

1st Corinthians

1 Corinthians 1-4

Written by Paul, with the help of Sosthenes (a fellow Christian and probably Paul's scribe for the letter), from Ephesus (see chapter 16:8), in the time frame of Acts 19:21-22, probably 55 AD. The letter was motivated by questions and concerns brought to Paul by members of the church in Corinth.

Note the description of believers in 1:2, the double emphasis on being holy (sanctified and saints), and the description of Christians as people who "call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (compare 1 Chron. 16:8, or Genesis 4:26).

Blessing and assurance are almost always a part of Paul's opening remarks in his letters (1:3-9). The 1 Corinthian letter is aimed toward correction of various problems more than any other letter of Paul, beginning with 1:10. There was a (lack of) unity problem at Corinth that comes up repeatedly, particularly in chapters 1-4, and then again in 8-13, and obliquely in 16. There were also moral issues (chapters 5-7 especially) and problems of order and relationships in the church that were impacted by division, but had other causes as well.

Apollos had visited Corinth from Ephesus for a time in Acts 18:27-28, after Paul left to return to Antioch in Syria. Some of the brethren were strongly attracted to his eloquence, which surpassed Paul's speaking ability. We don't know just when Peter/Cephas had visited Corinth, but he had (1:12, 9:5), but he too made a strong impression on some of the brethren. Unfortunately, contrary to the interests of any of those men or any true apostle or preacher of Christ, their service to the Lord became matters of competition between the brethren, as to who as the better or more important leader, when each of them was intending only to serve Jesus Christ and point the brethren toward following him.

Note that Paul wasn't a "score keeper" tallying his success by how many he baptized in one place or another (1:13-17) so as to look good or feel good about himself.

The world needs Jesus, the Jesus who died on the cross for the sins of

the world, but doesn't want that sort of savior. The pagan world rejects the cross as foolishness and the Jews wanted a spectacular world conquering messiah (1:18-31), when in fact God's wisdom grounded in apparent weakness and humility is the only answer. The citation in 1:19 references Isaiah 29:14 and Jeremiah 8:9, and 1:31 references Jeremiah 9:23-24. The conflict between what the world calls wise and genuine wisdom from God is nothing new, and continues to this day. The world and the Lord define success differently, and we need to learn what real wisdom and real success look like in God's purposes. It is very difficult for the proud and "successful" to see their need for divine assistance and to humble themselves before the Lord.

2:1-5 reflects the circumstances of Paul's first visit to Corinth in Acts 18:1ff, after having debated with the philosophers in Athens, with little gain. His determination to let the cross of Christ dominate his message is to be remembered and imitated, with humility and knowing our own weakness, while depending on God's Spirit and divine power.

2:6-16 leans heavily on support from the Psalms and the prophets to make the case that without the help of God's Spirit we cannot really know God's truth. Note the eternal nature of God's plan, v7, the allusion to Psalm 2 and to Psalm 24:7, the citation of Isaiah 64:4, and then Isaiah 40:13. Notice the manifold work of the Spirit in bringing clarity in v10-14.

Unfortunately, having the available blessing of spiritual discernment doesn't always equal following the path of God's wisdom, and so Paul continued in chapter 3 with "but". The Corinthians, and of course many among the churches still, were immature in Christ and substantially still living and thinking in terms of flesh, where appearances matter and talent for public speaking is important for defining authority. When Paul writes about himself and Apollos in chapter 3, bear in mind 4:6, that they are being used as examples to make the point about division and preferences within the church, cliques and in-groups.

As Paul wrote this letter he and Apollos were together in Ephesus (16:12). They could share notes about their respective experiences in Corinth. Neither of them was seeking in any way a set of disciples bearing their personal imprint or loyal to them. Both were servants of Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the loyalty and the glory. Paul drew on imagery from both the prophets and the parables of Jesus in describing the church in the world in v6-9. The building illustration of 3:9-17 reflects on the Tabernacle

erected by Moses and the Temple erected by Solomon. Divine plans and human execution. When Paul wrote of being a “skilled master builder” in v10 he’s alluding to Bezalel and Oholiab in Exodus 35:30-36:1 who took the lead in building God’s building God’s way. Note of course the one foundation in v11, and the fact that there will be testing, trials, and sometimes losses in doing God’s building work. Not every sprout that grows will persist unto harvest, and not every material built with will withstand the test of time. Some people led to the Lord will not continue in him through testing, and that’s a painful disappointment to the builder or planter, but doing the work of the Lord calls for persistence in the midst of disappointment.

3:16-17 has the plural “you” (you all). The church as a collective in God’s temple and the habitation of God’s Spirit. The church is the body of Christ. Later, in 6:19, Paul wrote of the individual believer being the temple of the Holy Spirit, the singular “you.” Both of these are true, the Spirit dwells in the church as God’s temple, and the Spirit dwells in each Christian, each Christian’s body being a sacred temple of God. Don’t harm the church, and don’t desecrate your body by sin.

3:18-22 reconnects with the theme of Godly wisdom vs the world’s perspective and cites Job 5:13 to affirm the point. A hierarchy that will be referenced later in chapter 11 is mentioned in v22-23, where the children of God still need to have propriety and respect for order and authority.

In 4:1-4 Paul affirms, as he did several times in his speeches and letters, that he kept a clear conscience, but that alone was no assurance of righteousness. He’d had a clear conscience when he persecuted the church (which he’ll bring up in chapter 15). It’s important to keep a clear conscience, but more important to know God’s will and follow it.

Notice the reference to the Lord’s coming in 4:5, which Paul also alluded to in 3:13 and 1:8, and will mention again. This was an important thread for Christian living then, and still is.

4:8-13 surely has an ironic tone. The men who preached the message of the cross suffered persecution and humiliation, yet the Corinthians had aspirations of greatness comparing themselves among themselves, big fish in a small pond. In the midst of these criticisms Paul could say, “imitate me” in 4:16. Considering what he just wrote of his personal experiences for

Christ in v9-13, that is a tall order.

Timothy, as noted in Acts 19:22, was on his way to Macedonia when the issues in this letter were brought to Paul's attention. That trip would bring Timothy to Corinth along the way back, as noted in 4:16ff and 16:10-11. Timothy wasn't coming to sort out their problems, he didn't even know about their problems, and so Paul found it necessary to instruct the brethren about how they were to receive him when he came. Timothy wasn't coming as a disciplinarian... but Paul would.

What does the kingdom of God consist in/of? Compare 4:20 and Romans 14:17 for two angles on that.

1 Corinthians 5-8

In chapter 5 Paul takes up a 2nd theme reported to him about the Corinthian church (the first was the divisiveness couple with pride in chapters 1-4). Living in a promiscuous society, they weren't discerning the seriousness of sexual sin. The specific sin of a man being in a public sexual relationship with his mother was being overlooked by brethren with the pride Paul had debased in the previous chapters. Paul asserted that even pagans knew such a relationship was repugnant and not to be accepted. Various kinds of incest were defined and prohibited in Leviticus 18:6-18, and those prohibitions relate not only to sexual perversion but also to human dignity and respect for the family God ordained from the beginning.

Paul directed the church to take extreme measures to remove the sin from the body of believers, excluded the man from the fellowship, and even to "deliver this man to Satan" (5:5). Paul wasn't using symbolic language here. While many Christians in the modern era have lost sight of the potency of spiritual forces working in this world, the Bible consistently affirms that there are active unseen forces, angels of light and darkness, principalities and powers, spirits of various kinds. Christians have been rescued from the domain of darkness and brought into the kingdom of God's Son (Colossians 1:13), and being delivered into the clutches of Satan is an experience of severe chastening Christians should never want to have (see also 1 Timothy 1:19, 2 Timothy 2:25-26 and Job 1:9-10). Nevertheless, in the power of Christ the church at Corinth was to prayerfully invoke that harsh exclusion from the Lord's care and protection,

to provoke a change. The spirit of the action was/is to be in framed with the attitude seen in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15.

5:6-8 equates sin generally with leaven, which readily spreads through the lump of dough. The imagery here calls on instructions for sacrifice, see Leviticus 2:11, and particularly the Passover sacrifice, equating Jesus with the Passover lamb we all participate in. Passover here, for the Christian, is not an annual festival but a way of life, abstaining from the leaven of sin and partaking of the lamb continually.

We also see in 5:9-13 that Christians are to hold one another to a higher standard than what we would expect of the world. The world has its own standards and can't be expected to obey God while they are dead in sin. Note the list of (persistent) sinful behaviors in 5:11.

The idea of "judging" one another in established moral behavior flows into Christians having the integrity to settle issues between themselves in 6:1-8, including Jesus' message to his disciples (us) to forgive one another and turn the other cheek. Upholding Jesus' name and showing his character in our behavior is more important than our "rights" or our stuff.

6:9-11 revisits the same sort of sins as listed in 5:11, but this time with the emphasis on Christians being different than the world for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The world supposes some of the sinful inclinations listed in 6:9-10 to be innate and unchangeable, but Paul asserted that "such were some of you." Being washed, made holy, and justified are the result of God's work in our lives in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit. What we cannot overcome on our own can be overcome by the Lord in our lives.

6:12-20 zeroes in on every kind of sexual immorality as especially destructive to the very being of humans, sins against our own bodies, which for Christians demeans the Lord who has purchased our body with his blood and dwells in each Christian as a living temple housing the Holy Spirit. In 3:16-17 the church as a body was described as God's temple where the Holy Spirit dwells, here in 6:19 each Christian's body is similarly described. We should honor the Lord's body, the church, and not harm it. We should honor our own body as belonging to the Lord and keep it holy. We've been joined to him in spirit (6:17), a covenant bond that must not be broken.

7:1 turns to matters the brethren specifically asked Paul about. First comes celibacy, which Paul affirms as a good thing for those who have a “gift” (v7) for such a life, but most people don’t. Therefore, most people are better off marrying. And staying married. And the best thing is being partnered to another believer, but the marriage covenant is to be honored by the Christian whoever the marriage partner is. There are sometimes exceptional circumstances, but the general rule is stay married and seek the satisfaction and contentment of your marriage partner (7:3-5). The principle of the bodies of husbands and wives belonging to one another was just used in 6:15-20 to make the case for being faithful to Jesus, so certainly be faithful in marriage.

Among the principles referenced in 7:17-24 (not everything has to change as a result of becoming a Christian) is the strong inference that slavery, being owned by another person, is not God’s will (7:21-23). In additional comments about the strings attached to marriage, Paul commented on men trying to please their wives and wives trying to please their husbands (7:32-35), which isn’t a bad thing, but is a responsibility and sometimes distraction that the intentionally unmarried don’t have to contend with. It’s natural and appropriate to want to please a spouse, but it changes our perspective on many things that may affect some forms of service to God.

What Paul wrote about widows remarrying here in 7:39-40 is augmented by instructions to Timothy written a bit later in 1 Timothy 5:3-16.

Food offered to idols apparently was another topic the Corinthian Christians asked about (8:1). A firm instruction had already been written about that in the letter recorded for us in Acts 15, particularly v28-29. Paul had signed on to the writing of that letter, and he won’t contradict it here 5 years later. It’s important to read the whole discussion of foods sacrificed to idols which continues through chapter 10, and not just a segment of Paul’s reasoning on the topic in a selected verse or two.

A theme that runs all through the discussion of foods dedicated to idols in 8-10 is concern for other people. Think about the example you are setting by what you do, and the influence you are having both within and outside the church (8:1b, 7, 9-13). Paul’s emphatic conclusion is that Christians are not to knowingly eat what has been dedicated to an idol, lest

others be led astray, and because while we serve one Lord and one God, there are other spiritual forces involved in idolatry that we must not sanction or traffic with (8:5, 10:20-21).

1 Corinthians 9-11

In 1 Cor 9 Paul uses himself as a primary example (recall 4:6) to make the point that a Christian should be willing to give up personal “rights” for the sake of the gospel, to help a brother, to win others to Christ. This was a primary aspect of the reasoning against eating meats sacrificed to idols in chapter 8. As noted again in chapter 15:1-11, Paul was chosen by the Lord to be His eye witness and Apostle. As a preacher of the gospel he had a right to be supported (including a family) by the church, and the church has a duty to support those who preach the gospel (9:4-7, 13-14). Specifically in his relationship to Corinth, Paul had chosen not to personally receive support from them, although while in Corinth he did receive support from other churches (9:12, 15, 2 Corinthians 11:8-9, 12:13, Philippians 4:14-18). This self-denial on his part was an example of making sacrifices for the sake of others, not to “put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ” (9:12). The principle emphasized in 9:19-23 isn’t about moral compromise, or doctrinal variation, but about giving up matters of personal preference for the sake of serving the gospel of Christ and winning people to salvation.

Note the way Paul draws on lessons from the Law in 9:9, 13-14, even while affirming that he was not under the Law (9:20).

Of incidental interest is that the brethren in Corinth were familiar with Peter/Cephas, and Barnabas (who did not visit Corinth with Paul) and the brothers of the Lord, all of whom were engaged in preaching the gospel (9:5-6), who were known to be supported by the brethren, and who traveled with a Christian wife at least some of the time.

The examples from scripture, particularly the Law, in 10:1-13, should guide us to see Christ throughout the scriptures. Knowing the Old Covenant stories is foundational to knowing what Jesus did and how we ourselves should think and live (note 10:6, 11). The historical experiences of God’s people and God’s instructions to them need to be taught to Christians, with a view to seeing Christ in the rock and baptism in the sea and service and support in the priesthood and the altar, and so forth.

Notice that idolatry, the theme in chapter 11, is brought back into focus in Paul's examples from scripture (10:7, 14). The argument against participating in idolatry, even by purposely eating food dedicated to idols, which is just food, is directly continued in 10:14-11:1 with attention to the conflict between eating at the Lord's table and the table of demons. The reasoning that a thing is not specifically prohibited (all things are lawful, 10:23, 6:12) is foolishness. Christians are to focus on what is good and holy and beneficial, not only to one's self but to others, both in the brotherhood and in the world. Thus it is right to enjoy the bounty of God's creation (10:25-26, 1 Timothy 4:4-5) with thankfulness, but not if that indulgence misleads or harms someone else.

Many Americans have embraced a myth that idolatry was a "back then" problem, but billions of people are still entrapped in overt pagan worship of idols to this day, and hundreds of millions include a pantheon of images for religious dedication under the banner of Christian faith. There is a constant allure to idols of all sorts in the materialistic and self-indulgent culture that surrounds Christians. Idolatry and participating with demons (10:20) are as much a reality in the 21st century as they were in the 1st.

Note that Paul wrote the "end of the age(s)" had come upon followers of Christ (10:11). Some folks are still looking for and speculating about "signs of the end" but the end has been underway since the turning point of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. We live in the end times, as did the Lord's first disciples.

Note that temptation is survivable with the God's help (10:13), but is pictured as something to endure. The "way of escape" may call for suffering and sacrifice on the part of the saints.

The Lord's table is used as a warrant for avoiding idolatry in 10:14-22, just as being a living temple of the Holy Spirit was a warrant for avoiding sexual sins in 6:18-20. We belong to Christ, the participation in his body and blood affirm that bond, and must be taken seriously, as further described in 11:17ff.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16 lies between Paul's discussion of self-denial for the sake of others in regard to foods sacrificed to idols and his reminder of the establishment and observation of the Lord's supper. Various Bibles have headings on these verses like "Head Coverings" or some variant or

expansion of that remark. However, the topic seems rather more to be respect for authority and order than a particular command found nowhere else in the Bible. Jesus is intentionally subordinate to the Father, Christians, and specifically men, are willingly submissive to Jesus, and Christian women/wives should be willingly submissive to Christian men/their husbands. Most interpreters who want to make an issue of sisters wearing a defined head covering when the church comes together define the head covering themselves, because Paul didn't, except for specifically mentioning hair. It seems appropriate in general terms for Sisters to have longer hair than Brothers, but there's no clear definition here or elsewhere of how long is long or how short is short. And then this message is specifically applied by some to the assembly of the church, which is not stated. Rather, in 11:17-18 Paul turns his attention to the gathering of the church. The immediate context of 11:2ff is the teaching to avoid giving unnecessary offense to anyone in 10:31-33, not the church gathering. Considering what Paul wrote in 14:33-35 about sisters being quiet during the public prophesying in the church, it would be odd to give parameters for sisters praying and prophesying with a particular (unspecified) item of clothing in 11:2-16 in the church, only to then say they shouldn't do that anyway in 14:33-35. Surely the section about propriety in respect for "the head," for authority, is not directed to a specific undefined item of clothing for the gathering of the church, but to an overall demeanor also discussed in Ephesians 5:22ff. The church meeting is not the only venue for praying and prophesying, and there were and are appropriate venues for sisters to speak the word and vocalize prayers. Sisters here and elsewhere in the scriptures are called upon to be consciously respectful of brothers, and of Jesus, and of the Father.

And then Paul does specifically addresses the gathering of the church in 11:17ff, including instructions that run through 16:2.

Paul's description of the way the Lord's Supper began is very similar to Luke's, which makes sense. Paul in 11:18-21 echoes teachings from the 1st 4 chapters and chapters 8-10 about considering the needs of others, the whole body and not just ourselves or a segment of the church we are most comfortable with. The warrant in v22 isn't about eating together, it is about manners. It's good for Christians to eat together, it's bad to be ill-mannered and embarrass other people by eating in front of them and not sharing.

Paul states that his teaching about the Lord's Supper came from the

Lord himself, v23. Jesus showed him some things through the prophetic scriptures (Romans 16:25-26) and some things by visionary encounters (Acts 26:16, Galatians 1:11-12).

Notice the connection between faith, testimony, the 2nd coming, and the Lord's Supper in 11:26.

Paul wrote that there are serious and literal consequences in the lives of believers who do not carefully consider the body (that would be both the bread and the church) in v27-32. We are not accustomed to thinking of real time real world consequences for failing to honor the Lord and his body, and tend to be more comfortable with thinking in terms of eternal judgment in considering v32. Nevertheless, v31 reflects back on 5:4-5 and 6:1-8, dealing with issues of sin within ourselves and within the body of Christ lest we suffer very real consequences.

1 Corinthians 12-14

Chapter 12

Paul in chapter 12 and following continued themes of unity and cooperation and concern for others, as he turned to another topic the church in Corinth had inquired about (compare 7:1, 8:1, 12:1), namely spiritual conduct. Note that while the Greek words for giving and gifts are used several times in chapter 12, they are not in v1, although most English translations supply "gifts" in connection with "spiritual". In most KJV or NASB Bibles you can see that "gifts" is in italics, because it is a word supplied by the translators. The word Paul used, "spiritual" in v1, is the same word he used in 2:13, 2:15, and 3:1 in reference to the taught wisdom of the Spirit and to people who walk in the Spirit. My point is that the instructions in 1 Corinthians 12-14 should be read more generally and applied consistently for any church in any generation, not limited to particular spectacular manifestations of the Spirit, signs and wonders. The topic in chapter 12 is reasonably spiritual matters, not especially miraculous signs.

When Paul wrote of speaking by the Spirit in 12:2-3 he was not providing a simple litmus test for spirituality. John wrote much the same thing in 1 John 4:2-3. Neither is speaking of simple verbiage, as we know that unclean spirits several times verbally acknowledged Jesus' identity

(Mark 1:23-26, Acts 16:16-17 for example). To affirm with conviction that “Jesus is Lord” is to acknowledge his divine nature, calling on his name (as also in Romans 10:9-10, Philippians 2:9-11), with “Lord” being the Greek term used for the name of God (YaHWeH in Hebrew) in the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament. That acknowledgment calls for obeying his word, willingly bowing before him, owning him as Lord and master.

Note in v4-6 we are reading about “gifts... service/ministries... activities” under the one Spirit, one Lord, and one God (the Spirit, Son, and Father). The unity of the godhead produces the unified actions of the church, for mutual good. As Paul listed some of the ways the Spirit facilitated the work of the body of Believers there are activities in the category of signs and wonders, such as healings and working of miracles, while others appear more in the area of what we sometimes think of as natural gifts, or learned skills, such as the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge. Sometimes tongues too can be in the area of acquired facility. Not every Corinthian Christian had experienced the “laying on of hands” of an apostle (Acts 8:17-18) but Paul wrote that “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all” (12:7) and distributed “to each one individually as he wills” (12:11). Not every member then or now had a gift for working miracles, but every member has some gift, some manifestation of the Spirit, which may come to fulness by exercise, training and practice. Consider also Ephesians 4:7ff which is also in the context of the unity of the one Spirit, one Lord, and one God and Father of all (Eph 4:1-6). Jesus gives to everyone as he chooses, and it is to everyone. Everyone comes into the body of Christ in the same way, by the same Spirit (12:12-13). Note the reflection of 10:4 and 10:21 in 12:13b. Paul stressed universality by mentioning categories of Jew and Greek, slave and free in v13. See also Titus 3:4-7 for the centrality of the out-poured Spirit in cleansing and unifying (all) believers.

Everyone in the body should see that they are needed and valuable, whatever their abilities or contributions, and everyone in the body should honor every other part of the body. Often the least obvious contributions are of the utmost importance. Service doesn't have to be splashy or exciting to be necessary or useful. In 12:25-26 Paul stressed again the problem of competition and cliques in the church, or rather stressed the positive need for mutual respect and care for each other.

The offices and functions in 12:27-31 are not an exhaustive list of

“spiritual gifts” but do show a hierarchy of authority and influence. Note the 3 that are enumerated are also listed in Ephesians 4:11, along with evangelists. It is reasonable to think of “teachers” here in terms of elders/appointed leaders in the churches (see Acts 13:1, James 3:1 w/Acts 21:18, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Timothy 3:2). A similar list of workers in the churches in Romans 12:3-8 includes gifts of grace, some of which might be construed as miraculous and others talents or skills. The enablement to do the Lord’s work should always be perceived as a gift of grace enabled by God’s Spirit (recall Exodus 35:30-36:2), administered by Jesus Christ.

Notice in 12:31 that the “gifts” Paul wrote about were not static. They could be sought and made more effective (see also 2 Timothy 1:6-7).

Chapter 13

From 12:31b through chapter 13 Paul drilled down to the great motivator that gives meaning to everything Christians do for one another and for the Lord. A commitment to labor in love is fundamental to labor having real value or meaning. Head knowledge and great sacrifices are alike meaningless unless love is the motive force.

The description of love’s characteristics in 13:4-8a is beautiful and worthy of memorizing for review and meditation. Bad behavior, even to the level of insults, is ruled out by love, and good deeds both large and small are certainly produced by it.

Paul includes himself as knowing “in part” in v9, and includes himself as seeing “in a mirror dimly.” (Mirrors then were generally polished metal and gave a far from perfect image.) When will we “know in full”? Consider that some think of “prophecies” especially as predictions of future events, and think especially in terms of a cessation of spiritual events, but future predictions were substantially the credentials of Biblical prophets, and only one aspect of their work. Prophecies were more than anything else corrective. God sent prophets to chasten and rebuke his people (and the nations) as in Hosea 6:5. When will there be no more need for prophecies? When there is no more need for chastening and rebuke. When will there be no more need for tongues? When the rebellion of Babel (Genesis 11) has ended and all are one in Christ. These things and the sort of knowledge Paul referenced in 8:1-3 (and remember the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 3) will pass away, and we will know fully and go from

partial to perfect, when the Lord returns and the kingdom comes in its fulness, when saints in immortal bodies stand in the presence of the Lord. Meanwhile, we have the great motivators, faith, hope, and love (13:13, and see 1 Thessalonians 1:3).

Chapter 14

14:1 connects back to 12:31. Desire gifts that will serve the Lord and build up the church, and especially pursue love.

Because we generally associate prophesy with miraculous messages from God many miss the basic theme of 1 Corinthians 14 which is instruction for cooperatively building up the church when the saints come together (the theme that began in 11:17ff). Regarding prophets, remember that Aaron was a prophet of Moses (Exodus 7:1ff) because he repeated the words that Moses gave to him. A prophet in that sense is a spokesman. One can be called a prophet if he speaks God's truth, even if it isn't a new revelation. Some of course prophesy from their own imagination (Jeremiah 14:14-15), which isn't inspired, nor right. Paul described some pagan philosophers as prophets (Titus 1:12). He also suggested that some who considered themselves prophets weren't necessarily especially inspired in 1 Corinthians 14:37. Don't be too quick to dismiss the relevance of 1 Corinthians 14 because Paul wrote of prophets speaking in the church.. Likewise, speaking in tongues could be a miraculous sign (Acts 2, Acts 10), but tongue simply means language (14:10). There is no hint in 1 Corinthians 14 of ecstatic utterances, and a plain command that one person speak at a time, with speakers of unknown languages being immediately translated for the group. We can have mixed groups today where more than one language is spoken, perhaps English and Spanish for example, and for someone in the group who speaks Spanish to address the whole group might require an English translator, or vice versa, exactly as described in 1 Corinthians 14. All of the principles Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 14 are applicable to the assembly of saints anywhere in any generation. Edifying one another (building each other up), having propriety and order, taking turns to speak and teach, thinking about the message when we sing and pray, taking thought for the common good (see also Hebrews 10:24-25). 1 Corinthians 14 in conjunction with chapters 10-11 and 16:1ff provides our most complete glimpse in the New Testament of what a meeting of the church included, and should include, as well as its aims and the means to achieve them. Note the repeated emphasis on

understanding and edification (building up).

Curiously, despite modern vocabulary, the one time the word “worship” is found in connection with the assembly of the church in 1 Corinthians 14:25, regarding an unbeliever who visits and is amazed at the understandable truth he hears.

In the instructions for church assembly Paul wrote of taking turns (14:26-35), and an eagerness to participate. Then Paul stated that the women are not to take a turn to stand up and participate in the sequence of public speaking (14:33-36). The instructions are presented as “in all the churches” and grounded in the Law (the creation account, Genesis 1-3). Similar limits are stated in 1 Timothy 2:8-15 regarding the meetings of the church, and are in harmony with 1 Peter 3:1-7 as well as the overall concern for submission and respect noted in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 and Ephesians 5:22-33. There is nothing here about talent or ability or wisdom or understanding, nor anything about value or reliability. Rather what is here is an unwavering distinction in the roles of men and women that is part of the creation order, and partly too consequences of sin. The world consistently errs in redefining roles and relationships between men and women and the confusion impacts the family God designed for nurturing children and the church Jesus bought and cleansed to be his radiant bride. There is no prevarication on Paul’s part, though clearly there was some controversy in those days and our own. He states that what he wrote was “the command of the Lord” in v37.

Important concepts for the gatherings of the church include 14:5b, 12b, 15, 16, 19, 26, 27-28, 29-31, 33-35, 40.

1 Corinthians 15

Having given instructions about the way the church was to keep peace and order in meetings, for the building up of the saints, in chapter 14, Paul reminded the disciples in chapter 15 of the factual basis of Christian faith, the core of the gospel (good news), the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Believing the good news about Jesus and continuing in it are the basis of being saved (15:1-2)

Some of the appearances of Jesus in v3-7 are recorded in the gospels, and the litany itself is thought to be a composition memorized and shared

by Christians from the earliest days of the church. The appearance of Jesus to the crowd in v6 was probably in Galilee, probably on the occasion of Matthew 28:16-20. The appearance of Jesus to (his brother) James is not mentioned elsewhere, but was of great importance, helping James move from skeptical sibling to devout disciple and leader, and of course the Lord's appearance to Paul in v8 is recorded in Acts 9 and referenced again in Acts 22 and 26.

Paul's ordination as an apostle, based on the Lord's appearance to him, was an anomaly, untimely by Paul's own description, but accepted and upheld by those who were apostles before him. Knowing his own sins against the Lord and his church motivated Paul to work that much harder, dependant on God's grace for his salvation and his strength.

The prelude about the definite truth of Jesus rising from the dead leads into an argument for the validity of the whole concept of the resurrection of the dead in 15:12ff. While most Jews believed, from their scriptures, that there will be a resurrection of the dead this was a new concept for the pagans who became Christians, and various errors cropped up. Some of the errors that circulated were addressed in 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff, still others in 2 Thessalonians 2:1ff, while a general denial of bodily resurrection seems to have influenced some in Corinth. Paul asserts that if there is no resurrection then being a Christian isn't a very good idea (15:19). However, Paul's confident assertion from the scriptures (15:3-4) and abundant eye witness testimony (15:5-7), and his own experiences (15:8-11) is that the resurrection of Jesus is real, and the impending resurrection of the dead is really coming (15:20ff).

The comparison of Adam and Christ (15:21-22, 45-49) puts Jesus in place as our progenitor, the father of the renewed human race, free from death. The need for a human to overcome death (15:21) is fleshed out in Romans 5:12ff. The reference to first fruits (15:20) reflects on the sheaf of grain offered at the beginning of harvest on the day after the Sabbath that followed Passover (Lev 23:9-11) which was resurrection day, the day Jesus arose from the dead.

The resurrection of the dead, specifically those who belong to Christ are mentioned here, occurs at the second coming (15:23) which initiates "the end" (15:24) when all opposing forces are destroyed (in judgement, the lake of fire, Revelation 20:9ff).

Meanwhile, Jesus is now reigning on the throne of the kingdom until that final victory (15:24-28) when, as a faithful son and regent he restores the triumphant kingdom to the rule of the Father. Jesus is already Lord of all, but not all enemies have been destroyed, and all resistance will be subdued forever.

The reference to baptism for the dead in v29 is a curious turn of phrase. It seems unlikely that Paul is referring to some practice illicitly in use among Christians or pagans without clarifying its impropriety. If he's referring to Christian baptism the view would most likely be that of Romans 6:2ff and Ephesians 2:1-7, that we were dead in sin and through baptism into Jesus were raised with him to new life. More than 30 different interpretations for this verse have been posited by various commentators, but Paul knew it made sense to the original readers as a warrant for acknowledging that the resurrection is real, which is the main point. Paul attests to his own confidence in resurrection life by alluding to daily dangers he faced in 15:30ff. Probably his allusion to "beasts at Ephesus" in v32 is allegorical, there were real threats there, but we've no record of an episode like that, and as he wrote this letter from Ephesus it seems unlikely that had literally happened at this juncture (recall 13:3).

The phrase in 32b, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die," is from Isaiah 22:13 where Israel was chided for ignoring God's warnings and taking choosing their own path of hopeless rebellion. The line about bad company in v33 is probably a quote from the Greek poet Menander's play "Thais" and is consistent with themes in Proverbs 1:10ff and elsewhere. The brief admonition against drunkenness in v34 is echoed many times in scripture.

1 Corinthians 15:35-58 focuses on the nature of the resurrection body, what do know and what we don't and can't know. The resurrection body is very different than the current flesh body in important ways, including not being flesh (50) or of dust (49). Yet it is connected to the body we bear now, as illustrated by the seed that is buried and the sprout that shoots up. Quite different, but one drawn from the other. Words like glory and immortal and imperishable are associated with the transformed body that is coming, saying that these future bodies are greater than our current bodies. This isn't a ghostly existence like the afterlife envisioned by many pagans, but a renewed life of unsurpassed strength and vigor with a durable, functional

body made for eternity.

The 2nd coming with the last trumpet is referenced in the prophets (Isa 27:12-13, Zech 9:14 for example) and Matthew 24:31, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and Revelation 11:15.

The triumphant assurances of 15:57 & 58 are surely worth remembering.

1 Corinthians 16

The opening line in 16:1 indicates this was another question Paul was responding to (as in 7:1, 8:1 and 12:1). Paul was specifically organizing a contribution for the poor saints in Jerusalem, as referenced also in 2 Cor 8-9 and Romans 15:25. The event in view was carried out in Acts 21:18, a larger repetition of an earlier collection mentioned in Acts 11:29-30. We can know that a regular (voluntary) collection was part of church life from the beginning (Acts 2:44-45, 4:34ff) and had been a part of the life of Jesus' disciples even while Jesus was physically with them (Luke 8:3). The contribution "On the first day of every week" is consistent with the regularly planned gathering of the church (1 Corinthians 11:18ff, Acts 20:7) with the weekly declaration of the Lord's death until he comes. The same instruction was in place for many churches (16:1, 2 Corinthians 8:1ff). Meeting obligations (such as 1 Cor 9:14, as well as 16:1), and being prepared for future need are an ordinary part of church life.

Paul did end up accompanying the gift to Jerusalem (16:3-4, Acts 20-21).

Paul's travel plans in v5-6 were disrupted by plots against him, as later written about in 2 Corinthians.

The "many adversaries" in 16:9 included those who started the riot in Acts 19, compelling Paul to revise his travel plans somewhat.

Timothy's visit in 16:10 was mentioned in Acts 19 and chapter 4 of this letter.

Apollos was clearly back at Ephesus, where he'd met Aquila and Priscilla (end of Acts 18) and was given a letter of introduction to the

churches of Achaia, including Corinth. Paul wrote of Apollos as a fellow worker in chapter 3, and “urged” him to visit Corinth, but did not demand or command. Circumstances led to Titus visiting Corinth instead, very successfully.

Note the commendation of dedicated disciples as leaders in the Christian community in 16:15-28.

When Paul wrote this letter, Aquila and Priscilla were still in Ephesus. By the time he wrote Romans a few months later they’d moved back to Rome.

Note the plea directed to Jesus in v22, as well as the approbation of those who do not love the Lord.