

Synthetic Bible Studies

Containing an outline study of every book of the Bible
with suggestions for Sermons, Addresses and
Bible Expositions

By

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LESSON SEVEN

I CORINTHIANS

In Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians we have what is perhaps the most varied Epistle in the New Testament.

It touches not only upon two or three of the greatest doctrines of Christianity, but a number of question of casuistry of deep practical importance, and of interest ever current. It was probably written from Ephesus, and a little earlier than the Epistle to the Romans, though as to that the material for forming a judgment is not conclusive.

The circumstances under which it came to be written will appear, sufficiently for our present purpose, as we proceed with the outline and analysis.

The Epistle opens with the customary salutation (vv. 1-3), and thanksgiving (vv. 4-9); upon which we cannot pause to dwell further than to call attention to the important allusion to the second coming of our Lord JESUS CHRIST in verses 7 and 8, a precious truth upon which the apostle enlarges very much in certain other of his Epistles which follow.

I. Concerning Party Divisions, 1:10-4:21

The first great division of the Epistle, or, if you please, the first theme on which the apostle dilates at length, is that indicated at the head of this paragraph.

The general statement of the situation is contained in 1:10-17. It begins with an exhortation to his readers, (v. 10), and after relating the source of his information concerning their "contentions" (v. 11), an expostulation follows (vv. 12, 13), the whole concluding with a general caution based upon his own example (vv. 14-17).

This general statement of the situation is followed by a particular rebuke of intellectualism as applied to the teaching and reception of the Gospel (1:18-31), in which we begin to get a hint of the cause or origin of these party divisions. Such intellectualism makes the cross of CHRIST of none effect (vv. 17, 18); it has been proven foolish by the history of the world in the past (vv. 19-25); it is in itself rather a hindrance than a help to salvation (vv. 26-29); and it is done away with in CHRIST (vv. 30, 31).

There is a precious substitute for intellectualism, as Paul shows in chapters 2, 3, by his own example (2:1, 2); it is seen in his simplicity of speech (vv. 3, 4), and his enduement of the HOLY GHOST (vv. 4, 5). The absence of intellectualism, however, does not mean the absence of true wisdom (vv. 6-16), the nature of which he describes (vv. 6-8), as also its source (vv. 9-12, and means of communication (vv. 13-16). These Corinthians were really incapacitated to receive this wisdom in its richer depths for the cause which the apostle indicates (3:1-4).

This intellectualism, thus described, was associated with a false estimate of their human teachers, as to which the apostle now seeks to set them right (3:5-4:21).

These teachers were simply ministers (servants) by whom they believed (3:5-9), and were responsible to GOD for the character and results of that service (vv. 10-15); hence they should not be gloried in by men (vv. 16-20).

Moreover they were the possession of the church, the whole church; and one was as truly the possession of the church as another; hence the folly of divisions on account of them (vv. 21-23).

They should be faithful to GOD (4:1-5), and should not be regarded with partiality (vv. 6, 7).

The subject is concluded with personal allusions, warnings and exhortations (vv. 8-21).

II. Concerning the Moral Disorder, Chapters 5, 6

The second theme of the Epistle concerns a case of immorality in the church, covering chapters 5 and 6.

The nature of it is stated in verse 1, and the sinful indifference of the church about it is referred to in verse 2. The apostle imposes a judgment upon the offender (vv. 3, 5), rebuking the church at the same time for their neglect in doing so (vv. 6-8). He also lays down a general principle to be observed in such cases (vv. 9-13).

The sixth chapter opens with a rebuke of litigation, a subject apparently very remote from that of the immorality we have just left. But as Paul recurs to that subject again at the close of the chapter, I am strongly of the opinion that the occasion for treating of litigation grew out of the

immorality in some way.

Notice, however, that such disputes should be settled within the church (v. 1), which was qualified for such action (vv. 2, 3). Arbitration is recommended (vv. 4, 5), and on the whole, abnegation is to be preferred to litigation (vv.6-8). A general warning follows (vv. 9-11).

At this point it is that the recurrence is made to the abuse of the human body, giving the inspired writer the opportunity to refer to its true dignity.

First, he exposes a false general principle (v. 12); and then refers to a special application of it (v. 13). It was an axiomatic truth indeed, that meats were meant for the belly, and the belly adapted to the meats. But it was wrong to draw from this the easy inference that because the human body possessed other functions it was right to gratify its desires in those directions without restraint.

A time was coming when there would be no meat to eat, and no physical organ to receive and digest it; and by inference, when there would be a lack of desire and capacity in other directions purely physical. Nevertheless, the soul of man would have a body, and it would be his own body raised from the dead, and glorified like unto CHRIST's own glorious body (v. 14).

What a shame, therefore, for this body thus dignified and exalted, and intended for the Lord to be given to fornication!

Moreover, did they not know that the body of a believer was even now a member of CHRIST's mystical body? Would they make it a member of a harlot (vv. 15-17)? Then there was the peculiar nature of this sin to be considered (v. 18); and the fact that the believer's body was the temple of the HOLY GHOST (v. 19); that it was redeemed by the precious blood of CHRIST as truly as was the soul redeemed (v. 20); and that there rested upon each one the solemn obligation to glorify GOD in his body.

What moving considerations these concerning the right use of the human body, and all growing out of the treatment to be accorded to the man who had been guilty of the sin and crime of incest!

III. Concerning Marriage, Chapter 7

The heading of this division suggests the next theme with which Paul deals. It is apparent from the first verse of chapter 7, that the messengers of "**the house of Chloe**" (1:11), who had brought verbal reports to the apostle of the contentions and divisions in the church, had brought a written document as well containing certain questions which the brethren desired answered.

One of these concerned marriage, and that of celibacy and divorce naturally arising out of it.

In Paul's answers to these questions, however, we are not to suppose he has given us the whole of his views upon the subjects involved, much less the whole of the New Testament teaching thereupon, but only so much as connects itself with the particular questions put to him at the time. As Robertson says: "These are questions of casuistry which depend on the particular case, from which the word 'casuistry' comes."

There was a party in this Grecian church which held that marriage was in itself sinful in Christians and ought to be abstained from; and Paul introduces his discussion of the theme by frankly admitting that, in the abstract, the unwedded life was good (v. 1), although in the practical working of things marriage was more desirable, or even necessary as a preventative of sin (v. 2).

If then, persons married, this meant that they were to fulfill the usual conjugal obligations of that state (vv. 3, 4); which were not to be remitted, except for a brief period possibly, and by mutual consent, lest sin should have an opportunity to creep in upon them by that means (v. 5). Nevertheless, although he thus spoke so plainly and positively on the subject, he would not have them suppose that marriage was imposed upon all as a definite command, but only that, in opposition to the erroneous teaching, they should understand that they were permitted to marry if they chose, without committing sin in the act (v. 6). On the other hand, his own example of unweddedness was desirable to be followed when it was possible to do so without the danger of being overcome by temptation to sin (vv. 7-9).

From the general subject of marriage the apostle is led to discuss the related one of separation and divorce.

Where both parties are believers this is not permitted (vv. 10, 11); certainly remarriage is not permitted in case such separation occurs (v. 11). CHRIST, the Lord, personally taught this when here in the flesh (v. 10).

In the case also where one is an unbeliever, no separation is permitted on religious grounds (vv. 12, 13). In such a case the unbelieving one is "sanctified" by the believing one (v. 14); the children of such an union are sanctified in the same way (v. 14).

Should the unbelieving one voluntarily separate himself or herself on religious grounds, the believing one is not "**under bondage**" in that case (v. 15). What does that mean, "**under bondage**"? - does it mean that the believer is not under necessity to renounce the Christian faith in order to restore his unbelieving partner, or does it mean he is not under necessity to remain without another partner? - may he marry again?

The first seems the safer understanding to accept and teach, but the second seems quite as near to the apostle's meaning.

Great caution is needed here, and should it be assumed that Paul, as an inspired teacher, gives such liberty as this, we are to remember that it must be qualified by other teachings of the same authority, concerning our submission to "**the powers that be**"; governments and states pass laws on these subjects which it is the duty of the child of GOD to obey. See Romans 13.

Verse 16, however, is about as difficult to understand as the preceding one, i. e., it is as easily capable of two meanings.

It may mean, "Hold on to your unbelieving partner for you may possibly be the means of saving him;" or it may mean, "Let him go, for how do you know you shall save him?" The first, indeed,

seems more in accordance with the Christian spirit generally considered; but the second has the support of the words, "**God hath called us to peace**" (v. 16).

It is right to say, before passing from this immediate subject, that the "sanctification" of the unbeliever referred to in verse 14, cannot mean that which is coincident with salvation. It must mean simply, that the unbeliever is sanctified in the sense that the believer may continue to live with him without impairing his own sanctity. Compare I Timothy 4:5.

In the case of the sanctification of the children it can only mean something of the same kind, perhaps that "the faith of the Christian parent gave the child a nearer relationship to the church than otherwise it could have." This holds good, however, only of such marriages as were contracted before the conversion of either party. Christians are, later on, forbidden to contract marriage with the unconverted (v. 39 compared with II Corinthians 6:14).

This law of separation, up until this point, limited in its application to the matter of marriage, is now expanded to include the separation of Jew and Gentile (vv. 17-20), and bondmen and freemen (vv. 19-24); the teaching being intended to show that Christianity does not interfere directly, but only indirectly, with existing institutions.

As another expresses it, Christianity is intended to make men free in the responsibilities of their positions, and not free from those responsibilities. Christianity teaches us, in a sense, to be indifferent to external relations altogether.

The thought now recurs to the subject of marriage, or rather celibacy (vv. 25-35).

First, we have the apostle's opinion expressed (v. 25); he next speaks of the undesirability of marriage under the existing or approaching circumstances of persecution (vv. 26-31); there is spiritual freedom in the unmarried state (vv. 32-34); nevertheless, the apostle is cautious in giving his advice (v. 35), for he would not put an undue restraint upon them.

There are two more particulars that Paul must touch upon before his subject is concluded.

One is the duty of parents to marriageable daughters (vv. 36-38), and the other the second marriage of women (vv. 39, 40).

As to the first, parents, i. e., fathers, felt a sense of responsibility for the marriage of their daughters, and it was a cause of humiliation to them to have a marriageable daughter remain unmarried. But if this stricture concerning the greater desirability of the unmarried life for Christians should maintain, what were they to do? Paul indicated the circumstances under which they may permit the marriage of their daughters (v. 36); at the same time that he assures them of the liberty they have to keep them unmarried without experiencing any shame on account of it (v. 37); concluding this branch of his subject, as in the other instances with a statement of his own preference (v. 38).

As to the second marriage of women, he speaks of their liberty in the premises (v. 39), the limitation on that liberty (same verse), concluding with his own advice (v. 40).

We now reach a new general division, which we call

IV. Concerning Social Disorders, Chapters 8-10

The members of this church were doubtless very largely of Gentile origin, and of course, in their heathen state, worshiped idols, and participated in the social festivals to their honor in the pagan temples.

Now that they had become Christians, such worship was at an end so far as they were concerned, but occasionally their heathen neighbors and friends would invite them to partake of such feasts, or of the meat offered in sacrifice thereat, in a social spirit, and out of regard to former fellowship or, as we might say, for the sake of old times.

A question had arisen in the church, therefore, as to whether it were lawful for Christians to accept such invitations.

There were those who answered, "Yes," and whose argument in the premises was specious. They said, "An idol is nothing in the world, there is no such thing as an idol, hence it is as lawful to eat meat offered to an 'idol' as any other kind of meat; and as lawful to eat it in an idol's temple, so-called, as any other place." They boasted much of their spiritual "knowledge" on these points, standing upon the principle of "Christian liberty," and reasoning, as many do in our own day quite as unjustifiably, that they were not "**under law but under grace**," and hence might do as they pleased.

In dealing with the subject, Paul first states the case (8:1-3), in which he takes occasion to remark that there is something better than spiritual knowledge after all, and that is spiritual love, an occasion for the exercise of which the present question very amply afforded.

He next admits the abstract truth in the argument of those who favored the liberty in question (vv. 4-6); but presents as an offset to the exercise of that liberty the claim of the weaker Christian brother (vv. 7-13). The ground of his weakness is dwelt upon (v. 7); the injury his soul may receive (vv. 8-11); the nature of the action against him on the part of those who unduly press their Christian liberty (v. 12); and finally, the principle that should actuate them in such a case (v. 13).

This principle was one upon which he himself acted in all cases (9:1-27). He had authority as an apostle (vv. 1, 2), and there were privileges connected with it (vv. 3-14); but he denied himself these privileges for the sake of the Gospel and the sake of souls (vv. 15-23); and he exhorted the church to follow his example (vv. 24-27).

Moreover, there was serious peril in their doing otherwise.

Let them consider the sad chapter in the history of Israel (10:1-14). Think of the privileges they enjoyed (vv. 1-4); but their overthrow nevertheless (v. 5). Their example was intended as a warning (v. 6). Their sins are enumerated (vv. 7-10). The lesson is very plain (v. 12). Be wise, be careful (vv. 13, 14).

Lastly, there was a gross incongruity in such conduct on the part of Christians (10:15-22). Idol feasts are compared with the Lord's Supper, and participation in both is seen to be incompatible and perilous.

The practical view of the subject is, seek first the good of others rather than your own selfish pleasures (vv. 23, 24). There is such a thing, of course, as being over-scrupulous (vv. 25-27), and yet we are to be continually on our guard for the sake of others (vv. 28-33), following the example of Paul (11:1).

V. Concerning Ecclesiastical Disorders, Chapters 11-14

The apostle is obliged to rebuke and censure this church in some other particulars, but before doing so, he very graciously commends them as far as he is able. Many of the instructions about church order which he had given them they had kept, but there were others of which they had become negligent (11:2).

1. One of these concerned the conduct of women in the religious assemblies, who, in all probability, carried their newly-found Christian liberty a little too far, over-stepping the bounds of propriety in some matters, as established by the custom of the times. In the sight of GOD, indeed, all are equal; i. e., in CHRIST JESUS, there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28), but there must be distinctions in society or the latter could not exist.

Paul approaches the subject by an observation concerning the relation of the sexes (v. 3); then treats of the particular offense of which one of them was guilty (vv. 4-6), closing the matter by an argument against the practice (vv. 7-16). In this argument he shows that in such assemblies the woman has a visible superior (v. 7); that she was created second to man (vv. 8, 9); that she should consider the angels who are regarded as present at such gatherings (v. 10); and that she should consider commonly understood propriety (vv. 11, 12).

2. Another of these ecclesiastical disorders concerned the administration of the Lord's Supper (vv. 17-34), their conduct of which the apostle was unable to praise (vv. 17-19). It was not conducted decorously and sacredly. The divisions or factions he refers to in this case were not doctrinal or theological, as in the case of the opening chapters of the Epistle, but social cliques. The church came together in a semi-social way, and held what was called a love-feast. At the close of this the Lord's Supper was partaken of. But this love-feast is described in verses 20 and 21 as a very selfish and rather gluttonous affair.

The well-to-do brought an abundance of viands with them, and gathering their "set" around them, partook without regard to the poor who were able to bring little or nothing. The apostle rebukes this spirit and conduct (v. 22), and reminds the guilty ones of the original institution of the rite (vv. 23-26). He then warns them of the consequences of partaking of the supper thus unworthily (vv. 27-32), and tells them how they should arrange the matter in the future (vv. 33, 34).

3. A third ecclesiastical disorder touched the subject of spiritual gifts (chaps. 12-14), a subject of the most practical importance for the consideration of the church in every age. In 1:7 the apostle had reminded them that they had "**come behind in no gift.**" GOD had been very abundant in the

bestowment of His benefits upon them; but these benefits were to be used for Him in the edification of the whole church. But this they had not done, however. There was an absence of true Christian love in their spiritual ministrations one to another.

Approaching the theme of spiritual gifts, the apostle

- (1) points to their source (12:4-6);
- (2) he describes their nature (vv. 7-11);
- (3) he speaks of their equality (vv. 12-31);
- (4) their abuse (13:1-13);
- (5) their choice (14:1-25);
- (6) their employment (vv. 26-40).

Under the head of the "equality" of the gifts we see the practical design for which they were bestowed on these believers, and we see also, in the plainest language, the wonderful unity existing among them as the one body of CHRIST.

This is one of the deepest truths revealed in the New Testament, of which we shall have more to say in the study of a later Epistle. Suffice now to observe that all lived in the Head and for the Head, JESUS CHRIST, and hence their loyalty to, and love for, Him carried with it necessarily loyalty to and love for one another. How gross then, and how serious, the absence of the grace of love in the exercise of their mutually-important spiritual gifts!

Chapter 13, in dealing with this, speaks first, of the supremacy of love over and above any and all of these gifts (vv. 1-3); it then describes love, tells us what its nature is, showing unmistakably its divine and supernatural character (vv. 4-7); and finally, it dwells upon its permanency (vv. 8-13). These gifts will be done away with some day, when their need is done away with, but love, as part of the life of the renewed man in CHRIST shall never cease.

Under the head of the choice of the gifts (14:1-25), the apostle emphasizes the practical value of prophesying, by which he does not mean necessarily, the foretelling of events, but rather the forthtelling of the truth. He means testifying, proclaiming, exhorting, preaching the Word of GOD, the commonest, simplest, and, like the air we breathe, and water we drink, the most useful and necessary gift of all. The use of the natural tongue to set forth the glory and goodness of GOD to the benefit of all.

This leads to a further amplification of the idea of the employment of the gifts (vv. 26-40), in which we have a picture of an apostolic prayer-meeting or church gathering, in which the different disciples come prepared to take part (v. 26).

There is a tendency to disorder and confusion among them which the apostle corrects (vv. 27-33), and which leads him to speak especially of the contribution thereto which came from the female portion of the auditory (vv. 34, 35).

In these last indicated verses, I do not understand the apostle to contradict his position in 11:5, where, by inference at least, he grants to women the privilege of public prayer and prophesying. They were simply not to interrupt by untimely questions, which, considering the social position of women in the East, would be indecorous as well as disorderly and contributing to confusion.

VI. Concerning the Resurrection of the Body, Chapter 15

There is nothing more vital in the whole Epistle than that treated of towards the conclusion, viz: the resurrection of the body.

There was a party in the church which appeared to question it. The apostle establishes the fact of the resurrection, however, on the basis of the resurrection of JESUS CHRIST (vv. 1-19). This was proven by the Scriptures (vv. 3, 4), and the testimony of eyewitnesses (vv. 5-11). Its denial involved the denial of everything Christian, the preaching of the Gospel (v. 14), saving faith (same verse), the apostles' testimony (v. 15), their salvation (v. 17), the blessedness of the righteous dead, and all ground of hope even for the present time (vv. 18, 19).

After thus establishing the fact of the resurrection of CHRIST, the apostle bases thereupon the resurrection of the race (vv. 20-22). But there will be a difference in this resurrection as to time, and, inferentially, as to circumstances and character (vv. 23-28).

- the first division of the resurrection army is composed of the person of CHRIST Himself - "**the first fruits**";
- the second will be composed of only "**they that are Christ's**" and will come forth "**at His coming**," i. e., at the beginning of the millennium (I Thessalonians 4:13-18);
- the third will be composed evidently of the rest of the dead, who will come forth at "**the end**," i. e., the end of the world at the close of the millennium, when CHRIST shall have delivered up the (mediatorial) kingdom to the Father (Revelation 20).

The next point in the discussion is the nature of this resurrection body (vv. 35-57). It will not be the same body that was buried as to its constituent particles and appearance (vv. 36, 37), and yet it will be the same as to identity (v. 38).

The superiority of the raised to the buried body is set before us, in detail, in verses 42-44.

Observe the moving exhortation in which the consideration of the subject ends (v. 58).

VII. Concluding Observations, Chapter 16

It is remarkable that the inspired writer should pass so abruptly from the exposition of the transcendent doctrine of the resurrection, the very corner stone of Christianity, to so prosaic a theme as a "collection." But is it prosaic in the sense that it is of small account? How much it has to do with the preservation of GOD's witness in the earth and hence with the account we must give of ourselves in the resurrection!

Notice the character or object of this collection (16:1), when it was to be made (v. 2), and on what principle (same verse), and also the place whither it was to be sent, and the method of sending it (v. 3).

All these particulars are of importance for our government in similar matters to-day, and their strict observance would save scandal and heart-burnings.

- though Paul had spoken so plainly of the defects in the life of this church, what shows that it was in the spirit of love towards them (vv. 5-7)?
- from what place does he seem to write (vv. 8, 9)?
- he had spoken plainly of Apollos, but did it indicate any estrangement between those two servants of GOD (v. 12)?
- who especially had ministered to him of late (vv. 17, 18)?
- what token of validity does this Epistle contain (v. 21)?
- do you know what "Maranatha" means (v. 22)? It means, "*Our Lord cometh.*"

It was with this hope before him that he began his letter, and with this hope before him he laid down his pen.

~ end of Lesson 7 ~
