grace was manifested to the Corinthians was in their being richly endowed with gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul specifies gifts of **utterance and all knowledge**, presumably meaning that the Corinthians had been given the gifts of tongues, interpretation of tongues, and knowledge to an extraordinary degree. **Utterance** has to do with outward expression and **knowledge** with inward comprehension.

1:6 The fact that they had these gifts was a confirmation of God's work in their lives, and that is what Paul means when he says, **even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you**. They heard **the testimony of Christ**, they received it by faith, and God testified that they were truly saved by giving them these miraculous powers.

1:7 As far as the possession of gifts was concerned, the Corinthian church was not inferior to any other. But the mere possession of these gifts was not in itself a mark of true spirituality. Paul was really thanking the Lord for something for which the Corinthians themselves were not directly responsible. Gifts are given by the ascended Lord without regard to a person's own merit. If a person has some gift, he should not be proud of it but use it humbly for the Lord.

The fruit of the Spirit is another matter entirely. This involves the believer's own surrender to the control of the Holy Spirit. The apostle could not commend the Corinthians for evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, but only for what the Lord had sovereignly bestowed on them—something over which they had no control.

Later in the Epistle the apostle will have to reprove the saints for their abuse of these gifts, but here he is content to express thanks that they had received these gifts in such unusual measure.

The Corinthians were **eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ**. Bible students are not agreed as to whether this refers to Christ's coming for His saints (1 Thess. 4:13–18), or the Lord's coming with His saints (2 Thess. 1:6–10), or both. In the first case it would be a revelation of Christ only to believers, whereas in the second it would be His Revelation to the whole world. Both the Rapture and the glorious appearing of Christ are **eagerly** awaited by the believer.

1:8 Now Paul expresses the confidence that the Lord **will also confirm** the saints **to the end, that they might be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ**. Once again it is striking that Paul's thanksgiving is concerned with what God will do rather than with what the Corinthians have done. Because they have trusted Christ, and because God confirmed this fact by giving the gifts of the Spirit to them, Paul was confident that God would keep them for Himself until Christ's coming for His people.

1:9 Paul's optimism concerning the Corinthians is based on the faithfulness of **God** who called them **into the fellowship of His Son**. He knows that since God had gone to such tremendous cost to make them sharers of the life of **our Lord**, He would never let them slip out of His hands.

II. DISORDERS IN THE CHURCH (1:10–6:20)

A. Divisions among Believers (1:10–4:21)

1:10 The apostle is now ready to take up the problem of **divisions** in the church (1:10–4:21). He begins with a loving exhortation to unity. Instead of commanding with the authority of an apostle, he pleads with the tenderness of a brother. The appeal for unity is based on **the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**, and since the name stands for the Person, it is based on all that the Lord Jesus is and has done. The Corinthians were exalting the name of men; that could only lead to divisions. Paul will exalt the name of the Lord Jesus, knowing that only in this way will unity be produced among the people of God. To **speak the same thing** means to be of **the same mind and** of one accord. It means to be united as to loyalty and allegiance. This unity is produced when Christians have the mind of Christ, and in the verses to follow, Paul will tell them in a practical manner how they can think Christ's thoughts after Him.

1:11 News concerning the **contentions** in Corinth had come to Paul from **Chloe's household**. In naming his informers, Paul lays down an important principle of Christian conduct. We should not pass on news about our fellow believers unless we are willing to be quoted in the matter. If this example were followed today, it would prevent most of the idle gossip which now plagues the church.

1:12 Sects or parties were being formed within the local church, each one claiming its distinctive leader. Some acknowledged preference for **Paul**, some for **Apollos**, some for **Cephas** (Peter). Some even claimed to belong to **Christ**, probably meaning that they *alone* belonged to Him, to the exclusion of others!

1:13 Paul's indignant rebuke of sectarianism is found in verses 13–17. To form such parties in the church was to deny the unity of the body of **Christ**. To follow human leaders was to slight the One who had been crucified for them. To take the name of a man was to forget that in baptism, they had acknowledged their allegiance to the Lord Jesus.

1:14 The rise of parties in Corinth made Paul thankful **that he had baptized** only a few in the assembly there. He mentions **Crispus and Gaius** as among those whom he had baptized.

1:15, 16 He would never want anyone to **say that he had baptized in his own name**. In other words, he was not trying to win converts to himself or to make a name for himself. His sole aim was to point men and women to the Lord Jesus Christ.

On further reflection Paul remembered that he had **also baptized the household of Stephanas**, but he could **not** think of **any other**.

1:17 He explains that **Christ did not send him primarily to baptize, but to preach the gospel**. This does not mean for a moment that Paul did not believe in baptism. He has already mentioned

the names of some whom he *did* baptize. Rather, it means that his main business was not to baptize; he probably entrusted this work to others, perhaps to some of the Christians in the local church. This verse, however, does lend its testimony against any idea that baptism is essential to salvation. If that were true, then Paul would be saying here that he was thankful that he saved none of them except Crispus and Gaius! Such an idea is untenable.

In the latter part of verse 17, Paul is making an easy transition to the verses that follow. He did not **preach the gospel** by using **wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect**. He knew that if men were impressed by his oratory or rhetoric, then to that extent he had defeated himself in his efforts to set forth the true meaning of **the cross of Christ**.

It will help us to understand the section that follows if we remember that the Corinthians, being Greeks, were great lovers of human wisdom. They regarded their philosophers as national heroes. Some of this spirit had apparently crept into the assembly at Corinth. There were those who desired to make the gospel more acceptable to the intelligentsia. They did not feel that it had status among scholars, and so they wanted to intellectualize the message. This worship of intellectualism was apparently one of the issues that was causing the people to form parties around human leaders. Efforts to make the gospel more acceptable are completely misguided. There is a vast difference between God's wisdom and man's, and there is no use trying to reconcile them.

Paul now shows the folly of exalting men, and emphasizes that to do this is inconsistent with the true nature of the gospel (1:18–3:4). His first point is that the message of the cross is the opposite of all that men consider to be true wisdom (1:18–25).¹⁷

1:1 Sosthenes was probably the former ruler of the synagogue at Corinth (Acts 18:17).

1:2 All believers in Christ are **saints** by virtue of their call, having been set apart to belong to Him. Having been placed in Christ, they are to grow progressively in holiness.

1:4 Paul rejoices in the grace of God at work in their past (vv. 5, 6), present (v. 7), and future (vv. 8, 9). Jesus Christ is validating the eternal purposes of God for His people.

1:5 Enriched: No one is impoverished by becoming a Christian. The particular wealth Paul has in mind is in the realm of spiritual gifts. Noteworthy is his introductory mention of **utterance**, affirmed as enriching, even though he will later bring severe correction regarding their manner of employing vocal gifts.

1:6 The changed lives of the Corinthians gave divine confirmation to Paul's **testimony** to Christ (see 2 Cor. 3:1-3).

1:8 Blameless: Paul's confidence of final approval is based on God's faithfulness.

1:10 The first problem addressed is the rivalry and strife that resulted over preference for religious leaders based on their assumed superior wisdom. Probably most were claiming to be of the "Paul-party" (v. 12). As a recipient of revelation, no one stood as close to the fountainhead of Christianity as Paul. He expressed gratitude that he had **baptized** only a few, lest anyone could claim baptism **in the name of Paul** and assume undue allegiance to him or privileged position before others. The gospel has to do with Jesus Christ, and one's allegiance belongs *to* Him and all position is *in* Him.

¹⁷ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (pp. 1746–1749). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

1:10 See section 4 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 1 Cor.

1:18–25 Message of the cross: A mutual antagonism exists between the wisdom of this world and the wisdom of God, and the conflict shows up supremely in the Cross of Christ. God works most wisely and most powerfully in ways directly opposite human expectations. Even as Jesus hung on the Cross, the Jews asked for a power-sign (Matt. 27:40–43). The Greeks made the pursuit of wisdom a meaningless end in itself, as Paul learned at Athens (Acts 17:21).¹⁸

Psalm 27:1-6

Proverbs 20:20-21

August 5

INTRO TO EZRA

Introduction to Ezra

The book of Ezra shows Yahweh's faithfulness and emphasizes the loyalty He rightfully deserves. The narrative begins with the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy: After 70 years of exile in Babylon, the Jewish people would return to their homeland (Jer 25:11–12; 29:10–14; Ezra 1:1). Upon their return, the people began rebuilding the Jerusalem temple—the symbol of God's presence among them. The book of Ezra depicts the difficulties of rebuilding a community based on faithfulness to Yahweh.

Background

Approximately 50 years before the narrative of Ezra begins (in 586 BC), the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and took the residents of Judah into exile. By the time the book of Ezra opens in 538 BC, the balance of world power had shifted from the Babylonians to the Persians. A year after conquering Babylon, Cyrus, the king of Persia, issued a decree that any Jews who wished to return to Judah and rebuild the temple would not only be allowed to do so, but would receive government support (Ezra 1:2–4).

Judah's territory was now only a small area centered around Jerusalem. Instead of being self-governed, Judah was ruled as a province of the Persian Empire. The events in Ezra primarily take place in this location, with a few references to Persian concerns related to other locations.

The Jewish exiles did not leave Babylon all at once; the return to Judah happened in waves. Ezra led the third main group in 458 BC (80 years after King Cyrus' decree). The book of Ezra probably was written a few decades later, around 445–430 BC. The text was originally part of a single work that also included Nehemiah.

Structure

¹⁸ Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Ro 16:26–1 Co 1:8). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

Ezra may be divided into two sections. The first section (chs. 1–6) records events that happened before Ezra’s time. It opens with King Cyrus’ proclamation permitting the Jewish exiles to return to Judah (1:1–4; 538 BC). The first two waves were led by Judah’s first two governors under Persian rule: Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel (1:5–11; 2:1–70). Zerubbabel and Joshua (also called Jeshua) the high priest unite to lead the temple rebuilding project. The returned Jewish exiles soon find themselves in conflict with other people living in the area and ultimately at odds with the government, and the work to rebuild the temple comes to a halt (chs. 3–5). With encouragement from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (Hag 1:4, 9; Zech 1:16; 4:9), temple construction resumes around 520 BC (Ezra 6). In 516 BC, the temple, the symbol of God’s presence among His people, is rededicated—signifying the completion of the 70 years Jeremiah had proclaimed (Jer 29:10, 12).

Ezra 7–10 concentrates on a later period, starting in 458 BC. A command by the Persian king Artaxerxes (who reigned about 60 years after Cyrus) sends a scribe and chief priest named Ezra to Judah as an authority in the law of God (Ezra 7:6, 25–28). When he arrives, he appoints and trains judges and magistrates for the leadership of Judah. Ezra’s attention first goes to the issue of intermarriage between men from Judah and foreign women from the local people living in the land (9:1–2). God’s people had disobeyed His command to live separately as a holy nation, and the intermarriages had likely led to syncretism of Yahweh worship with that of foreign gods (compare 1 Kgs 11:1–8; Neh 13:26). Under Ezra’s leadership, the people repent, and the men give up their foreign wives.

Outline

- Return from exile and rebuilding of the temple (1:1–6:22)
- Ezra’s return and reforms (7:1–10:44)

Themes

The book of Ezra is about the importance of staying faithful, and God’s strength to fulfill His promises. Against all odds, God worked in the heart of King Cyrus to allow the exiles to return. Despite this powerful sign of God’s favor, the temple was neglected for years because God’s people feared local opposition. It took the people receiving a message from two of God’s prophets to restart the project (Haggai and Zechariah; see Ezra 5:1). During Ezra’s time, the community again showed unfaithfulness in disobeying Yahweh’s commands about marriage (chs. 9–10). Returning to live in the promised land was not enough; the people needed to abide by God’s law. They needed to be faithful to the one who had redeemed them from exile.

Being people of God comes with blessings and responsibilities. Although we experience His transforming power and grace, we also confront daily choices about the depth of our commitment. Trusting God is often about both seizing the opportunities to do His work and acting faithfully even when those around us do not.¹⁹

¹⁹ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

EZRA, LEADER OF THE EXILES, SON OF SERAIAH (עֲזָרָה, *ezra*). A scribe, priest, and teacher of the Law. Led exiles back to Judaea from Babylon. Commissioned by Artaxerxes to appoint magistrates and judges (Ezra 7:25) and to teach and enforce the “Law of God” and the “Law of the King” in Judaea (Ezra 7:25–26). One of the earliest and most notable figures of Second Temple Judaism.

Ezra in the Bible

Ezra was a priest from the line of Aaron (Ezra 7:1–5) and a scribe “skilled in the Law of Moses” (Ezra 7:6). His works are recorded in Ezra 7–10 and Neh 8. Sixty years after Tattenai, Shethar-bozenai and other officials rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem (517–458 BC; Ezra 6:14). Ezra led the priests, Levites, temple servants, and people of Israel who chose to return from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:7, 13). There, he beautified the temple and served as priest, scribe, and teacher of the Law.

Ezra’s Mission

Before leaving Babylon, King Artaxerxes instructed Ezra to improve the Jerusalem temple and to take command of the Judaeen community (Ezra 7:11–26). His letter commissioned Ezra to take donations of silver, gold, vessels, and free-will offerings to the temple and present them before the God of Israel. The money was designated to purchase sacrificial animals and whatever else was necessary (Ezra 7:17–18). Artaxerxes provided funds from his own treasury and gave Ezra expense accounts in all the treasuries of the province (Ezra 7:20–22). This was done “lest [God’s] wrath be against the realm of the king and his sons” (Ezra 7:23). He also prohibited taxing priests, Levites, and other temple servants (Ezra 7:24).

Ezra was sent to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem according to the Law of God (Ezra 7:14) because he devoted himself “to study the Law of the Lord, to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel” (Ezra 7:10). He was also commissioned to appoint judges and magistrates, teach the law of God to those who do not know it (Ezra 7:25), and ensure that those who break “the law of God and the law of the king” would be punished accordingly (Ezra 7:26). The result of Ezra’s commission is illustrated in the “intermarriage crisis” (Ezra 9–10) and Ezra’s public reading of the Law (Neh 8).

Ezra’s Response to Reports of Intermarriage

Ezra demonstrates how the Law functions in the Judaeen community, specifically in his response to intermarriage (Ezra 9–10). When officials report to Ezra that “the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost” (Ezra 9:2), Ezra grieves and confesses before God (Ezra 9:3–15). An assembly gathers to weep and confess (Ezra 9:4; 10:1–2), and the people make a covenant to “put away” foreign wives, and remedy the situation within two months (Ezra 10:3–17). Probably only the descendants of Jeshua actually divorced their foreign wives (Ezra 10:18–44; Eskenazi, “Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah,” 515). This scene establishes communal norms and future expectations. It does not attempt to retroactively implement the Law (Eskenazi, “Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah,” 515–16).

Both the prohibition of intermarriage and “putting away” are rooted in the Law (Ezra 9:14; 10:3), yet neither is expressed in the Pentateuch. Exodus 34:11–16 prohibits making any covenant with the nations residing in the land. Deuteronomy 7:1–5 dooms those who make this covenant to destruction. In both passages, intermarriage is only one expression of making a

covenant—the prohibition prevents idolatry. Ezra 9–10 prohibits intermarriage because it affects inheritance (Ezra 9:11–12). If intermarriage was remedied “according to the Law”, the wives and their offspring would be killed (Deut 7:1–5), not “put away.”

Ezra uses various theological and legal concepts from the Pentateuch to provide a homiletic interpretation (Japhet, *From the Rivers of Babylon*, 142–51). He uses the Law’s concepts to define the problem, develop a solution, and affect change instead of attempting a literal adherence (Japhet, *From the Rivers of Babylon*, 151). In this sense, his decisions are done “according to the Law” (Ezra 9:14; 10:3).

Ezra Publicly Reads the Law

Ezra’s actions institute the Jewish tradition of reading and explicating the Law on regular, public occasions (Marcus et al., “Ezra,” 653). Ezra reads the Law on the first day of the seventh month—Rosh Hashanah (Neh 7:73)—and every day during the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot; 8:13–18). The assembly gathers and summons Ezra to read the Law (Ezra 8:1, 13), appealing to his authority as scribe (Ezra 8:1) and priest (Ezra 8:2). Ezra reads from a book while standing above the crowd with officials on either side (Ezra 8:4–5). Levites help the people understand the Law by paraphrasing it—or perhaps by translating from Hebrew to Aramaic (Ezra 8:8; van der Kooij, “Nehemiah 8:8,” 79–80). The people weep, but Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites command them to rejoice, for the day is holy (Ezra 8:9–12).

On the second day, elders, priests and Levites come to Ezra to study the Law (Neh 8:13). They learn that the Feast of Tabernacles is in the seventh month, so they make preparations. All the returnees celebrate for eight days, for the first time since Joshua, while Ezra reads the Law (Ezra 8:14–18).

Knowledge of the Law becomes public when Ezra reads it aloud. The Law shifts from a “special possession,” reserved for the priesthood, to a “common possession,” accessible to the masses (Newsom, *Self as Symbolic Space*, 29–36). The people’s desire to know the Law comes from themselves, not the elite (Ezra 8:1, 13). The Law becomes central to their identity as they reconstitute Israel. Observing and learning about the Law brings people together and gives them the vocabulary to explore their differences. This paves the way for the sectarianism that later defines Second Temple Judaism (Newsom, *Self as Symbolic Space*, 28–34).

Ezra in Early Jewish Tradition

Early Jewish Tradition, especially the Talmud, understands Ezra as an essential figure in the early history of Judaism. In addition to the biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah, Ezra’s name is also connected to the Jewish, Greek deuterocanonical book I Esdras and the pseudepigraphic IV Ezra (or II Esdras). Although Ezra does not appear in “Sirach’s list of worthies” (Sir 44–49), he is prominent in the writings of Josephus and the Talmud (Meyers, *Ezra—Nehemiah*, lxxii). Josephus considers Ezra the principle priest of the community, emphasizes his skill in the Law, and preserves the tradition that Ezra died at an old age and was buried in Jerusalem (*Antiquities* 11.5; Meyers, *Ezra—Nehemiah*, lxxii).

Many Talmudic references elaborate on biblical and extrabiblical traditions about Ezra and attribute “the veritable creation of Judaism to him” (m. ’Abot 1:1). The Rabbis focus on Ezra’s role as keeper and teacher of the Law, for “Ezra would have been worthy of receiving the Torah had Moses not preceded him” (b. *Sanhedrin* 21b). He is credited with re-establishing the Law after Israel had forgotten it (*Sukkah* 20a) and founding regulations and legal enactments in relation to the Law (b. *Megillah* 31b, *Bava Qamma* 82a). Some manuscripts of the Targum—

Aramaic translations of the Old Testament—scribe authorship of the book of Malachi to Ezra, while *b. Bava Batra* 16a attributes the book of Chronicles to him (see Meyers, *Ezra—Nehemiah*, lxxiii—lxxiv; Hirschberg, *Ezra*, 653).

Ezra in Early Christian Tradition

Although he is not mentioned in the New Testament, the early Church Fathers speak of Ezra as a servant, prophet, priest, Levite, and scribe (Meyers, *Ezra—Nehemiah*, lxxiii). According to Origen, “Ezra, who was most learned in the law and repeated orally the whole Old Testament, wrote the law and some other things that happened and were revealed” (as quoted in Meyers, *Ezra—Nehemiah*, lxxiii). Writings attributed to Ezra are quoted by Origen and others, suggesting that they were authoritative for the early Church.

Scholastic Concerns: Date and Historicity

Two main issues arise concerning Ezra: the dates of his activity and the nature of his mission. First, Ezra lived in the late fifth century BC, during the early period of Persia’s rule over Jerusalem (539–332 BC), but the biblical text is unclear when exactly his mission was put into action. For example, Ezra 7:7 states that Ezra traveled to Judaea in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, which places the beginning of his mission in 458 BC. This fits with Neh 8:9, which portrays Ezra as contemporary with Nehemiah, who came to Judaea in 445 BC. This chronology entails that Ezra did not publicly read the Law until 13 years after his arrival.

However, Ezra 7–10 indicates that Ezra’s activities take place in Jerusalem, yet Nehemiah found the city with few people and no houses (Neh 7:4). These problems have led some to pose alternative dates for Ezra’s return, either in the 37th year of Artaxerxes I (428 BC) or in the seventh year of Artaxerxes II (397 BC; Marcus et al., “Ezra,” 652). These arguments are largely based on three passages (Wright, *Date*, 7, 17–21):

- Ezra 9:9 indicates the building of Jerusalem’s wall is taking place, yet the wall was not rebuilt until the time of Nehemiah. According to Ezra 4:12, 23 and Neh 1:3, some sort of wall was standing before Nehemiah’s time.
- Ezra 10:1 implies Jerusalem had a large population, while Neh 7:4 indicates only a few people lived there at that time. Ezra 10:7 suggests that most people lived in surrounding regions and would congregate in Jerusalem in order to work on the wall.
- Ezra 10:6 speaks of Johanan, the son of Eliashib, as Ezra’s contemporary, while Neh 12:22–23 states that Johanan was the grandson of Eliashib. According to the Elephantine papyri, which are Jewish texts from Persian-period Egypt, Eliashib was high priest in 408 BC. However, in Wright’s view, “It is likely that the Johanan of 408 BC was the grandson of the Eliashib of Nehemiah’s day. The name Johanan is common, and it would not be strange if Eliashib had both a son and a grandson of that name, the son being brother of Joiada” (Wright, *Date*, 20).

These discrepancies within the biblical text can be remedied if Neh 8 is placed between Ezra 8 and 9—then all of Ezra’s activities would have happened within 12 months (Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 24). Still, the date of Ezra’s move from Babylon to Jerusalem is uncertain based on the biblical evidence alone, though any of the proposed dates still place him in the midst of the Persian period.

Second, on the issue of historicity, Ezra’s mission (Ezra 7) has no parallel and is inconsistent with how his mission plays out (Ezra 8–10; Neh 8). No Persian official was entrusted with a role,

power, or wealth comparable to Ezra's (Janzen, "The 'Mission' of Ezra," 630–38; Grabbe, *A History of the Jews*, 324–31). Thus, some have posited that Artaxerxes' letter may be an ideological reworking of a genuine correspondence and that the authenticity of the Ezra Memoir (Ezra 7–9) is suspect (Blenkinsopp, *Ezra—Nehemiah*, 46; Grabbe, *Yehud*, 78, 330).

Furthermore, Ezra's actions do not match his mission. He beautifies the temple (Ezra 7:15–23; 8:24–36), but there is no mention of him appointing judges and magistrates (Ezra 7:25). When he reads the Law (Neh 8), it is because the people ask (Neh 8:1, 13). Ezra does not see the problem when the people transgress the Law (Ezra 9:1), nor does he devise the solution (Ezra 10:2), even though he was sent to teach and enforce the Law (Ezra 7:25–26). Ezra's actions in Ezra 8–10 do not correspond to Ezra 7:12–26. He seems like a Babylonian *šatammu*—the administrative head of a temple assembly who enforces the assembly's decisions rather than his own (Janzen, "The 'Mission' of Ezra," 639–42).

The above difficulties have led some people to suggest that Ezra is not a real historical figure or that Ezra's character is a composite of several individuals (Grabbe, *Yehud*, 331). For example, C.C. Torrey states, regarding Ezra—Nehemiah, "the story of Ezra is the Chronicler's masterpiece" and "the book has no value whatever, as history" (Torrey, *Composition*, 57–65). Most scholars, however, follow the view that Ezra's autobiography contains elements that are "too concrete, sober, precise and probable ... to regard them as pure fiction" and "that there are details in the record that the Chronicler would not have included if he had been inventing" (Lods, *The Prophets*, 298).

Ezra's mission is further complicated by the absence of a unanimous view of his role and importance in pre-Talmudic tradition, including the wisdom book of Ben Sira (AD 600; Grabbe, *A History of the Jews* 300–31; Torrey, *Composition*, 61–62). Wright counters the argument pertaining to Ben Sira by noting that Sira speaks primarily of the building of the temple and the city, which was done under the leadership of Nehemiah; therefore Sira is not concerned with Ezra (Wright, *Date*, 8). In addition, Lods notes that Sira has Sadducean tendencies, which would have been at odds with Ezra's strict reforms, leading Sira's omission of his activities (Lods, *The Prophets*, 298–300).

At the end of the day, biblical texts about Ezra are ambiguous and can be read as either historical or fictitious; there is not enough information to make an infallible argument in either direction (Grabbe, *Yehud*, 331).

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AMY BALOGH WITH MATTHEW J. MCMAINS

EZRA THE LEVITE (עֲזָרָה, *ezra'*). A Levite and priest listed among the exiles who accompanied Zerubbabel on the return from exile (Neh 12:1).²⁰

Ezra 1:1-2:70

1:1-11 The book of Ezra begins with Cyrus' proclamation allowing the Israelites to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (compare 2 Chr 36:22-23). The book recounts the efforts of the returned exiles to re-establish a Judean community centered on Jerusalem.

Introduction to Ezra

The Historical Books

How to Study the Bible

1:1 the first year of Cyrus 539 BC, the year in which Cyrus conquered Babylon and became king over all of Mesopotamia. Cyrus founded the Persian Empire.

Cyrus

Cyrus II (the Great) was the son of Cambyses I, a Persian, and Mandane, the daughter of Astyages, king of the Medes. Cyrus became king of the Persians in 559 BC. Originally a vassal of Astyages, Cyrus led a successful revolt against the Medes in 550 BC and continued to build and solidify his empire until his death in 530 BC. His son Cambyses II inherited the throne after his death.

Date	Event
Cyrus becomes king of Persia	559 BC
Cyrus conquers Babylon	539 BC
Cyrus allows Jews to return to Jerusalem	538 BC

king of Persia A title rarely used for early Persian kings.

²⁰ Major Contributors and Editors. (2016). [Ezra the Levite](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

the mouth of Jeremiah Likely refers to Jer 25:11–12 and Jer 29:10, where the prophet predicted 70 years of captivity for the Jews. See note on Jer 25:11.

the spirit of Here, the Hebrew term for “spirit” is used in reference to mental will (see Ezra 1:5). Via God’s influence, Cyrus willingly allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem. Likewise, God gave individual Jews a desire to return to the land (v. 5).

Old Testament Anthropology

1:2 the God of the heavens Rarely used prior to the exile, this title for God became popular among the Jews during and after the exile (see 5:11, 12; Neh 1:4, 5; Dan 2:18, 19).

The Name Theology of the Old Testament

has given me all the kingdoms of the earth A similar decree appears on the Cyrus Cylinder.

a house The original temple in Jerusalem, built by Solomon, was burned by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar when they destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC (2 Kgs 25:9; 2 Chr 36:19).

Judah Refers to the geographical location of Jerusalem, not the southern kingdom.

1:3 all of his people While the Assyrians and Babylonians regularly exiled vanquished nations and transplanted foreigners to conquered territories, the Persians allowed captive nations to return to their homelands. Cyrus hoped that his benevolence would lessen the risk of revolutions throughout his empire—happy citizens rarely rebel.

may his God be with him A customary way of wishing someone a safe journey, similar to the term “godspeed.”

may he go up to Jerusalem The Hebrew term for “go up” is used throughout the OT to designate a trip to Jerusalem (e.g., 2 Sam 19:34; 1 Kgs 12:27; 2 Kgs 12:17; Zech 14:17). Since Jerusalem is situated at the top of a mountain, travelers must literally climb up to the city.

the God of Israel Demonstrates the Persians’ tolerance of other religions.

1:4 survivor The Jews who survived the exile (see Isa 10:20–21).

the men of that place Refers to the neighbors of the Jews who have decided to return to Jerusalem. The national heritage of these neighbors is unclear. The phrase may refer to Gentile neighbors, or Jews who remained in exile.

1:5 Judah and Benjamin The primary tribes taken to Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem. While only these tribes are mentioned, they are not the only ones who were exiled.

the priests and the Levites Those who return are divided into three social groups: laity, priests, and Levites. This threefold designation is repeatedly used in Ezra to denote the entire population (see Ezra 2:1–58; 3:8, 12; 6:16; 7:7, 13; 8:15, 29; 9:1; 10:5, 18–43).

1:7 the objects of the house of Yahweh Nebuchadnezzar took the vessels to Babylon during his campaigns against Judah (605–586 BC). They were mistreated by Belshazzar (Dan 5).

the house of his gods Refers to the various temples of the gods worshiped by Nebuchadnezzar, including Marduk and Nabu.

1:8 Mithredath the treasurer Probably the senior Persian financial officer in Babylon. Another Mithredath—mentioned in Ezra 4:7—served during the days of Artaxerxes, at least 80 years after the events of this chapter.

Sheshbazzar The Babylonian name Sheshbazzar means “may Shamash protect the son.” Shamash was the Babylonian sun god. Sheshbazzar’s exact identity is unknown. The epithet “prince of Judah” indicates that Sheshbazzar was a member of the royal family.

1:11 All of the objects of gold and silver metal were five thousand four hundred The total number of the temple vessels identified in vv. 9–10 is 2,499. The reason for this discrepancy is unknown.

It is possible that vv. 9–10 lists only the largest, most important articles, whereas v. 11 records the total number of all vessels, including the less significant ones. It is also possible that the articles enumerated in vv. 9–10 were those taken by Nebuchadnezzar and returned by Cyrus, whereas the total in v. 11 includes the articles donated by the neighbors of the Jews (compare vv. 4, 6). It is also possible that the list is incomplete or corrupted.

Babylonia Babylon was one of the oldest cities of civilization. See note on Mic 4:10.

Babylon

Babylon was founded by Nimrod, the son of Cush (Gen 10:8–10). Located 200 miles north of the Persian Gulf, Babylon was split by the Euphrates River, which divided the city into eastern and western halves. The city began its rise to prominence ca. 1830 BC. The most significant ruler of this early period was Hammurabi (ca. 1728–1686 BC). The height of Babylon’s glory occurred during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (605–562 BC), which was the period of the Jewish exile in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar beautified Babylon by constructing a series of gardens. He also built the Ishtar Gate and restored the Temple of Marduk. Herodotus reports that the city was in the form of a square, measuring 120 stade (about 14 miles) on each side.

to Jerusalem Even in the midst of their march into exile, God promised the Jews that He would bring them back to the land that had been promised to them and here he does so (Jer 31:15–17).

2:1–70 This chapter lists the Jews who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. The list is distinguished from the narrative by means of an *inclusio* (bracketing by repetition of the word *ir*, translated “city” or “town,” in Ezra 2:1 and 2:70). For the book’s original audience, this passage presents the great heroes of the past—those who had taken the first step toward rebuilding the nation of Israel. Many original audience members in Judah could trace their roots directly back to those who had returned to the land 100 years earlier.

2:1 the province An administrative district.

2:2 came Eleven names are recorded here. Nehemiah includes another—Nahamani (Neh 7:7).

Zerubbabel, Jeshua Leaders in Ezra 1–6. Zerubbabel and Jeshua (or Joshua) are routinely mentioned together (see 3:2, 8; 4:3; 5:2). With the exception of 3:2, Zerubbabel is always mentioned first. Zerubbabel served as the governor of Judah, while Jeshua served as the high priest. Together they represent the political and religious leadership of the nation.

Mordecai The name “Mordecai” derives from the name of the Babylonian storm god, Marduk; it means “worshiper of Marduk.” This is not the Mordecai mentioned in Esther; he was in the Persian capital of Susa some 50 years after the return from exile.

Rehum Not to be identified with the Rehum of Ezra 4:8–23, who wrote a letter of complaint to Artaxerxes. The Rehum of 4:8 is identified by the epithet “commander,” a title lacking here.

2:21 Bethlehem The well-known city named Bethlehem in Judah, not the lesser-known one in Zebulun.

2:23 Anathoth A priestly city, the birthplace of Jeremiah (Jer 1:1).

2:62 they were not found Some of the individuals who returned could not prove their ancestry. This proof would likely have consisted of a genealogy tracing one’s heritage to one of the sons of Israel; the Jews routinely kept genealogies to prove their Jewish ancestry (see 1 Chr 5:17; Neh 7:5).

2:63 governor A Persian title, perhaps similar in meaning to “excellency.” The governor alluded to here is probably Sheshbazzar or Zerubbabel.

the Urim and Thummim Two small objects used to discern the will of God. The Urim and Thummim were placed in the breastpiece of the high priest (see note on Exod 28:30; Lev 8:8). The exact use and form of the Urim and Thummim are unknown.

Old Testament Theology and Divination

2:64 The whole assembly The entire religious community that returned to the land from Babylon.

forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty The sum of the various groups mentioned in this chapter is only 29,818, which is 12,542 less than the number given in this verse. It is possible that women and children were not included in the initial numbers but were included in the final tally. It is also possible that not all families are listed in the individual tabulations.

2:65 male and female servants The servants were likely regarded as property rather than as part of the congregation. The majority of these servants were probably foreigners. The servants composed about one-seventh of the total number of returnees, suggesting the Jews had prospered in Babylon.

2:66 horses Horses and mules were primarily used as riding animals, whereas camels and donkeys served as pack animals. Other animals such as sheep and cattle were likely included in the trip. Many of these animals would be sacrificed as a burnt offering once the altar was complete (Ezra 3:1–6).²¹

²¹ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Ezr 1:1–2:66). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

POSTEXILIC PERIOD The period between the Persian conquest of Babylon and rule of exiled Jews (539 BC) until the fall of the Persian Empire (331 BC). For further information, see these articles: Second Temple Period; Israel, History of, Post-monarchic Period; and Palestine, Administration of, Persian.

Biblical Relevance

In 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, conquered Jerusalem, plundered the city, removed the sacred treasures from the temple and destroyed it, and exiled the elite members of society. The basic structures of society were left largely intact in order to work and pay tribute to Babylon (Provan et al., *A Biblical History of Israel*, 281–84). Forty-seven years later, Cyrus II led the Persians in conquering the neo-Babylonians and took control of Judah. This shift in power proved to be beneficial for exiled Jews.

The postexilic period began after Cyrus' defeat of the neo-Babylonian Empire in 539 BC. Shortly after this victory, he issued a decree permitting the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple and the city's fortifications (538 BC; 2 Chr 36:23). Ezra writes that the spirit of God came upon Cyrus and prompted him to release the people. This was to fulfill Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer 25:1–14; Ezra 1:1). According to Ezra 1:2, Cyrus acknowledges that God's spirit came upon him, claiming that God "has commissioned me to build His house at Jerusalem which is in Judah." Cyrus returned the vessels Nebuchadnezzar plundered from the temple. He also decreed that gold, silver, beasts for freewill offerings, and other possessions for the restoration of God's house should be given from the royal treasury and from Persian citizens (Ezra 1:2–4; 6:3–5).

Discovery of the Cyrus cylinder confirms the Persian practice of allowing exiled peoples to return to their homeland with the images of their gods. Cyrus's words recorded in Ezra 1:2–4 might lead the hearer to think that he believed Yahweh is the only true God and that He resides in Jerusalem. But the Jews were not the only recipients of Cyrus's benevolence, which casts doubts on his motives for releasing them (Ezra 1:2). Releasing the exiled Jews in order to reinhabit Jerusalem, rebuild the temple, and fortify the city was likely an attempt to secure Persia's political interests in the west. Israel acted as a buffer between Persia and Egypt. Allowing the Jews to return under good conditions produced a happy vassal state and solidified Persian borders.

The First Return

The return from exile can be divided into three phases. Sheshbazzar led the first wave of returnees. This group of about 50,000 individuals left Persia for the land of Judah shortly after Cyrus's decree in 538 BC. Zerubbabel most likely joined the company a short time thereafter. These returnees first set out to rebuild the altar under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua, son of Jozadak (Ezra 3:2). This was done in the seventh month (Ezra 3:1). With the altar rebuilt, the people made sacrifices to God (Ezra 3:3), observed the Feast of Booths (Ezra 3:4), continued offering sacrifices according to the Mosaic prescriptions (Ezra 3:5–6), and contributed funds to the task of rebuilding the temple (Ezra 3:7).

In the second year after their return, the foundations for the temple were laid (Ezra 3:8). All the people gathered together to praise God upon the completion of the foundation. The sound produced by the crowd was a mixture of joy and sorrow: those who had not seen the temple's

former glory rejoiced at the completion of the foundations; those who had seen the glory of Solomon's Temple mourned because the second temple could not compare (Ezra 3:12–13).

As construction on the temple continued, opposition arose throughout the land. The inhabitants of the land heard about the rebuilding Yahweh's temple and asked to participate (Ezra 4:1–2). Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the other leaders of Israel rejected their offer outright. Williamson suggests the leaders rejected this proposal on political grounds (Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 51). Cyrus granted permission only to the exiles to rebuild the temple. Those wishing to join the enterprise were self-confessed foreigners. Their involvement might jeopardize the whole project. Provan, Long, and Longman III suggest that a deeper theological issue was at stake. This group was exiled to the land of Israel during the reign of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria (Ezra 4:2). They most likely intermarried with the inhabitants of the northern and southern kingdoms that remained in the land. This would have produced an "ethnically mixed and religiously syncretistic" group (Provan et al., *A History of Israel*, 294). As such, their participation in the construction of God's holy temple would have been ritually inadmissible. Moreover, Israel and Judah were exiled for their unfaithfulness to the covenant and their religious syncretism. Similar issues with intermarriage and idolatry arise later in the book (Ezra 9–10).

Although the project to rebuild the temple and the city began with great vigor, the people soon stopped building. According to the book of Haggai, the returnees claimed that it was not time to restore the temple (Hag 1:2). The people seemed more concerned with their own wealth and prosperity than with the house of God (Hag 1:4). Haggai rebuked them, pointing out that their crops had not yielded their fullness because of their unfaithfulness, and he exhorted them to finish building the temple (Hag 1:10–11). The people responded with obedience. Temple construction resumed in the second year of the reign of Darius (ca. 520 BC; Hag 1:1) and was completed in the sixth year of his reign (515 BC; Ezra 6:15).

The Second Return

Ezra's ministry began about 73 years after the completion of the temple (458 BC; for difficulties in dating related to the ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah, see Ezra, book of and Nehemiah, book of). Ezra's return to Jerusalem marked the second wave of returnees to the city. Artaxerxes granted leave to Ezra and Israelites within his kingdom who desired to return to Jerusalem. Like Cyrus, he gave them funds from the treasury for the house of Yahweh (Ezra 7:12–28). Ezra's ministry consisted of teaching the people the law of God (Neh 8:1–8). Not long into his ministry, the leaders brought the people's unfaithfulness to Ezra's attention. They had not separated themselves from the surrounding nations, and they were taking foreign wives (Ezra 9). After consulting God, Ezra commanded the people to repent and separate themselves from their foreign wives (Ezra 10:11); the people confessed their sins and complied (Ezra 10:12–17).

The Third Return

During Ezra's ministry as priest, opposition arose to the restoration of Jerusalem's walls. Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and others in league with them wrote a letter to King Artaxerxes claiming that the Jews, on completion of the walls, would cease paying tribute to Persia (Ezra 4:4–16). Artaxerxes decreed that the rebuilding should cease (Ezra 4:21). However, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes' reign (445 BC), Nehemiah petitioned the king to return to Jerusalem in order to rebuild the walls (Neh 2:5). Artaxerxes agreed (Neh 2:8). Nehemiah's return in 445 BC marks the third and final wave of exiles returning to Jerusalem.

Nehemiah functioned as the governor of Judah (Neh 5:14). As governor, he endured fierce opposition. The forces of Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, and the Ammonites threatened to kill those engaged in repairing the walls (Neh 4:7–9). Under threat of death, Nehemiah pressed on and encouraged his compatriots that God would protect them (Neh 4:14). Eventually Nehemiah's resilience resulted in the reconstruction of the city walls. During his stint as governor, Nehemiah battled usury and mistreatment of the poor (Neh 5:1–13), marriages to foreign wives (Neh 10:30; 13:23–30), improper Sabbath observance (Neh 10:31; 13:15–21), and failure to supply the temple (Neh 10:32–39; 13:10–13).

Timelines: Below are three sets of timelines during the postexilic period.

Important Dates

Solomon's Temple Destroyed	586 BC
Persia Conquers Babylon	539 BC
Cyrus' Edict	538 BC
First Return (Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel)	538 BC
Temple Construction Resumes	520 BC
Temple Construction Completed	515 BC
Second Return (Ezra)	458 BC
Third Return (Nehemiah)	445 BC
Persia Falls	331 BC

Persian Kings

Cyrus II	559–530 BC
Cambyses II	530–522 BC
Gaumata	522 BC
Darius Hystaspes	522–486 BC
Xerxes	486–465 BC
Artaxerxes I	464–424 BC
Darius II	423–404 BC
Artaxerxes II	404–358 BC

(List of Persian kings and dates taken from Kaiser, *History of Israel*, 428)

List of Yehud Governors

Sheshbazzar	538 BC
Zerubbabel	520–510 BC
Elnathan	
Yeho'ezer	490–470 BC
Ahzai	
Nehemiah	445–433 BC
Bagohi	

(List of Yehud Governors taken from Provan et al., *Biblical History of Israel*, 291)

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1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5

Vs 4-5

²² Cerone, J. N. (2016). [Postexilic Period](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

“And my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit. I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God.”

1:18–25 Message of the cross: A mutual antagonism exists between the wisdom of this world and the wisdom of God, and the conflict shows up supremely in the Cross of Christ. God works most wisely and most powerfully in ways directly opposite human expectations. Even as Jesus hung on the Cross, the Jews asked for a power-sign (Matt. 27:40-43). The Greeks made the pursuit of wisdom a meaningless end in itself, as Paul learned at Athens (Acts 17:21).

1:20 Where *is* the wise?: The deep gap between human and divine ways is evidenced throughout human history, as the quotation from Isaiah in v. 19 and the four questions in v. 20 show. The pro-Egyptian policies of Israel in Isaiah’s day seemed to be the only reasonable recourse, but it was completely contrary to the divine plan of salvation (Is. 29:14).

1:24 The power of God: The gospel is the revelation of truth, but in the final analysis it is the operation of God’s power with victory over sin and death. Biblical salvation is nothing short of a complete restoration of the universe, with a new heaven and a new earth.

1:25 See section 2 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 1 Cor.

1:26 A survey of the converts at Corinth proves the mutual rejection between human and divine wisdom. Only a few came from the world of culture and social sophistication. The heart of true wisdom is knowing the ways and the will of God, and living in harmony with ultimate, created reality. The human wisdom Paul opposes is not intellect or education, but a false independence of God and a bent toward self-sufficiency. God rejects human wisdom because of its pride and self-glory.

1:30 Righteousness, a term taken from the courts, is God’s judicial determination to right every wrong, His gift to the guilty which removes all condemnation and puts them in a state of justification, including full acquittal from all charges against them. **Sanctification** is a symbol taken from the temple, showing the need for cleansing from pollution. It includes a renewal by the power of the Holy Spirit, which allows acceptable living before God and points to our ultimate perfection in His presence. **Redemption**, taken from a background of slavery and debt, speaks of freedom and final deliverance from all aspects of sin, including the resurrection of the body.

2:1 Both the content and the style of Paul’s preaching conformed to the ways of God as revealed in the Cross. Paul did not preach to show off his oratorical skills and draw attention to himself; rather, he spoke with **fear, and . . . trembling**, a figure of speech denoting the opposite of self-confidence. **Demonstration of the Spirit and of power** not only refer to the fact that the miraculous accompanied Paul’s preaching (2 Cor. 12:12), but also to the Holy Spirit’s transforming power in the individual lives of the Corinthians at the time of their conversion. Far from a mere intellectual conversion through human wisdom, they encountered the Spirit Himself who demonstrated His presence in them through various spiritual gifts, including speaking with tongues.²³

²³ Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., 1 Co 1:8–2:1). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

1:18 The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. As Barnes so aptly stated:

The death on the cross was associated with the idea of all that is shameful and dishonorable; and to speak of salvation only by the sufferings and death of a crucified man was fitted to excite in their bosoms only unmingled scorn.

The Greeks were lovers of wisdom (the literal meaning of the word “philosophers”). But there was nothing in the gospel message to appeal to their pride of knowledge.

To those who are being saved, the gospel is the power of God. They hear the message, they accept it by faith, and the miracle of regeneration takes place in their lives. Notice the solemn fact in this verse that there are only two classes of people, those who perish and those who are saved. There is no in-between class. Men may love their human wisdom but only the gospel leads to salvation.

1:19 The fact that the gospel would be offensive to human wisdom was prophesied by Isaiah (29:14):

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”

S. Lewis Johnson in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* notes that in context these “words are God’s denouncement of the policy of the ‘wise’ in Judah in seeking an alliance with Egypt when threatened by Sennacherib.” How true it is that God delights to accomplish His purposes in ways that seem foolish to men. How often He uses methods that the wise of this world would ridicule, yet they achieve the desired results with wonderful accuracy and efficiency. For example, man’s wisdom assures him that he can earn or merit his own salvation. The gospel sets aside all man’s efforts to save himself and presents Christ as the only way to God.

1:20 Paul next hurls out a defiant challenge: **“Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age?”** Did God consult them when He devised His plan of salvation? Could they ever have worked out such a plan of redemption if left to their own wisdom? Can they rise to disprove anything that God ever said? The answer is an emphatic “No!” **God has made foolish the wisdom of this world.**

1:21 Man cannot by his own **wisdom** come to the knowledge of God. For centuries God gave the human race this opportunity, and the result was failure. Then **it pleased God** by the preaching of the cross, a **message** that seems foolish to men, **to save those who believe.** The foolishness of the thing preached refers to the cross. Of course, we know that it is not foolishness, but it seems foolish to the unenlightened mind of man. Godet says that verse 21 contains a whole philosophy of history, the substance of entire volumes. We should not hurry over it quickly, but ponder deeply its tremendous truths.

1:22 It was characteristic of the **Jews** to **request a sign.** Their attitude was that they would believe if some miracle were shown to them. The **Greeks** on the other hand searched for **wisdom.** They were interested in human reasonings, in arguments, in logic.

1:23 But Paul did not cater to their desires. He says, **“We preach Christ crucified.”** As someone has said, “He was not a sign-loving Jew, nor a wisdom-loving Greek, but a Savior-loving Christian.”

To the Jews, Christ crucified was a **stumbling block.** They looked for a mighty military leader to deliver them from the oppression of Rome. Instead of that, the gospel offered them a Savior nailed to a cross of shame. **To the Greeks,** Christ crucified was **foolishness.** They could not

understand how One who died in such seeming weakness and failure could ever solve their problems.

1:24 But strangely enough, the very things that the Jews and the Gentiles sought are found in a wonderful way in the Lord Jesus. To those who hear His call and trust in Him, **both Jews and Greeks, Christ becomes the power of God and the wisdom of God.**

1:25 Actually there is neither foolishness nor weakness with God. But the apostle is saying in verse 25 that what seems to be **foolishness** on God's part, in the eyes of men, is actually **wiser than men** at their very best. Also, what seems to be **weakness** on God's part, in the eyes of men, turns out to be **stronger than** anything that **men** can produce.

1:26 Having spoken of the gospel itself, the apostle now turns to the people whom God calls by the gospel (vv. 26–29). He reminds the Corinthians that **not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.** It has often been pointed out that the text does not say “not any” but **not many**. Because of this slight difference, one English lady of noble blood used to testify that she was saved by the letter “m.”

The Corinthians themselves had not come from the upper intellectual crust of society. They had not been reached by high-sounding philosophies but by the simple gospel. Why, then, were they putting such a premium on human wisdom and exalting preachers who sought to make the message palatable to the worldly-wise?

If men were to build a church, they would want to enroll the most prominent members of the community. But verse 26 teaches us that the people men esteem so highly, God passes by. The ones He calls are not generally the ones the world considers great.

1:27 God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty. As Erich Sauer says:

The more primitive the material, the greater—if the same standard of art can be reached—the honor of the Master; the smaller the army, the mightier—if the same great victory can be won—the praise of the conqueror.

God used trumpets to bring down the walls of Jericho. He reduced Gideon's army from 32,000 to 300 to rout the armies of Midian. He used an oxgoad in the hand of Shamgar to defeat the Philistines. With the jawbone of a donkey He enabled Samson to defeat a whole army. And our Lord fed over 5,000 with nothing more than a few loaves and fishes.

1:28 To make up what someone has called “God's five-ranked army of fools,” Paul adds **the base things of the world and the things which are despised and the things which are not.** Using such unlikely materials, God brings **to nothing the things that are.** In other words, He loves to take up people who are of no esteem in the eyes of the world and use them to glorify Himself. These verses should serve as a rebuke to Christians who curry the favor of prominent and well-known personages and show little or no regard for the more humble saints of God.

1:29 God's purpose in choosing those of no account in the eyes of the world is that all the glory should accrue to Himself and not to man. Since salvation is entirely of Him, He alone is worthy to be praised.

1:30 Verse 30 emphasizes even further that all we are and have comes from Him—not from philosophy, and that there is therefore no room for human glory. First of all, Christ **became for us wisdom.** He is the wisdom of God (v. 24), the One whom God's wisdom chose as the way of salvation. When we have Him we have a positional wisdom that guarantees our full salvation.

Secondly, He is our **righteousness**. Through faith in Him we are reckoned righteous by a holy God. Thirdly, He is our **sanctification**. In ourselves we have nothing in the way of personal holiness, but in Him we are positionally sanctified, and by His power we are transformed from one degree of sanctification to another. Finally, He is our **redemption**, and this doubtless speaks of redemption in its final aspect when the Lord will come and take us home to be with Himself, and when we shall be redeemed—spirit, soul, and body.

Trails delineated the truth sharply:

Wisdom out[side] of Christ is damning folly—righteousness out[side] of Christ is guilt and condemnation—sanctification out[side] of Christ is filth and sin—redemption out[side] of Christ is bondage and slavery.

A. T. Pierson relates verse 30 to the life and ministry of our Lord:

His deeds and His words and His practices, these show Him as the wisdom of God. Then come His death, burial, and resurrection: these have to do with our righteousness. Then His forty days' walk among men, His ascension up on high, the gift of the Spirit, and His session at the right hand of God, have to do with our sanctification. Then His coming again, which has to do with our redemption.

1:31 God has so arranged it that all these blessings should come to us **in the LORD**. Paul's argument therefore is, "Why glory in men? They cannot do any one of these things for you."

2:1 The apostle now reminds the saints of his ministry among them and how he sought to glorify God and not himself. He came to them proclaiming **the testimony of God, not with excellence of speech or of wisdom**. He was not at all interested in showing himself off as an orator or philosopher. This shows that the Apostle Paul recognized the difference between ministry that is soulish and that which is spiritual. By soulish ministry, we mean that which amuses, entertains, or generally appeals to man's emotions. Spiritual ministry, on the other hand, presents the truth of God's word in such a way as to glorify Christ and to reach the heart and conscience of the hearers.

2:2 The content of Paul's message was **Jesus Christ and Him crucified**. **Jesus Christ** refers to His Person, while **Him crucified** refers to His work. The Person and work of the Lord Jesus form the substance of the Christian evangel.

2:3 Paul further emphasizes that his personal demeanor was neither impressive nor attractive. He was with the Corinthians **in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling**. The treasure of the gospel was contained in an earthen vessel that the excellence of the power might be of God and not of Paul. He himself was an example of how God uses weak things to confound the mighty.

2:4 Neither Paul's **speech** nor his **preaching** were in **persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power**. Some suggest that his **speech** refers to the material he presented and his **preaching** to the manner of its presentation. Others define his **speech** as his witness to individuals and his **preaching** as his messages to groups. According to the standards of this world, the apostle might never have won an oratorical contest. In spite of this, **the Spirit** of God used the message to produce conviction of sin and conversion to God.

2:5 Paul knew that there was the utmost danger that his hearers might be interested in himself or in his own personality rather than in the living Lord. Conscious of his own inability to bless or to save, he determined that he would lead men to trust in **God** alone rather than **in the wisdom of**

men. All who proclaim the gospel message or teach the word of God should make this their constant aim.²⁴

Psalm 27:7-14

Proverbs 20:22-23

“Don’t say, “I will get even for this wrong.” Wait for the Lord to handle the matter.”

August 6

Ezra 3:1-4:23

3:1–7 The returned Jewish exiles begin by building an altar to Yahweh. This was the first step in establishing proper worship of Yahweh in the land—for which the sacrificial system was of paramount importance. The building of an altar was also a way of thanking Yahweh for restoring them to the land. Abraham built an altar to Yahweh immediately after entering the land for the first time (Gen 12:7). Joshua likewise built an altar to Yahweh after entering the land following the exodus (Josh 8:30–31).

3:1 seventh month Tishri (late September and early October) according to the Jewish calendar. The year is probably 538 BC.

Calendars in Old Testament Times

3:2 Jeshua The name “Jeshua” (or “Joshua”), which means “Yahweh is salvation,” is the OT equivalent of the name Jesus. Jeshua was the son of Jozadak and of the priestly family of Jedaiah, one of the 24 priestly families organized by David (compare 1 Chr 24:7). He was also the grandson of Seraiah, the high priest during the destruction of Jerusalem (compare 1 Chr 6:14; 2 Kgs 25:18). Jeshua was the first high priest of the Jewish community that returned from exile.

Zerubbabel Means “the seed of Babel” or “born in Babel.” Zerubbabel served as the governor of Judah. Since Sheshbazzar is not mentioned here, he may have died by this time. Or, he may have returned to Babylon after leading the returnees back to Judah.

burnt offerings Since the burnt offerings began on the first day of the seventh month (Ezra 3:6), the altar was likely rebuilt prior to the seventh month.

the altar of the God of Israel In accordance with the Law, the new altar would have been built using unhewn stones (Exod 20:25; Deut 27:6).

Altars in the Old Testament Table

²⁴ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (pp. 1749–1752). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

the man of God A commonly used title to denote a prophet of Yahweh (1 Sam 2:27; 9:6; 1 Kgs 13:1). Here it likely refers to Deut 33:1, where the phrase is applied to Moses (Josh 14:6).

3:3 on its foundations The new altar was built on the foundation of the previous one.

they were in terror In order to build the new altar, the people had to destroy the previous one used by the Jews, Samaritans, and foreigners who lived near Jerusalem during the exile (Jer 41:5). The destruction of the altar surely infuriated these groups, which may account for the rift between those who returned from Babylon and those who remained in the land (Ezra 4:1–5).

the peoples of the lands A general reference to the foreign inhabitants of Judah and the surrounding provinces, including the nations of Edom and Ammon—the traditional enemies of Israel.

burnt offerings for the morning and the evening Each day, morning and evening, the burnt offering consisted of a lamb prepared with flour, oil, and wine (Exod 29:38–42; Num 28:2–8). These sacrifices were previously restored by Joash (2 Chr 24:14) and Hezekiah (2 Chr 29:7, 27–29).

3:4 the feast of booths One of the three pilgrimage festivals where every Jewish male was expected to be in Jerusalem (Deut 16:16). The Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles) was an autumn harvest festival celebrated from the 15th to the 21st of the seventh month (Tishri) (see note on Lev 23:33–44). During this week, the Jews were required to live in booths (or tents) set up around Jerusalem to commemorate the wilderness wanderings of the exodus generation. The dedication of Solomon’s temple also took place during the Feast of Booths (1 Kgs 8:2, 65).

Israelite Festivals Table

Israelite Calendar Table

described for each day A special sacrifice was offered on each of the seven days of this feast (see Num 29:12–38; Lev 23:33–36, 39–43). Both the first day of the feast and the day after the feast ended were days of rest.

3:5 the appointed times The festivals with fixed dates include new moon celebrations, Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Firstfruits, the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles). See the festival calendars in Lev 23 and Num 28–29.

who gave a freewill offering A voluntary sacrifice that could be offered whenever an individual felt led to do so (Lev 22:18–23; Num 29:39).

3:6 the first day of the seventh month The date of the Feast of Trumpets, or Rosh Hashanah. Assuming a year of 538 BC, the date was September 17.

was not yet founded The next major section of the book deals with the rebuilding of the temple. Even though the altar had been rebuilt and the sacrificial system reinstated, the work was not complete. God wanted the entire temple rebuilt (Hag 1).

3:7 money The Jews prepare to build the temple's foundation by hiring masons and carpenters, whose skills were essential to the project. These skilled laborers were hired with money likely taken from the treasury referred to in Ezra 2:69.

food, drink, and olive oil Following the example of Solomon, the people contracted the Phoenicians to bring timber from Lebanon to the port city of Joppa (compare 2 Chr 2:16). The Phoenicians were paid with food, drink, and oil—just as they had been during the time of Solomon.

Sidonians Sidon was a city located on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, about 20 miles north of Tyre and about 95 miles north of Joppa.

Tyrians Tyre was a city located on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, about 20 miles south of Sidon. Both Tyre and Sidon were included in the territory allotted to the tribe of Asher (Josh 19:28–29).

cedar trees Cedars from Lebanon—greatly prized throughout the ancient Near East—appear throughout the OT as a symbol of worldly strength, surpassed only by Yahweh's power (see Psa 29:5; Isa 2:13; Amos 2:9; Zech 11:2). They were also used to build the Jewish temple at Elephantine in Egypt (see note on Isa 49:12).

Joppa A city located about 30 miles northwest of Jerusalem on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. It was included in the territory allotted to the tribe of Dan (Josh 19:46). Because of its harbor, it served as the port city for Jerusalem.

according to the authorization over them of Cyrus likely needed to approve this transaction since it involved multiple provinces in the Persian Empire.

3:8 the second year The rebuilding of the foundation occurs about seven months after the events of Ezra 3:4–6.

second month Iyyar (late April and early May). The year is probably 537 BC.

the remainder of their brothers Although Sheshbazzar is not named here, he evidently had a hand in the project; he is credited with it in Ezra 5:16.

twenty years and older Levites now took on responsibility at the age of 20 (1 Chr 23:24; 2 Chr 31:17). Originally, one had to be 25 (Num 8:24)—and those who carried the tabernacle were required to be at least 30 (Num 4:3, 23, 30). The minimum age may have been lowered because the total number of Levites kept declining. This change would ensure that there were always enough Levites to fulfill the temple duties.

direct The priesthood oversaw the project to ensure that it was ritually correct.

3:9 Kadmiel A Levite (see Ezra 2:40) who was granted the privilege of standing on the platform as the book of the law was read in Neh 9. He also signed the sealed document of Neh 10:28–39.

3:10 laid the foundation of the temple of The returned exiles may have simply repaired the foundation of Solomon's temple rather than building a new one from scratch. Second Kings 25:9 indicates only that the temple was burned, which makes it possible that the original foundation remained intact.

trumpets The trumpets here are probably not the ram's horn often used for signal calls. Both instruments are typically translated "trumpet."

3:11 loyal love is everlasting for Israel This celebration echoes 2 Chr 5:13. This refrain is used throughout the Psalms (Pss 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1; 136:1).

Chesed Word Study

3:12 elderly priests, Levites, and heads of the families who had seen The first temple was destroyed in 586 BC. The date is now ca. 537 BC, meaning that these men are well over 50 years old.

3:13 from afar Perhaps as much as five miles.

4:1-5 The following passage builds on the previous chapter by detailing the response of neighboring people to the efforts of the Jews. By this time, the neighbors had lived in Judah for decades, many likely born in the land. Now, the returned exiles—whom they regard as "foreigners"—are taking their land and influence away.

4:1 the enemies of In their first appearance in the narrative, the neighbors of the Jews are identified as adversaries. As a result, their request in Ezra 4:2 represents a veiled attempt to hinder the work of the Jewish people rather than a sincere request to join the project.

the returned exiles The Hebrew term used here, *bene haggolah*, may be literally rendered as "sons of the exile."

4:2 Esarhaddon Originally another Assyrian king, Sargon, had brought in colonists from a number of Mesopotamian towns when Samaria fell in 722 BC (2 Kgs 17:24). Additional colonists were later brought in during the reigns of Esarhaddon (681-669 BC) and Ashurbanipal (668-627 BC). While colonization of Israel is unattested in extrabiblical literature, it is known that Esarhaddon settled easterners in Sidon after a successful campaign in Syria and Palestine.

4:3 not for you but for us Passages like Isa 56:6-8 indicate that foreigners were allowed to worship in the temple. However, Isaiah presents standards the foreigners must meet in order to do so (Isa 56:6)—standards they likely did not meet since they are identified as enemies.

the king of Persia has commanded Cyrus' original decree granted only those who returned from exile the right to rebuild the temple.

4:4 made them afraid to build There was little the Jews could do to protect themselves: The supply lines from Tyre and Sidon were long and unguarded. The small group of Jewish people in Jerusalem were surrounded on all sides by enemies; they were completely vulnerable.

4:5 officials The Hebrew word used here is the same word used of the Persian king's advisers in Ezra 7:28 and 8:25. The foreigners may have bribed the Persian authorities to frustrate the rebuilding project.

Darius king of Persia Darius ruled from 522-486 BC.

Darius

Darius the Great assumed the Persian throne in 522 BC. Darius' father was Hystaspes, the governor of Parthia. Darius served as an officer alongside Cambyses, the son of Cyrus (see note on 1:1). Since Darius was not an obvious heir, revolts erupted throughout the Persian Empire in the early years of his reign, yet he eventually succeeded in solidifying his hold on the throne. Darius proved to be an extraordinary administrator and implemented far-reaching reforms. Chief among these was the standardization of coinage, weights, and measures, which helped facilitate trade and commerce throughout the empire. In addition, he erected a magnificent palace in Susa, referred to as the "citadel of Susa" in Neh 1:1. Darius was followed on the throne by his son Ahasuerus (Xerxes; see Ezra 4:6 and note).

4:6-23 The following passage is a parenthesis in the narrative. Ezra—in an attempt to illustrate some of the measures used by the enemies of the Jews—references events that took place between 50 and 80 years *after* the events of vv. 1-5. These events evidently reminded him of the lengths the opposition was willing to go in order to stop the Jews. However, the account only indicates a change in time period by referring to different kings. Knowledge of these kings and the dates of their reigns is essential for making sense of this account. The kings mentioned in this passage are Ahasuerus, better known as Xerxes (v. 6; 486-465 BC), and his successor Artaxerxes (vv. 7, 8, 11; 464-424 BC).

4:6 an accusation The accusations contained in this letter were probably the same ones mentioned in vv. 13-16. Evidently, nothing happened as a result of this attempt.

Ahasuerus The Persian king Ahasuerus is better known by his Greek name, Xerxes. Xerxes became king in December 486 BC and reigned over the Persian Empire until 465 BC. Xerxes is a central figure in the book of Esther.

4:7 Artaxerxes Artaxerxes reigned over the Persian Empire from 464-424 BC. Ezra led a return to Israel in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, and Nehemiah served as the king's cupbearer. See note on Neh 2:1.

their colleagues The word *kenath*, "associate," occurs eight times in the next 48 verses. It refers to the various associates of the named officials, including secretaries, lawyers, minor officials (Ezra 5:6), and military personnel used as bodyguards.

Aramaic 4:8-6:18 was written in Aramaic, as was 7:12-26. Aramaic is a Northwest Semitic language related to Hebrew and Phoenician. It became the common language (or *lingua franca*) of the ancient Near East because of the abundance of Aramaean merchants in the region. Eventually, Aramaic became the official language of the Persian Empire. Daniel 2:4-7:28 is the only other significant section of the OT written in Aramaic.

4:8 Rehum The primary author of the letter. A common name at this time, Rehum is the shortened form of a Babylonian name *Rahim-ili*, "my god is merciful," or *Rahim-sarri*, "my lord is merciful."

Shimshai The name Shimshai is derived from the word *shemesh*, meaning "sun." He is named after Shamash, the Akkadian sun god.

the scribe The term used here, *saphar*, is probably connected to the Babylonian term *sapiru*, meaning “high official.” At this time, scribes usually served as little more than secretaries, writing down the king’s decrees and keeping a record of the events that occurred during each reign (2 Kgs 22:10; 1 Chr 24:6).

a letter A different letter than the one mentioned in Ezra 4:7.

4:9 the Erechs The city of Erech (or Uruk) was one of the cities founded by Nimrod in southern Mesopotamia (Gen 10:10). It is identified with modern Warka, located on the western bank of the Euphrates. The city was known for its celebrated shrine to the goddess Ishtar. The men of Erech are identified as Babylonians because the city was located within the ancient territory claimed by Babylon.

the Susians The capital of Elam and later one of the capitals of the Persian Empire.
Susa

The city of Susa is located in the southwestern portion of modern Iran, about 150 miles north of the Persian Gulf. Its ideal winter climate made it a favorite retreat for the Persian kings. The region was brutally oppressive during the summer months, with temperatures commonly reaching 140°F. The ancient writer Strabo notes that snakes and lizards crossing the street at noon in the summer heat were roasted to death (*Geography* 15.3.10). Nehemiah served as the king’s cupbearer in Susa (Neh 1), and Daniel pictured himself there in his vision of the ram and male goat (Dan 8).

4:10 Osnappar The Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (reigned 668–627 BC) is here referred to as “Osnappar” in Aramaic. His father was Esarhaddon, the Assyrian king referred to in Ezra 4:2. Ashurbanipal invaded the territory that included Erech (Uruk), evidently exiling some of the inhabitants to the region of Samaria. In 641 BC, he became the only Assyrian king to conquer Susa, again exiling some of the inhabitants to the region of Samaria (v. 9).

Beyond the River This phrase (used throughout Ezra as well as in Neh 2:7, 9; 3:7) is the name of a Persian province, indicating the region west and south of the Euphrates River. This province stretched from the Euphrates to the border of Egypt, encompassing the whole of the Levant (which includes Syria, Lebanon, and Israel). Babylon was the administrative center of this province until the later reign of Darius.

4:12 the Jews who have come up from near you to us A reference to the return of Ezra and his party in 458 BC. The term “Jews” became the common name of the people of Israel after the exiles to Assyria and Babylon (Neh 1:2; Esth 2:5; Dan 3:8).

They are finishing the wall The walls had lain in ruins since Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction of the city in 586 BC, and their rebuilding became a priority during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.

4:13 they will not pay Taxation was the primary method of securing income for the royal treasury. Each satrapy was responsible for paying annual tribute to the Persian king.

4:14 we eat the salt of the palace The authors of the letter made their living in the king’s service—they were his employees.

the dishonor of the king The Hebrew term used here literally means “nakedness.”

4:15 the book of records Probably alluding to the official records of the earlier ancient Near Eastern empires of Assyria and Babylon who had conquered Israel and Judah. The former capitals of those empires were now cities under Persian control.

a rebellious city The southern kingdom of Judah rebelled against the Assyrians in the days of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:7). They also rebelled against the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar in the days of Jehoiakim (597 BC; 2 Kgs 24:1) and Zedekiah (588 BC; 2 Kgs 24:20). The city was destroyed in the first place primarily because of their repeated rebellions against the Babylonians.

4:17-21 This section contains the reply of Artaxerxes to the letter of Ezra 4:11-16. Artaxerxes takes seriously the exaggerated rhetoric of his officials concerning what is happening in Jerusalem.

4:17 Samaria The Persian administrative center in the region.

4:20 Mighty kings Possibly refers to the Israelite kings David and Solomon, and maybe Uzziah and Hezekiah.

governing all May exaggerate the threat posed by the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Even during the reigns of David and Solomon, the Israelites did not govern such a vast territory.

4:23 they stopped them While the Jews are forced to quit working to rebuild Jerusalem, the walls of the city will eventually be completed by Nehemiah. Ironically, they would be completed by a decree of the same king who ordered the work to stop. The opposition described in Ezra 4:7-23 dates to the reign of Artaxerxes (464-424 BC). See note on vv. 6-23.

4:24 Then Here the text resumes the narrative from v. 5 concerning the opposition Zerubbabel faced which resulted in about a 15-year pause in the work to rebuild the temple. This verse introduces the narrative of chs. 5-6.

stopped The Jewish people in Jerusalem stopped working on the temple in 535 BC. They did not work on the temple for the rest of the reign of Cyrus (until 530 BC) and the entire reigns of Cambyses (530-522 BC) and Pseudo-Smerdis (522 BC).

the second year of the reign of Darius The second year of Darius' reign would be 520 BC (see note on v. 5).²⁵

1 Corinthians 2:6-3:4

Vs. 10 -

“But it was to us that God revealed these things by His Spirit. For His Spirit searches out everything and shows you God’s deep secrets.”

²⁵ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Ezr 3:1-4:24). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Vs 3:1-4 Christian who still drink milk. Jealousy. Quarreling. Behaving as people of the world.

2:7 The very nature of God's **wisdom** renders the wisdom of this world inadequate, for it is not of this age. **Mystery** in the NT does not mean mysterious or difficult to understand, but denotes a truth hidden in God's mind until He chooses to disclose it. God had the plan of redemption in mind before the creation of the world, and it would have remained unknown had He not revealed it in Christ. Believers live by a secret, the essence of which is Christ and His glorious purposes for the world.

2:8 None of the rulers: This passage asserts that Satan ("the god of this age," 2 Cor. 4:4) and the demons of hell ("principalities and powers," Col. 2:15) were completely confounded by the Cross. This is a profound disclosure of Satan's limited ability to anticipate the tactics of Almighty God, the reminder that God's sovereign power and omniscience are always the insurance of the believer's ultimate victory in Christ.

2:9 Eye has not seen: The quotation from Is. 64:4 (v. 9) implies three ways of knowing: perceptual knowledge (**eye, ear**) through observation and sense experience; conceptual knowledge (**heart, mind**) by reason and intellectual inquiry; and spiritual knowledge (**love**) by moral and personal affinity. Since knowledge of the things of God is more of a spiritual than an intellectual nature, there is no basis for glorying in any religious leader for his supposed superior grasp of reality.

2:10 God has revealed: Two elements are necessary to know the things of God: a revelation from God by the Spirit, and an appropriate spiritual response by man (2:14-3:4).

2:11 As one's own inner thoughts are known only to himself, so the mind of God is known only by God's Spirit. God has chosen to make Himself known in Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit has brought this revelation of Christ to the church through the apostles.

2:13 Spiritual things with spiritual: Spirit answers to spirit, not spirit to mind. The Holy Spirit interprets spiritual things to spiritual people. This text also may describe the means by which the Word of God has been given to us in the Bible as the Holy Spirit puts spiritual "ideas" into specific spiritual "words" of His selection.

2:13 See section 2 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 1 Cor.

2:14 People fall into three spiritual categories that clarify how the revelation of the Cross by the Spirit is received from the human side. **The natural man**, unregenerate and devoid of the Spirit, has no appreciation for the gospel. The **spiritual man**, regenerate and possessing spiritual maturity, as seen in freedom from sectarian strife (3:3, 4), has a nature that responds to the truth, and unbelievers find him difficult to understand. The **carnal man**, regenerate but living much like an unregenerate, is a believer with childish ways, as seen in a jealous and sectarian spirit. An immature Christian lives more for human opinion than for Christ.

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

3:1 True Spiritual Growth Requires God's Word, THE WORD OF GOD. Beginning in 1 Cor. 2:10, Paul elaborates our need of Holy Spirit-given wisdom and revelation, and he ties this very firmly to our receiving the "words . . . which the Holy Spirit teaches"

(2:13). He immediately turns from these observations to an outright confrontation with the carnality of the Corinthians, attributing it to the shallowness of their intake of God's Word ("not able to receive (solid food)," 3:2; see also Heb. 5:12-14).

The demanding truth of this passage is that no amount of supposed spiritual insight or experience reflects genuine spiritual growth, if it is separated from our basic growth in the knowledge of God's Word in the Bible. Without this rootedness in the word, we may be deluded about our growth. Such "rootedness" is in truth and love, not merely in learning knowledge or accomplished study. In order to experience true spiritual growth, we must spend time in the Word and separate ourselves from the hindrances of lovelessness, competitiveness, and strife.

3:1 See section 4 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 1 Cor.²⁶

2:6 First of all, the **wisdom** shown in the gospel is divine in its origin (vv. 6, 7). **We speak wisdom among those who are mature** or full-grown. **Yet it is not the wisdom of this age**, nor would it be wisdom in the eyes of **the rulers of this age**. Their wisdom is a perishable thing which, like themselves, is born for one brief day.

2:7 We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery. A **mystery** is a NT truth not previously revealed, but now made known to believers by the apostles and prophets of the early Church Age. This mystery is the **hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory**. The mystery of the gospel includes such wonderful truths as the fact that *now* Jews and Gentiles are made one in Christ; that the Lord Jesus will come and take His waiting people home to be with Himself; and that not all believers will die but all will be changed.

2:8 The rulers of this age may refer to demonic spirit beings in the heavenlies or to their human agents on earth. They didn't understand the hidden wisdom of God (Christ on a cross) or realize that their murder of the Holy Son of God would result in their own destruction. **Had they known** the ways of God, **they would not have crucified the Lord of glory**.

2:9 The processes of revelation, inspiration, and illumination are described in verses 9–16. They tell us how these wonderful truths were made known to the apostles by the Holy Spirit, how they in turn passed on these truths to us by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and how we understand them by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

The quotation in verse 9 from Isaiah 64:4 is a prophecy that God had treasured up wonderful truths which could not be discovered by the natural senses but which in due time He would reveal to **those who love Him**. Three faculties (**eye** and **ear** and **heart**, or mind) by which we learn earthly things, are listed, but these are not sufficient for the reception of divine truths, for there the Spirit of God is necessary.

This verse is commonly interpreted to refer to the glories of heaven, and once we get that meaning in our minds, it is difficult to dislodge it and accept any other meaning. But Paul is really speaking here about the truths that have been revealed for the first time in the NT. Men could never have arrived at these truths through scientific investigations or philosophical inquiries. The human mind, left to itself, could never discover the wonderful mysteries which were made known at the beginning of the gospel era. Human reason is totally inadequate to find the truth of God.

²⁶ Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., 1 Co 2:7–3:1). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

2:10 That verse 9 does not refer to heaven is proven by the statement that **God has revealed them to us through His Spirit**. In other words, these truths foretold in the *OT* were made known to the apostles of the *NT* era. The **us** refers to the writers of the *NT*. It was by the **Spirit** of God that the apostles and prophets were enlightened, because **the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God**. In other words, the Spirit of God, one of the members of the Godhead, is infinite in wisdom and understands all the truths of God and is able to impart them to others.

2:11 Even in human affairs no one knows what a **man** is thinking but he himself. No one else can possibly find out unless the man himself chooses to make it known. Even then, in order to understand a man, a person must have **the spirit of a man**. An animal could not fully understand our thinking. So it is with God. The only one who can understand the things of God is **the Spirit of God**.

2:12 The **we** of verse 12 refers to the writers of the *NT*, although it is equally true of all the Bible writers. Since the apostles and prophets had received the Holy Spirit, He was able to share with them the deep truths of God. That is what the apostle means when he says in this verse: **“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.”** Apart from **the Spirit who is from God**, the apostles could never have received the divine truths of which Paul is speaking and which are preserved for us in the *NT*.

2:13 Having described the process of revelation by which the writers of Sacred Scripture received truth from God, Paul now goes on to describe the process of inspiration, by which that truth was communicated to us. Verse 13 is one of the strongest passages in the word of God on the subject of verbal inspiration. The Apostle Paul clearly states that in conveying these truths to us, the apostles did **not** use **words** of their own choosing or words dictated by **man’s wisdom**. Rather, they used the very words **which the Holy Spirit** taught them to use. And so we believe that the actual words of Scripture, as found in the original autographs, were the very words of God (and that the Bible in its present form is entirely trustworthy).

A howl of objection arises at this point since to some people what we have said implies *mechanical dictation*, as if God did not allow the writers to use their own style. Yet we know that Paul’s writing style is quite different from Luke’s, for example. How, then, can we reconcile verbal inspiration with the obvious individual style of the writers? In some way which we do not understand, God gave the very words of Scripture, and yet He clothed those words with the individual style of the writers, letting their human personality be part of His perfect word.

The expression **comparing spiritual things with spiritual** can be explained in several ways. It may mean (1) teaching spiritual truths with Spirit-given words; (2) communicating spiritual truths to spiritual men; or (3) comparing spiritual truths in one section of the Bible with those in another. We believe that the first explanation fits the context best. Paul is saying that the process of inspiration involves the conveying of divine truth with words that are especially chosen for that purpose by the Holy Spirit. Thus we could paraphrase: “presenting spiritual truths in spiritual words.”

It is sometimes objected that this passage cannot refer to inspiration because Paul says we **speak**, not “we write.” But it is not uncommon to find the verb “to speak” used of inspired writings (e.g., John 12:38, 41; Acts 28:25; 2 Pet. 1:21).

2:14 Not only is the gospel divine in its revelation and divine in its inspiration, but now we learn that it can only be received by the power of **the Spirit of God**. Unaided, **the natural man**

does not receive the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness to him. He cannot possibly understand them **because they** can only be **spiritually** understood.

The colorful Vance Havner advises:

The wise Christian wastes no time trying to explain God's program to unregenerate men; it would be casting pearls before swine. He might as well try to describe a sunset to a blind man or discuss nuclear physics with a monument in the city park. The natural man cannot receive such things. One might as well try to catch sunbeams with a fishhook as to lay hold of God's revelation unassisted by the Holy Spirit. Unless one is born of the Spirit and taught by Him, all this is utterly foreign to him. Being a Ph. D. does not help, for in this realm it could mean 'Phenomenal Dud!'

2:15 On the other hand, the man who is illuminated by the Spirit of God can discern these wonderful truths even though **he himself** cannot be **rightly judged** by the unconverted. Perhaps he is a carpenter, or plumber, or fisherman; yet he is an able student of the Holy Scriptures. "The Spirit-controlled Christian investigates, inquires into, and scrutinizes the Bible and comes to an appreciation and understanding of its contents" (KSW). To the world he is an enigma. He may never have been to college or seminary, yet he can understand the deep mysteries of the word of God and perhaps even teach them to others.

2:16 The apostle now asks with Isaiah the rhetorical question: "**Who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?**" To ask the question is to answer it. God cannot be known through the wisdom or power of men. He is known only as He chooses to make Himself known. However, those who have **the mind of Christ** are able to understand the deep truths of God.

To review then, first there is *revelation* (vv. 9–12). This means that God revealed previously unknown truths to men by the Holy Spirit. These truths were made known supernaturally by the Spirit of God.

Secondly, there is *inspiration* (v. 13). In transmitting these truths to others, the apostles (and all other writers of the Bible) used the very words which the Holy Spirit taught them to use.

Finally, there is *illumination* (vv. 14–16). Not only must these truths be miraculously *revealed* and miraculously *inspired*, but they can only be *understood* by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit.

3:1 When Paul first visited Corinth, he had fed the believers with the elementary milk of the word because they were weak and young in the faith. The teaching which had been given to them was suitable to their condition. They could not receive deeply spiritual instruction because they were new believers. They were mere **babes in Christ**.

3:2 Paul had taught them only the elementary truths concerning Christ, which he speaks of as **milk**. They were not able to take **solid food** because of their immaturity. In the same vein, the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:12). With regard to the Corinthians, the tragic thing was that they still had not improved sufficiently to receive deeper truth from the apostle.

3:3 The believers were **still** in a **carnal** or fleshly state of soul. This was evidenced by the fact that there was **envy** and **strife** among them. Such behavior is characteristic of the men of this world, but not of those who are led by the Spirit of God.

3:4 In forming parties around human leaders, such as **Paul** and **Apolllos**, they were acting on a purely human level. That is what Paul means when he asks, "Are you not ... behaving like mere men?"

Up to this point, the Apostle Paul has been showing the folly of exalting men by a consideration of the true nature of the gospel message. He now turns to the subject of the Christian ministry and

shows from this standpoint also, it is sheer foolishness to exalt religious leaders by building parties around them.²⁷

Psalm 28:1-9

Proverbs 20:24-25

“The Lord directs our steps, so why try to understand everything along the way?”

Means what?

August 7

Ezra 4:24-6:22

5:1–5 This passage narrates the restarting of the temple building project in the second year of the reign of Darius I. This was the perfect time to restart the project, as the early years of Darius’ reign were filled with political turmoil.

5:1 Haggai The prophet’s message motivating the people to resume work on the temple is recorded in Hag 1:1–11. Haggai appears to have been well known; he is routinely identified as “the prophet,” but no information is ever given about his ancestry (e.g., Ezra 6:14; Hag 1:1, 3, 12).

Zechariah Zechariah was a Levite, probably born in Babylon (Neh 12:1, 16). He was the son of Berechiah and the grandson of Iddo (Zech 1:1). Ezra identifies the prophet simply as “the son of Iddo,” to indicate he was a member of the priestly family of which Iddo was the head (Neh 12:16).

5:3 Shethar-bozenai Shethar-bozenai was likely the governor’s top assistant; he may be the scribe who drafted the letter recorded in Ezra 5:7–17. The placement of his name parallels that of 4:9, 17, where Shimshai is identified as the scribe of Rehum.

came to them Their chief concern was whether the Jews’ actions involved subversion. The Persian Empire had been teeming with revolts since the death of Cyrus, and the political situation became worse when Darius took the throne. See note on 4:5.

²⁷ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (pp. 1752–1754). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Who issued you all a decree The Jews could not produce the credentials necessary to prove their right to rebuild the temple. The governor needed to investigate their claim.

5:5 the eye of their God A similar phrase occurs elsewhere in the Bible: Deut 11:12 uses it to describe Yahweh's concern for the land of Israel, and it appears in Job 36:7 to describe Yahweh's providential care for the righteous (compare Psa 34:15; Psa 33:18).

5:6-17 Although the exact date of this letter is not mentioned, various passages aid in narrowing the possibilities. It could not have been written prior to August or September 520 BC (the month of Elul), when the Jews resumed the building of the temple after Haggai delivered his rebuke to them for halting the project (Hag 1:15). It must have been written prior to February or March 516 BC (the month of Adar), when the temple was completed (Ezra 6:15). Considering the length of time needed for all the events to occur, the letter was probably not written later than 517 BC. Therefore, any date between August or September 520 BC and the end of 517 BC is possible. A date near the end of 520 BC is most likely. The form of this letter and its response are similar to those of ch. 4.

5:7 all peace This may be an abbreviation of a common pagan greeting: "May all the gods seek the welfare [or peace] of my lord abundantly at all times." *Shelam*, meaning "peace," is the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew *shalom*.

5:8 the great The Aramaic term used here can mean "chief" or "head" as well as "great." Since this reference is made by an unbeliever, a translation such as "chief god" or "head god" is most appropriate.

stone blocks Refers to rolling stones—boulders that are too large to move by any other means.

timber is being put in the walls The technique of laying timber between layers of stone or brick was common in the ancient Near East. It was probably used as a means of strengthening buildings against earthquakes as well as to help bond the building. See note on 6:4.

5:10 their names Tattenai was probably withholding the names until he heard from the king concerning the validity of the claims.

5:11 the God of heaven and earth A popular title for God after the exile. See note on 1:2.

5:12 our ancestors angered the God of The Jews were well aware of the reason for their exile. They acknowledged that their ancestors provoked Yahweh by worshiping other gods (Ezek 23; Hos 2:1-13). As a result, Yahweh punished them by scattering them among the nations (Lev 26:33; Deut 28:64) and allowing their temple to be destroyed (2 Chr 7:20-22).

5:13 King Cyrus of Babylon's Although unusual, this title is not without precedent: Cyrus refers to himself as the king of Babylon in the Cyrus Cylinder. The title is used here to emphasize Cyrus' power over Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (Ezra 5:12). See note on 1:1.

5:14 he appointed governor This term for "governor" may refer to the governor of a province or administrative district (vv. 3; Neh 12:26) or to a royal commissioner.

Sheshbazzar See note on Ezra 1:8.

5:16 the foundation This Hebrew term for “foundations” occurs only three times in the OT, all in Ezra (4:13; 5:16; 6:3). It may be a reference to the platform on which the temple was built. It can also refer to the foundations of the temple building itself.

5:17 good for the king A standard feature in official Aramaic letter writing.

6:1 Babylonia Since the community of returned exiles originated in Babylon, Darius assumed the decree was made there. Darius likely knew that Cyrus stayed in Babylon following his conquest of the city.

6:2 Ecbatana A summer capital of the Persian kings, called Hagmatana in Persian, Ecbatana in Greek, and Achmetha in Aramaic. The city was situated in a mountainous region with a temperate climate.

scroll A rolled piece of parchment or papyrus.

A record The Aramaic term used here, *dikhron*, is related to a Hebrew word for “memorial” (*zikkaron*) that can designate a commemorative symbol including a text (Exod 17:14; 28:12; 30:16). The same Aramaic term was used in a document granting permission to the Jews at Elephantine to build a temple there. This title was usually placed on records of lists and inventories.

6:3–5 The decree of Cyrus recorded here is similar to that of the first chapter but has some notable differences. The differences may indicate the information came from two different sources. The edict of Ezra 1:2–4 may have been a portion of the decree that heralds would proclaim in each city as they journeyed throughout the empire—a shortened form of the official decree suitable for posting. The decree of vv. 3–5 could have been taken from the official records of the Persian king, which would contain the full text of the original, thus detailing all of the particulars.

6:3 cubits The measurement from the tip of the fingers to the elbow. While a standard cubit is roughly 18 inches, a “royal” or “great” cubit was 20.4 inches. These dimensions called for the rebuilt temple to be twice as high and three times as wide as Solomon’s temple (1 Kgs 6:2).

width sixty cubits There is no reference to the length of the building (1 Kgs 6:2).

6:4 a layer of timber The mention of timber reveals that this temple was built with the same techniques employed by Solomon. This verse even prescribes the same ratio of stone to timber (three to one) as Solomon (1 Kgs 6:36).

6:6 keep far away from there This command directs the Persian officials of the province to not interfere with the project. The governor of the province certainly would have been allowed access for inspections and other such situations.

6:7 the governor of the Jews Tattenai is the governor of the entire Persian province of Trans-Euphrates (called in Aramaic *avar-naharah* or “Beyond the River”). This province extended from the Euphrates River in the north to Egypt in the south. Zerubbabel is only the governor of the Jews. Darius viewed Zerubbabel as subordinate to Tattenai.

6:9 Whatever may be needed—young bulls, young rams, sheep The most valuable and important sacrifices in the religious worship of the Jews (Num 7:87–88; 1 Chr 29:21; compare Lev 1).

6:10 pray for the life of the king The Cyrus Cylinder records a similar decree: “May all the gods whom I have placed within their sanctuaries address a daily prayer in my favor before Bel and Nabu, that my days may be long.” According to Greek historian Herodotus, it was customary among the Persians to utter a prayer for the king whenever a sacrifice was offered (Herodotus, *Histories* 1.132).

6:11 let him be impaled on it The punishment involves the violator either being nailed to a beam from his house and hanged on it or being impaled by the beam. The wording is vague, literally stating “being raised up, let him be struck upon it.” It is unclear whether the raising up of the victim or of the beam is in view.

let his house be made a pile of rubble If anyone harmed the house of God, his own house would be destroyed.

6:12 May the God who has set his name there overthrow An invocation reflecting the ancient Near Eastern curse formula.

with diligence The Aramaic term used here, *osparna*, has the sense of “completely” or “thoroughly.”

6:13–18 This passage narrates the completion and dedication of the temple, the climax of the first half of the book of Ezra.

6:13 with diligence The Aramaic term used here is also used to describe the building efforts of the Jewish people (Ezra 5:8), the urgency of the king’s decree (v. 12), and the actions of Tattenai and his colleagues in carrying out that decree.

6:14 were building and prospering Possibly a figure of speech with the subsequent meaning, “successfully built.”

by the decree of Cyrus The same word is used for both occurrences of “decree” in this verse. However, the “decree” of God is vocalized *ta'am*, whereas the “decree” of the Persian kings is vocalized *te'em*, possibly indicating a distinction between a divine and human command.

6:15 the month of Adar February or March 516 BC—about four years after the Jewish people restarted the project and approximately 20 years after they laid its foundation. The temple was rebuilt 70 years after its destruction.

Israelite Calendar Table

Date	Event
Cyrus allows Jews to return to Jerusalem	538 BC
Temple altar is rebuilt	536 BC

Temple building is stopped	535–520 BC
Temple is completed	516 BC

6:16 the dedication of This term eventually becomes the name of an annual festival commemorating the rededication of the temple after its defilement at the hands of Antiochus Epiphanes. See John 10:22 and note.

6:17 one hundred young bulls, two hundred young rams, four hundred lambs While this was a significant sacrifice for the impoverished returned Jewish exiles, it pales in comparison to the 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep offered in dedication to Solomon’s temple (1 Kgs 8:63).

a sin offering for Israel Lev 4:22–24 prescribed the offering of a male goat as a sin offering. Each tribe of Israel was represented in this offering.

6:19–22 Here, the language of the narrative reverts back to Hebrew (see note on Ezra 4:7).

6:19 first month This date can be calculated to March or April 516 BC.

Passover feast On Passover, each household sacrificed a one-year-old unblemished lamb at twilight (Exod 12:6). The lamb was then eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (Num 9:11). The Passover holiday commemorated Yahweh’s redemption of the nation of Israel from bondage in Egypt.

6:21 the nations of the earth Possibly a reference to Gentile converts who returned to Israel from Babylon with the Jews. It may also refer to Jews who remained in the land throughout the exile, but now separated themselves from foreigners, recommitting themselves to worship of Yahweh alone.

6:22 the festival of unleavened bread This celebration began on the day following Passover and lasted seven days (Lev 23:6–8). During this week, the Jews were forbidden from eating leavened bread (Deut 16:3). The first and seventh days were to be days of rest (Exod 12:16). This festival commemorated the hasty departure of the Jews from Egypt.

the king of Assyria The kings have now been identified as the “king of Persia” (Ezra 1:1, 2, 8; 3:7; 4:3, 5, 7, 24; 6:14), the “king of Babylon” (5:13), and the “king of Assyria.” The title is probably used here to denote the reversal of the foreign policy of the Assyrians. The Persians, having conquered the Assyrians and Babylonians, are now in a position to right the wrongs committed by those kings.²⁸

1 Corinthians 3:5-23

¹⁶ Don’t you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? ¹⁷ God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.

²⁸ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Ezr 5:1–10:44). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

S/G

**What are the ramifications of being His temple?
How do we treat His temple? How do we Care for it?
In us? In others?**

:2, 3 The Corinthians thought of themselves as spiritual. They were preoccupied with attaining wisdom and in wisdom's name had aligned themselves with their favorite leader. Their divisiveness revealed human pride at the root of their desire. According to Paul, true spirituality does not lead to an elitist attitude but rather to a deeper understanding of the profound mystery of God—Christ crucified (1 Cor. 3:2).

COMPETITION: *WHEN SISTERS FIGHT*

Competition in the sense of a common struggle for the same objective can be a healthy thing. It can inspire us to study harder and run faster. To be challenged and pushed to reach a goal is not wrong in itself. However, when sin starts to edge its way into the competition, the goal of personal achievement is distorted into an obsession to “show up” someone else. Such competition can move our eyes from focus on the intended goal and instead make us dwell upon comparing ourselves to another. This makes competition wrong (2 Cor. 10:12).

Competition has become so commonplace in our culture that we assume it is acceptable to God in any form. Scripture does not support that position. The ideal advocated in the Bible is cooperation, agreement, and unity among believers. Several metaphors are used to describe such cooperation among believers: we are a “building” with parts jointly fitted together, a “body of Christ,” a “chosen generation,” and a “royal priesthood” (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 2:20–22; 1 Pet. 2:9). The bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon the early church came as those gathered reached “one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). The apostle Paul spoke on numerous occasions of the need for unity of spirit (Eph. 4:3).

When Jesus came to visit, Mary and Martha started using their gifts of service. Mary sat at Jesus' feet, loving and being loved by Him. Martha, a practical “doer,” started preparing food and a place to rest. However, Martha looked away from her goal of serving Christ and began to evaluate Mary's performance. Both women were serving in meaningful ways. The problem came when Martha overlooked the fact that they were both on the same team and began to sit in judgment of her sister (Luke 10:41, 42).

The gifts of the Spirit are to work in harmony with one another as the Holy Spirit directs, so that the entire body of believers is built up (1 Cor. 12:7, 11, 12). We are responsible for one another's welfare; we are to pray for one another; we are called to be one-minded and to live in peace (2 Cor. 13:11). Indeed, when arguments arise, we are to give “preference” to one another—or to defer for the sake of achieving harmony (Rom. 12:10).

See also notes on Conflict (Song 5; Matt. 18); Forgiveness (Ps. 51; Luke 17); Friendship (Luke 1); Fruit of the Spirit (Col. 3); portraits of Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4); Martha (John 11); Mary of Bethany (John 11)

3:10–15 The judgment seat of Christ (Gk. *bema*) is not the place for assigning eternal destiny but rather for determining rewards for believers (see Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; chart, Judgments in the New Testament). This judgment is marked by these characteristics:

Only those whose foundation is laid in Jesus Christ will appear (1 Cor. 3:11);
Every believer has a choice to build with the valuable and lasting or with the worthless and fleeting (vv. 12, 13);
These works will be judged by the discerning gaze of Christ Himself (v. 13; see Rev. 1:14; 2:18);
Rewards will be given for those works of permanent value (1 Cor. 3:14);
Worthless and insincere works will be destroyed, but the believer will be saved, even without reward (v. 15).

3:16, 17 Paul described the Corinthians as God’s temple (Gk. *naos*), referring to the innermost dwelling place of God, the Most Holy Place, in contrast to the entire temple complex (Gk. *hiera*). Because of the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Corinthians were God’s Most Holy Place. The words “defile” and “destroy” are the same in the Greek text, meaning “spoil” or “ruin” instead of “annihilate.” The idea then is that when an individual spoils God’s temple, God will then spoil him. Paul pointed out that God had only one temple in Corinth, and the Corinthians were that temple.²⁹

PARTNERS IN MINISTRY (3:5–17)

Paul goes on to try to explain that he and Apollos are not rivals but partners, sharing the work of building God’s church (3:5–9). Using the imagery of a garden, he said that one minister plants, another waters the seed, another reaps—but it is God who produces the life. Therefore, the human instrument is inconsequential.

He then changed the imagery to that of a building (3:9) and called himself “a wise master builder” who laid the foundation, which is Jesus Christ (v. 11). Other men have been building upon what he started. Their work, in the sense of their teaching, was of three types: (1) some employed enduring materials such as “gold, silver, precious stones”—the wisdom of the gospel, which is divinely revealed truth; (2) others built with flammable materials such as “wood, hay, straw” (or sticks, grass and straw)—perhaps more human wisdom or worldly church practices; and (3) some tended to destroy God’s temple by causing division within the local congregation.

The passage has both a pastoral and an ongoing personal application. Once the basic foundation of faith in Christ is laid, every Christian is responsible for what he does with the new life he has been given. We must see to it that we build to last (3:10–17).

²⁹ Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman’s Study Bible* (1 Co 3:2–16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The issue in Scripture seems to be twofold: what are we building with our lives (and churches) today, and what materials are we using? It is clear that some believers may have their life's service judged as worthless and receive no reward other than the assurance of heaven itself (vv. 15, 16).

FAITH ALIVE

- What building materials are described in verse 12?
- What do you think they represent in a believer's life?
- How do they relate to each other?
- What will the fire test or reveal? (v. 13)
- What will determine if an individual will receive a reward? (vv. 13, 14)
- How should the fact that God's Spirit lives in every Christian affect the way we live? (v. 16)
- In what ways have you been able to plant and water God's Word in others this week?
- What could you do in your church this month to help build up other Christians?

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

(4:1-21)

Paul goes on in 1 Corinthians 4 to provide some background for helping the local groups within the Corinthian congregation learn how to judge and evaluate their leaders.

FAITH ALIVE

- How are we to treat persons who are in a position of ministry leadership?
- Are we to look up to them? Respect them higher than others? Why or why not?
- Give them any special powers or privileges? Why or why not?
- How can congregations show honor without putting pastors on a pedestal?

First, Paul reminds them of a leader's responsibility as a steward and as an example (vv. 1-5). From a personal perspective, a leader or Christian worker is a representative of Jesus Christ. His conversion, his call, his gifts are from above. Wise believers will respect God's servant, not because of his pulpit oratory, his sparkling personality, or his administrative genius, but because he is the Lord's representative. And wiser still is the pastor or Christian worker who remembers with deep humility that he represents the Lord, not because of any wonderful qualities in himself, but because the Lord has allowed him such a holy calling. As one pastor put it, "God wrote the message, and I am just the messenger boy."

In a sense, each believer is a "steward" (4:1). This word in Greek, *oikonomos*, comes from two words meaning "house" and "to arrange." The word originally referred to the manager of a household or estate, and then in a broader sense denoted an administrator or a steward in general.

All believers are stewards (1 Pet. 4:10), but in a particular way this is true of a spiritual leader. The Master, in His absence, has made him an overseer of His work. The Christian worker is a servant of Christ and a steward "of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1). "Mysteries" here are not literary "whodunits," but God's great plan of redemption, which was originally unknown to mankind, but now made crystal clear by the writings and teachings of the apostles and prophets. The minister (or "servant") is held accountable both to know and to faithfully give out these great truths of God's Word as he would preach "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

From a public perspective, Paul offered himself as an example (1 Cor. 4:3, 4). He felt he had a clear conscience before any human court of evaluation, but acknowledged his final judgment was with God, who alone is fully competent to offer perfect judgment. Human evaluations meant little to the apostle. Such judgments are frequently faulty, shallow, and premature. Too often they are mere criticism based on personal preferences and not facts or Scripture.

Only divine judgment is perfect, and that time of judgment is coming. The only proper time for complete evaluation of a Christian worker's merit is still future—"until the Lord comes" (4:5).

Second, Paul challenged them about a leader's relationship with his sheep. Just as the spiritual maturity and the fruitful service of a church depend much on a leader's qualifications, so is there much dependence on the quality of those being led. A good relationship between the two is necessary. When mutual trust, love, and respect are lost, Christ's cause is seriously damaged.

Paul demonstrated a "servant-leader" style that was very transparent and "incarnational." He first lived out the basic truths in his own life and then explained and taught them to those he led. He opened the pages of Scripture and also the doors of his own heart so that others not only heard the truth but saw the process by which it was believed and incorporated into a life of faith.

FAITH ALIVE

Though the Corinthians were "puffed up" with pride (4:6, 18, 19), Paul sought to humble them without rejecting them. He first appealed to reason (vv. 6, 7) and used his pen as a rod to correct the wayward saints.

Apparently there was a strong streak of spiritual arrogance among these early believers. Drawn into unwise and unhealthy exaltation of human leadership, they seemed to feel they had a "corner on the truth." They looked down their noses with contempt at other believers not marching to their own personal drumbeat.

Paul corrected the Corinthians with three rhetorical questions, which hurt their egos (v. 7).

1. "*Who makes you differ from another?*" Were they really superior to any other believer or group?
2. "*What do you have that you did not receive?*" Who gave them the gospel? Who gave them salvation? Who gave them milk and solid food for spiritual growth?
3. "*Why do you boast as if you had not received it?*"

Their silent response to these questions spoke volumes.

Like the Corinthians, our abilities and blessings come from God; we cannot take credit for them. They are God's gifts, and our use of them is our gift to God. They are to be used in service and blessing to others and not selfishly kept for our exclusive enjoyment.³⁰

3:5 **Apollos** and **Paul** were *servants* (*minister* is Latin for "servant") **through whom** the Corinthians had come to believe in the Lord Jesus. They were simply agents and not the heads of rival schools. How unwise then of the Corinthians to raise servants to the rank of master. Ironside quaintly comments at this point, "Imagine a household divided over servants!"

3:6 Using a figure from agriculture, Paul shows that the servant is after all very limited in what he can do. **Paul** himself could plant and **Apollos** could water, but only **God** could give **the increase**. So today, some of us can preach the word and all of us can pray for unsaved relatives and friends, but the actual work of salvation can only be done by the Lord.

3:7 Looking at it from this point, we can readily see that the planter and the waterer are really not very important, relatively speaking. They have not the power in themselves to bring forth life.

³⁰ Hayford, J. W., & Curtis, G. (1997). *Pathways to pure power: learning the depth of love's power, a study of first Corinthians*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Why then should there be any envy or rivalry among Christian workers? Each should do the work that has been allotted to him, and rejoice when the Lord shows His hand in blessing.

3:8 He who plants and he who waters are one in the sense that they both have the same object and aim. There should be no jealousy between them. As far as service is concerned, they are on the same level. In a coming day, **each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.** That day is the Judgment Seat of Christ.

3:9 God is the One to whom all are responsible. All His servants are **fellow workers**, laboring together in **God's** tilled harvest **field**, or, to change the picture, working together on the same **building**. Erdman renders the thought as follows: "We are fellow-workers who belong to God and are working with one another."

3:10 Continuing with the idea of building, the apostle first of all acknowledges that anything he has been able to accomplish has been due to **the grace of God**. By this he means the undeserved ability from God to do the work of an apostle. Then he goes on to describe his part in the beginning of this assembly at Corinth: "**As a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation.**" He came to Corinth preaching Christ and Him crucified. Souls were saved and a local church was planted. Then he adds: "**And another builds on it.**" By this, he doubtless refers to other teachers who subsequently visited Corinth and built on the foundation which had already been established there. However, the apostle cautions: "**But let each one take heed how he builds on it.**" He means that it is a solemn thing to exercise a teaching ministry in the local church. Some had come to Corinth with divisive doctrines and with teachings contrary to the word of God. Paul was doubtless conscious of these teachers as he penned the words.

3:11 Only one foundation is required for a building. Once it is laid, it never needs to be repeated. The Apostle Paul had laid the foundation of the church at Corinth. That **foundation** was **Jesus Christ**, His Person and Work.

3:12 Subsequent teaching in a local church may be of varying degrees of value. For instance, some teaching is of lasting worth, and might be likened to **gold, silver, or precious stones**. Here **precious stones** probably do not refer to diamonds, rubies, or other gems but rather to the granite, marble, or alabaster used in the construction of costly temples. On the other hand, teaching in the local church might be of passing value or of no value at all. Such teaching is likened to **wood, hay, and straw**.

This passage of Scripture is commonly used in a general way to refer to the lives of all Christian believers. It is true that we are all building, day by day, and the results of our work will be manifested in a coming day. However, a careful student of the Bible will want to note that the passage does not refer primarily to all believers but rather to preachers and teachers.

3:13 In a coming day, **each one's work will become clear.** **Day** refers to the Judgment Seat of Christ when all service for the Lord will be reviewed. The process of review is likened to the action of **fire**. Service that has brought glory to God and blessing to man, like gold, silver, and precious stones, will not be affected by the fire. On the other hand, that which has caused trouble among the people of God or failed to edify them will be consumed. **The fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.**

3:14 Work in connection with the church may be of three types. In verse 14 we have the first type—service that has been of a profitable nature. In such a case, the servant's life work **endures** the test of the Judgment Seat of Christ and the worker **will receive a reward.**

3:15 The second type of work is that which is useless. In this case, the servant **will suffer loss**, although **he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire**. E. W. Rogers points out: "Loss does

not imply the forfeiture of something once possessed.” It should be clear from this verse that the Judgment Seat of Christ is not concerned with the subject of a believer’s sins and their penalty. The penalty of a believer’s sins was borne by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary, and that matter has been settled once for all. Thus the believer’s salvation is not at all in question at the Judgment Seat of Christ; rather it is a matter of his service.

Through failure to distinguish between salvation and rewards, the Roman Catholic Church has used this verse to try to support its teaching of purgatory. However, a careful examination of the verse reveals no hint as to purgatory. There is no thought that the fire purifies the character of a man. Rather, the fire tests a man’s work or service, of what sort it is. The man is saved despite the fact that his works are consumed by the fire.

An interesting thought in connection with this verse is that the word of God is sometimes likened to fire (see Isa. 5:24 and Jer. 23:29). The same word of God which will test our service at the Judgment Seat of Christ is available to us now. If we are building in accordance with the teachings of the Bible, then our work will stand the test in that coming day.

3:16 Paul reminds the believers **that they are the temple** (Gk., the inner shrine or sanctuary) **of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in them**. It is true that every individual believer is also a temple of God indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but that is not the thought here. The apostle is looking at the church as a collective company, and wishes them to realize the holy dignity of such a calling.

3:17 A third class of work in the local church is that which may be spoken of as destructive. Apparently there were false teachers who had come into the church at Corinth and whose instruction tended more to sin than to holiness. They did not think it a serious matter to thus cause havoc in a temple of God, so Paul thunders out this solemn declaration: **“If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him.”** Viewed in its local setting, this means that if any man enters a local church and wrecks its testimony, **God will destroy him**. The passage is speaking of false teachers who are not true believers in the Lord Jesus. The seriousness of such an offense is indicated by the closing words of verse 17: **“For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.”**

3:18 In Christian service, as in all of Christian life, there is always the danger of self-deception. Perhaps some of those who came to Corinth as teachers posed as men of extreme wisdom. Any who have an exalted view of their own worldly wisdom must learn that they must become fools in the eyes of the world in order to **become wise** in God’s estimation. Godet helpfully paraphrases at this point:

If any individual whatever, Corinthian or other, while preaching the gospel *in your assemblies* assumes the part of a wise man and reputation of a profound thinker, let him assure himself that he will not attain true wisdom until he has passed through a crisis in which that wisdom of his with which he is puffed up will perish and after which only he will receive the wisdom which is from above.

3:19 **The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God**. Man by searching could never find out God, neither would human wisdom ever have devised a plan of salvation by which God would become Man in order to die for guilty, vile, rebel sinners. Job 5:13 is quoted in verse 19 to show that God triumphs over the supposed wisdom of men to work out His own purposes. Man with all his learning cannot thwart the plans of the Lord; instead, God often shows them that in spite of their worldly wisdom, they are utterly poor and powerless.

3:20 Psalm 94:11 is quoted here to emphasize that **the LORD knows** all the reasonings **of the wise** men of this world, and He further knows **that they are futile**, empty, and fruitless. But why is Paul going to such pains to discredit worldly wisdom? Simply for this reason—the Corinthians were placing a great premium on such wisdom and were following those leaders who seemed to exhibit it in a remarkable degree.

3:21 In view of all that had been said, **no one** should **boast in men**. And as far as true servants of the Lord are concerned, we should not boast that we belong to them but rather realize that they all belong to us. **All things are yours**.

3:22 Someone has called verse 22 “an inventory of the possessions of the child of God.” Christian workers belong to us, whether **Paul** the evangelist, or **Apollos** the teacher, or **Cephas** the pastor. Since they all belong to us, it is folly for us to claim that we belong to any *one* of them. Then **the world** is ours. As joint heirs with Christ, we will one day come into possession of it, but in the meantime it is ours by divine promise. Those who tend its affairs do not realize that they are doing so for us. **Life** is ours. By this we do not mean merely existence on earth but life in its truest, fullest sense. And **death** is ours. For us it is no longer a dread foe that consigns the soul to the dark unknown; rather it is now the messenger of God that brings the soul to heaven. **Things present** and **things to come—all are** likewise ours. It has been truly said that all things serve the man who serves Christ. A. T. Robertson once said: “The stars in their courses fight for the man who is partner with God in the world’s redemption.”

3:23 All Christians belong to Christ. Some in Corinth were claiming to belong to Him to the exclusion of all others. They formed the “Christ-party.” But Paul refutes any such contention. We are all **Christ’s, and Christ is God’s**. By thus showing the saints their true and proper dignity, Paul reveals in bold relief the folly of forming parties and divisions in the church.³¹

Psalm 29:1-11

Proverbs 20:26-27

“The Lord’s light penetrates the human spirit, exposing every hidden motive.” Vs 27

³¹ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (pp. 1754–1757). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.