1 Corinthians

Chapter 1

1:1. “a called apostle.” See commentary on Romans 1:1.

“call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In this context, to “call on the name” of the Lord means to pray to him, to ask him for something. Christians are to call on the name of the Lord Jesus, that is, pray to him for help in life. Throughout the Old Testament, when people “…called upon the name of the LORD,” it was to pray to, appeal to, or ask for help from God.

Abraham was in the habit of praying to God, and he “called on the name” of Yahweh (cp. Gen. 12:8; 13:4). Isaac “called on the name” of Yahweh (Gen. 26:25). In 1 Kings 18:24, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal and said, “you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of Yahweh.” Then the prophets of Baal “called on the name of Baal,” meaning they prayed to Baal (1 Kings 18:26), and after that, Elijah prayed to God, and God answered with fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:36-38). The Syrian general Naaman was angry when the prophet Elisha did not come out and personally pray to God for him: “Naaman went away angry and said, ‘I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy’” (2 Kings 5:11). David also prayed to God, he “called on the name of Yahweh,” and was answered by fire from heaven (1 Chron. 21:26). Psalm 99:6 indicates many people called on the name of Yahweh and their prayers were answered by Him. In Zechariah 13:9, God says, “They will call on my name and I will answer them.”

The New Testament uses the same terminology to refer to praying as the Old Testament does. When a person calls on the name of Yahweh, he prays to Yahweh. When a person calls on the name of the Lord Jesus, he prays to Jesus. So we see that 1 Corinthians 1:2 mentions prayer to Jesus: “To the church of God in Corinth…together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours.” This is clearly the same phrase used in the Old Testament, and is applied to Jesus as well as God.

In Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament, Vincent writes about the phrase, “call upon the name of” in 1 Corinthians 1:2. He says, “It is used of worship, and here implies prayer to Christ.” R. C. H. Lenski writes in The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians, “‘To call on him’ means to praise, bless, thank, worship him, and to ask of him all that we need for body and for soul.”

The context of Romans 10:12 and 13 show that the word “Lord” refers to Jesus, and verse 12 says, “For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.”

Romans 10:13 says, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” This verse is a quotation of Joel 2:32, which is a prophecy of people calling on the name of God for help and deliverance—definitely prayer to God. The fact that the Word of God takes the quote about prayer to God from the Old Testament and applies it to Jesus in the Church Epistles is very solid evidence that God is showing us we can pray to Jesus.
2 Timothy 2:22 also shows believers calling on the Lord: “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Old Testament believers called upon the name of Yahweh to get help, and we today can call upon Jesus for help. The fact that the same phrase for prayer and supplication is used in both the Old and New Testaments shows that as Old Testament believers prayed to God, we can pray to Jesus and expect him to answer our requests.

Another verse that shows that Christians prayed to Jesus is Acts 9:14, where Paul was sent to arrest those people who called on the name of the Lord. Stephen also called on the name of the Lord as he was being stoned to death. He had a vision of Jesus standing for him, and then prayed to him for help (Acts 7:59). [For more on praying to Jesus, see Appendix 15: “Can We Pray to Jesus?”]

1:4. “because of” (epi with the dative; see Lenski).

“in Christ Jesus.” This is the static “in,” and refers to a connection, a union, with Christ (See commentary on Rom. 6:3; Eph. 1:3). It is due to our union with Christ that we have been given grace, not because of our own merits. This verse might well be translated, “through your union with Christ Jesus.” Lenski writes: “All the divine gifts of grace which enrich the Corinthians and all the grace itself from which they flow are connected from beginning to end with ‘Christ Jesus.’”

1:5. “through union with him.” The Greek simply says, “in him,” but it is referring to our connection with, our union with, Christ. (See commentary on Rom. 6:3; Eph. 1:3). The New Testament by Williams reads, “through union with him.” Some versions simply take the Greek word en (“in”) as an instrumental dative, and read, “by him,” but the truth the verse is expressing is deeper than that.

1:6. “even as the testimony about the Christ was confirmed in you.” This verse is a parenthesis, the figure of speech Epitrechon, a sentence incomplete in itself but thrown in for explanation. (cp. Bullinger, Figures; cp. Lightfoot, Notes).

“the testimony about the Christ.” This is an objective genitive (cp. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament; Lightfoot, Notes). In this sense it means the testimony concerning (or “about” ESV) Jesus. The Corinthians learned about Christ from Paul, and now that testimony is confirmed in them as they are enriched by God.

1:7. “trailing behind the others.” (cp. Wuest, Expanded Translation). The Greek means that the Corinthian church was enriched so that they did not have less measure than others, be “left behind” (Thayer). Christ will enrich all Christians, if they will let him.

1:8. “that you may be blameless.” Cp. Lightfoot, Notes.

1:10. “in the name of Jesus Christ.” This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority. [For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6].

“made complete.” The thought is more than just “united,” as many translations have. There is a completeness (more literally, a perfection) in thinking the same thing. (Cp. NASB, Thayer; Lenski).

1:23. “deathtrap.” The Greek is skandalon, the trigger stick of a snare or trap. Christ is more than a stumbling-block, as if someone could trip and move along. He is the trap-trigger, a deathtrap to those who refuse to believe. (Cp. Lenski).

1:24. “called ones.” In the Epistles this phrase refers to those who have accepted God’s call and are saved. See commentary on Romans 1:1 and Romans 8:28.

1:26. “not many…not many…not many.” The figure of speech ellipsis is used powerfully here. Ellipsis emphasizes what is in the text, while de-emphasizing what has to be supplied (in italics). “Not many” of those who would be valued by the world are called, but God, by those He calls and works with, puts the world to shame.


Chapter 2

2:1. “secret.” We believe that “secret,” not “testimony” is the correct reading. The reading musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) seems better supported textually than marturion (#3142 μαρτύριον) (see Metzger, Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament), and it has good contextual support. The next ten verses are about the Administration of the Secret. We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

2:2. “to know.” This is the figure of speech Heterosis (Intransitive for the Transitive; see Bullinger, Figures of Speech). Paul decided not to “know anything among them,” actually, “make known [preach] anything among them” except Christ.

2:7. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]


2:11. “things.” The word “things” is missing for both men and God, only the definite article “the” being in the Greek text (this is the figure ellipsis). The context shows that it refers to all the deep things: thoughts, motives, etc. We could say “heart,” but that would be too restrictive.

2:14. “natural.” The Greek word, an adjective, is psuchikos (#5591 ψυχικός; pronounced psoo-key-kos'). The adjective psuchikos comes from the noun psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced, psoo-kay'), which is usually translated as “soul.” In order to properly understand psuchikos, it is important that we understand psuchē, soul.

Psuchē has a large number of meanings, as any good Greek-English lexicon will show. Although some of the definitions are found more clearly in Greek literature than in the Bible, many of them are clearly in the Bible. Meanings of “soul” (psuchē), that we find in the Bible include:
• The life force that animates the body, both human and animal. Thus “soul” often equals “life.”
• Our emotions, attitudes, thoughts, and feelings.
• The person himself or herself; the individual.

[For a much more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

The adjective psuchikos means “of, belonging to, somehow relating to, the ‘soul,’ psuchē,” and as such it can have a lot of different shades of meaning, depending on the context in which it is used. Psuchikos can be a characteristic of the earthly body, in which case it is “physical,” “natural,” but that is not the emphasis in this context. In this context is relates to the person as he is being governed by sensual appetites. Thus it means “natural; unspiritual; fleshly; worldly; governed by soul; soul-oriented.” It pertains to behavior which is typical of human nature” (Louw-Nida Greek English Lexicon). It means, “governed by the ψυχή, [psuchē], i.e., the sensuous nature with its subjection to appetite and passion” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon).

It will help us to see the impact of this section of Scripture had on early Christians if we realize that in secular Greek, psuchikos was a word of honor, much like today in the secular realm a person who is well educated, well-traveled, and well experienced might be called “worldly,” whereas we Christians use the word “worldly” in a negative sense to mean someone who is not oriented toward God but to the world. Aristotle, for example, used the word psuchikos to refer to the higher things of the soul versus the lower things of the soma, body. The New Testament, introducing the truly higher things of the spirit of God, pneuma, takes the world’s vocabulary and puts it in the proper perspective from God’s point of view. Being psuchikos, “of the soul,” was not a good thing, because it related to the lower, natural and earthly things of man, not the higher spiritual things.

Sadly, although the New Testament placed psuchē and psuchikos in their proper place as primarily belonging to the flesh and lower order of things (although our attitudes and emotions can certainly be godly), as the doctrine of the “immortality of the soul” grew in Christianity, particularly in the 4th and 5th centuries, the “soul” began to be elevated in people’s thinking as a wonderful thing that would survive the death of the body, and that theology is still dominant today, making translations such as “of the soul,” “soul-oriented,” or “soul-governed,” unclear to many readers. We need to get back to the proper meaning of biblical words to correctly understand the Bible.

It seems clear from the context that when Paul describes people using the word psuchikos, he is saying that they are not born again of God’s spirit, they are only “soul people.” That seems especially clear in light of 3:1, where Christians who have not yet matured in Christ are not referred to as psuchikos (natural; soul-governed), but as sarkikos (#4559 σαρκικός), “flesh-governed;” “flesh-oriented” (from the word sarx; #4561 σάρξ; “flesh”).

It is difficult to translate psuchikos, especially since it has different shades of meaning in different contexts. Here in 1 Corinthians 2:14, it refers to people who are not born again, so “natural” is a good translation. The translation “natural” does a good job of making the point that the person does not have the spirit of God. In 1 Corinthians 15:44 and 46 psuchikos refers to the life force that animates the body, and so “soul body” is about as well as can be done. In James 3:15 and Jude 1:19 psuchikos is used of earthly and demonic wisdom apart from the spirit of God, so we used the translation, “merely of the soul.”

Chapter 3

3:1. “of the flesh.” The Greek word is sarkikos (#4559 σαρκικός; pronounced sar-key-kos), and is from the word sarx (#4561 σάρξ), flesh. It means “of, belonging to, somehow relating to, the ‘flesh.’ The word sarkikos can be more literal and pertain to the human or animal body which is flesh, or it can be more metaphorical. When used metaphorically, sarkikos refers to being “fleshly” or “carnal,” i.e., “having the nature of flesh” and being under the control or influence of the natural passions and desires of the body. It can thus refer to being controlled or governed by mere human nature instead of the spirit of God.

Here in 1 Corinthians 3:1, “of the flesh” refers to Christians who have not yet decided to live by the spirit and are being influenced by their flesh nature. Thus, sarkikos (“of the flesh”) is directly contrasted with psuchikos (“of the soul” cp. 1 Cor. 2:14), which refers to the person who is not born again (See commentary on 1 Corinthians 2:14). The psuchikos person is unsaved (1 Cor. 2:14). The sarkikos person is saved but has not made the decision to obey God and so is still influenced by the flesh (1 Cor. 3:1).

3:5. “servants through whom you believed.” There was a problem in Corinth with the believers being divided over following certain leaders in the one Body (1:11-12). This verse, 3:5, explains the shift from including Peter in the list of 1:12 and 3:22, to only mentioning Paul and Apollos here in 3:3-11. It seems Peter did not actually go to Corinth to plant or water, only Paul and Apollos did. This is why they were the “servants through whom you [Corinthians] believed.” Paul planted by starting the church and Apollos watered by ministering to them, and “he who plants and he who waters are one… God’s fellow workers. You [Corinthians] are God’s field, God’s building” (3:6, 9). Peter is left out of these verses because the point of 3:3-11 is how the Corinthians should think of the ministers that particularly served them in the body of Christ. Hence he says, “Now these things, brothers, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes” (1 Cor. 4:6). Peter did not go Corinth, so it makes sense that he would not be a part of this section. However, after dealing with this subtopic Paul gets back to the broader point of wrong-thinking about ministers generally (not just those who directly plant and water your church), concluding with, “So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas” (3:21-22).

3:13. “Day.” This refers to the Day of Judgment. Every builder has a “day of judgment.” For those who are hired to build a house, for example, the day of Judgment is when the owner shows up to look at the finished product. At that time, the quality of the work will be evident, and the builder will be rewarded by being paid, or he will suffer loss by having to redo his work, or by not getting paid the money he was expecting. God gives us our lifetime to build for Him. On the Day of Judgment, our work will be evident to all. If we have not built well upon the foundation of Christ, our work will be burned and we will enter the kingdom saved, but with no rewards (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10: “good or worthless.”)

3:16. “sanctuary.” The Greek word is naos (#3485 ναός), which means the inner sanctuary, and then, occasionally, by association, the temple building that houses the inner sanctuary. Then, by metonymy, the Greek word naos is used of the Body of Christ (Bullinger, Vine). In contrast, the Greek word hieron (#2411 ἱερών) means the temple building along with its porches, outer courts, and all associated out buildings. Interestingly, the hieron is never used figuratively in the Bible, it is always literal. In this verse, the “sanctuary” of the Lord is the Body of Christ. For more information, see the note on Ephesians 2:21.

3:17. “mars...mar.” The Greek word translated “mar” is phtheirō (#5351 φθειρόω). It has a number of meanings, including “ruin, corrupt, mar, bring into a worse state, spoil, destroy.” Examples of how phtheirō was used include: financial ruin; seducing and thus “ruining” a virgin; ruin or corrupt someone by false teaching or immoral behavior; ruin a contest by breaking the rules; and of ruining something by destroying it. Phtheirō is used in verses such as “Bad company corrupts good behavior” (1 Cor. 15:33) and “Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires” (Eph. 4:22).

In this context the Bible is speaking of Christians, who are guaranteed everlasting life, and because Christians are guaranteed everlasting life, “destroy” cannot be the correct meaning of phtheirō here, especially because 3:15 has just told us that even if a person loses every reward he could have earned, he will still be saved and have everlasting life. We also know that phtheirō cannot mean “destroy” because in the context (1 Cor. 3:16), the “sanctuary” refers to the whole Church, not an individual (the word “you” in verse 16 is plural). No one can “destroy” the Church! In the context of 1 Corinthians 3, the word phtheirō is best understood as “to bring into a worse state” or “to mar.” The point of the verse is that if a Christian “brings the Church into a worse state,” that Christian will be “brought into a worse state” by the Lord at the Judgment. In other words, no one mars the Church without personal consequences. This verse is one of the many in the NT that contrasts salvation with rewards. [For the permanence of salvation and the guarantee of everlasting life, see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation.” For the difference between salvation and rewards, and rewards in the Kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or worthless”).

“sanctuary.” See commentary on 3:16 above.

3:18. “deceive.” The word is exapatao (#1818 ἔξαπαταω), “thoroughly deceive” (See entry on 1 Tim. 2:14). We have translated the word simply “deceive” in order to avoid possible confusion. For one could read the verse to mean, “Let no one thoroughly deceive himself;” as though a little self-delusion was acceptable, but no one should be thoroughly self-deluded.


Chapter 4

4:1. “house-managers.” The Greek is oikonomos (#3623 οἰκονόμος), and means, “The manager of a household or of household affairs; especially a steward, manager, superintendent (whether free-born, or, as was usually the case, a freed-man or slave) to whom the head of the house or proprietor has entrusted the management of his affairs”
In our case, we are oikonomoi, stewards or “house managers,” entrusted by Jesus Christ with the affairs of the oikonomia, the “Administration” of the Sacred Secret. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

4:3. “man’s day.” Versus The Lord’s Day, when the judgment will be right, just, and final.

4:4. “I am not aware of anything against myself.” “Not a statement of fact, but a hypothesis to show the unreliability of mere complacent self-satisfaction. Note the use of sunoida (second perfect active indicative with dative (disadvantage) of the reflexive pronoun) for guilty knowledge against oneself (cf. Acts 5:2; 12:12; 14:6)… Failure to be conscious of one's own sins does not mean that one is innocent.” (Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament).

4:6. “puffed up” is the literal meaning of phusioo (#5448 φυσίοω), which is “a later substitute for φυσάω; it is largely limited to Christian literature…lit. ‘blow up, inflate’ from φῦσα [phusa] (orig. ‘pair of bellows’, then var. ‘wind, blast’, etc.). Thus, figuratively, to cause to have an exaggerated self-conception, puff up, make proud. The Passive in an active sense, become puffed up or conceited, put on airs.” [BDAG]. Be arrogant. Six out of its seven usages in the NT are in 1 Corinthians. After saying that some are puffed up (4:18; 5:2), Paul notes that love is “not puffed up” (13:4).

4:15. “though you have ten thousand guides.” This verse would have had more impact in ancient Corinth than it does today. The children of the wealthy were escorted to school by a “pedagogue,” a person who oversaw their safety, which is why some translations have “guardian” here, while we have “guide” (because eventually the pedagogue did more than just escort and protect, they did some guiding of the child). However, a child from a wealthy family would have many pedagogues, but still, only one father in the family. Paul is making that point, that any Christian will have many guides in their life, but he was their spiritual father, he founded the church at Corinth.

Chapter 5

5:2. “Let him who has done this deed be removed.” The verb for “removed” is in the imperative mood, and so the verse can be translated like it is in the REV, or it can be translated: “The one who has done this thing must be removed.” In this context, and in light of verse 5, it seemed that Paul would have used a softer tone and directed the Corinthians what to do, rather than commanding them what to do.

5:5. “to deliver such a one to the Adversary for the ruin of the flesh.” To deliver to the Adversary means to put out of the Church (see commentary, 1 Tim. 1:20). “Flesh” is the Figure of speech metonymy for “the desires of the flesh.” The person is excommunicated from the Church and put out into the world, where he is unloved, and (hopefully) his fleshly desires will come to an end (be destroyed) as he comes to realize the value of Christian fellowship. Thus his “spirit” (his attitude toward God and thus his rewards), “may” (the subjunctive expresses the possibility) be saved at the Return. The word “saved” is in the subjunctive mood, expressing the possibility that putting someone
out of the church “may” bring him to repentance, but there are people who leave the Church and never repent, but become very worldly. God, however, opts for the greater possibility and expresses His desire for the person. Instead of kicking him out and saying he “may” stay worldly, He says that he “may” yet regain his attitude and rewards.

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

“ruin.” The Greek word translated “ruin” is olethros (#3639 ὀλέθρος), which occurs four times in the New Testament (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:3; 2 Thess. 1:9; and 1 Tim. 6:9). The word means desolation or destruction, though literal annihilation is not always intended. The English word ruin is a good translation, especially because it reserves the translation destruction for the stronger word apoleia (#684 ἀπώλεια), which denotes a more irrevocable and harsh destruction than olethros.

5:9. “associate” in the more formal sense of the word, to be in association, close company, with, or to mix together.

“sexually immoral men.” The noun is masculine, and men are indicated by the context.

Chapter 6

6:2. “judge and administer.” The Greek word is krinō (#2919 κρίνω), and it means “to make a selection; to pass judgment on; to judge; to condemn.” Here it is used in the active voice, meaning that it is not a one-time judgment, but rather an ongoing process of judgment, or what we would call ruling or administering, because administering is made up of a series of individual judgments. The Bible tells us that when Jesus comes down from heaven, he will set up his kingdom on earth (see commentary on Matt. 5:5; “the meek will inherit the earth”). Christians who have been faithful will help rule that future earth (Matt. 19:28; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26; see commentary on Heb. 2:5). The Amplified Bible says that believers will one day “judge and govern” the world, and that is the sense of the word. The same word, krinō in the active voice, is used in 6:3 of angels, letting us know that we will judge and administer angels.

The word “judge” when used of the world and angels not only refers to the administering the world to come, but also refers to the Day of Judgment, at which point the righteousness of the saints will “judge” or condemn those who have ignored or stood against God and the things of God.

6:4. “have no standing.” From exoutheneo (#1848 ἐξουθενέω). See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:20. This word is usually translated elsewhere as “treat with contempt.”


6:9. “unrighteous.” This verse, and verse 10, probably refers to people who are not saved (and are acting out their unrighteousness by flagrant sin). This is why verse 11 says that “some” of “you” were like the unrighteous people in this list. We know from reading both First and Second Corinthians that the church in Corinth still had lots of sinners. But the Corinthians were washed, sanctified, and justified, in other words, saved. The
unrighteous people referred to here, who act out their unrighteousness with evil works, are not saved. Someone might ask, “If this section is to the unrighteous (unsaved) why does it bother to list the sins, since no unsaved person will “inherit the kingdom” (be saved) anyway.” Actually, in some cases an “unrighteous” person, someone who is not born again, will be granted everlasting life at the Second Resurrection. At that resurrection, people will be judged by their works, but they will not be saved if their works are flagrantly unrighteous.

It is possible, but less likely, that the verses in this section are referring to Christians who are participating in flagrant sin. In this case, the word “inherit” refers to rewards, not salvation. The Christian’s salvation is secure, and that is stated clearly and in many different ways [See Appendix C, “The Permanence of Christian Salvation” in The Christian’s Hope; and Appendix A, “The Administration of the Sacred Secret” in The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be like Christ]. In spite of the fact that our salvation is secure, our rewards are not. It is possible for a Christian to enter Paradise “naked” (1 Cor. 3:12-15) and ashamed (1 John 2:28; Mark 8:38). The Christian who practices flagrant sin has everlasting life, but will have no “inheritance” on the New Earth in the Millennial Kingdom. We must remember that the word “inherit” can refer either to everlasting life (cp. 1 Cor. 15:50) or to the inheritance as a reward in Paradise (Col. 3:24). The context will reveal which of the two meanings applies. There will be Christians who will enter into Paradise but not “inherit” it—they will have no reward. This will be terrible for those who experience it—and is a major reason why “the hope” is called the anchor of our souls (Heb. 6:19). This list of ungodly behaviors is not exhaustive but representative (cp. Lenski). Nevertheless, it is complete enough that Christians are to clearly understand that a Christian cannot live in opposition to God’s will and expect His blessings.

“sexually immoral.” The Greek is pornos (#4205 πόρνος), which is a masculine noun and technically refers to a man who is sexually immoral or a male prostitute. However, the masculine form was used in a broad sense that included sexually immoral women. A female prostitute or a sexually immoral woman was a pornē (#4204 πόρνη), but whereas the masculine form was used to include women, the feminine form was not generally used to include men. In early Greek, pornos and pornē referred much more specifically to prostitutes and prostitution. Greek (and Roman) morals were much looser than Christian morals, and so, for example, in both Greece and Rome slaves were the sexual property of whoever owned them, and a slave owner having sex with a slave was not only overlooked, it was pretty much expected. By the time of Christ, and especially in the Christian world, the words, and the neuter noun porneia, were not just used of prostitution but of sexual immorality in general.

“idolaters.” The Greek is eidololatrēs (#1496 εἰδωλολατρὴς) and it means “image worshipper” or “idolater.” The primary meaning is a Christian who worships images. However, over time it was broadened to include other things that were considered idols. The first of the Ten Commandments is to not have any other gods beside the one true God. Anyone who gets “spiritual power,” “spiritual advice,” or “just worships” another god or thing is an idolater. Christians need to be very careful who they pray to for help and what they look to for spiritual help such as “lucky charms.” God is offended by them. Also, something that is usually overlooked in modern idolatry is that ancient idolatry often had some kind of sexual immorality as part of the worship.
“adulterers.” The Greek word is moichos (#3432 μοιχός), and it refers to someone who is married but having sexual intercourse with someone other than his or her spouse. In the Old Testament, and in both the secular Greek and Roman world, the definition of adultery was different. In the Old Testament, “adultery” properly referred to a married or betrothed woman having sexual intercourse with someone other than her husband. The Greek, Roman, and Hebrew concept of adultery was substantially the same, the infidelity of the husband did not constitute adultery. The New Testament specifically commands that each man and woman is to have his or her “own” spouse, and thus the New Testament definition of adultery is narrower than the Old Testament definition, including any married person having intercourse with someone other than his or her spouse. The world and its evil forces want to discount the evil in adultery, so it is called “an affair,” “cheating” or “indiscretion,” as if it were no big deal. But it is a big deal, and God has always firmly commanded that people do not commit adultery. Verses forbidding it are in the Old Testament (Exod. 20:14, etc.), the Gospels (Mark 10:19, etc.), and in the Church Epistles (Rom. 13:9, etc.).

“passive homosexual partners.” The Greek is malakos (#3120 μαλακός), and it literally means “soft” or “soft to the touch.” Although it had other uses such as “soft clothing,” it was the standard word in the Greek language for the “passive” one in the homosexual relation. In the Greco-Roman world, the “passive” partner was often a youth, and so, for example, the New American Bible says “boy prostitutes,” but malakos is general enough to refer to the passive person in the relationship. The masculine form of the Greek is used, but as it is used in this context it would also refer to the passive partner in a lesbian relationship.

“homosexuals.” The Greek is arsenokoitēs (#733 ἀρσενοκοίτης), which is from arsen, “male,” and koite, “bed,” and describes a man who “beds” another man, i.e., a homosexual. Although arsenokoitēs is sometimes used in a wide sense referring to all homosexuality, it also had a narrower sense, referring to the one who took the dominant or “male” role in the homosexual relation. Because 1 Corinthians 6:9 also specifically refers to the malakos, the use of arsenokoitēs in this verse refers to the dominant homosexual.

6:11. “in the name of Jesus Christ.” This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority. [For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6].


6:19. “of the holy spirit.” Genitive of content. Our bodies are sanctuaries that contain the holy spirit.

“the holy spirit.” The Greek puts “in you” between “the” and “holy spirit” making the article hard to recognize for beginning students, nevertheless, pneuma hagion (holy spirit) refers to the gift. This is clear because it is “in you,” and God is not “in us,” and we have this holy spirit “from God.” God gives His gift of holy spirit, which is sealed “in” believers (Eph. 1:13). [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

“from God” is the genitive of origin, sometimes translated “of God.”
7:1. “touch” is euphemistic in the Greek language for touch in a sexual way, especially sexual intercourse (the Hebrew language has the same idiom, cp. Ruth 2:9). This verse is referring to the sexual intercourse in marriage, since sexual intercourse outside of marriage is sin (and it would be superfluous for God to say that sinful sex is not “good”). The NIV picks up the sense of the verse when it reads, “…it is good for a man not to marry.” The question remains, then, as to why God did not simply state that people should not marry, why did He use the idiom? It is because the word “touch,” although used euphemistically, still has literal overtones. Just as most men are stimulated by sight (hence the huge market for women’s lingerie), women can be stimulated by being touched, being held. It is not good for men to touch women and get them emotionally distracted if the man has no intention of marriage.

“woman.” The word woman is in the genitive case, because it is a Greek idiom that words following touch are in the genitive (Lenski; Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament.)

7:2. “so much sexual immorality.” The Greek simply reads “immorality” in the plural, but this is a plural of emphasis (Bullinger calls this “Heterosis of number,” (Bullinger, Figures). There was so much sexual immorality in Corinth (and in the world in general, which is still true today) that in order keep from being sexually distracted, each person should have his or her “own” spouse. Relief from sexual pressure is not the only reason for marriage, but it is an important one, others include companionship and children. This verse sets the standard for the New Testament: that God has moved away from the polygamy that was allowed in the Old Testament.

“let each woman have her own husband.” We translate this verse as “let each woman have” due to the fact that the verb “have” εχω (#2192 ἔχω; “to have”) is in the present tense, active voice, imperative mood. The imperative mood is the mood of command, and here is an exhortation. The verse is not saying “Every man must have his own wife and every woman must have her own husband” in the sense that every person must be married. The context of this chapter makes it clear that is not the meaning. The point of the imperative exhortation is that there is so much sexual immorality in the culture that, if a person needs sexual release, the man must have his OWN wife, and the woman her OWN husband.

If this verse had just said, “Let every man have his own wife,” it would not have particularly caught anyone’s attention in the culture of the day. Although some of the Jewish men and other men of Middle Eastern descent in Paul’s audience had more than one wife, most did not, and having more than one wife was not a part of the Greco-Roman culture. However, the unspoken cultural norm for Paul’s audience was that men were free to have sex with many women besides their wives, while for a wife to have sexual intercourse with another man was “adultery.” For example, any household slave was the sexual property of the man of the house, and it was accepted that men had sex with their slaves. Also, for a man to have sexual intercourse with a prostitute was also accepted behavior. Furthermore, if a man was traveling and stopped at an inn, the proprietor would provide a slave woman (or a man for those with homosexual desires) for
a fee. In fact, it was part of many Roman dinner parties that the host would provide prostitutes after the meal (Instone Brewer; Divorce and Remarriage in the Church, p.177).

This verse changed what was accepted and godly behavior: Paul writes that God’s command is that the woman had her OWN husband. Thus, the godly man was not free to have sexual intercourse with others besides his wife. The effects of this verse were very far reaching. First, it elevated the woman’s position in the family and culture. It is a common Christian myth that Paul was somehow against women. Of course, given the way his writings have been mistranslated and misinterpreted, it is certainly could seem Paul was against women. However, when we properly translate this verse and others like it, we can see that the New Testament was a Magna Carta for women, giving them rights and privileges they had never had before. That a woman would have the sexual attention of her own husband and not share him with slaves and strangers was a huge advance for women [For other verses in the NT that elevate women’s position in the culture, see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:34, 35; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12; 3:2; 5:14; and 1 Pet. 3:7].

Another thing this verse did was it protected woman from the selfishness of men. Any man who professes to be a Christian must keep his hands off other women, even if in the culture in which he lived, he had a legal right to use them sexually, such as with the case of his slaves. A slave in the house of a committed Christian would be secure in the knowledge that the master of the house would make sure she would not be used by the men of the house or be passed around at one of his dinner parties.

Another effect this verse had was it separated Christian men from their non-Christian friends. The average man in the Greco-Roman culture would have thought it strange indeed not to fulfill one’s desires by having legal sex with one’s slaves and prostitutes, and thus this command in 1 Corinthians 7:2 caused a division, and some suspicion, between the Christian men and the non-Christian Romans around them. Thus obeying this command of God was hard on many men, who had to choose between their culture and their God. Thankfully, eventually when the Roman world became Christian after the time of Constantine, this verse would define not only Christian behavior, but what acceptable behavior was for “good people.”

There was one thing this verse did that we today would not expect: it placed women in a dilemma when it came to sex with their husbands. At the time of Paul, the average lifespan of a woman was in the low 30’s, around age 32. This was in large part to the fact that between 5 and 10 percent of the women died in childbirth (some died as a result of an attempted abortion, trying to avoid the risk of childbirth). This fact was not lost on many women of the time, and thus many of them preferred their husbands to have sex with their slaves or a prostitute rather than risk their lives in childbirth.

Thus this verse, which is the very foundation of the Christian family, that “family” would be built upon a man and a woman in an exclusive relationship, also caused great difficulties for both the men and the women. The Christian life is simple, but rarely easy.

7:3. “obligation.” If you marry, you are obligated to provide sexual intercourse to your spouse. The Greek word we translated “obligation” is opheile (opheile) and means, “that which one ought to do, duty” and also “that which one owes in a financial sense, obligation; as debt” (BDAG).
7:4. “The wife does not have authority over her own body…likewise also the husband…” Both the husband and the wife have authority of their bodies before they get married. However, when one enters into a marriage covenant, he or she agrees to no longer have authority over his or her own body, but to give that authority over to the husband or wife.

7:5. “mutual consent.” The Greek word sumphonos, (#4859 σύμφωνος, which moved from Greek to Latin to our English word “symphony”) from the time of Homer, Plato, Aristotle, down, means harmonious, accordant, agreeing; by mutual consent, by agreement (Thayer). If the husband and wife are going to abstain from sexual intercourse, it must be only for a season, and they must be in harmony about the decision.

“that you may have leisure for prayer.” This is literally the way the Greek reads (and also Lenski’s translation). It could also be translated “that you may give yourself to prayer” because the reason for the leisure was so that time could be given to prayer. “That you may devote yourself to” as in some versions, seems a little strong for the Greek. One needs to ask why God would word the verse this way. Why “leisure” for prayer? The answer is in the greater context of the chapter. The person who marries will have trouble in the flesh (v. 28) and has to be concerned for his or her spouse and marriage (vss. 32-35). In that context, if the couple can be apart for a while, they have “leisure” to pray and focus on the things of God.

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

“because of your lack of self-control.” This does not flatter our human nature, but it is an honest assessment of the situation. Most people do not have much self-control when it comes to sexual continence.

7:6. “I say this…” The word “this” is touto, which starts the verse in the Greek, and regularly refers to what has just been stated. Paul had stated that the husband and wife did not have authority over their bodies, their spouses did. However, then he said that they could “deprive” each other for prayer if it was by consent. However, this was not a command. The couple did not have to spend time apart. He does not command time apart, even for prayer. He allows it as a consent if the couple feels it is best.

“by God’s command.” The Greek phrase kata epitagē (κατὰ ἐπίταγη) is a technical phrase that means “by the command of; by order of.” In this case, the command would have been by God (or the Lord Jesus Christ, doing God’s will), so “God’s” is added in italics for clarity. See commentary on 1 Timothy 1:1.

7:7. “even as I myself.” The Apostle Paul, though once married, was now single. What happened to his wife is a matter of speculation. The average life span of a woman in the Roman Empire at that time was 32, many women died in childbirth or from myriads of other causes. It is also possible, but less likely, that his wife was from a powerful Jewish family and left him when he became a Christian.

“gift.” Here “gift” refers to the ability to live without sexual pressure being a hindrance to godliness. Some people feel the need for sex and companionship more acutely than others. If a person feels no need to get married, then this chapter is giving guidance that if he stays unmarried he will be able to serve the Lord without distraction.
7:8. “unmarried.” The term “unmarried” can be a general term, and here probably refers to the unmarried men. The Greek culture had a specific word for widows, but not a word for the male side, “widowers.” If “unmarried” was used to include unmarried women, then the more specific term “widows” would be added because the pressure to remarry would be especially strong for widows, who had a very hard time on their own in most ancient societies, and the Greco-Roman society being no exception.

7:9. “are not exercising.” The present indicative tense of the verb means that the action is happening at the time. The other use of this word (1 Cor. 9:25) is also in the present indicative tense and refers to athletes who are exercising self-control in their athletic training. The people this verse refers to are not exercising self-control sexually—they are stepping over the morality line. This is not referring to people who strongly desire to have sexual intimacy and are having a hard time waiting, it is referring to people who are not waiting, they are acting upon their sexual desires. These people should get married so they stop sinning. It seems foolish to us today to say that just because you cannot seem to control your sexual urges toward someone you should then marry that person, but that is the biblical mandate.

“burn with desire.” The Greek word means “burn” and can refer to burning with sexual desire (Thayer), but since burning with passion is derived from the context and not the word itself, we felt it better to put “with desire” in italics. Not putting it in, as in the NASB, has caused some to teach that if you sin sexually you will “go to hell” and burn. This is written to the Christian Church, whose salvation is assured, so that is not the meaning.

7:10. “command.” From the Greek paraggello (#3853 παραγγέλλω). Technically, to bring an order from one to another, thus some translate as announce, but the origin was an order, so command is best here and many other places.

“not I, but the Lord.” There are many Scriptures that testify that the Bible is God-breathed, literally, the words of God. Some testimony is in the form of direct statement (2 Tim. 3:16: “All Scripture is God-breathed”), while other testimony is derived from the way the Bible speaks of itself, for example, that if anyone adds to the words of the Bible he will be cursed (Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18), and still other testimony comes from the statements of the men of God, including Jesus, who relied on Scripture as being the Word of God and not the words of man (Job 23:12; Jer. 15:16; John :39; 17:17). There is no evidence that the “Word of God” is a mixture of the Word of God and the ideas of man. How could anyone separate which was which and rely on that kind of document?

Paul made it clear that the epistles he wrote were by revelation (Gal. 1:12), and that each of them was from God and Jesus (cp. 1 Cor. 1:3). However, when Paul wrote, he wrote in first person (actually, Paul dictated most of the epistles to a professional scribe who wrote down what Paul said, then Paul would sign the end of the epistle; cp. commentary on Gal. 6:11). This would not have confused his readers, who were used to prophets and angels speaking for God. There is no evidence that Paul’s readers thought that Paul was putting his own thoughts down as he wrote, even though he consistently used the word “I.” All through Corinthians (indeed, all through all his epistles), Paul uses “I” and is personally representing the Lord. He uses “I” dozens of times in 1 Corinthians alone (cp. 1:10; 5:9; 10:19; 14:5). Furthermore, the other New Testament writers did the same as Paul (cp. Acts 1:1; James 2:1; 1 Pet. 2:11; 1 John 2:7; Jude 1:3).
In light of the information above, readers can be confused when they read in 1 Corinthians 7:10, “I command, not I, but the Lord,” because it makes it seem like Paul is inserting his own opinion in these verses. He is not. Instead, what he doing is similar to what he does in all his epistles when he quotes Scripture as a basis for further authority. For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:19 he quotes Isaiah 29:14 to help people understand the point Scripture is making and to add weight to what he is saying. He could write his epistles without quoting the Old Testament as an authority, but the quotation helps. However, the Four Gospels were not written when 1 Corinthians was written, so Paul could not say, “As Jesus said and it is written [in Matt. 19:6] ‘Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.’” So instead, Paul makes a reference to the well-known teaching of the Lord Jesus about marriage: that the wife should not be separated from her husband. Paul reminds people that this is something that the Lord himself taught while on earth by saying, “not I, but the Lord.” Then, in verse 12 when Paul stops referring to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, he says, “But I (not the Lord), say to the rest....” At that point Paul resumes writing in first person by revelation, as he had been doing.

“depart” From chorizō (#5563 χωρίζω pronounced core-ee'-zō). From Herodotus down chorizō means: to separate, divide, part, put asunder (Thayer). It has been used for, and can mean, divorce. However, in the Gospels the word “divorce” (sometimes translated “put away”) is properly apoluō (#630 ἀπολύω). It seems that if only divorce was being referred to, that is the word that would be used here. By using the word chorizō, the Lord places emphasis on the fact that the wife is not to separate from her husband, which would include divorce. However, as many marriage counselors will testify, many women who are married are “separated” from their husbands in all but local proximity. As Christians, our marriages are to reflect Christ and the Church, and there is to be no separation between the people.

7:12. “But to the rest I say (I, not the Lord).” See commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:10 7:14. “brother.” The context makes it clear that this “brother” is the Christian brother of the woman, i.e., her husband.

7:21. “Do not be concerned about it.” A Greek idiomatic phrase (Lenski). A Christian slave would worry that his circumstances would keep him or her from serving much, or as he or she would want to. The Lord says he understands the circumstances and “not to worry.” This is a word of comfort to all of us. Moms may feel that all the responsibilities of family may keep them from the Lord; Dads may feel that work limits their ability to serve. The Lord knows that we must take care of obligations on earth.

“rather do that.” Some commentators and translators (Cp. NRSV) believe that having said that each one should remain in the calling in which they were called in verse 20, a slave should remain a slave even if offered freedom. Yet the chapter has several examples of people changing from unmarried to married, bound to loosed, etc. Should not a slave be able to change also? Certainly. The point of verse 20 is that we should not labor at change for change’s sake, because the Lord can work with us in the situation we are in. However, if the opportunity to better oneself arises, then avail yourself of that (Cp. Lenski.).

7:26. “deem.” The word “deem” means to have an opinion. It is similar to “consider,” but with more emphasis on judgment than reflection.
Chapter 8

8:2. “he does not yet know as he ought to know.” Lenski has a wonderful explanation of this verse. If a man has come to know about idols and meat offered to idols, yet if he stopped with just that knowledge, and never put the total picture together as it relates to living in the love of God towards the brothers, then he really does not know as he ought.

8:4. “we all understand.” there is agreement between Paul and the Church at Corinth on the subject of idols. “No idol in the world really exists.” The Corinthians were surrounded by idols, images of Zeus (Jupiter), Artemas (Diana), Hermes (Mercury), Aphrodite (Venus), etc. The primary definition of “idol” (εἴδωλον eidolon) in Greek writing from Homer forward is an image, a likeness. It refers to the image of a heathen god: Acts 7:41; 1 Cor. 12:2; Rev. 9:20 (Thayer). Thus, this verse is saying that in reality there are no such gods as “Jupiter,” etc. Paul will later tell the Church that the realities are demons (10:20). The two phrases marked off in quotes follow the context and the style of the RSV, the NRSV, and the ESV. These were things that everyone knew, and apparently someone had said.

8:5. “so-called gods.” As with Lenski, NRSV, NIV, ESV. Paul grants the “what if” to satisfy in doubters, but then stakes his claim that to us there is only one (true) God and one (true) lord. In the Greco-Roman religion, there were gods in heaven, such as the Olympian gods, and gods on earth, such as the forest dwelling gods, etc. Also, the word “lord” refers to human dignities as well. For example, Nero was called lord both in the Roman writings and in the Bible (Acts 25:26). See Deissmann, Light From the Ancient East, p.353-355.

8:6. “one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we are for him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we are through him.” This verse clearly distinguishes between Jesus and God. There is one God and Father, and there is one man, Jesus, who is our “Lord.” This verse shows how God and Jesus work in unity to get the Church what it needs. God gave Jesus all authority and made him head over the Church, so now we get what we need “through” Jesus.

Some Trinitarians say that this verse supports the doctrine of the Trinity because it says that all things came through Jesus Christ. But what the verse actually says is that all things came “from” God, “through” Jesus. That stands in contradiction to Trinitarian doctrine because it places Jesus in a subordinate role to God. According to this verse, Jesus is not “co-equal’ with the Father; the Father is “God” and the ultimate source of all things, and Jesus is not called “God.”

The context is the key to understanding what the phrase “all things came through him” means. There is no mention in either the immediate or the remote context about the creation of the world such that the “all things” refers to the original creation of Genesis.

This verse is speaking of the Church. God provided all things for the Church via Jesus Christ.

The whole book of 1 Corinthians is taken up with Church issues, and Paul starts 8:6 with “for us,” i.e., for Christians. 1 Corinthians 8:4 and 5 had said that even though there were “so called” gods, for us “there is no God but one.” The Roman world was polytheistic, and people were used to having different “gods” and different “lords”
provide different things in different ways. As the various gods provided things, often those provisions would be mediated and distributed to the people through “lords,” lesser gods or people, such as the priests. That was a major reason the Romans had so many temples and shrines to the different gods and worshipped them all—to curry as much of their favor as possible. But Paul challenged that commonly-accepted practice, and boldly stated that there was only one God “from whom are all things,” and only one Lord “through whom are all things.”

The very next two verses, verses 7 and 8, have a practical application of the truth that there is only one God who provides everything for us through Jesus Christ. Since “no idol in the world really exists,” (v. 4), then they do not really provide the food that is sacrificed to them and cannot affect it for better or worse. Thus, for the Church, there are no laws against eating food sacrificed to idols. Verse 8 says, “But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.” However, this revelation was new for the Church. The Old Testament believers did not have this freedom. They had dozens of food laws, and many people who had converted to Christianity still could not eat food with a clear conscience if it had been offered to an idol—even though the idol was nothing and the source of the blessing was God working through Jesus Christ. Hopefully though, by explaining the situation, more Christians would become free in their conscience and not be bound by old regulations.

By wording the verse the way he does and saying there is one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus, Paul pens this verse in a way that clearly stands against the Trinity. If the Trinity really existed, then this verse would have been the perfect place to say so, and have something such as, “for us there is only one God made up of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost,” or something similar. There is no good reason that the verse would be written in a way that is so clearly non-Trinitarian, calling the Father, “God,” and Jesus, “Lord,” if the Trinity existed. Furthermore, the logical reason that this verse is worded the way it is and the reason that the Bible does not make a clear statement about the Trinity, here or anyplace else, is that there is no Trinity. There is, as this verse says, “one God” and “one Lord, Jesus Christ.” [For more discussion on this verse, see J. S. Hyndman, Lectures on The Principles of Unitarianism, pp. 58-63; Patrick Navas, Divine Truth or Human Tradition, pp. 42-45.]

8:8. “bring us close to God.” From the Greek word paristemi (#3936 παρίστημι) See BDAG. Definition “e,” and cp. NIV, NRSV.

“left behind.” The Greek word means to fall behind, be inferior, to be left behind in a race (Thayer).

“overflow of credit.” The word is perisseuō (#4052 περισσεύω). Intransitive and properly, to exceed a fixed number or measure; to be over and above a certain number or measure,...to exist or be at hand in abundance...to abound, overflow (Thayer), to be an excess of credit (Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament). This verse would have been hard hitting to the Corinthians, where wealth, luxury, and sports combined, and some men fell behind, while others had an excess or overflow. In the case of food, not eating does not cause us to be left behind with God, nor does eating give us an overflowing abundance of credit.
Chapter 9

9:26. “aimlessly.” The Greek is adēlos (#84 ἀδήλως; pronounced “ä-day-lōs”), meaning, aimless, or without aim, i.e. not as one who has a fixed goal (BDAG). It refers to being without a special goal or purpose, to doing something without specific intention, to be “aimless.” It can be understood simply as “without having some goal” or “without some reason” or “without trying to accomplish something.”

9:27. “but I treat my body harshly and make it my slave.” The Greek word hupopiazō (#5299 ὑπωπιάζω), like almost every word, has several meanings. BDAG Lexicon lists three primary meanings:

1) To blacken an eye; give a black eye, strike in the face.
2) To bring someone to submission by constant annoyance, wear down. A more appropriate rendering for a figurative sense would be “browbeat.”
3) To put under strict discipline, punish, treat roughly, torment (1 Cor. 9:27 of the apostle’s self-imposed discipline. But the expression is obviously taken from the language of prize-fighting in verse 26).

Of these three, number 3 is the most preferable given the context of 1 Corinthians 9:27 and what we have to do to control our bodies.

“disqualified.” An adjective in Greek, thus we added the object in italics: “for the prize.”

Chapter 10

10:4 “the spiritual rock that followed them.” The rock that came after the Israelites, as history turned out, long after them, was Christ.

The Greek text does not have the article “the,” but it is not necessary to use the definite article when the noun comes after a preposition (in this case, ek; see commentary on Matthew 1:18).

The Greek word translated “follow” is akaloutheō (#190 ἀκολουθεῖω pronounced ah-koe-loo-thay’-ō) and its basic meaning is “to come after,” which can be either in time or spatial sequence. Thus it refers to following after something sequentially. It also can mean to accompany someone who was taking the lead, thus “go along with.” It was used metaphorically for following someone doctrinally as a disciple, thus “be a disciple.” This use came from the fact that the disciple did actually “follow” the teacher where he went both physically and mentally. It was also used of following in the sense of obeying or complying, as in “follow my directions.”

The common definition of akaloutheō, combined with the scope of Scripture, shows that in this case “follow” means to come after: Jesus came centuries after the Israelites. The Israelites did “drink,” i.e., get nourishment, from knowing about the Christ who was to come after them, just as did Abraham, who rejoiced at seeing the day of Christ (John 8:56).

There are some very Trinitarian versions, such as the NIV, that translate the word “follow” as “accompany,” as if Jesus were accompanying the Israelites on their journey. But akaloutheō appears in the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament 90 times, and even in the NIV it is translated as some form of “follow” (like “follows,” “following,” etc.) 83 of
those times. The NIV translates ἀκολουθεῖον as “accompanied” only twice, here and in Mark 6:1, and we submit that the NIV does so here because of the translators’ Trinitarian bias and not because the context calls for it.

While it is true that lexically ἀκολουθεῖον can be translated as “accompany,” it should not be translated that way here for several reasons. First, we must remember that when ἀκολουθεῖον is used as “accompany,” it is still used in the sense of following, or going with, a leader. It is not used in the sense of “accompanying” a group while at the same time being the leader of the group. But if the Messiah was with Israel, he clearly would have been leading the group in some way, not just following them around.

Also, the scope of Scripture shows that “follow” in the sense of “come after” is the correct interpretation. Since this verse mentions the Israelites in the desert, the desert wanderings become the “remoter context” against which one must check any interpretation. As we have already noted, there is no reference that can be brought forward to show that Christ was either with the Israelites or was somehow following them around. Are there verses that show that the Israelites were looking forward to the Messiah? Yes, many. For one thing, it was in the wilderness where that great prophecy of the coming Messiah was given: “A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel,” and “their kingdom will be exalted” (Num. 24:7 and 17). This prophecy of the Messiah spoke of him as a future reality, not a present one. Furthermore, the Passover Lamb foreshadowed the Messiah. The manna anticipated Christ being “the true bread from heaven.” The Tabernacle, with all its offerings, foreshadowed Christ in many ways, including being the place where people would meet God. The High Priest was a type of the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ.

Not only the verses associated with the wilderness wanderings, but the whole Old Testament, spoke of the Messiah as a future hope. For example, Micah 5:2 foretells his birth in Bethlehem, and Isaiah 53 shows his future life and death. Also, verses such as Jeremiah 33:14 and 15 show that the Christ was the “promised Messiah.” But there is no need to promise the Messiah if he was already with the people. No clear verses say the Messiah was with Israel, and the Jews never understood that to be the case.

The lesson from this verse is that the people looked forward to the coming of the Messiah and “drank,” i.e., got strength and nourishment, from knowing that he was coming, just as we today get strength and nourishment from knowing that he is coming again.

10:7. Quoted from Exodus 32.6.

10:9. “We must not tempt the Lord.” This verse, and its context, make it clear that it is not at all wise to test the Lord. People regularly ignore God’s commands, as they are free to do, for this is “man’s day” (1 Cor. 4:3). But there is a day coming when God will hold people to account, and we will all want to be found righteous on that day. Although the verb “tempt” is present subjunctive, it has the intensifier “ek” as a prefix, and thus the translation “must” is considered appropriate (cp. ESV; NRSV; RSV; The Source NT; God’s New Covenant).

Many translations read “Christ” instead of “Lord” and use this verse as a support of the Trinity. Some Greek manuscripts read “Lord,” some read “God,” and some read “Christ,” and furthermore, the Church Fathers are divided as well, because different Fathers quoted the verse differently, clearly because they were reading manuscripts that differed from one another. The subject of textual criticism is very involved, and it is
common that scholars differ in their opinions as to which texts are original and which texts have been altered. In this case, there are early texts that read both ways, so the job of determining the original reading from textual evidence becomes more difficult. Although there are a wide variety of manuscripts, even old ones, that read “Christ,” as Bart Ehrman points out, “These arguments, however, are not persuasive. In fact, we know that most Christians had no difficulty at all in understanding how Christ could have been active in the affairs of the ancient Israelites. Most of them believed he was actively involved and read his involvement into Old Testament narratives on every possible occasion” (*The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*; pp. 89, 90). Ehrman goes on to point out why the text would have been changed to read “Christ” and shows that the Alexandrian text is usually considered more accurate, and the Alexandrian texts (Sinaiticus, B.C. 33) read “Lord.” We agree with Ehrman’s conclusions and the authors of the English versions that read “Lord,” and believe “Lord” was the original reading.

As it is translated in versions that take the word “Lord” as original, there is no Trinitarian inference or support (cp. ASV, Amplified Bible, GWN, NASB, NIV, NJB, Rotherham, RSV, etc.). There is only a Trinitarian inference if the manuscripts that read “Christ” are considered original.

Every translator will testify to the importance of context in determining the correct translation of Scripture. We feel the context makes it clear that “Lord” is the correct reading. Although there are many times that the Israelites were said to tempt “God” or “Yahweh” (often translated “the LORD”) in the Old Testament, there is not even a single reference to tempting Christ. Furthermore, there is not even a reference to tempting “adonay,” the generic word for “lord.” The Israelites tempted their God, Yahweh, never “Christ.”

By reading the 1 Corinthians 10:9 carefully, we obtain a vital clue to its meaning and the proper translation. The verse says that when the Israelites tempted “the Lord,” they were “destroyed by serpents.” This phrase allows us to find the exact record in the Old Testament that is being referred to. In Numbers 21:5, the Israelites “spoke against God” and then “Yahweh sent venomous snakes among them” (21:6). In the record of this event in the Old Testament, “God” and *Yahweh* are both mentioned, but “Christ” is never mentioned, neither is the generic Hebrew word for “lord.” Furthermore, there is no scripture anywhere in the Old Testament that says “Christ” poured out his “wrath,” and certainly not by sending serpents. Thus, if some Greek texts read “the Lord” and others read “Christ,” the context points to “Lord” as the correct interpretation.

There are some commentators, however, who assert that the context mentions Christ because 10:1 says that the Israelites drank of the rock, and the rock was Christ. We would first point out, as we have in the commentary, that actually 10:1 militates against the reading “Christ” in 10:9, because 10:1 says that the Christ was coming in the future, in which case he could not have been tempted by the Israelites (see commentary on 10:1). In fact, we know that Christ followed the Israelites by 1400 years. When Balaam the prophet said the Messiah was coming in the future (Num. 24:17), no one protested and said he was with them at that very time. In fact, all the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah coming in the future were never contested, or clarified as if they meant only that he would come “in the flesh” in the future but was with them at that time as a spirit.

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[For more discussion on this verse, see Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, pp. 89, 90; Don Snedeker, *Our Heavenly Father has No Equals*; pp. 441, 442].

10:13. “common to man.” This translation explains the Greek adjective *anthropinos* (#442 ἀνθρώπινος), meaning “pertaining to being human.” Paul is saying no temptation has taken hold of you that isn’t human—that is, “such as comes to a human being, and such as a human being may endure” (Lenski). We translate this “common to man” to avoid the confusion that this refers to temptations that originated by fellow humans. This is not the meaning, for Satan is directly or indirectly behind every temptation.

“but.” The particle *de* (#1161 δέ) is usually used when there is a weak contrast, or a pause, but it is often better represented by “and” than “but.” Here, *but* is more appropriate, to make clear the contrast between our temptation and God who does not tempt us (James 1:13). God is very much opposed to the temptation’s success. He will never allow the force of the temptation to exceed our ability to choose against it, and furthermore, not only will he assure this but “also” (*kai*) provide a way out. Therefore, man is without excuse. If he sins, he cannot blame God (James 1:13), nor can he claim the lure of the situation overpowered his will, nor that there was no other choice. If we sin, it is always our fault in that the choice was ours.


10:30. “defamed.” The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3]. Paul was being defamed, personally attacked, for behavior that was not sinful. This is done far too often in Christianity. We defame people and hurt their personal reputation over things that are our personal opinion (like what should be worn when, what hair styles are “right,” what cars people should drive, etc.). This is not the Christian way to behave. We have no right to defame others who are just living their own lives.

Chapter 11

11:4. “dishonors.” This is the Greek word *kataischuno* (#2617 καταισχύνω); see commentary on Romans 9:33, “put to shame.”

11:5. “with her head uncovered dishonors her head.” This verse shows how important to God it is that there be order in the church. Many verses in the NT let us know that God is a God of order and decency (cp. 1 Cor. 14:33). It was a custom among the Jews that women cover their heads in public. Although it is often taught that the Romans had that custom also, archaeologists and historians have provided enough evidence to show us that although women often covered their heads, it was not a hard and fast cultural norm. Nevertheless, among the Romans, untidy, or natural, free-flowing hair was often associated with unrestrained behavior or even prostitution. Thus, in light of the culture of the time, we can see why God did not want the church meeting to be the place where different cultures clashed and things were uncomfortable.

Proper attire was not the only thing in the first century that the cultures clashed over. The Jews had very strict laws about eating, while the Romans did not. That caused tension in the Church, which Paul addressed in Romans 14:13-21. In that section the
Word of God says, “It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall” (Rom. 14:21 NIV). The “do anything else” includes the way we dress—if it makes people uncomfortable, the loving thing is to not dress that way.

Although the simple clash of the Roman culture with the Jewish culture is enough to explain why Paul had to address the issue of women’s head coverings, there may also be another reason. It was becoming clear that men and women were one in Christ, both empowered by holy spirit, and both with important ministries in the Church. Thus it is possible, and suggested by some commentators, that the women were taking off their head coverings as a symbol of their equal position in Christ with the men in the Church. That is certainly a possibility, and if it is the case, then this verse shows us that equality in Christ does not remove the responsibility each Christian has not to turn the church into a place of uncomfortable debate. It also shows that there are certain gender differences between men and women that are reflected in attire even though the men and women are one in Christ and both able to minister in the congregation (see commentary on 1 Tim. 2:11-15). Thus, there are a few places in the NT that specifically address the way women dress, while not mentioning how men dress (cp. 1 Tim. 2:9).

It is important for us to understand that this verse is addressing the cultural norms of the time, and instructs women to cover their head (not their face) in public meetings. Today our cultural norms are not the same as in biblical times, and so women regularly go to church without a head covering. On the other hand, we see how Christians with the correct attitude understand the culture of a certain region or even individual church. If the people in a certain church put on their “Sunday best” for church, with ladies in dresses in men in a coat and tie, a loving Christian who visits that church will dress in the same way and not press his or her freedom in Christ.

“dishonors.” This is the Greek word kataischuno (καταισχύνω); see commentary on Romans 9:33, “put to shame.”

11:9. “man was not created for the woman, but the woman for the man.” The actual meaning of this verse has been hotly debated. Figure of Speech: Irony. By this irony God hopes to “wake up” the Corinthians to the fact that He placed all of them in the Body as it has pleased Him.

11:10. “symbol.” Something that represents something else, especially if the thing represented is immaterial or spiritual. A “sign” usually points to something else, not as much “represents” something else (as a road sign points to the condition of the road ahead, not “represents” the conditions, or the “signs” that Jesus did pointed to his Messiahship, not represented his Messiahship.)

11:17. “resulting in worse.” The NIV translation of this verse, while not literally following the Greek text, is a very clear dynamic equivalent translation, and catches the meaning of the verse: “your meetings do more harm than good.” This should be a very powerful lesson for all Christians, because our tendency is to say that if someone goes to church, that is a good thing. Not necessarily. Our gatherings should be a place where we are encouraged, challenged, taught what the Bible really says, and mentored in the Faith. The goal of the meeting is to produce strong Christians who are doing the will of God in their lives. If church has become a social gathering place, or a place where our sin is accepted and we are not challenged to change, or a place of education without instruction
in obedience, or a place where traditional teachings not based on the Bible are regularly taught as truth, then our meetings are doing more harm than good.

11:18. “as a congregation.” The Greek word “congregation” is ekklēsia (#1577 ἐκκλησία; see commentary on Matthew 16:18). The Greek text reads, en ekklēsia “in assembly,” which we represent in the REV as “as a congregation,” in other words, when your congregations get together. This is not just a chance meeting of friends, but a purposeful meeting of the “church.” The churches were small and usually met in homes (cp. Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon 1:2), although no doubt sometimes they found venues, even outdoors, when the entire congregation of believers in an area could be together. Sadly, even when the Christians in Corinth met as small groups, there were divisions among them.

11:21. “supper.” The Greek deipnon (#1173 δείπνον) means 1) the main meal of the day, 2) an elaborate dinner or feast for guests, or 3) a meal with cultic significance, such as the Passover or Lord’s supper. We have stayed with “supper” because “the Lord’s supper” is a part of Christian vocabulary, and in many places in the English speaking world, “supper” is the main meal of the day.

11:25. “new” The Greek kainos means new in quality. It is not just “new” in time, which would be neos, the New Covenant is new in quality. It was ratified at the last supper, and will be effective when Christ returns to earth and sets up his kingdom. Just because Christ ratified the New Covenant in his death does not mean it is in force. God gave Abraham the land by covenant, and yet he never saw it in his life, and in fact the Israelites never had the full extent of the land God promised in covenant, but they will get it in the Millennial Kingdom. Thus, there can be a large gap between when a covenant is made and when it is fulfilled. That is the case today. All one has to do is study in the OT what God says will happen when the New Covenant is in force to realize it is not in force yet. We today are living in the Administration of the Sacred Secret.

11:27. “in an unworthy manner.” The context tells us what that is in this case: the people of Corinth were not helping each other out. The rich came and were stuffing themselves and getting drunk, while those who had “nothing” (v. 22) went hungry. Thus, because the “body,” (the Church) was not recognized as one body with many members, each as important as the other, some people were weak and sick, and others had died.

11:29. “body.” Many versions have “body of the Lord,” or “the Lord’s body,” but in this verse the text just reads “body.” The reference is almost certainly an amphibologia (Bullinger: Figures. Double entendre). It refers to the body of Jesus which was broken as a sacrifice for others, and thus stands as an example of how we ought to live sacrificially for others; and it also refers to the fact that anyone who ate his fill and got drunk while another Christian nearby was starving did not properly discern the body, i.e., the Body of Christ, in which all people are members of one body, each of equal importance and each needed.

11:31. “accurately judged” is diakrino (#1252 διακρίνω), a word with many meanings. It is more than just “judge,” which is krino (#2919 κρίνω). We have to make an accurate judgment of ourselves. Where are we strong, where are we weak, how can we contribute, where are we in need of help or possibly in error? If the Corinthians were open to that kind of constructive criticism, and then did the hard work of self-correction, they would not be behaving in such an un-Christlike manner as to not share their food with each other.
we would not be judged." (krino) i.e., by the Lord, and even by circumstances now. 11:34. “And the rest.” There is more than just what is mentioned in Corinthians that needs attention, but Paul will deal with that personally when he arrives, which indicates that it is not essential that it be handled immediately.

Chapter 12

12:1. “spiritual matters.” The Greek text has the definite article “the” before “spiritual,” which may mean, as it seems apparent from the context, that the Corinthians had written Paul about spiritual matters even as they had about sexual matters (1 Cor. 7:1). Thus Paul would write about “the” spiritual matters, using the figure ellipsis to emphasize “spiritual.”

The word “spiritual” is pneumatikos (πνευματικός), which is an adjective, so most translations supply “gifts” as the noun that “spiritual” modifies. However, the context is much broader than gifts, so “gifts” is too narrow a word to supply as the noun in this particular context. “Things” usually refers more to concrete entities or objects, whereas “matters” refers more to ideas and concepts, so “matters” seems to be the best noun to supply in this context. In 1 Corinthians 14:1, “things” is more appropriate than “matters,” because we diligently pursue spiritual things.

“Spiritual matters” or “spiritual things” fits the subject of Chapters 12-14, which are about spiritual matters, including “gifts” (12:4), “service” (12:5), “working” (energizings) (12:6) and “manifestations” (12:7-10). It is common for translators to try to get the sense of the context and supply a noun to complete the sense of pneumatikos. For example, in Romans 15:27, it says the Gentiles share in the pneumatikos of the Jews. The NIV and ESV supply “blessings,” while the KJV and ASV say “things.” 1 Corinthians 2:15 uses pneumatikos, and the NIV supplies “man,” reading “spiritual man,” while the ESV supplies “person,” and reads “spiritual person,” and the KJV reads “he that is spiritual.” In 1 Corinthians 9:11, pneumatikos is used in the context of spiritual things that are sown into a person’s life, so the NIV supplies “seed,” reading “spiritual seed,” while the KJV supplies “things,” reading “spiritual things,” and the NRSV says, spiritual “good.”

The wide variety of spiritual matters being discussed in 1 Corinthians 12-14 dictates that “matters” or “things” be supplied to complete the sense of pneumatikos in 1 Corinthians 12:1, 14:1, etc. Those chapters are speaking about spiritual matters of many kinds, not just spiritual “gifts.” Adding the word “gifts” obscures what God had so clearly stated in the original text and causes people to be confused about the manifestations of holy spirit. [For more on “gifts,” see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:1]. 12:2. “mute” is a noun, not an adjective, and contrasts the mute idols with the living God. The Greek is worded in such a way as to emphasize the word “mute.” It is not just “mute idols,” but “the idols, the mute [ones].” It is factual, or course, that the pagan idols are mute, but it is also a slap at them, almost sarcasm. This verse echoes the Old Testament, which points out several times that idols cannot speak (Ps. 115:5; 135:16).

“led…led astray.” The difference between “led,” agō (ἀγέω) and “led astray” apagō (ἀπάγω) is one of intensity. Apagō has the sense of forcefully carried off. So
although the people did follow willingly, the forceful presentation and charisma of the pagan leaders was a powerful force in leading people astray.

The point that the verse is making is a powerful one. People trust their spiritual leaders to lead them to truth and right. However, Paul makes the point that when the Gentiles were led to idols, they were being led astray. This happens today with many teachers, who lead their flocks astray and into hurtful and harmful doctrines and practices.

12:3. “make known to you” (as per Fee, *New International Commentary on the New Testament*; etc.) sets the contrast with “I do not want you to be ignorant” in v. 1. The versions are divided as to the “en,” and whether it is an instrumental dative, “by” or should be translated as “in.”

“speaking in union with the spirit of God.” Speaking “in union with” the spirit comes from the preposition en, which describes a relationship (see commentary on Romans 6:3. Lenski also has, “in union with.”). Also, it can be instrumental and be translated “by,” however, that is not the primary meaning here as can be seen by the “in” in the last phrase of the verse. It is about being in a state of agreement or concord with the holy spirit. In the wider context of this section of Scripture about the manifestations of holy spirit (chapters 12-14) it can be seen that speaking “in” the spirit of God can include speaking in tongues, and it might well be thought by pagans that people speaking in tongues were cursing God, which Paul says does not happen.

“in the holy spirit.” In this context, the Greek word en (“in”) is more than just an instrumental dative for “by.” To be “in” the spirit is to be in a state of agreement or concord with the spirit such that one’s actions can agree with, and sometimes even flow from, the holy spirit. When a person says, “Jesus is Lord,” and really means it, that person’s words agree with God’s declaration about His Son. Anyone can mouth the words “Jesus is Lord,” but saying them without meaning them would not be “in,” (“in a state of agreement with”) the holy spirit and the words of God. An unsaved person can see the truth about Jesus and confess him as Lord and be “in” (in agreement with) the holy spirit and get saved.

The “the” is not needed in the Greek text before the words “holy spirit” because the preposition en can make the pneuma (spirit) definite without the article. In this case, the Greek text does not have a definite article before “holy spirit.” The preposition en is before the phrase which means it can be understood as if the “the” was actually present. In Greek, if a preposition governs a noun, it is the context that determines whether the noun is definite or not, and therefore whether there should be a “the” or not in the English translation. Daniel Wallace writes in *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (p. 247): “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.” A. T. Robertson writes: “…the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. …The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. …[As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.” Robertson then cites some examples that use ek, as does this verse in Matthew (*Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, pp. 790-792). [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]

12:4. “being distributed.” The Greek word is diairesis (#1243 διάιρεσις), it is plural, and it is generally used in reference to “distribution,” meaning that there are different distributions of the gifts, i.e., that different people are being given different gifts (See
Lenski, C. K. Barrett, and Rotherham). That the gifts differ is too obvious to mention, and misses the point. The gifts differ, but the point is that the gifts are distributed to different people, so the whole Body of Christ working together is necessary if we are to have all the gifts of Christ working fully.

“spirit.” The word *pneuma*, spirit, must be studied carefully because the word “spirit” can refer to the gift of holy spirit, or to Jesus, or to God, depending on the context (both Jesus and God are called the “Spirit”). There are a few reasons that “spirit” could refer to the gift of holy spirit: the fact that “spirit” in verse 3 refers to the gift of holy spirit; the fact that verses 4, 5, and 6 would then have the gift of holy spirit, the Lord (Jesus), and God; and the fact that although there are many “gifts,” there is only one gift of holy spirit. However, there are also some reasons that “Spirit” can refer to Jesus or God. Verse 4 and 11 are almost parallel, with the “Spirit” distributing to people. If “Spirit” in verse 4 refers to God, the word “Lord” in verse 5 refers to Jesus Christ, and “God” in verse 6 refers to God, then we have a chiasmic structure that is common in other parts of Scripture: “A—B—A,” in this case, “God—Lord—God.” The weight of evidence, however, seems to favor that “spirit” in verse four refers to the gift of holy spirit.

12:6. “energizings...energizes.” If anyone is going to do signs, miracles, or wonders, he must understand that he must, by trusting God, bring the power of God to bear on any given situation, but it is always God who provides the power, the energy, for the event to happen. See commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:20, “ambassadors.”

12:7. “manifestation.” The word “manifestation” is the Greek word *phanerōsis*, (#5321 φανέρωσις), and it means, “to cause something to be fully known by revealing clearly and in some detail – ‘to make known, to make plain, to reveal, to bring to the light, to disclose, revelation’” (Louw Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*). The English word “manifestation” comes from two Latin words, *manus*, meaning “hand,” and *festare*, meaning “to touch.” A “manifestation” is something concrete and tangible that can be “touched with the hand,” so to speak. The gift of holy spirit is not tangible, because it is spirit. That is why Scripture does not promise that one will feel anything when he gets born again. God may accompany someone’s New Birth with a miracle in the senses world so that he knows it without a doubt, but that is rare and certainly not promised.

To understand this verse, indeed, 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14, it is vital to understand the difference between the “gift” and the “manifestation” of holy spirit. The “gift” is the holy spirit itself, and each Christian receives the “gift of holy spirit,” at the moment he is saved, born again (Acts 2:38; Eph. 1:13). The gift of holy spirit that is sealed in each Christian cannot be detected by the five senses. No one can see, hear, smell, taste, or touch it. However, the gift of holy spirit inside each Christian can be manifested, brought forth into evidence, in the nine ways set forth in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10.

A “manifestation” is detectable by the five senses. Electric energy in a light bulb is manifested (made obvious) in the form of light and heat. A manifestation of the chicken pox virus, which cannot be seen, is a rash with small pimple-like sores.

The multipurpose “Swiss Army” knife (today there are many “multi-purpose” knives that are similar) is a good example of the difference between a gift and a manifestation. The traditional Swiss Army knife has a red handle, and many come with two blades (big and little), two screwdrivers (flathead and Phillips), a can opener, an awl,
scissors, a file, and a pair of tweezers (nine manifestations!). If you receive one Swiss army knife as a gift, you can use (bring into manifestation) any or all of its implements, and cut, snip, tweeze, etc. The one gift of the Swiss knife has many manifestations. Similarly, the one gift God gives each believer is holy spirit, which can be manifested in nine ways.

“of the spirit.” There has been much scholarly discussion about the exact nature of the genitive, “of” in the phrase, “the manifestation of the spirit.” The confusion is in large part due to the fact that most theologians think the “Spirit” is God. The spirit in this verse is the gift of God, holy spirit, and the genitive is the genitive of origin or production. The gift of holy spirit is the source of the manifestations, and the phrase means, the manifestations that originate with, or are produced by, the spirit of God. A somewhat parallel phrase occurs in 2 Corinthians 4:2, which has “the manifestation of the truth” (KJV, which has the articles accurately placed). One cannot see the “truth” in the apostle’s minds, but it is there, and it is the origin of their behavior, which can be seen by everyone. The gift of holy spirit and “truth” are invisible in a person, but they produce manifestations that can be clearly seen in the senses world.

“common good.” The Bible specifically says that the manifestation of holy spirit is for the “common good.” Benefits are missed, or consequences occur, when Christians do not walk with the power of the manifestations of holy spirit. Imagine the Bible with no manifestations of the power of God—no record of Moses smiting the rock, or Joshua stopping the Jordan River, or Samson pushing down the pagan temple, or God telling Samuel to anoint Saul as king, or Elijah calling down fire from heaven, or God telling Jonah to go to Nineveh.

The Bible would be much less exciting, and would bring much less hope and blessing, if the power of God were absent from its pages. If Ananias had not walked in the power of the manifestations, he would not have had the blessing of healing Paul (Acts 9:10-18). If Peter did not walk in the power of the manifestations, he would not have had the blessing of being the first to lead Gentiles into the new birth (Acts 10:9-46). If Paul had not walked in the power of the manifestations, Eutychus would have remained dead (Acts 20:9-12). If a Christian does not speak in tongues, he misses out on its being a sign from God that he is saved (1 Cor. 14:22). Similarly, if the manifestations are absent or misused, there are consequences. If everyone in the congregation speaks in tongues at the same time, for example, an unbeliever may get the wrong impression (1 Cor. 14:23).

12:8. “For to one.” This verse (and verses nine and ten), seem to indicate that each Christian gets only one manifestation, something that has confused many Christians. When we understand what the manifestations of holy spirit are, it becomes obvious that each Christian has the ability to manifest each of them. For example, 1 Corinthians 14:5 says it is the will of God that every Christian speak in tongues, and 1 Corinthians 14:23 gives an example of everyone in the Church in Corinth speaking in tongues. But if every Christian spoke in tongues, and each could only have one “gift,” then no Christian could have any other “gift.” That cannot be the case. For one thing, every Christian is encouraged to speak in tongues, and also to prophesy and interpret (1 Cor. 14:5). That means each Christian is encouraged to operate three manifestations, not just one! But there is more. The manifestation, “a message of knowledge” is God or the Lord Jesus giving knowledge to believers by revelation. Every believer can get guidance from God or the Lord via the gift of holy spirit inside them. But if each believer can only have one
“gift,” then they would not be able to speak in tongues and get revelation too. These examples should be very clear, and the evidence that each believer can operate all of the manifestations becomes even clearer as we study the subject. For example, every believer needs to have spiritually energized faith to accomplish God’s will in their lives. But since “faith” is in this list that many people say a person only gets “one” of, that would mean if a believer had this “faith,” that would be the one and only thing on the list he would get. Could the Bible really teach that if a person speaks in tongues, or prophesies, or gets revelation knowledge from the Lord, he cannot have faith? Of course not! That makes no sense.

This verse is not saying that each person only gets “one” manifestation. It is teaching that God energizes different people at different times. At any given time or meeting, God energized different people in different ways. To make sure that things in the Church are done “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40 KJV), at any given time the Lord energizes different manifestations in different believers. Thus at a Christian meeting, one person will speak in tongues and interpret, another will prophesy, another will minister healing, etc. [For the difference between “to another” and “to a different one” see commentary on 12:9].

“is given through the spirit.” The manifestations of the spirit come via the gift of holy spirit. We must be clear that God can give knowledge or wisdom to people in many ways. For example, He spoke to Moses via a burning bush. He spoke to Gideon via an angel. He can send a prophet. Messages given in ways such as that are revelation, but they are not “manifestations of holy spirit.”

To be a manifestation of holy spirit, the revelation has to come from God or the Lord Jesus Christ to the Christian via the gift of holy spirit within him. In most cases in the Old Testament and the Gospels, when God wanted a person to prophesy or, like Joseph, to be a wise ruler, He put holy spirit on him so He could more fully communicate with him. Joseph had the spirit of God upon him so he could hear from God (Gen. 41:38). Moses and Joshua had the spirit of God (Num. 11:17; 27:18); the seventy elders of Israel had spirit upon them (Num. 11:25). God put his spirit on Bezalel so he could get the wisdom of God on how to build the Tabernacle (Exod. 31:1-5). Judges of Israel such as Othniel (Judg. 3:10), Gideon (Judg. 6:34), Jephthah (Judg. 11:29), and Samson (Judg. 14:19), had the spirit of God to help them rule and fight. King Saul had the spirit, and prophesied (1 Sam. 10:6). When the spirit of God came on Amasai, he heard from God and prophesied (1 Chron. 12:18). So did Azariah (2 Chron. 15:1 and 2), Jahaziel (2 Chron. 20:14), Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:20), and others. Furthermore, it was holy spirit that gave David the power to hear from God and get the plans for the Temple (1 Chron. 28:12). John the Baptist had the spirit of God upon him from birth (Luke 1:15). Thus, when we speak of “a message of wisdom” and “a message of knowledge” being manifestations of holy spirit, we are speaking of God or the Lord Jesus giving direct revelation to the person via the holy spirit born within that individual.

It is very important to realize that when the Bible says “manifestation of the spirit,” it means exactly that—these are evidences of holy spirit, not natural abilities that God has given to the person. They are the presence of holy spirit being made visible. We make this point because some people treat these manifestations as if they were talents that some people have, with no specific connection to the gift of holy spirit they received when they were born again. It is true that God does give different people different talents.
Some people sing well; some people are very athletic; some are very intelligent; some people are great artists, etc. These are all God-given talents, but they are not manifestations of holy spirit. On the other hand, the manifestations of the spirit such as speaking in tongues, interpretation, prophecy, trust (“faith”), gifts of healings, and miracles, require both the power of holy spirit and the cooperation and action of the believer involved. The manifestations of holy spirit do not operate apart from the free will of the believer. Take speaking in tongues, for example. The Lord will provide the words to say, but the believer must do the speaking. The manifestations are good examples of us being “fellow-workers” with God (1 Cor. 3:9).

“message.” The Greek word is logos (λόγος). We translate these manifestations as a “message” because the Greek word logos means an intelligible communication. The first definition of logos in Thayer’s Greek Lexicon is “a word, yet not in the grammatical sense (equivalent to vocabulum, the mere name of an object), but language, vox, i.e., a word which, uttered by the living voice, embodies a conception or idea” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon). The NIV uses “message,” and other versions, such as the RSV, NRSV, and NJB, use “utterance,” which would be fine as long as it is understood that it is the Lord who “utters” the message to the person via the gift of holy spirit, and not the person who “utters” the message of wisdom to someone else.

The translation “message” communicates accurately exactly what the Lord gives by revelation: a message. The message may come in many ways: an audible voice, a picture or vision, a physical sensation, an emotion, or a firm realization (an inner knowing). The King James Version says “word of wisdom” and “word of knowledge” and so those terms are widely used, and “word” is used for “message” in Christian jargon. Nevertheless, it could be misleading to a new Bible student who might think of revelation as “words,” especially because in our experience the majority of the revelation any person receives is not a “word” and not even by “words,” but much more often by an impression or picture.

In this verse, the Greek word logos is used of individual revelation to people. This is important because both logos and rhema (ῥῆμα) are used of individual messages of revelation given to Christians. We say that to correct the error of some Bible teachers who say that rhema refers to individual revelation while logos refers to the Word of God. This verse, 1 Corinthians 12:8, is a good example of logos being used of revelation to an individual, and examples of rhema as individual revelation include: Matthew 4:4; Luke 2:29; 3:2. In contrast, examples of rhema being used of the whole word of God include 1 Peter 1:25 (cp. Heb. 6:5).

“A message of wisdom.” Definition: A message of wisdom is God or the Lord Jesus Christ, by revelation, providing a person with wisdom. It is God or the Lord giving a person direction, or guiding them in how to apply the knowledge he has about something.

For an explanation of how a message of wisdom works, see the commentary on “a message of knowledge.” Both “a message of knowledge” and “a message of wisdom” are revelation [For more on what “revelation” is and how it works, see commentary on Galatians 1:12].

For years scholars have discussed the manifestations of holy spirit, and there are many differing opinions. For example, reading different commentaries shows that some scholars think “a message of wisdom” is being able to understand the wisdom of God, or perhaps being able to express the wisdom of God. The Living Bible, for example, calls “a
message of wisdom,” “the ability to give wise advice.” Many people, saved and unsaved, give wise advice. That is not a manifestation of holy spirit. The manifestation of a message of wisdom occurs when God gives a Christian a message about what to do in a given situation via the gift of holy spirit.

The reason for the discussion and the uncertainty is that the manifestations are not defined in 1 Corinthians. There is a good reason for their not being defined. It is common in all writing that authors leave out details and descriptions that everyone knows. Writers today commonly mention cars, planes, the Internet, and thousands of other things that they do not explain because the readers know what those things are. There are many examples of this in the Bible also.

A good example occurs in the Gospel of Luke. Luke did, for the time in which he lived, a good job of dating the birth of Christ by telling us it was about the time of the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria (Luke 2:2). No doubt everyone in Luke’s day who read that said, “Ah, now I know when the birth of Christ occurred.” Today, however, not much information about Quirinius has survived the centuries, and so there is controversy about the date of the birth of Christ. Another example involves biblical animals. No doubt when Job was written, everyone knew what the “behemoth” was (Job 40:15). Today we do not know enough information for scholars to agree on what the animal is. Another example involves nations. Genesis and other books of the Bible mention the “Hittites” (Gen. 10:15), but that nation was lost in history so completely that until the nineteenth century when archaeologists uncovered entire Hittite cities, some scholars even doubted their existence. (see Joseph Free, Archaeology and Bible History, p. 108.) Nevertheless, the Bible never describes the Hittites because the biblical readers knew exactly who they were and where they lived.

The people of Corinth and other Christians in the first century were familiar with the manifestations of holy spirit, so there was no need for Paul to explain what they were or how they worked. God’s people had been manifesting holy spirit for generations (except for speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues, but the Corinthian Church was familiar with those by the time Paul penned Corinthians). God had put holy spirit upon people in the Old Testament such as Moses, Joshua, Deborah, David, Elijah, and many others, and those people could then hear knowledge or wisdom from God (thus, the message of knowledge and wisdom). They had the trust (“faith”) to do what God asked of them even when it seemed impossible, they did miracles, and when Jesus came on the scene, he taught his disciples to heal and cast out demons. The believers of Corinth were familiar with all these manifestations, and of course Paul, who founded the Church in Corinth on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18), had also instructed them.

Some scholars have tried to look in Greek culture to find the meaning of the manifestations based on the definitions of the Greek words themselves (for example, “wisdom” was very important in the Greek culture). That misses the point, and for the most part has been unhelpful in discovering the nature of the manifestations, and is one reason why there is so much debate about the manifestations by scholars. The manifestations were not Greek experiences or concepts, but the timeless manifestations, outward evidences, of the inward presence of holy spirit. These manifestations were not to be found in Greek culture, vocabulary, or history, but in the experiences of the men and women of God throughout the centuries.
English culture today is somewhat similar to the Greek culture in that there has been very little accurate exposure to the power of holy spirit and very little accurate teaching on it. Therefore, we need a clear explanation of the manifestations so we can understand them. As the Greeks of old, we need to get our understanding from the Bible itself and then add to our understanding by utilizing and experiencing the manifestations.

“a message of knowledge.” A message of knowledge is God or the Lord Jesus Christ, by revelation, providing knowledge to a person; i.e., giving that person information, insight, and understanding about something.

The message of wisdom and the message of knowledge are “revelation” manifestations, and we will cover them in this one entry because they often work seamlessly together, with a single revelation from God consisting of both a message of knowledge and a message of wisdom. We call these the “revelation” manifestations because they deal with God or the Lord Jesus “revealing” something [For more on what “revelation” is and how it works, see commentary on Galatians 1:12].

We can understand the difference between “a message of knowledge” and “a message of wisdom” by understanding the difference between “knowledge” and “wisdom.” Knowledge is information about a situation, while wisdom is what to do about the situation. The first definition of “wisdom” in Webster’s 1828 Dictionary captures its essence: “the right use or exercise of knowledge.” Since the time of Adam and Eve, it has been important for mankind to hear from God. When God speaks to individuals, if what He says is knowledge, i.e., information and insight, the revelation is “a message of knowledge.” If what He says is wisdom, i.e., direction or what to do about a given situation, the revelation is “a message of wisdom.”

A good example of a message of knowledge would be Joseph interpreting Pharaoh’s dream (Gen. 41:25-27). God gave Joseph knowledge about the meaning of the dream, which was that there would be seven years of plenty, then seven years of famine. That revelation is a message of knowledge because it only gives information, the facts of the case.

When God gives someone a message of knowledge, He may or may not need to give a message of wisdom so the person will know what to do. For example, if a person has lost his car keys, all God has to do is let the person know where they are, He does not have to give a message of wisdom and say, “Go get them.” The person will do that without having to have a message of wisdom. Often, however, God will give a message of wisdom when He gives a message of knowledge. What if God had told Joseph about the years of plenty and the years of famine, but then never said what to do about it? The best Joseph could have done in that case would have been to pick a reasonable solution. However, God did give Joseph a message of wisdom when He told Joseph to store up twenty percent of the harvest during the plenteous years for the upcoming famine years (Gen. 41:33-36). When God gives a person direction, and tells him what to do, then it is “a message of wisdom.”

The Bible is full of examples of “a message of knowledge” and “a message of wisdom,” and God gives us numerous examples so we will understand how He communicates and directs us. The Bible usually does not make it clear whether these examples are via the gift of holy spirit or simply the audible voice of God, but they are all revelation nevertheless. In Numbers 11:16-20 Moses gets both knowledge and wisdom from God. In Joshua 1:2-9 God gives Joshua both knowledge and wisdom. In Judges 7:4
God gave Gideon both knowledge and wisdom. In 1 Samuel 8:7-9 God gave Samuel wisdom, telling him what to do, and knowledge, telling him why to do it. In 1 Kings 14:5, God gave Ahijah knowledge of what was going to happen, and wisdom, telling him what to say. In 1 Kings 17:2-4, God gave Elijah wisdom by telling him what to do, and knowledge, telling him what would happen. These are only a few examples of “a message of knowledge” and “a message of wisdom,” but we can learn a lot from them. For one thing, we see that these manifestations could work independently, but they often work seamlessly together in one “message” from God. Another thing we can see is why God did not need to define the manifestations to the people of Corinth. God’s revelations of knowledge and wisdom are clearly laid out in the Bible and are essential to living a powerful and successful spiritual life.

A message of knowledge and a message of wisdom are God “speaking” to us to guide and help us. It is inconceivable that He would not do that for each and every Christian. Surely He would not give guidance to one Christian and not to another. Every Christian can, and needs to, manifest holy spirit in messages of knowledge and wisdom in order to live a rich and successful Christian life. No doubt most Christians have heard from God via the manifestations without even realizing it. Although there are times when God gives a message of knowledge or wisdom in such a clear and powerful way that it cannot be missed, usually God speaks in a “gentle whisper” or “a still small voice.” (1 Kings 19:12; NIV, KJV).

We need to be aware that there is a difference between “a message of knowledge” and “the manifestation of a message of knowledge” and also between “a message of wisdom” and “the manifestation of a message of wisdom.” A message of knowledge or wisdom can come from God in many ways: God’s audible voice (Deut. 4:12); an angel (Judges 13:3-5); a miracle such as a donkey speaking (Num. 22:28, 30) or handwriting on a wall (Dan. 5:5). That type of revelation is a message of knowledge or a message of wisdom, but it is not the “manifestation” of a message of knowledge or wisdom because it did not come via the gift of holy spirit.

The “manifestation of a message of knowledge (or wisdom)” is a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit, which means the information comes from God or the Lord to the person via the gift of holy spirit inside the person. One thing that is important to realize and keep in mind is that a message of knowledge and a message of wisdom are manifestations of holy spirit, but they come via the human mind. The fact that the revelation from God comes to our minds via the spirit opens the door to a few different problems: first, that we may not be sure whether we are receiving revelation or “just thinking something,” second, we may think we are hearing from God when we are not, and third, we may think that a “thought” was just us thinking when it really was revelation from the Lord. It is noteworthy that the Greek word pneuma (as well as the Hebrew word ruach) is used of both our thoughts and emotions, and the “spirit” God gives us, and it can sometimes be very hard to distinguish revelation from our thoughts.

12:9. “to a different one.” God has placed the nine manifestations of holy spirit into three groups, or categories. Most English versions are not sensitive to this, and read “to one” or “to another” eight times. However, there are actually two different Greek words, allos (#243 ἄλλος) and heteros (#2087 ἱερός), that need to be properly understood and translated, rather than both of them simply being translated “to another.” In Greek, allos was generally used to express a numerical difference and denotes “another of the same
sort,” while *heteros* usually means a qualitative difference and denotes “another of a different sort.” When a list is put together, and the items are said to be *allos*, they are of the same kind or nature. When they are said to be *heteros*, they are different in nature. Thus what we see in this section is God separating the manifestations into three groups, dividing the groups by the word *heteros*, which we showed in brackets when we quoted the verses. In our translation, we used “another” when the Greek word was *allos*, and “different one” when it was *heteros*.

Studying the groups reveals that two manifestations are revelation (hearing from God), five of them relate to the power of God, and two are oriented toward worship.

- **Revelation**: A message of knowledge; a message of wisdom
- **Power**: Trust (“faith”), gifts of healing; miracles; prophecy; discerning of spirits
- **Worship**: Speaking in tongues; interpretation of tongues

Although it is helpful to study these manifestations separately so we can best understand them, we need to be aware that we are doing that only for the sake of clarity. God never intended them to be completely separate and distinct in the lives of the believers who experience them. He is our Father and He wants a relationship with us, and He wants us to be effective fellow-workers with Him (1 Cor. 3:9). In order to do that, must be able to worship God (the worship group), hear from Him (the revelation group) and work for Him (the power group). In the day-to-day life of a believer who is striving to love God, live a holy life, and do God’s will, the manifestations will often work seamlessly and result in great blessing for the believer and the people affected. For example, a Christian woman, let’s call her “Susan,” may be by herself enjoying worshipping God by singing in tongues to some Christian music she is playing. Then the phone rings and it is her friend who needs prayer because many things are going wrong in her life and today she is sick. Susan immediately feels the leading of the Lord to pray for specifics about her friend’s life (the revelation manifestations at work) and then commands healing to take place in the name of Jesus Christ (faith and healing). By the time she gets off the phone, her friend is feeling better emotionally and physically. In this scenario, Susan did not think to herself, “Now I need a message of knowledge. Now I need a message of wisdom. Now I need the manifestation of trust.” No, she had a relationship with God and love for her friend, and the manifestations worked together seamlessly to produce the “common good” mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:7.

“trust.” The manifestation of trust is a person having the confidence or trust that what God or the Lord Jesus Christ has revealed to him by revelation (a message of knowledge or a message of wisdom), will come to pass or come to pass at his command. The manifestation of trust is the first manifestation that God places in the second group of manifestations, which we call the “power” manifestations. We believe that trust is the foundation of the power manifestations. “Trust” is the translation of the Greek word *pistis*, (#4102 πίστις) which means “trust,” “confidence” or “assurance.” (cp. Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *Don’t Blame God!* Chapter 10, “Keep the Faith”). We like to use the word “trust.”

It is important to distinguish the biblical definition of “faith” from today’s definition that has permeated the Christian Church and society. When most people think of “faith,” they think of it in terms of the modern definition: “firm belief in something for
which there is no proof” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*; 11th edition). When religious people have no proof for what they believe, we often hear them say, “You just have to take it by faith.” It is vital to understand that “belief in something for which there is no proof” is not the biblical definition of “faith.”

The biblical definition of “faith” is “trust,” and we trust things only after they have been proven to us. Jesus never asked anyone to believe he was the Messiah without proof. He healed the sick, raised the dead, and did miracles, and he asked people to believe the miracles that he did (John 10:38). Similarly, God does not ask us to believe Him without proof. He has left many evidences that He exists and that His Word is true. Thus when God asks us to have “faith” (trust), He is not asking us to believe something without proof. God proves Himself to us, and because of that we trust Him, that is, we trust what He says to us.

1 Corinthians 12:9 uses the word trust (“faith”), but it is in the context of the manifestations of the spirit (12:7). Thus, “trust” in 12:9 is the “manifestation of trust,” not just our regular “trust” (“faith”). All of us have trust in a large number of things. In fact, ordinary life would be impossible without trust. A person would not sit down if he did not trust the chair would hold him. God asks us to trust that Jesus has been raised from the dead because the Bible, history, and life give plenty of evidence for it.

In contrast to ordinary trust, the manifestation of trust is necessary to accomplish the special tasks that God, by revelation, asks us to do. For example, Jesus said that a person with trust could tell a mountain to be cast into the ocean and it would be done (Mark 11:23). Well, all of us have seen mountains, and we know that we do not have the human power to move them, so how can we just “trust” that we can cast a mountain into the sea just by commanding it to happen? We need to access the power of God to move the mountain. To be able to “trust” that God’s power is available to us to perform a miracle we need God to tell us we can do it.

The way the manifestation of trust works is that God first tells us to do something by revelation. Then, having the revelation from God that we can do the miracle, we trust the revelation and command the miracle to happen. The trust we must have in what God told us by revelation is “the manifestation of trust,” and when we truly trust what God has revealed to us, miracles happen.

Moses brought water out of a rock by the manifestation of trust (Exod. 17:5 and 6), Gideon defeated the Midianites by the manifestation of trust (Judg. 6:16), Elijah multiplied the oil and bread by the manifestation of trust (1 Kings 17:14-16), and the other great miracles of the Bible were done by the manifestation of trust. When it comes to miracles and gifts of healings, we need the manifestation of trust because we cannot heal the sick or do miracles by our human power. God must give us a message of knowledge and a message of wisdom, letting us know that it is His will for us to heal someone or do a miracle, and then we must trust God that since He gave us the revelation to do the miracle, we can in fact do it.

Every Christian needs to utilize the manifestation of trust. Christ said that when people received holy spirit they would receive power (Acts 1:8), but no one can operate the power of God without the trust to do so. Since every Christian needs to use the manifestation of trust to bring to pass the revelation that God gives him, every Christian has the ability to manifest trust. Thus, we see that the manifestation of trust, like a
message of knowledge and a message of wisdom, is for every Christian, not just certain ones.

The understanding of the manifestation of trust is obscured by the fact that often the Bible just says “trust” when the context dictates it is the manifestation of trust that is being referred to. God expects us to know what the Bible says about the manifestation of trust and how it works. While there are many records where the revelation from God clearly precedes the person operating the manifestation of trust and accomplishing the miracle, many records do not explicitly state that God gave revelation first. Although this could seem confusing, it is simple to understand. God expects us to understand how the manifestation of trust works by studying the whole Bible. If we cannot do something by our natural human ability, then we need God’s power, and that means we must have a word (revelation) from Him that we can have trust in. Once God gives us the revelation we can then trust what He says and command the miracle, which God’s power then brings to pass.

In the case of Moses turning the Nile River to blood, the Bible tells us God gave the revelation to Moses of what to do, then Moses trusted God and did it (Exod. 7:14-20). When Moses split the Red Sea, God gave him the revelation of what to do, and Moses trusted and did it (Exod. 12:16, 21). When Joshua conquered Jericho, God told Joshua exactly what to do (Josh. 6:2-6) and Joshua trusted what God said (operated the manifestation of trust), and brought the miracle to pass. When David battled the Philistines, he did not just go to battle in his own strength. He first got a revelation from God that he would win the battle, then had trust in the revelation he received and went to war and won (2 Sam. 5:19-21). There are many records that show God giving revelation to a person who then trusted the revelation and brought the miracle to pass.

There are, however, many times in the Bible where the text does not explicitly say God gave revelation first. Does that mean that God did not give revelation in those cases? No. In order for there to be “trust,” there has to be something to trust in. No one can just “trust” to divide an ocean or move a mountain. No human has that power. So unless God tells us by revelation that He will do the miracle, we have nothing to trust in. We do not just have “trust;” we trust in something.

The fact that God does not always tell us in His word about the need for revelation before the manifestation of trust explains why, for example, so many people read Jesus’ teaching about casting a mountain into the sea (Matt. 11:22, 23) and are confused. The context of Jesus’ teaching about the mountain was him cursing a fig tree. But he did not do that without revelation from His Father. He told his disciples that he could not do anything of himself, but did what the Father showed him (John 5:19; cp. John 5:30; 8:28). Thus in the context of acting by revelation and operating the manifestation of trust, he spoke of casting a mountain into the sea.

Hebrews 11 is the great chapter on trust. But if we closely examine the records, we can see that the trust in the chapter is mostly the manifestation of trust. Enoch was a prophet who heard from God (Heb. 11:5; Jude 1:14). Noah received revelation to build the ark (Heb. 11:7; Gen. 6:13-22); God gave Abraham revelation to move to Canaan, and Abraham obeyed, operating the manifestation of trust (Heb. 11:8; Gen. 12:1). Sarah gave birth to Isaac by the manifestation of trust, trusting in God’s specific promise to her (Gen. 18:10-15; Heb. 11:11). Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice because of a specific revelation from God (Heb. 11:17; Gen. 22:1). Moses kept the Passover by trust, because
he trusted what God said to do and how to do it (Heb. 11:8; Exod. 12:1-14). Moses also split the Red Sea by the manifestation of trust in response to the revelation God gave him (Heb. 11:29; Exod. 12:16, 21). Joshua’s trust in the revelation God gave him caused the walls of Jericho to fall (Heb. 11:30; Josh. 6:2-6). These are just some of the examples of the manifestation of trust in the Bible, and they show us that we do not just “have trust,” we trust what God has told us.

When we understand the manifestation of trust we can see how inseparably it works with the other manifestations of the spirit. The manifestation of word of knowledge or word of wisdom is God telling us what we can do. The manifestation of trust is our trusting that what God just told us is true and is the reason we then act on what He said to bring the miracle or healing to pass, and the manifestation of miracles or healings is the power of God being applied and accomplishing the miracle or healing. To be truly effective for God, the Christian needs the confidence to operate all nine manifestations of the gift of holy spirit. [For more on revelation and how revelation works, see commentary on Galatians 1:12].

“gifts of healings” is a person exercising his God-given spiritual ability to heal by the power of God, according to what God or the Lord Jesus has revealed to him by revelation (a message of knowledge or a message of wisdom).

We cover the manifestations of gifts of healings and working of miracles together because they are similar in many ways. The “gifts [plural] of healings [plural]” is so called because God does multiple healings, and each of them is a gift, done out of His grace or mercy. Gifts of healings and working of miracles are manifestations of holy spirit because it takes a believer to do them by the power of God that he has been given. It is very important to realize that it is people, empowered by holy spirit within, who do healings and miracles. On rare occasions God heals or does a miracle without human agency, but that is not “the manifestation” of gifts of healings or miracles because the gift of holy spirit inside a Christian was not employed.

To do a healing or miracle, several manifestations come into action. First, the person needs a message of knowledge and/or a message of wisdom to know what the situation is and what to do about it. Second, he needs the manifestation of trust to bring to pass the healing or miracle. Third, he must represent Christ on earth and, via the power of God, bring to pass the miracle as God supplies the energy for it. Notice how Peter raised Tabitha: he said, “Tabitha, get up” (Acts 9:40). Then she got up from the dead. Peter spoke the miracle into being. First, Peter prayed. Then, when he had revelation from the Lord to go ahead, he raised her from the dead by the power of God. Once Peter received the revelation to raise Tabitha, he performed the miracle. We believe that there would be more miracles and healings in Christendom today if Christians would step out and really trust what the Lord tells them to do. Too often we are waiting for God to do Himself what He has given us the spiritual power to do.

It is not our intention to demean the power of prayer in any way. Christians are commanded to pray, and should do so as much as possible. However, when God or the Lord Jesus gives us the revelation to do a healing or miracle, that is not the time to pray, it is the time to step out and act, trusting that the Lord will energize the miracle as we command it to come to pass. If the miracle or healing takes time, the one receiving the revelation must stay keep on trusting and praying to see it accomplished.
Jesus’ apostles and disciples had holy spirit upon them (John 14:17), which is why he could send them out to heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons (Matt. 10:8; Luke 10:9). Furthermore, Jesus said that when people have holy spirit, they have power (Acts 1:8). It is clear that since every Christian has the gift of holy spirit, then every Christian has the power to do healings and miracles (Mark 16:17 and 18, John 14:12), just as the disciples of Christ and the prophets of old did. We need to increase our trust and step forth boldly to do what the Lord directs us to do. We realize that although the presence of holy spirit gives each Christian the spiritual power to do healings and miracles, not everyone is called to walk in that kind of ministry. There is a difference between inherent spiritual ability and how that ability will actually be evidenced in the life of an individual Christian. Nevertheless, we assert that many more Christians would be doing healings and miracles if they knew they had the ability, and were confident to act on the spiritual power they have.

The manifestations of gifts of healings and working of miracles are often interwoven. There are certainly miracles that are not healings, such as when Moses parted the sea so the Israelites could escape Egypt. Also, there are healings that are not miracles, when, although the natural power of the body to heal itself is augmented by the healing power of God, the healing is not instantaneous. However, there are many miracles of healing in the Bible, such as the instantaneous healing of Bartimaeus, who was blind (Mark 10:46-52). Also, casting out a demon can be a miracle (Mark 9:39).

**12:10. “energizings of miracles.”** The manifestation of working of miracles is a person exercising his God-given spiritual ability to do miracles by the power of God, according to what God or the Lord Jesus has revealed to him by revelation (a message of knowledge or a message of wisdom). For an explanation of the manifestation, see “gifts of healings” in verse 9 above. The phrase “energizings of miracles” is working more than one miracle and represents that the verb is plural in the Greek.

“**prophecy.”** The manifestation of prophecy is speaking, writing, or otherwise communicating a message from God to a person or persons. God or the Lord Jesus gives the Christian a message of knowledge or a message of wisdom via the holy spirit born inside him, and when he gives that message to someone else it is prophecy. The revelation that is spoken as prophecy can come in the moment, coming almost word by word as the speaker says them, something we refer to as “inspirational prophecy.” However, it can also come as a complete revelation given to the speaker before it is spoken as prophecy, or prophecy can come as a combination, with some revelation coming beforehand and some coming as the prophecy is spoken. In the Old Testament, when a person had holy spirit, he or she almost always prophesied. That is why Joel said that when holy spirit was poured out on all believers, they would prophesy (Joel 2:28), and why Peter, in his teaching on the Day of Pentecost, referenced Joel (cp. Acts 2:17, 18).

God says His servants will prophesy, so there should be little argument about it. The manifestation of prophecy is to strengthen, encourage and comfort people (1 Cor. 14:3). It can reveal the secrets of people’s hearts so that they can be closer to God (1 Cor. 14:24 and 25). A study of prophecy in Scripture shows that prophecy is part of the power of God, which is why God places prophecy in the “power” group of the manifestations. Some Bible teachers have placed prophecy in the “worship” group of manifestations, but prophecy is not primarily worship, it is speaking a message from God to people. It is used
in a worship service, yes, but that does not make it worship. At any given Christian service all the manifestations may come into play, depending on the needs of the people.

Many Christians do not prophesy, but not because they do not have the spiritual ability. Scripture makes it clear that every Christian has the power to prophesy because of the presence of holy spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:17; 1 Cor. 14:1, 5, and 24). If a Christian does not prophesy, either he has not been sufficiently instructed, or he does not have the trust to step out on what he has been given, or he does not want to prophesy.

There is a reason why each Christian should covet to prophesy. Bringing God’s messages to His people is not only a tremendous privilege, it is essential for the well-being of the Church. A study of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, reveals how valuable the prophets were in the spiritual wholeness of the people of Israel. Prophecy is not only about speaking about the future. Not only can every Christian prophesy, as the Scripture says, but we should want to. That every believer can prophesy gives us more conclusive evidence that each believer can manifest all nine manifestations. [For more on prophecy, including what it is, how it comes to the Christian via holy spirit, that each Christian should want to prophesy, and the difference between the manifestation of prophecy and the ministry of a prophet, see John Schoenheit, Prophecy].

“discerning of spirits.” This is God or the Lord Jesus Christ revealing to a person information about the presence or absence of spirits (including both the holy spirit and demons), sometimes including the identity of demons present and whether or not he may cast them out, and providing the power to do it.

The Greek word translated “discerning” is diakrisis (#1253 διάκρισις), and it has several meanings. It can mean a “distinguishing” or “differentiation.” Also, it can mean to quarrel (William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon). One of the definitions in Liddell and Scott’s Greek lexicon is “decision by battle, quarrel, dispute.” Thus diakrisis can be much more than just “discerning,” it has the overtones of quarreling or fighting. Since “discerning of spirits” is a total package of recognizing “spirits” and dealing with them, God places it in the “power” group of manifestations. In this verse, discerning is plural. Nevertheless, we used “discerning” because it has the overtones of plurality. If a person is “discerning,” it is because he has exhibited discernment in a multitude of situations.

The manifestation of discerning of spirits is necessary if men and women of God are going to deal effectively with the spiritual realities of this fallen world. There are many “spirits” in this world, including angels and the gift of holy spirit. Nevertheless, because of the spiritual battle that rages around all of us, the most important aspect of discerning of spirits is dealing with the demonic forces of this world. Ephesians 6:12 makes it clear that Christians do not primarily wrestle against fleshly forces, but spiritual forces.

Our Adversary, the Devil, walks about as a roaring lion, seeking people to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). God has not left us helpless in that situation, but has empowered us to deal with him. The manifestation of discerning of spirits is more than just recognizing them; it also involves entering into battle against them and casting them out. Recognizing demons, protecting the believers, and casting them out are all part of “discerning of spirits.” [For more insights into the spiritual battle, see the commentary on Mark 1:25 and Jesus “subduing” evil spirits].

1 Corinthians 7:12
The manifestation of discerning of spirits is interwoven with the other manifestations. For example, a believer manifesting discerning of spirits may simultaneously be aware of the presence of the demon, know what to do about the situation, and begin to command it to come out of the person. Receiving the information about the demon and knowing what to do is similar to and interwoven with a message of knowledge and a message of wisdom, while the casting out the demon can be in the category of a miracle (Mark 9:38 and 39), even as a healing can be a miracle (Acts 4:16).

Every Christian will encounter demons, whether he recognizes them or not. What a great blessing and comfort to know that God has equipped each of us to deal with any demon that comes against us. Ephesians 6:12, which says we wrestle with demonic powers, is written to every Christian. Therefore, every Christian can manifest discerning of spirits.

The word “spirits” in the phrase “discerning of spirits” does not refer to “attitudes.” Although that is one of the meanings of pneuma, it is not the meaning in this context. There are many very gifted people who can “read” people and situations very well, but many of them are unsaved. That discernment is a natural ability, just as is native intelligence and other natural abilities.

In some Greek texts there is the word “and” before both “to another prophecy” and “to another discerning.” We have left out the word “and” because textual research shows that it seems much more likely the words were added in some texts than subtracted in others.

“various kinds of tongues.” The manifestation of the spirit that involves speaking languages the speaker does not understand is commonly known as “speaking in tongues.” Speaking in tongues is a Christian speaking a language of men or angels that he does not understand, a language that is given to him by the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:33). It is one of the great blessings that God has given to the Christian Church, and He desires that every Christian speak in tongues: “Now I want all of you to speak in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:5). For a much fuller explanation of speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:5.

“the interpretation of tongues.” The interpretation of tongues is interpreting, or giving the sum and substance, in one’s own language, that which he has just spoken in tongues. The word “interpretation” is Hermēneia (#2058 ἑρμηνεία), which means interpretation or exposition. It does not necessarily mean a word for word translation, but rather an interpretation, giving the gist or sum and substance. Thus the interpretation of tongues is giving the gist of what was just spoken in tongues. The Bible makes it clear that speaking in tongues is always “to” God (1 Cor. 14:2), so the interpretation will be to God also, and will be praise and prayer to Him. That is the big difference between prophecy and the interpretation of tongues. Prophecy is a message to the people (1 Cor. 14:3), while interpretation of tongues is to God (or the Lord Jesus Christ), but is heard by the congregation, who are then edified by it.

The interpretation of tongues, like speaking in tongues itself, is given by the Lord. No one understands what he is saying in a tongue, so no one could give an interpretation of what he is saying. The interpretation comes from the Lord Jesus Christ, just as the tongue does. The manifestation of interpretation of tongues works just like speaking in tongues and prophecy do—the words come from the Lord Jesus Christ to the individual
via the gift of holy spirit inside him. When a person speaks in tongues in a meeting, he should interpret so that the people in the meeting can be edified (1 Cor. 14:5).

The interpretation of tongues is to be done by the one who spoke in tongues, just as 1 Corinthians 14:5 says (see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:27).

12:11. “purposes.” The word “purposes” at the end of the verse is the contextual key that “Spirit” does not refer to the gift of holy spirit, for the gift of holy spirit does not “purpose” anything, but only speaks what it hears (John 16:13).

12:13 “in one spirit.” The Greek word we translate as “in” is “en” (#1722 ἐν), and it can be translated in its plain sense as “in” or as an instrumental dative, “by.” If it is “in” one spirit, it indicates that all Christians are baptized in the gift of holy spirit, which is the case. However, some people would argue that the word pneuma (“spirit”) refers to Jesus Christ and should be capitalized (Jesus is called “the Spirit” a number of times in the NT; see commentary 2 Cor. 3:17). However, we were not all “made to drink” of Jesus Christ, as the last phrase in the verse indicates. Thus when we read the entire verse, the only way “spirit” can be used consistently is if it refers to the gift of holy spirit. Every Christian is baptized in the gift of holy spirit, and that happens when the person is born again. We were all immersed in spirit, and made to drink of it (John 7:37-39). For the fact that a person receives the gift of holy spirit the moment he is saved or “born again,” see commentary on Ephesians 1:13.

“drink of one spirit.” The word “drink” is not literal, but is an idiom referring to experiencing something, or to partake of something. Christians all have the experience of receiving the gift of holy spirit. Jesus used the figure of drinking in John 4:14 and 7:37-39. A related idiom is the word “cup.” Thus, Jesus asked James and John if they could “drink the cup” that he himself would drink (Mark 10:38), and Jesus asked God to “take this cup from me” (Luke 22:42).

12:28. “tongues.” For a much fuller explanation of speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:5.

12:30. “Do all speak in tongues?” Speaking in tongues is a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit, and therefore every Christian has the God-given ability to speak in tongues. Nevertheless, many do not, for different reasons. The key to understanding this verse is realizing that the things listed (tongues, interpretation, and healing) are manifestations of holy spirit that some people are especially gifted at or are energized to do in the Church. It is a matter of fact that everyone does not speak in tongues or interpret, or heal, even though technically they have the spiritual power and ability to do so. For more on speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.

Chapter 13

13:1. “speak with the tongues.” For information on speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.

{sounding brass.” The Greek is chalkos ἐκχόν (χαλκός ἐκχόν), which is literally something like “bronze ringing,” “bronze sounding out,” or “echoing bronze.” Its reference to bronze was an appropriate metaphor to use in the Epistle to the Corinthians because Corinth was famous for its bronze. Nevertheless, it is an unclear phrase to us now, because it does not clearly refer to any instrument we know of. Because of that, a
1 Corinthians

number of different interpretations have been set forth to explain it. One is that trumpets and horns were made of bronze or brass in the Roman world, so it could refer to a “sounding brass” [horn]. The horn would make a loud noise, but often just for show.

Perhaps the more accurate explanation of *chalkos* ἔχον is that it refers to the resonating jars that were set in niches at the theaters. These large bronze jars would vibrate with the sound of the actor’s voices and help to amplify them. Corinth had resonating jars, but in the second century BC they were sold to raise money for public use. We do not know if they were replaced, but in any case Paul and his audience would have known about them. The jars amplified the voices of actors who were just “playing a part,” so the resonating jars would be an appropriate metaphor for speaking in tongues—or doing anything else for that matter—without love.

Vitruvius Pollio was a military engineer under Augustus and knew Julius Caesar. He wrote *On Architecture* sometime before 27 B.C. It records some of his own experience and discoveries, as well as some earlier discoveries in architecture and engineering. He wrote:

…bronze vases are to be made in mathematical ratios corresponding to the size of the theatre. They are to be so made that, when they are touched, they can make a sound from one to another of a fourth, a fifth and so on to the second octave. Then compartments are made among the seats of the theatre, and the vases are to be so placed that they do not touch the wall, and have an empty space around them and above. They are to be placed upside down. On the side looking towards the stage, they are to have wedges put under them not less than half a foot high. Against these cavities openings are to be left in the faces of the lower steps two feet long and a half a foot high. …

7. Someone will say, perhaps, that many theatres are built every year in Rome without taking any account of these matters. He will be mistaken in this. All public wooden theatres have several wooden floors and naturally resound. We can observe this also from those who sing to the zither, who when they wish to sing with a louder tone, turn to the wooden scenery, and, with this help, gain resonance for their voice. But when theatres are built of solids, that is of the rubble walling, stone or marble which cannot resound, the use of bronze vases is to be followed.

8. But if you ask in what theatre this is done, we cannot show any at Rome, but we must turn to the regions of Italy, and to many Greek cities. We find a precedent in Lucius Mummius who destroyed the theatre at Corinth, and transported these bronze vessels to Rome, and dedicated them, from the spoils, to the temple of Luna. Further, many clever architects, who in towns of moderate size have built theatres, have chosen, for cheapness’ sake, earthenware vessels with similar sounds, and arranging them in this way have produced very useful effects. (Quoted in Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, p. 75).

People who act without love are like human-size hollow jars that make a noise but do not actually accomplish anything important to God. Love is truly “Christianity 101,” and it is imperative that we think, speak, and act, in love.
“clanging cymbal.” The word “clanging” is onomatopoetic. “Alalazon” was used of a wail or a battle cry. Although there were pagan cults that used cymbals, the use in this verse is not necessarily an allusion to that kind of use. Cymbals were used also as musical instruments. The obvious point that Paul is making is that speaking in tongues without love is just like a clanging symbol—there is a lot of noise but no actual lasting godly effect.

13:2. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musteron (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musteron actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

13:8. “where there is a message of knowledge.” The reference in the context, which mentions the manifestations of prophecy and speaking in tongues, is to “a message of knowledge.” Paul would assume that since the OT prophecies said that “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9), and he will go on to say that we will know even as we are known, that “knowledge” will not pass away, but the manifestation of “a message of knowledge” (1 Cor. 12:8) will pass away. We felt this so compelling, and have seen such confusion regarding it, that we added the italics to clear up the point.

13:10. “the Completeness.” The exact Greek phrase is to teleion (τὸ τελεῖον #5406), literally in this context, “the complete,” (or perhaps, “the perfect,” or even, “the end”). “Complete” is a substantive, an adjective being used as a noun [For more on substantives, see commentary on Matthew 5:37], so “the completeness,” or even “that which is complete,” is a good translation. The context lets us know what “the complete” is, the completion of all things. The real “Completion,” or “time of perfection” (NLT), is when the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, the curse on the earth is finally removed, and God lives with mankind and sees people face to face (Revelation 21:1-4; 22:3).

When we study the vocabulary of this verse, it seems clear that it was written very purposely in a way that lends itself to a partial fulfillment and an ultimate fulfillment. “the Completeness,” or “the time of perfection,” certainly in part refers to Rapture for Christians when they get a new body like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21). Then there is a more complete “time of perfection” at the Second Coming. At that time the Old Testament believers are raised from the dead, the earth and animal nature are restored, and Christ rules from Jerusalem. After the Millennial Kingdom, the final and ultimate “time of perfection” comes when the New Jerusalem comes to earth and there is a new heaven and new earth.

Many conservative theologians see the time of completeness as the Second Coming of Christ, the Parousia, which involves the return of Christ and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom on earth. It is true when that time comes there will be a perfection that does not exist now—the air and water on earth will be restored, animal nature will change, and there will be no war or hunger [for more on the Messianic Kingdom on earth, see commentary on Matthew 5:5]. Also, the believers who are raised from the dead at the First Resurrection will have new bodies like Christ’s body, and since Christ is ruling in Jerusalem, we will see him face to face.

Given the perfection in the Millennial Kingdom, are there reasons why it would not be the time of perfection spoken of here in 1 Corinthians 13:10? There are several reasons. Although many things will change in the Millennial Kingdom, many will not.
There will still be death (Isaiah 65:20-22), the earth will still be subject to when it was cursed (Gen. 3:14-18; Rev. 22:3), and Christ will rule with a rod of iron (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 19:15). Also, although 1 Corinthians 13:8 says that prophecy will cease when the time of perfection comes, it is clear that prophecy will not cease in the Millennial Kingdom. Many prophets wrote that the spirit would be poured out from heaven during that time (Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28, 29), and Joel wrote that “your sons and daughters will prophesy” (Joel 2:28). So if prophecy stops when the time of perfection comes, but people are still prophesying during the Millennial Kingdom, then the time of perfection has not yet come.

Although it is generally assumed that the phrase “face to face” is speaking of Christ, that is only an assumption. Actually, the phrase is referring to seeing God face to face. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve walked and talked with God Himself, and he took on a human form to fellowship with them. Since the Fall, although God has taken on human form and appeared to a few people such as Abraham, Moses, and the Apostle John, most people never see God. However, that will change in the Everlasting Kingdom when the New Jerusalem comes to earth. At that time “the dwelling of God will be with men, and he will live with them” (Rev. 22:3). God is “with” us now, so when Revelation 21:3 says that God will be with us and live with us, it is referring to a restoration of the relationship that Adam and Eve had with God, and that quality of relationship will not be restored until the Everlasting Kingdom is established after the Millennial Kingdom comes to an end [For more on God appearing in human form, see commentary on Acts 7:55].

Many theologians have argued that “the completeness” is the Parousia, at the end of this age. We believe, as we have said above, that “the completeness” refers to the Everlasting Kingdom, not the Parousia and the Millennial Kingdom. Nevertheless, in light of the fact that these theologians were arguing that the “Completeness” was a time of perfection and not the completion of the canon or any other such thing, it is appropriate to quote from a few of them. Robert Thayer (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon), in his entry on ἔλθῃ, says that 1 Corinthians 13:10 refers to “the perfect state of all things, to be ushered in by the return of Christ from heaven.” R. C. H. Lenski (The Interpretation of 1 and 2 Corinthians) states: “The aorist subjunctive ἔλθῃ (“comes”), marks the great future moment when the goal shall be reached, namely the Parousia of Christ. Then this entire state of imperfection which is now evident upon the earth will be abolished, for it will have served its purpose. An entirely new way of apprehending, of seeing, and of knowing shall take its place.”

Gordon Fee (The New International Commentary on the New Testament), writes: “…the term ‘the perfect’ has to do with the Eschaton itself [the end of this Age], not some form of ‘perfection’ in the present age. …At the coming of Christ, the final purpose of God’s saving work in Christ will have been reached; at that point those gifts now necessary for the building up of the church in the present age will disappear, because ‘the complete’ will have come.” Ray Collins, a Roman Catholic theologian, translates to teleion as “the end.” He writes: “In English, to teleion can be rendered as ‘the end’ or ‘the perfect.’ Given the eschatological [future] thrust of the periscope, it seems useful to render the Greek by ‘the end.’ It is clearly a reference to the eschaton.”

Some theologians have argued that “the complete” has already happened, and that it was fulfilled when the Word of God was fully written. That, of course, would mean that speaking in tongues and prophecy had passed away, which is usually the main reason for
drawing that conclusion in the first place. Theologians who do not see, or do not believe in, speaking in tongues, but clearly see it in Acts, had to have a reason to say that it no longer exists, and 1 Corinthians 13:10 was the closest thing they could find to a verse that said that. But to conclude that speaking in tongues has passed away because this passage says “the complete” has come, and then to make “the complete” the complete canon of Scripture, is to misunderstand the whole section of Scripture.

Even a straightforward reading of the passage in the King James Version says that “now” we know in part, but when “that which is perfect is come, that which is in part will be done away.” Can anyone really say that our knowledge, which is now “in part,” has been done away? We still know “in part!” Furthermore, we still see as if in a mirror, darkly (i.e., an indistinct image). Can anyone say we see clearly yet? Also, the Bible says “then” we will know “face to face.” We will only know both God and Christ face to face in the Everlasting Kingdom.

Paul wrote the book of 1 Corinthians, in about 53 AD, long before the canon of Scripture was finished when John wrote Revelation, which was likely close to 90 AD. Think about what it would mean if Paul wrote in Corinthians that speaking in tongues would pass away when the canon of Scripture was complete. It would mean that, in essence, God told Paul, “In about forty years, speaking in tongues, prophecy, and knowledge will pass away.” What would have been the point of God telling people what would go away in forty years? Would it have made people more zealous to speak in tongues and prophesy while they still could, before those things stopped? No, it would not have.

In his commentary on First Corinthians, Richard Hays writes that some groups of Christians interpret 13:10 to mean that the charismatic gifts in the church cease to operate after the New Testament canon is completed, and he says, “This interpretation is simply nonsense. There is nothing in the passage about ‘the New Testament’ or about a future revocation of revelatory gifts in the Church. …Only ‘then,’ in the consummation of God’s kingdom, will we know fully—as God knows us already in the present.”

Besides the Scriptural argument that 1 Corinthians 13:10 does not say that speaking in tongues has passed away—and no other verse does either—there are other important things to consider on the subject. For one thing, speaking in tongues is a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-10). It is not a separate “gift” (the Greek text never calls speaking in tongues a “gift,” see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:1). Speaking in tongues is one of the nine ways the spirit of God in us is revealed. If speaking in tongues is gone, we would normally think the other manifestations of the spirit would be gone too, which would mean things like the manifestation of trust (“faith”), word of knowledge, and miracles had passed away too. If the spirit of God born in Christians does not change, how can one manifestation of it disappear, but the others remain the same? That does not make sense.

Also, we should ask ourselves, “Why would God take speaking in tongues from the Church?” The benefits and blessings of speaking in tongues are as necessary today as they were 2000 years ago. The Bible gives us many benefits of speaking in tongues: it is prayer in the spirit; it is giving thanks to God; it is proof of one’s salvation; it builds a person’s trust; and more [For the benefits of speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:5]. Surely these things are as necessary in the Church today as they were in the
first century, so why would God take tongues from the Church? We think it is clear He did not.

There are Christians who do not believe in, or do not want to believe in, speaking in tongues. Sometimes that is because that particular Christian has never seen speaking in tongues, and sometimes it because the person has seen people speak in tongues, but do it improperly. Speaking in tongues is under the control of the one speaking, which is why God tells us where and how to do it (this is in contrast to the teaching that God is in control of speaking in tongues—but He is not). Many people, often in Pentecostal churches, ignore the way the Bible says to use speaking in tongues and so misuse it. For example, the Bible says that not everyone in the church should speak in tongues at the same time; and it also says that if someone does speak in tongues publicly, it must be interpreted. The misuse of tongues has alienated some people to such an extent they think that what they saw cannot be from God.

Thankfully, there is a time of perfection coming when we will be face to face with God and Christ and there will not be any confusion on these subjects. 13:12. “in a mirror.” This was an apt illustration in Corinthians, because the city of Corinth was known for its mirrors (cp. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians).

Chapter 14

14:1. “Diligently pursue.” The Greek word is diokō (#1377 διώκω), “to follow with haste, and presumably with intensity of effort” (Louw & Nida Greek Lexicon); to move rapidly and decisively toward an objective (BDAG). In light of the definition and context, we felt “diligently pursue” was better than just “pursue.”

“spiritual things.” The word “spiritual” is pneumatikos (#4152 πνευματικός), which is an adjective, so most translations supply “gifts” as the noun that “spiritual” modifies. However, the spiritual things that Christians are to pursue are clearly including the manifestations of the spirit, such as tongues, interpretation, and prophecy, which are “manifestations,” not gifts (although they are regularly miscalled “gifts”).

Most Christians commonly use the word “gifts” to describe what the Bible calls “manifestations” of the spirit, and this causes problems in Christianity. What is the difference between a gift and a manifestation? A gift is individually given, and no one has a gift unless it was given to him. A manifestation is an evidence, a showing forth, of something that a person already has. There are spiritual gifts, which include holy spirit, God-given ministries such as that of an apostle or a prophet, and the gift of everlasting life (Rom. 6:23). But the nine manifestations are not gifts, and calling them “gifts” can have a negative effect on the quality of believers’ lives.

If a person believes that he will be given at most only one of the manifestations (which is the most common teaching about the “gifts of the spirit”), then to him there is no difference between a gift and a manifestation. The major problem that occurs when the manifestations of holy spirit are thought to be “gifts” is that it causes many Christians to be spiritually passive. Instead of realizing that they can use each of the nine manifestations, some believers wait on God, hoping that one day He will give them the “gift” of tongues, or the “gift” of something else. Such people are waiting for something
they already have! They may even plead with and beg God, and end up disappointed with Him for not answering their prayers. Christians need to know that they have received the power of holy spirit, and that God is waiting for them to act.

The theology of Bible translators is in large part responsible for people thinking that the manifestations of the spirit are gifts. Notice how often the word “gift,” “gifts,” or “gifted” appears in most translations of 1 Corinthians 12-14. Yet not one of these uses of “gift” is in the Greek text.

- 1 Corinthians 12:1a—Now about spiritual gifts, brothers…
- 1 Corinthians 13:2a—If I have the gift of prophecy…
- 1 Corinthians 14:1—Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.
- 1 Corinthians 14:12—So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.
- 1 Corinthians 14:37a—If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted…

It is easy to see why the average Christian thinks of prophecy and the other manifestations as “gifts.” It is difficult to read most versions of the Bible and come away with an accurate understanding of it when the translators have followed their theology instead of the reading of the Greek and thus distorted the clear reading of the text. One good thing about the King James Version, American Standard Version, and New American Standard Version is that the translators italicized many words that are not in the Hebrew or Greek text, but which they added in an attempt to clarify what a verse says. In today’s English writing words are sometimes italicized for emphasis. A Christian reading those versions needs to remember that the italicized words are not being emphasized, they were added to the original text.

“prophesy.” The Greek word is propheteuō (#4395 προφητεύω), the verb “prophecy.” Although it is in a hina clause, in this case and context the hina is not “in order that” but rather just a statement; “that you prophesy” (Lenski), or even just “to prophesy” (The Source New Testament; A. Nyland).

14:2. “for no one understands.” The phrase, “for no one understands,” is an accurate translation of the Greek text. The point the verse is making is that when someone speaks in tongues, he does not understand what he is saying. Many versions add the word “him” at the end of the phrase, saying “for no one understands him.” Adding the word “him” when it is not in the Greek text changes God’s intended meaning, and causes the verse to be in error. There are times, such as in Acts 2 and as has been reported in Christian history, when someone in the audience will understand what another person says in tongues. Thus, if 1 Corinthians 14:2 is made to say that no one listening to someone speaking in tongues will ever understand what the speaker is saying, it creates a contradiction in Scripture, and confuses people who want to be able to read and understand the Bible. 1 Corinthians 14:2 is very clear: when it comes to an individual speaking in tongues, “no one understands,” that is, no one will understand what he himself is saying. This is also what 1 Corinthians 14:14 says: “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.”

“by the spirit.” The Greek text simply has “pneuma” (spirit) in the dative case, pneumati (πνεύματι), which in this case would mean, “by spirit” or more fully, “by way of the spirit.” God, or the Lord Jesus Christ, gives the divine language (speaking in
tongues) to the person syllable by syllable, word by word. The person speaks out what
the Lord gives him as it comes to him from the Lord, speaking word by word. The
individual speaking does not know the language; it is “tongues” to him.

“sacred secrets.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as
“sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious
or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of
Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

14:3. “speaks to people.” Some have used 1 Corinthians 14:3 to teach that there must be
at least 3 people present to manifest interpretation of tongues or prophecy. They claim
this verse limits us to speak unto “men” (plural), and God does not intend prophecy or
interpretation to be done with only one other individual present. But this teaching is
misguided. The word “men” can be used in a generic sense, referring to mankind; or it
can be used numerically, referring to men (plural) instead of just “a man” (singular). In I
Corinthians 14:1-3, it can be easily seen that the word “men” is generic (mankind) and
does not refer to the number of people present. “Men” is being contrasted with “God.”
Prophecy is “to people” and interpretation is “to God.”

We can prophesy or interpret if there is anyone to listen, even just one person. We
can demonstrate this is accurate by examining Scripture. Although there was no
interpretation before the day of Pentecost, there was prophecy. According to the idea that
“men” in 1 Corinthians 14:2 meant more than one man, it would then follow that no one
who gave a genuine prophecy ever gave it to just one man. But when we examine
prophecy, we discover that prophecy was often spoken to just one man, such as when
Samuel gave Saul a prophecy with no one else around (1 Sam. 9:26-10:8), or when
Nathan gave David a prophecy—in that case, others were there, but the prophecy was
only to David. So prophecy can definitely be to just one “man.”

The point of 1 Corinthians 14:1-3 is not to limit our manifesting to when we have
a group, but rather to point out that when we speak in tongues it is “to God” and not “to
mankind,” and when we prophesy it is “to mankind,” not “to God.”

“edification, and encouragement, and comfort.” Each of these is equally
important, a point that God makes clear through the Figure of Speech polysyndeton, or
“Many Ands.” Proper grammar would have only one “and,” after exhortation.

14:4. “while.” We have translated the de as “while” (Cp. Lenski). The de is a soft
contrast, and the fact is that both tongues and prophecy edify. So while the tongues
speaker edifies himself, the prophesier edifies the church.

14:5. “want.” The Greek word is thelō (#2309 θέλω), and in this context it means “want
or desire.” It does not mean “wish” in the sense of “a desire for something generally
unattainable,” as “I wish I had a billion dollars.” It can mean “wish” if “wish” is
understood to mean “want” or “desire,” but since we generally use “wish” to mean a
desire for something we generally cannot have or that is unlikely, “wish” is not a good
translation here. Speaking in tongues is a manifestation of the spirit, and anyone who has
the spirit, which means anyone who is saved, has the spiritual ability to speak in tongues.
God never forces people to speak in tongues; we must operate the manifestation
ourselves and speak. Thus it takes personal desire, and proper instruction, to speak in
tongues, which explains why God wants Christians to do it but most do not. “Want” is a
very good translation here, as seen in the RSV, ESV, etc., and “would like” is good too,
as seen in the NIV and NRSV.
“speak in tongues.” Speaking in tongues is a manifestation of holy spirit that contributes greatly to the quality of our lives as Christians. Before we see what speaking in tongues is, it is helpful to examine five things it is not.

• Speaking in tongues is not:

1) It is not a “gift.” No properly translated verse of Scripture calls speaking in tongues a gift. It is one of the “manifestations” of the gift holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-10).

2) It is not gibberish, babble, or a made-up language. Some languages sound strange to our ears, but the Word of God assures us that genuine speaking in tongues is indeed a language of men or angels.

3) It is not speaking a language you already know. When a person speaks in tongues, he does not know the language he is speaking. The Bible says, “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful” (1 Cor. 14:14, cp. 14:2).

4) It is not designed for missionary work. The language people speak when they speak in tongues is not chosen by the person speaking, it is given by the Lord via the gift of holy spirit. The Bible gives many reasons Christians should speak in tongues, and missionary work is not one of them. Furthermore, there is no record in Scripture where anyone used speaking in tongues to do missionary work. That idea came from the early Pentecostal movement when God, apparently to show people that speaking in tongues was not gibberish, gave known languages to people as they spoke in tongues, just as he did on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:11). For example, when Agnes Ozman manifested speaking in tongues, she spoke in Chinese (Roberts Liardon, God’s Generals, p. 119). Upon hearing known foreign languages, people listening assumed speaking in tongues was for mission work.

5) Speaking in tongues is not “dead,” “gone,” or “passed away.” Some Christians believe that it was only for the early Church and is now gone, but that cannot be the case. Tongues is prayer in the spirit, is giving thanks well to God, is proof of one’s salvation, and more. Surely these things are as necessary in the Church today as they were in the first century. 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 says that speaking in tongues will pass away when “that which is perfect is come,” and when we know even as we are known. “That which is perfect” is the Lord Jesus Christ, as verse 12 makes clear when it says we will be “face to face” with him. Furthermore, we will know as we are known only when the Lord comes, and until then we will continue to know “in part” (1 Cor. 13:12).

• Speaking in tongues is: Let us now look at 15 different and important things about speaking in tongues.

1) Speaking in tongues is a Christian speaking a language that he does not understand, a language that has been given to him by the Lord Jesus Christ via the gift of holy spirit.

2) It is something God wants us to do. “Now I want all of you to speak in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:5). The late J. E. Styles, a Charismatic teacher who led many people into speaking in tongues during his ministry, wrote, “From our own experiences, and from the testimony of many others, both ministers and laymen, we are convinced that every Spirit-filled child of God should speak with tongues.
every day in his own private prayer life” (J. E. Styles, *The Gift of the Holy Spirit* (Fleming H. Revell Company), pp. 37, 38.)

3) It is the absolute proof to a Christian that he is saved, born again, and guaranteed everlasting life in Paradise. Speaking in tongues is supernatural, i.e., it is beyond man’s natural ability. It is a God-given ability made possible by the presence of holy spirit that is born inside each Christian. No non-Christian can speak in tongues. Because speaking in tongues is a manifestation of holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-10), the only people who can speak in tongues are those who have holy spirit, and every Christian was sealed with holy spirit when he believed (Eph. 1:13).

4) Speaking in tongues makes a person operate the most basic principle of the Christian walk, which is trusting and obeying the Word of our heavenly Father. God says to speak in tongues, but to do so a Christian must trust that what God says is true, and then he must walk out on that trust and obey what God says.

5) It is a witness of the resurrection of Christ to the believer, and also a sign to unbelievers (1 Cor. 14:22).

6) It is speaking a language of men or of angels (1 Cor. 13:1) which explains why there are so many tongues that are not known human languages.

7) It is speaking to God, not to men (1 Cor. 14:2).

8) It is speaking sacred secrets (the Greek word *musterion* means “sacred secret,” not “mystery,” and it is translated “sacred secret” in *Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible*). It is a blessing and a privilege for Christians to be able to speak sacred secrets to God by speaking in tongues.

9) It is speaking the wonders of God (Acts 2:11). On the Day of Pentecost, the tongues the Lord gave the apostles to speak could be understood by the audience, and even the skeptics had to admit that the apostles were speaking the wonders of God.

10) It is praise to God (Acts 10:46; 1 Cor. 14:16 and 17).

11) It is giving thanks to our Heavenly Father (1 Cor. 14:17).

12) It is prayer in the spirit (1 Cor. 14:14 and 15). It is very important to realize that speaking in tongues is prayer in the spirit. Sometimes Christians call fervent or emotional prayer “prayer in the spirit,” but in the Bible that phrase refers only to speaking in tongues.

13) It builds up the one speaking (1 Cor. 14:4; Jude 20). It does not build up the one speaking in tongues because he understands what he is saying, because he does not understand what he is saying when he is speaking in tongues. It builds him up in his trust and in his spiritual sensitivity, because the words have to come from the spirit to his mind.

14) It is under the speaker’s control. If the person does not “speak,” i.e., move his mouth, his tongue, and make the sounds, he will not speak in tongues. A Christian speaking in tongues can start and stop when he wants to. He can speak loudly or softly, he can sing or shout in tongues. Since it is under the speaker’s control, it can be misused and operated incorrectly. This is why the Word has directions in 1 Corinthians 14 of how to speak in tongues correctly. For example, there is no profit in someone standing up in front of a group and speaking in tongues, because those listening will not understand the tongue and the speaker
will be speaking “into the air” (1 Cor. 14:6-9). Similarly, if the whole church has gathered and everyone is speaking in tongues at the same time, if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in, he will probably say you are all out of your mind (1 Cor. 14:23). One thing we need to be aware of is that on rare occasions a person who is demonized (“possessed”) will be taken over by the demon and forced to speak in a language they do not understand (demons know angel languages). This is not speaking in tongues; the counterfeit can be recognized because it is never under the control of the speaker.

15) Speaking in tongues is primarily designed for one’s personal edification and use, but it is also to be utilized in a gathering of Christians by following it with its companion manifestation, the interpretation of tongues, so that the Church is edified by one’s praise to God. Speaking in tongues followed by the interpretation of tongues enables each believer to obey God’s exhortation to “…strive to excel in building up the church” (1 Cor. 14:12, ESV).

• How does a person speak in tongues?
  1) Remember that God would not ask you to do something you cannot do. He clearly says, “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:5).
  2) Act. Open your mouth and utilize the mechanics of speech, but do not speak English or any other language you know. What you will be speaking is whatever language the Lord chooses to give you. The only way to fail is to not speak. Do not wait for the Lord to give you a sentence. The syllables form as you speak them. The water did not become firm for Peter before he stepped on it, but as he stepped. It is the same with speaking in tongues.
  3) Keep speaking even if it seems strange. You are not used to speaking words without understanding them, but that is what you have to do to speak in tongues. Practice makes it easier.
  4) You may tend to repeat the same syllables or words over and over. Although that is speaking in tongues, it is not the developed language that you should desire. Remember that you are doing the speaking, so relax and let the Lord help you expand your vocabulary with different sounds.
  5) Overcome any fears you have about it. Some people do not speak in tongues due to a fear about it. One common fear people have is that they will not really speak in tongues, but instead will have some kind of counterfeit. God never warns us about counterfeit tongues, so we should not worry about that. When a Christian is speaking words he does not understand, and is in control of his mouth, then he is speaking in tongues (cp. Luke 11:13). Another common fear people have is that they are making up the language they are speaking. Speaking in tongues is part supernatural and part natural; part spirit and part flesh because the language comes via the spirit but we have to use our flesh to speak. In fact, some Christians do not speak in tongues even when they know it is God’s will because they expect God to speak through them, i.e., take over their mouths and make them speak. He will not do it. The Bible says the Christian does the speaking. Thus, it may feel like you are making up the language, but as you speak more and more, and the language starts to really flow out of you, you will realize there is no way you could be making it up. Keep speaking and let the language develop. Another fear some people have is that they will “sound stupid.” Nothing
that comes from the Lord is ever “stupid.” We should be very thankful for whatever language the Lord gives us. Another fear some people have is that they are not “good enough.” Since speaking in tongues is a manifestation of holy spirit, if you are saved then you already have holy spirit and can therefore speak in tongues. Remember also that speaking in tongues is prayer and praise in the spirit. Everyone is “good enough” to pray and praise God, so get speaking in tongues!


“speaking in tongues.” Speaking in tongues is a language of men or angels, and it is not understood by the speaker or anyone speaking the same language or languages he speaks. The manifestation of interpretation of tongues is for the edification of the congregation. For more on speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.

“revelation.” For what “revelation” is, see commentary on Galatians 1:12 and 1 Corinthians 12:8.

14:7. “lifeless.” = without ψυχής, soul-less (occurs only here in the NT).

14:9. “a message.” Logos can be what is said, a message. [For more information on logos, see commentary on John 1:1, “Word”.

14:10. “voices, voiceless.” Not just “languages.” That is not the word here, although some commentators think that phonai means “languages.” However, then the verse makes no sense: there are many kinds of languages, and none languageless (see Lenski). The “voice” can refer to individual human voices (explains better “it may be,” not trying to set any number), and no voice is “voiceless,” i.e., without sound.

14:12. “zealous for spirits, spiritual utterances.” In both Greek and Hebrew, the word translated “spirit” (Hebrew: ṭūāch; Greek: πνεῦμα) has many meanings. In this verse and a number of others in both the Old and New Testaments, the word “spirits” is put by the figure of speech metonymy for the manifestations produced by the spirit. In other words, “spirits” means “manifestations of the spirit,” which would include speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecy, etc. Lenski correctly understands that “spirits” refers to the manifestations of the spirit, “This term ‘spirits’ designates the different manifestations of the one Holy Spirit [holy spirit] in the individual Christians.” Understanding that “spirits” can mean the manifestations of holy spirit is essential to understanding a number of verses in the Bible. For example, this same use of “spirits,” is used in 14:32; 1 John 4:1, 2, 3; 2 Thessalonians 2:2, 8; Isaiah 11:4 (translated “breath” in most versions)

The people in Corinth were very zealous for spiritual power. When they came together, everyone had a tongue (i.e., everyone spoke in tongues in the congregation), an interpretation, or a revelation (14:26). Although their zeal needed to be tempered, they were in the spot that most Christians should be: zealous to use the spiritual power God has given us. Too many Christians are content not to utilize the spiritual power they have.

1 John 4:1 says, “do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits” and since the context is false prophets, the word “spirits” in that verse (and verses 2 and 3) also primarily refer to prophecies. The exhortation in 1 John is that Christians should not just believe every prophecy and spiritual utterance, but test them to see if they are from God. This is necessary because many false prophets are gone into the world, and thus the information that every prophecy that acknowledges that Jesus has come in the flesh is from God, while those prophecies that do not are not from God. We do need to
acknowledge that the use of “spirit” for “utterances of the spirit” also leaves the door open for the word “spirit” to be a literal reference to the “spirit” (the gift of holy spirit or the demon) that is producing the prophecy.

2 Thessalonians 2:2 is another place where “spirit” primarily refers to a prophecy, and Paul warns the church at Thessalonica not to be unsettled or alarmed by a prophecy that the Day of the Lord has already come (see commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2:2).

2 Thessalonians 2:8 says the Lord will kill the lawless one by the “spirit” (pneuma) from his mouth.” There again we see the use of “spirit” is a reference to the prophetic word. Although we do not fully understand it, it is clear that Christ is prophesying and destroys the lawless one by the “spirit,” the powerful spiritual utterance that he speaks. In the beginning God created the universe by speaking it into being (Genesis 1) and after his resurrection Jesus received all power and authority from God (Matt. 28:18). Thus it makes perfect sense that Jesus could destroy the wicked by a prophetic word, an utterance with true spiritual power. This is also foretold in Isaiah 11:4, which says, “He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath [ruach; “spirit”] of his lips he will slay the wicked.” The phrase, “rod of his mouth” is the genitive and can be translated, “rod from his mouth,” and similarly “spirit of his lips” can be translated “spirit from his lips,” i.e., the spiritual utterance from his lips.

The prophetic word coming from the mouth of Jesus Christ is portrayed as a sword coming out of Christ’s mouth in Revelation 1:16; 2:16; 19:15, 21. We are told in Ephesians 6:17 that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God.

“strive.” The Greek is zeteō (#2212 ζητεω), which means seek or strive for. Here, “strive” is better than “seek,” because it is not that we have to look for how to build up the Church, we have to strive, or push ourselves, to do it.


14:13. “so that.” The person prays (speaks in tongues) so that he can interpret. The traditional explanation of this verse is that people should pray for the ability to interpret speaking in tongues. “Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret” (NRSV). That cannot be correct, because the interpretation of tongues is a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit, and anyone who has the gift of holy spirit, which means every Christian, has the spiritual ability to interpret speaking in tongues (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:1, “spiritual things”). We do not “pray” for the ability to interpret, we “pray” in tongues so that we will have a message to interpret.

The next verse (14:14), uses the word “pray” for speaking in tongues. It says, “for if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays.” This makes it clear that “pray” in these verses is referring to speaking in tongues. 1 Corinthians 14:13 and 14 read: “Therefore, let the one who speaks in a tongue pray so that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.” If we understand “prayer” is speaking in tongues in this context, the verse is saying: “Therefore, let the one who speaks in a tongue, pray in tongues so that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.” This now makes perfect sense. The context of these verses is edifying the congregation (14:12, 16, 17). If I speak in tongues, I am edified, but the congregation is not. Therefore if I am going to edify the congregation, I must pray in tongues so that I will then have something to interpret. Then the congregation can be edified by my interpretation.
Frederic Godet wrote in *Commentary on St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians*, that verse 13 did not mean, “Let him ask of God the power to interpret.” Godet wrote:

“But the terms aitein or deisthai would perhaps suit better a positive position than proseuchesthai, which rather denotes the state of prayer; and the use Paul makes of this same term proseuchesthai in the following verses, specially to denote ecstatic prayer, hardly admits of our taking it in verse 13 in another sense. The words: let him pray (in tongues) that he may interpret, therefore signify: “In giving himself up to the Spirit who leads him to pray in a tongue, let him do so with the intention and with the settled aim beforehand to reproduce the contents of his prayer afterwards in intelligible language.”

Thomas Edwards came to the same conclusion as Godet, and both of them use the term “ecstatic prayer” for speaking in tongues. Edwards wrote that the hina phrase in Greek should be understood to have its normal telic meaning, and added:

“let him that has that gift of tongues pray with tongues, but let him do it with the purpose of interpreting his utterance afterwards;” that is, he should not be content with ecstatic prayer, but should strive after the gift of interpreting his prayer.

*Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek Testament* (Samuel Green, 1886), notes that the general meaning of the subjunctive mood (and the word “interpret” is in the subjunctive mood, derived from the preposition hina), is to signify possibility or intention. Thus it says, “In 1 Cor. 14:13 it is not meant that the disciple is to pray for the power to interpret, but that his gift of prayer is to be so exercised as to involve the power of interpretation.”

Because the congregation cannot understand what we are saying when we speak in tongues, in a meeting we should speak in tongues out loud with the specific intent of interpreting the tongue and thus edifying the body of believers. 14:15. “What, then, is to be done?” The opening phrase is difficult in English. The NIV has the sense, “What shall I do then?” The same phrase is in Acts 21:22. See NASB there. 14:16. “Otherwise.” The Greek word is epei (#1893 ἐπεί, pronounced, “ep-ā”), which is a marker of time, cause, or reason. Here it is a marker of reason, and a very important one, because it links verses 15 and 16 together and shows that it is not proper for someone to “bless” (bless and praise God) with the spirit (i.e., by speaking in tongues) in the congregation unless that person interprets. If there is no interpretation, the people do “not know what you are saying.” Thus, although it is possible to “pray with the understanding” and “sing with the understanding” without it being an interpretation, in this context that is the most important emphasis. “is unlearned.” The Greek is literally, “occupies [or “fills”] the place of the unlearned.” It is not as if the unlearned have a special place just for them. “Occupying the place” is an idiomatic way of referring to them being there and taking up space, or “a
place.” “Instead of merely using the term ‘the unlearned,’ ‘the layman,’ Paul very properly describes the man: “he that occupies the place of the unlearned” (Lenski; The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians). This is an example of when an idiom in a language makes translating difficult. Translating the Greek literally introduces questions and confusion in the mind of the English reader that would never occur to a Greek reader, thus we feel justified in simplifying the English. One should not have to learn Greek idioms to understand the English Bible.

14:18. “speak in tongues.” For more on speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.

14:20. “Brothers, do not be children in your thinking.” This verse starts a new section, and reminds the believers to use their minds and their wisdom. The use of “children” is directly related to the quotation from Isaiah 28 that is in the next verse. The Israelites had repeatedly ignored God’s warnings about their sin, so as the clock moved forward to their destruction by Assyria, God asked them, “Who is it he [God] is trying to teach? To whom is he [God] explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast?” (Isa. 28:9). Then one verse later He says, “Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people” (Isa. 28:11).

Here in Corinthians God is using the quotation from Isaiah and its mention of “children” to good effect. God’s people are not supposed to act like children who cannot think or see consequences. To the world, speaking in tongues should be seen as a great miracle. Here are people, Christians, obviously speaking languages they have never been taught. This should be a “sign” to them (God speaking to them!), that He exists. Sadly, it was for the early Church as it was for Isaiah 700 years before Christ, and as it is for us today, “and not even then will they listen to me, says the Lord.” Most Christians do not see the value in speaking in tongues and even deny its existence. Most unbelievers scoff at it.

14:21. “In the Law.” Quoted from Isaiah 28:11, 12. This is the general use of “Law,” where “Law” refers to the whole Tanakh (technically a form of synecdoche, the part for the whole). In later Jewish writings, the term “law” was even sometimes used of some of the Jewish traditions that had become firmly embedded in society.

“I will speak to this people, and not even then will they listen to me.” This quotation from Isaiah is not a prophecy foretelling that people would speak in tongues. No one would have understood such a prophecy. The point of what God said in Isaiah 28 was that for years God had “spoken” to the people of Israel in many different ways to get them to return to Him, including verbally and through other signs, and they had ignored what God said.

One way God had spoken to Israel was through his prophets. He warned the people of Israel about their sin and told them they needed to return to Him. Amos, much earlier than Isaiah, had said Israel would face dire consequences for its sin: “Thus says the LORD: ‘For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,’” (Amos 2:6 ESV). Hosea had also spoken of Israel’s sin and its consequences. “Then the LORD said to Hosea…’I will soon punish the house of Jehu…and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel’” (Hosea 1:4).

God had also “spoken” to Israel in other ways as well. God made it clear in the Law of Moses that if Israel obeyed Him they would be blessed (cp. Deut. 28:1-14), but if they turned away from Him they would be cursed (cp. Deut. 28:15-68). In fact, Deuteronomy specifically stated that if Israel turned away from Him they would be
defeated by their enemies (Deut. 28:47ff) and carried away from the Promised Land (Deut. 28:64ff). Israel had a covenant promise from God that He would bless and protect them if they would be faithful to Him. Therefore, when they were not faithful and things started to go wrong in Israel, that was God “speaking” to them and warning them that they were not right in His sight.

Amos chapter four lists some of the ways God said he “spoke” to His people, but “you have not returned to me, declares the LORD” (Amos 4:6). God spoke to Israel by famine, by the fact that it rained in one city but not in another, by the scorching east wind, by the mildew that ruined their crops, by crop-devouring insects, by plagues, by wars, and in other ways as well (Amos 4:6-13).

Isaiah 28 is one of the many places where God is reproving Israel for its sin. The leaders were proud and drunkards (28:1), even the priests and prophets (false prophets) were drunkards (28:7). Since the prophets in Israel no longer spoke for God, He said that, “He [God] will speak to this people” Himself, (28:11), but how would He do it? Israel had refused to listen to Him speaking through His true prophets or His warnings of famine, plague, and war, so how would God speak to them? God said He would speak to them by fulfilling His promise of Deuteronomy 28:64; Israel would be carried away from the Promised Land by strangers, Assyrians, who spoke another language, “another tongue” (28:11 KJV).

When they were conquered by the Assyrians and carried away from the Promised Land, Israel should have realized that God was fulfilling His promise in Deuteronomy, and repented with all their heart and soul. Even Solomon, in his prayer at the dedication of the Temple, prayed that if Israel sinned and was carried away from their land, “if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you…and say, ‘We have sinned, we have done wrong and acted wickedly;’ and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul…and pray toward the land you gave their fathers…then from heaven…hear their prayer and their pleas, and uphold their cause. And forgive your people, who have sinned against you” (2 Chron. 6:37-39). Alas, Israel never repented, and so never did return from their captivity. God foresaw that, and thus He said, “but they would not listen” (Isa. 28:12).

When we understand the history of Israel and what Isaiah 28 is saying, we are able to understand why God quoted Isaiah 28:11 and 12 in 1 Corinthians 14:21. The congregation in Corinth started with the Jews (Acts 18:1-18), and it was the Jews, historically God’s chosen people, who harassed Paul in Corinth, even dragging him before the regional government (Acts 18:12). The Jews resisted Paul and the Gospel he preached, and they were not listening to God (nor were most of the Gentiles) just as Israel had behaved in the days of Isaiah. Therefore, just as in the days of Isaiah, God decided to speak to them and give them a sign of His presence and power even though again it looked like, “and not even _then_ will they listen to me.” However, this time the sign He gave the unbelievers was not prophecy, which was a manifestation of the spirit and a sign they had encountered (and ignored!) for hundreds of years, but a new manifestation of the power of God: speaking in tongues. That is why 1 Corinthians 14:22 says that “tongues are for a sign” to those people who do not believe. It is indeed a sign of God’s power whether they ignore it or not, but as Israel ignored God’s signs and suffered because of it, those who ignore God’s signs today will also suffer consequences.
The point of 1 Corinthians 14:21 is that God, as always, is trying to reach out to people, giving them signs of His presence and power. The Assyrians with their powerful armies and strange language were a sign to Israel that they had abandoned God and His covenant blessings. Now, the strange language of tongues is again a sign to unbelievers, and if they ignore that sign, they do so to their peril.

14:23. “everyone speaks in tongues.” Paul had just made the point in verse 22 that speaking in tongues was a sign to unbelievers. It can be easily seen that this could be overplayed by the congregation, who might think that if the unbelievers saw not just one person speak in tongues, but everyone speak in tongues, that would be really convincing. However, the Word tells us what modern experience has confirmed: that when unbelievers come across a whole church speaking in tongues at one time, they are not convinced; rather, they are generally confused or frightened, and think something is wrong with the people. Churches that make a practice of having everyone speak in tongues at one time need to take heed to this verse. [For more on speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:10 and 14:5].

“raving mad.” The translation “raving mad” (some versions read, “mad,” or “out of your mind”) is an attempt to represent the Greek text in this context of public worship, which, unfortunately, cannot be easily translated into English. In the Greek pagan worship, it occasionally happened that the devotees were taken over by demons and acted in a frenzied, frantic, raving manner. The New Testament scholar, C. K. Barrett, writes: “You are mad…does not mean, You are suffering from mental disease, but, You are possessed…” (C. K. Barrett, Black’s New Testament Commentary: The First Epistle to the Corinthians). God wants to prevent confusion in Christian fellowships. He never wants people who attend church to think that the congregation has been taken over by demons and gone into a religious frenzy. He makes it clear that what is done in the service “…must be done for the strengthening of the church” (1 Cor. 14:26b).

14:24. “convinced” by all. The Greek word elegcho is hard to translate here. We went with “convinced” because it is being contrasted to the ones who, upon seeing tongues, were not convinced but said the people were “raving mad” (actually, demonized). However, it also carries the meaning of being openly exposed, brought to light. In prophecy, the life of the person is often brought to light in a way that convinces them that God is among you.


14:27. “one at a time.” The Greek phrase ana meros (ἀνὰ µέρος), which literally translates into something like “up a part,” is idiomatic, and means “one at a time” (Porter, Idioms of the Greek New Testament).

“the same one must interpret.” The Greek for this phrase may be read two different ways—“one, as in anyone, must interpret,” or “the one, he alone must interpret.” Those who claim that a different person may interpret someone’s tongue in an assembly favor the first reading. However, we will see that this creates problems with the context of chapter fourteen and is therefore most likely not the sense of the Greek. The underlying Greek text is composed of the word heis, (#1520 εἷς) which is the cardinal number one (however, we will see it is not always used in that simple manner) and the verb for “interpret,” dieirmēneuō (#1329 διερµήνευο), in the third person, singular, imperative mood. When the verb is put in this form it means, “he/she/someone must interpret.”
We use the word *must* to indicate that this is a command. Although the imperative mood is sometimes used of exhortations and can be represented by “let,” in this case the context and scope of the subject dictates that the imperative mood is better served by the English word “must,” rather than “let.” In English, “let” usually indicates passivity rather than activity of command, the person is allowed to do something if they want to, but are not being told they must do it. Thus, “I will let you eat one of my cookies if you want to,” versus, “You must eat a cookie.” Thus “let” does not capture the sense of the verse in this situation. If someone speaks in tongues in the congregation, no one understands him, so to be walking in love and obeying God, he “must” interpret. Paul is giving a command here.

Putting *heıs* and *diermēneuō* together, we get “one must interpret.” If this is taken to mean that one, as in anyone, can interpret the tongue, then this verse seems to go against what Paul has written up to this point on how tongues ought to be interpreted. There are three places prior to this verse where the practice of interpreting tongues is discussed. These are 1 Corinthians 14:5, 13, and 15-16:

1. Verse 5 tells us that a person who speaks in tongues is not edifying the church unless he interprets. This would seem to indicate that the person who speaks in tongues would be edifying the church if that same person (he) followed the tongues with an interpretation. According to normal Greek syntax, the logical antecedent for the verb “interpret” would be *ho lalon* (“The one speaking” in tongues).

2. Verse 13 instructs us that a person who speaks in a tongue should “pray” that he may interpret. This instruction seems clear that the same person who spoke in the tongue should be the one who interprets. In Greek, “the one speaking in tongues” is the subject of the verb “interpret.”

3. Verses 15-16 begin with Paul rhetorically asking the question “What then should a person do?” regarding the proper place and practice of tongues and interpretation in the church assembly. He then answers the question by stating that it is proper to “pray/praise” with the spirit and then “pray/praise” with the understanding; otherwise people will not be edified because they will not understand the tongues (praying/praising with the spirit) by itself. The first word of verse 16 is a key to understanding Paul’s intent in these two verses. It is the word “otherwise.” Paul is saying that unless he follows his speaking in tongues with an interpretation others will not be edified. Verses 15-16 clearly indicate that Paul is teaching that the person who speaks in tongues should follow it with an interpretation. He says *I* will pray with my spirit then *I* will pray with my understanding also. Paul sets the example of the same person giving the interpretation.

It seems then that every verse to this point indicates that the person who gives the tongue ought to be the one to give the interpretation. This is strong evidence that we should not read Paul as going against this in verse 27. Instead, there is a legitimate alternative reading that clears up the apparent inconsistency. A closer look at the Greek word *heıs* reveals that this word is not always used in the sense of the number one. Lenski states that, “There is no reason to stress εἷς to mean one person only for the two or the three speakers…” Gingrich’s Lexicon lists three different definitions for *heıs* while
Thayer lists five different definitions with numerous subcategories under each category. One of the definitions that Thayer provides in his second definition category is the usage of the word *heis* in the sense of ‘alone’ or ‘only.’ He cites Mark 2:7 as an example of this usage: “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (ESV). The word translated “alone” is the Greek word *heis*. It makes no sense to translate their statement, “Who can forgive sins but God one.” It is made clear by this verse that a legitimate Biblical usage of the Greek word *heis* meaning “alone” does exist. The sense is to indicate the “one and same” nature of the subject, *this one God only* can forgive sins.

If we bring this meaning back into 1 Corinthians 14:27 we get the following phrase, “he alone must interpret” or “this same one must interpret.” This sense put along with the rest of the verse would read as follows: “If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it should be* two or three at the most, and in turn, and the same one must interpret.” This reading lines up with Paul’s earlier instruction in the chapter and actually prohibits the very activity which the contradictory reading promoted (i.e. someone else interpreting). We should note that if Paul had meant to teach that someone else should interpret the messages, he could have said it in many different and clearer ways. He could have used the following words instead of *heis*:

- *tis* - this would have indicated that anyone could have given the interpretation.
- *heteros* - this would have indicated that any other one could have given the interpretation.
- *to autos* - this would have indicated that the same one should give all interpretations.
- *hekastos* - this would have indicated that each one in turn should give his own interpretation after someone speaks in tongues.

However, verse 27 uses none of these words. It does use the word *heis*, which in contrast to these other words, shows that “the one and the same” one who spoke should interpret the message.

**14:28. “But if there is no one to interpret.”** This translation fits the context and follows versions such as the ESV, RSV, and NRSV. This verse is saying that if no one in the room has been instructed in interpretation or if no one desires to speak in tongues and then interpret at that time, then instead of speaking in tongues out loud without interpretation, each person should just keep quiet.

This verse is not saying that the “interpreter” is a different person than the one who speaks in tongues. The phrase, “if there is no one to interpret” is a simple statement of fact—not a reference to another person. There are many people who speak in tongues and who do not interpret, as is clearly evidenced in congregations of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. So, it can happen that “there is no one to interpret” for several reasons. For one, people may not have been instructed in interpretation or may have even been taught that since they speak in tongues they cannot interpret. Or, people may not want to interpret because they are comfortable with just knowing how to speak in tongues. Or even that people may not feel like interpreting in that particular meeting. In each of these cases, there is “no one to interpret” in the room.

Far from showing that the person who interprets is different than the person who speaks in tongues, this verse is more evidence that the person speaking in tongues is the same person who must interpret. In a large congregation, especially with new people and...
visitors coming and going, how would anyone who might desire to speak in tongues know if someone else in the room was “an interpreter?” And since the Bible says not to speak in tongues in public worship without there being an interpretation, that would place a terrible burden on the person who becomes inspired to speak in tongues to be sure that someone in the room would interpret. The only real and practical way to be sure that if someone speaks in tongues, there will be an interpretation, is if the one who speaks in tongues is the same one who interprets. Both speaking in tongues and interpretation are manifestations of the gift of holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:10), and are both operated from the freewill and trust (“faith”) of the individual Christian. So when a Christian has been instructed in the use of the manifestations, and wants to use them in a meeting as a blessing to the people there, he or she will speak in tongue and then interpret the message so the congregation can understand it.

14:30. “revealed.” For what “revelation” is, see commentary on Galatians 1:12 and 1 Corinthians 12:8.

14:32. “And spirits spoken by prophets are subject to prophets.” This verse has a primary interpretation, and some sub-themes. First, it is accurate as translated above. The text does not read, “the spirits” or “the prophets.” There are no definite articles. Second, “spirits” is the figure of speech metonymy for “spiritual utterances,” or prophecies, due to the fact that they originate from the spirit. Thus if this verse were to be expanded according to meaning, it would be: “The prophecies of prophets are subject to prophets.” That “spirits” refers to spiritual manifestations, prophecies, can be seen both from this chapter and from a similar use in 1 John. For example, in verse 12, people are said to be “zealous for spirits.” In that verse, as in this one, “spirits” is put by metonymy for that which is produced by the spirit, which is the manifestation, or evidences of the spirit (see commentary on 14:12). Here in 14:32, the “spirits of,” is a genitive of origin, and should be understood as “spirit from,” or expanded as, “And spiritual manifestations, prophecies, from prophets are subject to prophets.”

Another example of this use of “spirits” is in 1 John 4:1: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” The context of 1 John 4:1 makes it clear that we are to test the “spirits,” the manifestations (specifically prophecies), because many false prophets are in the world, and thus there are many false prophecies (“spirits”) in the world. Then the context of 1 John 4 goes on about what the false prophets say (see commentary there). Another use of the word “spirits” in the sense of a prophetic word is 2 Thessalonians 2:2 (see commentary there).

14:34, 35. These verses are in brackets because there is good evidence that they were not part of the original text, but were an early textual note that was copied into the text. It is more accurate to the original text to omit these verses when reading. As much as we dislike omitting a verse or verses that have been accepted as part of the text, it is honest to recognize that occasionally the biblical text was changed, and in this case there is good evidence that these two verses are an early addition to the text. [For more information and full commentary on these verses, see Appendix 12: “The Role of Women In The Church”]

14:38. “If anyone does not acknowledge this, he is not acknowledged.” (Cp. Lenski; NAB) If anyone in the congregation is hardhearted and does not acknowledge that what
Paul was writing was the word and direction of the Lord, then that person should not be acknowledged in the Church as a leader, teacher, or spiritual person.

14:39. **“do not forbid anyone to speak in tongues.”** In spite of this command, many congregations forbid people from speaking in tongues. The Corinthian church needed instruction on the subject of the manifestations of holy spirit, which Paul provides in chapters 12-14. He clarifies the manifestations themselves in chapter 12, encourages people to manifest. He tells people to eagerly desire spiritual things (14:1), to speak in tongues (14:5; which means that not everyone was), and to seek to edify the church (14:12). Paul set the example for the Corinthians by saying that he spoke in tongues more than all of them combined (14:18), and he explained that tongues were a sign to unbelievers (14:22). In light of the clear command to not forbid speaking in tongues, it is astounding how many Christian denominations do exactly that, clearly contradicting the clear teaching of Scripture. Christians should take to heart the desire of God that is clearly expressed in 14:5: God wants every Christian to speak in tongues.

Due to the construction of the words in the verse, it sometimes gets suggested that this verse is the figure of speech Tapeinosis, or Understatement, and that what Paul is really saying is “Greatly encourage people to speak in tongues.” Although God would like us to greatly encourage speaking in tongues, the evidence is that this is not the figure Tapeinosis. In considering whether or not a verse is a figure, we must keep in mind that the literal reading is always to be preferred if it makes sense in the context. In this case, the fact on his third missionary journey Paul had to write to the people of Corinth about the manifestations shows that the people had become unclear about them. After all, only a couple years earlier Paul would have instructed them about the manifestations when he was there for a year and a half (Acts 18:11). Nevertheless, division started in the Church (1 Cor. 1:10ff), and along with that came confusion about the manifestations. It got to the point that there were people who were not speaking in tongues, and apparently not eager to do so (hence the encouragement to speak in tongues and be eager about the manifestations). It is easy to see in that context that there even would have been some people trying to stop the speaking in tongues, just as there are today in the Church. In that context, a clear warning not to forbid speaking in tongues was necessary. This would put an end to any debate about whether or not the manifestations had a place in the Church. Also, in verse 38, Paul wrote that if a person did not acknowledge this instruction, he was not to be acknowledged as a spiritual person. Thus the people in Corinth were instructed not to endlessly debate the issue with those who were defiant towards the power of God, but simply not acknowledge as leaders or people of authority anyone who stood in opposition to what Paul was teaching.

**“speaking in tongues.”** For more on speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.

### Chapter 15

15:1. **“I want to remind you.”** This is the correct sense of the Greek, although the death and resurrection of Christ was fundamental, and something they should have known and boldly stood on. In the REV, we, like some other versions such as the NIV, have translated this “I want to remind you.” That is the essence of what Paul was writing to the
Corinthians, but he worded it as “I make known to you,” which is the way some of the more literal English versions, such as the NASB, read. Paul had already told the Corinthians about the resurrection, so by saying “I make known to you” something they already knew, he was mildly reproving them for not standing on what they knew.

Grosheide writes: “The solemn beginning of this chapter must be understood against this background. I make known is not, “I remind you,” but “I make known emphatically” (cp. Gal. 1:11) (F. W. Grosheide, The New International Commentary). There are a couple reasons why “remind” is better than “I make known to you” in this verse. First, it clears up what is otherwise a cause of confusion in the English and makes it clear that Paul was telling them something that he had already taught them. Second, in English, reminding someone can be a mild reproof if the person was already supposed to know what you were reminding them of, so in this case the sense of reproof in the verse is not totally lost by the translation: “I want to remind you.”

15:2. “are being saved.” There are verses that say we have been saved (Eph. 2:8), verses that say we are being saved (1 Cor. 15:2), and verses that say we will be saved (Rom. 13:11). Our salvation is more than just our guarantee of everlasting life. We get that guarantee when we believe and are sealed with holy spirit (Eph. 1:13, 14), and because we believed, we will be with Christ forever. However, a guarantee is not the actual thing, and the guarantee of salvation is not salvation in full. The verses that say we “have been saved” are using the idiom of the prophetic perfect (see commentary on “seated,” in Ephesians 2:6). “Salvation” is being rescued from this present evil world, and that is still future, and will occur when Christ comes and we get our new, everlasting bodies. Also, we “are being saved,” in the sense that our being rescued from this world is being worked out every day, and we are building both wholeness now and rewards in the future. It is in this light that if we “believed in vain (to no purpose)” we will have everlasting life (cp. 1 Cor. 3:11-15), but we will be in Paradise without the fruits and rewards of salvation-rewards which every believer would have earned if he had been serious about his salvation and obeying his God. Life is not to be wasted. God created us to do good works (Eph. 2:10), and people who hide their talent in the ground and do not use it for God’s purposes are “wicked, lazy” servants (Matt. 25:26).

15:3. “as of first importance.” The phrase en prōtos is literally “in the first place (or position)”, and in this context refers to what Paul thought was the most important. Paul is not remembering the very first thing he taught the Corinthians, but rather what he thought was most important.

15:4. “was raised.” This is a better translation than “rose again.” See commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:15.

15:12. “if Christ is being preached.” A good example of the idiomatic Greek use of “if” meaning “since” (cp. Eph. 3:2). However, it is so well understood in English that Christ had been being preached that leaving the “if” does not cause confusion, and the sentence reads smoother with it left in.

“out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “from among the dead.”

15:12. “how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” This is an interesting question in light of the Jewish, Greek, and Roman culture and beliefs that the congregation in Corinth came out of. It shows how thoroughly Paul communicated the basic beliefs of the Christian Faith, and how essential those beliefs are to Christianity.
When Paul went to Corinth he first went to the synagogue so that he could convert the Jews and Greek “God-fearers” who were there (Acts 18:4; for “God-fearers,” see commentary on Acts 13:16). When he was rejected in the synagogue, he went to the “Gentiles,” the non-Jews (Acts 18:6).

When Paul talked to the Jews in the synagogue, it is likely that at least some of them were of the persuasion of the Sadducees, that there was no resurrection (Matt. 22:23) or had taken on some of the beliefs of the Greeks and Romans around them, that the soul (life-force) of the body lived on after the body died, but the soul never occupied a physical body again. The Greeks and Romans believed that the soul lived on after the death of the body, but without a physical body, and they scoffed at the resurrection of the dead (Acts 17:32).

Given that so many of the congregation had come from a background in which there was no physical resurrection, it seems logical that at least some of the Christians in Corinth would have remained unconvinced, or at least be confused, about the need for a physical resurrection. It seems that Paul would not have needed to ask the question, “How do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” Many people would answer, “We never believed in a physical resurrection.” So what Paul’s question really tells us is that the physical resurrection of the bold is an essential piece of the Christian Faith, that he had taught it thoroughly, and also that it should be fundamental part of the teaching in every Christian church.

Sadly, however, the situation in Corinth is similar to the situation in much of Christianity today. Many Christians are convinced that Christians “go to heaven when they die,” and are confused about the need for a physical resurrection, even though it is clearly part of the Christian Faith (Acts 24:15; Rom. 6:5; 1 Cor. 15:44-54; Phil. 3:11; 1 Thess. 4:16; 2 Tim. 2:18; Heb. 11:35; cp. the prophecies of the dead being raised in the Old Testament and Gospels: Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:11-14; Hos. 13:14; Dan. 12:2, 13; Luke 14:14; John 5:24-29).

15:15. “in contradiction to God.” The Greek here for “contradiction” is from the preposition kata (#2596 κατά). BDAG defines kata as contradiction in this verse: “give testimony in contradiction to God” (def. b, β). Paul’s reasoning starts by assuming that God always knows the true position of things and speaks the truth. Supposing for argument’s sake that God did not in fact raise Christ, then God’s position would be that He did not raise him. And thus Paul would be testifying against God by saying He did something He did not in fact do. Testifying against God in this sense would be to speak in contradiction to God.

15:18. “asleep.” The Greek verb is koimaō (#2837 κοίμαω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60. If Jesus has not been raised, then there is no resurrection from the dead, no Rapture to be with Christ, and those who have died are not just dead, they have “perished.”


“asleep.” The Greek verb is koimaō (#2837 κοίμαω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

15:22. “in Adam…in Christ.” The Greek word translated “in” is en (#1722 ἐν), and here refers to a relationship, a connection. [For more on the “in” of connection, see commentary on Colossians 1:17 and Romans 6:3].
“Adam.” The Greek reads, “the Adam,” letting us know that it is the well-known one, the first man created. However, we do not reproduce the word “the” in English.

“all die.” The Greek word translated “die” is ἀποθνῄσκω (♯599 ἀποθνῄσκω) in the present tense, active voice. Robertson (Grammar, p. 827) calls this the “frequentative present,” and it is also called the iterative present. It means “they go on dying.” It refers to the ongoing process of Christians dying.

“all will be made alive.” The Greek word translated “will be made alive” is ζωοποιεῖ (♯2227 ζωοποιεῖ), and it is a future tense. Robertson rightly refers to this as a punctiliar future, because different groups of people will be made alive en masse in the future: first at the Rapture, then at the first resurrection, and lastly at the second resurrection [For more on the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15].

This verse has confused many, and been a central pillar in the teaching of the doctrine referred to by theologians as “Universalism,” that is, that every person who has ever lived will be saved, no matter what they believed or how they behaved. A central part of that argument is that both uses of “all” should be understood the same way, that is, if “all” (everyone) dies, then “all” (everyone) must be made alive (i.e., everyone must be given everlasting life). Proponents of Universalism correctly argue that it does not fit the context to make the first “all” refer to everyone, but the second “all” refer only to Christians. Although that would certainly be convenient, it does not do justice to the grammar.

The key to understanding what Paul is saying is the context, which is about Christians and the resurrection. Paul is not discussing that fact that everyone dies; he is discussing why there must be a resurrection, because some people were saying there was no resurrection (v. 12). The whole argument in Chapter 15 is about Christians only; it is not about “everyone,” i.e., both Christians and unbelievers. Paul is discussing Christians who die and then must be resurrected to be alive. Paul starts by pointing out that this was the pattern for the founder of the Faith, Jesus Christ, who himself died and then was made alive via resurrection (vs. 3, 4). Then Paul points out that if there is no resurrection, then Christ is not raised (v. 13), so he must be dead, and our trust in Christ is therefore futile (v. 17). Furthermore, the Christians who have already died have “perished,” they are forever dead (v. 18). But Paul then triumphantly says that in fact Jesus has been raised from the dead, and is the first one to be raised from the dead (v. 20).

Of course, it is clear that Christians are dying, just as it will be clear that Christians will be raised from the dead, but Paul clearly states this point in verse 22 so no one will misunderstand. He says, “For just as in our connection with Adam all Christians die, so in our connection with Christ all Christians will be made alive.”

Many of the underlying arguments of the Universalist position are based on the assumption that God is love, so He cannot allow anyone to suffer in Gehenna or perish. However, those arguments misunderstand love. The nature of love is not controlling, but rather allowing someone the freedom of choice even if the choice is a bad one with bad consequences. We should all understand this. We see people every day make choices that are harmful to them, but we also understand that they have the freedom to make those choices even if we wish they would take a better path in life. It is not loving for us to force people to live the way we want them to, even if it would be better for them. Similarly, it is not loving for God to force people to live in a way that is good for them, even if the end of people’s bad choices is death.
The Bible is clear that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18), so if He says the wicked will be destroyed, then they will be [for more on the destruction of the wicked see Appendix 5: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”]. There are many extremely clear teachings in the Bible about the destruction of the wicked, and we cannot simply discount them because we wish people would do well now and in the hereafter (cp. Matt. 10:28; 2 Pet. 2:4-6). God cannot tell us the wicked will be destroyed and then not follow through with it. It is because God is love that He warns us over and over to be wise and do what is right.

The Bible has warning-story after warning-story of people making bad choices and suffering and even dying because of them, but we do not see God removing their freewill and making them make good choices so they will not suffer and die. Instead, we see God pleading with people to make the right choices and do well (cp. Ezek. 33:11). Much of the point of the emphasis on wisdom in the book of Proverbs is so people will make the right choice and not suffer and die.

15:24. “when... after.” This verse contains the Greek word hotan (#3752 ὅταν) twice, which we have rendered “when” and “after.” The proper translation of this word unlocks the temporal sequence of the end that Paul is revealing. Hotan is a temporal term that can signify either simultaneous action with the main clause or prior action to the main clause. The difference depends on the tense and mood of the verb that it modifies: “with the present subjunctive, when the action of the subordinate clause is contemporaneous with that of the main clause… with the aorist subjunctive, when the action of the subordinate clause precedes that of the main clause” (BDAG). Here in verse 24 the main clause is “then comes the end,” the action that is contemporaneous with the end is “when he delivers (present subjunctive) the kingdom to God,” and the action that is prior to the end (making the end “after” this) is “he abolishes (aorist subjunctive) all rule and all authority and power.” Paul is being very precise in revealing the order of events. First Christ abolishes all the powers, and then he delivers the kingdom to God, and this delivery is simultaneous with the end. The end is the telos, or end goal, the desired conclusion of the creation project. Compare BDAG’s definition of telos: the goal toward which a movement is being directed, end, goal, outcome.

“he.” We believe the pronouns in verses 20-28 should be understood as follows:

20 But in fact, Christ has been raised out from among the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then those who are Christ’s, at his coming. 24 Then comes the end, when he (Jesus) delivers the kingdom to God, even the Father, after he (Jesus) abolishes all rule and all authority and power. 25 For it is necessary for him (Jesus) to reign until he (Jesus) has put all these enemies under his (Jesus’) feet. 26 The last enemy to be abolished—death! 27 For he (God) has put all things in subjection under his (Jesus’) feet. But when it says, All things have been put in subjection, it is clear that the one (God) who subjected all things to him (Jesus) is not included. 28 And when all things have been subjected to him (Jesus), then the Son will subject himself to him (God) who subjected all things to him (Jesus), that God may be all in all.

“brings to an end all rule and all authority and power.” Jesus is the one who abolishes all rule and all authority and power. He has the power and authority to do that, because God gave it to him (Matt. 28:18; John 5:21-29; Acts 2:34-36; Eph. 1:22; Phil.
The rule, authority, and power refers to the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12); see also commentary entry on 15:25. Scripture teaches that there are angelic rulers and cosmic powers who hold certain authority in the universe, and that some of these powers are hostile to God (E.g., Dan. 10; Psalm 82; Matt. 24:29; Luke 4:6; Rom. 8:38-39; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 6:12; 1 John 5:19; Rev. 12:3-10). Here, Paul is saying that Christ “abolishes” these positions of authority. This comes from the Greek word katargeō (#2673 κατάργεω). BDAG gives the following definitions for katargeō, all of which can adequately describe what Christ does to the angelic rulers, authorities, and powers: 1) to cause something to lose its power or effectiveness; hence invalidate or make powerless; 2) to cause something to come to an end or to be no longer in existence; hence abolish, wipe out, set aside. 3) to cause the release of someone from an obligation (one has nothing more to do with it); hence be discharged, be released.

All this authority has been transferred to Christ (Matt. 28:18) and he will discharge the demons of their rule, wipe out their authority, and render their power ineffective. But as Hebrews 2:8 makes clear, even though everything has been put under Christ’s subjection, we do not yet see everything subjected to him. The powers are still in the heavenly places now (Eph. 6:12). It is not until the end that Christ takes his mighty power and begins to reign, starting with the war in heaven and the conquering of Satan and his minions (Rev. 11:15-18; 12:10).

15:25. “all his enemies.” The Greek has the definite article, and literally reads, “all the enemies.” This refers to a particular set of enemies, namely the spiritual forces behind “all rule and all authority and power” just mentioned in verse 24, and that is why we, along with most other versions, replace “the” with “his.” The enemies are Christ’s enemies. This echoes Ephesians 6:12 (ESV):

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (emphasis added).

It is necessary for Christ to reign until all these enemies are put under his feet. (See also Hebrews 2:5-9, 1 Peter 3:22, and Revelation 11:15-18; 12:10).

15:26. “that will be brough to an end.” In the Greek this verb, katargeō (#2673 κατάργεω), occurs in the present tense. It is an instance of the Prophetic Present, presenting a future reality as certain by speaking of it in the present tense. “This tense startles and arrests. It affirms and does not merely predict. It conveys a sense of certainty” (Lenski). This idiom uses a present tense verb, instead of a future tense verb, to express an action in the future, and by doing so emphasizes that the action is certain to come to pass, and usually quite soon (See commentary on Ephesians 2:6 and Luke 3:9 for more on the prophetic present). In this case, the words “brought to an end” are in the present tense, and Young’s Literal Translation has a very literal translation of the verse: “the last enemy is done away—death.” The problem with translating the Greek literally here, like Young’s does, is that most Christians are not familiar with the prophetic present idiom or the prophetic perfect idiom, and would tend to misunderstand a literal translation—because death has not yet been abolished. Nevertheless, the idiom gives great comfort to the knowledgeable reader who understands that God is communicating clearly that death will indeed be destroyed, and soon. However, most English versions
use the English future tense, translating the verb in a way that does not confuse the reader. Thus, the NASB reads, “The last enemy that will be abolished is death.”

“death.” This is death, the absence of life, not just the death of the body. In the Garden of Eden, God said to Adam that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would “die” (Gen. 2:17). God said “die,” not “live forever in a bad place” (i.e., “hell”). When people die, they are “dead,” and by definition, death is the absence of life. When it comes to things that we cannot know, such as what happens when a person dies, we must trust that God has given us the answers in His Word. It is important to realize that because there are some people who assert that “death” means “separation,” but that is not biblically correct. When a person “dies,” he is not alive and “separated” from God; rather, he is not alive in any form or in any place. The Bible uses the same Hebrew and Greek words for the “death” of humans, as for the death of animals and plants. There is no special word for the “death” of people that means “separation,” and no reason to say that the word “death” means “separation” when referring to a person but actual “death” when referring to an animal. There is a reason God uses the same words for the death of a human and the death of animals—death is the same for all of them, and “death” is the total absence of life. [For more information on the state of the dead, see Appendix 4: “The Dead are Dead.”]

15:27. Quoted from Psalm 8:6.

“it says.” Some versions translate this “he says” (KJV; ASV; NASB), which would make God the first person speaker being quoted. Although it is true that God inspired the Scripture and is its author, in this instance Paul is dealing with the biblical text of Psalm 8:6 where the Psalmist, as the narrator, is speaking of God; it is not God who is speaking in the first person. This is a quote of the narration of Scripture and should be handled as it often is by preachers and teachers who say, “the Bible says…it says,” not “the Bible says…He says.”

15:28. “subject himself.” The form of this verb, hupotassō (#5293 ὑποτάσσω), can either be passive (“be subjected” [NIV; ESV; NASB]) or be a middle future, “the son will subject himself” (Lenski; Robertson, Grammar). The latter translation makes sense, that the son subjects himself. In every other use in this context, the active or passive of “subject” refers to the use of force, but that certainly does not apply to the Son, who out of love for His Father and of his own free will subjects himself after all enemies are subjected by force.

15:29. “baptized for the sake of those who are dead.” The exact way to translate this verse has been debated for centuries. In 1770 John Salomon Semler proposed that the standard translation was likely not correct, and broke the first sentence into two, making something such as: “Otherwise, what are they doing who are baptized? It is on behalf of dead ones if the dead are not raised.”

While the exact translation may be debated, the essential meaning of the section is not. Although we have no records of it today outside the Bible, it seems clear that Christians were being baptized as a ritual of standing in place of those who had died without being baptized. The fact that this is not mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament, or by any of the Church Fathers, or in the secular writings of those who speak (usually disparagingly) about Christianity, shows that the practice was probably local and very short lived. It is very common that ancient cultures had practices of which we today
know very little because many local customs were never written down or the records
were lost.

The text speaks of being baptized “for the sake of” \[huper\] those who had died. The Greek preposition \textit{huper} means “for the sake of” or more colloquially, “in the place
of.” Paul’s argument is thus right to the point: if there is no resurrection from the dead,
then being baptized for someone who has died is pointless, and anyone who doubts the
resurrection, but gets baptized on behalf of a dead person, is contradicting what he says
by what he does.

The most likely explanation for the custom is that living Christians were being
baptized for people in the congregation who were known to be faithful and believers but
had not as yet received the rite of baptism. In the early centuries of the Church, especially
once the Romans persecutions had started, it was often the case that a person had to be
faithful to the Church for some probationary period before he or she was allowed to be
baptized, which granted them the full status of membership in the congregation. It seems
probable from this passage of Scripture that at some point in the early Church a new
custom started such that if a person in the probationary period died, someone else was
then baptized in his or her place, most likely as a demonstration that the person really was
a believer and would be in the resurrection, and that was being practiced at Corinth.

15:31. “I swear this, brothers, by your reason to boast, that is, Christ Jesus our
Lord.” It would seem by the large number of ways that this verse has been brought into
English that it is a very difficult verse.

Some versions start with “I protest.” While that gets the sense of the fact that Paul
is upset with the people of Corinth, it misses the sense of the Greek, which is a well-
attested formula by which people swear to something. A number of versions (cp. GWN;
NAB; NJB; NLT; The Source NT) and commentators (cp. Lenski; A Thiselton, \textit{The New
International Greek Testament Commentary}) explain that Paul is using a grammatical
formula that the Greeks used in making oaths. A. Nyland (\textit{The Source New Testament})
writes:

Paul used the common Greek expression for swearing by a divinity (νη, ne, with
accusative)...This Greek word has no other meaning. In Greek times, people frequently
said, ‘I swear by Zeus!’ and here Paul is saying, “I swear by your reason to boast!” and
the Greek requires that the reason to boast must have divine implication. Paul used the
word \textit{kaukthesis}, which is ‘reason to boast,’ which cannot mean ‘pride’ or
‘glory,’ and in no way is he suggesting here that he is proud of the Corinthians—quite the
opposite. He is giving the Corinthians a severe roasting for their behavior. Paul is saying
that his reason to boast is their reason to boast, and this reason is Jesus.

Despite the number of translations that say Paul is boasting in the Corinthians (cp.
CEB; HCSB; GWN; NASB; NET; NIV; NJB), there is every reason to believe the verse
should not be translated that way. Starting right from chapter one, Paul has said he is
upset with the Corinthians. They were divided (1:10ff; 11:18ff), and Paul was glad he had
not baptized them (1:14). He treated them as if they were immature in the Faith (2:1ff;
3:1ff). He reproved them for their arrogance, and had to admonish them to imitate him
(4:8ff). He reproved them for the sexual immorality allowed in the church (5:1ff). He
reproved them for taking each other to court (6:1ff). He had to defend himself against
personal challenges to himself and his ministry (9:1ff). He told them their meetings were
doing more harm than good (11:17). He had to give them exact instructions on love
They were not respecting each other in the meetings, but were stepping on each other (14:26ff).

If all the above were not enough reason to see that Paul is not boasting in the Corinthians, early in chapter 15, some church members were actually saying there was no resurrection from the dead (15:12). Paul really went after that, and argued forcibly that Jesus was raised from the dead. By 15:30 he says his life is in jeopardy every day for Christ, something he confirms in the first phrase of 15:31: “I die every day!”

It would be strange indeed if, at this point in 1 Corinthians, Paul suddenly reversed his tone and told the Corinthians that he boasted about them. On what possible basis? That cannot be what Paul is saying. Instead, in 15:31 Paul is saying that he swears by Jesus Christ, who is their boasting too, that what he has been saying is true. It seems natural, given the doubt that some in the church at Corinth had about Paul, that he would want to bolster his words by swearing that what he was saying was true. When he wrote 2 Corinthians, likely less than six months later, he had to emphasize that he was not lying (2 Cor. 11:31).

In light of the whole scope and tone of 1 Corinthians, it makes perfect sense that Paul would swear by “what they boasted in—Jesus Christ” that what he was saying was true.


15:40 "There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies." Some versions use the adjectives, “celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial” (which contrasts the earth with the planets) while some use the adjectives “heavenly bodies and earthly bodies,” which places contrast more on heaven and earth. The immediate context does have “sun, moon, and stars,” which favors “celestial” and “terrestrial,” but the chapter is all about the resurrection of the dead, which is about the difference between our earthly body and the heavenly body we will have. Also, there is no reason that angels and other spirit beings are not included in the “heavenly bodies” description, and planets and stars are in fact “heavenly bodies,” so that is the way we have gone in our translation.

15:44. “soul body...spiritual body.” The Greek phrase translated in the REV as “soul body” is σῶμα ψυχικός (#4983 σῶμα σῶμα; and #5591 ψυχικός ψυχικός), and the Greek phrase translated “spiritual body” is σῶμα πνευματικός (#4983 σῶμα σῶμα; and #4152 πνευματικός; in the Greek, the noun “body” comes before the adjective, while in English we put the adjective first). The adjective ψυχικός comes from the noun ψυχή (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced, psoo-kay’), which is usually translated as “soul,” and the adjective πνευματικός comes from the noun πνεῦμα (#4151 πνεῦμα), which is usually translated as “spirit.”

The adjective ψυχικός means “of, belonging to, somehow relating to, the ‘soul’ (ψυχή),” and the adjective πνευματικός means “of, belonging to, somehow relating to, the ‘spirit’ (πνεῦμα).” In this case, from the context and scope of Scripture we can see that the verse is saying that today we have a body that is related to the soul and “soul-powered,” while in the future we will have a body that is related to spirit, and “spirit-powered.” [For more on ψυχικός, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 2:14, “natural”].

The human body is now animated by what the Bible calls “soul,” but when believers are raised from the dead or changed at the Rapture, we will no longer be animated by soul, but will be animated by spirit. So, for example, Ezekiel 37:5-14 says that God puts ruach, “spirit,” into people, making them come alive. “Thus says the Lord
GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves… I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live.” (Ezek. 37:12-14 NRSV abridged). Unfortunately, many English versions translate the Hebrew word **ruach** in Ezekiel 37 as “breath” and not “spirit,” but some versions, such as the Douay-Rheims, NAB, Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible, and YLT, say “spirit” in these verses. A study of the whole Bible on this subject shows that God will put spirit into people’s dead bodies, which will then come to life (see commentary on John 3:3 and John 3:6).

The phrase “soul body” seems awkward, but “soul” is not easily made into an adjective in English. “Spirit” is much easier, and becomes “spiritual,” but it seems the best we can do with “soul” is “soul body.” It is tempting to use the translation, “soul powered body,” but the soul does more than just power the body. Partly because of the difficulty with “soul body,” many versions translate **sōma psuchikos** as “natural body,” but that is not really what the verse is saying. The verse is not saying that our body is “natural,” it is saying that our body is animated by “soul.” This verse is contrasting our current soul-powered body, which will die, with our future pneumatikos body, a spirit-powered and spirit-enabled body that will live forever. Marvin Vincent correctly states that the phrase sōma psuchikos (“soul body”) “signifies an organism animated by psuche, soul” (Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament). And just as our “soul body” is animated by soul, so in the future our “spiritual body” will be animated by “spirit,” and it will live forever.

It is important that we do not become confused and think that when 1 Corinthians 15:44 says a “spiritual body,” it means a non-corporeal body, like a ghost. The meaning of a sōma pneumatikos (“spiritual body”) is clear from the context. A “soul body” is a body animated by soul, and a “spiritual body” is a body animated by spirit, not a body that has no physical substance and is immaterial.

When we are raised from the dead or changed at the Rapture, we will have a body like Jesus Christ has now (1 Cor. 15:48, 49; Phil. 3:21). When Jesus first appeared to his followers who were inside a room with locked doors, “they were terrified and frightened, and thought they were seeing a spirit [pneuma]” (Luke 24:37 REV). Those disciples had never seen a resurrected body, and because Jesus came into the locked room where they were staying, they thought they were seeing some kind of ghost-like being with a non-corporeal body. Jesus quickly corrected their misconception and said, “Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me, and see, for a spirit [pneuma] does not have flesh and bones, as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39 REV). Even in his resurrected body Jesus has flesh and bones, and we will too. However, our new flesh and bone body will not be powered by the soul that we have today, it will be powered by, and relate to, spirit.

“Since there is.” We translated this as “Since there is,” because that is more the meaning of the Greek text than the conditional statement. The condition expressed by the Greek word **ei** is assumed to be true, so translating **ei** as “if” can be misleading. For more on translating the Greek word **ei**, usually “if,” as “since,” see the commentary on Ephesians 3:2, “Since.”

**15:45. “man…became a living soul.”** This is quoted from Genesis 2:7.

“soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is **psuchē** (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; and attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here **psuchē** is used of the person himself. Thus, many modern versions say “living being,” or
“living person.” Adam’s body was just inanimate (“dead”) material until God breathed life into it. That is the one and only time God created life for people. God took life from Adam (his “rib” or “from his side”) and made Eve, who then had life. Since that time the life (“soul”) of Adam and Eve has been passed down to their progeny. Every person alive today has the life that God breathed into Adam.

When God breathed life into Adam, He did not breathe in something that was like a ghost that inhabited the body and could live apart from the body. He gave “life,” to every cell of Adam’s body. In fact it is the presence of what the Bible calls *nephesh* in the Hebrew Old Testament, and *psuchē* in the Greek New Testament, and we call “soul” in English, that differentiates between a something alive and something dead. A living cell has “soul,” while a dead cell does not.

The soul is sustained by the body, which provides a medium in which it can survive, and when the body can no longer function, the “soul,” the life, dies. It does not go anywhere when it dies, it just dies. “Soul” in the cells of our bodies die by the millions every day, and we never ask “Where did the life go?” We believe it just died. Confusion about “soul” only occurs when every cell dies together, in other words, when the person himself dies. At that time we ask, “Where did the soul go?” But the answer is the same no matter how many cells dies at one time—the “soul” just dies and is gone, it does not “go” anywhere. The dead person is then completely dead in every sense of the word, and is awaiting the resurrection and the Day of Judgment. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”]

“life-giving.” There is a lot of meaning in the phrase that Jesus is a “life-giving” spirit. The primary meaning is that God has given Christ the power to raise the dead (John 5:21; 6:39-54; 11:25). That is why the phrase “life-giving spirit” is used in this verse. The context is speaking of raising the dead (cp. 1 Cor. 15:35, 42). However, it is also true that Jesus gives us power in this life, but that is a secondary meaning in this context (Cp. 2 Cor. 4:7-10; 2 Cor. 12:9; 2 Tim. 1:7).

“spirit.” Jesus is referred to as a “spirit,” but has a flesh and bone body. See commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:44 above. After his resurrection, the New Testament sometimes refers to Jesus as “the Spirit.” Because when Jesus was raised from the dead he had a spiritually powered body, the New Testament sometimes refers to him as “the Spirit” (cp. Acts 2:4; 10:19; Rom. 8:26 and 27, 2 Cor. 3:17 and 18; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; and 22:17; see commentary on Revelation 2:7).

15:46. “soul body.” See commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:44.

15:51. “Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”). This is the only time *idou* appears in 1 Corinthians, so it brings a very important emphasis (cp. more than 60 times in Matthew). God wants us to pay serious attention to the sacred secret that involves our resurrection (or Rapture) and receiving new bodies that will be spiritual bodies like Jesus’ body.

“sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word *musterion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *musterion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

“sleep.” The Greek verb is *koimaō* (#2837 κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.
1 Corinthians 15:52. “last trumpet.” The key to understanding the “last trumpet” is understanding the athletic and cultural analogy it refers to. It is not the actual last trumpet in time, but the trumpet that closes the event or festival. The Age of Grace (the Church Administration) will close with the Rapture, accompanied with the trumpet of God (1 Thess. 4:16).

Some commentators try to determine the time of the Rapture by the “last trumpet,” and believe in a mid-Tribulation Rapture because they say the “last trumpet” in Revelation is the seventh trumpet of Revelation chapters 8-11 (the seventh and last of the seven is Rev. 11:15). But that is not what the “last trumpet” means. For one thing, the seventh trumpet in Revelation is chronologically not the last trumpet in the Bible (more on this below). Besides that, however, 1 Corinthians was almost certainly written in 55 or 56 AD, but the book of Revelation, which reveals many truths that were not known before, including the 7 trumpet judgments, was not likely written until sometime around 90 AD. When Paul wrote about the “last trumpet” to the Corinthians, they surely understood what he meant, something they could not have done if they needed to have the book of Revelation (or Matthew!) to be able to understand what Paul wrote. The “last trumpet” was known by the Corinthians because they knew the common custom of trumpets ending the events they attended.

There are many athletic analogies in Corinthians. This makes perfect sense when you understand the history and culture of Corinth, especially in light of the Greco-Roman athletic culture. Athletic events were a huge part of the Greco-Roman world. There were 4 “PanHellenic games” that had gone on for centuries. The most well-known were the Olympic Games, which were held in Olympia in Greece in honor of the god Zeus, and the winners received an olive wreath crown (and lots of money). The second most popular games were the Isthmian Games, which were held at Corinth in honor of Poseidon, and the winner received a pine wreath crown (and lots of money). The other two PanHellenic games were the Pythian Games, which honored Apollo and were held every 4 years at Delphi (staggered 2 years so they would not conflict with the Olympic Games), and the Nemean Games, which were held every 2 years at Nemia in honor of Zeus and Hercules. And beside these games, there were many lesser “games.” Corinth had a number of smaller games, much like schools today have “local meets,” “regional meets,” and “national meets.”

Because of the importance of athletics to the Corinthians, there are a number of athletic references in 1 and 2 Corinthians. For example, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 has many athletic terms. 1 Corinthians 9:24 has “run” (trechō, to run in a race); “race” (stadios, race-course); “prize” (brabeion, the prize for the contest). 1 Corinthians 9:25 has “is completing” (agonizomai, to strive in a contest). The word agonizomai is from agonu, the place where the games took place. 1 Corinthians 9:25 also has “exercises self-control” (egkrateuomai, to exercise self-control in training); and “crown” (stephanos, the crown or wreath received for winning the contest). 1 Corinthians 9:26 has trecho like verse 24, and also “box” (pukteuo, to box); “beat the air” (aera deron, to beat the air or shadow box). In 2 Corinthians 10:13, 15 and 16, the word “sphere” is kanon, meaning rule or standard, and was used of the measure of a leap in athletics. 1 Corinthians 7:18 mentions becoming “uncircumcised.” It was embarrassing for a Jew to participate in the Grecian games because the contestants were nude, so an operation was devised whereby the skin of the penis was cut and pulled forward so that when it healed it looked like the contestant was uncircumcised.
Closely aligned to the athletics of Greece were the Roman games, which often involved gladiators and people fighting animals. 1 Corinthians 4:9 mentions the spectacle of the arena, and the procession that it sometimes involved. 1 Corinthians 15 has a couple allusions to the Roman games. In 1 Corinthians 15:32 Paul wrote, “If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’” Paul was not actually in the arena, but the analogy to the Roman games was well understood at Corinth.

It was standard for the Roman Games to begin and end with trumpets. The Corinthians would easily understand that “the last trumpet” was the one that ended the Games. For the Church, the ending, the “last trumpet,” is the trumpet that accompanies the Rapture, which ends the Church Age. It is important for the analogy to realize that no Corinthian would think that the “last trumpet” meant there were no more trumpets and no more Games. It just meant that those particular Games were over. The next Games would begin some weeks or months later. The last trumpet of Corinthians accompanies the Rapture of the Church to heaven and ends the “Church Game” on earth, then “the Game of life” continues on with the Tribulation, which has 7 Trumpets we know of (Rev. 8:7-11:15). Then, after the Battle of Armageddon, Christ will gather the elect with a loud trumpet (Matt. 24:31). We can see from the scope of Scripture that this gathering of the elect includes both the gathering of the people who are still alive on earth and also the First Resurrection, also referred to as the Resurrection of the Righteous. [For more the Resurrection of the Righteous, see commentary on Acts 24:15].

It is noteworthy that the Age of Grace, the Age of the Christian Church, began with a sound and will end with a sound. The day the Christian Church started on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), it started as “a sound came from heaven like a strong rushing wind” (Acts 2:2). The Day of Pentecost was in June, and a typical June day in Israel is cloudless and quite calm. There was no “strong rushing wind,” there was only the sound of one, which is why all the people were amazed. If there had been a strong wind accompanied with the sound of strong wind, no one would have thought anything about it. It was only because there was the sound of the wind without the wind that it caught people’s attention.

The Church Age will end as it began, with a sound, in this case, the sound of a trumpet. The trumpet and Rapture will mark the close of the Church Age and the end of the Body of Christ on earth.

15:55. “Death” is in the vocative case, the case of direct address. This is the figure of speech Personification (Prosopopoeia) where death is set forth as a person and spoken to.

Chapter 16

16:2. “prospered.” See commentary on “go well with you” on 3 John 1:2.
16:5. “for I intend to pass through Macedonia.” The Greek text reads, “For I am passing through Macedonia.” Paul was not passing through Macedonia at the time, but was writing 1 Corinthians from Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8). This is a case where the Greek present tense is used to indicate an intention. This is also a common idiom in English. We say, “I am going to the store,” using the present tense, when actually we are sitting at
home discussing what we will do during the day. Many versions translate the intention into the text and say, “I intend to go through Macedonia.” While this is clear, it is always good to have some understanding of the idiom of the original.

16:11. “treat…with contempt.” From \textit{exoutheneo} (\#1848 ε\textsuperscript{2}ζω\textsuperscript{2}θε\textsuperscript{2}ν\textsuperscript{2}ω). See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:20.

16:12. “brother Apollos.” Cp. CJB. The Greek literally reads “Apollos the brother,” with the word “brother” in the genitive case. It is a descriptive genitive, describing an attribute of Apollos, that he is a brother in the Lord. To translate this “Apollos our brother,” as many versions do, would shift the emphasis of the phrase from Apollos’ membership in the whole family of God (brother Apollos), to his relationship to Paul and company (our brother).

16:18. “give recognition.” This is the from the Greek word “to know” \textit{epiginosko} (#1921 ε\textit{πιγινώ\textsuperscript{2}σκω}). The Greek adds the preposition \textit{epi} as an intensifier, Paul’s command to “know” such men is rightly understood by all versions to mean “acknowledge” such men, or “give recognition” to such men. Included in the sense, but hard to translate, is the idea that the people would not only be recognized publicly, but they would be appreciated by the believers. For this translation, compare Williams’ \textit{The New Testament: a Private Translation in the Language of the People}; CJB; and NJB. The \textit{Complete Jewish Bible} and \textit{New Jerusalem Bible} translate the word “appreciate” here, which captures the sense very well.


16:22. “is not a friend with the Lord.” The Greek word we translate “is…a friend with,” is \textit{phile\textsuperscript{o}} (#5368 φιλ\textsuperscript{e}ω). It is hard to translate the Greek verb \textit{phile\textsuperscript{o}} in this context and keep the English as a verb. If we say, “love,” as most versions do, we lose the meaning of \textit{phile\textsuperscript{o}} here, and confuse it with \textit{agap\textsuperscript{e}} love. We could say if someone is not “friendly to” or “fond of,” but these seem too weak. Likewise, “attached to” seemed too unclear, because when a person is saved they are attached to the Lord by virtue of being a part of the Body of Christ. It seemed that using the noun, “a friend” and having “with the Lord” as an indirect object of the verb instead of the direct object that it is in the Greek was still the best way to keep the meaning in English. For a more complete understanding of \textit{phile\textsuperscript{o}}, see the note on John 21:15.