

LESSON SEVEN

PAUL'S FIRST CORINTHIAN LETTER (Continued)

A. SERVICE AND SERVANTS: (I Corinthians 3 & 4).

1. THE CARNALITY OF DIVISIONS:

The Corinthians believed that Paul was teaching beneath their high intellectual level but Paul was ministering to them according to their immediate need. He could not give them spiritual meat because they were still babes in Christ. The carnality of divisions among them indicated their infancy in Christ. We should remember that divisions in the church always are an indication of infancy and carnality.

2. LABORERS TOGETHER WITH GOD:

"For we are labourers together with God" (verse 9). This is a tremendous truth: that the ministers do not work for God, but with God. The church belongs to the Lord. The church is God's husbandry, God's building. This truth removes a tremendous pressure from the individual minister. He is working with God and it is God who gives the increase.

Ministers should never be compared with ministers or preachers with preachers. All are workers together with God. All are working for one common goal, looking forward to the harvest, but the harvest comes from God. Only God can get the glory and no man should glory in men (verse 21).

3. THE TEMPLE OF GOD:

Paul states that the church is God's building, the temple of God. Here again we see the importance of unity and the terrible sin of division. There is only one foundation: which is Jesus Christ, and every material that goes into the construction of the church, must be that which is to the glory of God. Everything that is to the glory of man and for the promotion of man's cause is impure and temporal and will be destroyed. There are various types of building materials: indestructible - gold, silver, precious stones; and temporary - wood, hay and stubble. Man's works do not purchase salvation and here we see a clear distinction between salvation and rewards. It is possible for a man's soul to be saved, but his works being of no value, to be burned. If his motives are not permanent, but temporal or earthly, he may be saved as one snatched from a burning fire but his works, destroyed. We must have one motive; that's to build for eternity and to the glory of God.

4. STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD:

Here ministers are called stewards; servants to who have been committed the property of the master. To the ministers of Christ has been committed the mysteries of God. The mysteries of God are the tremendous truths and revelations of God's Word. What a tremendous responsibility it is to preach God's Word, just as it is, without changing or adding to it. We should note that the ministers are required to be found faithful. Apostle

Paul did not say we must be successful but we must be faithful. Also, we are not to be judged of man but since we are entrusted with the mysteries of God, it is to God that we have to give the accounting and it is He who will do the judging.

5. PAUL PLANS TO RETURN TO CORINTH:

Paul reminded the Corinthians that he was their spiritual father. They had been saved under his ministry. Although they might have 10,000 teachers, yet they only had one father. Their spiritual father would have more true concern for their welfare than anyone else would.

Some at Corinth were puffed up and boasting in Paul's absence. However, Paul planned to visit Corinth and he would see if they had the power that they boasted of. He asked them whether they desired him to come as a father of correction or as a father of love and meekness. We should note the parallel between Paul's coming to Corinth and Christ returning to earth again. We must be ready, if we do not want Christ to come in judgment.

B. DISCIPLINE, LAWSUITS AND IMPURITY: (I Corinthians 5 & 6).

1. THE SIN OF INCEST:

There was a case of incest in the church, a situation more shocking than that among the heathen. Both Jewish law and Roman law forbade incest.

Paul had previously written to them not to have any fellowship with a fornicator, yet the Corinthians here were puffed up in their tolerance of this sin. Apparently this man was one of influence and popularity in their midst. Paul did not hesitate in naming the sin and in naming the punishment.

2. HANDING OVER TO SATAN:

In I Corinthians 5:5 we have stated the most severe act of discipline that the church can administer; it is handing one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the soul might be saved. This would be an act of excommunication so that the individual would be removed from the protection of the church and the blessings of God. In this place he would be open to the attack of Satan, where he would be brought low and be made to suffer for his wrong. The purpose of this would be that the man eventually would be brought to the place of repentance and restoration with God. This does not refer to living in sin here and then being saved in eternity. This one delivered over to Satan would have to be brought to a place of repentance here in this life if his spirit was to be saved.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that there is no way of avoiding the pagans around them, and the sins with which they were not to have fellowship, but within the church these sins must not be found. We should note that he mentions also, apart from the fornicator, the covetous, idolater, railer (slanderer), drunkard and extortioner. With these there must be no fellowship within the church. They are not to judge those in the world but they must judge the saints within the church.

3. EXHORTATION AGAINST GOING TO LAW IN THE HEATHEN COURTS:

Paul rebuked the Corinthian saints for going to law against their brethren in the heathen courts. The saints were to work out their own problems among themselves. There were three reasons given why Christians should not take their problems to law:

- a. They are to judge the world in the future.
- b. They are to judge angels.
- c. The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom.

Paul exhorted them to suffer wrong from another rather than take his grievance before the heathen courts, and bring about any disharmony in the church.

4. IMPURITY:

In the latter part of chapter six the apostle emphasizes the necessity of holiness and the principles which should govern the life of a Christian. The Christian is not his own: he has been bought with a price; therefore, he belongs to the Lord. His body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. As such, he must keep it holy and pure.

Certain things might be lawful but still not profitable. His life must not be governed by the principle of whether the matter is lawful or not, but he must be governed by the principle: Is it profitable and necessary? He must remember that his entire life must glorify the Lord. There is a definite difference between expedience and lawfulness. The Christian liberty is governed by this difference.

C. MARRIAGE: (I Corinthians Chapter 7).

1. THE MARRIAGE OF CHRISTIANS:

Some seem to think that Paul exalted celibacy above wedlock. However, this is not true. We should consider all his instruction on the matter. In chapter 7 he began to answer some of the questions they had asked and the first question was about marriage. He strictly did not believe that saints of God should ever indulge in sexual relationships. He exalted personal chastity. He would never have endorsed premarital promiscuity or extra-marital sexual relations after marriage. He believed in the ideal family, which was father and mother obeyed and honored by well-trained, unprovoked children.

2. MARRIAGE WITH AN UNBELIEVER:

The Christian should never marry an unbeliever. However, it is possible for someone to be saved who was already married, and their companion was an unbeliever. In this case they should remain together. The believer makes the children legitimate. It is the responsibility of the believer to maintain peace. However, if the unbeliever leaves, the believer is not under bondage.

3. MARRIAGE OF A VIRGIN DAUGHTER:

The latter part of chapter 7 deals with the proper attitude of the father towards his virgin daughter. In those days a father had authority to cause his daughter to marry or to remain single. Paul advised that either case is right before the Lord, married or single. Paul gave permission for widows to remarry but advised that they will be happier if they remain as widows.

D. CHRISTIAN LIBERTY: (I Corinthians 8 thru 10).

1. EXERCISE OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY:

The Apostle Paul continues to answer the questions that this church had asked. One of them was concerning the eating of meats offered to idols. To us this may not seem too important but Paul devoted no less than three chapters to his answer, applying it to different aspects of Christian living. His answer to this question brought into view the matter of the influence of this young church on the city of Corinth.

In Corinth it was common to find meat offered for sale, at a bargain price, which had been offered to idols in the heathen temples. The question, which concerned the Christians, was this: Does the purchase and use of this meat, part of which has been offered to idols, involve us with idol worship? The fact that they asked the questions showed that they were uncertain and divided about it. Paul's answer might be summed up as follows: Because they were Christians they knew that an idol was not real. There could not be contamination with something that does not exist. Therefore, there would be no harm in purchasing and eating this meat. If they were to go to the marketplace to purchase meat they should not enquire whether or not it had been offered to idols. However, as they sat down to eat, if someone said that this meat had been offered to idols, then they should not eat. In eating they would not be doing that which was wrong except that they would become a stumbling block to others and they would offend a weak conscience. Here would be their sin: in hindering somebody else. Therefore, they should not touch this meat if it offended others.

2. PAUL'S LIBERTIES:

Paul spent some time in dwelling upon his liberties and privileges. However, he did not make use of any of these privileges for the all-important thing to him was the preaching of the gospel. He did not preach in order to earn a living, but because God had called him to preach. He did not abuse his power in the gospel. He was free, yet he became a servant to all.

3. ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN:

We should give serious thought to this tremendous statement of the apostle, for this was a key to his tremendous success in the gospel ministry. He maintained his ministry by going anywhere and everywhere, no matter what the situation and surroundings were to reach people with the gospel. He crossed over boundaries of prejudice in race and religion to win men and women for Jesus.

4. THE WAY TO ESCAPE:

In verse 27 we have another tremendous statement of the apostle, shedding more light upon his greatness. Like the athlete who keeps himself in training behind the scenes to win an earthly crown, Paul kept his body in subjection. From this statement, the apostle continues with a review of the defeats of the children of Israel and warned the Corinthians concerning these things. He stated that there were four main things that overthrew the Israelites in their journey through the wilderness: lust, idolatry, fornication and unbelief. He warned the Corinthians against these. At the same time he told them that no one need fall for God had given them a way of escape and that with every temptation there was deliverance. Finally he exhorted them to flee from idolatry - to run for their life. This actually is the true way to escape.

LESSON SEVEN

SELF HELP TEST

A. Explain the following expressions:

1. Stewards of the mysteries of God.
2. Handing over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.
3. All things to all men.

B. Write a paragraph giving Paul's teaching regarding marriage.

C. State the three reasons why Christians should not take their problems to law.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.