

1 CORINTHIANS 3–7

1 Corinthians 3

3:1

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 189.

In 1 Corinthians 3:1, Paul transitioned back to the theme he had begun to develop in 1:10–13 dealing with divisions. His long digression on wisdom, however, had been necessary to show the seat of the divisions and their cure—a cure necessary to save not only the branch but also the gospel. His purpose was to show that the people could not be both spiritual and divided. The two conditions were mutually exclusive. His reproof consists of a frontal attack focusing on the very heart of the matter.

3:2

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 190–192.

Where these Corinthian Saints feel themselves to be more spiritually mature than others, Paul shows that they are not at all. Indeed, he calls them *νηπίοις* (*nēpiois*), “infants.” In doing so, he partially explains why he approached them the way he did. They were acting childish, which forced him to concentrate on the milk of the gospel rather than the solid food they believed they deserved. His purpose in so addressing them was to shame them into seeing how spiritually immature they really were.

Thus, Paul's call is a request not so much that these people grow up as that they quit acting infantile. His warning, and a lesson that all Saints should learn, is that the narcissistic and self-centered competitiveness

that often characterizes young children and precludes them from seriously respecting the interest of others leads through spiritual myopia to spiritual blindness and, eventually, spiritual death. On the way, it precludes them from making proper judgments about what the Lord’s message is, how He operates in bringing it to the world, and how He intends it to be taught.

With the phrase “I gave you milk to drink” (1 Corinthians 3:2 BYU Rendition), Paul begins to answer the charge leveled by his detractors that he fed them only pabulum and not the real substance they felt they were getting by interpreting the gospel through the lens of Greek philosophy. Paul used this somewhat polemical metaphor to show them that he acted as a mother giving to these children only what they could handle. What must not be overlooked in Paul’s metaphor, however, is that he is not talking about two completely different diets. Both the meat and the milk represent gospel truths that he has shared with them. He is speaking only of different degrees of it. Both are true and nourishing spiritual foods.

Some Corinthian Saints, in their self-deluded feeling of advanced spirituality, had sought for deeper understanding through Greek philosophical speculations with its often-accompanying rhetorical eloquence and, in so doing, had actually partaken of a synthetic, non-nourishing food that could prove deadly because it allowed them to reject the solid food of the gospel—namely, the Atonement of Jesus Christ—and put in its place the poisonous philosophies of men.

3:3–8

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 191–194.

When certain of the Corinthian Saints aligned themselves with one or more of the Church leaders, they may have thought they were complimenting and boosting the prestige of their supposed patrons. The all-pervasive Roman environment would have greatly contributed to their willingness to do so. The patron-client relationship, so distinctive to Roman culture, was one of the ways both parties used to climb the social ladder. The more those on the lower rungs supported those above them, the more prestige all enjoyed. This led to supporting one’s house above all else. Paul crushes that notion. Essentially, he says, “By creating these divisions you are saying nothing about us—you are *talking about yourselves*, and what you are saying is not flattering! Do not imagine that we are pleased! Your fights are *all about you—not about us!*”¹

The Apostle had already made it abundantly clear that “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:27), and that included Cephas, Apollos, and Paul.

Paul insisted the Corinthian Saints were carnal, acting as did those bound down by the flesh. In 3:3 he supplied his evidence. In short, it was because they promoted envyings and jealousies. Members of each faction zealously advanced their point of view and doctrinal stance. For example, there were those

who, like the Greeks, rejected the idea of a corporeal resurrection (15:12, 35). There were others who promoted self-indulgent license by misreading the power of the Atonement (5:1–6). These and others endlessly battled for dominance. But the allure on all sides was the same—a carnal attitude that seduced them into mistaking their ideas and their will for those of God. In other words, because of their obstinacy and self-righteousness, these Corinthian Saints ascribed their own doctrines and causes to the Lord and, because of the aura of holiness and legitimacy that gave, they jealously defended them at all costs. In the process, they were tearing the Church apart. Their dedication to their false ideas blinded them from seeing that the power of the Spirit promoted harmony, unity, and peace.

The last point Paul made in this section was of critical importance. Each person will receive his or her own unique reward (3:8). The reward would not be based on the task that God assigned but on the effort the person put into magnifying it. It is the magnification, not the job, that is all important. As the Lord has promised, “he who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come” (Doctrine and Covenants 59:23). We can best comprehend what Jesus meant when we understand just what the term *peace* meant to the ruling powers in His day. Many in the Greco-Roman world understood peace as an absence of hostile feelings between parties large or small, and the word essentially described an external condition. For the Christians, however, the emphasis was on concord between individuals and particularly on friendship between the Saints and God. Though the word always carried the idea of the state of mind in the celestial realm, for mortals it meant the total lack of inner turmoil coupled with knowing one was reconciled to God. For Jesus, then, the emphasis was on the internal not the external environment.

3:9–10

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 194, 200–201.

Paul concludes his thought in 1 Corinthians 3:9 by stating that the Saints are “God’s field,” even “God’s building” (as in our BYU Rendition), the point being that the Church belongs to God and Him alone. Therefore, its members should not follow some leader or forceful personality. All should give their total allegiance to God exclusively.

Paul abruptly changed his metaphor in 3:9 from field to building. However, three particulars remain the same with both figures: first the focus on the branch at Corinth as a whole, not on individual members; second, God as the owner and, therefore, master of all; and third, Paul as the initiator of the work.

For instance, Paul never backs away from the fact that he was the one who founded the Church at Corinth. He uses two particulars to show he did it properly and with authority. First, he acted under “the grace of God” (3:10). He was, by divine assignment, the “apostle of the Gentiles” (Romans 11:13) and the first to bring the glad tidings to Corinth. Therefore, their whole church sprang from his authority and rested upon it.

Second, Paul emphasized that he was a skilled builder. The title he gave himself, ἀρχιτέκτων (*architekton*), pointed to a craftsman of wide-ranging experience and expertise. Paul’s words suggest that he not only had all the expertise necessary but also used it precisely. As a result, he had laid down a proper and strong foundation.

It is important to note that Paul never identifies himself as the foundation. The foundation is Jesus Christ. He is the base of the Church. The foundation also consists of a doctrinal component—namely, “Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2), or Christ’s Atonement and all that grows out of that horrific yet sacred act. Though Paul does not claim to be the foundation, nevertheless, he bases his authority on it, and that authority gives him the right to instruct the community.

3:11

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 202–202.

The Apostle’s concerns are clear. His words, “For no one can lay any other foundation than the one that has been laid” (1 Corinthians 3:11 BYU Rendition), identify his first concern. They suggest that some of the more liberal elements in the Christian community were trying to replace the very foundation of the Church by instituting another one composed of the wisdom of men. This simply could not happen and still have the Church be Christ’s Church.

Paul’s second concern was with both the material and the skill that some were using to build the superstructure. Even if the basic foundation were not replaced, that did not mean the edifice would be strong unless the same skill and quality of building materials were used. Indeed, the wrong theology would cause the doctrinal structure to fail and the spiritual building to be set ablaze. He, therefore, stressed the necessity of building with the most enduring and flame-resistant material possible and with the greatest skill because every kind would be tested by fire and only that which was properly set and imperishable would withstand the heat of the day. Little wonder, then, that Paul urged them to pay very close attention to what they were doing.

3:13

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 202–203.

Note that fire will be the final judge not only of all people’s work but also of the people themselves. When the angel Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith, he addressed this very situation (see Joseph Smith—History 1:30–42). He quoted Malachi 3:2, which asks a question: who shall abide the day of the Lord’s coming? The question is a good one because the Lord would be “like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap” (Malachi

3:2). The first image refers to purifying, and the last, to cleansing. The Lord's purpose in this coming would be to purify and make clean those who are His. His primary instrument would be fire. He would, however, come again with fire, but this fire would destroy all that would not be purified or cleansed. Both comings would bring judgment but of very different kinds.

3:15

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 204.

Paul's final words in this section serve as a warning and admonition. The Apostle states that his readers may yet be saved, as if plucked from the fire (1 Corinthians 3:15), but it will take immediate action on their part to be so. Any delay could prove their spiritual death.

3:16

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 208–209.

Though unholy by Christian standards, even Venus's temple carried an aura of sanctity in the eyes of its devotees. Its priests and hierodules were ever on guard against defilement. It was the aspect of sacredness that Paul appealed to as he used the imagery of the temple. The Church was God's temple at Corinth, and it was to act as a counterpoint to Aphrodite's temple and those of all the other gods.

Though Paul often referred to the temple in his writings, it was mostly as a metaphor. The imagery of the temple allowed Paul to stress the holiness of the Church of Christ and set up the warning against anyone who would defile it. For the Christian, there was only one God, and He could have but one temple in Corinth and they were it.

3:18

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 213.

In this section, Paul disarms those Christians who think they are wise. He warns against self-deception that originates in a kind of thinking that seems wise but is actually foolish. He shows them that by following the reasoning of the world, they have transformed the gospel of Christ into some impotent and worthless hybrid. As a result, they have left its saving principles for the damning philosophies of the world. Since it is wisdom they are after, he shows them the proper way to achieve it.

3:19–20

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 213.

With 1 Corinthians 3:19–20, Paul picks up the theme he started in 1:18–25, contrasting the wisdom of the world with that of God, but he more fully develops it. In this instance, however, he makes a contrasting point. In the earlier passage he stated that the world saw God’s wisdom as foolishness. Here he shows that it is the world’s wisdom that, from God’s perspective, is foolishness. The reason is that the best thinking of those in the world is flawed by shortsightedness, self-interest, and secularism. It is, therefore, flawed from the top down. The adjective Paul used to describe the world’s wisdom, *μάταιος* (*mataios*), stresses its impotency. The best efforts of the wise of the world, so far as achieving any kind of lasting salvation is concerned, are utterly futile for they have no power.

3:21–23

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 216–220.

With the emphatic coordinating conjunction *ὥστε* (*hoste*), “and so, therefore, and further,” in 1 Corinthians 3:21, Paul signals to his readers that he is now concluding his argument. That conclusion, found in 3:21–23, holds a quiet but powerful grandeur that beautifully summarizes the points he has made. He begins with an exhortation—let no one boast in humankind—then supplies its theological basis: that the individual Saint can achieve total unity with the Father and the Son. These words succinctly solved the Corinthian problem by undercutting both its factionalism with its devotion to certain leaders and the pride-based self-sufficiency that it supported.

The exhortation “let no one boast in mankind” (as in our BYU Rendition) is the logical extension of Paul’s insistence on the futility of human wisdom. That insistence included belonging to a faction even if it claimed to derive its prestige and doctrine from Paul, Apollos, or even Cephas. Even in deference to the important position these leaders held, they were still mere mortals. Further, neither the Church nor its members were their property. The Church was the exclusive property of God, and the members were not slaves but fellow workers. Reversing the perceived order, Paul insisted that, properly seen, it was the leaders who were the servants of all. Full trust must be placed only in God and Christ. Only in them should the Saints glory.

Paul next explained why they should not follow mortals in their effort to gain acceptance, prestige, and security. What they simply did not get was that all of these things were already theirs. In his analogy of the field (3:5– 9), he already showed them that they were not *of* Apollos or *of* Cephas. They were, however, *of* God. That meant that they had become members of his family and were heirs of all that he had.² It also meant that each individual could, while in mortality, have a personal and deeply spiritual relationship

with God. The fact that a person could establish such a personal relationship with the Father and Son (see John 14:23) placed heavy responsibility upon Paul’s readers, for it meant that they must reach in faith beyond men, the world, and the immediate. It meant that, as hard as it might be, they had to give up philosophy and anchor themselves to God and His revealed truths. Such was necessary even when that truth went counter to logic and reason, demanding belief in “Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2)—that is, in His Atonement with its attendant Resurrection.

In summary, all things belong to the Saints—all that are material, societal, spatial, temporal, and celestial. Seen in this light, which Paul did, to be bound to one person or even a group of people imposed too narrow a view upon the Christian. Each had to see the eternal reality. And what was that? As Paul said, “Ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” (3:23). Because they belonged to the family of Christ, they were His fellow heirs and Christ was God’s and, therefore, His eternal heir. According to modern scripture, those who obtain exaltation in the celestial kingdom inherit all that the Father has.

Another point in Paul’s writings that must not be overlooked is a doctrine that is admittedly subtle but nonetheless clear: Paul believed in apotheosis, which is that the righteous really could become as the Gods. Only if they held this rank could all things become subject unto them.

1 Corinthians 4

4:1

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 229.

Note that in his attempt to bring the Saints to his side, Paul began by defining the role of an Apostle. They were assistants, but the word he used, *ὑπηρέτης* (*hypēretēs*), though describing one having a subordinate role, stressed the legitimacy of that person to act. In addition, they were the *οἰκονομος* (*oikonomos*)—that is, stewards, persons of trust and authority. Often such persons had specific responsibilities. Paul defined the Apostles; they were stewards of the Lord’s mysteries. Among the Greeks, the word *mystery* carried a very heavy religious nuance, being associated with specific religions whose sacred rites were guarded with secrecy and shared only with a select group of persons who had proven themselves true to the order. For Paul, however, it also defined that sacred knowledge unknown until God revealed it—namely, the fullness of the gospel with all the saving ordinances that went with it.

4:2–3

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 231.

Paul next defined the most important quality of a steward—trustworthiness (1 Corinthians 4:2). It was not the steward’s managerial or organizational skills or his ability to handle finances and command people that counted most. It was, rather, his total dedication and trustworthiness in carrying out his responsibilities. Paul’s point was that he had fulfilled that trust in proclaiming, in its purity, the gospel message and organizing the branches. Therefore, no Corinthian tribunal, whether ecclesiastical or civil, had any right to judge him (4:3). There was only one who had the authority to judge his stewardship, and that was the one who assigned it—namely, his Master. Therefore, all human judgment, because it could not take fully into account his motives and objectives, was invalid, and that included his own.

4:6–8

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 236.

Paul attacked these factional leaders and their followers for unjustifiable glorying, bordering on gloating, with an abruptness that evidenced his deep repugnance for their attitude. To think that they had been “so well fed by Paul’s successors, so furnished in talent and grace, that they desired nothing more” was arrogance beyond belief.³ To get them to see the ridiculousness of their attitude, Paul used questions dripping with sarcasm. The force of these questions betrays his desperate attempt to move his readers away from their complacent and dangerous situation. He had to bring them back to Christ’s Atonement and the obligating grace that grew out of it. Their misguided and damaging efforts to use “wisdom” as the means of interpreting the cross had caused them to lose sight of its value and to believe that they were saved without it. They had created a kind of cheap grace resulting in “forgiveness without repentance” and “baptism without church discipline” with the result that they were living not like Christians but like the rest of the world. Their smugness over their perceived holiness and superior knowledge showed just how far afield they were. But more seriously, it prevented them from much needed repentance.

4:9–13

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 243–246.

With the final sentence of the last paragraph (1 Corinthians 4:8), Paul set up the contrast he wished to develop in this new sentence. The contrast was not only between his authority and that of his detractors but also between their view and his concerning the Christian situation in the world. He boldly pointed out to them that the Apostles had not entered into any kind of era of rest and peace and, by implication, neither had they. He carefully laid out his reasoning throughout this pericope, but his main point was that the Apostles were not in a comfortable box seat watching all that was going on. In reality they were made a

spectacle not unlike those condemned to the gladiatorial arena. They were like common criminals condemned to die as sport for others (compare 15:22).

Paul used the imagery of being made a spectacle (4:9) ironically, as a means of illustrating that those in the world consider the Apostles as little more than wretched beings destined for mere entertainment until their death. The reality was that God saw them as His stewards carrying forward his work. Paul's description of the lowly state of the Apostles was admittedly exaggerated, but it helped him make his case and likely gave the Corinthian Saints pause about how they viewed the current situation in light of what was happening to the leadership of the Church. It may also have forced them to consider, by comparison, their own prideful state when viewed against the humble state of the Apostles.

With 4:10, Paul continues his contrast between his detractors' perceived view of the Apostles in comparison to themselves. To sharpen his point, he continued to use rather severe sarcasm. He employed three antitheses—foolish versus wise in connection to their education, weak versus strong in connection with their demeanor, and despised versus honored in connection with their position in society.

The key in determining what Paul was doing here is to understand that the senior Church leaders' position was due to their calling by and work for Jesus. They were fools—weak and despised *by the world*—because that is how the Savior wanted it. Indeed, that is how the world viewed *Him*. The problem Paul was trying to correct was generated by certain Christians who adopted the world's views and, as a result, had their perspective of reality turned upside down. Paul admitted that they were “in Christ” (*ἐν Χριστῷ, en Christō*) in that they had joined the Church and received its blessings. On the other hand, he noted that the Apostles were “through Christ” (*διὰ Χριστόν, dia Christon*)—that is, empowered by Him to carry on his mission but in the way *He* determined. That meant giving up station in and the respect of the world. This is what the Saints needed to understand: first, to fully comprehend why the Apostles acted the way they did, and second, to accept them as their leaders.

In 4:11, Paul finally dropped his irony to put the record straight. The Apostles, he noted, found themselves hungry, cold, poorly clothed, persecuted, homeless, and working themselves to exhaustion. It is likely that he was exaggerating for effect, but his words do reflect the tension and general conditions in which the Apostles and other ministers of Christ lived. The image he paints encapsulated the consequences of being *ἄτιμος (atimos)*, “despised.” Each element he listed was the result of the world's contempt for those who insisted on following the Lord and doing his will. The word *atimos* also revealed the impossibility that the Christian leaders faced in ever achieving rank or respect from the world. It simply dismissed them without a hearing.

Paul stressed the hard work he and others had to do (4:12). To what degree Paul's description of having to labor to the point of exhaustion was true of all the Apostles and Church leaders is unknown, but it certainly fit Paul's condition. As one engaged as a leatherworker (*σκηνοποιός, skēnopoios*), Paul certainly was brought no prestige by his profession, which did demand very hard labor and arduous hours of work. Shops in which the artisans plied their trade were often noisy, dirty, and even dangerous. These were

places avoided by the wealthy whenever possible. This may have been why some of the Corinthian Saints were upset when Paul refused their patronage. Had he accepted it, he would have had the ease and status of a professional rhetorician. Paul knew, however, that was not the way the Lord wanted it and therefore refused their largesse.

In 4:12–13, Paul gave the Apostles’ response to ill-treatment: “When we are insulted, we respond with kind words; when we are persecuted, we endure it patiently; when we are defamed, we seek to reconcile” (BYU Rendition). In putting over his point, Paul used a series of present active participles. Their use highlights an action not when it occurs but while it is actually taking place. In other words, the Apostles constantly acted, not reacted, to the various forms of abuse they suffered. In this way they ceded no power to their enemies but rejected the worldly and typical patron-client relationship so prevalent at the time. Their stance allowed them to express the difference between themselves and both Gentiles and Jews.⁴

Nonretaliation and patience in affliction would not have been viewed with respect, however, in the Roman world. On the contrary, such persons would have been seen as weak or unmanly and, therefore, despised. The standards of the world, however, were not those of the Church. The Lord had set the standard, and He expected His disciples to follow it (Matthew 5:48). Paul’s examples showed that the leaders did.

4:13–14

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 251–252.

Paul’s softer tone was meant to conciliate his readers to him, but given the strength of his words and his heavy-handed use of irony, it is hard to see how he could claim his intent was not to shame them, at least to a small degree. Paul’s objective, however, was not to generate low self-esteem but to promote realism. His derisive words, exaggerated images, and biting sarcasm were meant to forcefully correct myopic vision and misplaced loyalties, not to humiliate his readers. He dearly loved these people (he called them ἀγαπητά [*agapēta*], “beloved”), was anxious for their salvation, and therefore, wanted to provide a warning in such a way that it could not easily be dismissed.

4:15

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 252, 254.

Having referred to his readers as his “dear children,” Paul then expanded on the metaphor in two ways. First, in 1 Corinthians 4:15, he called himself their father. This relationship was, of course, in a spiritual sense but worked because Paul was the one who initially brought the gospel into the area.

Second, his status as father also came with some accompanying rights and obligations. Most of all, it gave him a unique authority over his Corinthian family. Among other powers, it allowed him to demand that they conform to his example as their father. As noted already, many gentile Corinthians were highly conscious of status, living as they did in a shame-honor culture. That status consciousness produced the major sore point with Paul and his methods among them. Paul's objective here, however, was not to do away with status but to place it on a sure, spiritual foundation, one that focused on Christ's atoning sacrifice, "the cross," and its meaning. This kind of status turned Corinthian social mores on their heads. But the posture the Saints were to take had already been defined by the Lord.

The image of the father helped Paul in another way. He could contrast it with others who exercised authority over children—namely, those whom he refers to as "guardians" (*παιδαγωγός, paidagōgos*). Just who Paul was referring to is unknown, but his exaggeration suggests he could have in mind his self-appointed detractors: those men and women who had not been properly building on the foundation he had laid. These would be people who were very willing to act as self-appointed guides and guardians over the Church and delighted in directing the lives of others. By promoting their own perceived holiness and deep spiritual understanding, they felt free to expound their teachings. They induced the more gullible and easily persuaded to follow them. In all these ways, they effortlessly led many in the Church astray.

4:16

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 254–255.

Paul admonished his readers to imitate him in his obedience to the Lord (1 Corinthians 4:16). He was asking them to prove by their conduct that they truly had been born anew through the regenerating power of the Spirit brought by accepting the gospel in faith. He was forcing them to look at their conduct to see if it exhibited divine parentage. Paul was saying that the lifestyle of the Corinthian Saints should be fully apostolic. His admonition was a case not of "do as I say" but of "do as I do." The doing, however, was not to be in some wooden, unthinking way. Paul did not want a bunch of automatons automatically following some preset program. He wanted people in whose lives the Spirit breathed and whose actions flowed from that power.

4:17

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 255–256.

Since Paul was not yet free to come to Corinth himself, he sent his excellent representative, Timothy. The young man had a two-fold task: first, to help the people remember the mode of Paul's apostolic

life revealed by his devotion to the gospel, and second, to reinforce Paul's consistency in his teachings (1 Corinthians 4:17). The Apostle's words stressed the fact that what he taught and was teaching the Corinthian Saints was that which he taught to all branches of the Church. There was but one standard for all churches everywhere.

Both of these tasks, however, were but to effect one purpose—to get the people to follow his example as one living a Christian life. The Apostle's words, *τὰς ὁδοὺς μου τὰς ἐν Χριστῷ* (*tas hodous mou tas en Xristō*), “my ways in Christ,” echoed the words used by Christians, *ἡ ὁδός* (*hē hodos*), “the way,” to express succinctly the gospel with its attendant lifestyle. Paul's “ways,” then, were bound to the Savior and His plan of salvation anchored in the reality of His Atonement.

Paul's example had two components: first, that of living the Christian lifestyle, and second, that of accepting true doctrine. Though both are linked, they do not go hand in glove. Many have high ethical values without following the doctrine of the Lord. However, such can be a slippery slope. Ethics in and of themselves, often being tied to present circumstances and current mores, can be shaped by political or social agendas and follow fads and fashions. Even Christian ethics can actually cause mistranslations of the Lord's will. Pure doctrine, being based on eternal principles, defines the foundation of the gospel and assures that all that is built thereon is correct and proper. Keeping the doctrine pure, therefore, is essential because, as President Gordon B. Hinckley emphasized, “small aberrations in doctrinal teaching can lead to large and evil falsehoods.”⁵

Paul was faced with that very problem. Some of the Saints had reinterpreted Christ and, as a result, were promoting beliefs, behaviors, and causes not in accordance with the gospel. The Savior was no longer the center of their religion because they had left the doctrine of “Christ, and him crucified” (2:2).

4:18

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 256–259.

Paul's words to the Saints revealed two points: First, the phrase “some of you” (4:18 BYU Rendition) indicated that the contention was coming from within, not without the Church, by persons who were very opposed to Paul. Second, though these self-important malcontents did not represent the majority, they did exercise quite an influence over many and had swayed quite a number to accept their false doctrines.

Up to this point, Paul had not directly acknowledged them, but he did so now. Because he had not been around for quite some time, they had come to believe he never would and, therefore, felt that they could disregard him with impunity. His words gave a clear and pointed warning that their belief that he would not dare show up was utterly false. Because they were “puffed up” (*πεφυσιωμένος, pephysiōmenos*, “inflated, filled with air”), he was going to put them to the test to see if these windbags could actually muster any real power.

4:19

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 259.

The real bite in Paul's challenge was in his use of the word *λόγος* (*logos*), "word, speech," in juxtaposition with *δύναμις* (*dynamis*), "power, might." Paul was using the word *logos* to express an idea that was much broader than the usual meaning of "talk or preachment." He was defining the term as that rhetorical ability to persuade with which his detractors had become so enamored. It was because Paul, who had the ability, would not use these means that they rejected him.

Paul understood, however, that clever, persuasive words were not good enough even when those words came from an authentic source. Jews had the word in the Torah and all the Christian factions had it in the gospel, but that was not where authority lay. Though the word was necessary, it was not enough. It must be authenticated and witnessed by divine power. Two expressions of this power were the priesthood and the gift of Holy Ghost.

4:20

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 259–260.

On his part, Paul had taught the truth, and it had been authenticated by the power of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:4–5). Upon his return, he would see if the words of his detractors had had the same results. They must prove that their *logos*, with all its sophisticated worldly wisdom, was also filled with spiritual affluence. Their challenge was specifically to emulate the Apostle in producing the powerful dynamic of the Spirit that converted, sanctified, and saved. Of course, Paul knew full well that he had nothing to fear from these men, for as he pointed out in 4:20, the real proof of one's authority was not in persuasive words and clever arguments but in the power of the Spirit that transforms the natural man into a child of God.

4:21

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 260.

In this section of the epistle, we see Paul fully exercising his apostolic responsibilities. As an Apostle, he was responsible ultimately to God for the use of his authority. One of his responsibilities was to set the Church in order. No amount of defaming, challenging, or rejecting could or would diminish his right to set the Church's affairs in order. The question he posed to his detractors was not whether he would do it but which method he would use. He left that choice up to them.

Due to cultural customs, his threat had weight. Because Corinth was a Roman colony, it did not have the same level of democratic spirit as most Greek cities. As a result, the people there were more used to being subject to a ruler figure. Many of the Saints, therefore, would have understood that Paul, as the father of the Corinthian branch, was within not only his rights but also his obligations to correct his erring children.

One last point seems important. That Paul asked his detractors to choose between the harshness of the rod or the gentleness of love should not be taken to mean that punishment could not be administered without love. Real love means sweetness balanced with sinew, and that brings with it attention and action to both good and bad behavior. So the question Paul asked forced his readers to choose not between love and hate but between which actions love would bring.

1 Corinthians 5

5:1–8

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 272–273, 275–278.

Paul's writings in this section show how Paul responded when an absolute standard was at play. Later in this epistle we will see how he responded to circumstances of a more situational nature. His position on immoral practices stood on eternal absolutes that reached beyond situational circumstances and variables. On these rules, Paul was not willing to even consider dialogue. That was not the case on situational issues. We see his response to these in chapters 7–11, where he showed the legitimate nature of some "situational ethic" that must take into account the circumstances being met at that moment. There he was willing to negotiate, dialogue, and even explore "What if . . . ?" questions. His willingness to combine a situational ethic with an absolutist stand reveals his skill when making pastoral judgments, showing his sensitivity to issues at hand that involve different kinds of cases. A point that should not be missed, however, is that the response the Saints were to take on both absolute and situational cases was determined and put into perspective by one having divine authority.

There is no doubt that some in the Christian community at Corinth exhibited a flagrant disregard for both civil and religious law. This may have been generated by their belief that they lived on a new and higher plane that put them beyond the law because they were "kings" and ruled in their own right (1 Corinthians 4:8). Paul's concern, therefore, was with both the moral sin and the arrogance that condoned it. These Saints seem to have thought that they possessed an enlightened tolerance. Unfortunately, their attitude encouraged feelings of smugness and superiority that worked against any sense that they were wrong.

So concerned was Paul with this situation that he used his full apostolic powers to judge a man guilty of committing an immoral act of such odious nature that even the very liberal gentile inhabitants of Corinth found it disgusting. Paul's phrase *κέκρικα ὡς παρών* (*kekrika hōs parōn*), "I have judged as being

present” (5:3), is very telling. Paul was not saying that he was judging as though he *were* present in a fictive sense. He was saying that through the power of the Holy Ghost, he *was* present with them in a very real but spiritual way. His words confirm the fact of a temporal reality in which he really was with them and, thus, could make a fair and accurate judgment.

In 5:4, Paul demanded that a disciplinary council be held, but under clear conditions. Because it was going to deal with a man’s spiritual life, it was to function “with the Spirit” and through the “power of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Joseph Smith Translation, 1 Corinthians 5:4). Under those conditions, both the Church and the individual would be fairly treated. Further, meeting these conditions ensured that God’s will would be done and the necessary discipline would be administered.

The problem still remains concerning exactly what Paul had in mind when he demanded “the destruction of the flesh” since the Church in his day had no more power to execute someone than the Church today. It is very unlikely that he was demanding that the elders break civil law to punish a man who had broken civil as well as religious law. The answer may lie in how Paul visualized the work of Satan in this instance. This may also answer the question of how the Lord can make up for the inability to the Church to exercise capital punishment.

As Paul’s words read, the devil was to be the executor in destroying the man’s flesh. The adversary had been given power to bruise man’s heel (Genesis 3:15); however, he does not have power to destroy bodies. On the other hand, he does have power to torment human beings both in this world and the world to come. Therefore, the destruction of the flesh likely referred to a change in a person’s mortal nature that would result from the devil’s incessant and excruciating torment. Through this means, ideally, stubbornness and rebelliousness, a result from being far away from God, would be purged from the soul and the door to a sincere and complete repentance opened.

Paul’s reprimand in 5:6 (that what they prided themselves in was ill-founded) points to the false but seductive belief promoted by some Corinthian Saints that Jesus’s death had freed them from the constraints of all law. As a result, they wrongly believed that nothing was forbidden them. Their arrogance and pride forced them to maintain their belief system even though it meant defending the incestuous actions of the immoral man. Paul blasted their doctrine not only for being false but also for being ill-founded, meaning that its basis was evil or malevolent.

His use of the metaphor of leaven in 5:7 emphasized that what might seem insignificant to certain Corinthian Saints was actually deadly on at least two levels. First, the idea itself was so virulent that it had the potential of corrupting the whole body of Church doctrine. Second, harboring the man tainted the reputation of the Church community as a whole and could bring not only disgrace upon it but also disastrous consequences, including its corporate destruction. Therefore, immediate action had to be taken.

To save the Church, the infected leaven had to be completely purged, for as Paul’s symbol shows, it could infuse and poison the whole. Paul’s list of inappropriate behaviors in 6:9–11 suggests that the symbol of leaven referred not to the man but to the false beliefs that upheld the man’s behavior. Paul’s push

was, therefore, threefold: first, excommunicate the man, thus freeing the Church from any suspicion by those outside that it condoned such behavior; second, get rid of the false and pernicious doctrine that supported it; and third, destroy the prideful arrogance that upheld it. In this way, the old leaven would be purged. Further, no new leaven was to be introduced. The Church was to be kept from anything that could contaminate and corrupt its doctrine.

In place of the old, leavened bread, Paul wanted a new leaven-free loaf composed of purity of motive and absolute conformity to doctrinal truths. These characteristics nicely summarized the obligations necessitated by being a Christian. The Saints' motives were to be pure, not driven by pride, arrogance, or profit, and they were to adhere to truth and avoid the self-deception that had led some to accept gross and dangerous ideas. All pride and arrogance were to be purged out. In this way, the vice that fed so many of the Church's problems would be destroyed.

At the heart of Paul's admonition was the need to adhere to the pure doctrine of the kingdom again centered on the implications and ramifications of "Christ, and him crucified" (2:2). Indeed, as Paul noted, "Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us" (5:7 BYU Rendition). The noble purpose of that sacrifice, keeping with Paul's imagery, was to make the Saints an unleavened loaf—that is, free of false doctrines and false practices. The end result was the salvation of both the Church and the individual. By that means, the Church would not fear destruction, and the member would not fear death.

5:9–13

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 282–287.

Despite the abrupt reference to the command he had given in a former letter in which he told the Saints not to associate with immoral people (5:9), Paul was not introducing different subject matter in this new paragraph. He was still concerned about these people's pride and their sustaining the incestuous man. He used the quote from his former letter, therefore, to reinforce his present position by showing that it was not new. Indeed, branch members should have known his stance already and followed it. His words show that he remained insistent that the fornicator be "driven out" of the company of Saints.

The Greek term *πορνεία* (*porneia*) is probably derived from *πόρνημι* (*pornēmi*), "to sell." Thus, a *πόρνη* (*pornē*) was a woman for hire (that is, a prostitute). In the classical world, the word-group referred only to harlots and prostitution. This was not the case, however, among Jews and, later, Christians. The diaspora Jews, who translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek, adopted the words cognate with *πόρνη* (*pornē*) to translate זָנָה (*zānāh*) and its cognates. This set of words denoted all kinds of immorality, including adultery, but emphasized prostitution. By the second century BC, however, the Jews had diminished the

particular emphasis on prostitution and broadened *πορνεία* (*porneia*) to include all forms of extramarital sexual relations. The Christians took over this meaning, and in the New Testament, we find a hard and unconditional repudiation of all extramarital and unnatural immoral acts.

The Apostle stressed the incompatibility of *porneia* with the kingdom of God. For him such acts unmasked a person who had apostatized from the Savior. No *πόρνος* (*pornos*), therefore, could have any part in God's kingdom. Church leaders, Paul instructed, were duty bound to keep the Church free from such sins by cutting off the unrepentant person. Members themselves were to have nothing to do with those who refused to repent from *porneia* (see 5:13). The Church had to excommunicate such people because a man not only shamed his own body but also brought blame upon the Church—the very temple of God (see 6:19). Unrepentant fornicators also jeopardized the operation of the Spirit of God within the Church because licentiousness expressed the unbridled passions of the flesh and, therefore, was opposed to the work of the Holy Spirit.⁶

Some have suggested that the New Testament shows a softening attitude toward *porneia*. Such is not the case. It is true that the Lord invited publicans and sinners, including harlots, into His fold. However, He did this—and this is the point that is often overlooked—only on condition of repentance. The *porneia* must be over, for it was at heart an anti-God state of mind that excluded the person from fellowship (see Matthew 15:18–19).

Paul did have to refine his instructions in 1 Corinthians 5:10 concerning avoiding association with the *pornois* to those who belonged to the Church. So flagrant was immorality in Corinth that the only way one could avoid not associating with the immoral in daily interactions was to either move or die.

In 5:12, Paul asked two rhetorical questions designed to give his reasoning for the stand he championed in 5:9–11. These questions made it clear that the Apostle did not promote a physical separatism wherein the Saints would cloister themselves in their own communities. There was to be free association with those outside the Church. This free association, however, did not mean an abandonment of standards. Church administrators were fully free to judge those within the Church. The Apostle's point was that the Christian leadership had a strict responsibility to oversee Church matters but not those belonging to the gentile community. For that reason, he refused to judge those outside the Church.

In 5:13, Paul returned to the major point of this part of his epistle: what the branch should do about the incestuous man. To give his instruction some real punch, Paul used a wordplay. Up to this point he had referred to the immoral as *πόρνοι* (*pornoī*), “fornicators” (5:9–11), but here he referred to the incestuous man as *πονηρός* (*ponēros*), “an evil one.” His words tied directly to those found in the Septuagint of Deuteronomy 17:7, wherein Israel was commanded to drive out the evil from among them. As it was in ancient Israel, so, too, it was to be in the meridian Church. The Christian community was to maintain its purity and spiritual separation from the world while still functioning within it by excommunicating all members who refused to live its standards.

1 Corinthians 6

6:1–8

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 298, 301–303.

In 1 Corinthians 6:1–8, Paul addressed the issue of Saints going to court. He never identified the issue or issues over which the Saints were contending. Given that the major theme of chapters 5–7 dealt with matters of morality and sexual propriety, it is likely that issues growing out of adultery were causing the fuss. To bring this type of litigation before gentile judges, whose views on matters of morality would have been at odds with those of the Church, would certainly have caused concern for Paul. Certainly the lack of legal status of most Christians would have prevented them from receiving any kind of Roman justice.

The question naturally arises, just who was suing whom? The nature of civil legislation at the time supplies a probable answer. Though high Roman criminal courts could be trusted to take seriously the charges brought before them, that was less so with the local civil courts. It is likely, therefore, that those Saints who were bringing the lawsuits were the wealthy in the branch since only they could afford good assistants and expect the law to act in their favor. When rich went against rich, there could be some balance, but when the rich sued the poor, the rich won.

The Apostle, as very clearly stated in 6:5, desired in this part of his epistle to shame those who had the effrontery to do such an act. He emphasized his point using biting sarcasm in the question, “Is it so with you that there is nobody among you who is sophos (“wise”) [σοφός], so that he [or she] might render a decision between the brothers?”⁷ Paul’s question was designed to force the Saints to see their true condition in light of their perceived one. Bringing suits against one another was no small matter, but it was a sign of the depth of their spiritual flaws. Indeed, the lawsuits were merely an aggravation to a condition that was already out of hand.

Paul’s questions in the second part of 6:7 reached the heart of the matter. With them, he demanded that his readers examine the seat of their actions. One’s first desire should be to defuse any situation before it gets out of hand. Christians were morally obligated, despite the urgings of pride and a desire toward self-preservation, to meet their antagonists face-to-face and try to work things out. Even when this move did not work, they were not yet free to make matters public but must ask for the arbitration by people of trust. Only when these failed were they free to bring in the weight of the community. “Hence,” as one scholar noted, Paul “turns the issue upside down, just as justice, penalty, and ‘rights’ of the self are turned upside down in the theology of the *cross* (1:18–31) and in the mind of *Christ* (2:16–3:4).”⁸

In 6:8, Paul made it very clear exactly why these people should feel shame. They were guilty of greed and the fraudulent acts it produced. That being the case, they were no better than the pagans over whom they felt so superior. In fact, his words insinuate that many pagans were more righteous than these Saints. Thus the Corinthians had serious need to repent. Once again Paul’s words forced

his readers to take a close audit of their spiritual strength. They were rapidly slipping off the way and desperately needed a course correction.

6:9

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 308, 311–312.

In 6:9, Paul continued the list of grievous sins (5:10–11) that kill the Spirit and cause one to lose his or her inheritance in the kingdom of God. To the six sins he previously mentioned—fornication, greed, idolatry, verbal abuse, drunkenness, and swindling—he added two more: adultery and homosexual relations.

Though all were bad, *μοιχός* (*moichos*), an “adulterer,” committed a particularly heinous sin. It was a sin against the marriage covenant. To protect marriage and its sacred purposes, God put strong safeguards around it. These included His laws against sexual immorality. Fidelity to partner—that is, cleaving to him or her *alone*—rested at the center of the whole. Therefore, adultery was specifically forbidden. The Lord could not have been clearer when He said, “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). So important was this commandment that the Lord has repeated it in every standard work, often multiple times.⁹

Adultery is here defined as sexual relations between a married person and any other person except his or her spouse.

In addition to the *πόρνος* (*pornos*) and the *μοιχός* (*moichos*), the Apostle also castigated the *μαλακός* (*malakos*) and *ἀρσενοκοίτης* (*arsenokoitēs*). *Malakos* means “soft” and, when applied to persons, designated the effeminate man or boy who played the passive role during homosexual activities. The *arsenokoitēs* was the active homosexual partner.

The position of those who insist that Paul did not have general homosexual practices in mind but spoke within a specific Greco-Roman context does not stand up to close scrutiny. Paul's attitude toward homosexuality is clear. In no way does he see it as an alternative lifestyle acceptable to God. To interpret him otherwise is to ignore his context and setting. Paul condemned the sin primarily on theological, not moral, grounds. Moreover, although Paul stood with Judaism, which strictly condemned homosexuality, he was writing to a primarily gentile audience that held vastly different attitudes towards homosexuality, some insisting that it was natural. Paul's teaching actually pushed against the moral current of many in Corinth and elsewhere. He was not, therefore, as some claim, simply reflecting the attitude of the time. He saw homosexuality as a “wandering from the truth” of God's purpose for sexuality.

6:10

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 312–313.

Deadly sin reaches well beyond those pertaining to sexual matters. Paul had already listed several, but he now included κλέπτει (*kleptai*), “thieves.” This sin was part of a larger range of sins forbidden in the eighth commandment, “Thou shalt not steal.” The commandment forbade taking another person’s property “by coercion, fraud, or without his uncoerced consent. Cheating, harming property, or destroying its value is also theft.”¹⁰ The verb Paul used focused on that aspect of stealing done by stealth and cunning, most notably taking advantage, embezzling, cheating, or various forms of legal trickery (though something may be lawful, that does not make it morally right). An often-overlooked aspect of any kind of theft is that it is “a violation of God’s fundamental order.”¹¹ He has given people the right to have what they work for and expects others to respect that. The thief, however, seeks a short-cut path to wealth by avoiding the work necessary for its proper attainment and, in doing so, violates God’s system. Such an act among the Christians, who were preparing the spiritually legal and moral superstructure for God’s kingdom, simply could not be tolerated.

6:11

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 313.

Paul did not let his desire to shame his readers stand in the way of giving them hope. As noted above, one of his objectives was to force the Corinthian Saints to see the reality of their situation as opposed to how they perceived it. Though many had fallen to grievous transgressions before their conversion, these sins were now in the past. Ideally, no longer were they like the wicked. The kingdom of God still stood open before them. Through the grace of God, they had found forgiveness, their former sins had been removed, and a change of character initiated. Through the power of God’s Spirit and in the name of the Lord, they had come under His transforming power and, therefore, were expected to live up to their new condition. If they did not do so, all the cleansing, purification, and empowering would come to naught and they would be, just like the wicked, shut out forever. Their lot, indeed, might even be worse, for having had access to the Spirit and having turned away, they would suffer the full wrath of God.¹²

6:12–20

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 323–329.

Paul turned to the next area of improper conduct perpetrated by some members of the Corinthian branch. The problems here derived from the influence of idolatry with its sexually immoral overtones, which acted to compromise the Saints’ exclusive faithfulness to God and Christ. It expressed itself in advocating the misuse of the body in two ways: self-gratification and inappropriate sexual activity, in this case going

to a brothel. Paul's major point here was that the believer's body was "for the Lord" and not for the purpose of self-gratification (1 Corinthians 6:13). There was no dualism in early Christianity as there was in Platonic philosophy between the body and the spirit or mind. Indeed, the body was the physical temple that the Holy Spirit sanctified and then inhabited and the means by which the Saints brought glory to God (6:19–20). The major point Paul was making in this section was the inseparability of "Christian identity and Christian lifestyle, or of theology and ethics."¹³

In putting this view across, Paul distanced himself from two theological slogans popular among a segment of the Church that they used to justify their illicit behavior. The first was "all things are lawful unto me," meaning, "I can do anything."

So far as the first was concerned, Paul did not attack their view directly but rather raised the point of debate to a higher plane by appealing to the theology that provided the ground for proper behavior. This allowed him to qualify their view so sharply that it essentially negated it. The concern was no longer with what they could or could not do but with what was beneficial and helpful to the community, both civil and religious. Just because they were free to act did not free them from the obligation of acting for the greater good because of Christ's Atonement. That which was beneficial had to be the guide to determine how they were to express their moral agency. Just because something was lawful or right or even all right in the world at large did not mean it was moral to God. The Christian must act on the basis of what was proper, good, harmonic, and spirit inducing—in short, what was in keeping with God's will.

The other slogan some Saints adopted was that "food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food.' But God will do away with them both" (6:13 BYU Rendition). They used this to justify their giving in to sexual passion and lust. The implication of the slogan was that there was nothing wrong or sinful about satisfying natural bodily appetites. The slogan allowed them to separate the low physical plane from the higher spiritual one and to believe that the lower had no impact on the higher. Because the physical body would not be regenerated, it did not count and, therefore, anything done to satisfy its temporal wants, even if they were carnal and sensual, did not hurt anyone.

Paul's response set the record straight. He did not address the issue of the permanence of either *βρῶμα* (*brōma*) "food" or the *κοιλία* (*koilia*) "stomach." Instead he focused on the *σῶμα* (*sōma*), "the body." The reality of the Resurrection lay at the heart of his point here. Whatever may be said for food or digestion, the *sōma* was not transient and, therefore, not to be equated with the *koilia*. Though the present body would be transformed in the Resurrection, the indisputable fact was that corporality still remained. Therefore, what one did to, for, or with his or her body counted on the eternal scale of things. Hence the purpose of the body was not for gratification, especially not in sexual areas, but for service to the Lord.

Paul next addressed a major concern generated by the belief by some of the libertine elements among the Saints that it was perfectly all right to frequent the local brothels. Through the force of a rhetorical question (6:15), Paul attempted to get the Corinthian Saints to see the asininity of their insistence that physical acts do not harm spiritual standing. It was their belief that because the body dies and stays dead,

it is morally irrelevant. In other words, what the body did in no way affected personality. Of the many items they did not understand, a very important one was that the Saints, having made covenants with the Lord, became one with him in a very profound, deeply spiritual, and intimate way (6:15). This close bonding, using Paul's analogy, made one a member (*μέλος*, *melos*, "a limb or organ") of Christ. The Saints, body and soul, were therefore metaphorically part of the Lord's body and shared in His holiness. Each person was to be one exclusively with the Lord.

In Paul's thought, the whole person—body and spirit—belonged to the Savior. His Atonement redeemed both and, therefore, He had claim on both. Therefore, sexual relations with a prostitute were much more than a mere physical act. It broke the physical bond between Saint and Savior. To join with a prostitute, therefore, violated both the holiness and oneness so essential to the spiritual life. Using the Septuagint of Genesis 2:24, the Apostle showed that intercourse with prostitutes constituted becoming "one" with them, thus violating and destroying the Saint's oneness with Christ (1 Corinthians 6:16–17).

Paul's argument revealed his deep respect for the body and the importance of keeping it holy (separated from the lusts and passions of the world) in order for it to be a fit tabernacle, not just temporally but eternally, for the individual's spirit and that of the Lord in the plan of happiness.

In addition, Paul's position in no way devalued marital intimacy. In fact, his stand did just the opposite. He reached beyond the myopic perspective of his time and revealed the physical relationship as one ordained by God that imposed a self-commitment between the marital partners that involved the whole person, body and soul. In marriage, each partner was fully giving himself or herself to the person to whom he or she belonged. It was this self-giving and self-commitment that made intimacy in the marital context holy (7:14). Since both of these were totally lacking in any relationship with a prostitute, that sexual act was most reprobate and unholy. It was the aspect of self-giving and self-commitment that linked the relationship between husband and wife to that of disciples and Lord. In both, the covenantal relationship made the participants one.

Paul's view of sexual sin came, in part, due to his respect of the physical body and the fact that it constituted a part of the whole self that, through covenant, was joined to Christ. The problem with sexual sin was that it wrenched (*αἶρω*, *airō*) the soul away from the body of Christ (both spiritually and communally) and joined it to another. No other sin did that.

Showing Paul's extreme regard for the holy nature of the pure body was his comparing it to the temple (*ναός*, *naos*) of God. Unlike the imagery he used in 3:16, in which the temple represented the community of the Saints, here it referred to each individual. The Spirit of God dwells not only in the Church as a whole but also in each individual member. It was, in large measure, to achieve this relationship—a higher endowment than had been possible before—that the Savior faced the terrible weight of the cross. Indeed, He prayed that his disciples "may be one, as we [the Father and Son] are" (John 17:11).

The Saints' bodies, Paul assured them, were not their own, but gifts from God and the salvation of the body was purchased by the precious blood of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). That blood bought

them from the slave block of sin (Romans 6:17–22). The act did not, however, make them free men and women. Indeed, they now belonged to a new master, Jesus, and were under obligation to do His bidding. That did not, however, make their position lowly. Indeed, being the slave of one of high rank, and especially being a member of his court, brought the individual a great deal of prestige. Indeed, some slaves had greater prestige than did most freemen, thus, the importance of being *ὁ δοῦλος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* (*ho doulos Iēsou Christou*), “the slave of Jesus Christ,” a station that brought with it high status.¹⁴

1 Corinthians 7

7:1–9

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 340–342, 344.

Having previously addressed the attitudes of the libertines who felt that anything goes, Paul now addressed those of the ascetics who felt that nothing goes.

His first topic was that of the sexual relationship in marriage. This subject followed naturally from his discussion of sexual immorality in chapters 5 and 6.

Writing in 1983, one Latter-day Saint scholar wrote, “Most translations have Paul begin with the grim generalization, ‘It is good for a man not to touch a woman’ (1 Cor. 7:1). This is a strange statement for a scripturalist who elsewhere relies on Genesis, which commands man to leave parents and be ‘one flesh’ with his wife (Gen. 2:24), a passage cited by Christ himself (Matt. 19:5). But Joseph Smith’s translation makes ‘not to touch a woman’ part of the Corinthian’s letter of inquiry and not Paul’s answer. . . . In this case Paul’s refutation [was] the tender picture of married love . . . , exactly reversing the mood of ‘not to touch a woman.’”¹⁵

Paul was quite direct in addressing those members who felt that a higher mode of spirituality could be achieved by celibacy even within marriage and were advocating this idea. This ascetic portion of the Christian community likely picked up the idea that was growing among certain followers of neo-Platonic philosophy that austere abstinence was a good thing. Indeed, some advocated that intimacy should be strictly reserved exclusively for procreation. Paul’s counsel was that abstinence could be practiced, but only for a specific reason, a short period, and with mutual agreement (1 Corinthians 7:5).

Paul’s response to the position of the ascetics that one should not “touch a woman,” was, “On the contrary!” It is of note that his views were generated not by a kind of high idealism but rather as a response to a positive and realistic view of human nature. Certain cases of sexual misconduct (*τὰς πορνείας*, *tas porneias*) had come to his attention. These intensified the need for the expression of conjugal rights in marriage with its obligatory fidelity.

Paul's view of love within the marriage relationship actually went against the general view of much of gentile and Jewish society at the time. Although Corinthian society was rather libertine in its views of chastity, the popular view in much of the Greco-Roman world was that marriage was primarily for "the procreation of legitimate heirs who would inherit and continue the name, property and sacred rites of the family."¹⁶ In saying that, we do not want to imply that marriages lacked commitment and affection. Though it is true that nearly all marriages among the nobile free-born classes were arranged, many reached the ideal of becoming warm and congenial.

The Apostle, in effect, redefined the purpose of marriage, putting it in the context of a mutually satisfying sexual relationship. Indeed, Paul did not even mention procreation as the primary and dutiful purpose of marriage. Instead, he lifted intimacy to its rightful place as the binding and holy self-commitment and self-giving of one lover to another.

Verse 7:5, like 7:2, taken at face value, presents a somewhat negative reason for marriage—as a counter to temptation. The same appears to be true for 7:9. However, the Greek text suggests that Paul was directing his remarks to widows and widowers, suggesting that they should remain unmarried unless their sexual passions were so strong that these distracted them from full devotion to the gospel. In that case, it was better for them to remarry. In such cases, marriage would be a real boon in preserving chastity.

To counter the problem, the Apostle was quick to set himself up as an example, saying, "It is good for them to remain even as I am" (7:8 BYU Rendition). Unfortunately, he did not specify exactly what he meant, likely because many of his readers had known him while he labored among them. Given the breadth of his remark, we can say with confidence that he was moral, dedicated, and exhibited strong self-control.

It would be helpful if we knew Paul's marital status at the time he wrote. Unfortunately, we do not, but it seems very likely that he was a widower who determined not to remarry in order to give himself fully to the ministry.

7:10–16

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 356–359.

Paul next turned to questions the Saints had concerning divorce and interfaith marriages. He first addressed the issue of divorce. Paul seemed well aware of the Lord's very positive and supportive view of the importance of marriage and to have adopted it himself. It seems that some men divorced women and some women divorced men at every whim. Divorce occurred with so much ease in the Roman world that one ancient authority complained in satirical tones that men "leave home in order to marry and marry in order to divorce."¹⁷ The Jews were also affected with the disease, albeit with them it was more lopsided, with males mostly initiating the action.

A number of factors contributed to the high divorce rate. First, it was relatively easy for either gender to initiate a divorce for any number of reasons. Second, marriages were mostly arranged, often for reasons of social advancement without consideration of the couple's compatibility. Further, females married young, many as early as twelve, allowing immaturity to exacerbate conditions in a poor marriage.

Verses 7:10–11 must be explored together because they highlight one aspect of Paul's teachings: that of mutuality. Paul would have agreed with the old adage, "What is good for the goose is good for the gander." He insisted that the command from the Lord was against divorce between Christians. Paul did include a caveat that if a woman should divorce her husband, she should remain single. He did not explain why at that point but would later on.

These verses make one point very clear: Paul generally counseled against divorce.

In 7:12–16, Paul turned to the issue of interfaith marriages. In this section, the Apostle sought to allay the anxiety that had arisen because one mate had not accepted the gospel. A new convert who had abandoned a former pagan lifestyle might wonder if living with an unrepentant and unbelieving spouse might pollute the atmosphere of the home and corrode the Saint's sanctity. Paul's answer was a surprise, saying in essence, "No. In fact, just the opposite is true."¹⁸ As he saw it, the unbelieving spouse was actually made holy, at least to a degree, by the believing mate. Paul may have had the Old Testament principle of holiness by association in mind. In that case, holiness was not a static but a dynamic quality that could be passed from one source to another. His view opened the door to future possibilities for the unbelieving spouse, especially that of becoming fully holy by example of the mate. Holiness could be attached to the unbeliever because of his or her willingness to make the necessary compromises to keep the marriage intact. Those compromises would have included decisive changes in behavior, belief, and attitude. The willingness to make these changes brought the Spirit not only upon the spouse but also upon the home and the children.

7:17–24

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 378–381.

Having addressed the issue of marriage between member and nonmember, Paul next turned to the topic of social standing. His counsel was to remain in whatever station one was when converted. The Saints' call to live on a higher spiritual plane did not mean that they were to fight against the current social order. The depth of their spirituality was not contingent on their social or ethnic condition but on how they fulfilled their call.

The reason social status should not have been a major concern was the nature of "the call." In the meaning of the verb *καλέω* (*kaleō*), "to call" (which Paul repeated eight times in just six verses), we find the central doctrine on which Paul placed his counsel. The verb denoted an urgent invitation for the person

called “to accept responsibility for a particular task, implying a new relationship to the one who [did] the calling.” As noted previously (1 Corinthians 1:2), God called people to be “in Christ,” the preposition suggesting the spiritual bond developed between Savior and disciple during conversion. The phrase also connoted the individual’s commitment to Christ being such that he or she was willing to do as the Lord commanded.

In 7:18–19, the Apostle made the point that within the kingdom, all were one and, therefore, there should be no higher sacred culture, no higher sacred language, no higher sacred heritage. All were brothers and sisters and children of one culture, that of the divine. God’s call was tailored to each individual and the Saint did not need to become socially or culturally someone or something else to fulfill it. They could remain as they were when God called them. Whatever the personal shaping that occurred by the Saint’s cultural identity, it in no way detracted from his or her value to the kingdom. The Church accepted what was good in all cultures. The caveat, however, was “what was good.” That which was not good—that is, did not adhere to gospel principles and practices—had to be abandoned. What really mattered for all was constancy in keeping God’s commandments.

In 7:22–23, Paul was not attempting to reduce the psychological and physical hardship of slavery by telling his readers that they were all slaves of Christ and, therefore, to some degree, shared the same condition. Nor was he saying that, paradoxically, because of Christ, all were in some sense free, concluding that the external status of each person really did not matter. What Paul was stressing was the benefit that befell one who had a relationship with Christ. To be the slave *of* Christ, as we have noted above, carried a certain cachet, but to be His freedman carried even more. Paul used the metaphor of slavery not as a sign for a servile and lowly status but as a very positive symbol of the promise of salvation through spiritual progression.

We see this same idea expressed by the Lord to His disciples when He said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:13–15). The word translated “servant,” *δοῦλος* (*doulos*), denoted a slave, which station His disciples held because He had purchased them from the slave block of sin. And that cost Him dearly. As a result they belonged to Him. He next moved them, due to His power of spiritual manumission, to the station of freedmen. Not content therewith, He made them *φίλοι* (*philoï*), “friends”—that is, those with whom He shared loving and intimate association. Here the noun “friends” referred to those who belonged to His inner circle and, therefore, were more than associates but dear and trusted confidantes who shared equal rank.

Even though that was the case, Paul never let the Christians forget that they were deeply indebted to their Savior. They had been bought at the price of his blood (7:23), and as a result, He now owned them until such time as He freed them. Being the Lord’s own, however, had great benefits. It became His responsibility, which He took on gladly, to care for and keep them. His care, however, put them in even deeper debt. Thus, they even more fully belonged to Him. Nonetheless, they shared in His status and

honor. Even so, they bore the responsibility of fully representing Him at all times and in all places. The relationship also brought them great freedom from the cares and concerns of the world, for the Saints were the Lord's responsibility and had Him to care for and direct, inspire, and assist them.

7:25–28

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017) 386–387.

In this section, Paul addressed the question as to what unmarried men should do given the conditions the Church faced. In the preserved teachings of Jesus, nothing addressed Paul's concerns, and the Apostle was quick to admit that. Indeed, there was no precedent for his position. He validated his counsel, however, on two facts: first, through the grace of the Lord, he had been placed in a position of trust, and second, there was an impending crisis coming that informed his decisions. That crisis was, most immediately, the Apostasy.

Due to what was coming, Paul's continual counsel was "stay as you are" so that you may do the "greater good" (Joseph Smith Translation, 1 Corinthians 7:26). Right then was not the time to worry about changing either marital or social status. Indeed, time was pressing (7:29), and therefore, all who could must devote themselves to the Lord's ministry. Their task was to save as many people as possible and accomplish other Church objectives before it was too late.

7:29–35

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017) 393.

Properly interpreting this section demands an understanding of conditions, both immediate and future, that the Church faced. Paul's phrase *ὁ καιρὸς συνεσταλμένος ἐστίν* (*ho kairos synestalmenos estin*), "the time is short," meant that the impending crisis he referred to in 7:26 would shortly occur. That nearness dictated that the tempo of the Church's mission had to be stepped up. Everything Paul did was in response to this impending crisis. His use of the noun *καιρός* (*kairos*), "time," is telling. It shows that he recognized that the Saints were living in a critical, if limited, period. Therefore, much was at stake. Opportunity as well as necessity dominated his agenda and structured his counsel. Paul's directions to the Saints were, therefore, temporary—that is, restricted to the immediate condition at hand and directed to a specific body of Saints (namely, those called to missionary work [Joseph Smith Translation, 1 Corinthians 7:29]). Though temporary, as 7:29–35 shows, the moment had to be taken with such seriousness as to push all other activities into the background. And why? Because "the way of life in this world [was] passing away" (7:31 BYU Rendition).

7:31

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 394–395.

Imminence was driving everything, but the imminence of what? Was world history about to come to an end with the ushering in of God's kingdom? Or was the Saints' condition going to change, resulting in severe pressure? Paul was aware of prophecies that dealt with both.

Much of the scholarly world has focused upon only one of these, the *ἔσχατον* (*eschaton*), or Second Coming of the Lord. Many insist that Paul felt it would take place in his lifetime. However, there is much that argues against this idea. For example, nowhere does Paul hint at how the Saints should prepare for the end of the world. Instead, he recommended marriage and normal activities except for those called to missionary service or those who were willing to do so. In short, it was not the expectation of the *eschaton* that drove him. He knew that conditions were rapidly changing. These changes straitened his expectations for those called to missionary service.

His major concern was with another catastrophic event, one about which he warned the Saints continually—namely, the *ἀποστασία* (*apostasia*), “Apostasy.”

Whatever Paul thought about the timing of the *eschaton*, he knew the Apostasy was imminent and, therefore, the more urgent event to prepare for. It seems that by AD 57, when he wrote to the Corinthians, he was surprised to see how rapidly conditions were moving that would allow the Apostasy to happen.

7:33–34

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 396.

Paul taught his readers that the key to missionary success was singlemindedness. The Savior had already stressed the same thing.¹⁹ “No man, having put his hand to the plough,” He taught, “and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). Paul applied the teaching as he explained why those in the ministry must act as if they were single, emotionally secure, and free of earthly entanglements. To be otherwise, missionaries would be pulled in two directions and, therefore, unable to prevail against cares and anxieties of neither their spouse nor the world. Only when these distractions were missing could ministers put their full energy into carrying out the Lord's mission. And considering the imminent crisis the Church was facing and the little time they had to prepare for it, it is little wonder Paul called on his fellow missionaries to devote full time to that service.

7:36–38

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 400–401.

We must keep in mind that Paul developed his counsel within the context of problems faced by the Corinthian Saints who asked him for answers. Some of the members were hostile to Paul and may have demanded he explain himself. His answers are, therefore, highly contextualized. Since we do not have the full context, some areas simply must be left open. On the whole, however, Paul's message comes through very clearly. What shaped his counsel was the necessary service to Christ that demanded the peculiar and particular circumstances in which the Church found itself—that is, the impending Apostasy.

In this section, Paul addressed those who were called to serve after they were engaged. Some questioned the rightness of a couple getting married under prevailing circumstances. The Apostle's counsel was very practical. Marriage might be best based on three conditions: first, if individuals felt that waiting would be a disservice to the affianced; second, if waiting would put the betrothed beyond normal marriageable age and, thereby, make them less attractive to other suitors; and third, if the missionary had promised that they would marry within a short time. Paul was once again careful to state that if those called decided not to serve the mission but marry instead, they did not sin.

7:37

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 401.

For the Apostle, the key issue was whether the young adult called was making the decision to postpone marriage for the time being due to personal convictions or external pressures. As a safeguard, in 1 Corinthians 7:37, Paul laid down four guidelines to ensure that the choice was completely the young adult's own. First, individuals had to have a personal and deeply held conviction that what they were doing was right. Second, they were to feel no external pressure from anyone in making their decision. Third, they were exercising their own right to make this decision. And fourth, they were determined to keep their betrothed chaste (that is, unmarried for the time being).

7:39–40

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 403.

Paul, following the Lord, was against divorce, but there was a question about remarriage after a spouse died. Likely following Old Testament precedence but making sure everyone knew it was his opinion, Paul

stated that the widow was free to marry whomever she chose. The Apostle made one stipulation, that she marry a fellow Christian. His advice does not contradict the position he expressed in 7:12–15, where he counseled against the breakup of mixed marriages. Those had been contracted before the spouse had converted, not after. Paul fully expected his readers to marry within the Church, whether it was an original or later marriage.

7:40

Adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 403.

Paul did, however, recommend that widows remain unmarried because he felt that they would find themselves happier if they did so. His statement in no way devalued his positive view of marriage so clearly expressed earlier. Marriage, including intimate husband-wife relationships, was a gift of God. So also was putting off marriage for divine service. Some were called to one, and some to the other. Though Paul did not explain why he took the position he did, looming over everything was his knowledge of the impending crisis—that is, the Apostasy. His very carefully stated view that single people were more able to give themselves fully to the service of the Lord provides a clue to his intent here. Because the Church was verging on a crisis and had only a short time to accomplish its mission, he wanted everyone who could to devote themselves in full measure to God’s cause without distractions. He was careful not to overstep his bounds, however. Even though he felt he was inspired, he did not want to raise this teaching to that of Church doctrine. Even as an Apostle, he did not have that authority. Even today, the material in this section of Paul’s writings has never become Church doctrine.

Notes

- 1 Kenneth E. Bailey, *Mediterranean Eyes* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 123; italics in the original.
- 2 Romans 8:15, 17; Ephesians 1:5; Galatians 3:29; 4:5; Titus 3:7.
- 3 George G. Findlay, *St. Paul’s First Epistle* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021), 800.
- 4 Matthew 5:43–44; Luke 6:28; 1 Peter 2:23; 3:9.
- 5 *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1997), 620.
- 6 Galatians 5:19, 22; see 1 Corinthians 3:16–17.
- 7 Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 237.
- 8 Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 436.
- 9 See, for example, Deuteronomy 5:18; Matthew 19:18; Mosiah 13:22; Doctrine and Covenants 59:6.

- 10 John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Craig, CO: Craig Press, 1973), 452.
- 11 Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 452.
- 12 See Hebrews 6:4–6; 2 Peter 2:20–22; Doctrine and Covenants 42:25–26.
- 13 Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 458–459.
- 14 Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10; Titus 1:1.
- 15 Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1983), 104.
- 16 Roy Bowen Ward, “Musonius and Paul on Marriage,” *New Testament Studies* 36, no. 2 (1990): 286–287.
- 17 Juvenal, *Satire 6*; but see also Seneca, *De Beneficiis*, 3.16.2.
- 18 Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 528.
- 19 Matthew 6:25, 28; 10:19; Luke 12:22; compare 3 Nephi 13:22; Doctrine and Covenants 4:5; 82:19.

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