

1 AND 2 CORINTHIANS - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
 - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. As you read through the letters to the church in Corinth, do you learn anything significantly different or new about what God is like? What was the historical background for these letters? Do these letters represent a true Christian gentleman trying to deal with the complex problems of the Corinthian church and becoming so involved that he actually suffered as he did so? Does 1 Corinthians 13 sound like the Saul (Paul) who persecuted Christians before the "Damascus road experience"? How could he write 1 Corinthians 13:4,5 and also 2 Corinthians 10:12-13; **11:5,6, 21-33**; 12:1,11? Or was he trying to practice just what he preached? (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

Corinth, capital of the province of Achaia, was the leading city of Greece. After having once been destroyed (146 BC), the city of Corinth was rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 46-44 B.C. to serve as a Roman colony. It was a wealthy port city with a large population (some estimate up to 600,000—of which two-thirds were slaves) and numerous pagan temples. There was also a Jewish synagogue there. At first, Paul looked the city over and doubted much work could be done there because of its wickedness. (*The Acts of the Apostles* 250) But, God sent Paul a specific message about Corinth, stating that there were "many in this city who are my people." (Acts 18:10, *NRSV*) We date the work of Paul in Corinth by an inscription found at Delphi, written at the command of Emperor Claudius (the same person who ordered all the Jews out of Rome), referring to "Junius Gallio my friend, and proconsul of Achaia," which has been dated to A.D. 51/52. (See Acts 18:12,14,17) The writing of letters to Corinth occurred from Ephesus about 5 years later.

Corinth was located on a thin isthmus of land connecting Greece and Achaia which was only three and one-half miles across. Trade from north to south and from east to west all had to pass through Corinth. At times, when the weather was particularly bad, the relatively small wooden boats of the time were dragged across the isthmus on a special track instead of attempting to sail them around Achaia. Thus, Corinth holds the unique distinction of being the only port in the world where "ships" arrived "by land and by sea"!

Corinth had a university and was famous for its athletic games and public buildings. (See 1 Corinthians 3:12,13; 4:9; 9:24-27) It also became famous for its immorality. In those days, prostitutes were called "Corinthian girls" and "to Corinthianize" meant to lead an immoral life. Just to the south of Corinth was a small plateau with a temple to the goddess of love, Aphrodite, on the top. One thousand slave girls descended from that temple every day to work the streets of Corinth as "temple prostitutes."

Apparently Paul was the first Christian to enter Corinth. Unrecognized religious groups were not allowed to own property at that time. So, Christian groups usually met in people's homes. It is possible that the church in Corinth met often in the home of Gaius. (See Romans 16:23; compare Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 14:23) At least 16 members of the Corinthian church are named in the New Testament. One widely respected estimate, based on Paul's comments, suggests there were no more than 50

members all together in the church. Ellen White seems to imply there were more. (*Acts of the Apostles* 487,489 suggests there were “thousands” of Christians martyred a few years later in Rome. Were there only 50 or 60 Christians in all of Corinth?) In light of the divisions in the church at Corinth, it is possible groups were meeting in separate homes and not very often meeting as a whole.

Paul tried to treat these believers as much like God would have treated them as he could. Twice, he stated that he was imitating Christ, and he wanted them to do the same. (1 Corinthians 4:16,17; 11:1) But, the Corinthians were surrounded by a very immoral and pagan society. Thus, Paul faced many questions about how Christians were to behave in such a context.

1 Corinthians

When people become Christians, they don't at the same moment become nice. This always comes as something of a surprise. Conversion to Christ and his ways doesn't automatically furnish a person with impeccable manners and suitable morals.

The people of Corinth had a reputation in the ancient world as an unruly, hard-drinking, sexually promiscuous bunch of people. When Paul arrived with the Message and many of them became believers in Jesus, they brought their reputations with them right into the church.

Paul spent a year and a half with them as their pastor, going over the Message of the “good news” in detail, showing them how to live out this new life of salvation and holiness as a community of believers. Then he went on his way to other towns and churches.

Sometime later Paul received a report from one of the Corinthian families that in his absence things had more or less fallen apart. He also received a letter from Corinth asking for help. Factions had developed, morals were in disrepair, worship had degenerated into a selfish grabbing for the supernatural. It was the kind of thing that might have been expected from Corinthians!

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians [1 Corinthians] is a classic of pastoral response: affectionate, firm, clear, and unswerving in the conviction that God among them, revealed in Jesus and present in his Holy Spirit, continued to be the central issue in their lives, regardless of how much of a mess they had made of things. Paul doesn't disown them as brother and sister Christians, doesn't throw them out because of their bad behavior, and doesn't fly into a tirade over their irresponsible ways. He takes it all more or less in stride, but also takes them by the hand and goes over all the old ground again, directing them in how to work all the glorious details of God's saving love into their love for one another. (Introduction to the Corinthian letters in *The Message*)

2. How many letters did Paul write to the church at Corinth? How many times did he visit the church at Corinth? (2 Corinthians 10:9,10; 12:14; 13:1; compare 2 Corinthians 1:23) Can you reconstruct the historical sequence of his letters and his visits? What was the conclusion of this experience with Paul, Titus, and the Corinthians? (2 Corinthians 7:6,12-16) What letter is referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9? Do we have that letter? Where

does he deal with the subject of sexual immorality? Could it be 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1? Compare also 1 Corinthians 1:11; 5:1. Is there a third letter and perhaps, even a fourth? (2 Corinthians 2:3; 7:8,12; 10:9-11) Do these verses sound like he is referring to 1 Corinthians? Does 2 Corinthians 10:1 and following sound like Paul is beginning a new letter? Why do you think the Corinthians would say such things, as in 2 Corinthians 10:10, about their former pastor?

Paul's first visit to Corinth was at the end of his second missionary journey. He stayed approximately one and one-half years (Acts 18:11) and established a church with the help of Luke, Silas, Timothy, Aquila, and Priscilla. The best evidence we have for establishing the date of Paul's visit is what we know about Gallio, the proconsul at Corinth for a short time:

Gallio. (gal'lee-oh), the son of the Roman rhetorician Seneca, brother of Seneca the philosopher, and holder of several important civil positions in the Roman Empire. His full name was Lucius Junius Gallio Annaeus. According to Acts 18:12-17, Paul was brought before Gallio's judgment seat in Corinth (discovered in recent times in the old city) when Gallio was proconsul in Achaia...

There are no further references to Gallio in the NT. Roman sources indicate that, after spending time in Achaia and Egypt, he returned to Rome to take an official position. After his brother Seneca's death in a conspiracy against Nero in the early 60s, Gallio fell into disgrace and ultimately committed suicide.

Gallio is important to biblical studies because his stay in Corinth is generally regarded as providing important extrabiblical evidence for establishing the chronology of Paul's activities. An inscription discovered at Delphi mentions Gallio as proconsul of Achaia at the time of the twenty-sixth accolade (an honor given to Roman officials) of the Emperor Claudius. It is not clear whether this was A.D. 52/53 or 51/52, but most scholars prefer the earlier date. Thus, according to Acts 18:12-17, the inscription, and Paul's own writings (1 Cor. 3:5-15), it would appear that Paul was in Corinth ca. A.D. 51/52 and that he founded the church there. (*Harper's Bible Dictionary*)

After returning to Antioch and spending "some time," (Acts 18:22,23) Paul traveled again to Asia Minor (modern Turkey), beginning his third missionary journey in 53 A.D. Arriving in Ephesus, he spent three years there. (Acts 20:31; AA 291) During this time he wrote several letters to the Corinthians. (1 Corinthians 5:9; 16:8) He apparently also made a short but painful and sad visit to Corinth some time during those three years. (2 Corinthians 1:23-2:2; 12:14; 13:1-3) Finally, he traveled to Macedonia and Greece where he spent three months in Corinth. (Acts 20:3)

Apparently, we do not have Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 5:9) in which he spoke out against becoming involved in fornication. However, a portion of it may have been copied or preserved in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1.

The book we call 1 Corinthians would then be Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. He wrote to deal with certain very serious conditions (1 Corinthians 1:11; 5:1) at Corinth

which had been reported to him by members of Chloe's family. He addressed these in 1 Corinthians 1-6. Then, he dealt separately with several important questions that had been put to him. (1 Corinthians 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1)

It is probable that after 1 Corinthians was written, Paul made that short but painful and sad visit to Corinth and discovered that most of his advice was being ignored! After returning to Ephesus, he decided the time had come for him to write a very strong letter demanding things change. (2 Corinthians 1:23-2:2; 12:14; 13:1-3, 9,10; compare 2 Corinthians 10:1-6,9,10; 11,12) He sent the letter with Titus to be delivered by hand to the Corinthian church.

After sending that letter, Paul wondered if he had done the right thing by using such strong language with those church members. He almost wished he had not written that letter. He decided to leave Ephesus and go to the port at Troas, hoping that Titus had arrived with news of their response. (2 Corinthians 2:12,13) But, Titus was not there, and Paul began to worry more than ever. He walked over to Macedonia, again hoping to find Titus on the way. (2 Corinthians 7:5,6) When he first arrived in Macedonia, Titus was not there. But, soon Titus arrived, and Paul was enormously relieved to get the good news that the letter had worked. The church in Corinth had reformed their ways and dealt with some of the problems they had. They were anxious to have Paul visit them again and work among them. (2 Corinthians 7:7-16)

With this good news ringing in his ears, Paul decided that he could spend a little more needed time working with the churches in Macedonia before he rushed down to Corinth. He wrote another letter and sent it back once again with Titus. (2 Corinthians 8:16,17,23,24) It is possible that fourth letter is what we have in 2 Corinthians 1-9 (except for 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 which is mentioned above.)

A short time later, Paul proceeded on to Corinth and spent the winter there. After having succeeded in dealing with the church at Corinth, he was ready to deal with problems that were arising in other churches. He looked forward to visiting new cities to establish and strengthen other churches. During these few months at Corinth, he apparently wrote Galatians and Romans.

In summary: Paul probably wrote four letters to the church at Corinth. He also made that short but painful and sad visit to Corinth.

First Letter: Likely written from Ephesus to deal with rumors of serious immorality in the church at Corinth. A portion of it may be preserved in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1.

Second Letter: Written from Ephesus after more rumors had come and members of Chloe's family had arrived to bring a letter from Corinth with questions that the members there had raised. This letter is what we call 1 Corinthians.

Painful/Sad Visit: Paul decided that a visit to Corinth might be in order. So, he traveled there most likely by boat. He was not prepared for the hostile reception he received and he fled back to Ephesus.

Third Letter: Written from Ephesus. After much crying and tears, he decided to write a "Sinai letter" to Corinth. He knew what God had done so many times in the Old Testament and he decided he should follow God's example. It is possible a portion, or possibly all of that letter, is preserved in 2 Corinthians 10-13. He sent Titus, personally, to deliver that letter with the hope he could also minister to the Corinthians.

Fourth Letter: Written from Macedonia after receiving the wonderful news from Titus that the “Sinai letter” had worked. A portion, or all of that letter, may be preserved in 2 Corinthians 1-9 (except for 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1).

The entire chronology of Paul’s experiences with the Corinthians is summarized as follows:

- (i) *The Previous Letter*, which may be contained in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1.
- (ii) The arrival of Chloe’s people, of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, and of the letter to Paul from the Corinthian Church.
- (iii) 1 Corinthians is written in reply and is despatched with Timothy.
- (iv) The situation grows worse and Paul pays a personal visit to Corinth, which is so complete a failure that it almost breaks his heart.
- (v) The consequence of this visit is *The Severe Letter*, which is almost certainly contained in 2 Corinthians 10-13, and which was despatched with Titus.
- (vi) Unable to wait for an answer, Paul sets out to meet Titus. He meets him in Macedonia, learns that all is well and, probably from Philippi, writes 2 Corinthians 1-9, *The Letter of Reconciliation*. (*Daily Study Bible Series: article on The Corinthian Correspondence*)

We do not know if Paul managed to return to Corinth between his first and second imprisonments in Rome, but it is likely. (See 2 Timothy 4:20)

3. What were the problems in Corinth? (1 Corinthians 7:1,2,25; 8:1; 11:17-22; 12:1)
 - A. Divisions in the church. (1 Corinthians 1-3)
 - B. A man living with his step-mother. (1 Corinthians 5)
 - C. Church members taking each other to court. (1 Corinthians 6)
 - D. Marriage and immorality. (1 Corinthians 7)
 - E. Eating food offered to idols. (1 Corinthians 8-10)
 - F. Worship practices: Who should cover their heads? (1 Corinthians 11:2-16) How should the Lord’s Supper be conducted? (1 Corinthians 11:17-34)
 - G. Spiritual Gifts. (1 Corinthians 12-15)
 - H. The truth about the resurrection. (1 Corinthians 15)
 - I. The offering for Judea. (1 Corinthians 16:1-4)
4. How do you reconcile the following verses?
 - A. “The Holy Spirit and we have agreed not to put any other burden on you besides these necessary rules: eat no food that has been offered to idols;...” (Acts 15:28,29, *GNB*) Compare 1 Timothy 4:1-5.
 - B. “Some people’s faith allows them to eat anything, but the person who is weak in the faith eats only vegetables.” (Romans 14:2, *GNB*)
 - C. “You are free to eat anything sold in the meat market, without asking any questions because of your conscience.” (1 Corinthians 10:25, *GNB*) Compare Mark 7:14-19; 1 Corinthians 8:1.

Was Paul directly contradicting what he and the other apostles, as well as the Holy Spirit, had agreed upon? What is the general principle being taught? (See 1 Corinthians 10:27-11:1)

Paul apparently recognized at the time of the Jerusalem Council, recorded in Acts 15, that the agreement which was reached was the best that could be expected. It should be noted that it was not an attempt to describe the most important principles of the gospel for the benefit of the Gentiles. Rather, it was a politically necessary decision outlining which of the Jewish rites and ceremonies were considered essential for even Gentiles before they could be considered good Christians, making it possible for them to sit peacefully in church with formerly Jewish Christians.

Later, when Paul was among the Gentile Corinthians, he spelled out for them the principles he believed should guide their actions. Corinth was a particularly challenging place to deal with the issue of food offered to idols because there were many pagan temples in and around the city. It was considered appropriate that when a farmer brought something to the central market, he should offer a portion of any meat or wine he had to sell to one of the “gods” on the way. Then, it was believed by the pagans that the entire load of “food” had been dedicated to that idol. People who ate the food were considered to be “blessed” by that god. Fortunately, the gods were mostly interested in wine and flesh meat. So, those were the primary foods dedicated to the gods. Thus, if a person was very superstitious about idols, he might choose to eat only vegetables (which had not been offered to any idol).

The situation was further complicated by the fact that the priests operating the pagan temples which received those constant offerings of meat and wine decided to make a profit from the sale of a portion of what they received. They opened “restaurants” connected to their temples where people could go and eat. A Christian who was strong in the faith and was fully convinced in his own mind that the idols had not affected the food in any way might feel safe eating in one of those restaurants, while those who had recently become Christians might have serious doubts. In the light of these considerations, Paul’s counsel makes good sense. It does, however, represent what has sometimes been called “situation ethics.”

It is very important to consider the implications of this information. Paul was saying that for Christians, the first and foremost consideration when deciding what should be done is one’s own conscience and one’s own relationship with God. The next consideration is the consciences of others. (1 Corinthians 8:7-13; 10:27-33) Somewhere after that was the decision made by the general conference in Jerusalem which Paul did not even mention!

Paul was clearly not discussing health in these passages, but rather, food offered to idols. There is nothing about the effect of these foods on the health of believers (with the possible exception of the general principle given in 1 Corinthians 10:31).

5. How did Paul feel about his personal freedom in Christ? (1 Corinthians 9:1,2,19-22; 10:23,24; Galatians 3:28; 5:1) How does a person who feels he is perfectly free in the gospel act? Do you think Paul would do, eat, wear, or say anything that would offend another church member, especially a new one? (See Romans 14:13-18; Galatians 5:13-15) **Could a person be truly free and still keep the commandments?**

Clearly, Paul believed he was completely free in Christ. He did not feel under obligation to anyone—even the general conference committee! (See # 5 above) But, while he believed each person must think through the issues for himself and make up his own mind, (see Romans 14:5) he also believed that when it came to correctly representing God and the good news, he was a slave! (See Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10; Titus 1:1) He would not do anything that might cause a new member, or a potential member of the church, to lose his way. (See 1 Corinthians 10:27-11:1)

Paul was very free, but he was willing to limit his own freedom for the benefit of others. He was doing what he thought was right because it was right. In the same way, those who really want to “serve” God will come to regard His commandments as descriptions of reality. Therefore, they will live in compliance with them, not because they feel obliged to, but because it is the right thing to do!

6. Do we really believe love is the fulfillment of all law? (Romans 13:8,10) If we love God and love our fellow men, have we really kept all the commandments? (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28) Would it be safe to live forever next door to someone who could be described by the words of 1 Corinthians 13? Would it really be safe for God to let into heaven anyone who could not be described by those words, or at least wants to be, and chooses to be truly loving?

If you really loved God and your fellow humans, would you knowingly break any of the Ten Commandments? In fact, the tenth commandment forbids any evil desire! The only kind of people that are safe to admit to the kingdom of heaven are those who do not even want to do anything wrong! God wants us to be completely free, and He refuses to run prisons or to employ angels to follow us around all the time to make sure that we do not do something we are not supposed to. For this reason, God admits to heaven only those who have come to understand Him well enough to realize He never asks us to do anything that is not ultimately for our best good. Not everybody will be at this level of maturity when they first arrive in heaven, but God will instruct those who need additional growth if they are willing to humbly listen and cooperate.

God requires perfection of His children. His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character. **This infinite standard is presented to all that there may be no mistake in regard to the kind of people whom God will have to compose His kingdom.** The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God’s law, and when those who claim to be children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God’s commandments. **Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven.** Clothed in the glorious apparel of Christ’s righteousness, they have a place at the King’s feast. They have a right to join the blood-washed throng. *Christ’s Object Lessons* 315; *God’s Amazing Grace* 148 (1900)

Who can measure or anticipate the gift of God? For ages sin had interrupted the flow of divine benevolence to man; but God’s mercy and love for the fallen race have not ceased to accumulate, nor lost their earthward direction. The inhabitants of the world, their reason perverted, have turned the earth into a lazar-house. But God still lives and reigns, and in Christ He has poured on the world a healing flood. **In the gift of God’s**

dear Son, a definite view of His character has been given to the race that is never absent from His mind. His very heart is laid open in the royal law. That infinite standard is presented to all, that there may be no mistake in regard to that kind of people God would have compose His kingdom. It is only those who are obedient to all His commandments who will become members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King. These will be honored with a citizenship above, a life that measures with the life of God,—a life without sorrow, pain, or death throughout eternal ages. *The Signs of the Times*, November 17, 1898

7. Considering Paul's behavior toward the Corinthian church, how should a truly mature Christian behave toward others? **Would he be willing to limit his own freedom rather than cause another child of God to stumble?** How many things did Jesus do to meet people where they were? He was circumcised on the eighth day. He spent thirty years growing up in an obscure Galilean town before He begin His public ministry so people would regard Him as an ordinary human being. He dressed in the ordinary clothes and spoke in the language of a typical villager from Galilee.

It should be clear from #6 above that Paul believed he was free but he was willing to limit his freedom in many ways in order to spread the gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23) When people realize we are doing this sort of thing just for their benefit, it has a great impact on them. God is constantly reaching down to touch the lives of human beings in their particular situations. Christians today must also learn this lesson. So many want to exercise their freedoms no matter who else is hurt! This behavior is not Christian!

8. How many of the following passages do you consider inspired? Are they all equally inspired?
- a. "For married people I have a command which is not my own but the Lord's..." (1 Corinthians 7:10, *GNB*; Compare Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11, 12; Luke 16:18)
 - b. "To the others I say (I, myself, not the Lord):..." (1 Corinthians 7:12, *GNB*)
 - c. "Now, concerning what you wrote about unmarried people: I do not have a command from the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is worthy of trust." (1 Corinthians 7:25, *GNB*)
 - d. "That is my opinion, and I think that I too have God's Spirit." (1 Corinthians 7:40, *GNB*)

Why would Paul make such statements? In this chapter, was Paul speaking truth that is consistent with the rest of Scripture?

Clearly, Paul had instruction from the Lord regarding what should be done when people were already married. (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11, 12; Luke 16:18) Thus, he did not need to do more than simply repeat Jesus' instructions on that point. But, regarding the other issues, Paul was expressing his "inspired opinion" given the situation as he knew it in Corinth. What he said is fully in harmony with the rest of Scripture and should be regarded as "inspired," as are other parts of his writings. Remember that Paul was not sitting down to write out additional portions of the Bible! In his mind he was simply writing good Christian advice given the times in which they lived.

The apostle felt at liberty to mention how and by whom he had been informed of the divisions in the church. "It hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you." (1 Corinthians 1:11)

Paul was an inspired apostle. The truths he taught to others he had received "by revelation;" yet the Lord did not directly reveal to him at all times just the condition of His people. In this instance those who were interested in the prosperity of the church at Corinth, and who had seen evils creeping in, had presented the matter before the apostle, and **from divine revelations which he had formerly received** he was prepared to judge of the character of these developments. Notwithstanding the fact that the Lord did not give him a new revelation for that special time, those who were really seeking for light accepted his message as expressing the mind of Christ. The Lord had shown him the difficulties and dangers which would arise in the churches, and, as these evils developed, the apostle recognized their significance. He had been set for the defense of the church. He was to watch for souls as one who must render account to God, and was it not consistent and right for him to take notice of the reports concerning the anarchy and divisions among them? Most assuredly; and **the reproof he sent them was as certainly written under the inspiration of the Spirit of God as were any of his other epistles.**

The Acts of the Apostles p. 302,303 (1911)

9. Do you agree with Paul when he said, "For I am the least of all the apostles—I do not even deserve to be called an apostle..."? (1 Corinthians 15:9, *GNB*. Compare 2 Corinthians 11:5; Ephesians 3:8; 1 Timothy 1:15,16) How would this statement compare with Ellen White's statement that she is a "lesser light"? (*4RH* 486:2;1; *CM* 125; *Ev* 257) Should these two be given the lowest positions among inspired writers?

We believe Christians should be humble. When one of the most prominent of the apostles used an expression of humility, do we suddenly want to take him very literally? Paul believed he should be treated as very inferior because he had formerly persecuted and even killed Christians, but God had a much better plan for Paul's life. If we believe that we must continue to hold Paul's past over his head, what has become of Christian forgiveness?

Ellen White's statements should be read in the same light. She had very little formal education. She was a woman. But, with God on her side, she started a church! No one else has so clearly set forth the issues in the great controversy and explained its implications as she did. God did not choose her because she was so poor at what He wanted her to do, but rather because she would prove to be so good at it! If we do not believe that, we are suggesting that God made a bad choice!

10. On what basis did Paul suggest that we might "speak in tongues"? Is this experience, in which no one else could understand what was being said, (1 Corinthians 14:2) the same as the Pentecostal experience in which "all of us hear them speaking in our own languages about the great things that God has done!"? (*Acts* 2:11, *GNB*) How much speaking in tongues would take place if we insisted that "everything must be done in a proper and orderly way"? (1 Corinthians 14:40 *GNB*; compare 1 Corinthians 14:33); if we "would rather speak five words that can be understood, in order to teach others, than

“speak thousands of words in strange tongues”? (1 Corinthians 14:19, *GNB*); if “two or three at the most should speak, one after the other, and someone else must explain what is being said”? (1 Corinthians 14:27, *GNB*); if “the women should keep quiet in the meetings. They are not allowed to speak”? (1 Corinthians 14:34, *GNB*); if we always recognized that “best of all, however, is the following way. I may be able to speak the languages of human beings and even of angels, but if I have no love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell”? (1 Corinthians 12:31-13:1, *GNB*); if we recognize that the Spirit of God is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13) so that everything said must be weighed and tested by the truth (Scripture)?; and if we realize that the gifts of the Spirit will lead to “self-control”? (Galatians 5:23)

The fastest growing group of Christians in our day are those known as charismatics or Pentecostals. There are many subgroups among them, not all of which agree with each other. These groups are distinguished by some or all of the following: (1) there is a great emphasis on “spiritual gifts”; (2) there are a great deal of “miraculous manifestations”; (3) to be a real member of the group, one is expected to have at least some manifestation in his own experience—in most cases this means speaking in a “strange tongue”; (4) If one has this experience, it is assumed that since the “Holy Spirit” has endorsed him/her, he/she is going to be saved. This “experience” supercedes in importance the study of Scripture, prayer, or any other part of the Christian life. (5) One is not allowed to question in any way what the “Spirit” does or the experiences of those who are Christians. This leaves almost no room for careful investigation of the truth. (See 1 John 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:21)

According to 1 Corinthians 12-14, was Paul suggesting that the primary purpose of spiritual gifts is to build up the church? Or, to confirm individual Christians in their spiritual experience? The experience that occurred in Jerusalem at the original Pentecost, as described in Acts 2, needs to be studied in this connection. At that time, real languages were being spoken. People heard the message in virtually all the languages of the civilized world of that day. It was more a gift of “ears” than a gift of “tongues” because apparently one person would be speaking and many different people would hear in their own languages. The result was not a “disorderly experience” but the conversion of thousands of people to the truth. (See appendix below) Later, the disciples scattered to almost every corner of the world, and they were able to communicate with people wherever they went.

“There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.” [Acts 2:5] During the dispersion the Jews had been scattered to almost every part of the inhabited world, and in their exile they had learned to speak various languages. Many of these Jews were on this occasion in Jerusalem, attending the religious festivals then in progress. Every known tongue was represented by those assembled. This diversity of languages would have been a great hindrance to the proclamation of the gospel; God therefore in a miraculous manner supplied the deficiency of the apostles. The Holy Spirit did for them that which they could not have accomplished for themselves in a lifetime. They could now proclaim the truths of the gospel abroad, speaking with accuracy the languages of those for whom they were laboring. This miraculous gift was a strong evidence to the world that their commission bore the signet of Heaven. **From this time forth the language of the disciples was pure, simple, and**

accurate, whether they spoke in their native tongue or in a foreign language. *Acts of the Apostles* pp. 39,40

By contrast, the experience of speaking in tongues in Corinth was very different. It was apparently brought into the Christian church by people converted from some of the mystery religions which were so popular in Paul's day. The goal was almost never to benefit the whole church body, but rather for the benefit of the individual Christian to "confirm" his "Christian" experience. Paul dealt with the situation much as he dealt with the question of slavery in his letter to Philemon, by giving instructions about how God would prefer to have them do things. However, if they had fully followed these "inspired instructions," both slavery and speaking in strange tongues would have disappeared. What is behind the "Pentecostal experience"? Is it a human phenomenon in which some untapped human characteristic is revealed? Or, is it the direct result of some supernatural force, either from God or from the Devil?

11. What would happen to the church if all the members were constantly striving to behold the Lord and were being changed as described in 2 Corinthians 3:18?

This is the state things will be in when we reach heaven. Certainly, if church members had been experiencing this sort of change in their lives as an ongoing manifestation, the second coming of Christ would surely have occurred before now!

12. What does it mean to carry within our bodies the death of Jesus? (2 Corinthians 4:10)

Paul suffered numerous beatings and all sorts of life-threatening situations. (See 2 Corinthians 11:21-33; Acts 14:19; 16:22,23) No doubt, he had many scars on him, probably some of them very visible on his face! He was constantly showing to all about him what he had been willing to bear for his Lord. Every day Paul was willing to face death for his Lord as he went about the work of spreading the gospel. This was no apathetic casual approach to life! Paul's opponents could have little to say when facing him personally since he so obviously was committed to what he was doing.

13. Is our message still the same as Paul's, "that God was making all human beings his friends through Christ"? (2 Corinthians 5:19, *GNB*) How would this affect our day-by-day living?

This is the essence of the good news! If we really believed it and lived it, how different would be our daily experience! John suggested that if we really had the love of Christ in our lives, everyone would take note of it! (See John 13:35) All God asks is for us to be His friends. If we really could convince the world of this, the good news would spread very rapidly!

14. Why did Paul say, "For God loves the one who gives gladly"? (2 Corinthians 9:7, *GNB*)

Look at Proverbs 22:9. This verse is a quote from the *LXX* translation of that verse into Greek. True Christian giving is prompted by the love of God. It is so contrary to the spirit of the world which is always trying to "get"! God is able to bless abundantly those who are willing to share what He gives them. The word for *gladly* in this verse is *hilaros* from which we derive *hilarious*. Such a person is really happy that he has an opportunity to give.

15. Who do you think were the "very special so-called 'apostles' of yours"? (2 Corinthians 11:5, *GNB*)

No doubt, Paul was talking about the Judaizers who had troubled the church in Galatia as well. Their work is referred to in 2 Corinthians 11:3,4. They made all sorts of boasts about their supposedly superior religion based on following “all the rules,” but there was no real Christianity in it. These were not members of the original twelve apostles but rather, they were Jews who, no doubt, came from Jerusalem and styled themselves as “missionaries” (that is the meaning of *apostle* in Greek; the Latin is *missionary*). Many of them were probably former Pharisees, a large number of whom had become Christians.

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