

EXPOSITORY STUDY OF PAUL'S FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH IN CORINTH

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Corinth was the capital of Achaia, a major province in the Roman Empire (now southern Greece). It was a port city and a commercial hub. Trade from Italy, Sicily, and the western nations landed at Lechaëum on the west; and that of the islands of the Aegean sea, of Asia Minor, and of the Phoenicians, and other oriental nations, landed at Cenchrea on the east. The city of Corinth thus became the mart of Asia and Europe. Its population and its wealth increased by the influx of foreigners. Apart from trade, Corinth was also known for the worship of Venus, a goddess of love (or licentious passion). Her shrine appeared above those of the other gods. Not less than 1,000 beautiful females serve as courtesans, or public prostitutes, before the altar of the goddess of love. It was assumed that sex with the temple prostitute brings success.

“Individuals, in order to ensure success in their undertakings, vowed to present to Venus a certain number of courtesans, which they obtained by sending to distant countries. Foreign merchants were attracted in this way to Corinth; The effect of this on the morals of the city can be easily understood. It became the most frivolous, dissipated, corrupt, and ultimately the most effeminate and feeble portion of Greece. It is necessary to make these statements, because they go to show the exceeding grace of God in collecting a church in such a city, the power of the gospel in overcoming the strongest and most polluted passions of our nature; and because no small part of the irregularities which arose in the church at Corinth, and which gave the apostle occasion to write this Epistle, were produced by this prevailing licentiousness of the people; and by the fact, that gross and licentious passions had received the countenance of law and the patronage of public opinion” **(Albert Barne, Introduction to 1Corinthians)**

“As we have seen that Corinth was well situated for trade, and consequently very rich... Corinth exceeded all the cities of the world, for the splendour and magnificence of its public buildings, such as temples, palaces, theatres, porticos, cenotaphs, baths, and other edifices... Corinth is also celebrated for its statues; those, especially, of Venus, the Sun, Neptune and Amphitrite, Diana, Apollo, Jupiter, Minerva, etc. The temple of Venus was not only very splendid, but also very rich, and maintained, according to Strabo, not less than 1,000 courtesans, who were the means of bringing an immense concourse of strangers to the place. Thus riches produced luxury, and luxury a total corruption of manners... Public prostitution formed a considerable part of their religion; and they were accustomed in their public prayers, to request the gods to multiply their prostitutes! And in order to express their gratitude to their deities for the favours they received, they bound themselves, by vows, to increase the number of such women; for commerce with them was neither esteemed sinful nor disgraceful.... So notorious was this city for such conduct, that the verb Korinthiazesthai, to Corinthize, signified to act the prostitute; and Korinthia koree, a Corinthian damsel, meant a harlot or common woman... Every part of the Grecian learning was highly cultivated here; so that, before its destruction by the Romans, Cicero call it “totius Graeciae lumen” — the eye of all Greece. Yet the inhabitants of it were as lascivious as they were learned. Though arts, sciences, and literature continued to flourish long in it, and a measure of the martial spirit of its ancient inhabitants was kept alive in it by means of those public games which, being celebrated on the isthmus which connects the Peloponnesus to the main land, were called the Isthmian games, and were exhibited once every five years. The exercises in these games were, leaping, running, throwing the quoit or dart, boxing, and wrestling. It appears that, besides these, there were contentions for poetry and music; and the conquerors in any of these exercises were ordinarily crowned either with pine leaves or with parsley. It is well known that the

apostle alludes to these games in different parts of his letters, which shall all be particularly noticed as they occur.” (**Adam Clarke, Preface to 1Corinthians**)

Much of the state of the church in Corinth was a reflection of the city in which she is. It is not surprising to see how learning, knowledge and oratory was highly esteemed in the church, even to the detriment of sound faith and character. As knowledge puffs, so the church was full of pride and divisions. The licentious atmosphere in the city also affected the church. They had issues relating to sexual immorality, indecent dressing, disorderliness in worship, participation in pagan festivity, etc. In the midst of all these, Paul would say, “necessity is laid upon me...woe is me if I preach not the gospel...” the situation of the city and the church would not discourage him. When he was afraid of being attacked, the Lord encouraged him saying: “...I have many people in this city” Acts 18:10. It is indeed encouraging to know that in a city like Corinth, God still have many people. It is the duty of the apostle to reach out to those people and establish a church that will pull down the gate of hell and bring down every stronghold over the heart of men. The apostle did not take this responsibility lightly. And as we have in our theme for this year’s conference, he said: “**A dispensation of the gospel is committed onto me**” 1Cor. 9:17. By this he meant “a tenure, an administration or management (stewardship) of the gospel has been entrusted to me”. Dispensation in English implies “a political, religious, or social system **prevailing** at a particular time”. Paul, understood that if he carried out his stewardship rightly, it was going to alter the system prevailing at that time, and bring in “**the dispensation of the gospel**”. Carrying out such a “management or stewardship” would mean setting out the right example for the church to follow, ensuring the church is rightly taught and that the message of the gospel is practically expressed through the Church. This is what we see Paul doing in this letter to the Corinthians.

We can trace a clear parallel between the state of Corinth (and the Church in her) and that of our cities/churches today. As in those times, learning is so advanced now, sports and entertainment is at its peak, our cities are filled with dissipation, effeminate, high level of sexual immorality, indecency, etc. These things are affecting the church today. It is in a time like this we have been called to bear stewardship of the gospel, to administer the gospel, until it becomes the conscience of men, until the gospel begins to define the character of the time. The aim of this study is to learn from Paul through this first letter to the Corinthians, how we may administer the gospel in a social system such as he had in Corinth, and to establish a church that is holy and separated from the worldliness all around.

It is generally accepted that the letter under consideration was written between AD.56 – 57 while Paul was about leaving Ephesus. That is about two years after establishing the Church in Corinth. The letter was written as a reply to some enquiry made by the church on certain practise, and to address some other issues reported to Paul by some members of the Church.

For the purpose of this conference, we shall study the letter under the following divisions:

STUDY 1: KEEPING FOCUS ON PREACHING THE GOSPEL (CHAPTER 1-3)

STUDY 2: STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERY OF GOD (CHAPTERS 4 -10)

STUDY 3: BUILDING THE CHURCH FOR EFFECTIVE WITNESS TO THE GOSPEL (CHAPTERS 11 – 16)

STUDY 1: KEEPING FOCUS ON PREACHING THE GOSPEL (CHAPTER 1-3)

1. Introduction and Thanksgiving (1:1-9)

- a. i. Discuss the significance of Paul's introduction of himself:
"called to be an apostle by the will of God"? v.1
(Sosthenes is probably same person mentioned in Acts 18:17; he was likely converted and became a companion of Paul. He is the penman for this letter. 16:21)
- ii. Who was the letter address to? v.2
- iii. What does it imply to say the church is "sanctified in Christ Jesus?" v. 2
- b. i. Discuss the significance of the prayers in v.3
- ii. Point and discuss the reasons for Paul's thanksgiving in v.4- 7.
What does this tell you about the church in Corinth?
- c. *"...the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you... who will confirm you to the end..."* v.6,8
(compare other translations).
 - i. What does it mean for the testimony of Christ to be confirmed in a life or a church?
 - ii. What does it mean for the Lord to "confirm you to the end" (see also
 - iii. What end is referred to in v.8? (See v.7), What should be our attitude in looking forward to that end (v.7,8)
 - iv. Read v.9 and discuss the two reasons why Paul was assured the Lord will secure his purpose in the church. [Note especially the phrase "called into the fellowship of his son" what does this mean?]

2. FOCUSING ON THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS (1:10-30)

- a. i. The apostle started this letter addressing the issue of division with a strong pleading (v.10). Discuss the effect of such division on the proclamation of the gospel.
- ii. What were the causes of all such division? V.12
- iii. From v.10 and 13, what should be the basis and the extent to which we should be united? [Note especially the phrase: were you baptized in the name of Paul? What does it tell us as to the true meaning of our baptism? (See 1Cor.12:13)]
- iv. Discuss various ways we see such division today, and the adverse effect it has on the gospel today.
- b. i. In preaching the gospel what should be our attitude towards all such divisions and distractions? V.17
- ii. From v.17 & 18, what is the primary focus of the gospel? Why is this message considered foolishness (v.18,23).
- iii. How does the message of the cross compare/contradict the popular demand for worldly power and wisdom (see v.22). To what end is the pursuit of such worldly "signs" and wisdom? (v.19 – 21)
- c. i. What is the impact of the message of the cross to those who believe? (v.21- 25)
- ii. Read v.26 -30. Take a sober reflection on who you were before you received the message of the cross. What difference has that message made on your life?

- iii. What is the ground of our righteousness, holiness and hope of redemption? (v.30)
- iv. What room does the message of the cross leave for personal boasting? v.31

3. THE GOSPEL: THE WISDOM OF GOD IN A MYSTERY (2:1-16)

- a. i. Paul called the gospel he preached “the testimony of God” v.1.
What do you understand by this phrase.
- ii. Read v.1-4 from various versions. What is the nature of the gospel, and how can it be preached?
- iii. What will be the effect of preaching the gospel by the demonstrating it through our life? (v.5) How does this stand in contrast with merely preaching it with excellency of speech”?
- b. i. Read v.6-8. What does this “Wisdom of God in a mystery” refer to?
(See also Col.1:27, 2:2-3)
- ii. Compare v.6 with Eph.4:13-15, Phil.3:8-19. What does it take to apprehend this wisdom of God in a mystery?
- iii. What is the effect of attending unto this wisdom of God...(v.7-8; see also Eph.1:3-10,3:8-21)
- iv. What does the phrase: “The things which God prepared for those who love Him” point to? (See Rom. 8:18-30)
- c. i. How do we come into a revelation of the things God has prepared for us in Christ?
(v.10-16, see also John 14:26,15:26, Rom. 8:5-7, 12-15)
- ii. How is this revelation communicated? v.13 Why cannot everyone receive this revelation v.14
- iii. Discuss the phrase “he who is spiritual judges all things” v.15
- iv. The basis for a right spiritual discernment and judgment is in having the mind of God.
(v.14-16). Discuss in practical terms how we may cultivate this mind of God. (See Rom.12:2, Eph.4:17-24, James 4:1 -10)

4. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF BUILDING THE CHURCH (3:1-23)

- a. i. Read 2:14-16 and 3:1-3. What is the major limitation of the church in coming into the things God has prepared for them?
- ii. What are the marks of carnality as described in v.3-4
- b. i. How did Paul view the church, himself and other ministers in v.5-9. How will such a view help us in ministry today.
- ii. **From v.10** what is the basis for ministry?
- iii. What should be our foremost responsibility as wise master builders? (v.10-11). What are the “other foundations” men sought to lay?
- c. i. What do you understand by building with “gold, silver and precious stone as against wood hay and straw” v.12
- ii. Read v.12-15. Why is it important we keep the judgment day in view as we build?
- iii. What does the phrase “...but he himself will be saved, yet as though fire” imply?
- d. i. The church is referred to as the temple of God (v.16-17, see also Eph.2:20-21).

In light of this study, what constitute the defilement of the temple of God. (See v.3 & 21). What is the consequence of defiling the temple of God? V.17. How does this compare with v.15?

- ii. Discuss the peril of bringing in the wisdom of this world into the church. v.18-20
- iii. What should be our singular focus as a church? (v.21-23) How will that help to keep us from the futility of worldly wisdom?

[The wisdom of the world most times involves the promotion of men or affiliated denominations. It involves seeking to attract men by popular appeal. True ministers must seek to keep the church focused on the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever comes through the ministers of Christ must not be attributed to such minister's persona, but must be received as a gift from God]

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

The apostle started the letter stating unambiguously his office as an apostle by the will of God. We see what a large heart and sense of responsibility he had for the Church and the gospel as he wrote not just to the Church in Corinth, but to all "everywhere who call on the name of the Lord". His joy was that the church was enriched in everything, and the testimony of Christ was confirmed in them. His overarching desire is that this testimony will be confirmed to the end.

He was poised to seeing that they are firmly established in the gospel. He would not be distracted by their petty quarrels, and rancour and party spirit. Rather he was focused with preaching the message of the cross; a message which if rightly received will deal with all of these issues. However, the message of the cross was not going to be preached by the eloquence of speech and the wisdom of men, but by the demonstration (through their life) of the power of the gospel, and the wisdom of God. It is this power and wisdom of God that conquers the spirit of this world, and the philosophy of this age.

By being possessed of the wisdom of God, the believer may know the things of the Spirit and rightly judge the spiritual value all things. This was what was lacking in the church in Corinth. Even though they knew so much, they have not developed the mind of Christ, they were yet carnal, and their scale of value was not based on the spiritual but on carnal considerations. The tendency was for them to hold one minister above the other. They divided themselves along the lines of the minister they fancy the most. Paul had to point out that he neither preached himself nor anyone else apart from Jesus Christ. Christ is the foundation of the church upon which we must build. Failure to build rightly on this foundation will spell total disaster on the day of judgment.

STUDY 2: STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERY OF GOD (CHAPTERS 4 -10)

1. THE REQUIREMENT FOR STEWARDSHIP (4:1-18)

- a.
 - i. Read v.1-2. What is the basic requirement for stewards?
 - ii. Why is it foolish to judge ourselves by our own standards or by the standards of me? (v.3-4)
 - iii. What is the standard of judgement/scrutiny which we must prepare to face? V.5
- b.
 - i. As servants and stewards, what is the right way to present ourselves before the church? v.6
 - ii. How can we deal with the temptation to compare and compete with one another? V.7 (See also 2Cor.10:12)
 - iii. Compare the attitude of some in the church (v.8) with Paul's example in v.9-13. To what extent did Paul condescend in order to discharge his stewardship in the gospel.
 - iv. Why is it important we avoid all form of self-promotion as stewards of God?
- c.
 - i. Discuss the importance of having an authority figure over our life. V.14 -15
 - ii. Paul set himself and Timothy as examples that should be imitated, what challenge does that leave for us as ministers? V.16-17
 - iii. The Church in Corinth valued oratory and argument to the point of being arrogant. (See v. 18-19) What according to v.20 constitute real value in the kingdom of God? (Read v.20 from AMP.)

2. RESPONSIBILITY IN CORRECTING ERRORS (CHAPTERS 5-8)

- a.
 - i. From 4:21, discuss the ways we may correct wrong behaviour in the church.
 - ii. Identify the major issues dealt with in Chapter 5 (see v.1-2)
 - iii. How did Paul deal with this matter? v.3-5
 - iv. Why is it important to deal with such issues decisively? (v.6-8)
 - v. What should be our attitude to unrepentant brethren (v.9-13)
- b.
 - i. What are the main issues raised in Chapter 6 (1-2, 16)
 - ii. What is Paul's counsel concerning the of contending with our brethren (v.2 – 7)
 - iii. The church in Corinth have become permissive (v.12). What are some of the things they made allowance for? v.9-10. What is the consequence of all such practices? v.9
 - iv. Read v.11, what should be the effect our being "washed and sanctified"? (See also Eph.4:11-32)
 - v. Discuss the statement: "Everything is permissible for me, but I will not be mastered by anything" v.12-13
 - vi. In dealing with sexual immorality, and sin in general, what encouragement can we draw from v.14 (See also Rom.8:11).
 - vii. Read v.15-19 and discuss why we must flee sexual immorality.
- c.
 - i. What is the main issue raised in Chapter 7?
 - ii. Discuss the importance of marriage in curbing sexual promiscuity. (v.1-5, 9) (See also 1Thess. 4:3-8, Heb. 13: 4)
 - iii. Read v.6-8. Why is it wrong to impose celibacy on people? (See also Matt.19:10-12, 1Tim.4:1-3).
 - iv. From v.10 -16, 39-40 discuss the stand of scriptures on marrying an unbeliever, Divorce, separation and remarriage (See also Matt. 19:3-9, 2Cor.6:14)

- d. i. Read v.18-24. What should be the guiding principle and our attitude towards whatever situation we find ourselves in life?
(**Comment:** Our aim and focus should be how to serve God the most in whatever situation we are. If we can improve our lot, we should, but only with the aim of how it could enhance our service to the Lord)
- ii. How will such an attitude help young people who are desperate about getting married (especially in a society like Corinth where finding believers who are of the same conviction is very difficult)? (See v.25-28)
- iii. In light of the urgency of preaching the gospel, and the need for commitment to the Lord, what should be our attitude to life in general? (v.29-35)
- iv. Read v.36 -38 and discuss the caveat place on continuing in celibacy.

Note: The rendering of the verse above may be confusing, but the commentary by Adam Clark makes it clearer: "The apostle by *Parthenos* does not mean a virgin, **but the state of virginity or celibacy**, whether in man or woman." Both Mr. Locke and Dr. Whitby are of this opinion, and the latter reasons on it thus: It is generally supposed that these three verses relate to virgins under the power of parents and guardians, and the usual inference is, that children are to be disposed of in marriage by the parents, guardians, etc. Now this may be true, but it has no foundation in the text, *for teerein teen heautou parthenon* is not to keep his daughter's, **but his own virginity, or rather his purpose of virginity**; for, as Phavorinus says, He is called a virgin who freely gives himself up to the Lord, renouncing matrimony, and preferring a life spent in continency. And that this must be the true import of these words appears from this consideration, that this depends upon the purpose of his own heart, and the power he has over his own will, and the no necessity arising from himself to change this purpose...."

- e. i. What is the main issue addressed in chapter 8?
- ii. Discuss the phrase "knowledge puffs up, but loves builds up" v.1,2
- iii. How did Paul address the issue of eating food sacrificed to idol v.4-8
- iv. What should be the overriding motive and principles in our personal conducts? V.3, 9-13. (See also 10:31- 33). Identify various personal areas where these principles may be applied.

3: THE COST OF PREACHING THE GOSPEL AND BUILDING THE CHURCH (CHAPTERS 9 – 10)

- a. i. Discuss Paul's response to the question on his apostleship. V.1-2
- ii. Identify some of the personal sacrifice the apostle made in order to preach the gospel. 3 – 6
- iii. Identify the scriptural right of preachers of the gospel from v.7-14
- iv. Why did Paul refused to exercise those rights? V.12-15
- b. i. How did Paul perceive his responsibility to the gospel? v.16 -18
- ii. What can we learn from how Paul discharged his stewardship? (v.19 -23)
- iii. From v.24-27, what was Paul's motivation and caution in the discharge of his stewardship (See also Phil.3:14,20-21, 2Tim.4:6-8)
- iv. Discuss the importance of discipline/training towards winning the prize? V.24- 27

Following from 9:27, the apostle went on to show examples of those who did not end up obtaining the prize set before them in chapter 10.

- c. i. Read 10:1-4. How does the spiritual resources available to the children of Israel compare with what we have today? How did some of them end even with such resources? V.5
- ii. Discuss the warnings given to us from v.5-12
- iii. What encouragement can we draw from v.13 as we face various temptations in life? [The dissipation in Corinth may make the church think that their temptation is peculiar. The apostle will have them know that it is common. We may be living in a different time and culture, but we all face temptations that are common to men. We can be sure that the same God that helped others is faithful to keep us through]
- iv. What should be our response in the face of temptation? V.14
- d. i. Read v.15-22. Compare the similarity between fellowshiping with the Lord through joining the Lord's table and fellowshiping with devils through eating food offered to idols. In what other ways can a person be exposed to fellowship with devils.
- ii. From v.23-30 Discuss the limit to our personal liberties as believers.
- iii. Why is it important to be sensitive to other people's conscience? (v.31-33, see also Rom.14:1)

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

The apostle continued by reminding the church of his stewardship, noting that the basic requirement for a steward is faithfulness. He had such a strong sense of accountability to God. It is not man with his bias and fallibility that will judge us, we are not even fit to judge ourselves. We shall stand to give account to an infallible and perfect judge, who will not only judge our actions or inactions, but our motives too. Knowing we shall stand before such a Judge, it is therefore very unnecessary to seek to make impressions on men, so as to court their fancy. Paul rather considered himself and all true apostles to be a "spectacle" (i.e. a prisoner captured and made sport of in an amphitheatre). How all they had to go through contradicted the self-projections the Corinthians esteemed! The suffering and condescension by no means diminished Paul's authority as an apostle; an authority that is exerted by the quality of life and example exhibited, and not by self-promotion and self-imposition.

Based on that authority, the apostle addressed some issues that were amiss in the church: sexual immorality, going to lawsuit against a brother before ungodly judges, the question of marriage especially as it has to do with marrying an unbeliever or remaining in a marriage with an unbeliever, and also the question of eating food offered to idols. The answer to all these issues lies in taking a course that would glorify God the most, promote co-operate edification and enhance personal growth in faith. Pursuing such will mean self-discipline, separating from compromised brethren, allowing oneself to be cheated (if need be), and even giving up marrying (if you must). How much are we willing to go through for our growth in faith, the edification of the church, and for the glory of God? To buttress this point, Paul pointed at his personal sacrifice for the gospel and for the church. He has given up his right to receiving payment, his right to marry, and even his right to a holiday. The singular reason he gave for all this is that: **"necessity is laid upon me...a dispensation of the gospel is committed to me"**. With such a mindset, he trained himself so that he might run to win, and not be a cast away. He ended the section by pointing to those who jeopardized their race: "all these happened to them for example, and they are written for our admonition".

STUDY 3: BUILDING THE CHURCH FOR EFFECTIVE WITNESS TO THE GOSPEL (CHAPTERS 11 – 16)

1. DEALING WITH SCRUPLES IN THE CHURCH (11:1-34)

- a. i. Read 11:1-2. The apostle appreciated their commitment to his teachings. However, some of them had questions concerning the use of head covering by women in the church. The apostle was obliged to explain. Why is it important we ask questions on practises we may not understand, rather than ignorantly condemn, or follow without question?
- ii. Read v.3-10. What does the covering of hair by women in the church primarily signify? (See also 1Tim.2:9-14) Why is this practise appropriate for public worship?
- iii. Does the subjection of women imply inferiority? (v.11 -12). How does mutual respect between both genders enhance the testimony of the church?
- iv. Corinthian society was filled with effeminacy; this was affecting the conduct in the church. In what ways do this affect the church today? Such best ways it can be dealt with. (V.13-16).
- b. i. In the second part of this chapter, the apostle rebuked the church for not following his precept on their conduct of the Lord's supper. What was the primary reason why they could not go about the Lord's table in the proper manner? (v.18 -19).
- ii. Read v.20 -22 and point out the wrong practise in the church as they went about the Lord's table.
- iii. What does the Lord's table primarily signify? (v.23-26) How does the attitude of the Corinthian brethren contradict what the Lord's table stood for?
- iv. Read v.27-33. What do you understand by: "...eating and drinking in unworthy manner... not discerning the body of Christ" v.29.
- v. Discuss the implication of abusing the Lord's table? Is this limited solely to the ritual of the holy eucharist?

2. BUILDING THE CHURCH THROUGH THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (CHAPTER 12)

- a. i. How did the background of the Corinthians believers affect the perception and exercise of spiritual gifts? V.1-2. Evaluate the effect of our background today in the exercise of spiritual gifts.
- ii. From v.3 what is the primary work of the Holy Spirit in the Church? (See also John 15:26). What does this tell us of those who employ the gift of the Holy Spirit for self-glorification?
- iii. Read v.4-6 from various versions. Discuss what is meant by difference in gifting, services and operations? Who is behind these diversities? How should this help our perception of what others are doing in the body?
- b. i. From v.7, how does the Holy Spirit manifest Himself in the Church? What is the purpose of His giftings?
- ii. Identify and discuss the various gifts of the Holy Spirit v.8-10
- iii. Who/What determines the gifts a person gets? V.11, 18, 31, 14:1,13

- c. i. With reference to expressing the gifts of the Holy Spirit, discuss the need to recognize that we are part of one body. V.12 (See also Rom.12:3-6)
- ii. What is the implication of being “baptized into one body...” and “...drinking of one Spirit” v.13
- iii. From the analogy in v.14-26, what should be our attitude to one another in the body of Christ?
- iv. Discuss the various ministries in the body of Christ. Why are they all necessary? V.27-30 (See also Rom.12:6-8, Eph.4:11-16)

Note: From v.31, the “best gift” does not imply that some gifts are better than the others, rather it implies that which best serves the body of Christ (See 14:12). The way to know and exercise that which best serve the body of Christ is given to us in chapter 13 and 14.

3. BUILDING THE CHURCH IN LOVE (CHAPTER 13 and 14)

- a. i. Read v.12:31-13:3, What is the more excellent way in exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit? What will exercising these gifts amount to without love?
- ii. Discuss the character of love as stated in 13:4-6
- iii. There are three key marks of spiritual maturity and advancement. Love is considered the greatest (13:13). What was the reason the apostle gave from v.8-12.
- b. i. What should be the motive behind our desire for spiritual gift? 14:1.
- ii. Why is prophesying considered very important and specially recommended? 14:3-5.
- iii. What is the benefit of speaking in tongues? (14:2, 14-15).
- c. i. We may speak with tongues in our personal communication with God (v.15-19). If we must address our brethren, what is recommended (v.5-13).
- ii. In light of the passage under consideration, discuss the meaning of v.20
- iii. Read v.21-22. How does tongues serve as a ‘sign’ to the unbelievers?
- iv. What is the effect of proper use or abuse of tongues and prophesying in the church? (14:23-25). Discuss ways in which these gifts are abused today?

NOTE: “Unbelievers” is used in two different sense in v.21 and 22. V.21 speaks of a warning, an impending judgment on people who have harden their hearts (Compare Dan.5:4-6). For unbelievers whose heart are still open to inquire of God, God speaks to them through prophesy or interpretation (see v.24).

- d. i. What is the recommendation/condition for the use of tongues and prophecy from v.26-33. What is the aim of such recommendation? V.39-40
- ii. 1Cor 11:4 indicate that a woman may pray or prophesy, how do we reconcile that with 14:34-35 (See also 1Tim.2:12).
- iii. What should be our reactions to those who insist on contending with this teaching? (v.36-37)

4: THE GLORIOUS HOPE IN OUR LABOUR FOR THE GOSPEL (CHAPTER 15)

- a. i. Why is it necessary to be reminded of the primary message of the gospel? V.1
- ii. What is the ultimate purpose of the gospel, and how may we realize it? V.2
- iii. What did the apostle consider “most important in the message of the gospel? V.3-8

- b.
 - i. Paul digressed to point out the effect of this gospel in his own life. Discuss this effect, and his response to the gospel. V.8-11 (See also Gal. 1:11-17). Why is it important to have a personal experience of the gospel before preaching it?
 - ii. The central message of the gospel is being undermined by some false teachers in Corinth. What was their assertion? V.12. How did Paul refute such assertion? (v.13-16)
 - iii. What would it imply to allow such false assertion? (v.17-19)
- c.
 - i. What assurance do we have from the fact of Christ resurrection? (v.20 – 23)
 - ii. From v.24 -28 what is God ultimately after in the gospel scheme? See also Eph.1:9-10.
 - iii. The ritual of baptism is a demonstration of the Christian's affirmation of his hope of resurrection. How should such hope reflect in our daily labour for the gospel? V.30-32. What does the apostle mean by the statement: "I fought with beasts in Ephesus..."
- d.
 - i. Read v.32-34. A man is a reflection of his basic philosophy. What was the overriding philosophy in Corinth? How was it affecting them? How does this compare with the philosophy of humanism today?
 - ii. Read v.35 – 44, 50-56. Discuss the nature we will bear on resurrection. (See also Rom. 8:18-23, 2Cor.5:1-4)
 - iii. What is our assurance of experiencing such a glorious change? (V.45-49, 57)
 - iv. In light of the hope we have, what should be our attitude in labouring for the gospel? V.58 (See also 2Cor.4:16-18)

5. **CONCLUSION: PROPER ADMINISTRATION FOR EFFECTIVE MINISTRY (CHAPTER 16)**

- a. i. In concluding the letter, the apostle outlined some administrative issues in the collection of gifts and in his itinerary and that of his co-labourers. From this example of Paul (1-5,10), discuss the importance of proper administration in Christian ministry, especially in regard to fund raising, ministry itinerary, hosting a visiting minister, etc.
- ii. Paul did not intend to make a passing visit but wishes to spend a longer time with them (5-7). In Ephesus he was already staying long (even with the many opposition) in order to maximize the open doors. What can we learn from this example as we go about ministry?
- iii. The Corinthians had a wrong notion that Paul and Apollos is in a kind of competition (See 3:5). How does 1Cor.16:12 help clear such notions. What lessons can we learn from this?
- b. i. Read v.13-14. What is the summary of Pauls entire message? Why is it so important to the church?
- ii. From v.15 – 18 Discuss the necessity of having a clearly defined leadership in the Church.
- iii. Paul did not attempt to impose leadership on the Church, but simply urge them to submit to certain brethren. What should be the basis of our accepting any spiritual authority? (v.15-18)
- c. i. What do you notice about the exchange of greetings in v.19? How can we promote such unity and warmth in the body of Christ?
- ii. Our love for the brethren is a reflection of our love for God. Love for God will naturally mean a desire for the Lord to Come and be glorified in His saints. What is the fate of those who do not love the Lord? V.22
- iii. Discuss the two things the apostle left with the church as he signs off the letter with his own hand (v.23-24)

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

As the apostle concludes the letter,

he dealt with critical issues regarding the cooperative life of the church. The central issue here is love. Stephen Kaung calls it “the law of the body”. The scruples about the sub-ordination of women in the church, the conduct at the Lord’s table and the use of spiritual gifts will all be resolved if all things are done in love. Love is the defining mark of the spiritual life and of maturity.

The apostle also addressed the critical issue of the hope which the gospel offers; namely the resurrection of the saints. The meaning of which implies that death, being the last enemy is defeated. Today, like in the Corinthian society, humanistic philosophy is prevalent, it is easy to forget that the ultimate design of the gospel is not to “eat and drink” but rather that the Lord Jesus may deliver the kingdom to God the Father, having destroyed all dominion, authority and power. To this end we must live and labour, knowing we have a rich reward.

The last chapter of the letter highlights Paul’s commitment to meeting the welfare needs of the churches, and his plans to visit the church in Corinth for their spiritual benefit. May the Lord truly find a man like Paul with a zeal for the church and the gospel amongst us. Amen