

A Verse-by-Verse Study of
1 Corinthians Chapters 10-14; Philippians Chapter 3
and James 3:1-4:10

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The original paper was modified to some extent in preparing this internet version of the paper. The primary change was in abbreviating some of the quotations.

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INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians chapter 10 contains important teaching regarding the need (and the ability) for Christians to live in righteousness and holiness. In this chapter the apostle Paul powerfully warned the Christians at Corinth that they must flee from sin. In the middle of this exhortation to the Corinthians, Paul wrote these significant words, “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it [without sinning]” (1 Cor. 10:13). This verse is one of the most important statements in the New Testament that demonstrate that Christians are enabled to always walk in righteousness and holiness with the victory over all sin, not that the victory is automatic, or is always easy.

In the first half of 1 Corinthians chapter 11, Paul dealt with the need for women to have their heads covered (as a symbol of submission) when they were praying or prophesying in church. We will discuss the relevance of this instruction for our day. The second half of the chapter contains some very important teaching regarding the Lord’s Supper. Paul wrote these words to address an abuse of the Lord’s Supper by some of the Christians in the church at Corinth.

In 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14 the apostle taught about charismatic gifts to address a misuse of the gifts by some in the church at Corinth. 1 Corinthians chapter 12 contains important teaching about the church being like a human body, with each member having different, important functions to perform for the good of the body, by the enablement/gifts of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians chapter 13 is located between two chapters that deal with charismatic gifts, and it deals with the gifts to some extent, but it is known as the great love (*agapē*) chapter. The apostle demonstrates that love is more basic and more important than charismatic gifts (not that the gifts are not very important for this age) and shows that our entire Christian walk, very much including the use of the charismatic gifts, must be characterized by love.

In the chapter dealing with 1 Corinthians chapter 12, I devoted some ten pages to the topic of *baptism in the Holy Spirit*, which is a very important, but controversial, topic. It is very important for us to come to a balanced understanding of what the apostle Paul meant by the words *baptism in the Spirit* in 1 Cor. 12:13. (These words are also used six other places in the New Testament, in the Gospels and Acts). Most Pentecostals and charismatics believe that (the) baptism in the Spirit is separate from (it does not include), and is subsequent to, the all-important life-imparting work of the Spirit (the new birth). As I have discussed in previous writings,¹ it seems clear to me that the words *baptism in the Spirit*, as these words are used in all seven of their occurrences in the New Testament, include the new birth, the all-important sanctifying work of the Spirit, and the charismatic dimension of the work of the Spirit.

It seems to me that Pentecostals and charismatics could modify their viewpoint regarding (the) baptism in the Spirit without giving up anything essential. Even though

¹ I include the references to those discussions under 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

the New Testament presents the entrance into the charismatic dimension as part of the initial baptism in the Spirit at the time we become Christians (along with the new birth and the sanctifying work of the Spirit), this modified viewpoint leaves room for born-again Christians to enter the charismatic dimension of the Spirit's work as a second experience (as it often happens in our day). The ten pages dealing with baptism in the Spirit consist mostly of extensive excerpts from three scholars, one a Pentecostal, one a charismatic, and one that is at least sympathetic to the charismatic renewal. As the quotations demonstrate, we (those three and me) are all in essential agreement on this topic.

When Pentecostals and charismatics adopt a more accurate viewpoint regarding the terminology *baptism in the Spirit*, they are removing a major source of division in the evangelical Christian community, which will help open the door for Pentecostals and charismatics to share with their brethren what they have learned about the very important charismatic dimension of the work of the Spirit.

Philippians chapter 3 contains much important teaching about victorious living in Christ, as the apostle Paul speaks of his walk in Christ. One primary reason I wanted to include this chapter is that many Christians cite Phil. 3:12 as a verse that supposedly proves that Christians, starting with the apostle Paul, cannot live above sin.² As we discuss this verse in context, and in some detail, I hope to demonstrate that this verse is being misunderstood by those who think Paul was confessing that he still was living in sin when he wrote this epistle near the end of his life.

The epistle of James is literally full of teaching that exhorts his Christian readers to make it top priority to live for God in righteousness and holiness, in accordance with His Word and wisdom, and by His enabling grace. The verses we are studying fit that pattern, but a primary reason I wanted to discuss this passage is that it contains a verse (James 3:2) that is often cited as a verse that also supposedly proves that Christians cannot live above sin. We will discuss this verse in its context, and in some detail. I don't believe James meant to communicate the idea that all Christians will necessarily continue to sin in many ways by the few words he wrote at the beginning of James 3:2, and even *if* he did mean to communicate that idea (which I very strongly doubt), the other things that James said in this epistle would require us to greatly qualify what he said here.

All quotations from the Bible were taken from the NASB (1995 edition) by the Lockman Foundation unless otherwise noted.

² The more we Christians expect and tolerate sin in our lives (and in the body of Christ), the more we are in trouble, and we are in big trouble in our day. It is necessary for us to appropriate and walk in the righteousness and holiness of God by the sufficient, saving, sanctifying grace of God in Christ *through faith*, but it is impossible for us to do this if we think the Bible teaches that we (all Christians) will necessarily continue in sin as long as we live on the earth. Our *faith* must be based on what the Bible teaches. Many Christians have a list of passages that prove – they think – that we will necessarily continue to sin; I believe they are misinterpreting essentially all the passages on their list. For a listing of the primary passages they use and references to discussions of those passages in my writings, see pages 75, 80 of this paper.

May the will of God be fully accomplished through this paper, and His people be edified! To Him—the triune God—be all the glory forever!

1 CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 10

For [This word ties 1 Cor. 10:1 back to 1 Cor. 9:24-27, where the apostle Paul told how he was making every effort to be faithful to Christ to the end of his race/contest (to the end of his life, or the return of Christ), fully doing the will of God (including his assigned ministry) unto the end, lest he be disqualified, which in the worst-case scenario would mean being denied a place in God's eternal kingdom. As 1 Cor. 9:24, 25 demonstrate, at least part of Paul's reason for speaking of himself as he did in 1 Cor. 9:25-27 was to illustrate what is required of all Christians. He knew that some of the Christians at Corinth needed to be exhorted to repent and make many changes in their Christian walks. He continues to teach and exhort them here in chapter 10 and in the following chapters, and he has already exhorted them quite a bit in the preceding chapters of this epistle.] **I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea** [The apostle is speaking of the people of Israel on their way to the promised land, after being liberated from slavery in the exodus from Egypt (cf. Ex. 13:21, 22; 14:15-31; and Psalm 105:39).]; **(2) and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea** [In the first four verses of this chapter, Paul emphasizes the similarity of the state of the people of the old covenant on their way to the promised land with the present state of the people of the new covenant on their way to heaven. The main point Paul makes in 1 Cor. 10:1-22 is that just as many of the Israelites fell in the wilderness and did not make it to the promised land because of their sins, even though they had a covenant with God, many of the Corinthian Christians, even though they have a covenant with God, are in very real danger of falling away and being removed by judgment because of similar sins. The new covenant does not allow Christians to continue in rebellion against God and His covenant any more than the old covenant allowed the Israelites to continue in rebellion against God and His covenant. We have no right to boast of our covenant with God while violating the terms of the covenant through rebellion. It is not enough to have a good beginning (as Israel did at the time of the exodus); we must stay faithful to the end and have a good ending, arriving at the promised destiny (heaven). The writer of Hebrews makes the same point in Heb. 3:5-4:16.

When Paul says "all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea," he is building on the fact that his readers have been baptized into Christ, referring to water baptism (cf. Rom. 6:3, 4; Gal. 3:27). The people coming out of Egypt were (in a sense) baptized into the old covenant under the leadership of Moses. Paul is showing that water baptism and a good beginning are not sufficient—they must live in faithfulness to their covenant to the end (to the return of Christ, or the end of their lives). The ancient Israelites had their counterpart to new-covenant water baptism, but most of them failed to enter the promised land.]; **(3) and all ate the same spiritual food** [Paul is alluding to the manna from heaven (cf. Ex. 16:4-36), which, in some ways, corresponds with our daily provision from heaven, referring especially to that which we receive from/through the Holy Spirit. Ancient Israel knew something of the presence of God (see under verse 4) and of the work of the Spirit, providing everything they needed (included with food and drink were things like guidance, protection, and clothing), even though the new-covenant work of the Spirit (including the new birth and the new-covenant

dimension of the sanctifying work of the Spirit) was not available under the old covenant.

When Paul says “all [the ancient Israelites] ate the same spiritual food” and “all drank the same spiritual drink” (1 Cor. 10:4), he is making the point that even though God was in their midst, making available to *all* of them everything they needed under the old covenant, *most* of them were unfaithful. And as 1 Cor. 10:5 says, “Nevertheless [that is, even though they had a covenant with God, and He was in their midst providing everything they needed], with most of them God was not well-pleased [because of their sins, some of which are spelled out in 1 Cor. 10:6-10]; for they were laid low in the wilderness [and did not make it into the promised land].” Then, starting in 1 Cor. 10:11, the apostle warns his readers that they are in very real danger of being rejected by God for committing similar sins if they don’t quickly repent.] **(4) and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.** [There is an apparent allusion here to the literal water (that flowed from a rock) which God miraculously provided for ancient Israel on more than one occasion (cf. Ex. 17:1-7; Num. 20:2-13; and Psalm 78:15, 16). Paul wants his readers to understand that God’s presence was clearly with the ancient Israelites and He was providing everything they needed. Specifically, Paul says that Christ (God the Son) was with them. He was with them in His preincarnate state; in the Old Testament He was often called the Angel of the LORD, not that they had enough information (revelation) back in the old-covenant days to fully understand this Person.

On the Angel of the Lord, see, for example, Gen. 18:1-19:1; 22:9-19; 31:11-13; Ex. 3:1-12; 14:19 (with 13:21, 22); Josh. 5:13-6:2; **Jud. 2:1-5**; and 6:11-24. It is significant that some of these references show that the One called the Angel of the LORD is also called LORD (*Yahweh* in Hebrew) in that He is deity, being God the Son. This is the same Person as the Logos/Word of John 1:1-5, 14. For more on the Angel of the Lord, see pages 165-177 (including the Notes) of *Mid-Week Rapture*. On God as a/the Rock, see Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31; 1 Sam. 2:2; 2 Sam. 22:2, 3, 32; Psalms 18:2, 31; 19:14; 61:2; and 62:2.

Paul’s unusual choice of words about Christ’s being a spiritual rock that followed them apparently alluded to a popular Jewish legend (that came in several forms) which spoke of a literal rock that followed Israel throughout the wilderness wanderings and provided water for them to drink. I’ll quote part of what John MacArthur said under these verses.³ “The Jews had a popular legend, still known and believed by many in Paul’s day, that the actual rock that Moses struck followed Israel throughout her wilderness travels, providing water wherever they went. I believe the apostle may have been alluding to this legend, saying, ‘Yes, a rock did follow Israel in the wilderness. But it was not a physical rock that provided merely physical water. It was a spiritual rock, the Messiah (the Hebrew term for Christ)...who was with our fathers even then.’ ... That supernatural rock protected and sustained His people and would not allow them to perish. Old Testament believers did not have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but even during the Exodus they had the sustaining presence of the preexistent Christ, caring for and fulfilling the needs of His people.”] **(5) Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low [or, struck down, killed; the NIV has, “their bodies were scattered over the desert.”] in the wilderness.** [Compare Num. 14:1-38; 26:64, 65; and Jude 1:5. See above under 1

³ *1 Corinthians* [Moody Press, 1984], pages 220, 221.

Cor. 10:2, 3.] **(6) Now these things happened as examples for us** [See 1 Cor. 10:11. The rebellious sins of ancient Israel with their consequent intense judgments serve as “examples” and intense warnings for Christians that they must make it a top priority to stay away from rebellion/sin against God. Paul was aware that some of the Corinthian Christians were guilty of similar sins when he wrote these verses; he was doing every thing he could do to wake up the Christians at Corinth who needed to repent.], **that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved.** [Cf. Num. 11:4-34; Psalm 106:13-15.] **(7) And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, “THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY.”** [See Ex. 32:1-35.] **(8) Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.** [There is widespread agreement that Paul was referring to Num. 25:1-18. Numbers 25:9 mentions that 24,000 died by the plague. It is not clear where Paul got the number 23,000.] **(9) Nor let us try [or, test] the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents.** [See Num. 21:4-9.] **(10) Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.** [Grumbling was a common occurrence with ancient Israel, as were God’s judgments against the grumblers, but Paul apparently was referring to the incident recorded in Num. 16:1-50.] **(11) Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.** [See 1 Cor. 10:6.] **(12) Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.** [The apostle does not say here that Christians cannot or should not have a solid assurance of salvation. We can and we should have the assurance that we have been born again and have eternal life (in a preliminary sense), and that if we were to die, or if Christ were to return, we would immediately enter the heavenly dimension to be with the Lord. (See, for example, John 5:24; 2 Cor. 5:8, 9; Phil. 1:21, 23; 3:20, 21; 1 Thess. 4:14; 1 John 2:28-3:3; and 5:13.) My last three sentences assume that we know the truth of the gospel, that we have submitted to this truth from our hearts, and that we are making it a top priority to live in line with the Word of God in righteousness and holiness by grace through faith.

Furthermore, Paul certainly does not say here that Christians are to doubt whether God calls and enables them to walk in righteousness and holiness on a continuous basis. That would contradict what the apostle consistently teaches in his epistles, including what he says in this epistle—very much including what he says in the next verse. If we should slip into sin, we must be quick to repent and ask for forgiveness; and we must make sure that we are making God and His righteousness top priority. God knows if we are sincere in repentance and if we are making Him, His Word, and His righteousness top priority.

Here in 1 Cor. 10:12 (in context with all of 10:1-22), the apostle was dealing with the fact that some of the Christians at Corinth, who were misinformed, fleshly, and proud, and who were convinced that they were quite secure in Christ and would certainly continue to stand, were, in fact, in serious danger of a great fall. (In the worst-case scenario, their fall would mean the loss of their salvation.) As the following verses show, a primary sin that Paul had in mind when he wrote this verse was the serious sin of idolatry, but we should not limit Paul’s concern to that particular sin. Verses 6-11 are not limited to the sin of idolatry, and verse 13 speaks of God’s provision for victory over all sin. Those being tempted with idolatry (some at Corinth were apparently

already involved in that sin) must seriously consider the fate of the idolaters spoken of in 1 Cor. 10:7.

The idolatry that the Christians at Corinth were being tempted with did not involve a direct, full-scale rebellion against God (at least not for most of those involved). Their problem was mostly in the category of being fleshly, misinformed, stupidity; however, if they did not follow Paul's command to flee idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14), their sin would become all the more serious. (It is not clear how much Paul had dealt with this topic in the past; the more he had dealt with it, the more rebellious and serious would be their present sin.)

The Christian who thinks he is automatically secure in God and does not fear falling into sin and is not making it a top priority to live in righteousness and holiness and to avoid sin and thinks that he can just continue to live in sin had better "take heed that he does not fall." There is no room under the new covenant for flagrant sin/rebellion against God/Christ—there should not be any sin. Those being bombarded with temptation (and all Christians are at times) must make it top priority to take God's "way of escape" (1 Cor. 10:13); those being tempted with idolatry, and much more so for any who have already become involved with this sin, must "flee from idolatry" (1 Cor. 10:14). One major problem in the body of Christ is that many Christians are not making it a top priority to find and to take God's "way of escape" from all sin.

I'll quote part of what Charles Hodge (a Calvinist) said under this verse.⁴ "False security of salvation commonly rests on the ground of our belonging to a privileged body (the church), or to a privileged class (the elect). ... Neither the members of the church nor the elect can be saved unless they persevere in holiness; and they cannot persevere in holiness without continual watchfulness and effort."

I'll also quote part of what Simon J. Kistemaker (another Calvinist) said under this verse.⁵ "He directs his application to all the readers but especially to those people who proudly think they have the freedom in Christ to do anything or go anywhere. He implicitly refers to the Corinthians who visit pagan temples (8:10)." **(13)** [This is one of the more important of the large number of verses in the New Testament that clearly teach that Christians are called and enabled to walk in victory over all sin—there always is a way to avoid sin. But this verse, in agreement with the consistent teaching of the New Testament, also makes it clear that victory over sin is far from being automatic. Christians must understand and do (by faith) the things required of them by their covenant with God (the new covenant) in order to cooperate with, and to walk in, the sanctifying grace of God in Christ (which always is sufficient).

This verse (in context with 1 Cor. 10:1-22) showed the Corinthian Christians that there was no excuse for any of them to be overcome by any temptation. (This is good news!) God had provided "the way of escape" for them. The truth of God that Paul communicated to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 10:1-22 should have been more than sufficient to convince any Christians who were open to God (and if we are not open to God, we should not consider ourselves to be Christians/His people) that they must take God's "way of escape" before they are subdued by temptation/sin and taken captive and (in the worst-case scenario) forfeit their salvation. God did not have his apostle write these things to condemn His people, but that His people might be warned and might

⁴ *1 & 2 Corinthians* [Banner of Truth, 1983 reprint of the 1857 edition], page 181.

⁵ *1 Corinthians* [Baker, 1993], pages 334, 335.

repent and fully submit to His sanctifying power provided in Christ Jesus. God's will for us is transformation, not condemnation!] **No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man** [The Christians at Corinth did not have to face temptations of a sort unknown to God's people throughout the ages, including the temptations to idolatry; the temptations they faced were common to man.]; **and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able** [These significant words make it clear that God will never allow Christians to face temptations that they cannot successfully resist (one way or another) by the sufficient grace of God in Christ. In other words, Christians can, and should, always live in righteousness and holiness with the victory over all sin. The apostle is assuming that Christians know the truth of the gospel, that they truly have been born-again and are indwelt by the mighty, holy Spirit of God, and that they, in obedience to the truth, are walking by/in/after the Holy Spirit on a continuous basis by faith. Paul, who had founded the church at Corinth, knew that his readers (at least most of them) had been correctly taught the all-important foundational truths of Christianity, and he knew that they (at least most of them) had received the Holy Spirit and knew something about walking in/by/after the Spirit through faith. He also knew that there was much fleshiness among the Christians at Corinth (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:1-4). There was no excuse for them to remain fleshly.

To the extent that Christians do not know the truth, or are not walking in the truth (but are walking in the flesh instead of the Spirit), they will frequently face temptations that they cannot handle. It is totally mandatory that Christians know and understand (and that they be totally committed in their hearts to) the basic truths of Christianity. For Christians to become grounded in, and committed to, the basic truths of Christianity will solve most of the problems we have in the Christian church of our day, and there is no viable alternative. We must know the truth and walk in the truth through faith (faith in God and in His Word), being enabled by His grace/Spirit, and for His glory.

Fleshy Christians (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:1-4)—they often think that they are quite spiritual—frequently cooperate with the devil by going places and doing things that are sure to bring temptations they cannot handle. Paul was not saying that God will always enable Christians to overcome temptations that they should not have faced in the first place, and that they would not have faced if they were living for God (in accordance with His Word and being led by the Holy Spirit). Very often the way to avoid sin is to avoid places of temptation—to flee places of temptation. On those occasions when we must, in the will of God, be in places of temptation (and sometimes we must be in these places for lengthy periods of time), His grace will be sufficient to keep us from being overpowered by the temptation.], **but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also** [The NIV has, “he will also provide a way out.”], **that you may be able to endure it.** [This significant verse shows that God will always provide a way for His people to escape falling into sin as we appropriate His sufficient grace. (That's far better than falling into sin and then looking for the way of escape.) There never is, therefore, a legitimate excuse for sin. Again, this is good news! However, in the case of the church at Corinth, some had already fallen into serious sin. See 1 Cor. 5:1-6:20; 11:17-34; and 15:12. Also, some of the Christians at Corinth had apparently already become involved in the sin of idolatry (even though they did not consider what they were doing to be idolatry). Those in sin must repent. Those being tempted must do what is necessary to avoid falling into idolatry (or any other sin). In the following verses (10:14-22) the

apostle demonstrates that for a Christian to participate in feasts/meals where sacrifices were being offered to pagan gods involved idolatry. In the next verse (10:14), the apostle exhorts them to “flee from idolatry.” (They must flee from all sin. In 1 Cor. 6:18, Paul exhorted them to “flee immorality.” Also see 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22.)

I’ll quote what Leon Morris said regarding the “way of escape [way out].”⁶ “Believers can always count on [God’s] help. He will always make a *way out*. This [Greek] word (*ekbasis*) may denote a mountain defile [a narrow passage through which troops must march in single file]. The imagery is that of an army trapped in rugged country, which manages to escape from an impossible situation through a mountain pass.” Whether Paul was thinking in such terms, or not, this illustration seems helpful to me. Instead of being surrounded, overpowered, and defeated by temptation and sin, we can be confident that God always provides a way of escape/a way out for us.

Quite a few commentators make the point that the Greek favors the idea that God has a corresponding “way of escape” for each temptation (not that He is limited to one specific “way of escape” for each temptation).

I’ll quote part of what Craig Blomberg said regarding 1 Cor. 10:1-13.⁷ “Verse 12 summarizes the significance of these warnings [of 10:1-11] for the Corinthians.... After all, the pagan temple feasts in Corinth involved similar idolatry, sexual sin, and trying God’s patience. ... Nevertheless, verses 1-12 are all balanced by the marvelous promise of verse 13. The circumstances that tempt us to sin are never qualitatively different from those which God’s people of every era have experienced, and we never have to give in to them. There is always an escape-hatch, which is defined as a way to persevere without sinning in whatever difficult situation we find ourselves” (page 193).

“Tolerance to temptation varies widely from one person to the next. Clearly we can also choose to reject the ‘way out’ and yield to temptation, but it is precisely that freedom which makes us accountable before God when we do sin. And it is important to stress that the way out is not necessarily the removal of the difficult circumstances but the ability to ‘stand up under’ them” (page 196).

“We never have to give in to temptation; no one makes us sin. Certain factors may generate greater temptations for some individuals than for others, as with the exponential increase in dysfunctional families in our day, but ultimately we are accountable for our own free choices. And for believers, one of those choices remains to accept God’s escape-hatch from sin. Our culture would rewrite the end of verse 13 so that it said, ‘But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you don’t have to stand up under it any longer,’ but that of course is the opposite of what God actually inspired Paul to write” (page 199). In that Paul followed the words “way of escape” with words about enduring, it is clear that sometimes (frequently) God’s way of escape involves resisting temptation over long periods (cf. James 1:12) and pressing on in faith.

I’ll quote part of what W. Harold Mare said regarding this verse.⁸ “Verse 13 is one of the most helpful verses in the NT and presents the great antidote to falling into sin through temptation. ... The temptations that come to the Christian are those all human beings face—they are unavoidable. But, says Paul, God is right there with us to keep us from being overwhelmed by the temptation. ... He will provide a way out, not to avoid the temptation, but to meet it successfully and to stand firm under it.”

⁶ *1 Corinthians* [Inter-Varsity Press, 1985], page 142.

⁷ *1 Corinthians* [Zondervan, 1995].

⁸ *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 10 [Zondervan, 1976], page 250. I had quite a few classes with Dr. Mare, who was a professor at Covenant Seminary when I was there.

I'll quote what David K. Lowery said under 1 Cor. 10:13.⁹ "After kicking out the props of false security [in verse 12], Paul pointed toward the One on whom the Corinthians could rely. The temptations that seized [the NIV has, "No temptation has seized you"] the Corinthians were like those people had always faced. They could be met and endured by depending on God, who is faithful. Part of the Corinthians problem, of course, was that some in the face of temptation were not looking for a way out by endurance, but for a way in for indulgence."

I'll quote part of what A. T. Robertson (a Southern Baptist Greek scholar) said under this verse.¹⁰ " 'The way out' is always there right along with (*sun*) the temptation. ... It is cowardly to yield to temptation and distrustful of God."

I'll quote part of what Raymond D. Brown said under this verse.¹¹ "God Himself does not lead men into temptation (cf. James 1:13); while he permits it, he provides the spiritual maturity to overcome it. The believer is not preserved from temptation, but he is preserved in it and through it. It is God who gives him the power to endure. Our faith depends on his faithfulness. The word translated 'way of escape' is *ekbasis*. ... It suggests an army that is surrounded and needs a route to safety. God provides a way to victory, rather than defeat."

I'll also quote part of what Donald S. Metz said under this verse.¹² "...if they fail they have no excuse. Paul also declares that God acts consistently and always provides strength for those who trust and follow Him. As Alford writes: 'He *has entered into a covenant* with you by *calling* you: if He suffered [allowed] temptation beyond your power to overcome...He would be violating that covenant.' God is fully aware of the circumstances surrounding every temptation and will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."] **(14) Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.** ["Therefore" refers to the warnings of the preceding verses coupled with the teaching of the preceding verse, which demonstrates that there always is a way of escape from all temptation/sin. As the following verses (10:15-22) and 8:10 show, the particular form of idolatry that Paul was concerned with was the attendance at sacrificial feasts/meals, where sacrifices were being offered to the gods (demons). It seems that the Christians involved in this idolatry did not think of it as idolatry. They were proud of their "knowledge" (cf. 8:1-13), but their knowledge was faulty. (A little knowledge can be dangerous, even if it involves some truth—we need the balanced truth.) They were right that the idol gods being worshipped did not really exist (cf. 10:19), but they did not know (at least they did not adequately understand) that demons were behind these religions—they were being worshipped in the sacrifices (see 10:19-22).

I'll quote part of what Leon Morris said in the article on 1 Corinthians under the subheading "Sacrifices to Idols."¹³ "To us it seems axiomatic that the believer can have nothing to do with idol worship. But in the 1st century practically all social life involved some contact with idolatry. Celebrations calling for men to eat a communal meal, whether public or private, would be the very kind of occasion when the offering of a sacrifice seemed most appropriate. Christians who claimed to be mature reasoned that an idol means nothing. 'What harm can it possibly do,' they asked, 'to eat one's meat in front of a block of wood or stone? What if the heathen do think of it as a god? We know better, and know that bringing meat before a piece of wood cannot defile it.' "

⁹ *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament edition [Victor Books, 1983], page 527.

¹⁰ *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 4 [Broadman Press, 1931], page 154.

¹¹ *Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 10 [Broadman Press, 1970], page 347.

¹² *Beacon Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8 [Beacon Hill Press, 1968], page 408.

¹³ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1 [Eerdmans, 1979], page 778.

I'll also quote a few sentences from what F. L. Godet said under verse 13.¹⁴ "Hoffman [another Bible commentator] rightly observes that nothing rendered the breach of the converted heathen with his past and with his surroundings so conspicuous as his refusal to take part in the sacrificial feasts. [Few people want to be *conspicuous* when it can lead to ostracism, persecution, loss of employment, etc.] And so, many Corinthians sought to persuade themselves that they might harmonize this participation with their Christian profession. Had they not declared the nothingness of idols? Such a feast, therefore, had no longer for them the character of a sacrifice; it was a purely social act...."

Most people (including Christians) are rather good at looking at things from their own vantage point and arguing that what they are doing is not sinful. But God is the one who determines what is sinful, and what is not. The apostle informed the Corinthians of God's viewpoint. For those that were submitted to the ministry of the apostle Paul, and most of the Christians at Corinth apparently were (cf., e.g., 2 Cor. 6:5-16), it would have become obvious what they must do, in accordance with his instructions. The epistles to the Corinthians show that there were some at Corinth who did not submit to the apostle; some wrongly thought that they knew more than Paul did—that was dangerous thinking.] **(15) I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. (16) Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing** [or, participation (Greek *koinōnia*)] **in the blood of Christ?** [I'll quote part of what Leon Morris said here.¹⁵ "The cup of blessing' (NIV *thanksgiving*) is the name the Jews gave the cup at the end of a meal, over which a thanksgiving was said.... 'Bless'...means that a prayer of thanksgiving was said over [the cup] (hence the translation of the NIV). Among the Jews the usual form of thanksgiving began, 'Blessed art Thou, O Lord,' after which came the matter for thanksgiving. Paul is referring then to the prayer of thanksgiving said over the cup at Holy Communion."] **Is not the bread which we break a sharing** [or, participation (*koinōnia*)] **in the body of Christ?** [The apostle is speaking of the Lord's Supper. For one thing, he wants to demonstrate that there is all-too-much similarity between this covenant meal, which commemorates the all-important sacrificial death of the Lamb of God, and the sacrificial feasts of the pagans. New-covenant believers certainly cannot be faithful to God and be involved in demon worship. One of the most grievous sins on the part of some of the ancient Israelites was the attempt to worship the gods of the nations along with the God of Israel. In the Lord's Supper (see Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; and 1 Cor. 11:17-34), we focus on, and we reaffirm, that which is at the heart of, and which is the basis for, our covenant with God, the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God. As the old covenant was ratified with blood (Ex. 24:8), so was the new covenant.

Christ, the Lamb of God, was slain at Passover: "for Christ our Passover has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7). The Lord's Supper was initiated at Passover; the Lord's Supper of the new covenant replaces Passover of the old covenant. His sacrifice also replaces all the other old-covenant sacrifices, including the very important sacrifices of the Day of Atonement. His sacrifice (unlike the old-covenant sacrifices, which foreshadowed His One Sacrifice) was able to fully solve the sin problem forever (cf., e.g., Heb. 9:11-10:31). The Christians of the early church, unlike the Jews and the pagans, did not have sacrificial offerings, but they had the Lord's Supper, and they lived their entire

¹⁴ *First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Zondervan, 1971 reprint of the 1886 edition], page 71.

¹⁵ *1 Corinthians*, page 143.

lives in the light of, and on the basis of, the One Sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

“In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Cor. 11:25; also see Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; and Luke 22:19, 20). As we remember the Lord and “proclaim [His] death until He comes,” we consider, with praise and thanksgiving, our glorious covenant with God. For one thing, we consider the provisions and benefits of the covenant (e.g., forgiveness; death and burial for the old man; the new birth and indwelling Holy Spirit; healing for spirit, soul, and body; and having a place in God’s eternal kingdom, reigning with the Lord Jesus in a never-ending reign, starting at the time “He comes [returns]”). These things are all part of what it means for us to share/participate in the blood and body of Christ; in union with Him, we share/participate in His death (He died in our place, bearing our sins) and in His resurrection life.

First Corinthians 1:9 says, “God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship [Greek *koinōnia*] with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” The Greek noun translated “fellowship” in 1:9 is used twice in 10:16, translated “sharing” (or, participation). (This Greek noun is also used in 2 Cor. 13:14 of “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.”) It is also instructive to note that the Greek noun *koinōnos*, from which *koinōnia* was derived, is used in 10:18, 20, translated “sharers.”

The Lord’s Supper is an appropriate time for us to renew our covenant with God. We consider what is required of us in this covenant, and we examine ourselves (cf. 1 Cor. 11:28) to make sure we are being faithful to the covenant. If required, we ask for forgiveness; and we commit ourselves to do everything we can do to repent and bring our lives into divine order (by God’s grace). We share in the blood of Christ and His body when we come to the “altar” spoken of in Heb. 13:10. In Heb. 13:8-16 we see that for us to come to this altar is for us to walk in the all-sufficient grace of the new covenant, staying faithful to God, as required by the covenant. This is something we are required to do on a continuous basis. When we celebrate the Lord’s Supper in faith, in truth, and in the Spirit, it is anything but a dead ritual. Christ is very much present with His people, even as the demons are present at the pagan sacrificial feasts.] **(17) Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body** [cf. Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:4, 16; and Col. 3:15]; **for we all partake of one bread.** [The “one bread” refers to the literal bread used in the Lord’s Supper, but since the bread represents the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, we can also say that the “one bread” refers to Him too. Under verse 16, we briefly discussed the fact that we share/partake in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, in union with Him. All those who truly partake of the “one bread,” are, by definition, “one body.” (This is true for the church worldwide, which is made up of all true Christians, not just for the local church.) The church is one body, and it must be understood that the members of this body cannot be united with other religious bodies or activities, where other gods are being worshipped. All true Christians are united with the Lord Jesus Christ (in/by the Holy Spirit), and through Him we are united with one another in the one body of Christ. We worship God (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit), Him and Him alone. In the Lord’s Supper we are communing with God (not that we just do this at the Lord’s Supper). He is our God; we trust Him; we obey Him; and we look to Him for all things.

One last issue: Do we literally partake of the body and blood of Jesus Christ when we partake of the bread and of the fruit of the vine at the Lord's Supper? Many Christians think so, but to me this idea confuses the issue; it puts the focus the wrong place and detracts from God's intended purpose in the Lord's Supper. (I am not suggesting that all who disagree with me on this issue miss the proper focus of Christianity. Many such Christians know and believe the basic truths of Christianity, they have been born again by the Spirit of God, and they are walking in the truth, righteousness, and holiness of God by the grace/Spirit of God.) I agree with the many who point out that the fact that Jesus was present with the apostles when He initiated the Lord's Supper should suffice to show that He did not intend for us to take His words literally about the bread being His body and the fruit of the vine being His blood. The Lord Jesus frequently used figurative language.

Furthermore, it seems clear to me that the words of John 6:52-58 (which speak of eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood), when read in context with all of John chapter 6 (and the rest of the New Testament), are to be understood in a non-literal, spiritual/Spiritual sense. If there is any reference at all to the yet-to-be-initiated Lord's Supper in John chapter 6 (and I doubt that there is), it is very limited. It is impossible to think, for example, that the bread of the Lord's Supper "gives life to the world" (John 6:33). John chapter 6 (and the rest of the New Testament) makes it clear that the work of the Spirit (who comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ and His atoning death, as we submit to God and His Word through faith) is what gives life to the world (cf., e.g., John 6:35-40, 63.) **(18) Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers [*koinōnos*] in the altar?** [In Paul's day Israel was still sacrificing in the temple at Jerusalem. It was understood that those who were sharers in that altar could not be sharers in other altars. The apostle is reinforcing his point that Christians, who have their altar, cannot be sharers in other altars, the altars of demons.] **(19) What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?** [cf. 1 Cor. 8:4] **(20) No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God** [cf. Deut. 32:17; Psalm 106:37; and Rev. 9:20]; **and I do not want you to become [or, be] sharers [*koinōnos*] in demons.** [I prefer the translation "be" instead of "become," with the NIV and other translations. For one thing, this translation fits better with the fact that some of the Corinthians were apparently already involved with this idolatry (1 Cor. 8:9-13). Because of their inadequate (fleshly) understanding, however, they did not realize that they were involved in idolatry. Now that the apostle has informed them that their attendance at the sacrificial feasts in the pagan temples (or at other locations) involves communion with demons, they will have to repent or face very serious trouble with God. I assume that some did repent and that others who considered joining them gave up their misguided plans, but I would not be surprised to learn that some rejected what Paul said here (at their peril).] **(21) You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.** [cf. 2 Cor. 6:16] **(22) Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?** [Compare Deut. 32:21. Many verses of the Bible point out that God is a jealous God—He will not tolerate His people's being unfaithful to Him (see under James 4:4 in this paper).] **We are not stronger than He, are we?** [Cf. Eccl. 6:10; Isa. 45:9.] **(23) All things are lawful, but not all are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.** [See

1 Cor. 6:12-20; 8:1-13. Some of the Corinthians were pushing the idea that all things are lawful to ridiculous extremes. It is true, however, that when it comes to indifferent (ceremonial) things, like whether we eat meat, or certain kinds of meat, or do not eat, all things are lawful. For one thing, we are not under the ceremonial laws of the old covenant. The apostle, in the following verses, will go on to speak of meat sacrificed to idols. He will show that it is OK to eat this meat, assuming that you know in your heart/conscience that it is OK (not that it is ever OK to be involved in the sacrificial feasts devoted to pagan gods; see 10:14-22), but that occasions may arise where you would waive your right to eat this meat for the sake of a weaker brother, who was not yet convinced in his heart that such eating would be OK before God. See Rom. 14:1-23.¹⁶ We are to “edify” and seek the good of (cf. 10:24) the weaker brethren, not contribute to their stumbling.] **(24) Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.** [Cf. Rom. 15:2; 1 Cor. 10:33; and 13:5.] **(25) Eat anything that is sold in the meat market** [Some of this meat had been sacrificed to idols.], **without asking questions for conscience’ sake** [Compare 1 Cor. 8:7. As Paul will go on to show, he is speaking of the conscience of the weaker brethren, who are not yet convinced in their hearts that it would be OK to eat meat sacrificed to idols.]; **(26) FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD’S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS.** [The apostle quotes Psalm 24:1 to help substantiate the idea that it is OK to eat all things. Compare 1 Tim. 4:3-5; Mark 7:19.] **(27) If one of the unbelievers invites you** [That is, he invites the strong Christian (at least he is *strong* with respect to his knowledge that it is OK to eat all things) to a meal at his home.], **and you wish to go, eat anything that is set before you, without asking questions for conscience’ sake.** [Compare 1 Cor. 10:25, 28, 29. As Paul explains in verse 29, he is speaking of the conscience of the weaker brethren.] **(28) But if anyone says to you, “This is meat sacrificed to idols,” do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you** [The one who informed the Christian regarding the status of this meat would apparently be one of the brethren who did not believe it was OK to eat such meat.], **and for conscience’ sake;** **(29) I mean not your conscience, but the other man’s; for why is my freedom judged [condemned] by another man’s conscience?** **(30) If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks?** [The “other man” would be a weak brother, who would judge/condemn you for eating meat sacrificed to idols. This same Greek verb is used in Rom. 14:3 and 4 (cf. 14:10) of the weak brethren judging/condemning the strong brethren for eating meat (not just meat sacrificed to idols). Also, the verb translated “slandered” here in 1 Cor. 10:30 is used in Rom. 14:16 in a similar way. It will not work for good, or for the glory of God (cf. 10:31), for the strong to “give thanks” and exercise their “freedom” and go ahead and eat the meat sacrificed to idols if it results in their being judged/condemned and slandered. It is clear that the weak brother would be wrong (sinful) in judging/condemning and slandering his brother, but Paul does not take time to make that point here—he is speaking here to the strong brethren.

The key point Paul makes here is that the strong need to waive their right to eat meat sacrificed to idols in a situation like this. That way they can avoid giving offense (cf. 10:32). Also, there is another, more-important issue that he raises in 1 Cor. 8:7-13 and Rom. 14:1-23. That is, the strong need to do everything they can do to avoid putting

¹⁶ This chapter of Romans is discussed in some detail in my *Paper On Faith*.

pressure on the weak to go ahead and do something (here, specifically, eat meat sacrificed to idols) before they are convinced/have faith in their hearts that it is OK before God. If they go ahead and eat before they are convinced/before their conscience is satisfied, it will be sin for them (even though in itself it is not sinful)—all sin is a serious matter.] **(31) Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.** [Cf. Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11.] **(32) Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God** [At least we should do everything possible to try to avoid giving offense. Some will always take offense, even as they took offense at Jesus.]; **(33) Just as I also please all men in all things** [The apostle tried to please all men in all things (that is, he did everything that he could reasonably do and still put God first, always doing His will), but it is very clear that many men, both Jews and Gentiles, including many Christians, took offense at him (not that their offense was justified).], **not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of the many, that they may be saved.** [Cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23.]

1 CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 11

In the first half of this chapter (11:1-16), the apostle Paul dealt with the need for Christian women to cover their heads when praying or prophesying in church. The primary point that Paul made in these verses was that God's divine order requires the submission (not inferiority or inequality) of women. Covering the head was a symbol of submission to God's order at that time, but in our day this particular symbol is not recognized by many, whether Christians or non-Christians (at least not in our country).

In the second half of this chapter (11:17-34), Paul dealt with the sinful manner in which the Lord's Supper was being conducted by some of the Christians at Corinth. The primary problem that Paul dealt with in these verses was that at the common meal, which was part of (or at least closely associated with) the Lord's Supper, some of the Christians who had plenty were not sharing their food and drink with their brethren that had little or nothing. The apostle made it clear that this behavior was totally inappropriate, even sinful. At the Lord's Supper the saints are called to remember with thanksgiving the new covenant established on the blood of Christ, the new covenant that was given to save them from sin, the new covenant that made all believers one in the body of Christ. These verses contain some very important information regarding the Lord's Supper.

Be imitators of me [cf. 1 Cor. 4:16; Phil. 3:17], **just as I also am of Christ.** [There is widespread agreement that this significant verse goes with chapter 10 and that the chapter division (which was added later) is unfortunate here. To say words like these, the apostle Paul had to be walking close to Christ in truth, righteousness, and holiness (by the grace/Spirit of God through faith). This certainly is a good testimony—to the glory of God!] **(2) Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.** [Compare 1 Cor. 4:17; 11:17, 22; 2 Thess. 2:15; and 3:6. The contents of this epistle show that Paul was being rather generous with the words of this verse.] **(3) But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman** [The NIV has, “the head of the woman is man.” Compare Gen. 3:16; Eph. 5:23. In Col. 1:18 Paul said that Christ is the “head of the body, the church.”], **and God is the head of Christ.** [In 1 Cor. 3:23 Paul said “and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.” As we discuss these controversial verses in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, we must humble our hearts before God and seek Him for the balanced truth. That *is* what we want, is it not? His will must be done in our lives and in the church! In some ways, according to God's prescribed order for this present age (based on what the Bible teaches), the man has authority over (is head of) the woman, both in the home and in the church. (Apparently there won't be any differences in the roles for men and women in the eternal age to come, cf., e.g., Luke 20:27-38.) This does not mean that the woman is inferior, or that she has a demeaning role—the Lord Jesus Christ is not considered inferior to God the Father, nor does He have a demeaning role. It is true, however, that even though the Son of God is fully deity with God the Father (and the Holy Spirit), He is, in some ways, (willingly and happily) subordinate to God the Father, and not only for this age, but also

for the age to come (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 15:27, 28); but lest we go too far and miss the balance, also see Rev. 21:22, 23; 22:1, 3.

We are not saying that the woman does not have the same full salvation and the same full access to God the Father through Jesus Christ and in/by the Holy Spirit that the man has (cf., e.g., Gal. 3:28). Nor would I say that women can never, in any way, exercise authority over men in the church—I believe we must leave room for God to be God (cf., e.g., Jud. 4:1-5:31; Acts 18:26). It is clear that women can pray and prophesy in church (1 Cor. 11:4; Acts 2:17; and 21:9), and it is clear that God has important roles for all Christians (including all women) to fulfill (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 12:12-31; Eph. 4:7, 16; and Rom. 12:3-8). I wouldn't say that a ministry like Kathryn Kuhlman's, for example, was out of order; it seems to me that her ministry was (for the most part at least) effective by the enablement of God.

We must acknowledge, however, that the apostle Paul (at least as a general rule) did "not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man" (1 Tim. 2:12).

Sometimes, as we will discuss further below, we need to take into consideration that some things, like the "practice" of women having their heads covered while praying or prophesying (1 Cor. 11:16), are culturally conditioned and not necessarily always applicable (or, fully applicable) for other/subsequent cultures. A practice/custom appropriate for one culture or generation could be totally misunderstood and counterproductive in another culture or generation.

In Paul's day for women to even be involved in the theological discussions at church (even asking questions) was considered out of order. (See 1 Cor. 14:34, 35.) In our day this is commonly done, and I assume quite appropriately. Such activity today need not be viewed as a manifestation of an improper, unsubmitive attitude. I definitely want to see every woman be, and do, everything they possibly can, as long as it is done in the will of God. We must guard against trying to bend God's Word and His will to suit our fleshly desires (and/or to fit the viewpoint of the world in our day). Our primary goal as men and women of God must be to please Him, to get our lives in divine order and keep them there. This will always work for good, but it may well go against some of our desires, and it will often go against the viewpoint of the world.

Men must not think of their authority from God as something to boast about in the flesh, but as a responsibility before God to be faithful and to humbly fulfill their obligations. (This applies to women too, in the areas where they have authority.) Men must be concerned lest they abuse their authority. If husbands, for example, put the emphasis on pleasing God in all things (instead of demanding their rights), including loving their wives as Christ loved/loves the church (cf. Eph. 5:25), it will always work for good, and no godly wife will be complaining. God's ways are always right, and they always work for good, including our good. I am confident that God will lead us to the balanced truth and to His will (divine order) for each of us and for the church as we humble ourselves before Him and His Word.

I'll quote a paragraph from what John MacArthur said under 1 Cor. 11:11, 12.¹⁷ "Far from oppressing women, the [Christian] church has been their greatest liberator. In Greek and Roman societies most women were little more than slaves, the possessions of their husbands, who often virtually bought and traded their wives at will. It was largely because of this inhumane treatment of women that feminism became so popular in the Roman empire. In

¹⁷ *1 Corinthians* [Moody Bible Institute, 1984], page 260.

many Jewish communities the woman's situation was not much better. Divorce had become easy and commonplace, but it was almost entirely the prerogative of the man. Some Jewish men held women in such low esteem that they developed a popular prayer in which they thanked God that they were not born a slave, a Gentile, or a woman."

I'll also quote some similar words from Simon J. Kistemaker.¹⁸ "Christianity has been and remains a force that liberates women from oppression and servitude. In many other religions, women are owned from birth by their fathers and on marriage by their husbands. They lack freedom, are in bondage, and never acquire equality. Even in ancient Israel, a female was secondary to any male. ... Women were not considered worthy of studying the Scriptures and were denied an education."] **(4) Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head.** [The practice of Jewish men wearing head coverings seems to have begun, at least for the most part, at a later date. Many believe that the words "his head" at the end of this verse refer to the man's literal head. So too for the second use of the words "her head" in the next verse. The fact that Paul continues in verses 5, 6 with the words "for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head" supports this viewpoint, and I assume this was Paul's viewpoint.

The man and the woman would both be disgracing their literal heads by being out of divine order—the man by wearing a symbol that tended to deny that "he is the image and glory of God" (1 Cor. 11:7) and the woman by not wearing the symbol of submission to God's order for this age. It is possible, however (and many commentators favor this viewpoint), that by the use of the words "disgraces his head" at the end of verse 4, Paul meant to include the disgracing of Christ as the head of the man (see verse 3). If so, then the words "disgraces her head" in verse 5 probably also include the idea that the woman disgraces the man/men (see verse 3).] **(5) But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying** [It is clear that the apostle believed that it is proper for women to pray and prophesy in the church. Compare Luke 2:36; Acts 21:9.] **disgraces her head** [See under 11:4.]; **for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved.** **(6) For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.** [That is, let her cover her head while praying or prophesying in the church (see 1 Cor. 11:5, 13).] **(7) For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.** [It is clear, however, that both male and female were created in the image of God. See Gen. 1:26, 27; 5:1, 2; 9:6; and James 3:9.] **(8) For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man** [See Gen. 2:21-23; 1 Tim. 2:13.]; **(9) for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.** [Paul is referring to the fact that the woman was created to be a "helper suitable for [the man]" (Gen. 2:18-23). It is also true that, in God's eternal plans, woman was created for God (not for the man), and every Christian woman (along with every Christian man) will be with Him and reigning with Him forever (cf., e.g., Rev. 3:21; 22:3-5).] **(10) Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head** [That is, as 1 Cor. 11:5, 6, and 13 show, when she prays or prophesies where the saints are gathered, she should have a covering on her head, which is "a symbol of [submission to] authority." In Paul's day, the covering symbolized her

¹⁸ *1 Corinthians* [Baker, 1993], page 379.

submission to God's prescribed order "of authority." The covering consisted of some sort of veil. Such coverings in the early church could take several forms, but typically they were a cloth covering; it could consist of a part of the garment (e.g., a kerchief/shawl) that was raised to cover the head when praying or prophesying. The most important thing, of course, was for the woman praying or prophesying to have an *attitude of submission*, without which the symbol of submission would be an empty, worthless ritual. However, at least at that time, as far as the apostle to the Gentiles was concerned, the symbol was required; it was not optional.], **because of the angels.** [The idea is that when the saints gather, some of God's angels are present, which makes it all the more necessary for things to be in divine order.] **(11) However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. (12) For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God** [cf. Rom. 11:36]. [These two verses bring some balance to the picture, but Paul did not write these two verses to negate what he says in the other verses.] **(13) Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?** [It is clear that the apostle did not think so, and it clearly was the "practice" (1 Cor. 11:16) in the church at that time for the women to pray (or prophesy) with the head covered.] **(14) Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him** [Paul does not mean that a man's hair must be short, but his hair would be short relative to the woman's hair. There is some room for differences in what would be considered acceptable in different cultures.], **(15) but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering.** [The apostle does not mean, as some believe, that if/since the woman has long hair, she does not need any other covering while praying or prophesying.] **(16) But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.** [In other words, the apostle required the Christian women at Corinth to submit to this church-wide accepted practice of having their heads covered while praying or prophesying. In our day, in our culture, few women wear a covering for their head, including while praying or prophesying. I am not sure exactly what God thinks about this (it is easy to speak for Him, and it is easy to be wrong too), but I am sure that it is a relatively minor issue with Him (if an issue at all) when compared with the major areas where many Christians are out of divine order in our day. I am speaking of things like the widespread need for an adequate understanding of the basics of the gospel, for the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23), and for righteousness and holiness.

I am sure that God is concerned that each Christian (men and women) be humble before Him and in divine order. I have to assume that God's order for men and women (as pictured, for example, in 1 Cor. 11:3) is applicable for this entire age, but, as I mentioned, I believe there is some room for changes in what submission means for women in different cultures. Today for many women to begin to cover their heads while praying or prophesying would probably prove to be more of a curious novelty than a sign of submission. There are cases in our day where some women (sometimes with persuasion from men) come to the conviction that they should wear a covering. If that is their conviction, they certainly should wear a covering. I believe it is very important, however, that these women do not try to force their conviction on the other women in their church or in other churches (as it sometimes happens), insisting that for them to

not be covered is rebellion against God. I'll close this section with the prayer that His will be done in this area, as in every area.] **(17)** [Throughout the rest of this chapter, the apostle deals with the sinful abuse of the Lord's Supper at Corinth. The Lord's Supper, as these verses show, included, or was closely associated with, a communal meal (sometimes referred to as the agape/love feast).] **But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. (18) For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it.** [Cf. 1 Cor. 1:10-12; 3:3, 4 with 4:6.] **(19) For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved** [by God] **may have become evident** [or, manifest] **among you.** [To the extent that some of the Corinthian "Christians" were not for real, or were extremely fleshly (cf. 3:1-5), factions/divisions had to manifest in the church at Corinth. I am not suggesting that fleshly Christians are rejected by God, but it is a dangerous place to be (we must make it a top priority to rise above fleshiness), and it certainly leads to factions (divisions) in the church, which is a major problem in our day.] **(20) Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper** [Many of the Corinthians undoubtedly considered it to be the Lord's Supper, but Paul says that some of them were so far out of order that he did not consider it to be a legitimate observance of the Lord's Supper. As he continued, the apostle dealt with one primary abuse of the Lord's Supper that had surfaced at Corinth. This one abuse is spelled out clearly in verses 21, 22 and 33, 34 (also see verse 29); the apostle was also concerned with this one abuse in the intervening verses (verses 23-32), but it is not nearly so obvious in those verses.], **(21) for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. (22) What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing** [cf. James 2:6]? **What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.** [The problem was that, as 11:21, 22, 33, and 34 show, some of those in the church at Corinth that had an abundant supply were not waiting for, or sharing with, those who had very little, or nothing. (With "takes his own supper first" [verse 21], compare "wait for one another" [verse 33].) Not only were some of the Christians poor, some were slaves (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 7:21, 22; 12:13). While some did not have enough to eat and drink, if anything, some of those with an abundance were drinking too much, enough to become intoxicated, and some were undoubtedly overeating too. The apostle asks, "*This is how you celebrate the Lord's Supper? This is how you remember the Lord and His atoning death (11:24, 25). This is how you proclaim His death until He comes (11:26), the very death that saved you and made you part of the family of God, the death that made you one with every other true Christian?*") **(23) For I received from the Lord** [The apostle received the gospel, including his teaching on the Lord's Supper, directly from Christ (cf. Gal. 1:11, 12).] **that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread** [See Matt. 26:20-29; Mark 14:17-25; and Luke 22:14-23.]; **(24) and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."** [I'll quote part of what Gordon D. Fee said here.¹⁹ "The identification of the bread with the body is semitic imagery

¹⁹ *First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 1987], page 550.

in its heightened form.²⁰ ...he means 'this signifies/represents my body.'²¹ [The view that some actual change took place in the bread] could only have arisen in the church at a much later stage when Greek modes of thinking had rather thoroughly replaced semitic ones."] (25) **In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood [cf. Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 10:16; and Ex. 24:6-8]; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."** [On "remembrance," cf. Ex. 12:14; 13:3; and Deut. 16:3.] (26) **For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.** [See under 1 Cor. 10:16, 17 in this paper for a discussion on the meaning of the Lord's Supper.] (27) **Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.** [When Paul spoke of eating the bread or drinking the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner in this context, he was undoubtedly thinking of the sinful abuse of the Lord's Supper spelled out in verses 21, 22, 29, 33, and 34. It is also true, however, that if we partake of the Lord's Supper, which commemorates the new covenant established on the basis of the atoning death of the Lamb of God, while violating the terms of the covenant *in any way*, we are partaking "in an unworthy manner." Compare Heb. 10:29. The problem would not be solved by refraining from partaking of the Lord's Supper, nor did Paul suggest that option. What we must do is ask for forgiveness and repent of any, and all, violations of our covenant with God. There is no other acceptable answer for unresolved sin.

I'll include two excerpts from what John MacArthur said under these verses.²² "Jesus transformed the Passover meal into the celebration of the infinitely greater deliverance He came to bring, of which the Passover was only a foreshadow. When we eat His body and drink His blood [MacArthur does not believe that the elements actually become His body and His blood], we remember the spiritual and eternal redemption that He bought with the sacrifice of that body and the offering of that blood. The Passover celebrated the temporary, physical deliverance of the Old Covenant. [There was, of course, a very important spiritual dimension of the old covenant too.] The Lord's Supper celebrates the permanent and spiritual deliverance of the New. 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood' (Luke 22:20). The Lord's Supper reminds us of the cross of Jesus Christ" (page 266).

"[The Lord's Supper] was a genuine meal, where the church congregated to eat the 'love feast,' a meal followed by the Communion. The Communion was connected to this supper in the Corinthian church, but abuses were obscuring its divine purpose and destroying its sanctity. In the early church the love feast and Communion customarily were held together, but abuses such as those in Corinth eventually forced the two to be separated in order to protect the Communion. The love feast soon disappeared altogether" (page 269). "Eventually, so many problems accompanied these [agape] feasts that at the Council of Carthage (A. D. 397), they were strictly forbidden."²³] (28) **But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.** [Although Paul was dealing with one particular sin in this context, these words (like the words of verse 27) fit well with the fuller sense of examining ourselves to make sure we are living in faithfulness to the

²⁰ Fee has a footnote here, "Compare 1 Cor. 10:4, 'the rock was Christ,' and Gal. 4:25, 'Hagar is Mount Sinai.' "

²¹ Fee has another footnote, "The presence of Jesus with them as he spoke these words would have made any other meaning impossible. Compare Moffatt [*First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*], [page] 168."

²² *1 Corinthians*, pages 266, 269.

²³ Daniel R. Mitchell, "1 Corinthians," *Liberty Bible Commentary*, New Testament [Old-Time Gospel Hour, 1982], page 448.

new covenant in every way. We should not wait for the Lord's Supper to examine ourselves and to make things right (cf. 2 Cor. 13:5); however, just before partaking of the Lord's Supper is a very appropriate time to examine ourselves.] **(29) For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly.** [Instead of "not judge [the body] rightly," we could translate "not discerning [the Lord's body]" with the KJV and NKJV. As we have discussed, Paul was zeroing in on the abuse of the Lord's Supper at Corinth. "The body" here refers to the body of Christ, the church. (First Corinthians 10:16, 17 are an important cross-reference; these verses demonstrate that those who share in the Lamb of God and His sacrificial death become/are "one body"; also see 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 1:18.) To not judge rightly/discern the Lord's body is comparable with "[despising] the church of God" (1 Cor. 11:22). I'll quote a sentence from Fee here.²⁴ "The 'unworthy' eating of verse 27 that brings judgment is now described as eating 'without discerning the body,' meaning the church (as in 10:16-17; this, after all, is the point of the whole section)."

In 1 Cor. 11:30-32 Paul expanded on what he meant by "judgment" here in 11:29. A graphic illustration of taking words out of context and misunderstanding the Scriptures (there are many such interpretations around the body of Christ, very often coming from sincere Christians) is provided by those who understand this verse to teach that the sicknesses at Corinth resulted from their not recognizing that healing had been provided for them in the atoning death of the Lamb of God. I believe it is true that healing is provided in the atonement (see the chapter dealing with this topic in *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*), but that is not what they needed to hear at Corinth to solve the sickness problems mentioned in verses 30-32. They needed to repent, as this passage clearly shows. Many today are trying to stand in faith for healing in cases where repentance is what is needed.] **(30) For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.** [That is, because of their sin (and as I mentioned, Paul was zeroing in on their sin of abusing the Lord's Supper [not that that was the only sin, or the greatest sin, that was taking place among the Christians at Corinth]), some judgment had already fallen on the Corinthians, with some even experiencing premature death (i.e., they "sleep"). As Paul will go on to show, God's motive in sending/allowing such judgments was/is to help motivate those in sin to repent. Compare 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20. For more on God's judging His people, see John 5:14; Luke 13:1-5; and see the chapter titled "A Study to Show that Under the Old Covenant Sickness Was Typically Considered To Be Part of the Punishment/Penalty/Chastisement for Sin" in *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.) It doesn't seem (in the context of 1 Cor. 11:27-32) that Paul considered those Christians who had died a premature death at Corinth by God's judgment to be in the category of those that had lost their salvation, though for some of them this could have been the case—God is the Judge. It is also possible that some who had died by God's judgment at Corinth had never become born-again Christians.] **(31) But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.** [For us to judge ourselves rightly, which goes with examining ourselves (cf. verse 28), we must not only ask for forgiveness, we must also repent and do what is required to make things right.] **(32) But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord** [cf. Heb. 12:5-13] **so that we will not be condemned along with the world** [at the final judgment]. [The idea here (and in 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20; and Heb. 12:5-13) is that God's

²⁴ *1 Corinthians*, page 559.

discipline/judgment is designed to bring us to repentance, righteousness, and holiness (cf. Rev. 3:19). There is no guarantee, however, that those in sin will repent when disciplined/judged; some, instead of repenting, get bitter and angry with God and go deeper into sin and rebellion.] **(33) So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat** [at the meal associated with the Lord's Supper], **wait for one another. (34) If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home** [That is, if some say they are too hungry to "wait" for the others at the meal associated with the Lord's Supper (such persons would be associated with those who have plenty), let them eat at home.], **so that you will not come together for judgment.** [As discussed above, some Corinthian Christians had already experienced judgment because of their abuse of the Lord's Supper (and other sins). These last two verses, along with 1 Cor. 11:20-22, confirm that the sin Paul was dealing with in this passage was their sin against the body of Christ by disregarding and shaming some of the members of this body at the Lord's Supper.] **And the remaining matters I shall arrange when I come.**

1 CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 12

The primary topic that the apostle Paul dealt with in First Corinthians chapters 12-14 was the gifts of the Spirit (charismatic gifts). We learn quite a bit about the gifts in these chapters, but we must understand that these chapters (like so many other chapters in the epistles of Paul) were written in a specific context. The apostle wrote these chapters to deal with misunderstandings about and a misuse of the gifts (especially the gift of tongues) at Corinth.

Now concerning spiritual gifts [The NASB has *gifts* in italics. “The things of the Spirit” would be a more literal translation of the Greek. However, “the things of the Spirit” here is comparable in meaning with the “gifts [of the Spirit]” mentioned in 12:4 (and with the “manifestation of the Spirit” mentioned in 12:7). The (neuter gender, plural number) Greek adjective used here in 12:1 (which was derived from *pneuma*, which is the Greek noun typically translated Spirit/spirit) is also used in 1 Cor. 14:1 (and in 14:12).], **brethren, I do not want you to be unaware** [or, ignorant]. **(2) You know that when you were pagans** [The apostle is speaking of the pagan background of the Gentile Christians at Corinth.], **you were led astray to the mute** [cf. Psalm 115:5; Isa. 46:7; Jer. 10:5; and Hab. 2:18, 19] **idols, however you were led.** [Compare 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 Pet. 4:3. Instead of being “led” by the Holy Spirit, they were formerly being “led astray” to the mute (dumb) idols, idols that could not speak. Much of their former guidance came from demon spirits, who were/are actively involved in pagan religions (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 10:19-21).] **(3) Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by [or, in] the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is accursed”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.** [In these first three verses of chapter 12, the apostle Paul somewhat insulted the Corinthians. He was trying to wake them up (those who needed to be awakened) so that they might humble themselves and repent, where repentance was required. I don’t believe Paul thought that the Christians at Corinth needed to be taught that the Holy Spirit doesn’t lead people to say “Jesus is accursed.” Furthermore, I doubt that these words were ever spoken in a prophetic utterance in the church at Corinth, and even if they were spoken, I don’t believe that any Christian seriously wondered if it was the Holy Spirit behind this utterance.

The Spirit is here to lead people to Jesus Christ and to exalt Him in every way. There is perfect unity and harmony between the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor. 12:4-6). The work of the Spirit exalts Jesus Christ and perfectly harmonizes with His work. All the charismatic gifts that are distributed, and wrought, by the Spirit in and through the body of Christ exalt Christ Jesus, and they work for the good of His people. But more must be said: When you observed the manifestation of the charismatic gifts in the church at Corinth (and this problem was not at all limited to the ancient church at Corinth), you might have thought that the gifts of the Spirit were given to promote disunity and confusion in the body of Christ. The problems, of course, did not originate with the Spirit; they came from a fleshly misuse of the gifts.

One last point here, I don’t believe the apostle was saying that it would be impossible for a non Christian, including one inspired by a demon spirit, to speak the words “Jesus

is Lord”; these words are sometimes spoken apart from the enablement of the Holy Spirit in a deceptive way, or just in a way that does not include faith in Jesus as Lord.] **(4) Now there are varieties of gifts** [The Greek has *charismata*, a plural form of the Greek noun *charisma*. The noun *charisma* (though not derived directly from) traces back to *charis* (grace); a charismatic gift is a manifestation of God’s grace. There are nine charismatic gifts listed in 1 Cor. 12:8-10, but in the New Testament the word *charisma* is used in a fuller sense, including many other gifts that the Spirit distributes to the saints, enabling them to fulfill their roles in the church. (See Rom. 1:11; Rom. 12:6²⁵; 1 Cor. 1:7; 12:9, 28, 30, 31; 1 Tim. 4:14; and 1 Pet. 4:10; all these verses use *charisma*; also compare Heb. 2:4.)], **but the same Spirit**. [Throughout 1 Cor. 12:8-13, the apostle frequently mentions the *same* Spirit and the *one* Spirit. He is emphasizing the point that since all the charismatic gifts originate from the *one* and the *same* Spirit, we can be sure they will all work together for the common good (unless they are misused by Christians); they are not coming from various sources that are disorganized or are in competition/strife with one another. The confusion and strife associated with the charismatic gifts at Corinth resulted from a fleshly misuse of the gifts. Of course chaos, even greater chaos, would have resulted if the source of some of the gifts at Corinth had been demonic, but (although that potential is always real) there is no indication that Paul attributed any of the problems with charismatic gifts at Corinth to counterfeit, demonic gifts.] **(5) And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord**. [The “ministries” undoubtedly include the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28-30; Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:11-16²⁶; Acts 6:1-6 (note “ministry” in 6:4); 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 2 Tim. 4:5 (note “ministry”); and Titus 1:5-9. Using the word *ministries* in the fullest sense, we could say that all Christians have a ministry since all Christians have important functions to perform in the body of Christ (each Christian has a measure). (See 1 Cor. 12:14-27.²⁷) However, the New Testament typically uses this word in a more limited sense, and I believe we should understand *ministries* in a more limited sense here.

As this verse (1 Cor. 12:5) shows, the Lord Jesus Christ is directly associated with the *ministries* in the church. Ephesians 4:11 says, “He (Christ Jesus) gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.” (Many Christians speak of the five-fold ministry based on Eph. 4:11.) Since all the ministries are under the *same* Lord, they will be perfectly unified and working together for the common good (except to the extent the ministers are not following Christ, but are doing their own thing in the flesh). It is obvious that the work of God the Son and the work of God the Spirit overlap here: Much of the enablement to fulfill these *ministries* comes by/through the charismatic gifts of the Spirit. As I mentioned, we certainly need not be concerned about any lack of unity and harmony between the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit.] **(6) There are varieties of effects** [or, workings], **but the same God who works all things in all persons**. [Compare Eph. 4:6. God the Father is spoken of here; in 1 Cor. 12:4-6 Paul mentions God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God the Son and God the Spirit are, in some ways, subordinate to God

²⁵ See the discussion of Rom. 12:1-8 in the *Paper On Faith*.

²⁶ All of Ephesians chapter 4 is discussed in a verse-by-verse manner in my paper dated July 2000.

²⁷ Also see Eph. 4:1-16 (note the reference mentioned in footnote 2). For one thing, the word *measure* is used in Eph. 4:7, 16.

the Father. The “effects [workings]” of the Father include the *gifts* given by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4) and the *ministries* given by the Son (12:5). As the apostle demonstrates in this chapter, we need all the members of the body of Christ with their different functions/measures/gifts/ministries. Each Christian has important and necessary contributions to make to the proper functioning of the body of Christ.²⁸ It is not just our gifts/ministries, however, that contribute to the proper functioning of the church. Even more important is our living in the truth, righteousness, and holiness of God, and our manifesting the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23), as we humbly walk/live in the Spirit by faith. Starting in 1 Cor. 12:31b and throughout chapter 13, Paul emphasizes the need for Christians to continuously walk in love (a fruit of the Spirit). Without love, the gifts can do more harm than good.] **(7) But [Now] to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.** [The words “each one” need not be understood here to include every single Christian. Sometimes Paul uses these words (actually it is one word in the Greek) in a way that does not include everyone (cf. 1 Cor. 1:12; 11:21; and 14:26). I do not believe that Paul says here that each Christian will be given, and used on a regular basis in, at least one of the nine charismatic ministry-gifts listed in 12:8-10. For one thing, not all Christians will have a *ministry*, using the word *ministry* in the more limited sense discussed above. Some, quite wrongly I believe, teach that we should all expect to be used on a regular basis in all nine gifts.

We should all be open to be used in any gift at any time; we do not want to limit God in any way. However, if I understand Paul here, and I believe I do, he is speaking (at least for the most part) of Christians being used (according to the plan of God) on a regular basis in particular gifts/ministries. That way we can become proficient (specialists) in the use of our gifts/in the fulfillment of our ministries; this enhances order in the church, with each minister having their recognized roles to fulfill and being proficient at them.

The key point the apostle makes in this verse is that whatever manifestations of the Spirit are given, they are always given for the common good; they are not given to exalt individuals or to cause strife, competition, pride, inferiority complexes, or things like these; and they never will lead to such things unless misused in fleshly/sinful ways. I’ll quote a sentence from what F. Godet said under this verse.²⁹ “And as the Spirit is *one* (ver. 4), it follows that all the gifts, however different, must tend to a common end, the good of the whole, and not to the selfish satisfaction of the individual on whom they were bestowed.”

We are different because, for one thing, in the will of God, we are given differing gifts, but this will not lead to strife and disharmony (unless we misuse the gifts) any more than it causes problems for a human body to have different members like eyes, ears, hands, and feet (see 12:12-27)—we need all the gifts, and we really do need one another; this is part of God’s plan. I’ll quote part of what D. A. Carson said under 1 Cor. 12:4-11.³⁰ “Doubtless the church is in some sense like a mighty army, but that does not mean we should think of ourselves as undifferentiated khaki. We should be more like an orchestra: each part making its own unique contribution to the symphonic harmony. Dictators of the right and left seek to establish their brand of harmony by forcefully imposing monotonous sameness, by seeking to limit differentiation. God establishes his brand of harmony by a lavish grant of highly diverse gifts, each contributing to the body as a whole.”] **(8) For to one is given the**

²⁸ See on Eph. 4:16 in the *Paper On Faith* and on Eph. 4:7, 16 in the paper dated July 2000.

²⁹ *First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Zondervan, 1971 reprint of the 1886 edition], page 193.

³⁰ *Showing the Spirit* [Baker, 1987], page 32.

word [The Greek noun translated *word* here (and later in this verse) is *logos*. Much of the popular teaching I have heard around the body of Christ regarding *logos* and *rhema* (another Greek noun normally translated *word*, which is not used nearly as often as *logos*) is wrong. (*Logos* is used 332 times in the New Testament; *rhema* 66 times.) You often hear that the *rhema* word is personal, alive, powerful, and effective, but that the *logos* word is not personal, alive, powerful, or effective. This is a serious error regarding *logos*, as the following examples will demonstrate (all these verses use *logos*): Mark 13:31; John 1:1, 14, 5:24, 38; 8:31; 12:48b; 14:23, 24; Acts 12:24; 1 Cor. 1:18; 14:19b; Phil. 2:16; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Tim. 4:6; 2 Tim. 2:9, 15; Titus 2:5; Heb. 4:12; James 1:18, 21, 22, 23; 1 Pet. 2:8; 3:1; 2 Pet. 3:5, 7; 1 John 1:1; 2:14; and Rev. 19:13. God's Word (His *Logos/Rhema*), as it is recorded in the Bible, the Word of the gospel of the new covenant, for example, is personal, alive, powerful, and effective (by the Spirit) for those who submit to it in faith (see, e.g., 1 Thess. 2:13). We need to come to the Bible with this attitude; it is mandatory for us to understand and to submit (in faith) to God's written Word.

Second Corinthians 3:6 is often misunderstood and misused: "who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." When the apostle Paul wrote "the letter kills," he was speaking, as the context clearly shows, of the letter of the Mosaic Law (which was the foundation for the old covenant). He was showing that we need the new covenant because the sin/spiritual death problem, which is solved by the new covenant through the atoning death of the Lamb of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, was not solved by the Mosaic Law/old covenant. God did not give it for that purpose; He always planned to send His Son to save His people. The letter of the Law intensified the sin problem. In that sense it "kills." (See, for example, 2 Cor. 3:7-9; Rom. 2:29; 4:15; 5:13; 7:5, 6, 8-13; 1 Cor. 15:56; and Gal. 3:19-21.)

Paul was not saying (in 2 Cor. 3:6) that the letter of the New Testament "kills." I have heard it said many times that Paul taught here that the letter of God's Word is dead (some say, in a disparaging manner, "it is only a *logos* word") and that we need to put all the emphasis on the Spirit. For one thing, God's written Word is alive by the Spirit. For another thing, the Spirit, who gave us the written Word of God (the Bible), does much of His work through the Word. We are dependent on the Word of God to learn the basics of the gospel, to learn what God requires of us, etc. Those who are trying to be led by the Spirit without making the Word of God a top priority in their hearts and lives typically fall by the wayside to one degree or another.] **of wisdom through the Spirit** [In defining these gifts, I am aiming to say the minimum. For one thing, I do not want to limit God by my definitions. There is quite a bit of room for variety in the working of the charismatic gifts. It is not especially important for us to always be able to categorize what gift a particular manifestation of the Spirit was. Sometimes a combination of gifts is manifested, for example, a combination of a word of knowledge and a word of wisdom.

I believe (in agreement with many) that the *word of wisdom* is the most important of the nine gifts listed in 1 Cor. 12:8-10, but all of them are important or God would not have given them to us. In this gift God reveals something of His purposes and plans and gives direction to His people by His Spirit. One major role for the word of wisdom is to help us understand and rightly apply the Scriptures. The word of wisdom can answer

questions like “What does God want us to do in this situation?” or “How are we going to solve this problem?” For an example, consider the revelation (including directions for Peter to go to the house of Cornelius) that God gave Peter concerning His plans to save Gentiles (Acts 10:9-35).], **and to another the word [logos] of knowledge according to the same Spirit** [In the *word of knowledge*, the Spirit reveals knowledge/information such as “What is the cause of this problem?” or “Where is the lost item?” There is almost no limit to the kind of information that God can reveal through this gift. He is interested in every area of our lives, but some areas are more important than others, like our living in the center of His will with the victory over sin.]; **(9) to another faith** [cf. 1 Cor. 13:2] **by the same Spirit** [This gift enables God’s people to do things, and to handle situations and deal with problems, in a manner that would not be possible without this special enablement by the Spirit. This is a charismatic gift given to Christians (to those who already have faith in God and saving faith in Christ); it can be considered an amplification of faith that enables the believer to do what would be impossible without this gifting.], **and to another gifts of healing by [or, in] the one Spirit** [Compare 1 Cor. 12:28, 30. As the margin of the NASB shows, *healing* is plural (healings) in the Greek. (The NASB has the plural *healings* in 1 Cor. 12:28, 30.) The fact that *gifts of healings* has the plurals apparently includes the often-observed fact that some healing ministries are especially effective with certain types of sicknesses/problems: Some are very effective with eye/sight problems; others with ear/hearing problems; others with types of growths; etc.], **(10) and to another effecting of miracles** [or, “workings of powers”; cf. 1 Cor. 12:28; Gal. 3:5], **and to another prophecy** [Here “prophecy” apparently speaks of Spirit-inspired utterance through Christians (the Christian speaks out messages that come from the Spirit, under the anointing of the Spirit). Sometimes the Bible uses the words “prophecy/prophesy” of Christians sharing a revelation that the Spirit had given them (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 14:29-32). We will discuss prophecy/prophesy/prophets further as these words come up in the rest of chapter 12 and in chapters 13 and 14.], **and to another the distinguishing of spirits** [This gift can enable Christians to distinguish between the working of the Spirit of God and the angels of God, and the working of the spirits of Satan’s kingdom. It is very important for us to be able to be able to discern Satan’s counterfeit gifts and ministries. We cannot be very effective in our warfare against Satan’s forces (cf. Eph. 6:11, 12) without being able to discern their activities.], **to another various kinds of tongues** [Compare Mark 16:17; 1 Cor. 12:28, 30; 13:1; 14:2-39. This verse (12:10) and 1 Cor. 12:28 are the only places in the New Testament where we read of “kinds of tongues.” In the context of this chapter (especially note 12:28-30), it seems clear that the apostle is speaking of a ministry-gift here. He is not speaking of a personal, devotional use of tongues, and he is not dealing with the experience of individuals speaking with tongues at the time they entered the charismatic dimension (as in Acts 2:4; 10:44-47; and 19:6). This ministry-gift, when coupled with the gift of interpretation, is comparable with the gift of prophecy in its results (cf. 1 Cor. 14:5). We also should leave room for those occasions where God speaks to a person(s) in a language they know, but which is unknown to the person(s) speaking in tongues, as on the Day of Pentecost. I have heard of quite a few occasions where this has happened in our day.], **and to another the interpretation of tongues.** [Compare 1 Cor. 12:30; 14:5, 13, 26-28. Since the tongues are typically unknown to the speaker and to the others gathered, the tongues are to be

interpreted so that the Spirit may reveal what has been said. Paul deals extensively with the need for the interpretation of tongues that are spoken in church in chapter 14. The *interpretation of tongues* is a gift of the Spirit; we are not dealing here with a translation by someone who knows the language.] **(11) But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.** [Compare 1 Cor. 12:4. This does not mean that the Spirit distributes the gifts “as He wills” independently of God the Father and God the Son (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 12:5, 6). On the words *one* and *same*, see under 12:4. I am very thankful that it is God who determines what gifts each Christian is to receive. We can trust Him for ourselves and for our brothers and sisters; He does not make mistakes. We cannot complain about His decisions (at least we had better not complain); our job is to be faithful, and as we are faithful, He may well increase our measure.] **(12) For even as the body** [referring to the human physical body] **is one and yet has many members** [with each different member having different functions to perform, each of them being important to the proper functioning of the body], **and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.** [Compare Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 10:17; and 12:13-27. “So also is Christ” means so also is the body of Christ, the church. The apostle is emphasizing the unity of all Christians (in union with Christ and by the Holy Spirit) in the *one body* (by the plan of God), as he does in the following verses.] **(13) For by one Spirit** [I would translate “For in one Spirit,” with the margin of the NASB. The Greek preposition *en*, which Paul used here, is most often translated *in*. There are six other verses in the New Testament that speak of *baptism in the Spirit* (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; and 11:16). All these verses use *en*, and I would translate *in* for each of these verses.] **we were all** [all true Christians] **baptized** [or, immersed] **into** [or, better yet, “baptized [or, immersed] resulting in”] **one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free** [Compare Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:13-18. I believe baptism (immersion) in the Spirit here, as with the other six uses of this terminology in the New Testament, includes the new birth, the sanctifying work of the Spirit, and the charismatic gifts. The more typical viewpoint among Pentecostals and charismatics is that *baptism in the Spirit* is a second experience that is separate from, and does not include, the new birth. It is true that in our day many Christians do enter the charismatic dimension as a second experience, but one of the main reasons this happens is that so many Christians (including many evangelicals) have omitted the charismatic dimension from Christianity. When we finally learn that this dimension is still part of the new covenant (often we learn this many years after we were born again), we enter this dimension through a second experience, an experience that could and should have been part of our becoming Christians in the first place (according to the New Testament pattern).³¹ What

³¹ See footnote 30 on pages 135-138 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*, starting with the last paragraph on page 137. There I also discuss the fact that many Christians learn long after their conversion that the Bible teaches that Christians are called and enabled to walk in righteousness and holiness with the victory over sin. Such persons may then enter (by faith) this dimension of the work of the Holy Spirit through a definite second experience that could be called a baptism in the Spirit. It is also true that some Christians, although they have known what the Bible teaches about righteousness and holiness, do not submit (in faith) in any full sense to this dimension of the Spirit’s work until later. Holiness is a big part of what baptism in the Spirit is all about. What we need is the end result of Christians walking in holiness on a continuous basis, whether there is a definite second (crisis) experience or not.

we need is an abiding walk in the charismatic dimension, not just an experience we had in the past that we can talk about.

Entering the charismatic dimension is part of what baptism in the Spirit means in the New Testament, an important part, but the new birth and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit are more important parts of what baptism in the Spirit means in the New Testament. It causes confusion to speak of a second experience where Christians enter the charismatic dimension *the* baptism in the Spirit. It seems to me that it should not be very difficult for Pentecostals and charismatics to modify their viewpoint regarding baptism in the Spirit. They would not really be giving up anything. It is true, of course, that they must first be convinced that this modified viewpoint more accurately reflects what the Scriptures teach. As a young Christian and charismatic, I spent a lot of hours over a ten-year period considering this topic, seeking God for the balanced truth.

We will further discuss baptism in the Holy Spirit as we continue with this discussion of 1 Cor. 12:13.³² Also, at the end of this study of 1 Corinthians chapter 12, we will further discuss this important (but also controversial) topic.

The apostle's emphasis here in 1 Cor. 12:13 is clearly on unity in the *one body* of Christ. Even those who are far from being united in the natural—Jews and Gentiles; slaves and free; etc.—are united in Christ. It is true, of course, that this unity will not be manifested to the extent that Christians do not know and submit in faith to this gospel truth; we must walk after the Spirit through faith for this reality to be manifested. The apostle emphasized this aspect of gospel truth to the church at Corinth because they were lacking in unity; there was much strife and disunity, as this epistle to the Corinthians demonstrates.], **and were all made to drink of the one Spirit.** [Compare John 7:37-39. We all receive/drink of the one life-giving, sanctifying Spirit, and we all receive/drink of the charismatic gifts that are made available to us in the one Spirit. On the word *one*, see under 1 Cor. 12:4; with this word Paul is again emphasizing the unity we are to have in the one body of Christ.

I'll quote part of what Fee said under this verse.³³ In his discussion of this verse, Fee has already stated that he believes that baptism in the one Spirit, which was spoken of earlier in this verse, means essentially the same thing as being made to drink of the one Spirit here at the end of this verse. (We at least begin to drink of the one Spirit at the time we are immersed in the Spirit.) Fee then says, "... Most likely [with the expressions *baptism in the one Spirit* and *being made to drink of the one Spirit*]... Paul is referring to

Many holiness churches teach holiness as a second work of grace (of the Spirit) that is separate from and typically later than becoming a born-again Christian. From my point of view, they are making a mistake very similar to that of most Pentecostals and charismatics. Holiness is a big part of what Christianity and baptism in the Holy Spirit is all about. We should not think of Christianity apart from holiness (or apart from the charismatic dimension). Anyway, I am thankful that holiness churches help us see that Christians are called and enabled to walk in holiness by the grace/Spirit of God, even as I am thankful that Pentecostals and charismatics help us see that the charismatic dimension of the work of the Spirit is still for us today.

³² I have already commented on this topic in previous writings; most of what I said there is not repeated here. Start with the section titled "Meaning of the Words Baptism [or, Immersion] in the Holy Spirit" in the *Paper on Faith*, which starts on page 109; read on through to the end of the paper (page 114). As noted in the first sentence there, that discussion builds on the preceding study of Acts 15:1-11; you should first read what was said under Acts 15:8, 9 on pages 108, 109. It will be necessary to read the pages in *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* that are cited in the *Paper on Faith* to adequately cover this topic.

³³ *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pages 605, 606.

their common experience of conversion, and he does so in terms of its most crucial ingredient, the receiving of the Spirit. Such expressive metaphors (immersion in the Spirit and drinking to the fill of the Spirit)...imply a much greater experiential and visibly manifest reception of the Spirit than many have tended to experience in subsequent church history....

If this is the correct understanding of these two clauses, and the full context seems to demand such, then the prepositional phrase 'in the Spirit' is most likely locative [meaning the Greek preposition *en* is to be translated "in," as Fee goes on to show], expressing the 'element' in which they have all been immersed, just as the Spirit is that which they have all been given to drink. Such usage is also in keeping with the rest of the NT."] **(14) For the body is not one member, but many.** [Compare 1 Cor. 12:20. The apostle is speaking here in 12:14 of the human body, but in this verse and the following verses, he also applies these truths to the body of Christ. The human body and the body of Christ both have many different members, and the members have different functions to perform—all the members and all the functions are important to the proper functioning of the body, by the design of God. Part of what makes us different in the body of Christ is the different callings and giftings of God.] **(15) If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.** [The foot insults God and His plans for the body of Christ if it thinks of itself as being inferior because it is not a hand. God's plans are always right, and complaining is always wrong. Besides that, the feet really are quite important to the proper functioning of the body. If you listen to the devil, you will become discouraged no matter what your role is. He even convinced Eve that she was being deceived by God and being denied that which was good and necessary for her while she was in the Garden of Eden. We cannot afford to, and we have no right to, listen to the devil. Jesus said "he is a liar, and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Learning the truth, submitting to the truth, and clinging to the truth will solve most of our problems. How precious is the truth!] **(16) And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.** [Again, if the ear should think this way, it would be totally wrong, and it would be insulting God and His plans.] **(17) If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?** [We need all the members with all their God-ordained functions in the human body and in the body of Christ.] **(18) But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body** [This is true for the human body and for the body of Christ. As Paul continues, the body of Christ becomes predominant in his discussion and the human body fades into the background. See under 1 Cor. 12:28.], **just as He desired.** [And He does all things well!] **(19) If they were all one member, where would the body be?** [The human body would be in big trouble if all its members were eyes or ears; there would not be a body. In a similar way, the body of Christ could not begin to function as a body if all the members had the same function.] **(20) But now there are many members** [having many different functions, all of them being important], **but one body.** [Compare 1 Cor. 12:12, 14. The words *one body* again emphasize the need for unity and harmony in the one body of Christ, in accordance with God's design and by His grace.] **(21) And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."** [It is clear that the hands and the feet are quite important to the proper functioning of the human body. Similarly, in the body of Christ, there is no room for any member to have a superiority complex. By God's plan no Christian can completely fulfill his assignments apart from

the other members; we are dependent on one another, whether we like it or not—but it is good.] **(22) On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.** [With the human body, we think of members like the internal organs. They may be weak in some ways, and they may not get much glory, but they are indispensable. With the body of Christ, we can think, for example, of the elderly, or the handicapped. God has ways to make such persons indispensable to the proper functioning of the church. For example, He can use such people in powerful ministries of intercession, healing, etc.]; **(23) and those *members* of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, (24) whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *member* which lacked** [For the human body, we think of those parts of the body that are covered. When applied to the body of Christ, God can, for example, make a slave a prophet, or use him in gifts of healings, etc.], **(25) so that there may be no division in the body** [especially referring to the body of Christ], **but that the members may have the same care for one another.** [As we have briefly discussed, God has ways to make things always work right. By His plan, every Christian really is important to the proper functioning of the church—we don’t have to fake it. To the extent that we walk in the Spirit and do things God’s way (knowing His will by His Word), it will be obvious that all the members really are important. However, to the extent that we are not living in the will of God and doing things His way; we will not adequately fulfill our assignments in the church; we will not glorify God as we should; we will not be a blessing to the other members of the body of Christ that we should be; we will not be the good witnesses for Christ that we should be; we will not be satisfied in our hearts; and we will not be fully ready to stand before God. Let’s make it top priority to do everything God’s way; there is no reasonable alternative.] **(26) And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.** [We will experience this reality in the body of Christ to the extent that we understand and submit to God’s plan and walk by the Spirit, setting aside the things of the flesh, like pride, jealousy, competition with one another, and self pity.] **(27) Now you are Christ’s body** [cf. 1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 1:23; 4:12; and Col. 1:24], **and individually members of it.** [When we speak of the church as Christ’s body, the picture is not (as I have heard it said) that we are a body without a head, with Christ being the head. When the Bible speaks of Christ’s being the head of the body (as, for example, in Col. 1:18 and Eph. 5:23), it speaks of the fact that Christ is over the church (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:22, 23; 5:22-24; and Col. 2:10). Note that some of the members of the body Paul mentions in 1 Cor. 12:16, 17, and 21 (eyes, ears, and nose [“sense of smell”]) are parts of the head.] **(28) And God has appointed** [or, set/placed; the Greek verb used here was also used in 1 Cor. 12:18] **in the church** [cf. 1 Cor. 10:32], **first apostles** [See Eph. 4:11. Some ministries are more important than others, but all are important. The apostle is the most important ministry, as Paul says here, “first apostles,” and especially when speaking of the twelve foundational apostles and the apostle Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7, 8). For one thing, they played a major role in laying the foundation for the new-covenant church, including giving us the New Testament. Others, however, besides the twelve and Paul, were called apostles in the New Testament: see Acts 14:14; 1 Cor. 9:5, 6

(Barnabus); 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19 (James, the Lord's brother); 1 Thess. 2:6 with 1:1 (Silvanus/Silas and possibly Timothy [cf., e.g., 2 Tim. 4:5]); and apparently Rom. 16:7 (Andronicus and Junias). The fact that Paul spoke of "false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ" in 2 Cor. 11:13 helps demonstrate that quite a few others beyond the twelve and Paul must have been known as apostles.

Should we have apostles today? I assume we should, but they would not be foundation-laying apostles in a class with the twelve and Paul. Whether we use the label apostle, or not, they would have the call from God and the greatest authority and anointing to help get the church in order, and to keep it in order, very much including what we believe (based on the Bible). There will undoubtedly be major differences in the ministries of apostles depending on their particular call and giftings from God, and on their assigned field of ministry with its particular needs, etc. (This was also true for the first apostles.)

If the apostles function as they should, in the will of God, they will be a great blessing to the body of Christ, and they will not be a threat to the other ministers (they will be a blessing). However, to the extent ministers are functioning in the flesh (and there is a lot of flesh around in our day), other ministers tend to be viewed as a threat. One last thing, just because someone calls himself an apostle (or some other ministry) does not necessarily mean that it is so. And just because a minister does not call himself an apostle does not necessarily mean that he is not an apostle. God is the one who determines such things.], **second prophets** [In this listing, Paul is apparently referring to five-fold ministry *prophets*, which is a ministry that includes more than the use of the charismatic gift of prophecy listed in 12:10. For one thing, in 1 Cor. 14:29-32 Paul speaks of prophets receiving revelations, which are to be shared with the church, and judged. Not all such prophets (as the word is used in 14:29-32) would be considered five-fold ministry prophets. I assume that some of them, at least at their present level of ministry, were not fully in this category, and that some of them (in the plan of God) never would become five-fold ministry prophets. Words like *prophet* can be somewhat flexible in their usage, and God can be quite flexible in the way He uses people. What matters is that His will be accomplished in the church, and in each individual Christian. Some other verses that refer to New Testament prophets are Acts 11:27; 13:7; 15:32; 21:10; Eph. 2:20; 3:5; and Rev. 11:10.], **third teachers** [On teachers, cf. Acts 13:1; Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 4:17; and James 3:1. I assume that Paul was speaking of five-fold ministry *teachers* here. Not all who teach in the body of Christ are not five-fold ministry teachers. For one thing, all five-fold ministers and most elders (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2) will do some teaching.

What about the five-fold ministry pastors? Why didn't the apostle list pastors here? (The same question could be asked regarding evangelists.) For one thing, it must be understood that Paul is not giving an exhaustive analysis of charismatic gifts and of ministries in this chapter, nor does he give an exhaustive analysis in any other passage. Even when we look at all that the New Testament says on these topics, we don't get the answer to every question; we must remain somewhat flexible before God, flexible when it comes to some of the details regarding ministers, charismatic gifts, and the overall structure of the body of Christ. I'm sure the Bible tells us all we need to know, as we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us into the balanced truth on these topics and into the details regarding what God would have us do in our day.

When the apostle Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (about AD 55), some things were still very much in a state of flux, and not fully established. This really was quite early in the history of the Christian church. (At the end of Paul's life, some ten years later in the mid-sixties, the church was still far from being fully established. And, as I mentioned, even in our day, we still need some flexibility.) The apostle Paul did not go on his (so-called) first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-28) until about AD 47. And he did not arrive at Corinth, on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:22), until about AD 50.

Very often Paul did not have people (who had been called and prepared) to install as five-fold ministry pastors in the many churches he was associated with. He and his ministry team often appointed elders over those churches (see Acts 14:23; 20:17; and Titus 1:5.) Some of those elders would eventually become five-fold ministers, including five-fold ministry pastors, but not all of them would. Some of those elders may have been considered five-fold ministry pastors from the time they were appointed as elders. The word *elder* is used with some diversity in the New Testament, as a concordance will demonstrate.

Paul did not list the pastor here in 12:28, but he did list *administrations*. The pastor typically heads up the *administration* of the local church, and the elders are involved with this function too. Also, the *helps* listed in this verse would often be closely associated with, and under the authority of, the pastor/elders of the local church.

All five-fold ministry pastors will do some teaching, and some five-fold ministry pastors are also five-fold ministry teachers. As I understand it, the five-fold ministry apostles and, typically, the five-fold ministry prophets and (at least some of) the five-fold ministry teachers were not limited to the local churches, as the pastors/elders were. In the local church the pastor has the highest authority, but, as I understand it, in the greater church (the body of Christ), the pastor is, in some ways, under the other five-fold ministers. The pastor of the local church certainly has the authority and responsibility to protect his people from many so-called apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers.

Every minister (every Christian) has the authority and responsibility to humbly fulfill his assignments before God. This is not about defending our turf and maintaining our rights, but about humbly fulfilling our responsibilities (by the grace/Spirit of God) for the glory of God and for the common good. All Christians (including ministers) are required to "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Eph. 5:21). By the plan of God, we all (including ministers) need one another. Every minister is going to have to answer to God for what he has done (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 3:10-17). To the extent that ministers walk in the flesh (and that is not all that hard to do, even for ministers; all they have to do to be fleshly is to do what comes naturally to man), they will compete with one another, and there will not be much harmony—but there's no excuse for this; it is a serious problem.

It is a serious responsibility to be a minister in the body of Christ; it is not something to boast about. Whatever our calling is in the body of Christ (and all of them are important by the plan of God), we can do it well by the grace of God in Christ if we make it a top priority and humbly walk by the Spirit. It is, of course, a privilege to be called into the ministry; compare, for example, what Paul said regarding the deacon in 1 Tim. 3:13.

One of the most important things each minister (each Christian) must do is to stay

within his *measure* assigned by God. Based on my observations, however, many ministers do not understand this concept. (See the discussion of Rom. 12:1-8 in the *Paper on Faith.*), **then miracles** [cf. 1 Cor. 12:10, 29], **then gifts of healings** [Compare 1 Cor. 12:9, 30. After mentioning three (five-fold) ministries (apostles, prophets, and teachers), the apostle now mentions two of the nine charismatic gifts that were listed in 12:8-10; however, as 1 Cor. 12:29, 30 help demonstrate, he is thinking of those who minister (apparently not limited to the five-fold ministry).], **helps** [The NIV translates, “those able to help others.” The Greek word translated *helps* here is not used anywhere else in the New Testament. There is widespread agreement that the idea is of helping those in need and that the ministry of deacon (cf. Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:8-13) fits here. I assume that it is to be understood that those who minister in the areas of *helps* and *administrations* do so by the enablement of the Holy Spirit. Such enablements could apparently be considered charismatic gifts, but these gifts are in a somewhat different category than the nine charismatic gifts listed in 1 Cor. 12:8-10.

Compare Rom. 12:6-8. (Romans 12:6 mentions “[charismatic] gifts [plural of *charisma*].” With *administrations* of 1 Cor. 12:28, compare those *leading* of Rom. 12:8.). Also note that helps and administrations are the only two items listed in 1 Cor. 12:28 that are not mentioned in 12:29, 30. *Helps* is especially applicable for the local church and is typically under the authority of the *administrations* (pastors/elders).], **administrations** [As I mentioned, the administration of the local church is typically headed up by the pastor, if there is one (as there typically is in our day), and it includes the elders.], **various kinds of tongues**. [By listing this gift here, the apostle confirms that he is speaking of a ministry-gift. On this gift, see under 1 Cor. 12:10.] **(29) All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? (30) All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?** [All are not apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, those who have gifts of healings, those who are used in a ministry of kinds of tongues, or other ministries that could be listed.] **(31) But earnestly desire the greater gifts** [plural of *charisma*]. [The verb translated “earnestly desire” is plural in the Greek; Paul was speaking to the members of the church at Corinth. (The Greek verb used here is also used in 1 Cor. 14:1, 39.) The apostle is speaking to all members of the church, but he is not saying, I do not believe, that each Christian has a right to expect to be used in the greater gifts. We should all earnestly desire all the gifts that God makes available to us, and especially those gifts that are the most important. One reason Paul mentioned “the greater gifts” was that some at Corinth were out of balance, overusing and misusing the gift of tongues while not sufficiently desiring, and making sufficient room for, the other gifts. Note that Paul listed tongues last in 1 Cor. 12:8-10 and 12:28-30.

We will discuss the overuse and misuse of tongues at Corinth as we continue with 1 Corinthians chapters 13 and 14. If we do not earnestly desire the gifts (which very much includes the need to believe they are available for our generation), we will not see much of the gifts; God will not force them on us; we must cooperate with His Spirit/grace. It is also true, of course, that we must make it a top priority to understand and rightly use the gifts. Many have heard horror stories (and some of them are true) regarding the devastation that resulted from a misuse of charismatic gifts, or supposed charismatic gifts.] **And I show you a still more excellent way.** [These words serve as an

introduction to chapter 13 (the verses and chapter divisions were added at a much later date; they did not derive from the apostle). Paul does *not* go on to say that we are to choose *love* instead of the *gifts*, but he does go on to say that *love* is more basic and more important than the *gifts*, and that it is necessary for the gifts to be accompanied by *love*.]

Further Discussion on the Meaning of the Words
Baptism in the Holy Spirit in the New Testament

Above, under 1 Cor. 12:13, we discussed this topic to some extent and I referred the reader to rather thorough discussions on this topic in my other writings. Here I'll make a few additional comments, but this section consists mostly of excerpts from two Christian scholars.

There have been some changes in the past thirty years, but most Pentecostals and charismatics still hold the viewpoint that (the) *baptism in the Spirit* refers to an experience completely separate from (and typically subsequent to) the new birth. As noted above, I believe *baptism in the Spirit*, as these words are used in the New Testament (and the other expressions that are used in the New Testament that have essentially the same meaning, like *receiving the gift of the Spirit*) very much include the new birth and the sanctifying transformation wrought by the Holy Spirit. The excerpt that I included above under 1 Cor. 12:13 from Gordon Fee (a Pentecostal scholar who is well respected as an expert in New Testament exegesis) shows that he and I are in essential agreement on this point.

There are at least two reasons why Pentecostals and charismatics need to reconsider this topic. For one thing, it always is important for Christians to seek God for the *balanced* truth of what the Bible teaches. I have observed over the years that if we do not make finding the balanced truth a top priority item, we probably will not find it. The world, the flesh, and the devil are against us; if we do not make God and His truth a top priority, we will frequently fall short of the balanced truth. (The same thing is true regarding His righteousness, holiness, etc.)

One major problem is that most Christians assume they already have the balanced truth. How could they possibly fall short of the balanced truth? Has their church not taught it this way for a long time? Surely their church could not be wrong—has God not blessed them; has God not favored them with gifts of the Spirit; has God not used them to help many? Just because God has blessed us and used us is no guarantee that we have everything right. If God only blessed and used those Christians that have everything right, He would not be using many Christians, or blessing many.

A second reason why Pentecostals and charismatics need to reconsider this topic is that the most common viewpoint among us is one of the most divisive issues in the body of Christ in our day. Unnecessary divisions in the body of Christ are a serious problem, but it is also true that this inadequate viewpoint regarding *baptism in the Spirit* tends to close the ears of the rest of the body of Christ to the important things they can and should learn from us.

I'll include several excerpts from the 1988 book *Treasures Old and New: Interpretations of "Spirit-Baptism" in the Charismatic Renewal Movement* by Henry I.

Lederle.³⁴ I found this book to be informative and helpful. Dr. Lederle (who taught at the University of South Africa at the time he wrote this book) informs us in the Preface that his “vivid charismatic experience” in 1980 overturned his doctrinal apple-cart in that he was a seminary graduate “with a Reformed [Calvinistic] background with both evangelical and ecumenical roots.” I am substantially abbreviating the quotations from Lederle for this internet version of the paper.

...

I’ll include two excerpts from the Introduction. “In the sixties and seventies...a new religious awakening made its influence felt in Christianity. [I became a born-again Christian in the spring of 1964. Later that year I became aware of the Pentecostal/charismatic viewpoint, and by the spring of 1966 I had become involved in the charismatic renewal.] The charismatic renewal movement spread across the globe in less than a decade reaching all five continents, most Christian denominations of Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox heritage, and the lives of some sixty million people. ... The focus of this study is on... the doctrine of Spirit-baptism” (page xi). ...

I’ll continue to quote from Lederle for the next page and a half. “... [Lederle mentions that Gordon Fee (I quoted from Fee, a well-respected *Pentecostal* New Testament scholar, above under 1 Cor. 12:13) had argued in 1972 that the words *baptism in the Spirit* in the New Testament do not refer to an experience subsequent to salvation.] ...

Fee states that experience generally precedes hermeneutics among Pentecostals [The Pentecostals are not the only ones who have this problem]: ‘In a sense, the Pentecostal tends to exegete his experience [instead of the New Testament]. For example, the doctrine of Spirit-baptism as distinct from and subsequent to conversion did not flow naturally out of his reading of Scripture.’ ... Fee considers the crucial point to be the experiential, dynamic quality of life in the Spirit: ‘Everywhere for Luke [who wrote Acts] it is the presence of the Spirit that signifies the “real thing.” ...

On page 32 Lederle mentions that Fee was influenced by James Dunn (I’ll quote from Dunn later in this section), a “Reformed New Testament scholar...who is a sympathetic critic with participant-observer experience in charismatic groups in England.”

“My basic contention [I’m quoting Lederle] is that the term [baptism in the Spirit] is being incorrectly applied and used today [in Pentecostal and charismatic circles], but the experience it refers to is a perfectly valid experience” (page 66). On page 65 Lederer commented that he is “not against speaking of various ‘entries’ or ‘comings’ of the Spirit once the two-stage grid has been disposed of.” [This is important.] ...

“...this study contends the heartbeat of the charismatic contribution to Christianity at large is not Spirit-baptism but the acknowledging of the dimension of the Spirit which is experientially manifested in spiritual gifts or charisms. ...” (page 216).

“... [The charismatic renewal] lies in vibrant, expectant faith; openness to the Holy Spirit and the wide range of his gifts; and a refusal to deny the experiential aspect of Christianity in order to appease rationalistic Western culture. [For many “Christians” it very much includes coming to an understanding of the gospel and salvation (including the new birth)

³⁴ Hendrickson Publishers.

through Christ Jesus for the first time. Many see for the first time that the Bible really is God's Word and that it is alive.] ... The charismatic renewal is a revival, a spiritual awakening, which needs to revitalize, energize, disturb and renew the contemporary expressions of the faith of the church. There are attempts in some circles to domesticate the charismatic renewal – to 'tame' it so that it amounts to roughly the same as traditional Christianity" (page 230).

Now I'll include several excerpts from James D. G. Dunn, who is a New Testament scholar from England.³⁵ It was mentioned above that Gordon Fee was influenced by Dunn. I do not know much about Dunn, and I do not agree with everything he says in this book, but I consider the overall teaching of the book to be quite important and quite perceptive, and I highly recommend this book. Throughout this book Dunn analyzes the many passages of the New Testament that are relevant to his topic(s). I am substantially abbreviating the quotations from Dunn for this internet version of the paper.

First I'll include an excerpt from the Introduction. "I hope to show that for the writers of the NT the baptism in or gift of the Spirit was part of the event (or process) of becoming a Christian, together with the effective proclamation of the Gospel, belief in (*eis*) Jesus as Lord, and water-baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus; ... only those who had thus received the Spirit could be called Christians; that the reception of the Spirit was a very definite and often dramatic *experience*, the decisive and climatic experience in conversion-initiation.... We shall see that while the Pentecostal's belief in the dynamic and experiential nature of Spirit-baptism is well founded, his separation of it from conversion-initiation is wholly unjustified...."

We shall see that the baptism in the Spirit from the start was understood as an initiatory experience.... The Pentecostal doctrine is built chiefly on Acts, but a detailed study will reveal that for the writer of Acts [Luke] in the last analysis it is only by receiving the Spirit that one becomes a Christian..." (pages 4, 5).

I'll include an excerpt from his chapter titled "Conversion-Initiation in the Acts of the Apostles." "... What the Pentecostal attempts to separate into two works of God is in fact one single divine act [not that all the ingredients of this "single divine act" come together instantaneously]. ... Faith would not justify [Dunn is using the word "justify" in the (very important) full sense that includes the transformation to righteousness by the Spirit] if God did not give his Spirit. Faith is only the reaching out of an empty hand to receive; it is what is received which alone ultimately counts" (page 96).

I'll quote from pages 135, 136 of Dunn's chapter XI, in which he deals with Paul's Corinthian letters. Dunn is commenting here on the third chapter of 2 Corinthians. ...

And I'll quote what he said under verse 8. "Christianity exists in a completely *new* dispensation; Christians live in a time that is wholly different and miraculous – the time of the End. This is because, and only because they have the Spirit. This is also the dispensation of righteousness (v. 9), which confirms what we have already concluded from Gal. 3: that possession of righteousness and possession of life = the Spirit, are synonymous (Gal. 3:21).³⁶

³⁵ *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* by James D. G. Dunn. SCM Press, Ltd. 1970, published in the U.S.A. by the Westminster Press.

³⁶ I discussed Gal. 3:21, which is a very important verse, on page 39 of *The Christian, the Law, and Legalism* and on pages 103, 104 of the *Paper on Faith*. I agree that the heart of new-covenant salvation is having life by the Spirit, and that those who have life by the Spirit are enabled (and required) to live in righteousness by the life/Spirit of God through Christ Jesus and His atoning death, which is what Dunn is saying, if I understand him.

....” And I’ll quote part of what he said later regarding 2 Corinthians chapter 3. “... ..it is impossible to conceive of the new covenant apart from the Spirit, and impossible to experience the blessings of the new covenant apart from the indwelling of the Spirit.” ...

In his following paragraphs Dunn discusses water-baptism, which he deals with quite a bit in this book since it is part of conversion-initiation as it is presented in the New Testament. Dunn argues that in the New Testament water-baptism, which was (typically) preparatory for receiving the Holy Spirit, was not optional. “The NT writers would to a man reject any separation of the decisive moment of faith...from [water] baptism... by way of putting the act of faith prior to [water] baptism, thereby reducing [water] baptism to a mere symbol.... Baptism properly performed is for the NT essentially the act of faith and repentance...” (page 227). That is, water-baptism is the appropriate NT occasion to complete the transaction of entering into salvation through union with Christ Jesus and His atoning death through repentance and faith. Dunn is not suggesting that there was no faith before being baptized in water, but that the faith transaction is not completed (based on the typical New Testament pattern) before submitting to the Lord Jesus Christ and His atoning death in water baptism. Most Christians I know do not agree with Dunn’s viewpoint, but I believe he is mostly right (right, that is, in explaining what the New Testament says) on water-baptism.

Most Christians I know hold the viewpoint that the faith transaction is completed with a sinner’s prayer (asking for forgiveness, inviting Christ into the heart, and, hopefully [sadly, this (along with repentance) is often skipped in our day], submitting to His Lordship). They believe that, at that time, the most important work takes place—they become born-again Christians. Most of them believe that the convert should eventually be baptized in water, in obedience to Christ, but they do not expect anything significant to take place at that time in that the all-important transformation has already taken place (their sins have been washed away; they have been born again; the Spirit of God has come to dwell in them; and they have the power to begin to live for God).

I am quite sure that this procedure can (and often does) produce acceptable results (this is pretty much what happened to me and to most of the Christians I fellowship with), assuming that the converts really understand the basics of the gospel and really submit to the gospel in faith (including repentance), and assuming that they are committed to press on in faith (by the grace of God), building their lives on the Word of God and truly being committed to the Lordship of Christ. It is, of course, also very important that the convert be part of a church that is committed to God and His Word. I am also quite sure that we will achieve better results if we come into better alignment with the balanced truth of what the New Testament teaches regarding water baptism. Furthermore, Christians can unite around the balanced truth.

I discussed water-baptism on page 126 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* (see the footnotes too) and under 1 Cor. 15:29 on pages 10, 11 of my November 1998 eschatological paper. I’ll quote part of what I said on pages 10, 11 of that paper here. “It’s clear to me that the Bible teaches a much higher view of [water] baptism than that held by many Christians today. I’m not bringing this up because I think this is one of the biggest problems in the Body of Christ. (I believe we have much greater problems to deal with in the Body of Christ, especially dealing with the basic truths of the gospel and the need to live in God’s will - in righteousness and holiness - by grace/the Spirit through faith.) Furthermore, I’m not bringing up water baptism because of some special interest in this topic, or because of some special experience I’ve had; I’m not emotionally involved regarding this topic and I’m not

obligated to any particular viewpoint (we are obligated to God and His truth). I'm bringing it up strictly based on what the Bible seems to rather clearly say on this topic. I'm certainly not suggesting, nor do I believe, that people can't be saved or sanctified apart from water baptism. God has been very generous with His people (in blessing us in spite of our errors), but that's no excuse to maintain our viewpoints when they're wrong/when they don't line up with the balanced truth of the Bible. The more we do things God's way, the more He'll be glorified, His will will be accomplished in the church, the more He can bless us and use us, and the more we can unite around the balanced truth.

It seems that many have formed their view of water baptism mostly in reaction to someone else who was out of balance in a different direction [for example, against the viewpoint of baptismal regeneration or the viewpoint that it is impossible to be born again before being baptized in water]. We need the balanced truth of what the Bible teaches in this area, as in every area. The Bible mentions forgiveness/washing away of sins at water baptism (Acts 2:38, 22:16); it mentions becoming united with Christ in baptism, including being united with Him in His death on the cross (cf. Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3); He died an atoning death in our place; we are to die to sin and to the old man in water baptism, and the old man is to be buried (Rom. 6:3, 4; Col. 2:11, 12); John 3:5 seems to speak of water baptism as a preliminary to being born of the Spirit [I believe the words "born of water" in John 3:5 refer to water baptism, which was quite prominent in that setting. Not only was John the Baptist baptizing (even Jesus was baptized by him), but Jesus (through His disciples) was also baptizing in water (John 1:25-34; 3:22-26; 4:1, 2). The baptism of John 3:5 is a baptism of repentance and faith. Regarding the Biblical pattern that the life-giving, sanctifying, gift-dispensing Spirit typically comes to believers immediately after, and in close association with, water baptism, see pages 126, 127 in *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*, including the notes. This reference also discusses Titus 3:5, another verse that apparently views water baptism as a preliminary to receiving the Spirit (not that there isn't room for exceptions to this pattern, cf. Acts 10:44-48).]; and 1 Pet. 3:21 even speaks of baptism saving us. As I mentioned, I'm not suggesting that these things (like forgiveness, dying to the old man, etc.) can't be received apart from water baptism, but baptism seems to be the most appropriate (Biblical) occasion to complete these transactions. [We must continue to walk in the Spirit by faith (based on what God has said in His Word) throughout the rest of our lives on the earth, which is far from being automatic or always easy.]

I believe it's necessary for us to understand that water baptism is meaningful and effective only if it's accompanied by the following indispensable things: We must hear the gospel and understand it (we must at least understand the basics of the gospel); we must repent and submit to the gospel (and God Himself) in faith; and we must have all the necessary work of the Holy Spirit (like His drawing, convicting, revealing, regenerating, and sanctifying work). Without these things water baptism is nothing more than another dead ritual. Some other verses to consider on water baptism are Matt. 3:1-12, 13-17; 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:41; 8:36-39; 9:18; 10:47, 48; 19:5; and Eph. 4:5."

1 CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 13

I'll quote part of what Paul W. Marsh said as an introduction to this chapter.³⁷ "It is hardly correct to refer to this chapter as a digression, providing as it does that cardinal Christian quality without which all the *charismata* are worthless. Moreover, the theme of 'gifts' as it is continued in chapter 14 proceeds to unravel its many practical problems under the all prevailing plea, Make love your aim. It is the essential link between the principle expounded in chapter 12 and the practice explained in chapter 14.

Love is a specifically Christian revelation. The Greek language with all its richness, incapable of expressing this deep reality, provided an obscure word [*agapē*] to be invested with an entirely new connotation by the NT writers. While Greeks praise wisdom and Romans power, Paul pens a psalm in praise of love which stands alone, by-passed in a world of hate."

I'll also quote part of what Gordon D. Fee said as the introduction to his discussion of 1 Cor. 13:1-3.³⁸ "... For Paul [being *spiritual*] meant first of all to be full of the Spirit, the *Holy Spirit*, which therefore meant to behave as those 'sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be his holy people' (1 Cor. 1:2), of which the ultimate expression always is to 'walk in love.' " Fee mentioned here that some of the Corinthian Christians tended to equate being *spiritual* with being used in spiritual gifts. Many Christians of our day make the same serious mistake.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels [The plural form of the Greek noun *glōssa* that is translated "tongues" here (and often) could also be translated *languages*. The NIV, for example, translates this noun as language(s) seven times in the New Testament (all seven uses are in the book of Revelation). The Bible does not mention the tongues/languages "of angels" anywhere else, but it is reasonable to assume that such tongues/languages do exist.³⁹ At least some of the tongues/languages spoken on the day of Pentecost were the languages of men (Acts 2:4-11).], **but do not have love** [Greek *agapē*], **I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.** [The apostle's point is that tongues being used without love will not prove to be a blessing to the body of Christ. Being "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" hardly qualifies as a blessing. Paul said what he did here knowing that tongues were being misused at Corinth (as chapter 12 suggests and as chapter 14 clearly demonstrates) and knowing that there was a shortage of love in manifestation at Corinth because of their sin/fleshiness. (The flesh cannot produce genuine *agapē*.) Throughout this chapter the apostle emphasizes the need for Christians to always walk in love (the Spirit of God enabling them to do so)—that is the dominant message of this chapter.

I'll quote part of what Fee said here.⁴⁰ "... To 'have love' ... means to be toward others the way God in Christ has been toward us. Thus...for those who 'walk in the Spirit' the primary ethical imperative is 'love one another.' [Christians *will* love one another to the extent they

³⁷ *New Layman's Bible Commentary* [Zondervan, 1979], page 1449.

³⁸ *First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 1987], page 630.

³⁹ I have heard a testimony (I assume it was accurate) that confirms that a person speaking with tongues can (as God wills) speak the/a language of God's angels.

⁴⁰ *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, page 631.

walk in the Spirit.] This is found at the heart of every ethical instruction,⁴¹ and the other exhortations are but explications of it.”

It can also be said that without the underlying attitude/motivation of love, charismatic ministry-gifts like tongues or prophecy (genuine gifts) can do more harm than good. Chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians shows that much of the public tongue speaking being done in the church at Corinth was not edifying the church. Even if the Corinthians who were misusing tongues in the church at Corinth thought that they were edifying the church before Paul instructed them otherwise (in chapter 14), they were not edifying the church. It seems rather clear that they were more interested in themselves, their gifts, and their personal edification than they were interested in edifying the church (by love through their gifts.) **(2) And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge** [The Greek favors the interpretation that “*the gift of prophecy*” here includes (the potential of) “[knowing] all mysteries and all knowledge.” The NIV has, “If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge.” First Corinthians 14:30, which (in context with 14:29-32) is speaking of prophets and prophesying, speaks of receiving revelations from God (which is something more than speaking prophetically under the anointing of the Spirit). On “*the gift of prophecy*,” see under 1 Cor. 12:10, 28, and see 1 Corinthians chapter 14.]; **and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains** [Compare Matt. 17:20; 21:21; and Mark 11:23. On the charismatic gift of faith, see under 1 Cor. 12:9 in this paper. I am not suggesting (nor do I believe) that mountain-moving faith always fits in the category of being a charismatic gift.], **but do not have love, I am nothing.** [The apostle certainly makes the point that charismatic gifts (genuine charismatic gifts) being manifested without love do not constitute an acceptable ministry, one that glorifies God and accomplishes His intended purposes.] **(3) And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor** [See Matt. 6:1-4. Compare the charismatic gift of *giving* in Rom. 12:8. Again, I am not suggesting (nor do I believe) that all *giving* in the body of Christ fits in the category of being a charismatic gift.], **and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.** [These things do not profit those doing them (before God) because they are not being done for the right reasons if they are not being done in/by love (including love for God and love for the neighbor). Such works are not acceptable before God, and He will not reward them. It must be understood that Christians are enabled to walk in love by the indwelling Spirit of God; love (*agapē*) is the first *fruit of the Spirit* mentioned by Paul in Gal. 5:22. But Christians do not just automatically walk in love; we must cooperate with the Spirit and walk after the Spirit through faith.] **(4)** [Paul undoubtedly wrote (under the inspiration of the Spirit) these characteristics of love contained in 13:4-7 with the shortcomings of the Corinthians (their manifestations of fleshiness) in mind.] **Love is patient, love is kind** [*Patience* and *kindness* are also listed by the apostle along with *love* as *fruit of the Spirit* in Gal. 5:22.], **and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant** [I somewhat prefer the KJV’s more literal “not puffed up” instead of “not arrogant.” The same Greek verb is also used in 1 Cor. 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; and 8:1.], **(5) does not act unbecomingly** [The NIV has, “It is not rude.”]; **it does not seek its own** [cf. 1 Cor. 10:24; Phil. 2:21], **is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered** [The NIV has, “it keeps no record of wrongs.”]

⁴¹ In a footnote here Fee said, “See 1 Thess. 4:9; Gal. 5:13, 22; 12:9; 13:8; Col. 3:14; Eph. 5:2.”

This does not mean that we are to overlook obvious sin being committed by Christians—that would not be *love* (cf., e.g., Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 6:1-11; and 2 Thess. 3:6-13).], **(6) does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth** [If, for example, a minister is involved in fleshly competition with other ministers, he might rejoice if another minister fell into sin, including the sin of teaching false doctrine, as if that somehow elevated him. The fall of another minister might make him look a little better (by comparison with the fallen minister) from the point of view of the flesh, but the reality is that the fall of Christians always hurts the body of Christ, including each of its members, not to mention the fact that God is robbed of glory that He should have received.

Unrighteousness is always against *the truth*. *The truth* includes *righteousness* (cf., e.g., Eph. 4:21-24 [Eph. 4:24 speaks of the “righteousness and holiness of the truth”]; 2 Thess. 2:12; Titus 1:1; and James 5:19, 20). Christians must always rejoice with righteousness and with the truth. Both ultimately come from God.]; **(7) bears all things** [I prefer this translation (“bears”) for the Greek verb (*stegō*) used here (cf. 1 Cor. 9:12; 1 Thess. 3:5; both verses use the same Greek verb); however, as the margin of the NASB shows, this Greek verb can also be translated “covers.” The BAGD Greek Lexicon gives “bear, stand, endure” as one set of meanings for this verb and “cover, pass over in silence, keep confidential” as the other set. BAGD does not offer an opinion regarding which of these two meanings was intended by the apostle here. The NIV translates, “It always protects.” (Protection is related to covering.)], **believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.** [I believe the NIV’s “always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” better communicates Paul’s intended meaning, but I prefer “always believes, always hopes, always endures (or, perseveres).” With the first verb of this verse included, it would read “always bears, always believes, always hopes, always endures (or perseveres).” (Instead of “always” we could translate “in everything.”) Apparently the idea is that no matter what happens (in and through all things), love (and the Christian who walks in love) keeps on bearing, keeps on believing, keeps on hoping, and keeps on enduring (or, persevering)—it does not stop or turn aside for anything; it keeps pressing on.

The apostle apparently includes the idea here, which he will expand upon in the following verses, that *love* is enduring, never-ending, eternal. This is true because it is God’s love. Christians are enabled to walk in this love through the indwelling Holy Spirit; however, as it was obvious at Corinth, Christians can still walk after the flesh instead of the Spirit, not that this is acceptable Christianity. To say that love is eternal and that the charismatic gifts will come to an end (as Paul will go on to say in the following verses) is, for one thing, to further demonstrate that love is more important than the charismatic gifts (not that we have to choose between love and the charismatic gifts, but we must always walk in love and operate the gifts in love).] **(8) Love never fails** [These words do not teach, as I have often heard it said, that our walking in love will always eventually result in the repentance of the other person. Some people never will repent. The love of God does not win over all men.

The most literal translation here, which I prefer, is “love never falls.” I believe Paul’s intended meaning is rather clearly established by the rest of this verse and the following verses. His primary point is that love (unlike tongues and prophecy) is a never-ending thing that will not pass away, it will never fall/fail. In the light of verse 7, when I say

love is a never-ending thing, I am including the idea that those who walk in the love of God (by His grace/Spirit) will endure/persevere through all things and forever. (All good things come from God, including love, truth, life, righteousness, and holiness.); **but if there are gifts of prophecy** [cf. 1 Cor. 13:2], **they will be done away; if there are tongues** [cf. 1 Cor. 13:1], **they will cease; if there is knowledge** [In this context, Paul is speaking of *knowledge* that is received by revelation, like with the *word of knowledge* (1 Cor. 12:8). Now “we know in part” (1 Cor. 13:9; cf. 13:12). In the eternal age to come we will have full, complete knowledge (see 1 Cor. 13:12).], **it will be done away.** [Prophecy, tongues, and knowledge (knowledge in the limited sense just mentioned) are only for this age; they will cease/be done away with when the eternal age arrives. Some Christians seem to be desperate to find a verse to back up their idea that the charismatic gifts (gifts like tongues and prophecy) ended with the first-generation apostles and the completion of the New Testament. They say that the words “when the perfect comes” of 1 Cor. 13:10 refer to the completion of the New Testament.⁴² I do not believe there is any possibility that this is what Paul meant. (See under 1 Cor. 13:10.) This verse (13:8), when read in context with 13:7-13, does not offer any support for the idea that the charismatic gifts are not for us today, and I do not know of any other verses that support that idea. Will I admit that much damage has been done through a misuse of charismatic gifts or supposed charismatic gifts? Emphatically yes! But that does not give us the right to try to eliminate all such gifts from the body of Christ.] **(9) For we know in part** [Compare 1 Cor. 13:12. We can only know the *part* that God reveals to us.], **and we prophesy in part** [We can only prophesy the *part* God gives us to prophesy.]; **(10) But when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.** [The Greek prepositional phrase that is translated “the partial” here is exactly the same as the Greek translated “in part” twice in 1 Cor. 13:9 and once in 13:12. For Paul to say “the partial [which includes knowledge and prophecy according to 13:9] will be done away” here in 13:10 is essentially a repetition of what he said regarding prophecy and knowledge in 13:8, even using the same verb for “will be done away.” The Greek adjective translated *perfect* here could just as well be translated *complete*. Paul is speaking of that which is perfect/complete in contrast with that which is partial/in part. Whether we translate complete or perfect, the apostle is speaking of the heavenly, eternal state that will start for us when Christ returns and we are glorified.

The Greek behind “the perfect [or, complete]” is neuter in gender, which confirms that Paul is not referring specifically to Christ Himself. (If Paul were referring to Christ as the *Perfect One*, he would have used the masculine gender.) It is true, however, that at the time Christ returns (comes), we will enter eternal glory (the completed/perfected state).] **(11) When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child,**

⁴² I’ll quote what Paul Marsh (*New Layman’s Bible Commentary*, page 1450) said regarding the idea that “ ‘the perfect’ refers to the completion of the Canon of Scripture.” “Such an interpretation exists only by virtue of the need to explain the absence of certain *charismata* in many churches today.” I’ll also quote part of what D. A. Carson (*Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* [Baker, 1987], page 71) said regarding this topic. “As Turner [“Spiritual Gifts Then and Now,” *Vox Evangelica* 15 (1985):7-64] remarks, the reference to the parousia is ‘so sure that Calvin was able to say: “It is stupid of people to make the whole of this discussion apply to the intervening time [before the coming of Christ].” However much we respect the New Testament canon, Paul can only be accused of the wildest exaggeration in verse 12 if *that* is what he was talking about.’ ”

reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

[Throughout this present age we are like children in comparison with our future glorified state, which is likened to adulthood. In the eternal, glorified state, we will no longer need things like gifts of prophecy; all such things will have been put away, being beneficial only for our present childhoodlike state.] **(12) For now** [throughout this present age] **we see in a mirror dimly** [With our present limitations we are not able to directly look at, or to fully know, God, or the things of God. We see, as in a mirror, only an imperfect and incomplete reflection (at least in some ways it is like a reflection) of the glorious reality. I'll quote what Craig S. Keener said regarding ancient mirrors here.⁴³ "Mirrors were often made of bronze, and given the worldwide reputation of Corinthian bronze, would perhaps strike the Corinthians as a local product (also cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). But even the best mirrors reflected images imperfectly (some philosophers thus used mirrors as an analogy to describe mortals' searching for the deity)..."], **but then face to face** [Compare 2 Cor. 5:7; Phil. 3:12-14. Then, in the glorified state, we will see directly, fully, and clearly (instead of a partial, imperfect reflection). With the words "face to face," the emphasis seems to be on our being able to see and to fully know (at least in one sense) God Himself (cf. 1 John 3:2; Rev. 22:4).]; **now I know in part** [Compare "we know in part" of 13:9; in the Greek "in part" is the same in both verses.], **but then** ["Then" here, as earlier in this verse, refers to the time starting with our glorification.] **I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.** [God fully knows us now (cf. 1 Cor. 8:3), but we will not fully know Him (which includes experiential knowledge of Him), including knowing fully the things associated with the glory of His eternal kingdom, until we have been glorified. Even if He were to reveal all things to us now, we would not be able to receive the revelation. This full knowledge is contrasted with the knowing in part mentioned in this verse.] **(13) But now faith, hope, love, abide** [or, "remain," NIV] **these three; but the greatest of these is love.** [The idea here is not that faith, hope, and love abide [remain] *now*, though it is true that they do abide [remain] now. The BAGD Greek Lexicon has the following heading under *nuni* (the Greek word translated "now" here): "with the idea of time weakened or entirely absent," and it lists 1 Cor. 13:13; Rom. 7:17. English sometimes uses *now* in a similar, *non-temporal* sense, as in "*now* hear this" or "*now* since that is true, this must be true also." The Greek word translated *now* in 13:12 is a different word.

The idea is that faith, hope, and love abide (remain) forever (they are eternal), unlike the charismatic gifts (like prophecy and tongues). Faith, hope, and love will play a vital role in God's eternal kingdom, but the charismatic gifts are just for this present age. Once we know fully (1 Cor. 13:12), we will not need the partial knowledge provided by the charismatic gifts.

It is easy to see that love is of foundational importance and is eternal; for one thing, "God is love" (1 John 4:16). And it should be easy enough to see that love is more important than charismatic gifts, not that the gifts are not important for this present age. Remember that Paul's main point in this chapter is that love is essential and Christians must walk in love, including in their use of the charismatic gifts.

Love, according to this verse, is even greater than faith and hope. (In a different context, if we were discussing how to be saved, for example, I would say that faith is

⁴³ *Bible Background Commentary – New Testament* [Inter-Varsity Press, 1993], page 480.

more important than love. We cannot begin to love as we should without the enablement of the Spirit that comes to us through salvation *by faith* in Christ Jesus.) It is not difficult to see how faith and hope can be considered eternal. When we think of faith in the basic sense of an attitude of the heart where we put God first, trust Him, believe Him, and obey Him, it is easy to see how faith will continue forever. And hope is appropriate for God's people in heaven in the sense of our having infinite confidence regarding the future.]

I'll quote part of what Raymond D. Brown said regarding *agapē* under 1 Cor. 13:1-13.⁴⁴ "The fourth [Greek] noun for love is *agapē*. It appears most striking that this word occurs only rarely among the Greeks. Yet it is the word most widely used for 'love' in the New Testament and in the LXX [Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament)]. The verb *agapan* [*agapaō*] occurs approximately 200 times in the LXX. The noun *agapē* is used there 19 times. The verb *agapan* is used 130 times in the New Testament and the noun almost 120 times.

... Christians were aware of its presence [*agapē*] in the LXX to express different kinds of love (cf. Jer. 2:2; Deut. 4:37; Hos. 3:1; 11:1; Gen. 22:2). Paul uses the word, partly, because it is used widely in the LXX.

... The other Greek words for love had distinctive connotations among Greek-speaking people. Since the word *agapē* was not used widely by them, it could be filled with Christian meaning. And it is employed to express various kinds of love in the New Testament (cf. John 17:26; Rom. 8:37; 1 Cor. 2:9; 2 Thess. 2:16; Matt. 5:43-48).

The meaning of love in the New Testament is not a mere continuation of what is found in the Old Testament. Love is radically redefined in terms of Jesus himself. It is the reality found in Jesus and in God's relationship to him (Mark 1:11; Matt. 12:18). That is a reality that goes beyond the Old Testament teaching. *Agapē* is understood in the light of the ministry of Jesus and of his death on the cross (cf. John 3:35; 15:9-10; Rom. 5:6-10; 1 John 4:10).

Agapē is used to express the spontaneous, creative, caring love that is expressive of God's nature and that extended to undeserving men in Christ. Men who accept God's love are empowered by the Spirit of God (Gal. 5:22) to live thankfully and obediently in response to God's love and thereby live by the love that redeems them in Jesus Christ. ... It comes not through self-assertion but through self-surrender. ...

Love is centered in concern for others. Moreover, love is the principle that controls the exercise of all gifts: love creates unity, not division. To follow the way of love is to follow the very nature of God himself. *Agapē* is the most excellent way because it is grounded in God."

⁴⁴ *Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 10 [Broadman Press, 1970], pages 369, 370.

1 CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 14

One reason I feel a need to teach on this chapter (not that I have all the answers) is that I believe several of these verses are very often misunderstood by Pentecostals and charismatics. All errors of interpretation lead to confusion and disunity in the body of Christ, and some errors lead to worse results. Some of the Christians that do *not* believe the charismatic gifts are for today torture chapters 12-14.

Pursue love [These words complete the apostle's important discourse on love that he began in 1 Cor. 12:31b. Compare 1 Cor. 16:14.], **yet** [or, "and" (Greek *de*)] **desire earnestly spiritual gifts** [1 Corinthians 12:31a says, "But earnestly desire the greater gifts." The Greek verb behind "desire earnestly" here in 1 Cor. 14:1 is exactly the same as the Greek behind "earnestly desire" in 12:31a. The NASB has *gifts* in italics here in 14:1. A more literal translation would be "the things of the Spirit." (See on 1 Cor. 12:1.)], **but** [I would translate "and" (Greek *de*)] **especially** [I prefer the KJV's "rather."]
that you may prophesy. [Compare 1 Cor. 14:39. I believe we would better understand Paul if we had a comma after "that you may prophesy" instead of a period. (We don't have Paul's original punctuation.) If we miss the strong linkage between what Paul says here in the second half of 1 Cor. 14:1 and what he says in 14:2 (this linkage is demonstrated by the "for" at the beginning of 14:2), we probably will misunderstand 14:1. We will probably end up thinking (as many do) that Paul teaches here in 1 Cor. 14:1 that prophecy/prophesying is the greatest gift.

I don't believe Paul intended to say that prophecy/prophesying is the greatest gift. He certainly didn't intend to say that the charismatic gift of prophecy (understanding prophecy in the sense of speaking messages under the anointing of the Spirit [see under 1 Cor. 12:10]) is the greatest gift. (The word *prophecy* is used in 1 Cor. 12:10; 13:2, 8; and 14:6, 22.) And even if we understand the *prophesying* spoken of here in 1 Cor. 14:1 (and in 14:3-5) in the fuller sense pictured in 14:30, 31, which we probably should do, I still don't believe Paul intended to say that this is the greatest gift.⁴⁵ All that Paul intended to say here, if I understand him, was that prophecy/prophesying is, in some ways, greater than speaking with tongues. We will discuss this point further as we continue.

With the words "[and] especially [rather] that you may prophesy," the apostle begins a lengthy discourse designed to contrast prophecy/prophesying with the misuse of the gift of tongues in the church at Corinth (a primary concern was the public use of tongues *without interpretation*). In this chapter Paul contrasts prophecy/prophesying with the misuse of tongues at Corinth; he does not compare prophecy/prophesying with the other gifts. Throughout this chapter, Paul uses prophecy as an example of a gift that edifies. Prophecy is greater than tongues without interpretation because prophecy edifies those hearing it, whereas speaking with tongues without interpretation doesn't (see 1 Cor. 14:3-5). (In this chapter Paul demonstrates that speaking with tongues without interpretation is inappropriate for church gatherings.) He repeatedly hammers

⁴⁵ Understanding *prophesying* in the fuller sense pictured in 14:30, 31 would include speaking forth revelations that were received from the Spirit. I assume that these revelations could include *words of wisdom, words of knowledge, and distinguishing of spirits*; these three gifts were listed in 1 Cor. 12:8-10.

away at this point throughout the rest of this chapter. It is almost unbelievable how much time he takes to demonstrate that speaking with tongues without interpretation doesn't edify the church. He must have known that some at Corinth were rather obstinate regarding their misuse of tongues. There was too much public speaking with tongues; the attitude/motivation of at least some of those speaking with tongues was far from (the required) love; and, significantly, the tongues (at least much of the time) were not being interpreted.] **(2) For one who speaks in a tongue** [cf. Mark 16:17; Acts 2:4, 11; 10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 30; 13:1; 14:4-39] **does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands** [It is good to speak to God, but it is not appropriate to speak out loud in a tongue in a church gathering unless it is interpreted because no one will understand what was said (even if God does). There is room for exceptions to this rule. (There is room for exceptions to most rules.) God could, for example, speak a word through a Christian in a tongue to someone in the church knowing that that person understands the language (like on the Day of Pentecost). In a case like that the interpretation of the tongue would not be required, but in such cases it would be appropriate to inform the church regarding what had taken place.

Paul's words here have sometimes been wrongly understood to teach that all words spoken in tongues are words directed to God. Acts 2:11 demonstrates that tongues can be words directed to people, not God. This is confirmed by many examples from our day, examples where God has spoken to people through tongues in a language they understood and examples where the tongues were interpreted.], **but in his spirit he speaks mysteries** [cf. 1 Cor. 13:2]. [The word *his* is in italics in the NASB; in the margin it has, "or, by the Spirit." I prefer "by the Spirit," or "in the Spirit," but it is also a fact that the *spirit* of the Christian is involved when speaking/praying in tongues (see 1 Cor. 14:14). No Christian can speak with tongues (I'm speaking of a genuine manifestation of the charismatic gift of tongues) without the enablement of the Holy Spirit, but it is also true that Christians are very much involved in speaking with tongues. Christians must cooperate with the Spirit of God to speak with tongues, as with prophecy, and with most other aspects of the Christian life. We're not impassive robots that God uses like a ventriloquist uses a dummy.

The Holy Spirit doesn't take over and make Christians speak with tongues, and most Christians who speak with tongues in our day testify that they can speak with tongues at any time. If they desired they could speak out loud during a church service, but as the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets (14:32) and those prophesying are not compelled to speak or to keep on speaking; so too for those speaking with tongues, including a devotional use of tongues. This chapter of 1 Corinthians seems to clearly show that those who spoke with tongues at Corinth could, and sometimes did, speak at inappropriate times; the Spirit didn't stop them (but He did correct them through Paul, and He probably tried to correct them directly and/or through others), and there is no indication that the tongues being spoken in the church at Corinth were not genuine.

The words "speaks mysteries" at least include the idea that no one (except God), including the speaker, understands what is being said.] **(3) But the one who prophesies speaks to men for edification** [*Edify* and *edification* are key words in this chapter (see 14:4, 5, 12, 17, and 26; and note the similar ideas of *profiting* in 14:6, *instructing* in 14:19, and *learning* and *being exhorted* in 14:31.) **and exhortation** [The NIV has "encouragement."] **and consolation** [The NIV has "comfort."]. [Many Pentecostals and

charismatics use this verse (wrongly from my point of view) to teach that (what is often called) the simple gift of prophecy (supposedly the gift mentioned in 1 Cor. 12:10) has no revelation content at all. (For one thing, as I mentioned under 1 Cor. 14:1, *prophesying* here probably shouldn't be limited to speaking messages under the anointing of the Spirit.) I'm quite sure that Paul didn't intend to exclude revelation from the prophesying that he was speaking of here in 14:3 (whether prophesying is limited to speaking messages under the anointing of the Spirit, or not). His point was to show that prophecy, unlike the misuse of tongues at Corinth (public tongues without interpretation), would bless the others with edification, exhortation (encouragement), and consolation (comfort).

To the extent that there would be no revelation in prophecy, it would hardly deserve the name prophecy. By revelation I mean a revealing of something God actually says/reveals to His people. If God just wanted to speak to one person through prophecy and tell them of His love for them, that would be a revelation. (The Bible, of course, is full of revelation, and we are to take it personally.) Such revelations could cover a wide range of topics. God could, for example, call an individual, or a church, to repentance; He could warn the church of a tornado coming to their town and direct them what they should do about it; He could confirm that He has called a particular person into a particular ministry; etc.

I have frequently heard Pentecostals and charismatics use this verse to try to prove that prophecy is out of order and not authentic if it contains any rebuking of people for their sin and calling them to repentance. They say (quite wrongly I believe) that 1 Cor. 14:3 excludes any such content. In the first place this verse is not giving a complete definition of prophecy. Also, words like *exhortation* include calls for repentance, and calls for repentance, if needed and heeded, will certainly result in the *edification* of the church. The more serious the message from God, however, the more we would expect the message to come through proven ministers.

Essentially all Pentecostals and charismatics that I am familiar with agree that any revelation given by God today would *not* be on the level of Scripture and would *not* be permitted to compete with Scripture. Significantly, God can help us understand the Bible through revelation gifts.] **(4) One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.** [It is important to know that speaking in a tongue does edify the one speaking; it is a good thing for Christians to be edified. Paul's primary point here, however, is that it is wrong for the one speaking in tongues in church to be concerned for his own edification in a setting where he should be concerned for the edification of the church. It does not make sense (and it certainly is not being motivated by love) for one person to be edified at the expense of the others; for one thing, while he is speaking in tongues and is the center of attention, other necessary things (like prayer, worship, preaching, teaching, ministering to those who have needs, and prophesying) cannot be done.] **(5) Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues** [This *wishing* by Paul does not change the reality that it is God who determines how the charismatic ministry-gifts are to be distributed. Paul, of course, had no desire to go beyond the will of God. The verb "wish" is sometimes used in a rather limited sense; see 1 Cor. 7:7; cf. Num. 11:29; 1 Tim. 2:4 ("[God] who desires [using the same Greek verb translated *wish* here in 1 Cor. 14:5] all men to be saved").

It seems probable to me that devotional tongues are available to all Christians in our

day, but Paul was not speaking of a devotional use of tongues here; he was speaking (at least for the most part) of tongues that would be spoken in the church and interpreted.⁴⁶ Although speaking with tongues was widespread in the early church,⁴⁷ I don't believe the New Testament clearly states that devotional tongues are available to all Christians. I am not saying, by the way, that the apostle made a clear distinction between a charismatic *devotional* gift of tongues and a charismatic *ministry* gift of tongues.], **but even more that you would prophesy** [Many Pentecostals and charismatics believe that these words, and the words of 1 Cor. 14:1, and especially the words of 1 Cor. 14:31 teach that all Christians can, and should, prophesy. I believe this widespread teaching that all Christians can, and should, prophesy has caused substantial damage to the body of Christ. If we tell Christians that the Bible teaches that all Christians can, and should, prophesy, and it is not really so—and I do not believe the Bible does teach this—we are in for some big trouble. We have opened a big door for the flesh, or even for demon spirits. Based on what I have observed, I believe that at least half of that which goes under the name of prophecy in some circles is not really prophecy. There is a lot of flesh, and I am afraid there are some demonic counterfeits too.

1 Corinthians chapter 12 does not fit the idea that all can prophesy (and this is true whether we think of prophesying as speaking forth under the anointing of the Spirit [see under 1 Cor. 12:10] or of prophesying in the fuller sense discussed under 1 Cor. 14:1)—God distributes the ministry-gifts as He wills. What I said above regarding Paul's *wish* that all spoke in tongues applies equally to prophecy. Regarding 1 Cor. 14:1, I have heard Christians say that Paul would not tell Christians to desire earnestly the things of the Spirit, especially (rather) that they might prophesy, unless prophecy was available to all. However, in 1 Cor. 12:31a, Paul told the same people to earnestly desire the greater gifts, and it is clear in chapter 12 that this does not mean that each gift is available to each Christians for the asking. Regarding 1 Cor. 14:31, which says. "For you can all prophesy one by one," I stand somewhat amazed by how often I have heard this verse used to supposedly prove that all Christians can and should prophesy. It has always seemed clear to me that, when you read these words in context with 14:29-32, Paul was speaking to the prophets—these words (of 14:31) were not addressed to all the Christians at Corinth.]; **and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.** [Based on these words, we can see that tongues, when they are interpreted, are the equivalent of Spirit-inspired prophetic utterances. The one who speaks with tongues need not be the one that interprets (cf. 1 Cor. 14:27, 28).] **(6) But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues** [For one thing, it is important to know that the great apostle *did* speak with tongues. Not only that, in 1 Cor. 14:18 he said, "I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all." But in 1 Cor. 14:19 he said, "however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind [in other words, five words in a common language], that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue."

⁴⁶ See under 1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 30 in this paper.

⁴⁷ See Mark 16:17; Acts 2:4-42; 10:44-48; 19:5-7; and 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14; also to be considered are Eph. 6:18 and Jude 1:24, verses that speak of praying in the Spirit, which includes tongues (cf. 1 Cor. 14:14-16). Many agree that it seems rather clear that they spoke with tongues in Acts 8:15-19 even though Luke doesn't clearly state that they did. Also, Paul probably first spoke with tongues when he was filled with the Spirit (mentioned in Acts 9:17; we know that he did speak with tongues, a lot (1 Cor. 14:18).

The apostle could edify them by speaking five words they understood, but he could not edify them by speaking ten thousand words they did not understand.

Paul could, of course, have spoken in tongues and then interpreted the tongues, but he did not suggest that option here. The point he is making here is that when he is with the Corinthians he communicates with them in words they can understand so they can be edified.

It seems clear that tongues with interpretation were not part of Paul's public ministry; at the most tongues played a very minor role in his public ministry. Paul must have done his extensive tongue speaking as part of his devotional life. Why did he do it? For one thing, he was edified, and I assume the Spirit used this gift to substantially enhance his time spent in prayer and worship.], **what will I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?** [There is much overlap in meaning between the four items listed here. For example, the apostle's *teaching* was saturated with *revelation*. *Prophecy* here could be understood of speaking messages under the anointing of the Spirit, but in this context it could be used in the fuller sense of sharing *revelations* he had received.] (7) **Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp?** (8) **For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle?** [There can be no music without a proper distinction in sounds, and the bugle cannot communicate the intended message without producing the required, predetermined sounds.] (9) **So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear** [The NIV has, "intelligible words."], **how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.** [Unless you speak words understood by the hearers, very little detailed communication takes place through your words, and that is exactly what happens when you speak to/before others in tongues.] (10) **There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages** [The Greek noun behind "language(s)" here in 1 Cor. 12:10, 11 is different than the Greek noun translated *tongues* in this chapter. As I mentioned under 1 Cor. 14:2, that Greek noun is sometimes translated *languages*.] **in the world, and no kind is without meaning. (11) If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me.** [Men cannot directly communicate with one another in a detailed sense unless they use a common language. These two verses were just a small part of Paul's lengthy discourse aimed at convincing the Corinthian Christians (those who needed to be convinced) that it was inappropriate for them to speak out loud in tongues in church unless the tongues were interpreted.] (12) **So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts** [As in 1 Cor. 12:1 and 14:1, a more literal translation would be "the things of the Spirit."], **seek to abound for the edification of the church.** [It is good to be zealous for the gifts/things of the Spirit (cf. 14:1), but the charismatic ministry-gifts must be used for the edification of the church. This is a dominant message in this chapter; see under 14:3.] (13) **Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.** [When the tongue is interpreted, the church will be edified (cf. 1 Cor. 14:5). In context Paul was dealing with a public use of tongues. (It is far less important to interpret devotional tongues, but that can be done as God wills.) Paul was addressing a situation where (often at least) no one was interpreting the tongues. If others had been interpreting, it would not have been nearly so important (if

required at all) for the one speaking with tongues to pray for the gift of interpretation.] **(14) For** [I would omit this word in the English translation. If we include *for* it tends to (wrongly I believe) force the words “pray with the mind” of the next verse to mean interpreting what was prayed in tongues. The Greek conjunction *gar* that is translated “for” here is included in brackets in my Greek New Testament.⁴⁸ The brackets show that there is doubt regarding whether the word was included in the original Greek text written by Paul. Gordon D. Fee argues against including *for* here.⁴⁹ In a footnote on page 667 he says: “This *gar* (not found in p⁴⁶, B, F, G, 0243, 1739, 1881, pc [referring to ancient Greek New Testament manuscripts], b, sa) is by all counts not original. Its omission [if it had been in Paul’s original manuscript] would be almost impossible to account for, either accidentally or deliberately – even more so independently across two early [Greek New Testament manuscript] traditions (Egyptian and Western). One can easily account for the [later] addition [of *gar* in some later Greek manuscripts], given both the frequency of this conjunction [*gar*] in this letter and the apparent awkwardness of the asyndeton [the practice of leaving out the usual conjunctions between coordinate sentence elements]...”] **if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays** [The *Amplified Bible* has, “my spirit [by the Holy Spirit within me] prays.”], **but my mind** [The KJV has “understanding.”] **is unfruitful.** [What the apostle apparently means here (in context with 1 Cor. 14:15-19) is that my *mind/understanding* (using the word *mind/understanding* in the sense that I speak words with my mind/understanding before others in a common language) is *not bearing fruit* in others if I pray in a tongue before them.

It is not true, as I have heard it said, that this verse shows that man’s *mind* (understanding, thinking, and knowing) is something totally separate from his *spirit*; I don’t believe Paul intended to communicate any such idea here. (Cf., e.g., Dan. 2:3; Mark 2:8; Rom. 8:16; and 1 Cor. 2:11.) The *spirit* of man is involved with the *mind* (understanding, thinking, and knowing). The Holy Spirit is also very much involved with the *mind* of the Christian as the Christian walks after the Spirit through faith. (See pages 118-120 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* on Rom. 8:5-9; and see note 32 on page 138 of that book.) **(15) What is the outcome then?** [I prefer the NIV’s “So what shall I do?”] **I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.** [To *pray with the spirit* here means to pray in tongues, by the enablement of the Spirit. To *pray with the mind* here means to pray in our own language, the way we normally speak. (Some say that to *pray with the mind* here means to interpret the tongues.) For us to pray in English, with our mind (understanding, thinking, and knowing) involved, does not mean that the Spirit is not involved—He is involved as we walk after the Spirit (not the flesh). The primary point the apostle makes here, as 14:16-19 confirm, is that there are occasions where we should *pray with the mind*, that is, we should *not* pray with tongues.

To *sing with the spirit* means to sing with tongues (by the Spirit); to *sing with the mind* is to sing, as we normally do, in languages we know. The *spiritual songs* of Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16 may refer to (or at least include) singing in/with the spirit/Spirit. It does not follow that the Spirit is (necessarily) excluded from our worship if we sing before God with our minds (in English).] **(16) Otherwise if you bless in [or, with] the spirit [in tongues by the Spirit] only** [I would omit this word, which the NASB supplied in

⁴⁸ United Bible Societies, Fourth Revised Edition.

⁴⁹ *First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 1987], pages 667, 669.

italics. The translators apparently assumed (wrongly I believe) that Paul was referring to the need to interpret the tongues after blessing (praising/giving thanks) in/with tongues. I assume that Paul brought up this topic because he had learned that some were blessing with tongues at Corinth. I believe Paul was saying here that there are times, like with such a blessing, that it should typically be spoken in the language of the people to begin with. The NIV has, “If you are praising God with your spirit.”], **how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted** [In the margin the NASB has, “unversed in spiritual gifts.” Instead of “one who fill the place of the ungifted,” the margin of the NIV has, “one who finds himself among the inquirers.”] **say the “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he doesn’t know what you are saying?** [It is not clear exactly what persons the apostle was referring to by the “ungifted” or “inquirers” here, nor is it very important for us to know. (The plural of the Greek noun that is translated “ungifted” here is translated “ungifted men” in 14:23, and the singular is translated “ungifted man” in 14:24.) People cannot give a wholehearted *Amen* if they do not know what was said. Even those who have received the Spirit and are well-versed in spiritual gifts could have trouble giving a wholehearted *Amen* with such blessings (thanksgivings). How much more so for those who are still somewhat on the outside of the church family. There probably would be occasions when they would not even have any idea that an *Amen* was appropriate (until they heard the others say Amen), much less would they be able to give a wholehearted *Amen*.] **(17) For you are giving thanks well enough** [by giving thanks in tongues], **but the other man is not edified** [and that is not acceptable]. [I find these words, “you are giving thanks well enough,” to be extremely interesting and informative. If the Spirit will enable Christians to give thanks in tongues (though we typically would not give thanks that way in a public gathering), it seems a reasonable deduction that He will help us pray in other areas, for example, about specific problems where we hardly know how to pray, in praise and worship, in intercessory prayer, etc. I am speaking, of course, about praying in our personal times of prayer (devotional tongues), not about speaking out loud in church gatherings.] **(18) I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all** [The NIV has, “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.”]; **(19) however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind** [On the interpretation of these verses, see under 1 Cor. 14:6. It certainly is interesting and informative to know that the apostle Paul viewed the use of tongues in his prayer/devotional life so highly. As in 14:14, the KJV has *understanding* instead of *mind*. Paul is referring to speaking five words the way men typically speak to one another, in a common language. As I mentioned, the fact that he is speaking “with [his] mind” does not mean that the Spirit is not behind what is being said (and especially when a person like the apostle Paul is speaking).] **so that I may instruct others also** [and the saints be edified], **rather than ten thousand words in a tongue** [and Paul be edified, but not the saints]. **(20) Brethren, do not be children** [The NIV has “infants.” Compare Eph. 4:14.] **in your thinking** [Some of the Corinthian Christians were quite immature (fleshly) in their thinking, including their thinking about spiritual gifts.]; **yet in evil be infants** [That is, do not permit any evil—be innocent (cf. Rom. 16:19).], **but in your thinking be mature.** [The Word of God, backed up by the enabling grace of the indwelling Spirit of God, enables Christians to think right. On having a renewed mind (by the Word of God and) by the Spirit, see under 1 Cor. 14:14.] **(21) In the Law it is written, “BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF**

STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME,” says the Lord. [Here “the Law” is used in a fuller sense than the Mosaic Law (as in John 10:34; 15:25; and Rom. 3:19). Paul is quoting part of Isa. 28:11, 12. If we do not understand Paul’s use of this quotation, we will never understand the following verses. These prophetic words of Isaiah were quite negative; they spoke of the coming invasions (of Israel) by the victorious Assyrian and then Babylonian armies, who would speak with “strange tongues” (that is, they would speak their own languages, languages strange to the Israelites; cf. Isa. 33:19; Deut. 28:49). These armies came, as judgment from God, because His people would not repent and be faithful to Him. This quotation (in the form “quoted” by Paul) stated that the people would not repent and listen to God even after this judgment.] **(22) So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers** [unbelievers who aren’t about to repent and become believers. As we discussed under 14:21, Paul is speaking of a *negative* sign, a sign appropriate for a rebellious, unrepentant people. The apostle takes it for a fact that the body of Christ is not characterized by rebellious, unrepentant people. Even at Corinth, where there was a lot of fleshiness and quite a bit of sin, the church was not characterized by unrepentance and rebellion. And, as Paul shows in this epistle, where there was sin at Corinth, there was discipline from God to deal with it (see on 1 Cor. 11:28-32 in this paper, and see Acts 5:1-6).

It would not be appropriate, therefore, for God to send such a negative sign (a sign like the one pictured in 1 Cor. 14:21) to the church at Corinth, nor did God send such a sign; however, and *this is Paul’s point*, the misuse of tongues at Corinth (including the excessive amount of tongues and especially the fact that the tongues were not being interpreted and understood by the church) had all too much similarity with the “strange tongues” of Isa. 28:11. The apostle was still trying to wake up the Corinthians (those who needed to be awakened) that their misuse of tongues was a serious negative—it was time for them to stop this foolish behavior.

Many misunderstand Paul here because they wrongly assume that he was speaking of a *positive* sign, like what happened with tongues on the Day of Pentecost. For one thing, there is nothing positive in 1 Cor. 14:21. Furthermore, seeing tongues as a *positive* sign for unbelievers here would lead to a contradiction with what Paul says in 1 Cor. 14:23.]; **but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.** [The words *is for a sign* are in italics in the NASB because these words were not included in the Greek. I would just as soon skip the added words *for a sign*. (The verb *is* must often be supplied in the English when it was not included [or required] in the Greek. The comma after *sign* would also be omitted.) Paul’s meaning is simply that prophecy (where God speaks to His people in a language they can understand) is appropriate for a believer’s meeting, whereas tongues/languages that are not understood by those hearing them (as in 14:21) are appropriate for a group of unrepentant rebels (for an unbeliever’s meeting). If we leave in the words *for a sign* (which is reasonable), the sign would be positive, a sign appropriate for a gathering of the saints at Corinth. By speaking of a *positive* sign, I do not mean to say that God’s prophetic word to Christians or to a church could not contain any negative elements like a call to repentance (see under 1 Cor. 14:3). It is a loving, positive thing for God to call His people to repentance when such a call is needed (cf., e.g., Rev. 3:19, 20).] **(23) Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers**

enter, will they not say that you are mad? [On “ungifted men,” see under 1 Cor. 14:16. Paul’s point here was that the ungifted men and even the unbelievers (those who had not yet become believers in Christ) would be enough in contact with reality to see that it did not make sense for God to continue to speak to His people (whom He supposedly loved as His born-again children) in languages they did not understand—it was time for the Christians at Corinth who were doing all the uninterpreted tongue speaking in the church to wake up.

When Paul said, “all speak in tongues,” he was picturing an exaggerated case where uninterpreted tongues were all that was being spoken throughout the church service. (Some of the Christians at Corinth may have desired a meeting close to this.) The picture was not, as I have heard it said, that Paul was concerned that they were all speaking with tongues *at the same time*. Note that in the next verse, Paul spoke of a meeting where all prophesy. It is clear that he was not thinking of all prophesying *at the same time*. That would have caused chaos, and it would not have led to the positive results pictured in 14:24, 25. It would, of course, have been out of balance to have nothing but prophecy throughout the meeting (cf. 14:26, 29), but there still would be much good fruit, unlike a meeting in which there was nothing but uninterpreted tongues.

One last comment, and I am not being dogmatic on this point, I do not believe that Paul (or, much more importantly, God) would have considered it inappropriate for all the saints to pray and/or worship and/or sing in tongues together for a period of time (it would necessarily be without interpretation, except as God chose to give some special interpretation) as long as no one was being left out or needlessly being offended. I am not making a big deal out of this concept, but I do not believe that this practice by some in our day violates the guidelines set down by Paul in this chapter. Paul did not give a complete teaching on tongues or prophecy in this chapter; what he said was designed to meet the immediate needs of the church at Corinth.] **(24) But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; (25) the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.** [See under 1 Cor. 14:23. If an entire meeting consisted of prophecy, even though the meeting would be out of balance, it would still make sense, and the truths of the gospel could go forth. The idea here is not of a specific prophetic word spoken to an unbeliever or an ungifted man (though that could happen, as God wills); note that “he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all.” (There is no guarantee, of course, that unbelievers will respond to the gospel no matter how much things are in order. Many never will repent; they willfully reject God and His gospel.) This certainly is a lot better result than the result mentioned if all speak with tongues: “will they not say that you are mad?” (14:23). As I mentioned, the apostle contrasts uninterpreted tongues and prophecy (using prophecy as an illustration of a charismatic gift that edifies) throughout this chapter.] **(26) What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.** [The apostle is calling for a proper balance in the church service. On “each one,” see under 1 Cor. 12:7. On “edification,” see under 1 Cor. 14:3.] **(27) If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret** [Paul limits the public speaking in tongues to two or three in a

service. He does not specify how long a person would be permitted to speak with tongues, but it would definitely be limited. Throughout this chapter Paul insists that public tongues must be interpreted. I do not believe that Paul meant to say that all the interpreting must be done by one person; cf. 1 Cor. 14:13, 38.]; **(28) but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.** [Compare 14:2. To speak to himself and to God here includes not speaking out loud (that is, keeping silent in the church, so as not to distract others).] **(29) Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.** [As with tongues and interpretation, prophesying is also to be limited to leave room for other ministries and activities. On prophets, see under 1 Cor. 12:28; 14:1, 3. Does the word *prophets*, as it is used here, include the Christians that speak with Spirit-inspired utterance (cf. 1 Cor. 12:10) but do not receive revelations (cf. 14:30)? It is possible; for one thing, such Spirit-inspired utterance is comparable with the interpreted tongues just spoken of in 14:27, 28 (cf. 14:5). It is important to see that the word *prophet* can be used in flexible ways.

Who are the others that are to pass judgment? Paul probably was thinking especially of the other prophets; however, I am sure he would agree that all Christians have some responsibility to judge what is spoken (cf., e.g., 1 Thess. 5:21, 22), and especially the other ministers that are present. For one thing, all prophecies must be tested against the Scriptures. In the days before the New Testament was completed, they would be tested against the accepted apostolic foundation of the new covenant (including the epistles of Paul that were available). Compare, for example, 1 John 4:1-6. They would also be tested, where applicable, against the Old Testament. Although Paul didn't mention it here, revelation received through tongues with interpretation (along with every other revelation or teaching) must also be tested.] **(30) But if a revelation is made to another who is seated** [The one prophesying is pictured standing.], **the first one must keep silent.** [It is clear that Paul was speaking here of something beyond Spirit-inspired utterance, though that could be included in what Paul means by prophesying in 14:31. The idea here is that the one prophesying must yield to the other prophets, not to mention the other ministries.] **(31) For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted** [This verse is often used to support the idea that *all* Christians can, and should, prophesy; however, it seems clear to me that Paul addressed these words to those who were gifted to prophesy, not to all Christians. See under 1 Cor. 14:5.]; **(32) and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets** [Paul's point here is that it will not do for the prophets to say the Spirit made me prophesy, or that He made me keep on prophesying so that I could not stop and share the floor with the other prophets (and other ministries). The same thing is true for those speaking in tongues. The Spirit does not make us speak with tongues; He does not make us speak out loud during church services; He does not make us keep on speaking; He does not make us stop speaking; and He does not force us to not speak at inappropriate times (for example, interrupting another person). Demon spirits, on the other hand, do tend to drive/force people to do things.]; **(33) for God is not a God of confusion** [The NIV has "disorder."] **but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.** [God is a God of peace, and His people and the gatherings of His people will be characterized by peace to the extent His people cooperate with Him and do things His way. The NIV (and others) takes the last words of this verse with the next verse; the NIV has, "As in all the

congregations of the saints, women....” I prefer the translation of the NASB.] **(34) The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says, (35) If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.** [In the first place, I should mention that Paul was undoubtedly addressing a specific problem that he had learned of; this applies to much that the apostle says in this epistle (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 1:11; 5:1; 7:1; 11:18; 15:12; and 16:15-18). Secondly, we must recognize that the apostle was not requesting a complete silence by women in church, but of their refraining from speech that was considered improper (out of order). First Corinthians 11:5 made it clear, for example, that women could pray and prophesy in church, but in 1 Cor. 11:2-16 the apostle dealt with the need for women to be submissive in church (which included having the head covered, as a symbol of submission, while praying or prophesying). See the discussion under those verses in this paper. As discussed there, there is room to see some difference in what submission means in different, subsequent cultures.

In Paul’s day for a woman to be involved in the theological discussions in church, even asking questions, was considered to be out of order and manifesting a lack of submission. First Timothy 2:11, 12 say, “Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” In our day women asking questions, etc. is commonly done, and I believe (in most cases at least) it is proper.] **(36) Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?** [The answer to these questions is obvious. The gospel did not originate at Corinth; it came there through the ministry of the apostle Paul. That being the case, it was time for the Corinthians to submit to the Word of God as it was delivered to them and stop trying to change it. They also needed to be submissive to the present ministry of the apostle Paul. I assume these words apply in a general way, and not just back to 14:34, 35.] **(37) If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment.** [These words (and many other words) demonstrate that Paul took his apostolic authority very seriously. I assume he wrote these words with some particular people in mind, who at least thought they were “prophet(s) or spiritual.” It is clear there were some “Christians” at Corinth who were sure they did not need to submit to the ministry of the apostle Paul; surely they knew more than he did, and surely they were above him in the Lord, they thought.] **(38) But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.** [The NIV has, “if he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.” In other words, as far as the apostle Paul was concerned, those that did not recognize (that disregarded/ignored) his apostolic authority were not to be recognized (they were to be disregarded/ignored by the church).] **(39) Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy** [cf. 1 Cor. 14:1], **and do not forbid to speak with tongues.** [This verse somewhat summarizes the message of this entire chapter; however, as Paul emphasizes in this chapter, the tongues must be interpreted if they are spoken out loud in church.] **(40) But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.** [Amen!]

PHILIPPIANS CHAPTER 3

This entire chapter of Philippians is quite important, but one primary reason I wanted to discuss this chapter is Phil. 3:12, which is often listed as a verse that supposedly proves the widespread (but I believe wrong) viewpoint that the New Testament teaches that all Christians—starting with the apostle Paul—necessarily continue to sin to some extent as long as they live in this world. I don't believe this verse says anything whatsoever about Paul (or any other Christian) continuing to sin. All that Paul says in Phil. 3:12 is that he has not arrived—he has not finished the race—and he must, therefore, press on in faith (which includes disregarding the things of the past and the things of the flesh), as required by the new covenant in the blood of Christ, until his race is finished and he ends up in eternal glory. In Phil. 3:12 (with 3:7-15), Paul used himself as an example of what all Christians can, and should, and must do in order to instruct/exhort those Christians at Philippi who needed to make some changes.

Rather than refer to his life in Christ to prove that Christians cannot stop sinning, Paul referred to his life in Christ to illustrate that Christians *can* live above sin. Compare, for example, Acts 23:1; 24:16; 1 Cor. 4:4, 16; 11:1 (“Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ”); 2 Cor. 1:12 (“For our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you”); 2:17; 4:1, 2; 6:1-10; Gal. 6:14; Phil. 1:20, 21; 3:7-10, 15, 17; 4:9; 1 Thess. 2:10-12; 2 Thess. 3:7-9; and 2 Tim. 1:3.

Much more important than the verses cited in the last paragraph, where the apostle spoke of his walk in Christ, are those many verses where he taught that walking in righteousness, holiness, and victory over sin (by the grace of God in Christ) is a big part of what Christianity is all about. (The gospel that God gave the apostle Paul to proclaim must be our primary standard, not the life of the apostle Paul.) Equally significant are those many similar verses in the New Testament that were not written by the apostle Paul. Many of those verses (from Paul and other writers) are discussed in *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*, especially in the last three chapters of that book. Quite a few such passages are discussed in my subsequent papers, especially the *Paper on Faith, The Christian, the Law, and Legalism*, and the paper dated July 2000.

The New Testament does, of course, make it clear that Christians can sin and that they will sin to the extent they do not know and/or do not walk in the full truth of the gospel on a continuous basis by faith, being enabled by the Holy Spirit. Even though the church at Philippi was a solid church (as this epistle shows), there was room for improvement (cf. Phil. 1:9-11, 25; 2:1-5; 3:11-15; and 4:2), not that all such room for improvement would be classified as sin. God does not use the word *sin* in a loose way; it is a serious word. Everything short of total, absolute perfection does not constitute sin.

I'll quote [Phil. 2:12-16](#), verses that do not fit well with the idea that Paul taught the Philippians that Christians cannot live in righteousness and holiness with the victory over all sin. “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence [Paul was not there to help them],

work out your salvation with fear⁵⁰ and trembling; (13) for it is God who is at work in you [His enabling grace is sufficient, but God does not force Christians to learn the full, balanced truth, to have faith in the truth, or to live in the righteousness and holiness of the truth (cf. Eph. 4:24)], both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure. (14) Do all things without grumbling or disputing; (15) so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear [or, shine] as lights in the world, (16) holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain [Paul would have toiled in vain (at least in one sense) if the Christians he ministered to rejected the truth, chose sin instead of righteousness, and were not ready to stand before God on the day of judgment].”

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord [cf. Phil. 4:4]. **To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. (2) Beware of the dogs** [cf. Psalm 22:16, 20; Rev. 22:15], **beware of the evil workers** [cf. Psalm 22:16], **beware of the false circumcision** [The “false circumcision” is to be contrasted with the “true circumcision” mentioned in the next verse. I assume, in agreement with most commentators, that Paul was referring to the Judaizers here (throughout verse 2). The Christians at Philippi, who were (at least for the most part) Gentiles, would have been a target for the Judaizers.] **(3) for we are the true circumcision** [cf. Rom. 2:28, 29; Col. 2:11, 12.], **who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus** [cf. Gal. 6:14] **and put no confidence in the flesh** [Some of the Judaizers probably had become born-again Christians, but their faulty doctrine, which required Gentiles to be (physically) circumcised and to submit to other ceremonial works of the Mosaic Law in order to be accepted by God, significantly distorted the gospel and detracted from the work of the Spirit. To put confidence in the flesh, as Phil. 3:4-6 demonstrate, includes putting confidence in ceremonial works (like circumcision) and things like physical lineage instead of relying totally on the all-sufficient, new-covenant salvation freely given in Christ Jesus.], **(4) although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more** [Compare 2 Cor. 11:13-12:13. Paul’s point here in Phil. 3:4-9 is that if he, with his high-level credentials in Judaism, needed to disregard Judaism and the things of the flesh (especially referring to the ceremonial laws) and to be totally faithful to Christ and the new covenant in His blood, everyone else needs to do the same thing. According to the gospel that Paul proclaimed, no one could legitimately “put confidence in the flesh”; all men need salvation through the grace of God in Christ Jesus, who lifts us above the flesh by giving us the Holy Spirit to regenerate us, to dwell in us, to sanctify us, etc. Some of the Judaizers undoubtedly were quite sincere, but they were in serious error. Following the doctrine of the Judaizers could cost a person their salvation (e.g., Gal. 5:2-4). Gentiles can also be guilty of putting confidence in the flesh (in things like works of the flesh, the family name, riches, worldly fame, intelligence, education, will power, etc.).] **(5) circumcised the eighth day** [cf. Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3; Luke 1:59; and 2:21], **of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin** [cf. Rom. 11:1], **a Hebrew of Hebrews**

⁵⁰ Although many Christians in our day reject this concept, the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) makes it quite clear that God’s people are to fear sinning against Him. See the discussion of Phil. 2:12-16 on pages 34-36 of my paper titled *The Christian, the Law, and Legalism*.

[Compare 2 Cor. 11:22. I'll quote part of what William Hendricksen said on the meaning of these words,⁵¹ "...that is, 'purest of the pure.' The idiom stresses *at least* the purity of his lineage: Hebrew son of Hebrew parents; hence *definitely* a Hebrew, a Hebrew if there ever was one!" In a footnote Hendricksen mentions that "Many are of the opinion that the phrase 'Hebrew of Hebrews' *also* calls attention to the fact that the apostle was a Jew not only by race but also by language and customs," and he says the possibility of this viewpoint must be granted.]; **as to the Law, a Pharisee** [cf. Acts 23:6; 26:5]; **(6) as to zeal, a persecutor of the church** [cf. Acts 8:3; 22:3-5; and 26:9-11]; **as to the righteousness which is in the Law** [see Phil. 3:9], **found blameless.** [Paul may have kept (to some reasonable extent) the righteousness required by the Law (especially when it came to the external, ceremonial requirements of the Law), but it is quite clear that he was not saying that he had fully kept the Law in his pre-Christian days. If he had been able to fully keep the Law, he would not have needed the Lamb of God to save him. Compare, for example, Acts 22:16; Rom. 3:9, 19-30; 6:14; 7:5-8:17; Gal. 2:16, 21; 3:10, 11, 13, 17-32; and 4:5.] **(7) But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.** [It would be easy to misunderstand what Paul said here with this translation of these last words, "for the sake of Christ" (which is also the translation of the NIV). You could get the (wrong) idea that Paul did what he did *for the benefit of Christ*. As Paul continues, it becomes clear that what he did he did for his own sake. He did what was required of him by the terms of the new covenant; he was concerned (and rightly so) for his salvation. The Greek might be better translated something like "on account of (or, because of) Christ," with the understanding that Paul was setting aside the things of the past (and the things of the flesh), which he spoke of in Phil. 3:4-6, "on account of/because of [his need to fully appropriate new-covenant salvation in] Christ." Gordon D. Fee translates "because of Christ."⁵² The NRSV translates, "Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ." The *New American Bible* has, "But those things I used to consider gain I have now reappraised as loss in the light of Christ." And the *Jerusalem Bible* has, "But because of Christ, I have come to consider all these advantages that I had as disadvantages."] **(8) More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord** [On knowing Christ/God, cf., e.g., John 17:3; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 3:10; and 2 Pet. 1:2, 3.], **for** [The same Greek preposition (*dia*) is used here that was translated "for the sake of [Christ]" in Phil. 3:7. I prefer a translation like "on account of/because of [whom]" here too. (Fee has "because of whom.") I am not denying, of course, that in some ways Paul did what he did for Christ, but in this context the emphasis is on what Paul was required to do to meet the terms of the new covenant in order to gain salvation in Christ—if we miss salvation, we miss everything.] **whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ** [The apostle did not merely set aside the things of his pre-Christian past in which he used to put confidence (the *things* he spoke of in Phil. 3:4-6), he also set aside everything that could interfere with his being a fully faithful Christian in union with Christ Jesus. He set aside his rights, even his right to keep on living, in order to fully submit to the will of his Savior and Lord. He knew that the rewards would infinitely outweigh all the difficulties he had to face as he lived in

⁵¹ *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* [Baker, 1979], pages 158, 159.

⁵² *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* [Eerdmans, 1995], pages 312, 313.

faithfulness to Christ as the apostle to the Gentiles (cf., e.g., 2 Cor. 4:16-5:10; Heb. 11:25, 26).], **(9) and may be found in Him** [Paul wanted to make sure that he, at all times (but especially when it would be time for him to stand before God in judgment), would be found in Christ, and fully in Christ and in His righteousness.], **not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law** [Compare Rom. 10:5; Phil. 3:6. There was a time that Paul, before he heard and understood the gospel, thought in terms of having his own righteousness before God (especially on judgment day) because he had (in some ways and to some extent) kept the (Mosaic) Law. (It is not true, as you sometimes hear it said, that Jews like Paul [speaking of his pre-Christian days] didn't leave any room for the grace and mercy of God under the old covenant. Being the people of the covenant(s) with God, they believed they benefited from His grace and mercy.) Now, as a new-covenant believer, he understood that righteousness, the very righteousness of God, is given to believers through and in Christ Jesus, and *only* through and in Christ Jesus. It is very important to understand that this righteousness is both imputed and *imparted*. (See the section titled "Christians are Enabled, and Required, to Live/Walk in Righteousness, Which Means Living/Walking in the Will of God, According to His Word/Law/Commandments," in my paper titled *The Christian, the Law, and Legalism*, including the cross-references to *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* and to the *Paper on Faith*.)

To receive and to walk in the righteousness of God in Christ, Paul had to set aside his own "righteousness." Significantly, as we discussed under Phil. 3:6, Paul came to understand that his own "righteousness" was not adequate (it would not suffice to open the doors of heaven for him when he stood before God in judgment). And he came to understand that this was not the plan of God (who, before the creation of the world, planned to sacrifice His Son to make His people righteous and to save them). Paul discovered that he had no other reasonable option than to receive and to walk in "the righteousness [of God] which *comes* from God on the basis of faith [in Christ].", **but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, (10) that I may know Him** [Compare Phil. 3:8. Paul is speaking of knowing Christ in a way that includes the experiential dimension through union with Him by the indwelling Holy Spirit. This knowing Christ includes experientially knowing "the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."] **and the power of His resurrection** [See Rom. 6:1-11; Eph. 1:19-2:6 (especially 1:19, 20; 2:5, 6); Col. 2:9-15 (especially 2:12, 13); and 3:1-11. Here in Phil. 3:10 (as in all the references just cited), the apostle is thinking, at least for the most part, of the power (the resurrection power that has spiritually resurrected/raised Christians through union with Christ by the Holy Spirit) that enables them to live in truth, righteousness, holiness, and fruitfulness as born-again Christians.] **and the fellowship of** [or, "participation in" (Greek *koinōnia*)] **His sufferings, being conformed to His death** [We participate in (have fellowship with) Christ's sufferings and are conformed to His death to the extent we truly die to the old man in union with Him and live in faithfulness to Him. (Christ's "sufferings" centered in His atoning death; He was bearing our sins with the guilt and the penalties; He died in our place.) Even as young Christians, we can, and we should, be dead to the old man (e.g., Rom. 6:1-11; 8:12-14; Gal. 5:16, 17, 24; Eph. 4:22-32; Col. 2:11, 12; and 3:1-11 [especially

3:2, 3, 5-9)].⁵³ To the extent we are not conformed to Christ's death (dead to the old man), our lives are not consistent with the new covenant established on the blood of Christ. Several of the cross-references just cited make it clear that the death of the flesh/old man is not automatically achieved nor automatically maintained; we must deny the flesh/old man and walk after the Spirit (based on what the New Testament teaches) on a continuous basis by faith.

What I said in the last paragraph is a big part of the gospel that Paul preached (as confirmed by the cross-references to his epistles that I listed). It also serves as a necessary foundation for what I will say in this paragraph and in the next three paragraphs. Because of the order of Paul's words here in Phil. 3:10—with "the fellowship of/participation in [Christ's] sufferings, being conformed to His death" being mentioned after "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection"—Paul apparently intended a different emphasis on the meaning of "the fellowship of [participation in] His sufferings, being conformed to His death" than I gave in the last paragraph.⁵⁴

Paul apparently was thinking here, at least to some significant extent, of the sufferings that came to him because he was a faithful Christian. (See, for example, Acts 14:22; Phil. 1:27-30; and Rom. 8:17-39.⁵⁵) He was faithful to be conformed to Christ's death, which included being dead to sin but also included his willingness to suffer with Christ (as he frequently did), or even to literally die for Christ (as he ultimately did). For Paul to live was Christ and to die was gain (cf. Phil. 1:21); he had renounced all for Christ (which is required of all Christians).

Romans 8:17 says, "and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* in order that we may also be glorified with *Him*." This verse (Rom. 8:17) is doubly significant in that it speaks of our suffering with Christ (which corresponds with "the fellowship of/participation in His sufferings" spoken of in Phil. 3:10), and it also speaks of our ultimate glorification (which corresponds with the "resurrection from the dead" spoken of in Phil. 3:11). Some suffering comes with the salvation we have received in Christ; we cannot allow such suffering to cause us to back off from pressing on (by grace) in faithfulness to Christ.

Second Corinthians 4:7-18 (especially 4:10, 11) are another important cross-reference for Phil. 3:10, 11. In 2 Cor. 4:7-18 the apostle was speaking about himself (and his ministry team), which is directly applicable to Phil. 3:10, where Paul is speaking of himself.⁵⁶ Second Corinthians 4:10, 11 say, "always carrying about in the body [the

⁵³ To be dead to the old man (to the flesh) includes not doing the sinful works of the old man/of the flesh (cf. Rom. 8:12-14; Gal. 5:19-21, 24). To the extent Christians really are dead to the old man (to the flesh) they won't be sinning. This is good news!

⁵⁴ What I said in the last paragraph is more foundational and more important than the issue the apostle is dealing with here. Paul has already incorporated what I said in the last paragraph into this discourse by speaking of having the righteousness of God in 3:9 and by speaking of knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection here in 3:10, and he will say more about the sanctified life as he continues with this epistle. He also discussed these things to some extent in chapters 1, 2, and Paul knew that his readers understood these things because he had taught them these things.

⁵⁵ These verses from Romans are discussed in some detail in my paper dated July, 2000.

⁵⁶ Even though Paul was speaking of himself (and his ministry team) in 2 Cor. 4:7-18, as being distinct from the Christians at Corinth to whom he ministered, the words of 2 Cor. 4:10, 11, 16-18 have some application for all true Christians. It is important to understand that Paul, even at the time of his conversion, was shown that his call would involve much suffering, much more than the suffering that

physical body] the dying of Jesus [which corresponds with “the fellowship of/participation in His sufferings, being conformed to His death” of Phil. 3:10], that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” (Cf., e.g., 2 Cor. 12:9, 10.) Second Corinthians 4:14, 17, 18 go on to speak of Paul’s (and his ministry team’s) ultimate resurrection and glorification (which corresponds with the “resurrection from the dead” spoken of in Phil. 3:11). Compare 1 Cor. 15:30, 31; 2 Cor. 1:5, 8, 9; and Col. 1:24.

Did Paul include any idea of his progressively dying more and more with the words “being conformed to His death” (Phil. 3:10)? Verses can be cited from Paul to show that we are improved through trials, assuming that we rightly respond to them (e.g., Rom. 5:3, 4; cf. James 1:2-4) and that we will continue to grow in Christ throughout this age (e.g., 2 Cor. 3:18).⁵⁷ But we need not, and I do not, understand Paul to be including the idea of progressively dying with Christ (or of our growing in Christ) here in Phil. 3:10.

What I especially disagree with is the idea of some that Paul was saying here that he was progressively dying to sin, which would mean that he was confessing that he was still living in sin to one degree or another. (See under Phil. 3:12-15.) If we are dead to the old man and are living in the will of God in union with Christ Jesus (walking in the righteousness of God spoken of in Phil. 3:9) by the enablement of the Holy Spirit—which includes suffering with Christ as the need arises—then we are living in a state (an abiding state) consistent with “being conformed to His death.” The apostle certainly was not saying that he had to live a long life full of suffering so that, when he had finally been conformed to Christ’s death (Phil. 3:10), he could be taken to heaven (Phil. 3:11).

Above, in the first paragraph under the words of Phil. 3:10 that we are discussing (“and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death”), I listed some key verses that show that Paul’s typical viewpoint was that we are to be dead (not just gradually dying) to the old man and to sin.⁵⁸ I’ll quote another relevant verse from the apostle, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh [speaking of the life he was still living in this world in a physical body] I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20).

I’ll quote from three commentators on the meaning of the words, “being conformed to his death.” First I’ll quote from Robert P. Lightner,⁵⁹ “The words ‘becoming like Him’ translate *symmorphizomenos*, which means ‘being conformed inwardly in one’s experience to something’ (cf. Phil. 3:21), in this case, to Christ’s death. As Christ died *for* sin, so a believer has died *to* sin (Rom. 6:2, 6-7; Col. 3:3). He should exhibit that cutting off from his former way by

comes to most Christians (cf., e.g., Acts 9:16). The New Testament confirms that those words regarding Paul’s suffering for the sake of the gospel came to pass, but also that God’s grace was/is sufficient.

⁵⁷ The Bible also shows that God chastens His children, as required, to help motivate them to repent, etc. (e.g., Heb. 12:5-11); but if His people walk in His righteousness and holiness, they will not need to be chastened, and I don’t believe the apostle meant to include the idea of chastening here in Phil. 3:10. Paul is speaking of “the fellowship of [Christ’s] sufferings, being conformed to His death” here, and Christ certainly never sinned so that He needed to be chastened. He did, however, learn about obedience through suffering (Heb. 5:8).

⁵⁸ This viewpoint was not at all limited to the apostle Paul; this is the typical viewpoint presented in the New Testament.

⁵⁹ *Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament* [Victor Books, 1983], page 660.

daily being set apart from sin (Rom. 6:1-4, 11-14) and living a new life by means of Christ's resurrection power (Rom. 6:4)."

I'll also quote from Henry Alford.⁶⁰ "It does not appear to me that St. Paul is here speaking, as Meyer and others maintain, of his imminent risk of a death of martyrdom, but that his meaning is general, applying to his whole course of suffering and self-denial, as indeed throughout the sentence. This conformity with Christ's death was to take place by means of that perfect self-abjuration [giving up rights] which he here asserts of himself – see Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 2:14; 4:10ff.; 1 Cor. 15:31; and especially Gal. 2:20."

Lastly, I'll quote from Ralph. P. Martin,⁶¹ "Conformity to Christ's *death* is best explained in the light of Romans 8:29 and Philippians 3:21. It involves the teaching and experience of Romans 6, where the death and resurrection of Christ are representative acts in which his people share. His death for sin, and to sin, carried the implication that in him we likewise die to the dominion of the old nature and rise to newness of life. When he died at Calvary our death was involved; but its outworking requires the exhortation of Romans 6:11 ["Even so consider (reckon) yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus"], which is another way of saying, 'Be conformed to his death.' Death, however, is the gateway to life. Paul dies to himself that he may live to God (Gal. 2:20). Self, represented by his past life as a Pharisee (see vv. 4-6), is dethroned – indeed, crucified (Gal. 5:24; 6:14) – that Christ might be enthroned as supreme Lord."]; **(11) in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.** [The apostle is speaking here of the yet-future, bodily resurrection into the glory of the fullness of eternal life that will take place when Christ returns. In Phil. 3:20, 21 he speaks of our resurrection into the glory of heaven, our true home ("For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself"), and in Phil. 4:5 he says, "The Lord is near."]

Other translations of these words at the beginning of verse 11 (and the literal translation of the Greek contained in the margin of the NASB, "if somehow," instead of "in order that") seem to better communicate what Paul said here; they make the outcome seem far less certain than the translation of the NASB. The NKJV has, "if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead," and the KJV is similar. The NIV has, "and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." I don't believe that Paul was wondering whether he would make it to glory, or not (cf., e.g., Phil. 1:21, 23). He did, however, understand that it was necessary for him to press on in faith until the end of the race, and he knew that he was committed in his heart to finish the race by the sufficient grace of God in Christ.

The apostle undoubtedly spoke as he did here, with his far-less-than-certain tone, in an attempt to wake up some Christians at Philippi that he knew were not adequately conformed to the death of Christ and pressing on in Him. I assume he could have named some Christians at Philippi, even though this was one of the more solid, healthy churches. (Even Christians that are quite sincere and committed can get out of balance in one direction or another. There are many forces at work trying to keep us from, or get us out of, the center of God's will. That is one reason we must stay humble, open, and teachable before God, and before our brothers and sisters in Christ.) In verses 12-15 Paul goes on using himself as an example of what must be done; he puts most of the

⁶⁰ *New Testament for English Readers*, Vol. 3 [Baker, 1983 reprint], page 1271.

⁶¹ *Philippians* [Inter-Varsity Press, 1987], pages 152, 153.

emphasis on the need for Christians to press on in Christ until the end of the race. If the great apostle to the Gentiles had not arrived and needed to press on, the Philippians did too (and so do we). By using himself as an example, he avoided giving offense as much as possible (but some will always take offense.)] **(12) Not that I have already obtained it** [Paul had not yet finished his race and obtained resurrection glory. (The great apostle has now finished his race, but he must still wait for the return of Christ to obtain the full resurrection glory of the age to come.) Until he finished the race, he—and all Christians, very much including *all* the Christians at Philippi—needed to press on. As an example of how Christians can get out of balance, consider 1 Cor. 4:8, “You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have already become kings without us; and indeed, *I* wish that you had become kings so that we might reign with you.” It is not hard to imagine that those Christians who overstated the extent to which they had arrived were not adequately pressing on in Christ. I do not believe that the Philippian Christians were as far out of balance as the viewpoint reflected in 1 Cor. 4:8, but we all have all-too-much potential to miss the center of God’s will.

First Corinthians chapter 15 shows that some at Corinth went so far as to deny the future resurrection of the body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:12). Somewhat related, if not directly related, to this serious problem that surfaced at Corinth was the viewpoint of two Christian leaders Paul mentioned by name in 2 Tim. 2:17, 18, “*men* who [had] gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection [had] already taken place” (thereby, for one thing, denying the future resurrection of the body). It is not hard to imagine that those who believed that the resurrection was past might be failing to adequately press on in Christ. I don’t believe that the doctrinal problems at Philippi were this serious. If they had been, Paul would undoubtedly have said more than what he said in this epistle to the Philippians to straighten them out.

The problems at Philippi that Paul was dealing with (by using himself as an example of what should be done) probably did not go beyond a failure on the part of some to adequately press on in Christ, which includes the need to disregard the things of the past/of the flesh and to be fully faithful to the new covenant, even when it involves suffering with Christ. All Christians are called (and enabled) to press on with a single-hearted commitment until the race has been completed and the prize has been received.] **or have already become perfect** [This *becoming perfect* (or however we translate the Greek verb here), as the words are used here in Phil 3:12, is speaking of something that will come to pass when Jesus returns and the resurrection from the dead takes place.⁶² Those believers who are still living on the earth when Christ returns will be transformed and caught up into eternal glory at that time; they will *become perfect/complete*.

Many think that with these words the apostle Paul was confessing that he still did not have the victory over sin, even though he was nearing the end of his life.⁶³ And it follows, of course, that *if* the great apostle to the Gentiles did not yet have the victory over sin (that is, *if* he confessed that he was still living in sin to some extent), we certainly could not expect to have the victory either. I don’t believe, however, that Paul

⁶² It is also true, of course, that for those Christians who die before Jesus returns (like the apostle Paul), their race is over and they go to heaven, but they still must wait for the time of the resurrection and full glorification.

⁶³ The most common view is that Paul wrote this epistle to the Philippians while a prisoner at Rome about AD 60-63. He had been converted some thirty years earlier, about AD 32, and he apparently was martyred in Rome about AD 65-67.

confessed here (or anywhere else in his writings) that he had not been walking in righteousness and holiness with the victory over all sin.⁶⁴ All he said here was that he had not already become perfect/complete (or, we could translate “have already reached my goal”) in the sense that he had not arrived yet at his goal of resurrection perfection/completeness. He (and *all* the Christians at Philippi and everywhere else) must, therefore, keep running the race; they must keep pressing on until they arrive at that goal (or at least until their assigned race on the earth has been completed).

The Greek lexicons confirm that the Greek verb used here (*teleioō*) includes the meanings of *completing* and *bringing to a goal*. A translation like “have already been made complete,” or “have already reached my goal” (note the use of the word *goal* in Phil. 3:14) would also be quite acceptable, along with the translation of the NASB.⁶⁵ In the article on this Greek verb in the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* under Phil. 3:12, H. Hübner translates, “not as if I already *had reached my goal*.”⁶⁶ The NRSV has, “or have already reached the goal”; the *New American Bible* has, “or have already finished my course”; and the *New Testament in the Language of Today* by William F. Beck has, “or am already at the goal.” It is quite clear that Paul had not been made complete/perfect or reached his goal in the full and final sense of being glorified and taken to heaven. He (and all Christians) must, therefore, keep running the race, keep pressing on as long as he lives, or until Jesus returns.

With the translation of the NASB (which is essentially the same as the KJV, NKJV, and NIV), we can rightly understand what Paul meant: He had not yet become *perfect* in the full and final sense of glorification. Whichever way we translate the Greek verb here, I don’t believe that Paul was confessing that he still did not have the victory over all sin—that idea was not inferred at all. (It is true, however, that those who are still running the race still have the all-to-real potential to sin.) To help substantiate the important point that the translation “Not that I...have already become perfect” need not, and should not, be understood to mean that Paul was confessing that he was still sinning to some extent (if we translate Phil. 3:12 that way, with the NASB), see Heb. 2:10; 5:9; and 7:8, where the NASB, NIV, and NKJV all translate this same Greek verb “to perfect, make perfect” (or the equivalent). All these verses from the book of Hebrews refer to the Lord Jesus Christ, and no Christian will suggest that Jesus was sinning in the days before he was made perfect. He was made perfect/complete only after His death on the cross and His resurrection and glorification in the sense He was then able to be our great high priest, having defeated sin, Satan, and death (including spiritual death) in His atoning death.

It will be instructive to consider the Greek adjective *teleios*, from which the verb *teleioō* was derived. For one thing, this adjective is used in a significant way in Phil. 3:15, which we’ll discuss as we continue. This adjective is used in 1 Cor. 13:10 of our

⁶⁴ I’m not saying that Paul would necessarily say that he had not sinned since he became a Christian, but he certainly didn’t confess that he continued to sin, quite the contrary. See the second and third paragraphs at the beginning of this chapter. What I am especially concerned about is the widespread but mistaken idea that the apostle Paul taught that all Christians will necessarily continue to sin to some extent. That viewpoint makes it impossible to have faith for victory over sin.

⁶⁵ The translation of the NASB (“or have already become perfect”) is acceptable as long as we don’t understand Paul to mean that he was still living in sin to some extent. We’ll discuss this point as we continue.

⁶⁶ Edited by H. Balz and G. Schneider, Vol. 3 [Eerdmans, 1993], page 344.

yet-future perfected/completed state in heaven. The New Testament uses of this adjective that are the most important for our present purpose are those uses where we are told that all Christians are (enabled and) expected to be (relatively) *perfect* (see, for example, Matt. 5:48; 1 Cor. 2:6 with 3:1-3; Phil. 3:15; and Col. 4:12). Christians who are (relatively) perfect certainly walk with victory over sin; to be (relatively) perfect is rather parallel in meaning with saying (as the New Testament frequently says) that Christians are enabled and required to be righteous, holy, and blameless as they walk on a continuous basis in/by/after the Holy Spirit through faith.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3 demonstrate that the Corinthian Christians (at least some of them) were anything but spiritual (by the Spirit); they were fleshly, living (at least in some ways and to some extent) like mere men (like non-Christians). That is why they were not (relatively) perfect as they could and should have been (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6). The apostle made it very clear that it was not acceptable for them to remain in that fleshly state. It was and is a dangerous place to be.

The verb *teleioō* is also used of a (relative) perfection of Christians in Heb. 10:14 and 11:40.⁶⁷ Also, see the subsection titled “A Discussion on the Overall Teaching of the Book of Ephesians Regarding How Long It Should Take for Christians to Become Holy/Spiritual (by the Spirit)/(Relatively) Perfect” on pages 31-34 of my paper dated July 2000.

I’ll quote a paragraph from what Ralph Earle said on the meaning of the verb here in Phil. 3:12 and on the meaning of the adjective in 3:15,⁶⁸ “On the basis of the same Greek root in verses 12 and 15 it would seem that KJV and NASB were more consistent in using ‘perfect’ in both places. But since Paul denies perfection in verse 12 and seems to claim it in verse 15, it may well be that one is justified in using ‘perfect’ in verse 12 and ‘mature’ in verse 15 (RSV, NEB, NIV). A. T. Robertson [a noted Greek scholar] comments on verse 15: ‘Here the term *teleioi* [a plural form of *teleios*] means relative perfection, not the absolute perfection so pointedly denied in verse 12’ (WP, 4:455). The context suggests that in verse 12 Paul is denying resurrection perfection. We may say that in verse 15 he claims what John Wesley called Christian perfection.”], **but I press on** [This verb, which is of key importance in this discourse, is repeated in verse 14. As I mentioned, Paul was undoubtedly using himself as an example of what all Christians must do because he knew that some at Philippi were not adequately pressing on (and the problem, of course, was not limited to ancient Philippi).] **so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.** [Paul had not yet laid hold of the yet-future eternal life/eternal glory to which he (and all Christians) had been called (cf., e.g., 1 Tim. 6:12, 19). This includes the resurrection from the dead and the ultimate perfection/completeness (or, reaching the goal) spoken of in the first part of Phil. 3:12. The apostle had been laid “hold of by Christ Jesus” in a rather dramatic (and merciful) way (cf. Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-16). The Lord also asked quite a bit of Paul in his ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles.] **(13) Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet** [The Greek verb (*katalambanō*) translated “having laid hold of it yet” here was used twice in verse 12. Paul is speaking of laying hold of resurrection glory (resurrection perfection).]; **but one thing I do: forgetting** [I believe a translation like “disregarding [caring nothing

⁶⁷ On those important verses from the book of Hebrews, see pages 157-159; 166, 167 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.

⁶⁸ *Word Meanings in the New Testament* [Baker, 1986], page 343.

about]”⁶⁹ for this Greek verb (*epilanthanomai*) would better communicate what Paul intended here. The translation “forgetting” fits better with the idea of *forgetting* the sinful things of the past. A translation like *disregarding* fits better with the idea of *disregarding* the things of the past to which we might cling (cf., e.g., Luke 9:62) and/or in which we might wrongly boast, which seems to fit this passage better. We do, however, have the privilege of *disregarding/forgetting* all the sinful and negative things from our past too—thanks be to God! Serious runners cannot afford to be distracted by looking back for any reason—with total devotion we must press on until the race is over (cf., e.g., Heb. 12:1, 2).] **what lies behind** [“What *lies* behind” includes the old man in his entirety, very much including the things of the flesh in which Paul used to boast (cf. Phil. 3:3-8) and in which some still were boasting (cf. Gal. 6:12-16). It is also true (whether Paul was thinking of these things here, or not) that we cannot rest on our past accomplishments/victories in Christ (even if our past life in Christ was all that it should have been)—we must continue to press on in Christ until the race is over.] **and reaching forward to what lies ahead, (14) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.** [Compare 1 Cor. 9:23-27. The “prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” refers to the prize of being caught up into the glory of eternal life when Christ returns. We could include the idea here of *the upward call* that initiates the rapture/catching up into the eternal glory of heaven (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rev. 11:12). Throughout Phil. 3:11-14 the apostle repeatedly speaks of the same ultimate goal for all Christians, using different terminology that expresses the same basic reality—if we miss that ultimate goal, we miss everything. In Phil. 3:11 he mentions the “resurrection from the dead”; in 3:12a he mentions obtaining *it* (eternal resurrection glory) and becoming perfect/complete (or, reaching the goal); in 3:12b he mentions laying hold of that for which also he was laid hold of by Christ Jesus (which speaks of the same basic reality, the eternal glory of heaven); in 3:13 he acknowledges that he has not laid hold of *it* yet so he must continue to reach forward to what *lies* ahead (the same prize of eternal glory); and finally, in 3:14 he says he presses on for this same prize. The apostle certainly belabored the point. He must have known that it was important to include this emphasis.

There can be no denying that the yet-future glory is extremely important (this is what we are saved for: to enjoy the presence of God and worship and serve Him forever), and there can be no denying that Christians must make pressing on toward that goal top priority. These verses make all the more sense if, as I have suggested, Paul knew that some of his beloved brethren at Philippi were not adequately pressing on, for whatever reason(s).] **(15) Let us therefore, as many as are perfect** [(The NIV and NKJV have “mature.”) One reason that these words are so important is that they help steer us away from the wrong interpretation of the words “or have already become perfect” of Phil. 3:12 (if we translate the Greek verb that way in Phil. 3:12, which is a good translation as long as we don’t read wrong ideas into it, ideas that Paul never intended). Here in

⁶⁹ See the BAGD Greek Lexicon. Gordon Fee (*Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*) translates “disregarding” on page 339, and on page 347, in a footnote, he says (in part), “Although the word can sometimes mean ‘forget’ in the sense of ‘not remembering,’ in figurative usage such as this one it more likely means ‘to pay no attention to, be unconcerned about’ . . .” The *New American Bible* has, “I give no thought to what lies behind.” The *New Testament in Modern English* by J. B. Phillips has, “I leave [the past] behind.” This leaving the past behind goes with having died to the old man and being conformed to Christ’s death.

Phil. 3:15 Paul speaks of those who are (relatively) *perfect*, very much including himself. This use of the word *perfect* is rather common in the New Testament. (See under Phil. 3:12. As I mentioned there, the verb used in Phil. 3:12 was derived from the adjective used here in 3:15.) All Christians can, and should, be *perfect* in a relative sense (or you could translate *mature*, but I prefer the translation *perfect* here and in quite a few other verses), which is rather parallel in meaning with saying that they can, and should, and must walk by/in/after the Holy Spirit through faith (based on the Word of God) and be righteous and holy. This is consistent Christianity (consistent with what we are called to in the new covenant).

When the apostle wrote these words, he was probably thinking of some Christians at Philippi who thought of themselves as *perfect*, but who were not really living that way, not by Paul's definition of *perfect*. What they must do if they really want to be (relatively) *perfect* (as they should be), the apostle has been telling them, and he will go on telling them with the next few words of this sentence. Based on what Paul has been emphasizing, their primary problem must have been that they were not adequately pressing on toward the ultimate goal. Christians who are clinging to the things of the flesh and/or Christians who overstate how much they have arrived will not be motivated to press on as they must.], **have this attitude** [I would translate "think this way," or the equivalent. The KJV has, "be thus minded"; the NKJV has, "have this mind"; and the NIV has, "should take such a view of things." The way they must think is the way Paul thought, which he has laid out for them in the preceding verses, using himself as an example of what all Christians must do. They must press on in Christ with a whole-hearted devotion, disregarding the things of the past/of the flesh. When I mention *thinking*, I am speaking, for the most part (as the Bible typically does), of the high-level thinking we do in our hearts (which includes our attitudes, motives, and priorities), not of thinking that is limited to our heads. I have noticed over the years that there is a widespread (but wrong) viewpoint around the body of Christ (but not with the scholars) that the words *thinking* and *mind* are to be limited to the thinking we do in our heads. Very often, for example, when a pastor or a teacher mentions the mind he points to his head. This may be a common use of the words *mind* and *thinking* in popular English, but what we need to know is what Paul meant by the word(s).]; **and if in anything you have a different attitude** ["you are thinking differently"], **God will reveal that also to you** [To those Christians at Philippi who were not adequately pressing on, which included clinging to, or boasting in, the things of the past/the things of the flesh, Paul said that God would reveal those things to them. Paul was assuming that the Christians at Philippi were submitted to his ministry and, more importantly, that they were committed to God and to His truth, including what Paul has been saying to them in these verses.]; **(16) however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.** [We must continue to maintain the things that are right while making any and all necessary adjustments as God reveals the need to us (through His Word, directly by His Spirit, or through another Christian, especially His ministers) to bring our lives into divine order.] **(17) Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. (18) For many walk** [It doesn't seem that Paul includes any of the Philippian Christians (his beloved brethren at Philippi) among those he goes on to speak of in an extremely negative way. Many "Christians" would show up in Philippi from other places. (For one thing,

Philippi was located on a major east–west Roman highway.) Furthermore, although (at least some of) the Judaizers that Paul spoke of in Phil. 3:2 could be included in the *many* of Phil. 3:18, the *many* are not at all limited to them. The Christians at Philippi (and all Christians everywhere and at all times) must be careful regarding who they fellowship with and especially who they submit to as ministers. “Ministers” that are not walking as they should walk (or “ministers” that are peddling false doctrine; false doctrine and sinful living often go together) can cause *great* damage to the Christian church.], **of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ** [They claim to be Christians, but they are “enemies of the cross of Christ” in that they have not submitted to the sanctifying power of the cross of Christ. Their hearts are fixed on the things of the world, and their lives are characterized by sin. “They profess to know God, but by *their* deeds [works] they deny Him” (Titus 1:16a).], **(19) whose end is destruction** [Even though they think of themselves as Christians, their citizenship is not in heaven (contrast Phil. 3:20)—they will not end up in heaven (unless they repent).], **whose god is *their* appetite** [“Literally, belly.” Compare Rom. 16:18. Putting the priority on the things of the body like what we eat goes with living for the world instead of living for God’s kingdom (cf. Rom. 14:17). I’ll quote part of what Craig S. Keener said under this verse,⁷⁰ “Graeco-Roman philosophers and non-Palestinian Jewish writers (especially Philo) repeatedly railed against those ruled by their passions, often remarking that they were ruled by their ‘belly’ (KJV, NRSV) or their (sexual or culinary) ‘appetite’ (NASB), disdaining their neglect of eternal things. Gluttony especially became part of Roman culture, and its practice by the aristocracy was a frequent butt of satirists’ humor. But being ruled by one’s ‘belly’ meant more than gluttony; it was used to mean any fleshly indulgence....”], **and whose glory is in their shame** [Instead of pressing on to enter the glory of heaven (cf. Phil. 3:7-16), these worldly-minded “Christians” *gloried* in the *shameful* things they were doing.], **who set their minds on earthly things** [instead of setting their minds on (thinking on) heavenly things (cf. Rom. 8:5-8⁷¹; Col. 3:2). The same Greek verb (*phroneō*) that is translated “set their minds on” here in Phil. 3:19 (actually it is a participle formed from this verb) is translated “set their minds on [the things of the flesh]” in Rom. 8:5 and is translated “set your minds on [the things above]” in Col. 3:2. This verb could just as well be translated “think” instead of “set the mind on.” This same Greek verb was used twice in Phil. 3:15. Instead of *thinking* like Paul did (see under Phil. 3:15), these worldly-minded “Christians” *thought* on earthly things. As I noted under Phil. 3:15, *thinking* (and the *mind*) in the Bible typically includes the thinking we do in our hearts.]. **(20) For our citizenship is in heaven** [Even now we are citizens of heaven (cf., e.g., Luke 10:20; Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1; Heb. 12:22, 23; Rev. 13:8; and 17:8).], **from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior [cf. 1 Cor. 1:7], the Lord Jesus Christ; (21) who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory** [Compare 1 Cor. 15:42-53. There is a whole lot more involved here than the transformation/glorification of the physical body. Our entire being and existence will be glorified (cf., e.g., Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:19-21; Col. 3:4; 1 John 3:2; and Rev. 22:3-5).], **by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.** [Cf. 1 Cor. 15:23-28.]

⁷⁰ *Bible Background Commentary – New Testament* [Inter-Varsity Press, 1993], page 564.

⁷¹ See pages 118-120 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* on these verses.

JAMES 3:1-4:10

This entire passage is important, but the main reason I wanted to discuss these verses is that James 3:2 is frequently cited as a verse that supposedly proves that all Christians will necessarily continue to sin. If we limit ourselves to the first words of James 3:2 (“For we all stumble in many ways”), James seems to be saying that all Christians will necessarily continue to sin. However, when we consider what James went on to say in the rest of this verse and some of the things he said in other parts of this epistle, and when we consider the writing style of James, I don’t believe he meant to say that all Christians will necessarily continue to sin. I request the reader to withhold judgment on this important question until after reading this present chapter.

If James was saying that all Christians will necessarily continue to sin, he was making a statement out of sync with the rest of the New Testament. Also, even if James actually meant to say that all Christians will necessarily continue to sin, his words (“For we all stumble in many ways”) would not have the power to modify to any appreciable extent what the New Testament so clearly teaches in so many places about Christians being called and enabled to walk in righteousness and holiness with the victory over all sin.

Admittedly, many Christians think that there are quite a few other verses in the Bible, besides James 3:2, that prove that Christians are not able to stop sinning in this life. As I have discussed in my previous writings, I don’t believe that any of these verses actually teach that Christians cannot live above sin.⁷² From my point of view, these verses are being misinterpreted. Although I don’t believe that James meant to say that all Christians will necessarily continue to sin in 3:2a, I acknowledge that it is not totally impossible that he meant to say that. Even if James did mean to say that (and, again, I don’t believe he did), the other things that he said in this epistle would *greatly* qualify how far he would go with that idea.

The most common view is that this epistle was written by the apostle James (cf. Mark 6:3; Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:18; 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19; and 2:9, 12), not one of the twelve apostles, a (half) brother of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that it was probably written in the mid 40s (though it could have been written as late as AD 60, or so).

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. [Ultimately it is up to God who should become teachers (and in what capacity they should be teaching) in the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 14:12, 28; Eph. 4:11). If God is calling a person to become a teacher, they must answer the call, but James’ warning here is appropriate. James undoubtedly knew that some were becoming “teachers” who had not been called by God to teach. It is hazardous to call

⁷² For a start see the section titled “A Discussion of the Three Most Important Passages Often Used to Try to Prove that Christians Cannot Walk in Victory Over Sin During this Present Age,” which starts on page 194 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*. The three passages are Rom. 7:14-25; 1 John 1:8; and Gal. 5:17. See the section titled “What is Sin?” starting on page 214 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*. There I discussed 1 Tim. 1:15 (with 1:12-16), which is another verse frequently listed (see page 219). I also discussed Rom. 14:23 there (page 215). (For a verse-by-verse discussion of Rom. 14:1-23 see pages 91-95 of the *Paper on Faith*.) Philippians 3:12, which is another verse frequently listed, is discussed in this present paper.

ourselves into the ministry. If God has not called and equipped us, we are going to be ministering in the flesh, and we are certain to mess things up to one degree or another. (Things like a high IQ or a good education are not sufficient to qualify a person to become a teacher in the body of Christ.) We are all going to have to answer to God.

The more authority we have in the body of Christ in areas like teaching, the more potential we have to harm (or to bless) God's people. With authority comes responsibility. This is serious business. And we certainly must refrain from teaching in the body of Christ from any motive of self-glory (which we must all carefully guard against since it is relatively easy for Christians to walk after the flesh instead of the Spirit.) **(2) For we all stumble in many ways.** [These words deserve our careful attention. *Stumbling* need not involve sin (there can, for example, be innocent mistakes), but when James says here that "we all stumble in many ways" right after the words "we will incur a stricter judgment," he is speaking, at least for the most part, of sin. This point is also confirmed by the use of the verb *stumble* in James 2:10.

Did James really mean to say that all Christians (including the twelve apostles, Paul, James himself, and all those in leadership in the church) will necessarily continue to sin in many ways? I don't believe he did. I'll list several factors that lead me to the viewpoint that James didn't intend to communicate the idea that all Christians will continue to sin in many ways:

1. James says a lot in this epistle about the need for Christians to walk in faith and live in righteousness, including the need to persevere in righteousness during difficult times, and he says these things in very strong ways—he takes a very strong stand against Christians having any sin—the epistle is literally packed with such teaching and exhortation (see James 1:2-8, 12-27; 2:1-26; 3:9-18; 4:1-17; 5:7-12, 16, 19, 20).⁷³ Many of these verses are quite powerful regarding the need for Christians to live in the center of God's will with total devotion and total loyalty to Him. Such teaching/exhortation by James is very relevant to the question as to whether he meant to communicate the idea (in the first words of 3:2) that all Christians will necessarily continue to sin in many ways.
2. It is very significant that James goes on with his very next words (in James 3:2) to speak of those who do *not* stumble in what they say. (Compare Matt. 12:33-37.) It seems that James intended these following words to greatly qualify what he had just written. He says that such Christians are (relatively) perfect,⁷⁴ able to control the whole body (in other words, they are able to always live in righteousness, in the will of God) in that they are able to control the tongue (which, according to James, is the hardest to control). It is very significant that

⁷³ James 1:2-8 are discussed on pages 64, 65 of the *Paper on Faith*. James 1:12-15, 21, 22; and 5:19, 20 are discussed on pages 9, 10 of *Once Saved, Always Saved?* James 2:14-26 are discussed on pages 65-67 of the *Paper on Faith*. James 1:18-2:13 are discussed on pages 20-23 of *The Christian, the Law, and Legalism*, and James 4:11, 12 are discussed on pages 23, 24 of that paper. James 3:9-4:10 are discussed later in this present paper.

⁷⁴ In 1:4 James speaks of Christians becoming "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." On being relatively *perfect*, see under Phil. 3:12, 15 in this paper. The word *perfect* in James 1:4 and 3:2 (as in quite a few other verses of the New Testament [see under Phil. 3:12, 15 in this paper]), includes walking in righteousness and holiness (by the grace/Spirit of God) with the victory over sin.

the statement “If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is able to bridle the whole body as well” is a class-1 condition in the Greek.⁷⁵ That is, the *if* clause (“*If* anyone does not stumble in what he says”) is assumed to be true by James. But how could James seriously say here in 3:2 that Christians can refrain from stumbling (in any sinful ways) in what they say? In James 3:8, for example, he says that no one is able to tame the tongue. The all-important answer, the new-covenant answer, is that what man in the flesh cannot do, he can do by the “greater grace” (spoken of in James 4:6) which God makes available to His born-again children. It is very significant that James has already informed us in 1:26 that Christians are able to control/bridle their tongues: “If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle [control] his tongue but deceives his *own* heart, this man’s religion is worthless.” On bridle/control, see below, still under James 3:2. In 1:19 James said “But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.”

3. It fits a pattern found elsewhere in the New Testament for a writer to make a sweeping generalization (like “we all stumble in many ways”), then to follow with a statement that greatly qualifies what he just said (like “if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well”). Let’s consider John 1:11, 12a: “He [the Word/Logos, the Son of God, by and through whom all things (including all persons/beings) had been created (cf. John 1:1-4)] came to His own [He came to His own when He came to the earth (cf. John 1:9, 14) through the virgin birth.], and those who were His own did not receive Him. [The Son of God came to His own (mankind), which was part of that which had been created by and through Him; they owed Him everything; nevertheless, they rejected Him. The Greek rather strongly supports the idea that the Son of God came to those who had been created by and through Him in that the Greek words translated “His own” are neuter plural, viewing mankind as part of that which had been created by and through Him. Some think “His own” refers to the Jews. Even if “His own” did refer to the Jews, John 1:11, 12a would still serve well as an example of making a sweeping statement and then greatly qualifying it, but John 1:11 says so much more, and fits the overall context of John 1:1-18 so much better, if we see mankind, not just the Jews, rejecting Christ. For one thing, there is widespread agreement that John wrote his Gospel especially for Gentile Christians.] (12) But as many as received Him...” After just being told that His own/mankind did not receive Him, we now learn (thank God!) that some (even many) did receive Him. They submitted to Him in faith. They became born-again Christians (John 1:12, 13).
4. In this epistle James sometimes makes sweeping negative statements that at first seem to be spoken to (or apply to) all his readers but which clearly do not refer to all his readers (see James 4:1-10; 3:5-12; these verses will be discussed as we continue). Furthermore, James makes sweeping statements that lump together

⁷⁵ See, for example, A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 6 [Broadman, 1933], page 39.

and condemn all the rich, which undoubtedly need substantial qualification (see James 1:10, 11; 2:6, 7; and 5:1-6).

5. Even if James intended to communicate the idea that all Christians will continue to stumble/sin in many ways with the first words of 3:2 (and I don't believe that he did), he made it very clear in the verses we are discussing (3:1-4:10), and in other verses of this epistle (see number 1 above), that this ought not (must not) be. Especially relevant is what James said about God's "greater grace" in 4:6. Many commentators agree that James was speaking of the enabling *grace* of God that would meet the need to rise above the sinful state pictured in 4:1-5, and they agree that James was saying that God demands a whole-hearted, one-hundred percent, total allegiance from His people. I have included quite a few excerpts from commentators under James 4:4-6 in this paper to help demonstrate these points. Based on what many commentators say under James 4:1-6 you wouldn't expect them to understand James 3:2 in a way that proves that Christians will continue to sin in many ways, but some of them do. I am sure that one of the main reasons they have no difficulty understanding James 3:2 that way is that they believe that other verses (especially 1 John 1:8 and Rom. 7:14-25) have already proved once for all that all Christians will necessarily continue to sin as long as they live in this world. Many commentators mention 1 John 1:8 when they discuss the words "for we all stumble in many ways" of James 3:2. On 1 John 1:8 see footnote 72.

I'll quote part of what Adam Clarke (AD 1760-1832), an associate of John Wesley, said under James 3:2.⁷⁶ "*In many things we offend all* [κιν]. 'We all stumble or trip.' Some have produced these words as a proof that 'no man can live without sinning against God; for James himself, a holy apostle, speaking of himself, all the apostles, and the whole Church of Christ, says, *In many things we offend all* [we all stumble in many ways].' This is a very bad and dangerous doctrine; and pushed to its consequences, would greatly affect the credibility of the whole gospel system." Clarke (in agreement with the early Methodists and many others) believed that Christians can and should live above sin by the grace of God in Christ.] **If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.** [The meaning of these important words is discussed above (under number 2). The Greek behind "to bridle" is an infinitive of the verb *chalinagōgeō*. This infinitive could also be translated "to control," or "to keep in check." A participle of this same Greek verb was used in James 1:26, which is an important cross-reference that is quoted above. The reader should also know that this Greek verb was derived from the Greek noun *chalinōs*, which is the noun translated "bits" in James 3:3. (A plural form of the noun is used in James 3:3.) This noun can also be translated *bridle*.] **(3) Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well.** [Compare Psalm 32:9. In the Greek this is another class-1 condition (the *if* clause in assumed to be true). By this illustration, James backs up the point that if we can control the tongue (control what we say)— which we can by the grace/Spirit of God in Christ—we can control the entire body.] **(4) Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder**

⁷⁶ Adam Clarke's *Commentary on the Bible*, abridged by Ralph Earle [Baker, 1967], page 1293.

wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. (5) So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. [James compares the tongue with the rudder on a ship. Even though the tongue is small compared with the body, as the rudder is small compared with the ship, the tongue has great power to work for evil (or for good), even as the rudder has power to control the direction of the ship.] **See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! (6) And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.** [Compare Prov. 16:27; Matt. 15:18-20. Even as a very small flame can set the entire forest on fire, so too the tongue, though it is quite small, can set the course of *our* life on fire (and the fire typically spreads to damage other lives, sometimes many other lives). This evil fire certainly does not originate with God; it is inspired by hell (that is, it comes from Satan and his kingdom [cf. James 3:15, 16]).] **(7) For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. (8) But no one can tame the tongue** [Fallen man (man in spiritual death and in bondage to sin), cannot tame the tongue. That is why all men need the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. I'll quote from Walter W. Wessel,⁷⁷ "But certainly God can tame it! ...the Lord has controlled it in the lives of many to bring great blessing to mankind."]; **it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison** [cf. Psalm 140:3; Rom. 3:13]. **(9) With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God** [cf. Gen. 1:26; 9:6]; **(10) from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.** [James doesn't mean to say, I don't believe, that all Christians "curse men" (or continue in other sinful behaviour). "These things ought not to be [they must not be] this way," and they will not be this way for those who have been given birth/been born again (James 1:18⁷⁸) and who walk in the wisdom of God (James 3:13-18), fully appropriating the "greater grace" that God gives to the humble (James 4:6).⁷⁹ They bridle their tongues (James 1:26), and they keep themselves unstained by the world (James 1:27). The problem of Christians having a double tongue (speaking both good and bad) relates directly to the problem mentioned in James 1:8 and 4:8, the problem of being "double-minded." The Greek adjective (*dipsuchos*) translated *double-minded* was formed from a word meaning *twice/double* and the word for *soul*. The double-minded man is divided in his heart/soul/spirit/mind/inner man instead of having the heart fixed on God. Christ came to renew the hearts/souls/spirits/minds/inner man of men, and when Christians walk after the Spirit through faith, a faith that is based on what the Word of God says (which is far from automatic), their hearts will be right, and their speech will be right (Matt. 12:33-37).] **(11) Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? (12) Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.** [These two verses expand on the fact that blessing and cursing (sin and righteousness) ought not (and in

⁷⁷ *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* [Moody Press, 1962], page 1436.

⁷⁸ The NASB has, "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures." The Greek verb translated "He brought [us] forth" could just as well be translated "to give [us] birth" with the NIV.

⁷⁹ It isn't enough to be born of the Spirit, we must walk in/by/after the Spirit by faith—which we can do (cf., e.g., Gal. 5:16-25; Rom. 8:12-14). These verses are discussed in *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.

some ways and to some extent *must not* and *cannot*) come from the same person/heart (cf., e.g., Matt. 7:15-20; 12:33-37).

I'll quote part of what John MacArthur said under James 3:2-12.⁸⁰ First I'll quote part of what he said under James 3:2b-5a. This first excerpt deals with the very important words of James 3:2b ("If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well"). "But the term [perfect] can also mean complete, or mature [we could say relatively perfect]. If that is the sense intended here, the idea is that a person who *does not stumble in what he says* gives evidence of a purified and mature heart, which is the source of his righteous speech. ... We could never be *perfect* in the sense that Jesus is perfect, in speech or in any other way, but we can, in the Holy Spirit's power, have a spiritually mature and sanctified heart that is expressed through mature, sanctified, God-honoring speaking and teaching. ...

James then makes a remarkable claim, declaring that a Christian who can bridle his tongue is *able to bridle the whole body as well*. In this context, *body* seems to refer to the person in general, to his whole being. In other words, if we can control our tongues – which respond so readily and limitlessly to sin – then controlling everything else will follow. If the Holy Spirit has control of this most volatile and intractable part of our being, how much more susceptible to His control will the rest of our lives be" (pages 151, 152).

I'll also quote part of what MacArthur said under James 3:10, "... The idea is that there should be no place in a Christian's life for duplicitous speech. It is an unacceptable and intolerable compromise of righteous, holy living. When God transformed us, He gave us the capacity for new, redeemed, holy speech, and He expects us, as His children, to speak only that which is holy and right. ..." (page 161).

I appreciate what MacArthur said in these excerpts, but it would not be fair to him or accurately reflect what he believes if I did not discuss further what he said under these verses. On page 151, when discussing the meaning of James' words *we all stumble in many ways*, MacArthur mentioned several verses (Prov. 20:9; 2 Chron. 6:36; Rom. 3:23; and 1 John 1:8; cf. 1 John 1:10) to back up the idea that all Christians will necessarily continue to sin in many ways. On page 158 he added Rom. 7:18 and Gal. 5:17 to the list. The first two verses are not very relevant regarding whether new-covenant believers can walk in victory over sin in that they come from the Old Testament, from the days before the sin problem was solved through the atoning death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The next verse listed by MacArthur, Rom. 3:23 doesn't say that Christians will continue to sin; it only says that all have sinned and need salvation in Christ Jesus. Regarding 1 John 1:8; Rom. 7:18; and Gal. 5:17, see footnote 72.] (13) [In 3:13-4:10 James goes on to speak of the need for Christians to live right —this is not presented as an option—in agreement with the *wisdom* that comes from God and by the enablement of His "greater grace" (James 4:6). These verses are not totally disconnected from the verses we have been discussing that deal mostly with the need for Christians to control their tongues and always speak right, as Christians can and should and must do. Our speech is part of our behavior, and the victory over all sin comes from the same source—full salvation in Christ Jesus. In James 3:13-18 there is a strong emphasis on the need for peace, gentleness, divine order, etc. These necessary things, James says, go with (are part of) the wisdom and truth (and salvation) of God.] **Who among you is wise [Greek *sophos*] and**

⁸⁰ *James* [Moody Press, 1998].

understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds [works] in the gentleness of wisdom [that is, in the gentleness that comes with (is part of) the wisdom that comes from God; the NIV translates, “the humility that comes from wisdom”]. [The Greek noun *sophia*, which is translated “wisdom,” was derived from the Greek adjective (*sophos*), which was used earlier in this verse. There is a strong emphasis on *wisdom* in James 3:13-18. For one thing, the word *wisdom* is used again in verses 15 and 17. The wisdom that comes from God (James 3:13, 17; cf. James 1:5⁸¹) is contrasted with the worldly, demonic “wisdom” (which is not real wisdom) that is pictured in 3:14-16. The wisdom that comes from God goes with “the truth [of God]” that is mentioned in 3:14. Ephesians 4:24 shows that righteousness and holiness go with (are part of) the *truth* of God. James 3:13-18 show that righteousness and holiness (including the “good behavior” and “gentleness” of James 3:13 and all the good things that are listed in 3:17, 18) go with (are part of) the *wisdom* that comes from God. It should be noted that all the good things that come with (are part of) the wisdom of God can be considered *fruit* that is produced by the Holy Spirit.⁸² Also, the wisdom of God itself comes to us through the Holy Spirit (including the wisdom contained in the Holy Scriptures) as do the righteousness and holiness of God. These things are all part of the full salvation offered to mankind in and through Christ Jesus.

I’ll quote part of what Douglas J. Moo said under this verse.⁸³ “... [The way we think in our hearts determines the way we will live.] ... James is true to the Old Testament conception of wisdom as a way of life, the attitude and conduct typical of a godly person. ... *In the meekness [or, humility] of wisdom* is to be taken as qualifying the *works*; they are to be done ‘in meekness’ that characterizes, or springs from, ‘wisdom’ Jesus, who was himself ‘meek’ (Matt. 11:29), pronounced a blessing on those who were meek (Matt. 5:5). This Christian meekness involves a healthy understanding of our own unworthiness before God and a corresponding humility and lack of pride in our dealings with our fellow-men.” **(14) But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition [or, strife] in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.** [Compare Rom. 2:8; James 3:16; and 5:19. All sin lies against the truth. Things like bitter jealousy and selfish ambition (or, strife) do not come from God, and they are not part of the truth (or wisdom, or righteousness) of God.] **(15) This wisdom is not that which comes down from above** [It does not come from God (cf. James 1:17).], **but is earthly** [cf. 1 Cor. 2:6; 3:19], **natural** [Compare 2 Cor. 1:12; Jude 1:19. The Greek behind this word (“natural”) is the *feminine* adjective *psuchichē*, agreeing with the noun for wisdom in the Greek, which is *feminine*. This adjective was derived from the Greek noun *psuchē*, which is typically translated *soul* or *life* in the New Testament. When it is translated *life*, it is the life of this world, as contrasted with the life of God (spiritual/eternal life by the Spirit of God). The BAGD Greek Lexicon gives “unspiritual” as the meaning of the adjective here in James 3:15

⁸¹ James 1:5 says, “But if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” In this context (James 1:2-8), James was speaking (at least for the most part) of Christians asking God for wisdom that will facilitate their knowing and living in the center of His will (by His grace).

⁸² On the fruit of the Spirit, see Gal. 5:22, 23. Note “gentleness” and “gentle” in James 3:13, 17 and “gentleness” in Gal. 5:23; “peace” and “peaceable” in James 3:17, 18 and “peace” in Gal. 5:22. Many other good things, being “pure” (James 3:17), for example, could be considered fruit of the Spirit.

⁸³ *James* [Inter-Varsity Press, 1985], page 132.

(*unspiritual* in the sense of being devoid of the Holy Spirit). The NIV and the margin of the NASB have “unspiritual.”], **demonic** [The NIV has “of the devil.” Note “set on fire by hell” in James 3:6.], **(16) For where jealousy and selfish ambition** [or, strife] **exist** [cf. James 3:14], **there is disorder and every evil thing.** [These things are “earthly, natural/unspiritual, demonic”; they do not come from God/the Spirit of God; they are not associated with the wisdom of God.] **(17) But the wisdom from above** [from God/the Spirit of God] **is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. (18) And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.** [The “fruit” that results from God’s people walking in His wisdom (by His grace/Spirit) is “righteousness” (living in accordance with His will/Word). One major point that James makes here is that righteousness will *not* be the result if God’s people do not walk in peace. As I mentioned, there is a strong emphasis in James 1:13-18 on the need for peace, gentleness, divine order, etc. These things are important, and some Christians, very much including some in positions of leadership, often need to be reminded of these things. James 1:20 illustrates this point, “for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.” To the extent that God’s people are walking in the wisdom/truth of God and in the Spirit of God there *will* be peace and there *will* be righteousness.] **(4:1) What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?** [As I mentioned, you could get the very wrong idea from James 4:1-10 (as with other statements by James) that James intended these words of James 4:1-10 to apply to all his readers (even to all Christians). Some Christians understand these verses that way. I am confident that James had no such intention. It is important to see that James would not have considered people who continued in that sinful state (without repentance) to be true Christians (cf., e.g., James 4:4).⁸⁴ In 4:4b James says that such people are enemies of God (not children/people of God).] **Is not the source** [of quarrels and conflicts among you] **your pleasures** [The NIV has “desires.”] **that wage war in your members?** [The warfare originates in the heart (cf., e.g., Mark 7:20-23). All Christians know something of an inner warfare in that the old man (the flesh) has not been annihilated yet. (It will not be annihilated until we are glorified.) Galatians 5:17 is one of the most important verses that mentions this warfare (also see Rom. 8:12-14). But Gal. 5:17, when read in context with Gal. 5:16, shows (as do Rom. 8:12-14) that Christians are enabled by the Spirit to win every battle and not sin (not that the warfare is always easy or enjoyable, or that the victory is automatic). Galatians 5:16 clearly shows that when Christians walk in/by/after the Holy Spirit (which they can do and are required to do on a continuous basis by faith), they will not sin. We must fix our hearts on God, on His Word, and on His righteousness. God does not tolerate a divided heart/double-mindedness (see under James 4:8). I was surprised, pleasantly surprised, that many commentators often made this point, and in strong, unambiguous ways.] **(4:2) You lust and do not have; so you commit murder.** [Most agree that James was not speaking, at least not for the most part (cf. James 5:6a), of literal murder. All Christians have wrong desires at times, but wrong desires do not constitute sin as long as the Christian resists them in the power of the Holy Spirit (e.g., Gal. 5:16, 17; Rom. 8:12-14).] **You are envious and cannot**

⁸⁴ John MacArthur (*James*, page 184) says that “some of the members of the churches to which James wrote were not saved. And because they were enemies of God, they were also enemies of each other and of true believers within the churches.”

obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. [God wants His people to look to Him and to ask Him for all the things they need (e.g., Matt. 6:25-33), but Matt. 6:33 shows that asking will not yield the desired results if His people do not seek Him first (not things) and His kingdom and His righteousness (which includes living right before Him by His grace). First John 3:22 confirms that we must live right before God if we want our prayers to be answered. First John 5:14, 15 teach us that we must ask in accordance with the Father's will. James 1:5-8, along with many other verses, show that we must pray in faith.] **(4:3) You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.** [The things that are asked for in such prayers would not be in accordance with God's will or His righteousness.] **(4:4) You adulteresses** [cf. Matt. 12:39], **do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God** [cf. Rom. 8:7]? **Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world** [cf. Matt. 6:24; John 15:19; James 1:27; 1 John 2:15-17; and 4:1-6] **makes himself an enemy of God.** [James certainly did not mean to say that all his readers (or all Christians) were "adulteresses" against God.⁸⁵ My point is confirmed by many verses throughout this epistle. If they actually were *adulteresses* against God, they would have made themselves *enemies of God*. There is a big difference between being a child of God and being an enemy of God. Some of the people that James called adulteresses probably had never become born-again Christians; such people could repent and submit to the gospel in faith and become true Christians. Some probably were totally backsliden Christians; they could repent.⁸⁶ And some probably were Christians who had a serious problem with a less-than-total commitment to God and His righteousness. James spoke to those he called adulteresses in powerful terms to help wake them up that they might repent from their unacceptable state of Christianity.]

I'll quote part of what George M. Stulac said regarding James 4:4.⁸⁷ He is commenting on the seriousness of the need to choose between friendship with God and friendship with the world. "...the seriousness of the one alternative is made clear with the shocking terms: *you adulterous people, hatred toward God, and enemy of God*. It all sounds so offensive that we are tempted to think that he must be addressing non-Christians rhetorically (similar to his address of the rich oppressors in 5:1). Here, however, he must be addressing his Christian readers [I would say he is addressing some of his "Christian" readers; to the extent the shoe fits, they must repent], for his immediate message is still too closely connected to the hypocritical wisdom and the fights and quarrels *among you* from 3:13 and 4:1. But he is again warning those who call themselves Christians that they may be false Christians who are really enemies of God.

⁸⁵ D. Edmond Hiebert (*Epistle of James* [Moody, 1979], page 250), speaking of the word *adulteresses* here in James 4:4 says, "the plural here implies that James is directing his rebuke at those individuals who were unfaithful to their covenant with Christ as the Bridegroom of the church."

⁸⁶ I believe that we can always counsel backsliden Christians who are wondering if God will accept them back into fellowship that the answer is *yes*. The fact that they have a desire to repent demonstrates that God hasn't given up on them.

⁸⁷ *James* [Inter-Varsity Press, 1993], page 144. I became friends with George Stulac back in the 60s through Memorial Presbyterian Church in St. Louis and through Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship when he was a student at Washington University in St. Louis. I became a born-again Christian in 1964 while attending that church. He went on to become a staff member with IVCF and later to become the pastor of that same Presbyterian church, where he still pastors.

James simply writes with a stronger conviction of the seriousness of sin than most of us are willing to hold. In fact he writes with a sense of moral outrage. ... We should accept James terms [e.g., adulteresses], learn from his acute sense of moral right and wrong, and apply it to ourselves in fear of the judgment that comes to any who are not true Christians. Harboring bitter envy and selfish ambition, with the actions of fighting and quarreling, makes us adulterous people who are treating God with hatred and enmity."

I'll quote part of what Peter H. Davids said here.⁸⁸ "That this self-seeking is tantamount to apostasy appears in the following parallel clauses...(e.g., Rom. 6:16; 1 Cor. 3:16; 5:6; 6:2-19; 9:13-24; cf. 1 Thess. 3:3, 4; 4:2; 2 Thess. 2:6). Two diametrically opposed pairs are presented: friendship and enmity are used to underline the polar opposition between God and the world. Here is a radical ethical dualism of the type found in 1 John 2:15-17 and elsewhere in the Johannine corpus. The world is not the created order or the earth, but the whole system of humanity (its institutions, structures, values, and mores) as organized without God. [The god of this world is the devil.] ... There is no middle point, no compromise. One is either God's friend or his enemy.... This is precisely the point Jesus made (Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13): one must be '100 percent.' Even the attempt...to cultivate the world is disastrous, for that inner disposition constitutes...one not just a compromiser or a poor Christian, but an enemy of God!"

I'll quote part of what Douglas Moo said here.⁸⁹ "James use of 'adulteresses' thus serves to characterize his readers as the unfaithful people of God. ... Certainly James readers were not overtly disclaiming God and consciously deciding to follow the world instead. But their 'jealousy,' 'selfish ambition' and 'unrestrained passion,' exhibiting as they did 'earthly, unspiritual and devilish' attitudes (3:15), amounted to just that. God will brook no rival, and when the believer behaves in a way characteristic of the world, he demonstrates that, at that point, his allegiance is to the world rather than to God. By drawing out the ultimate consequences of worldly behavior in this way, James seeks to prick the consciences of his readers and to stimulate their repentance. They need to recognize that their selfish, quarrelsome behavior is a serious matter indeed."

I'll also quote part of what Ralph P. Martin said under this verse.⁹⁰ "No room for compromise is permitted, as James concludes in the final sentence of the verse: 'Anyone who is determined to be the world's friend sets himself at enmity (lit. 'as an enemy') with God.' ... Those who go this way 'constitute themselves'...as opponents of God. Not that they intend to fall away from God; but rather James is pointing out that such worldly behavior borders seriously on apostasy. He is suggesting that some of the readers do not appreciate that their deliberate choice to befriend the world is actually an action that sets them against God. So he has to summon them to repentance. ... While James seems to be suggesting that the Christians of 4:4 are not without hope (though woefully misguided) [they can still repent], he is quite clear when he says that their present conduct is deplorable and ranks them with the ungodly." **(4:5) Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose** [In that the following "quotation" does not come directly from any verse in the Old Testament, I agree with the many commentators who believe James was referring to an important theme that is found in several verses in the Old Testament. (I'll list some verses that present this theme as we continue.)]: **"He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"?** [This verse is not easy, as demonstrated by the differing translations and

⁸⁸ *Commentary on James* [Eerdmans, 1982], page 161.

⁸⁹ *James*, page 144.

⁹⁰ *James* [Word, 1988], page 148.

interpretations. There is only one view that satisfies me. That view is given, for example, in the BAGD Greek Lexicon: Under *epipotheō*, the Greek verb translated “He...desires” by the NASB, BAGD says the meaning probably is, “he (God) yearns jealously over the spirit.” The translation of the NASB would be satisfactory, in my opinion, if “Spirit” were changed to “spirit.” The Greek noun *pneuma* is the same whether the Holy Spirit or the human spirit (or an evil spirit) is meant. The context in which the word is used typically shows how the word is to be understood; here there is much difference of opinion, but I believe the human spirit is meant.

The point is that God jealously desires/yearns jealously over the spirit/heart of His people in the sense that He demands that His people love Him and be faithful to Him with all their spirits/hearts/lives. The Bible, from the beginning to the end, demonstrates that God will not tolerate His people’s unfaithfulness through worshiping other gods, or through other forms of rebellion/sin. The Bible frequently says that God is a jealous God (e.g., Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; and 32:16, 32). Hebrews 12:9 says, “Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?”

The view that I have presented regarding the meaning of James 4:5 is a common view, probably the most common view found in the commentaries. Stulac, for example, favors the view that the human spirit is spoken of here, and he says, “the meaning is that God jealously desires us to belong wholeheartedly to him.”⁹¹

I’ll also quote part of what Moo said here.⁹² “If...verse 5b depicts the jealousy of God for us [and this is the viewpoint that Moo favors], verse 6a will emphasize that God’s grace is completely adequate to meet the requirements imposed on us by that jealousy. Our God is ‘a consuming fire’ and his demands on us may seem terrifying. But our God is also merciful, gracious, all-loving, and willingly supplies all that we need to meet his all-encompassing demands.’ ”

It is interesting that James did not mention the Holy Spirit in this epistle, assuming, as I do, that the human spirit is referred to in this verse. The all-important work of the Holy Spirit is included, however, in the “greater grace” that God gives, and we can see His work other places in this epistle (including the new birth of James 1:18.) **(4:6) But** [or, “And” (Greek *de*)] **He gives a greater grace.** [In the Greek of this verse, the word translated “greater” comes first, which puts some emphasis on this word. *Greater* than the power of sin (the sin that wants to reign over us; the sin pictured, for example, in James 4:1-5) is the transforming/sanctifying grace of God made available to us in Christ Jesus. This is a big part of what the gospel is all about. Forgiveness for our sins is a very important part of the gospel, but far more important is the transformation to righteous and holy living through union with Christ Jesus in the power of His blood and the power of His Spirit.

I’ll quote part of what Donald W. Burdick said under this verse.⁹³ He is giving the viewpoint he prefers for James 4:4-6, “...God has set a high standard for wholehearted love and devotion on the part of his people, but he gives grace that is greater than the rigorous demand he has made. ... The reference to the gift of grace looks back to God’s demand for

⁹¹ *James*, page 146.

⁹² *James*, pages 146, 147.

⁹³ *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12 [Zondervan, 1981], page 194.

loyalty (vv. 4-5). God in grace gives his people the help they need to resist the appeal of the world and to remain loyal to him.”

I’ll also quote part of what Walter W. Wessel said under James 4:5, 6.⁹⁴ “There are a number of possible translations of the words that follow, but it is in keeping with the context to follow the RSV, which makes God, not spirit, the subject of the verb: *He yearns jealously over the spirit which he has made to dwell in us.* God is a jealous God [Wessel listed some verses to back up this point], and hence he will not tolerate divided allegiance. No specific OT passage contains the words of this verse, but many passages express a similar sentiment.

The difficulties of living wholly for God in a wicked world are many, but he giveth more grace, which here seems to mean ‘gracious help.’ And this gracious aid God makes available, as Prov. 3:34 declares, not to proud, self-sufficient persons, but to humble, dependent men.”

I’ll quote part of what David P. Nystrom said here.⁹⁵ “In verse 6 James holds out a lifeline to those who have apparently been ignorant of the gravity of their situation. God’s grace, he says, is still available and abundant for them. God’s demands can be harsh, but he always provides the means to follow him. ... James probably has in view a panoply of gifts, such as wisdom, the Holy Spirit, forgiveness, salvation, Jesus Christ himself, and many others.”

I’ll also quote part of what James H. Ropes said under this verse.⁹⁶ “God makes rigorous requirements of devotion, but gives gracious help in order that men may be able to render the undivided allegiance which he exacts [requires/demands]. ... The comparative [greater] is most naturally taken as meaning ‘greater grace in view of greater requirement.’ [The grace must be sufficient to meet the need.] ... The context seems to require that [grace] be understood of the ‘gracious gift’ of aid to fulfil the requirement of whole-hearted allegiance.”] **Therefore it says, “GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.”** [James quoted from Prov. 3:34 (the Septuagint); compare Matt. 23:12; 1 Pet. 5:5. Based on what these quoted words say, all who call themselves Christians must humble themselves before God, and they must appropriate and continuously walk in His sufficient, transforming/sanctifying grace.] **(4:7) Submit therefore to God.** [Cf. 1 Pet. 5:6.] **Resist the devil and he will flee from you.** [Compare Eph. 4:27; 6:10-18; and 1 Pet. 5:8-10. All Christians must “submit...to God.” This is not optional (those who aren’t submitted to God aren’t true Christians), but it is a great privilege to be submitted to God, and it yields great blessings. This is what we were created for; this is what we were saved for.

Part of what is involved in submitting to God is resisting the devil, who is an enemy of God and the ruler of the kingdom of sin, and who is (in some ways) behind all sin (cf. 1 John 3:8-12). Again, this is not optional, but it is a great privilege and a great blessing to be able to resist the devil. The devil (or his companion *sin*) never does anything that is really good for man; his work *always* leads toward darkness, death, and destruction. It is true, however, that the things the devil (and sin) offers men look good—through deception and lies. To the extent Christians submit to God and resist the devil, they will not sin.] **(4:8)** [In this verse James further deals with what is involved in submitting to God and resisting the devil. These words (along with the words of 4:6, 7, and much other Scripture) make it clear that Christians have their part to play as they submit to God in repentance and faith and resist the devil—God does not just make all

⁹⁴ *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, page 1437.

⁹⁵ *James* [Zondervan, 1997], page 228.

⁹⁶ *Epistle of James* [T. & T. Clark, printed in 1978], page 265.

things work for the good of His people while they are passive. Faith is active.] **Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.** [Compare 2 Chron. 15:2; Zech. 1:3; and Mal. 3:7. As James continues he tells his readers (speaking to those who have not been living fully for God but who have been living in sin to one degree or another) what is involved in drawing near to God. Both of the things that James goes on to mention in this verse also fit in the category of resisting the devil (and sin and this world system).] **Cleanse your hands, you sinners** [Compare Job 17:9; Isa. 1:16; and 1 Tim. 2:8. James is not speaking of Christians asking for forgiveness here, as important as that is. He is speaking of the need for Christians to stop sinning (by the grace of God in Christ). The Greek verb translated “cleanse” here is often used in the New Testament, as it is here, of a sanctifying type of cleansing/purifying.⁹⁷]; **and purify your hearts** [cf. Jer. 4:14; 1 Pet. 1:22; and 1 John. 3:3], **you double-minded.** [The sin problem originates in the heart, so it is obvious that the solution to the sin problem must first and foremost purify the *hearts* of men. To understand James’ words here we must see the connection between having a *sinful heart* and being *double-minded*. Many Christians would not see the connection because they (wrongly) think only of the head when they hear the word *mind*. See above under James 3:10 for some important information regarding the meaning of the Greek adjective that is translated “double-minded” here. Being double-minded is mostly a problem of the heart. Christians do not have the power in themselves to purify their hearts, but they must take some initiative to learn what God’s word teaches regarding the need to be pure and how to appropriate and cooperate with His sanctifying/purifying grace. The fact that we are sanctified by God’s grace does not mean that we can be passive—again, faith is active. God must receive all the glory for our being transformed/purified, but He will not be glorified to the extent we do not walk in faith and appropriate His sufficient grace.

I’ll quote part of what Moo said here.⁹⁸ “...the term [double-minded/two-souled] brings forcibly to mind the ‘doubleness’ of the Christian who seeks to become ‘a friend of the world’ (4:4). ... To allow ‘the world’ to entice us away from a total, single-minded allegiance to God is to become people who are divided in loyalties, ‘double-minded’ and spiritually unstable.” Moo goes on to speak of their need to repent.] **(4:9) Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.** [These words (of James 4:9), spoken in context with what else James said, were aimed (at least for the most part) at his readers who needed to do some serious repenting; they were not aimed at all Christians.] **(10) Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you** [I prefer the translation of the NIV here, “and he will lift you up”; the KJV and the NKJV have essentially the same thing, “and He shall/will lift you up.”]. [Compare Job 5:11; James 4:6. If James readers who had not totally given their hearts to God would now humble themselves before Him, they could begin to receive (and to cooperate with) His “greater grace,” as discussed in James 4:6-8. God would then lift them up from their sinful state to where they should be, and must be, as Christians.

I’ll quote part of what Stulac said under James 4:4-10.⁹⁹ “Altogether, the paragraph of 4:4-6 emphasizes God’s requirement of Christians: ‘a total, unreserved, unwavering allegiance’

⁹⁷ For a start see the discussion of 2 Cor. 7:1 on pages 182, 183 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*. Other important cross-references are listed there.

⁹⁸ *James*, pages 148, 149.

⁹⁹ *James*, pages 147-151.

to God rather than to the world (Moo [*The Letter of James*] 1985:144). It equally emphasizes that this requirement is not an achievement by which the proud can earn God's friendship, for the call to devotion is based on God's extension of *grace* [including His transforming/sanctifying grace] *to the humble*. ...

Steps to Be Taken Toward God (4:7-10). ... [James] has a prescription for them: repentance. That is what his ten imperatives provide [speaking of the ten imperatives (commands) contained in James 4:7-10]—a forceful call to repentance as the requisite to love and peace in the community [and to get rid of all the other sin]" (pages 147, 148).

Later in his discussion of James 4:7-10, Stulac discusses the meaning of God's lifting up (James 4:10) of those who heed James' exhortation to turn to God in repentance: "From the context of the intervening imperatives, James would be telling us to expect that God will come near to forgive sin, to restore joy and to strengthen the repentant sinner to live in purity and righteousness. Seeing the requirement of radical life changes in 4:7-10 expands our appreciation for that preceding promise in 4:6—*he gives us more [greater] grace*. ["More grace" is the translation of the NIV, which Stulac is using.] ..." (pages 150, 151).

When we begin to see that God's grace is sufficient, we can begin to think in terms of His grace being sufficient for us to stop sinning. It is true, of course, that we *were* spiritually dead and sinful before we became Christians. When it comes to victory over sin, the key issue is what does God's Word say about His new-covenant salvation in Christ Jesus—does it say that His grace is sufficient for His people to be holy and stop sinning? If it does, and I believe it clearly does (as I have tried to show in much of my teaching), then we ought to start thinking, praying, talking, and walking this way.

One last comment, everything I have said in this paper and other writings is aimed at a sanctifying transformation, not condemnation—we don't need more condemnation in the body of Christ, but we do need a lot more understanding of the fullness of our salvation provided for us in Christ Jesus, with the emphasis on holiness and victory over sin. We look to you Father—your will must be done in us, in the church, and (ultimately) throughout the earth!]