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The Problem of Factions Versus Essential Unity in the Church of Corinth: A Study of Causative Factors and Paul's Answer to the Problem

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OF CAUSATIVE FACTORS AND PAUL'S ANSWER
TO THE PROBLEM

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THE PROBLEM OF FACTIONS VERSUS ESSENTIAL UNITY IN THE CHURCH OF CORINTH -- A STUDY OF CAUSATIVE FACTORS AND PAUL'S ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM

BY

Fred H. Lathy

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
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I have long been interested in Paul’s writings, his various doctrinal viewpoints, and the manner in which he dealt with problems as they developed during his ministry. Certainly, the Corinthian Church had its problems, and they were serious problems. Not the least of these was the matter of a factious spirit which seemed to prevail among the members and which was keeping the congregation from full effectiveness in its witness and work for Jesus Christ.

What were the background conditions out of which this Corinthian Church came forth? What types of people comprised this congregation? How and why did these various problems develop? What did Paul do to meet the need? What was his answer to the problems? What does all of this say to us today? These are but a few of the questions with which I am concerned and with which I shall deal in this study.

We recognize that within the Church of Jesus Christ with its power, its message, and its spirit, lies the hope of mankind and the world. The problem of ecumenicity within the church in our day therefore, becomes a matter of great interest and serious concern. We continually see the need for increased unity within local congregations, denominations, and the church universal. Was Paul also concerned
with this great problem even back in the very early days of the Christian Church? Did he sense something of the seriousness of division and discord and thus strive to perfect the spirit of unity within the early church? I believe the situations then and now, in Paul's day and in our own, are not unrelated. The focus of our attention in this study shall be upon Paul's day and his experiences, but I trust that there shall be much that shall be seen in this study which applies to our current need as well.
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CHAPTER I

THE GREAT CITY OF CORINTH -- SETTING FOR OUR STUDY

Introduction

As we begin our consideration of the Corinthian Church and some of its problems, it may be helpful to look at the city of Corinth, its history, its people, and its general characteristics. What sort of city was this in which the Christian Church was established by Paul? What types of people comprised its populace? What were its strong points, and weak points, as a city of Paul's day? What were the bases of these characteristics? What, if any, were the relationships between social and religious backgrounds of the Corinthian people and the serious problems which arose in the Corinthian Church? These are but a few of the questions which challenge my thinking and with which I shall be dealing in this and subsequent chapters.

Location

A study of a map of Greece shows us immediately that Corinth was destined for greatness because of its strategic location. The southern part of Greece was very nearly an island. On the east the Saronic Gulf deeply indented the land, and on the west the Corinthian Gulf. All that was left to join the two parts of Greece was a little isthmus
which was but four miles across, and it was on that narrow neck of land that Corinth was located. Lying upon an elevated terrace about two miles from the sea, it was situated a little southwest of the isthmus.

Such a position made it inevitable that Corinth should be one of the greatest trading and commercial centers of the ancient world. Occupying as it did this commanding position at the southern extremity of the narrow isthmus which joined the Peloponnesus to the mainland of Greece, and under the steep northern side of the tremendous rock of Acrocorinthus (1800 feet above sea level) which formed one of nature's strongest fortresses, it enjoyed unique advantages alike for commerce and defense. Called "The City of the Two Seas" its western harbor, Lechaemum, on the Corinthian Gulf, received the shipping of Italy, Sicily, and Spain, while its eastern port, Cenohreae, on the Saronic Gulf, received that of Asia Minor, Syria, Phoenicia, and Egypt. ¹

Since the distance between the two ports was less than five miles, the smaller ships were hauled on rollers across the isthmus along a roadway called the ἰλώκος. If the ships were too large to put on rollers, their cargo was trans-shipped on donkey or in wagon to other ships across the isthmus. This practice of going directly across the isthmus saved a journey of two hundred miles around

the southern tip of the Peloponnesus which was called the stormy Cape Malea, the most dangerous cape in the Mediterranean. The Greeks had two sayings which showed what they thought of the voyage around Malea. They said, "Let him who sails round Malea forget his home," and "Let him who sails round Malea first make his will." Mariners therefore, were glad to be able to take the course across the isthmus and avoid navigating the dangerous cape.

The desirability of cutting a canal across the isthmus was recognized by such notables as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Nero. In 66 A.D Nero actually began the construction of such a canal by digging the first dirt with a golden spade and setting six thousand young Jews, recently captured by Vespasian in the Jewish War, to work excavating it, but the attempt was soon abandoned. It was not until modern times that a canal was finally cut across the isthmus. Between 1881 and 1893 the present four-mile canal was cut across the isthmus at the narrowest point.

It is easy to see how great a commercial city Corinth must have been. All the north to south traffic of Greece had no alternative but to pass this way, and by far the greater part of the east to west trade of the Mediterranean world chose to pass through this strategic city.

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History

The isthmus was the most remarkable feature of the geography of Greece, and in all the periods of Greek history, from the earliest to the latest, its military importance is evidenced as well. The phrase of Pindar was that it was "The Bridge of the Sea" for it formed the only line of march for an invading or retreating army. Xenophon spoke of it as "the gate of the Peloponnesus," the closing of which would make all ingress and egress impossible, and we find that it was closed at various times, by being fortified and re-fortified with a wall, some traces of which remain to the present day. In the Persian war, when consternation was spread among the Greeks by the death of Leonidas, the wall was first built. In the Peloponnesian war, when the Greeks turned arms against each other, the isthmus was often the point of the conflict between the Athenians and their enemies. In the time of the Theban supremacy, the wall again appears as a fortified line from sea to sea.

When Greece became Roman, the provincial arrangements neutralized, for a time, the military importance of the isthmus, but when the barbarians poured in from the North, like the Persians of old, its wall was repaired by Valerian. Again it was rebuilt by Justinian, who fortified it with a hundred and fifty towers. Its history can be traced on through the later period of the Venetian power in the Levant, from the vast works of 1463, to the peace of 1699 when it
was made the boundary of the territories of the Republic.³

This history of Corinth actually falls into two parts. We recognize, first of all, that Corinth was a very ancient city. Thucydides, the Greek historian, claims that it was here that the first triremes, or Greek battleships, were built. Legend even suggests that it was in Corinth that the Argo was built, the ship in which Jason sailed the seas in search of the golden fleece.

In 146 B.C. disaster befell the city and it was captured by the Romans under the leadership of Lucius Mummius. It was at that time that the Romans were engaged in conquering the world. When they sought to control Greece, Corinth was the leader of the opposition and the champion of the Greeks, so it was here that the Achaianas made their last stand against the Romans. But they could not stand against the disciplined Romans, and in 146 B.C. the Romans captured the city, sacked it, and devastated it so completely that it was left as merely a desolate heap of ruins. Mercilessly the men were slain, the women and children sold into slavery, and the city itself burned and razed.⁴ After this, Achaia became a Roman province, and Corinth for a century remained in the condition of utter desolation to which it had been reduced.


But any city such as Corinth, with its strategic geographical location, could not very long remain a devastation. It was too important a city, too great a prize for those possessing her, to long remain in ruin. Therefore, almost exactly one hundred years later, in 46 B.C., the discerning eye of Julius Caesar saw the importance of the isthmus as a military and mercantile center and caused the city to be rebuilt. He sent forth a colony of Italians, who were chiefly freedmen and the most industrious of the metropolitan population, to rebuild and replenish the city. Within a few years it grew from its ruin to be once again a large and important city, named Laus Julia Corinthiensis in honor of Julius Caesar. The Greek merchants, who had fled on the Roman conquest to Delos and the neighboring coasts, returned to their former home. The Jews settled themselves also in this place which was most convenient both for the business of commerce and for communication with Jerusalem.

Corinth thus became a Roman colony, but even more important, it became a capital city, the metropolis of the Roman province of Achaia which included practically all Greece.

General Characteristics

While Corinth was a commercial city, it nevertheless prided itself in its culture, and abounded in studios and workshops, halls of rhetoric and schools of philosophy.
Actually, however, Corinth was not a Greek city but a Roman city, and merchants and sailors far outnumbered the intellectual inhabitants. It differed from Athens at this point, for Athens had the reputation of concentrating on developing the mind whereas in Corinth the greater emphasis and importance seemed to be associated with wealth.

It added greatly to its importance, and also to its prosperity, that Corinth was the metropolis of the Roman province of Achaia and the seat of the Roman proconsul (Acts 18:12). In more than one particular it became the leading city in Greece. It was proud of its political priority, proud of its commercial supremacy, proud also of its mental activity and acuteness, although in this last particular it was surpassed by Athens.5

Splendid buildings, enriched with ancient pillars of marble and porphyry, and adorned with gold and silver, rose side by side with the wretched huts of wood and straw which sheltered the mass of the poorer population (I Corinthians 3:12). Commerce became more and more active. Objects of luxury soon found their way to the market places which were visited by every nation of the civilized world — Arabian balsam, Egyptian papyrus, Phoenician dates, Libyan ivory, Babylonian carpets, Cilician goats' hair, Lycaonian wool, and Phrygian slaves.

With wealth came a type of superficial refinement. The life of the wealthier inhabitants was marked by self-indulgence and intellectual restlessness, and the mass of the people, even down to the slaves, were more or less affected by the prevailing tendency. Corinth was the Vanity Fair of the Roman Empire, at once the London and Paris of the first century after Christ.  

Unlike Athens, Corinth never became famous for its philosophers. Yet, it cultivated various arts. The Phoenicians, who settled there very early, left many traces of their civilization in the industrial arts, such as dyeing and weaving, as well as in their religion and mythology. The Corinthian cult of Aphrodite, of Milikertes (Melkart) and of Athene Pheonike were of Phoenician origin. Poseidon too, and other sea deities were held in high esteem in the commercial city.

Various arts were cultivated and the Corinthians, even in the earliest times, were famous for their cleverness, inventiveness and artistic sense. Their pottery was shipped to all parts of the Mediterranean world. They became famous for Corinthian brass, and Corinthian capitals and pillars are still known in architecture. They seemed to pride themselves in surpassing the other Greeks in the embellishment of their city and in the adornment of their temples. There

were many celebrated painters in Corinth, and the city became famous for the Corinthian order of architecture, an order which, though held in high esteem by the Romans, was very little used by the Greeks themselves. The Corinthians did not distinguish themselves in the field of literature, they did produce a goodly number of statesmen of importance. The Corinthians prided themselves on their interest in "knowledge" and philosophical pursuits, but it seems that with the majority this interest was quite shallow and superficial.

After the restoration of Corinth, the Isthmian games were revived. Next to the Olympic Games, which were held every four years, the celebrations at the Isthmia were the most splendid and best attended of all the national festivals of Greece. Preparations for these games began months ahead and proved a rich source of profit to the vendors and entertainers from Corinth. The contests were held in the Isthmian stadium near the port of Schoenus on the Saronic Gulf and included such exercises as leaping, running, throwing the dart, boxing, and wrestling. It appears also, that besides these there were contests for poetry and music, and the conquerors in any of these exercises were ordinarily crowned either with pine leaves or with parsley.

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Inhabitants of Corinth

The population of Corinth in Paul's day was quite cosmopolitan. The Roman colonists whom Julius Caesar had planted there formed the basis for the dominant Roman minority. As a colony the city was quite thoroughly Roman. When a Roman soldier had served his time, he was granted his citizenship and was then sent out to some newly-founded city and given a grant of land so that he might become a settler there. These Roman colonies were planted all over the world, and always the backbone of them was the contingent of veteran regular soldiers whose faithful service had won them their citizenship.

A variety of other nationalities, however, were also found in Corinth. There were many native Greeks in the city, and they left their own mark upon the life of Corinth. They became proverbial for litigious shrewdness, intellectual restlessness, and above all, sensual indulgence. They thought, by their delight in rhetoric and in a sham and shallow philosophy, to revive the historic glory of a past age. Also, as we have noted, Greek merchants who had fled because of the Roman conquest soon returned to their former homes when Corinth was rebuilt.

There were also many Jews among the population of Corinth. The rebuilt city offered them commercial opportunities which they were not slow to take. In the time of Paul, there was a greater number of Jews in the city than...
usual, for they had been banished from Rome by command of the Emperor Claudius. Aquila and Priscilla were among those who thus came to Corinth.\textsuperscript{9}

There was also a sprinkling of Phoenicians and Phrygians and people from the east with their strange exotic customs and their hysterical ways. Farrar speaks of "this mongrel and heterogeneous population of Greek adventurers and Roman bourgeois, with a tainting infusion of Phoenicians; this mass of Jews, ex-soldiers, philosophers, merchants, sailors, freedmen, slaves, tradespeople, hucksters, and agents of every form of vice." He characterizes Corinth as a colony "without aristocracy, without traditions, without well-established citizens."\textsuperscript{10}

We see, therefore, that because it was a seaport and an emporium of commerce, many classes and nationalities mingled in Corinth. As in every large city, great wealth and extreme poverty existed side by side, and with these conditions came a reputation for profligacy which came to be the identifying mark of Corinthian society.

**Reputation for Profligacy**

With these various nationalities, with no traditions, with no aristocracy, a mushrooming city with no higher aim than the making of money, the exploiting of pleasures, and

\textsuperscript{9}Acts 18:2

\textsuperscript{10}Farrar, \textit{op. cit.}, 315.
the enjoyment of life, Corinth soon established a reputation for profligacy which was unrivaled in the ancient world. Chrysostom said it was "the most licentious city of all that are or ever have been."\textsuperscript{11} Farrar, as we have already noted, pronounced Corinth "the Vanity Fair of the Roman Empire; at once the London and the Paris of the first century after Christianity. In the Gentile world it was famous-infamous for dishonesty, debauchery, and drunkenness."\textsuperscript{12}

Another writer has compared Corinth to the amalgam of Newmarket, Chicago, and Paris. It had the worst features of each, all mixed together. At night its streets were hideous with the brawls and lewd songs of drunken revelry. In the daytime its markets and squares swarmed with Jewish peddlers, foreign traders, sailors, soldiers, athletes in training, boxers, wrestlers, charioteers, racing men, betting men, courtesans, slaves, idlers, and parasites of every description -- a veritable pandemonium. Even in that old world the evil name of the city was proverbial. To accuse a man of behaving as "a Corinthian" was to accuse him of leading a low, shameless, and immoral life. It is said that no Corinthian name celebrated in literature, arts, or philosophy, occurs in all the annals of Greece.\textsuperscript{13}

Some of the reasons for these conditions seem quite apparent as we consider again the types of people which comprised this great city. There was a large transient population in Corinth at all times. There thronged in its streets

\textsuperscript{13} R. D. Shaw, \textit{The Pauline Epistles} (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913), 130.
sailors from both east and west, and sailors were reputedly a dissolute lot when they were on shore. All the restraints of temperance enforced on shipboard were thrown aside when the sailor was set free at the end of a voyage. Then too, as was frequently done, his wages were paid him in a lump sum at the end of a voyage, so he proceeded at once to spend them on one grand spree. Thus, the sailor had only an occasional opportunity to be dissolute, but when he was dissolute he went forth with an abandon that the landsman seldom attained. It should be remembered too, that Corinth had the sailors of two seas thronging its streets all the time.

Then too, there were other strangers who passed through Corinth, coming from all other parts of the world and tarrying there just long enough to taste of its pleasures. Away from the restraints of home and now among strangers, they were the more likely to indulge in all vices. D. A. Hayes suggests a very practical point of application here in that it is the complaint of Christian pastors today that in many instances their people, when away from home vacationing or in military service, are not faithful to church attendance and to religious duties as they are at home, but, on the other hand, are prone to indulge in questionable amusements and doubtful practices with which they would have nothing to do when surrounded by their neighbors and friends. It is also said that Americans traveling abroad live a freer life than they do at home. It is easy to see, therefore, that if these things are true today, and
among some Christian people, how much more they would have been true in the ancient day and among the heathen peoples in Corinth. 14

The religion of the city was one of the chief aids to sensuality. On the Acrocorinthus stood the temple of Aphrodite Pandemon. She was the guardian goddess of the city. In her temple were one thousand women who were professional prostitutes. They were the ἱεροσόλωμοι, the priestesses of Aphrodite, the goddess of lust and love. Their service was a service of impurity. They indulged in lascivious dances in the public festivals, and commerce with these priestesses in the temple was regarded as a religious consecration.

Actually, this cult of the goddess was Oriental rather than Greek in its gross sensuality. The rites of the Syrian Astarte had been imported to Europe and established on these Corinthian heights, and the city which grew up in association with these rites and practices was a city of uncleanness and sensual sin -- filled with idolaters who were fornicators, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners. 15

The civilization of Corinth was one which was corrupt and decaying, even while it was gilded and gay. It was to the Christians of Corinth, thus, that Paul wrote his most

14 Hayes, op. cit., 193.
15 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10
earnest and most scathing prohibitions of personal sensuality.\textsuperscript{16} He knew the constant temptation there was in their environment, and told them that if they were to cut themselves off altogether from fornicators and extortioners and idolaters they would have to get out of that world in which they lived in Corinth.\textsuperscript{17} Paul was resident there when he wrote that awful description of the sensuality of the pagan world, found in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. It was a sketch from life that he was writing, for he put down that which he saw in the streets of Corinth every day.

Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice.\textsuperscript{18}

We think as we read this indictment that it must be rhetorically exaggerated, but it did not seem so to Paul, for every day on the streets of Corinth he had seen the patent proofs of these things.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16}I Corinthians 5:1; 6:9-20; 10:7,8; II Corinthians 6:14; 7:1
\textsuperscript{17}I Corinthians 5:10
\textsuperscript{18}Romans 1:24-29a
\textsuperscript{19}Hayes, op. cit., 195.
As we pursue the matter further we see that for men breathing the moral atmosphere of Corinth, men whose earlier habits and notions had been formed in this environment, to conceive and maintain a Christian moral ideal was very, very difficult. Deplorable relapses occurred when the fervor of conversion had abated, and even the church on occasion proved shamefully tolerant towards sins of impurity.\textsuperscript{20} The acuteness of the Greek mind showed itself in antinomian sophistry; the "liberty" from Jewish ceremonial restrictions claimed by Paul for Gentile Christians was by some construed to mean complete license and was carried to a length which shocked not merely the scruples of fellow-believers but the common moral instincts of others as well.\textsuperscript{21}

Together with all this corruption of morals there was the cultivation of a superficial and cynical philosophy. Corinth kept up a pretense to great culture. It had a host of halls of rhetoric and schools of philosophy, as we have already indicated. One ancient historian says that you could not take a step in the streets of Corinth without meeting a sage.

Pindar saw the first city of Corinth in the height of its glory. Paul saw the second city of Corinth in the heyday of its power. The modern city of Corinth has no reminder of the splendor of the ancient times. In 1851 Lewin found there

\textsuperscript{20}I Corinthians 5:2; II Corinthians 12:20 f.

\textsuperscript{21}I Corinthians 6:12 ff.; 8:9-13; 10:23 ff.; 11:13b
only forty or fifty wretched houses. In the last half cen­tury its condition has improved and it has some eight thou­sand inhabitants today. "But all traces of its former glory have been swept away. Wherever else one may find the famed Corinthian pillars, it is not in Corinth. Only a few mas­sive Doric columns still stand like solemn monuments of the mighty past. Beyond these, and earth and sea and sky, there is nothing on which we can say the eyes of the apostle rested."\textsuperscript{22}

**Conclusion**

We have tried to see, in these few initial pages, the city which is the locale or setting for our total con­sideration. Within this stronghold of paganism and focal point of evil and corruption, we shall go on to see how Paul planted the cross of his Redeemer as he rose above his feeling of weakness and fear and attained and exercised boundless courage. He confronted the world's glory and in­famy with the sight of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified," confident that in the word of the cross which he preached there lay a power to subdue the pride and cleanse the foul­ness of Corinthian life -- a force which would prove to Gentile society in that place of utter corruption the wis­dom and power of God unto salvation. In "the Church of God in Corinth," with all its defects and follies, this redeem­ing power was lodged. How this was accomplished, in spite of great difficulty, we shall now go on to see.

\textsuperscript{22}Shaw, op. cit., 127.
CHAPTER II

THE TROUBLED CHURCH OF CORINTH -- CENTER OF OUR CONSIDERATION

Establishment of the Church

The establishment of the Church of Corinth was the crowning work of Paul's second missionary journey and perhaps one of the greatest achievements of his life. On this journey there were repeated interruptions of his plan of travel until the hand of God had caused him to enter Europe by way of Macedonia. He established several churches in Macedonia, but persecution drove him towards Achaia and prevented his returning to the work left unfinished in the northern province.¹

In Athens he met with opposition and contempt,² so he went on to Corinth in a spirit of depression and fear.³ Apparently Paul at first considered his stay at Corinth only a temporary sojourn for he was waiting the coming of his helpers with the information that he might return to the unfinished work in Macedonia. Little did he expect the harvest awaiting him there in Corinth. It was not until he had been encouraged by a heavenly vision and the experience of

¹Thessalonians 2:14 ff., cf. Acts 17:5-15
²Acts 17:18, 32
³1 Corinthians 2:3
considerable success that he felt justified in remaining at Corinth instead of returning to the more hopeful field in Macedonia. ⁴

We are told in the Acts account that he stayed in Corinth at least eighteen months which was longer than in any other city except Ephesus. ⁵ Though the relations of Paul with this church did not prove so happy as with Philippi, Corinth became one of the most important centers of the early church.

Though Silvanus and Timothy were not with him at the beginning of his ministry at Corinth, Paul quickly found two other co-laborers. Priscilla and Aquila had come from Pontus and were apparently among the Jews whom Claudius expelled from Rome. Paul lived with them and labored with them "for by trade they were tentmakers." ⁶ Nothing is said in the Acts of the baptism of this couple by Paul, and in I Corinthians 16:15 it is specifically stated that the household of Stephanas was the first group of converts in Achaia. We therefore conclude that Aquila and his wife had become Christians at Rome. ⁷

In presenting the work of Paul at Corinth, the account in Acts indicates the same pattern as in other cities.

⁴Plummer and Robertson, op. cit., xiv.
⁵Acts 18:11
⁶Acts 18:1-3
He began by speaking in the synagogue to the mixed congregation of Jews and Greeks, trying to convince his hearers that the Messiah had come in the person of Jesus. Though most of the Jews opposed and reviled him, it was among the God-fearers -- the devout Gentiles attracted to Jewish monotheism but unwilling to become proselytes -- that Paul found his most fertile soil for the seed of the Word. Yet two of the rulers of the synagogue were won to Christ -- Crispus and later Sosthenes.

As a result of the opposition by the Jews, Paul and his converts withdrew from the synagogue and established an independent work nearby in the house of Titus Justus, one of the Greek converts who had attended the synagogue. These Greek converts, by their social position and family connections, formed a bridge of access to the rest of the Gentile community. This proved to be of great help to Paul in his ministry.

The success of this Gentile ministry in Corinth, however, aroused the fierce anger of the Jews, and Paul feared a repetition of troubles with these Jews such as he had experienced in Thessalonica. He even thought of leaving the city in order to spare his followers the resulting persecution, but in a vision at night the Lord told Paul to remain in Corinth and assured him of great success and

8Acts 18:6
9Acts 18:8, I Corinthians 1:1
protection. Thus assured, Paul continued his ministry in Corinth.  

The trouble with the Jews, that Paul had feared, finally came out into the open when Gallio, the new proconsul, arrived in Corinth. Seeking to take advantage of the new governor, the Jews rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat accusing him of teaching a way of worship contrary to the law. Realizing that it was a religious argument and as such not in the sphere of his functions as a Roman judge, Gallio resolutely refused to take the case and summarily dismissed the court. This refusal of Gallio to act against Paul left him free to continue his work "many days" at Corinth before he decided to leave.  

When Paul departed from Corinth he left a church with quite a large membership. The members had a varied background, for there were Greeks, Romans, Jews, and perhaps some other nationalities. While some Jews had been won, the majority of the members are thought to have been Gentiles.  

We have now considered briefly how the Church of Corinth was established by Paul, but it remains for us to consider why it was established. We know that persecution and opposition to his ministry drove Paul southward to

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10 Acts 18:9, 10  
11 Acts 18:18  
12 Acts 18:8  
12 Corinthians 12:2
Corinth after his experience in Athens, but are there other reasons why he remained in Corinth and began the church there?

It is doubtful that the notorious immorality of Corinth had anything to do with Paul's selecting it as a sphere of missionary work. It was rather the fact of its being an imperial and cosmopolitan center that attracted him. As the Empire marched forward, it was necessary that the gospel march forward as well, and once the gospel was established in Corinth, it could rapidly spread out in every direction. The Empire had raised Corinth from the dead and had made it a center of government and of trade. Paul must have felt that the gospel could raise Corinth from the death of heathenism and make it a center for the diffusion of discipline and truth.

In few other places were the leading elements of the Empire so well represented as in Corinth. It was at once Roman, Oriental, and Greek. In short, Corinth was the Empire in miniature -- the Empire reduced to a single state, but with some of the worst features of heathenism intensified, as Romans 1:21-32, which was written in Corinth, plainly shows. Anyone who could make his voice heard in Corinth was addressing a cosmopolitan and representative audience, many of whom would be sure to travel elsewhere, and might very well carry with them what they had heard.

We need not wonder, therefore, that Paul thought it
worthwhile to go there, and after receiving encouragement from the Lord,\textsuperscript{14} to remain there a year and a half. Nor need we wonder that, having succeeded in finding the people whom the Lord had already marked as his own, like a new Israel, and having succeeded in planting a church there, he afterwards felt the keenest interest in its welfare and the deepest anxiety respecting it.\textsuperscript{15}

General Characteristics

The Corinthian Church, planted in a notoriously wicked city, inevitably exhibited many characteristics of its environment. The influences of heathen Corinth were not immediately overcome by the members, and some of the old moral habits and practices crept into the church and became the cause for Paul's concern.\textsuperscript{16} The faults of the Greeks manifested themselves in the life of the church — qualities of Greece in her decadence rather than her prime. As Findlay says,

Amongst so many freshly awakened and eager but undisciplined minds, the Greek intellectualism took on a crude and shallow form; it betrayed a childish conceit and fondness for rhetoric and philosophical jargon (I. 17, ii. 1-5, etc.), and allied itself with the factiousness that was the inveterate curse of Greece. The Corinthian talent in matters of "word and knowledge" ran into emulation and frivolous disputes.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14}Acts 18:9, 10
\textsuperscript{15}Plummer and Robertson, \textit{op. cit.}, xiii, xiv.
\textsuperscript{16}I Corinthians 5:9, 5:1, 2
Their over-emphasis upon individuality, and consequent lack of corporate responsibility, caused much difficulty in the Corinthian Church. We find evidence of it in the claim of each convert to choose his own leader, in the attempt of women to be as free as men in the congregation, and in the desire of those who had spiritual gifts to exhibit them in public without regard to the other Christians. Even the gifts of the Holy Spirit were abused for purposes of display, edification being often the last thing thought of in their exercise. The excesses which profaned the Lord's table and the unseemly conduct of women in the church meetings, were symptoms of the lawless self-assertion that marred the church and turned the abilities of many of its members into an injury rather than a furtherance to its welfare.

Of the evils which are common in a community whose chief aim is commercial success, and whose social distinctions are mainly those of wealth, we have traces in the settlement of problems in heathen courts, in the repeated mention of the θητορίας as a common kind of offender, and in the disgraceful conduct of the wealthy at the Lord's Supper.

18 I Corinthians 1:10-4:21
19 I Corinthians 11:5-15, I Corinthians 14:34, 35
20 I Corinthians 12, 14
21 I Corinthians 11:20 ff.
22 Findlay, op. cit., 731
23 I Corinthians 6:1-11
24 I Corinthians 5:10, 11
25 I Corinthians 11:17-34
The conceited self-satisfaction of the Corinthians as to their intellectual superiority is indicated by various hints and serious warnings as to the possession of wisdom and the true wisdom, and by the repeated rebukes of their inflated self-complacency.

One of the most serious problems was that of immorality. There was not only the condemnation of the Corinthians' attitude towards the case of incest in their midst and the solemn warning against thinking lightly of sins of the flesh, but also the very nature of the reply to the Corinthians' letter. The whole treatment of their marriage problems and of the right behaviour with regard to idol-meats is influenced by the thought of the many temptations to impurity with which the new converts to Christianity were surrounded. The majority of the converts probably had been heathen and therefore had been accustomed to thinking lightly of practices from which they were now expected to refrain. Anxiety about these Gentile Christians is very evident throughout the First Epistle to the Corinthians.

26I Corinthians 8:1,7,10,11; 13:2,8
27I Corinthians 1:17, 3:19
28I Corinthians 1:18-2:4
29I Corinthians 4:6,18,19, 5:2, 8:1
30I Corinthians 5:1-13
31I Corinthians 6:12-20
32I Corinthians 7:1-11:1
The bulk of the church's membership was drawn from the lower classes -- from dockyards, potteries, and brass foundries, from poor shopkeepers, bakers and fullers. It included slaves as well as freemen.\textsuperscript{33} It is important that we remember, however, that a slave was not necessarily a menial laborer. As a prisoner of war, for example, he might have been better born and more highly educated than his master or mistress. The term "slave" covered not only farm workers, laborers, and domestic servants, but secretaries, accountants, librarians, estate managers, physicians, and clerks of very high caliber and ability. While not many intellectuals or leading citizens from the villas of Corinth belonged to the Christian community at the start,\textsuperscript{34} it is interesting to note that some of the questions raised by the church, and the regulations which Paul had to lay down, imply free-born citizens of social position.\textsuperscript{35}

We see, therefore, in terms of characteristics of this early church, a group given up to unseemly wrangles and bitter divisions and a great variety of difficulties. We see difficulties cropping up in its most sacred assemblies, for its members were still implicated in the loose living of their heathen surroundings from which they were

\textsuperscript{33}1 Corinthians 12:13  
\textsuperscript{34}1 Corinthians 1:26  
struggling to be free. They were, however, still dangerously unsettled in their moral judgments and easily misled or gravely uninstructed in the elements of the Christian faith.

It seems quite clear that there was an absence or at least a weakness of self-government. No central authority kept in check the various dissenting elements or decided the grave questions which troubled the young church. Although there were evidences of Christian enthusiasm, the application of Christian principles to daily life was uncertain and quite wayward. The great problem of giving moral expression to their religious convictions seemed baffling to many of these new Christians. They seemed more interested in the superficial emotions and speculative considerations with their new faith than in the purifying of the personal and social life which this new way demanded of them. On every hand it seemed that remnants of their heathen practices and thoughts hampered them.

We can see that it was a strangely mixed society which comprised the Church of Corinth. But if we are to estimate its condition fairly, we must recognize that Paul felt it worthwhile to address to them the loftiest appeals and the most profound teaching. For all their waywardness, self-conceit, and self-deception, yet he saw in them the seed of great spiritual growth. The very fact that these questions of morality and faith were raised by them for his advice shows a strong determination in the church itself to
wrestle with its temptations and problems. We are looking here upon a phenomenon of real significance -- the gradual growth of a new spiritual life, a new moral order, a new social organism in the midst of the most adverse circumstances and out of most unpromising material. 36

Specific Problems

After leaving Corinth, Paul maintained constant touch with the church there. He heard many things which pleased him, but then the reports had become quite alarming for there were evils and problems in the church which were growing and which needed to be checked. Unless they were, they would lead to the ruin of the church. It is with these specific problems that we are particularly concerned in this section. Paul was not one to stand idly by and watch these problems wreck the church which he had established. He deals specifically with them in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, so we shall survey that epistle in order to see what was involved.

Perhaps the best way to begin would be to try to present an overview of the entire epistle and thus see the various emphases which the problems call forth, and then discuss them at greater length. The following outline as contained in The Interpreter's Bible will provide the overview we need.

I. Introduction (1:1-9)
   A. Address and salutation (1:1-3)
   B. Thanksgiving (1:4-9)

II. The problem of factions (1:10-4:21)
   A. Statement of the problem (1:10-12)
   B. Argument against factions (1:13-3:23)
      1. They put men in the place of Christ (1:13-17)
      2. The wisdom of men and the foolishness of God (1:18-2:5)
      3. The true wisdom is not possessed by the factions (2:6-3:4)
      4. The apostles are not rivals but fellow workers (3:5-23)
   C. Concluding considerations (4:1-21)

III. Moral standards of the Christian life (5:1-7:40)
   A. Problems of sex and property (5:1-6:20)
      1. The case of incest (5:1-5)
      2. The purity of the community (5:6-8)
      3. Separation from the world (5:9-13)
      4. Legal cases (6:1-8)
      5. Standards of the kingdom (6:9-11)
      6. Chastity among members of the body of Christ (6:12-20)
   B. Problems of marriage and celibacy (7:1-40)
      1. General principle (7:1-7)
      2. Advice to special groups (7:8-16)
      3. Maintenance of the status quo (7:17-24)
      4. Reasons for avoiding marriage (7:25-35)
      5. Advice to ascetic couples (7:36-39)
      6. Advice to widows (7:39-40)

IV. Christian freedom (8:1-11:1)
   A. Food offered to idols (8:1-13)
      1. Contrast between knowledge and love (8:1-3)
      2. The contents of knowledge (8:4-6)
      3. The attitude toward the weaker brother (8:7-13)
   B. Paul's own renunciation of rights (9:1-23)
      1. The privileges of an apostle (9:1-6)
      2. The apostolic right to financial support (9:7-14)
      3. Renunciation for others (9:15-23)
   C. The peril of the strong (9:24-10:22)
      1. The need for self-discipline (9:24-27)
      2. The warning example of the wilderness generation (10:1-13)
      3. The table of the Lord and the table of demons (10:14-22)
   D. Concluding statement of principles (10:23-11:1)

V. Christian worship (11:2-14:40)
   A. The veiling of women (11:2-16)
   B. The Lord's Supper (11:17-34)
1. The conduct of the meal (11:17-22)
2. The tradition about the Last Supper (11:23-26)
3. Dangers in the celebration (11:27-34)
C. The use of spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40)
   1. Many gifts of the one Spirit (12:1-31a)
   2. The way of love (12:31b-13:13)
   3. The service of the word (14:1-40)
VI. The resurrection of the dead (15:1-58)
   A. The resurrection of Jesus (15:1-19)
      1. The tradition concerning the fact (15:1-11)
      2. The significance of his resurrection (15:12-19)
   B. The eschatological drama (15:20-34)
      1. The order of events (15:20-28)
      2. Ad hominem rebuttal (15:29-34)
   C. The resurrection body (15:35-50)
      1. Various types of body (15:35-41)
      2. A spiritual body (15:42-50)
   D. The Christian's confidence (15:51-58)
VII. Personal matters (16:1-24)
   A. The contribution for the saints (16:1-4)
   B. Travel plans (16:5-12)
   C. Exhortations, greetings, and benediction (16:13-24)

The first four chapters of First Corinthians deal with the divisive spirit which prevailed within the church. Instead of being a unity in Christ, it was split into sects and parties which had identified themselves with the names of various leaders and teachers. This was probably the greatest fault in the church, the one affecting the largest number of people and most seriously threatening the future of the church organization, so Paul sets himself at once to deal with it. Paul conceived of the church as a great unifying institution for men. Within it there were to be no barriers of nationality, sex, or position in society. Male or female, Greek, Roman, Jew, Scythian, bond or free, all

37Craig and Short, op. cit., 12.
were to belong to one brotherhood and share and share alike in religious privileges and in mutual love. 38

Paul identifies four parties in the Church at Corinth. 39 They had not actually broken away from the church, for the divisions were as yet within the church. The word he uses to describe them is Υιονυματα, which is the word for tears in a garment. The church was in danger of becoming as unsightly as a torn garment. Apparently the great figures of the church who are named, Paul, Cephas, and Apollos, had nothing to do with the divisions. There were no dissensions between them. Without their knowledge and without their consent their names had been appropriated by these Corinthian factions.

It is Paul's teaching that these divisions had emerged because the Corinthians thought too much about human wisdom and knowledge and too little about the sheer grace of God. In fact, in spite of all their so-called wisdom, they were actually in a state of immaturity. They thought themselves wise, but they were really still babes. 40

The next problem with which Paul deals is also a distressing one. It was a case of flagrant immorality "of a kind that is not found even among pagans." 41 The seriousness rested at the point of the sin by the guilty individual,

38Hayes, op. cit., 217  
391 Corinthians 1:12  
40Barclay, op. cit., 9.  
411 Corinthians 5:1
but also at the point of the church permitting him to do it without reprimanding him concerning it. If such serious conduct was to be tolerated in the Christian church, the church might as well close its doors. If the church did not discipline this offender, it would sign its own death warrant in the spiritual realm, so Paul delivers his ultimatum on the subject -- this man must be put out of their fellowship.\(^{42}\) With such men they might have to associate in the outside world, but the Christian fellowship had a different meaning.

Back of this problem lay the broader question, the general matter of social immorality. This was the prevalent sin of the Greek world, for which Corinth was especially notorious. It shows how great a task Christianity had that the apostle should consider it necessary to solemnly warn the church about this matter.\(^{43}\) The Christian was one who had received the Spirit of God. How could he dishonor the body in which that Spirit lived? Christianity stood for purity of life.

Again in the matter of taking fellow believers into court in order to settle differences,\(^{44}\) we see the Greek influence making itself felt. The Jews did not ordinarily go to law in the public law-courts at all. They settled things before the elders of the village or the elders of the

\(^{42}\) I Corinthians 5:11-13

\(^{44}\) I Corinthians 6:1-8

\(^{43}\) I Corinthians 6:9-11
synagogue. To them justice was far more a thing to be settled in a family spirit than in a legal spirit. Actually, Jewish law forbade a Jew to go to a non-Jewish court, and to do so was considered blasphemy against the divine law of God.

It was different, however, with the Greeks. They were naturally and characteristically a litigious people. The law courts were in fact one of their chief amusements and entertainments, so going to law was integrally bound up with Greek life.45

Paul emphasizes that difficulties should be settled among themselves. To go to law at all, and especially to go to law with a brother, is to fall far below the Christian standard of behaviour. To take vengeance, or to try to, is always the unchristian thing to do. If the Christian has even a little of the love of Christ within his heart he will choose rather to suffer insult and loss and injury and damage himself than to inflict them on someone else. A Christian does not order his dealings with others by a desire for recompense and the principles of strict justice. He orders them by the spirit of love, and this spirit insists that he live at peace with his brother.

Beginning with First Corinthians chapter seven, we find Paul answering a series of questions and dealing with a set of problems concerning which the Corinthian Church

45Barclay, op. cit., 55.
had written to him asking his advice. Chapter seven has to do with the problem of marriage and celibacy. There was apparently in the church an extreme party whose effort to be holy had carried them so far that they did not believe in marriage or in maintaining the relation of husband and wife. For this group everything that had to do with the flesh was sinful. Paul denies this asceticism. If they do marry, it is not sinful, but he feels that with the end so near at hand it would be better for Christians to remain unmarried.

In considering Paul's answers to this whole problem, we should keep two facts in mind. First, Paul is writing to Corinth and this city was one of the most immoral towns in the world. For persons living in an environment like that, it was far better to be too strict than to be too lax. Secondly, the thing which dominates every answer which Paul gives is his conviction that the second coming of Christ was near at hand. His expectation was not realized, but Paul was convinced that he was giving advice for merely a temporary situation. If he had not felt this way, his answers would surely have been different.

Paul is not attacking marriage, as some have thought, but he is defending celibacy from the attack of those who felt it to be wrong. Paul allows marriage to all, but he

46 Corinthians 7:28,36  47 Corinthians 7:7,26  48 Corinthians 7:29,31
prefers celibacy for himself and all others who have his continence and consecration. The whole matter rests on his conviction, though, of the return of the Lord in the immediate future.

The question of the eating of meat that had been sacrificed to heathen gods shows how difficult the situation of the Christian was in the midst of a pagan world. When an animal had been sacrificed it was customary, after certain portions had been given to the priests, to use the rest for a feast which might be held in the temple or at home. Often this meat was taken to the market place and offered for sale to the public. Sometimes Christians were invited to the feasts of their unbelieving friends, or, on other occasions, they might purchase such meat in the market without realizing it. The question was whether or not it was wrong to eat this meat in either case.

Paul does not give a simple yes or no in answer to this problem. He is not interested in simply giving rules but is interested, rather, in setting forth principles of conduct. He declares that actually idols are nothing at all, so the meat offered to idols cannot therefore be unclean. The Christian by his knowledge is supposed to be lifted above these things, so when they went to a market to buy meat or when they ate with friends they did not need to stop to inquire whether the meat offered them had been

49 I Corinthians 8:1-13, 10:14-33
sacrificed to an idol. 50

There is something else to consider, however, in the whole matter -- something besides a man's own conscience, and that is his brother. Here we are brought face to face with the matter of Christian freedom. Some Christians had not gained this knowledge, and to them eating meat that has been offered to idols was like falling back into the old idol-worship. Consequently, seeing other Christians eating of this meat was against his conscience and caused injury to him. In such cases the brother was to be considered more important than the meat. The meat was a small matter, and "if food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall." 51 Paul points out in chapter nine that there were many things he was free to do, but he abstained from doing them for the sake of the church. He was well aware of Christian freedom, but he was equally aware of Christian responsibility.

But while an idol was nothing at all, and meat offered to idols was not necessarily unclean, it was quite a different matter for Christians to participate in the old idol feasts. How could the Christian go from the Lord's Supper to some pagan festival as though by accepting Christ he had simply added another god and another feast? He could not. Paul says, "Shun the worship of idols," 52 and if

50 I Corinthians 10:25,27
51 I Corinthians 8:13
52 I Corinthians 10:14
someone, as you eat with him, deliberately tells you that the meat had been offered to a particular god, you are not to eat it.53

The world of Paul's day was strongly individualistic. The old bonds were breaking and men were seeking the life of individual freedom, but Paul's continual emphasis for Christians was not simply on an individual life but a life in fellowship with others. People were inclined to underesti­mate religion as a social fact and Christianity as a fellow­ship. There were many problems which arose at this point.

There was the trouble that came from the women of the congregation.54 They had heard that Christianity did not involve bondage to rules but rather a freedom of the spirit, so why should they have to submit to old restric­tions placed upon women such as that requiring them to wear a veil in public and that forbidding them to take part in open meetings? The question was really very similar to that of the progressives who felt they could eat meat offered to idols. It was a purely individualistic point of view which only took into account individual conscience and liberty, but what these women failed to consider was the effect upon others and upon the church as a whole. In that day the veil was all important as it marked not only the inferior status of the woman, but was also the inviolable protection of her

53 1 Corinthians 10:28,29  
54 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, 14:33-36
modesty and chastity. There was only one class of Corinthian women which appeared unveiled upon the street and spoke in public. These were the unchaste women of low reputation. For Christian women to do this meant not only to shock some of their Christian friends, but to bring suspicion upon the Christian community. As a matter of fact, the Christians were often slandered simply because they were a mingled company of men and women who met in private.55

Paul's argument was not such as would appeal to us today. He sounds more like a Jewish rabbi than a Christian apostle, but his conclusions are both sane and Christian. It was better to err on the side of being too strict than on the side of being too lax. We must always remember that this whole situation arose in Corinth, probably the most licentious city in the world. Paul's point of view was that in such a situation it was far better to be too strict or too modest rather than to do anything which might give the heathen a chance to criticize the Christians as being too lax or which would be a cause of temptation to other Christians.

After his emphasis upon the subordination of women, Paul goes on to stress even more directly the essential partnership of man and woman and their mutual dependence one upon the other.56 Neither can live without the other.

561 Corinthians 11:11, 12
and if there is subordination it is not for the sake of subordination itself but that the partnership may be more fruitful and more lovely for both.

He concludes the whole passage with a rebuke to the man who argues simply for the sake of argument. Whatever the differences that may arise between men, there is no place in the church for the deliberately contentious man or woman. 57

We see the same spirit of individualism evidenced again in the troubles connected with the Lord's Supper. Apparently it was the common practice for Christians to meet in a fellowship supper, and as a part of that supper or in connection with it, there was a memorial of the last supper of the Lord with his disciples -- the Lord's Supper. There were probably prayers offered and at a given time such words were repeated as Paul gives here, 58 and bread and wine were passed to those present.

The Corinthian Church was made up mostly of poor people, but it no doubt had some members of means as well. Some of the rich brought to these suppers their rich and abundant foods and wines and feasted by themselves while the poor brethren looked on hungry and envious. 59 They were simply turning the whole occasion into just the type of pagan feast that they had long been accustomed to. It was

57 1 Corinthians 11:16
58 1 Corinthians 11:24,25
59 1 Corinthians 11:20-22
just the individualistic spirit manifesting itself again without the idea of fellowship or thought for the feelings of their poor brethren. Paul emphasizes that this is not a mere feast, or occasion for gluttony, but a supper with deep and solemn meaning. It was to proclaim and remember the Lord's death. If they intended to gather together merely to eat and drink in merry revelry, they could do that in their own homes.\(^{60}\)

The problem of spiritual gifts was simply another manifestation of the same spirit coupled with an element of pride and love of display which characterized the Greek.\(^{61}\)

To Paul, the gift of the Spirit to believers was the great fact of their new life. Their religion was not merely a hope of what Jesus would do upon his second coming, it was also a great possession realized in this life.

The possession of this Spirit manifested itself in different gifts which attracted special attention in the Corinthian Church. Prophecy and speaking with tongues were two forms of these gifts which were much desired. Prophecy was not prediction but a form of earnest speech or exhortation upon spiritual themes to which the speaker felt himself driven by a kind of inspiration. The speaking with tongues was a kind of ecstatic utterance of an incoherent kind whose meaning was apparently understood neither by the

\(^{60}\) Corinthians 11:17-34

\(^{61}\) Corinthians 12, 14
speaker nor listener.

These gifts represented great power within the early church, but they also represented the possibility of serious danger. The enthusiasm might easily lead to fanaticism and disorder, and the spiritual gifts to spiritual pride. The Corinthians, it seems, were very proud of their gifts, especially of the speaking with tongues. They paid little attention to order and reverence in their meetings and did not seem to care whether their prophesying and speaking with tongues were of any help to others. Paul rebukes them concerning orderliness and the importance of doing all things for the edification of the church, and proceeds to set forth great Christian principles rather than simply giving them commands. He tells them that true Christian gifts have their source in one Spirit, the Spirit of God. There should, therefore, be no conflict and no question of distinction of greater and less, but rather there should be perfect unity. The church is the body of Christ, and as the body is made up of different parts, so the church needs these different gifts. All belong together, and each must seek to serve the whole rather than simply living for himself.

The purpose of the gifts is service, and the test of their value is the good they do. It is easy to see that

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62 I Corinthians 14:12,19  64 I Corinthians 12:18-20
63 I Corinthians 12:4-6
the gift of tongues would thus be of little value if it was not understood by the people or by visitors in their midst. If, on the other hand, these people had opportunity to hear a prophet, then the truth of God had opportunity to strike home to their hearts and really do some good.

The final principle Paul sets forth is found in chapter thirteen, and this is perhaps one of the most beautiful writings in all Christian literature. He refers to love as the "more excellent way," the gift that is above all other gifts of the Spirit. For the Corinthians the presence of the Spirit was manifest in strange utterances and in striking accomplishments, but for Paul it meant moral character and life, and these he sums up in the word which Jesus often emphasized -- love. All their showy gifts and all their knowledge of which they were so proud, was nothing without this spirit of love. This love was very different from the spirit they had shown. It was patient and kind. It had no jealousy or pride. It was modest and humble, full of hope and of faith in men, and when all tongues and prophecies would be done away, this spirit of love would last.

The last question that Paul takes up is that of the resurrection. Apparently some of the Corinthians were doubting the idea of a resurrection from the dead. To the Greek mind it was absurd to talk of the raising again of the body, so here again we see the Greek influence at work.

65 Corinthians 12:31  
66 Corinthians 13  
67 Corinthians 15
The real issue for Paul was not a matter of one form of doctrine as against another, but Christianity itself as an historical fact was at stake. Was there a living Christ? Would men likewise be raised? What Paul is insistent upon is that if a man denies the possibility of the resurrection of the body he has thereby denied the possibility of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and has therefore emptied the Christian message of its truth and the Christian life of its reality.

Paul emphasizes that the message he had preached to them, centering in Christ who died and rose again, was the faith of the whole church.⁶⁸ Also, he assures them that they need not be troubled about the physical body that decays or how it shall be raised. It is not to be the natural body that is raised but a spiritual body such as it will please God to give.⁶⁹ Without this hope, he says, we have nothing. If there be no resurrection, then there is no living Christ, and if there be no living Christ, then our faith is empty.⁷⁰ But now true faith can be ours with its glorious hope.⁷¹

Such were the dangers that confronted the early church from without and within -- persecution of enemies, the constant environment of a debased life with which they still had to associate, the temptation of old habits, the

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⁶⁸I Corinthians 15:1-11
⁶⁹I Corinthians 15:25-49
⁷⁰I Corinthians 15:12-19
⁷¹Rall, op. cit., 241.
peril of fanaticism, and the great gulf existing between the lofty Christian principles and the customs of these people taken out of the lowest classes of paganism. Why is it that Christianity did not fail? It did not fail because it had forces greater than all these. Deeper than the jealousy and strife was the new spirit of brotherhood and love that bound them together. Stronger than the lure of old evil in the world about or in their own hearts was the purifying and transforming power of the new Spirit. And not the least part of the answer to the question was the leadership of such a man as Paul whose marvelous religious experience and power was joined to such wisdom in practical leadership.72

72Rall, op. cit., 241, 242
CHAPTER III

THE CONTENTIOUS FACTIONS WITHIN THE CHURCH --
THE HEART OF OUR CONSIDERATION

The Emerging Situation

As we have already seen, First Corinthians gives us a clear picture of the problems that beset the struggling churches whose members were recruited from heathendom. Long before the Corinthians wrote to Paul the questions that he sought to answer in the letter known as First Corinthians, we can be quite sure that he was aware of the various difficulties which might very well develop among them and harass them in their spiritual growth.

The first of these problems seems to have been their reluctance to be a community at all. Pride, hero-worship, and rivalry were stronger forces than the desire for unity. The Corinthian Christians apparently felt a greater sense of loyalty to particular favorites among the men who had founded the church, or were well known within the early church, than they did to their common Lord. Also, each man was so inflated with pride over his special spiritual gift, whether it was the utterance of wisdom or the gift of tongues, that he forgot that one Spirit was the

1 Corinthians 1,4,12,13,14  2 Corinthians 1:12
source of strength for all these ministries in the life of the church. The ability to serve in any particular capacity was a spiritual gift, and each and every gift was necessary to the proper functioning of the whole body, which was one of the ways in which Paul referred to the church. To make matters worse, the Corinthian Christians chose to parade their newly acquired talents before other unbelieving persons, who, in their failure to appreciate the spiritual nature of the gifts, thought the church was made up of a group of madmen. The Christian community in Corinth needed to be reminded that a spirit of order was vital to its corporate life and worship. Divisiveness, disorder, and display must all give way to love, the greatest gift of all, and its consequent unity of spirit.  

It seems that while Paul was among these people, ministering to them and leading them, these serious difficulties did not arise. Perhaps they were there in embryo. Perhaps they were there in terms of potential because of the heterogeneous nature of the community, but while Paul was with them things seem to have gone well. His personal influence acted on them like a spell, and with his presence to elevate, his words to inspire, and his example to encourage them, the Corinthians found it easier to reject that which was low and vile because they could somehow see their right to what was high and holy. Paul presented this

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new way of life to them and sought to establish them in it.

These Corinthian Christians, we have seen, were mostly of low position in society. We know that it is not in a day that the habits of a life can be set aside and be completely overcome. Even among these persons whose conversion experience had been most sincere there was yet a terrible battle against temptations that had to be faced. There was the temptation to dishonesty, which had mingled with their means of gaining a livelihood, and the temptation to sensuality, which had been woven into their being by their past life. There was the temptation toward party spirit which had to be weighed over and against unity of spirit as promoted and emphasized in their new Christian way.

The descendants of the colonists sent by Julius Caesar, the Greeks who were attracted to the principal city of their own country, Jews and strangers from all parts of the Roman Empire were all congregated in Corinth. The predominant character of the people was no doubt Grecian. The majority of the converts to Christianity were probably Greeks, as distinguished from Jews. In all ages the Greeks were distinguished by their fondness for speculation, their vanity and love of pleasure, and their party spirit. A church composed of people of these characteristics, with a large group of Jewish converts as well, educated in the midst of refined heathenism, surrounded by all the incentives to indulgence, and pressured on every hand by the
philosophers and false teachers, might well be expected to exhibit the very characteristics which are brought forth so clearly in First Corinthians.4

As we have noted, while Paul was with them they did remarkably well, but then when he had been away from them for such a period of time the effect of temptations upon them comes to be seen. They lived in the great wicked streets, among the cunning, crowded merchants, in sight and hearing of everything which could quench spiritual aspirations and kindle carnal desires, so the splendid spiritual vision which had been their's began to fade. Their experience seems to have been something like that of Lot's wife as she looked back upon that from which she had come forth. The temptations of their former way were great. It was hard to choose the kingdom of God and remain true to it. It was hard to give up the coarse and near for the immaterial and that which seemed far off in terms of ultimate, full realization. It was hard, as in the deliverance from Egypt, not to lust after the fleshpots of their former life. It was hard to curb and crucify passions which once they had satisfied under the guise of religion. It was difficult to see and exercise the way of escape which God had appointed them for each such temptation — hard to rejoice and not murmur at all these hardnesses of life.

4Charles Hodge, An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1852), VII, VIII.
Paul had helped them to overcome while he was among them, but he who had taught them the things of God had now for so long been silent. For perhaps three years they had not seen the hand of him who had pointed them to Christ, God and heaven. It became, therefore, with many of these Corinthian Christians as it had been with Israel when Moses was on Sinai — they "sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." Many, therefore, some in shame and secrecy and others openly, plunged once more into the impurity, the drunkenness, and the selfishness as though they had never heard the heavenly calling or tasted the eternal gift.  

It is not difficult for us to see, in the light of our consideration to this point, that the problem was basically a personal one. It was not primarily theological but personal, and the real cause of difficulty within the church lay at the point of personal actions, attitudes, and allegiance. There was as yet in Corinth no real schism, no secession, no outward disruption of the church, and Paul does not seem to contemplate the problem becoming more serious. He did not want to see, nor did he expect to see a church broken up into little sections each of which worshipped by itself and looked upon the rest with some element of distrust or contempt. If there was anything that he could do to preserve the unity of the church and maintain a spirit

5Exodus 32:6  
of love and brotherhood, Paul was anxious to do it. It did not seem possible to him that the members of the one body of Christ should refuse to worship their common Lord in fellowship with one another and in one place. The church was intended to be the grand unifying instrument to bring all men together as one. Within the church all kinds of men were to be gathered. Distinctions were to be eliminated, differences forgotten, and the deepest thoughts and interests of all were to be recognized as common. There was to be neither Jew nor Gentile, Greek nor barbarian, bond nor free. This was the ideal.

The Party Factions

We are all aware of the fact that the church in actuality has not measured up to the ideal which Paul envisioned for it. Instead of uniting men otherwise alienated, the church has tended to alienate neighbors and friends. It has thus lost a large part of its strength and effectiveness. Had the kingdom of Christ been visibly one, it would have been much more effective in the world.

Had there been union where there has been division, the rule and influence of Christ would have so far surpassed every other influence that peace and truth, right and justice, godliness and mercy, would have everywhere reigned. But instead of this the strength of the Church has been frittered away in civil strife and party warfare, her ablest men have spent themselves in controversy, and through division her influence has become insignificant.  

7Marcus Dods, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1898), 37.
We see an early illustration of this problem of party spirit, and possible serious division, in the early chapters of First Corinthians. Paul becomes aware of this condition which has developed in the Corinthian Church and deals with it immediately. "For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren .... that there are contentions among you." The Greek word for "contentions" might well be rendered "quarrels among you" or "wranglings among you." The proverbial party spirit of the Greeks had made itself felt even within the Christian fellowship, and rival factions were appearing and threatening to put an end to the peace and unity of the church.

"Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I am of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ." Here we can see Paul facing up squarely to the problem threatening the church. Although the parties had not yet outwardly separated from one another, the danger of their seriously disrupting the unity and consequent effectiveness of the church is apparent in Paul's concern. The members were known as belonging to one or the other of these groups, but they worshipped together and had not as yet renounced one another's communion. They differed at various points, but their faith in one Lord seemed to yet hold them together.

There were first of all those who held to Paul

8 I Corinthians 1:11  9 I Corinthians 1:12
himself and the aspect of the gospel which he had presented. They felt that they owed to him their own salvation, and having experienced the personal effect of the gospel, felt that Paul and his ministry constituted the most effective method of presenting Christ to men. However, they probably fell prey to the tendency to uphold Paul's authority more than to help the cause of Christ. Paul had preached the gospel of Christian freedom and the end of the law. It is most likely that this party was attempting to turn liberty into license and was using its new found Christianity as an excuse to do as it liked, and then claimed Christian freedom as its justification. Bultmann has said that the Christian indicative always brings the Christian imperative. These people had forgotten that the indicative of the good news brought the imperative of the Christian ethic. They had forgotten that they were saved, not to be free to sin, but to be free not to sin.

It would seem that the Pauline party was in danger of becoming more Pauline than Christian, if its adherents permitted their indebtedness to Paul to obscure their debt to Christ. This is what was happening, for they were priding themselves in the teacher and neglecting the great truths and new way of life they had been taught.

11Barclay, op. cit., 16.
To understand this more clearly, we must mention that group of Christians known in the writings of Paul as the "weak brethren." These were not a fastidious or schismatic party. They were really not a party at all but were individual converts of Jewish extraction whose minds were not as yet sufficiently enlightened to understand the fullness of their new life in Christ. Their conscience was sensitive and filled with scruples, resulting from early habit and old prejudices, and there was the danger that they might be led by the example of their more enlightened brethren to wound their own conscience by joining in acts which within themselves they felt to be wrong. Few things in Paul's writings are more beautiful than the tenderness and sympathy which Paul evidences toward these weak Christians. He plainly sets before them their mistake and shows that their prejudices result from ignorance, but he has no sterner rebuke for them than to express his confidence in their further enlightenment in the future.

So great was his concern lest the liberty which these weaker brethren saw evidenced in others should cause them to yield to temptation and go on to mar their conscience that Paul warns his more enlightened converts to abstain from lawful indulgences in order to protect these weaker ones and not cause them to stumble. "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth,"

Romans 14:1,2; Romans 15:1; I Corinthians 8:7; I Corinthians 9:22
lest I make my brother to offend."¹³ "For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."¹⁴

"Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died."¹⁵

These warnings certainly applied to the party bearing Paul's own name. These persons professed to follow his teaching, but they were not always animated by his spirit. They appear to have ridiculed the scruples of their weaker brethren and to have felt for them a contempt which was inconsistent with the spirit of Christian love.¹⁶ They exploited their Christian liberty and were inconsiderate in terms of their personal effect upon the lives of others.

There was also a party of persons in Corinth who claimed to belong to Apollos. Of Apollos himself we know comparatively little, but we do find a brief character sketch of him in Acts 18:24. He was a Jew from Alexandria, well versed in the scriptures, and an eloquent and powerful speaker. Alexandria was a center of intellectual activity in that day, and it was there that scholars had made a science of allegorizing the scriptures and thus came forth with remote and unusual meanings of the simplest passages. Also, the Alexandrians were enthusiasts for literary graces. They were in fact the people who intellectualized Christianity, and those persons in Corinth who claimed to belong

¹³ 1 Corinthians 8:13 ¹⁴ Galatians 5:13 ¹⁵ Romans 14:15b ¹⁶ Romans 14:10
to Apollos were no doubt the intellectuals who were turning Christianity into a philosophy rather than a religion.

The author of Acts indicates that though Apollos had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and spoke and taught carefully the things concerning Jesus, he knew only the baptism of John.17 Thus, it would seem that it was the author's intention to class him with John's disciples who are spoken of at the beginning of Acts, chapter nineteen.

We conclude, therefore, that while he was in Ephesus and under the influence and instruction of Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos truly became a disciple of Jesus. It seems clear that they did for him what Paul did for the disciples of John mentioned in Acts nineteen. They told him of Jesus and were thus the agents in his conversion to the Christian faith.18 Convinced by Priscilla and Aquila that Jesus was the Messiah whom he had been expecting, he would naturally want to carry on the same type of work he had been doing and would thus become a Christian evangelist.19 It is possible too, that some news received from Corinth might have led him to suppose he could be of active service there in the cause of truth. The Christians of Ephesus encouraged him in this intention and gave him letters of commendation to their brethren in Corinth.20

20 Acts 18:27
The appearance of such a preacher as Apollos must have been a great delight to the Corinthian Christians. He was just the kind of a man to attract and interest a Greek audience. He had all the qualifications which the situation demanded. His eloquence, his learning, and his large knowledge of the scriptures combined to impress those who heard him. He must have been popular from the very start. He came to Corinth after Paul left, and what Paul had planted Apollos so successfully watered that many seemed to owe everything to him. Until he came and fitted the gospel into their previous knowledge, and showed them its relation to other faiths, and opened up to them its ethical wealth and real bearing on life, they had been unable to fully understand and use the teachings Paul had given them. Paul had sown the seed in their minds. They had heard his statements and accepted them, but until they heard Apollos they could not lay hold on the truth with sufficient definiteness and could not boldly act upon it.

The teachings of Apollos, however, must not be interpreted as having been contradictory to those of Paul. They actually supplemented Paul’s teachings. Thus, Apollos watered where Paul had planted, and God gave an abundant increase.\(^\text{21}\) And yet evil grew up side by side with the good, for while he was a valuable aid to the Christians and an honestly cooperating worker in Paul’s great work of

\(\text{21}^\text{I Corinthians 3:6}\)
evangelizing the world, he became the occasion of fostering party spirit among the Christians and was unwillingly held up as a rival of the Apostle Paul himself. In that city of rhetoricians and sophists, the eloquent speaking of Apollos stood in distinct contrast to the simplicity with which Paul had purposely presented the gospel. Therefore, many attached themselves to the new teacher and called themselves by the name of Apollos, while others identified themselves as the party of Paul, forgetting that Christ could not be "divided" and that Paul and Apollos were merely "ministers" by whom they had believed.

The effort to magnify Apollos at the expense of Paul of course aroused the animosity of those loyal to the memory of the great apostle, and they in turn loudly proclaimed their devotion, so the harmony and peace of the church was speedily disturbed by these rival factions. We have no reason to imagine that Apollos himself encouraged or tolerated such divisive reactions. He apparently was entirely innocent in the matter and had no intention of stirring up party feeling when he went to Corinth, or of undermining Paul's influence and reputation. In fact, it may be that the trouble began only after he had left Corinth, or possibly he took his departure because of evidences of this problem developing and it was not his desire to encourage it in any way.

221 Corinthians 2:1,2 231 Corinthians 1:13; 3:5
It is very evident that Paul did not hold any grudge against Apollos and in no way held him to blame for the development of these factions. Paul speaks of him in his Corinthian letter in terms of fullest confidence and even urged him to return to Corinth in response to the wishes of the Christians there.²⁴ The two were clearly on the best of terms and in complete sympathy one for the other in their work. The difference, therefore, between the preaching of Paul and Apollos was a difference of form rather than of substance or content. They did not set forth two different gospels but one and the same gospel. Their method and style of preaching may have differed, but they were one in their aims and in their devotion to Christ and the Christian life.²⁵ Had he not known this, Paul could not have said that he had planted and Apollos had watered, and that "he that planteth and he that watereth are one."²⁶ When Paul tells the Corinthians that he had asked Apollos to return to revisit them, but Apollos had refused, it does not suggest any animosity existing between them. Very probably Apollos refused because he was aware that a party had been formed in his name and that his presence in Corinth would only foster and increase the difficulty. It is quite obvious, therefore, that there was no ill feeling nor jealousy between Paul and Apollos themselves, although keen rivalry existed among

²⁴I Corinthians 16:12
²⁵McGiffert, op. cit., 293.
²⁶I Corinthians 3:8a
The formation of the two parties which have been described could very well have led quite automatically to the formation of a third. Emphasis had been laid upon the merits of the leaders whose names they had adopted, and this would suggest to others an appeal centering in the original apostles of the Lord who held, in their minds, a dignity and esteem enjoyed by no other missionaries however able and successful they may have been. Thus the Cephas party arose, taking its name from the one who had been thought of as the leader and spokesman of the twelve apostles. It is possible that Peter had been in Corinth, but it is not necessary to insist that he had been there. His reputation and the knowledge the people had of him and his teachings could have accomplished the same end even though he had never been among them in person. His name was used, in possible opposition to Paul's, as representing the original group of apostles who had accompanied Jesus during his lifetime and who adhered to the observance of the Jewish law. The rise of this group suggests that those who composed it regarded Peter and the rest of the twelve original apostles in a special sense, and that Paul and Apollos were ranked on a distinctly lower plane than they. It may be the result of this that Paul emphasized his own apostleship and indicated that it was a matter of little concern to him that he

27Dods, op. cit., 35. 28I Corinthians 9
was judged by the Corinthians, for he considered himself accountable, as an apostle, to the Lord and not to men. 29

Just how far the party of Cephas in Corinth indulged in disparagement of Paul's authority we cannot know exactly. There are indications, though, that they insinuated that Paul felt doubtful about his own apostolic authority and did not dare to claim the right of maintenance which Christ had expressly given to his true apostles. 30

They also depreciated his maintaining celibacy and contrasted him in this respect with other leaders of the church who were married. 31 We can imagine how painful it must have been for a man like Paul to have been compelled to defend himself against such accusations, but we find him doing it, and effectively, in the Corinthian correspondence.

This group had in it more dangerous elements than the party of Apollos, for within it were manifest more strongly the legalistic aspects of faith. These persons were most likely Jews, and they sought to teach that a man must still observe the Jewish law. Some of this group had come to Corinth armed with commendatory letters from some of the twelve in Jerusalem and claiming the authority of Peter. They did not, apparently, teach the necessity of circumcision, but they did consider the teachings of Paul

29 I Corinthians 4:3,4  
30 I Corinthians 9:4,6; II Corinthians 11:9,10  
31 I Corinthians 9:6
heretical in that they set aside the Levitical Law. And it was natural that, with their Judaizing tendencies generally, with their legal prejudice regarding the use of meats, with their stringency as to the moral law, and with their exaltation of Peter at the expense of Paul, this group should have found followers from among the Jewish-Christian part of the church at Corinth.

If we are to identify a Judaizing element within the church at Corinth, it could well have been part of the Cephas party. If so, it was the more moderate of the element, for the more violent section is thought to have been part of the group calling itself by the name of Christ. These over-estimated the importance of having seen Christ in the flesh, and despised Paul as one who had later joined the list of apostles. From an outburst in II Corinthians, it would appear that this Christ party was formed and led by men who prided themselves on their Hebrew descent, and on having learned their Christianity not from Paul, Apollos, or Cephas, but from Christ himself. They claimed to be apostles of Christ and "ministers of righteousness," but since they taught "another Jesus," "another spirit," and "another gospel," Paul does not hesitate to denounce them as "false apostles" and "deceitful workers."

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32 II Corinthians 11:22  
32 II Corinthians 10:7  
34 II Corinthians 11:13  
36 II Corinthians 11:15  
36 II Corinthians 11:4  
37 II Corinthians 11:13
Contempt for all human teachers was by them exalted into a virtue, but probably their greatest sin was that the very name which should have been the common bond of union, the name by which Paul would plead for a restoration of unity, was degraded by them into the exclusive party badge of their narrow section of the whole congregation. At the time of the writing of First Corinthians, this group had either not so plainly shown its true colors or Paul was not aware of all the evil it was doing, for Paul does not seem to deal specifically with it in his first epistle.

Actually, a very detailed description of this group is not found at all in the Corinthian correspondence, although as we have seen there are references in Second Corinthians which have been related to this party. Not a great deal more is necessary, for certainly their condemnation is written in every chapter, and the whole of First Corinthians is a denunciation of the spirit of faction, of the sin of schism, which in their case reached a climax as they consecrated their sin with the very name of Christ.

It is important that we recognize, though, that the character of this group within the Corinthian Church is widely disputed. A prevailing view is that it was composed of Judaizers, as mentioned previously, but substantiation for this opinion is found in Second Corinthians, chapters ten and eleven. If there was in Corinth, at the time Paul wrote his first epistle, a party composed of such men as he denounces in Second Corinthians ten and eleven, it would
seem inconceivable that he should not have mentioned them in greater detail, have attacked them, nor have defended himself against them in his earlier epistle.

The Interpreter's Bible contains a fine summary of views on the matter of this suggested fourth party within the Corinthian Church.

Was there also a Christ party? Interpreters have not been successful in making a clear case for a fourth party. Some have claimed that the Christ party was composed of the conservative Jewish-Christian wing of the church. But the Judaizing problem is not faced until II Corinthians; there is no probable connection between this passage and II Corinthians 10:7. Other scholars have claimed that the Christ party contained spiritualists who admitted the authority of none of the apostles and appealed directly to Christ himself. They depended upon their own revelations and would accept no intermediary. But there is no adequate evidence to show that there was a specific party hostile to all human authority .... It can be concluded therefore that there were only three factions. The sharpest attacks are not made upon some hypothetical "Christ party," but appear to be directed against the followers of Cephas. Paul's relationship with Apollos is always cordial and is used as an example of what the relationship between apostles ought to be.

How then are we to explain the words "I belong to Christ?" .... Some interpreters take the words as a gloss: an early scribe wrote his slogan in the margin, from which it later came into the text. Others suggest that it is Paul's own reply to all parties -- he belongs to Christ. Still others claim that a group at Corinth was attempting to stand aloof from the factional strife and affirm its sole allegiance to Christ; but in opposing all "denominations," it inevitably became a separate denomination. Whichever of these theories we adopt, we need not see a clearly defined party.38

We can see, therefore, that it is not merely considered by some to be a mistake to identify the persons

38Craig and Short, op. cit., 21,22.
attacked in Second Corinthians with the Christ party of First Corinthians, but it is considered a mistake to suppose that there was any party at all by this name within the Corinthian Church arrogating to itself the name of Christ in an exclusive and special sense. Had there been such a group, Paul could hardly have spoken in the unguarded way he does in his epistle about those who were Christ's. 39

One of the more decisive arguments against the existence of this party is to be found in First Corinthians, chapter three, verses twenty-two and twenty-three. In this passage, at the close of his discussion of the divisions, and at the very climax of his denunciation of the party spirit, Paul speaks of three parties but does not include the fourth which, according to the popular theory associated with it, was the worst and most dangerous of all. And, it would seem that he played directly into the hands of that party, if it existed, by exhorting all the Corinthians to range themselves under the banner of Christ.

The words of I Corinthians 1:13, "Is Christ divided?" seem to indicate that the fault of the Corinthians was not necessarily that they were rejecting Christ and substituting another leader for him, but that they were dividing him. The implication seems to be that they all regarded themselves as alike under the banner of Christ, but that some

39 I Corinthians 15:23
had become Pauline Christians, some Apollos Christians, and some Cephas Christians. It seems clear, therefore, that the fourth group mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:12 was not, as with the first three terms, a party watchword, "but that it constituted the cry of other Corinthian disciples who belonged to none of the three factions, and who, disgusted at the display of party spirit, declared against all such divisions and announced their allegiance to Christ alone." With attitudes such as this Paul himself must have been in hearty sympathy. It was, in fact, just what he exhorted others to do, for he told them not to divide Christ by following particular leaders of their own choosing. He told them that the men they had chosen were only builders, and Christ was the one foundation upon whom all were to build. Paul emphasized that they who had been followed as leaders were all Christ's, and all the Christians in the Corinthian Church were to consider themselves as Christ's people as well.

We must make it clear again at this point, however, that though the church was thus torn and divided, it is apparent that an obvious and open rupture had not yet occurred. All the disciples still met together as one household of faith and carried on their worship in common.

40 McGiffert, op. cit., 297.
41 I Corinthians 3:10-23
42 I Corinthians 11:18; 14:26
It would seem, too, that they were all addressed by Paul as one church, and the epistle which they wrote him was sent, apparently, in the name of all. However, though the parties were yet in their early stages of development, and though the church was still intact, there was definite danger in allowing such a divisive tendency to go on unchecked. Therefore, Paul, being unable to go at once to Corinth himself as he wished to do, sent Timothy as his representative, hoping that he might succeed in harmonizing the various factions and in restoring peace to the church.

Other Divisive Factors

It is quite clear, as we read First Corinthians chapters five to fifteen, that the Corinthians were by no means united on issues discussed there. It is important that we consider these further points of difference and try to determine how they coincide with the bases of division in I Corinthians 1:11 to 4:21.

It may be that the divisions at the Lord's Supper were social and personal in character and did not necessarily reflect major differences in belief. But even social groupings tend to follow the lines of belief and inner conviction. Actually, it is in the later chapters of First Corinthians that we get the clearest picture of the important points of cleavage within the community.

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42 I Corinthians 1:2; 5:9
43 I Corinthians 1:11 to 4:21
44 I Corinthians 7:1
45 I Corinthians 4:17
46 I Corinthians 11:18
First, we see evidence of the presence of a libertine attitude. Apparently some members of the church were saying, "all things are lawful," and by that meant that sexual conduct was as morally indifferent as eating. Among these were probably the supporters of the man guilty of incest. On the other hand, there were some ascetics who were rejecting marriage completely. Here was division where neither group could be equated with the followers of either Apollos or Cephas. The problem arose not from the teachings of their leaders but from the background of the converts themselves.

Also, various emancipation tendencies within the community are apparent. Paul's advice to slaves need not suggest an active movement to secure freedom, but certainly there was some movement in that direction. Many of the women were in revolt against the subordination which was traditional for them. But here again, they were hardly siding with either Apollos or Cephas against Paul. They were converts interpreting Christian freedom in ways which Paul felt to be unjustified.

Freedom from food laws presented another issue. The idea was held by some that idols had no real existence, so food offered to idols could be no different from other food.

47 Craig and Short, op. cit., 7. 50 I Corinthians 7:26-38
48 I Corinthians 6:12 51 I Corinthians 7:14-24
49 I Corinthians 5:1-5 52 I Corinthians 11:2-16
and thus it made little difference if people ate this sacrificial food. Opposed to them were those of weak conscience for whom idol meat had emotional associations too strong to be shaken off easily. So, here again we see something of division in terms of varied reactions to the new faith against the old background of these people.

We see another cause for division and dissention in the matter of spiritual gifts and particularly in the exaggerated emphasis upon the ecstatic speaking with tongues. It is apparent that there was a tremendous desire for the gift of tongues. Those who suffered from a sense of inferiority because their gifts were less spectacular may well have included people from all the parties mentioned in chapters one to four of First Corinthians.

We meet further difficulty in the denial of the resurrection of the dead. What sort of converts were these if they held to the materialistic view that death ends all? What kind of hope did they have? The most satisfactory answer is that they held to such a depreciation of matter that their only hope lay in an immortality of the soul which involved no resurrection body. For them redemption meant deliverance from the body rather than resurrection. Certainly, this was not the Christian view of immortality nor

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53 Corinthians 8:4, 8, 9  
54 Corinthians 8:10  
55 Corinthians 14:2-5  
56 Corinthians 15  
57 Craig and Short, op. cit., 8.
the view propounded by Paul, so again at this point we see something of the variance of opinion which might well have resulted in division and dissention.

Summary

The Interpreter's Bible summarizes the whole matter very well.

We may conclude therefore that it is setting a false alternative to ask whether there were three or four parties at Corinth. There were various types of division which followed different patterns. Some were social divisions which appeared at the Lord's table; some were based on allegiance to the particular missionary who had converted them; others were concerned with Gnostic-spiritual positions, and may have represented trends rather than clear-cut party divisions. Such was the divided state of the church to which the apostle wrote to consolidate his authority and set forth the implications of Christian faith which seemed essential to him.58

58 Ibid., 8.
CHAPTER IV

THE CHRISTIAN ANSWER BY PAUL --
THE UNITY OF BELIEVERS

Paul's Initial Reaction

This threat to the unity of the church, as evidenced in the factious spirit of the Corinthian Church, touched Paul on a most sensitive spot. He was ever concerned that the church not be a group of segmented bodies of believers, but that there be a unity within the local church and the universal church which was apparent and effective.

As a "Hebrew of the Hebrews,"1 Paul was the inheritor of the tradition of the divine mission of his race and its purpose to the whole world. For him the Jewish people were destined to be a "divine commonwealth" into which other nations might be incorporated and so take their place and play their part in the furtherance of God's purpose. This was one reason why the Jews went forth to make converts, and we must not underestimate the moral passion of the Judaizing mission of the Jews and its power to sustain high standards and achieve spiritual ends.2 This was one part of Paul's inheritance, and it could not fail to profoundly influence his spirit and his outlook on life.3

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1Philippians 3:5
2Matthew 23:15
3Craig and Short, op. cit., 22.
However, Paul was also well acquainted with Greek thought and was influenced by it. Probably at first the Pharisee in him revolted against the Stoic concept of the fundamental unity of mankind. Stoics taught that God had made of one stock all the nations of the earth, and the time came when Paul had to accept this difficult fact.\(^4\) His sense of unity and responsibility among men was evidenced in his deeply realized consciousness of sin.\(^5\) He saw clearly that if ever the grave spiritual condition of men was to be changed into something better, God must undertake in the situation, and for Paul, God did thus undertake and through his atoning work broke down the "middle wall of partition"\(^6\) between Jews and Gentiles. Paul came to be convinced that no final distinction between Jew and Gentile could be maintained. He saw that deeper unity guaranteed and extended to all in the establishment of the church of Jesus Christ.

Man was created to be a son of God, and the missionary work of the church was to convey to man the revelation of his high calling and to do all it could to persuade him to accept that destiny. This was the tremendous sense of mission which Paul had in relation to the church and the gospel. These were the ideas and convictions that inspired and sustained him on his hazardous missionary journeys.

\(^4\) Acts 17:26  
\(^5\) Romans 3:9-25  
\(^6\) Ephesians 2:14b
This was his purpose in establishing Christian communities and churches wherever he went. They were to be the leaven that in the end would leaven the life of the entire world and unite all in Christ Jesus. The Christian churches were to be centers of unity scattered throughout all the world until the whole of mankind would be brought into the unity of faith and the glorious liberty and abundant hope of the sons of God.\(^7\)

But then, in the Corinthian situation, his high hopes were threatened with disaster by the spirit of partisanship which prevailed. It is interesting to note that Paul attacks the problem by recalling the members of the community in Corinth to the central issues of the gospel which he had already preached to them, which they had received, and which they should have remembered.

**Paul's Purpose**

Paul insists that the fault or blame in this problem of factions was not his own. He called to mind the fact that he had even refrained from administering baptism so as to eliminate the possibility of those involved becoming followers of him. He declared also that even in his mode of preaching he had given no occasion for any persons to boast of him as their leader. He considered the gospel a divine message, and he felt that if it were properly understood a party spirit could never have arisen in the church. He had

\(^7\)Craig and Short, *op. cit.*, 23.
purposely been careful to preach so that by no display of human wisdom, no tricks of oratory, no undue eloquence, no pretensions of philosophy, would the truth of his message or the divine source of his message be obscured.\(^8\)

Paul had determined to know nothing among them but Jesus Christ, and to know and proclaim him in a way least acceptable to the wisdom of the world -- as reduced to the deep disgrace of the death on a cross. It was Christ and his atoning work and not any philosophy of salvation that formed the sum and substance of Paul's message.

Since Paul sets forth this as his purpose when he came to Corinth, there are those who conclude that he was confessing that he had a different purpose when he came to Athens, the place of his preceding ministry. It is suggested by some that he failed in his ministry at Athens because he had been too philosophic, but this would seem to indicate a misunderstanding of his message at Athens and a misinterpretation of his words to the Corinthian Church.

Paul had preached at Athens, and he had preached Christ.\(^9\) His approach had been conciliatory and wise and he seems to have set forth the claims of his Lord with eloquence, fidelity, and power. It would seem that his message had been well adapted to his hearers. If he met with any failure, it was probably due to no fault on his part but to the

\(^8\)I Corinthians 2:1,2
\(^9\)Acts 17:18
intellectual pride of his hearers.

The contrast here is not between Paul's message at Athens and his preaching at Corinth but between his own preaching at Corinth and the preaching of perhaps other teachers who had been more philosophic in their presentations to the Corinthians and who had led the hearers to think so much of the messengers that they declared themselves their followers instead of claiming to be followers of Christ. It was this peril that Paul avoided by the simplicity of his speech and the plainness of his preaching.10

Paul realized that the party spirit in the Corinthian Church, therefore, was due to a misconception of the gospel and of the Christian ministry, so he endeavored to rebuke and to dispel this spirit by setting forth the true nature of the gospel and of the ministry. The gospel was a divine revelation, manifesting the power and the wisdom of God.11 Furthermore, it could be understood only when interpreted by the Spirit of God.12 As such the gospel left no place for glorifying of men, and it was thus absurd for believers to say that they belonged to Paul or Apollos or Cephas since there was but one gospel and since it came not from men but from God.

Paul's intention then, was to bring the Corinthians

11 I Corinthians 1:18-2:5 12 I Corinthians 2:6-3:4
to their senses, to help them think, to provoke reflection which would cause them to get their eyes off of their particular gifts, off of those persons who had ministered to them, and help them see Him who is the Giver of all these good things -- utterance, knowledge, and all spiritual gifts.

In dealing with the factious spirit, Paul made but few allusions to the actual character of the groups or the ideas represented by them, even though one of the groups bore his own name and the whole matter challenged him very sharply. He did not intend to rush thoughtlessly to the defense of those using his name nor to serve merely as a peacemaker in the strife, for in it all Paul had a higher purpose. It was not a matter of which faction was correct and which were in error, but rather that they all be made to realize that the testimony of Christ, which had been proclaimed to them, and according to which the life of the Corinthian Christians was now to be lived, must not be permitted to deteriorate to a mere idea or program in which personal standards, personal likes and dislikes become preeminent.13

Paul sensed that the main problem in all of the difficulty was the boldness and enthusiasm with which they believed, not in God, but in their own particular belief in God and in favored leaders, confusing their true belief with specific human experiences, convictions, trends of

thought, and theories. Such distorted emphases were dan-
gerous to the unity of the church and to the effectiveness
of it. Against this trend within the church, Paul speaks
forth, "Let no man glory in men,"14 or expressed in a more
positive way, "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."15

Paul emphasized "We preach Christ ..."16 who is the
"power of God, and the wisdom of God."17 He encouraged the
Corinthians not to be hasty in pronouncing judgment upon the
worth or worthlessness of their own and other's human ex-
periences and motives simply on the basis of their own wis-
dom, for "every man shall have praise of God."18 Barth sug-
gests that the emphasis upon God is the secret nerve of this
whole section. The real value of the Christian life is in
what happens to the individual involved and the fact that
God is behind what happens. It is He who enables it to hap-
pen within the human life, so it is not right for man to
focus his attention upon men who may be their leaders, and
upon their particular standards or doctrinal peculiarities,
but attention should rest upon God and Christ. "For other
foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus
Christ."19 God must always remain the subject in this re-
lationship which is created between Himself and man.20

14 I Corinthians 2:21
15 I Corinthians 1:31
16 I Corinthians 1:23a
17 I Corinthians 1:24b
18 I Corinthians 4:5b
19 I Corinthians 3:11
20 Barth, op. cit., 16.
"For who sees anything different in you? What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?"  

Paul asks the Corinthians, "Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" Thus, he emphasizes that while they continue to identify themselves as followers of their particular leaders, they have apparently not grasped nor understood who it is who has made them what they are -- who it is who has transformed their lives.  

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.  

For we are fellow workmen for God; you are God's field, God's building.  

Again the emphasis is upon God. They are God's field, God's building, and thus He must be given preeminence rather than mere men. Paul reminds them that these various leaders could plant and water, but only God gives the increase or growth. They do not belong to, are not in the service of Paul, Apollos, or Peter. Rather, everything is their in Christ -- the world, life, death, the present, the future, all is theirs and they "are Christ's and Christ is God's." The Corinthians were correct in accepting the testimony of their leaders as they impressed upon them the importance of

21 Corinthians 4:7  
22 Corinthians 1:13  
23 Corinthians 3:5  
24 Corinthians 3:9  
25 Corinthians 3:6b  
26 Corinthians 3:21-23
man's proper relationship with God, but then the leaders should have been set aside in terms of importance and honor, and this recognition have been given to God alone.

Paul deals with the matter of pride which is evidenced in the Corinthians as well. With such a factious condition existing, and with such emphasis upon human names and programs, persons involved are apt to become "puffed up" and to show forth a spirit far different from the real humility that should be theirs -- "puffed up" against others who do not belong to their particular faction.\(^{27}\) The point Paul is making is that these persons apparently fail to realize that all they are and all they have has been received from God. They pride themselves in their particular leaders, while the leaders themselves are humble and devout men:

> For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things.\(^{28}\)

This is a description of those religious individuals in whose admiration and under whose flag the Corinthians have made such great headway that they have forgotten to fear God, and thus it would appear, have lost that which these

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\(^{27}\) 1 Corinthians 4:6  \(^{28}\) 1 Corinthians 4:9-13
individuals in reality brought them!

Paul's emphasis is that the Corinthians must walk in humility! There was always a wonderful courtesy in Paul in his manner of presenting important matters. He had a way of including himself in his own warnings and his own condemnations, and we see him doing just that in this matter. He asks, "What have you that you did not receive?" and is suggesting that when we think of what we have done and can do and then think in turn of what God has done for us, pride is ruled out and only humble gratitude to God remains. The basic fault of the Corinthians was that they had forgotten that they owed their spiritual being to God!

Paul then uses a vivid picture to illustrate what he is saying. When a Roman general won a great victory he was allowed to parade his victorious army through the streets of the city displaying all the trophies that had been won. He was permitted to demonstrate his triumph and achievement. But near the end there came a little group of captives who were doomed to death. They were the men who had been captured and who were being taken to the arena to fight with the beasts and die. The Corinthians in their blatant pride were like the conquering general displaying the trophies of prowess. The apostles were like the little group of captives -- men doomed to die. To the Corinthians the Christian life meant flaunting their pride and their privileges and achievements. To Paul the Christian life meant a
humble service -- being ready to die for Christ.\footnote{29} The Corinthians needed this lesson in humility.

There might be some question as to the suggestion of Paul as he said, "I urge you, then, be imitators (followers, in the King James Version) of me."\footnote{30} If this were literally a summons to the Corinthians to follow Paul, it would be a denial of everything else he has been saying. However, it is a return to Paulism only in so far as it consists of its own abnegation and suppression. The context makes this all very clear. It is as though Paul is saying, "Come down from your wisdom, from your self-contentedness, from your wealth, from self-consciousness which now fills you and which is very evident. Come down from the brilliance of the Greek Christianity into which you have strayed, and, if you want to sail under the Pauline flag, come down into the foolishness and ignominy of Christ, where the truth is, and where not man, not even the Christian man, but God is great, and where I, Paul, your father in Christ, am to be found."\footnote{31}

\textbf{Paul's Specific Point of View}

The word "church" as found in the New Testament is from the Greek word εκκλησία \(\varepsilon\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\si\a\) and in its simplest connotation means an assembly or body of called-out persons. The church, therefore, can be considered as at once the sphere of the Spirit's operations and the organ of Christ's

\footnotesize
\footnote{29}{Barclay, \textit{op. cit.}, 44, 45} \footnote{30}{I Corinthians 4:16} \footnote{31}{Barth, \textit{op. cit.}, 19}
administration of redemption. It is the assembly of called-out ones, and is made up of the divinely adopted sons of God. It is not, therefore, a merely human organization. Christ is its Head. From him it receives its life through the indwelling Spirit. It is also the body of Christ, as constituting a mystical extension of the nature of Christ and consequently is composed of those who have been made partakers of that nature. The relation between Christ and the church is organic. As such, it embodies and affords on earth the conditions under which the Holy Spirit extends to men the redemptive work of Christ. In it and from it, Christ communicates to the membership of this body the quickening and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit for the extension of his work among men.\[32\]

The word \(\varkappa\) was not a creation of the Christian church, but when the church took it for its own use it was already a word with a history -- actually, a double history. It is important that we consider this background in order that we may see the associations which this word carried with it and the memories which it would awaken in the minds of those who heard it.

The word had a Jewish background. In the Septuagint the word was used for the assembled people of Israel or the assembled people of God.\[33\] So, for the Jew this word had


\[33\] Deuteronomy 9:10; 18:16; Judges 20:2; I Samuel 17:47; I Kings 8:14
always meant the assembled people of God, and the use of it now in the New Testament context carries with it the implication that the church is the people of God. Israel was God's chosen people, but she had failed to recognize and accept God's Son when he came and had thus forfeited her place and privilege as a nation. The real Israel, the new Israel, the true people of God, the genuine ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ was no longer the nation of Israel but was the church. The very word ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ sets forth that it is the Christian church which is the true instrument and agent of God.

The word also had a Greek background. In the great Greek democracies the ruling body was called the ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ and this consisted of every citizen who had not lost his rights as a citizen. In the days of the democracy the ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ was composed of all free men who were citizens of their city. So, to the Greek this word would tell of the glories of citizenship, and when the Christians took over the word something of this meaning remained, and the member of the ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ, if he were a Greek, could think of himself most easily and most naturally as a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is unusual when the great historical national ideals of two lines of culture meet as they do in this word. 34

We shall now look at some of Paul's particular usages of the term. He uses ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ both in the

singular and the plural to describe the body of believers in any given place -- the body of local Christians gathered together in any one place for worship and for instruction. Thus, he speaks of the Church at Cenchrea\(^35\) and the Church of the Thessalonians.\(^36\) He speaks of the churches of Galatia\(^37\) and the churches of Macedonia.\(^38\) He indicates the unseemly things which happen when the Corinthian Christians gather together in the church.\(^29\) He speaks of the things which he ordains and teaches in every church.\(^40\) In all these instances the word church describes the worshipping people of Jesus Christ, met together in his name.

Also, Paul uses this term to describe the church as a whole -- the whole company of believers in Jesus Christ in every place and in every nation. As far as his zeal went, he admits he was a persecutor of the church of Jesus Christ.\(^41\) He speaks of the church as being the body of Christ.\(^42\) Paul uses the word "church" as an all-embracing word to include all those Christians who have given their hearts and dedicated their lives to Jesus Christ.

It becomes quite clear in Paul's writings that he does not regard the church as a merely human organization

\(^{35}\text{Romans 16:1}\)

\(^{36}\text{I Thessalonians 1:1}\)

\(^{37}\text{Galatians 1:2; I Corinthians 16:1}\)

\(^{38}\text{II Corinthians 8:1}\)

\(^{29}\text{I Corinthians 11:18}\)

\(^{40}\text{I Corinthians 4:17; 7:17}\)

\(^{41}\text{Philippians 3:6}\)

\(^{42}\text{I Corinthians 12:27}\)
or institution, but rather that the church and the individual churches are the church or churches of God. He confesses that he persecuted the church of God, \(^43\) and when he is rebuking the contentious persons in the church at Corinth he says the churches of God have no such custom. \(^44\) He tries to make the Corinthians realize that their conduct was the equivalent of despising the church of God. \(^45\) The church may be made up of men, but it is nevertheless still God's institution -- the church of God.

We can see at this point something of a significant development in the thought of Paul. Here there seems to be the beginning of the great concept that the church is not a collection of loosely integrated or isolated units, but rather, wherever a congregation may be, it is the church of God in that place. It is not so much an emphasis upon the church of Corinth or Galatia, but upon the church of God. It is a development in the overall idea of unity within the church, and it bears upon the condition of the church on the local level as well as upon the universal church!

There are at least two things which may have aided Paul in his development of this concept. In Corinth he had to meet the problem of disunity -- the problem which concerns us in our study, centering in the factions within the congregation. It was Paul's conviction that the church is a unity --that it is not made up of different churches and

\(^{43}\) I Corinthians 15:9  
\(^{44}\) I Corinthians 11:22  
\(^{45}\) I Corinthians 11:22
sects and parties, and that it is not even, in the last analysis, composed of different congregations. He felt that it is all, wherever it is, the church of God. The situation at Corinth may have caused him to think this matter through seriously and thus come to these important conclusions. It may also have been that Paul's experience within the Roman Empire helped him in this direction. Rome had colonies all over the world, and there was a policy which she followed in areas to which she expanded. In strategic places from which whole areas could be controlled, Rome would settle little bands of citizens and these little colonies became the strategic centers which tended to bind the empire together. Wherever these colonies were, the Roman language was spoken, Roman clothes were worn, Roman customs were followed, and Roman law was observed and administered. They were little bits of Rome planted throughout the world, and wherever they were, they were Rome! So, in a very similar way, Paul saw the church, wherever it was, as the church of God. He saw the church as a unity which embraced all nations, and it remained the church of God regardless of its geographical location. The idea of unity of the church had firmly taken root in Paul's mind.46

Bultmann says much the same thing in dealing with Paul's use of ἐκκλησία.  

The fact that ecclesia sometimes means the total Church, sometimes the local congregation, reflects the peculiar double character of the eschatological Congregation. On the one hand, it is no phenomenon of the world but belongs to the new aeon; on the other hand, this eschatological Congregation, which as such is invisible, takes visible form in the individual congregations within the world.47

It is important that we now turn to some additional pictures of the church, which Paul uses, for from them we are able to learn more of his conception of the church and thus see more of the meaning of the answers he gives to the Corinthian Christians. He uses, for example, the picture of the church as a body, ἴσωμα, to stress the essential unity of the church. Although Paul speaks of the church in this way as he writes to the Romans,48 he develops the idea even more fully and vividly in his first epistle to the Corinthians.49 Like the body, the church is made up of many members, or parts, with each part having its particular function. Each part is important and needed by the rest in order to enable the total body to function properly and effectively. The body could not function at all if it were made up entirely of one type of member. There is need for all the different members. There is a vital interdependence among them, and when they are united and functioning properly together, they are tremendously effective. Also, when one member of the body suffers, it does not suffer in lonely isolation, but the whole body is affected.50

47 Bultmann, op. cit., 308.
48 Romans 12:4-8
49 I Corinthians 12
50 I Corinthians 12:12-27
We must keep in mind the problem with which Paul was dealing as he wrote to the Corinthians. They were lacking in this essential unity which should have characterized the church -- they were divided among themselves. Also, within the church there was a kind of piously unholy competition in regard to spiritual gifts.\(^5^1\) Those who had the gift of tongues prided themselves in their gift and competed with each other for an opportunity to deliver their message. The various gifts included words of wisdom, words of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing and performing of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, gifts of tongues, and the interpreting of tongues.\(^5^2\) Also, within the functions of the members of the church there were apostles, prophets, teachers, those with the gifts of miracles, of healings, of helps, of administration, of tongues.\(^5^3\) The big difficulty at Corinth was that the gifts of the Spirit were being used in a competitive way rather than in a spirit of cooperation. Even when they met for the Lord's Supper,\(^5^4\) the Corinthians were divided into their parties and sections, and thus the whole meaning and purpose of the sacrament were affected. They just did not seem to realize their intimate unity in Christ!

Paul's purpose here was to emphasize that the diversity of their gifts, distributed to different persons, could in no sense be pleaded as an excuse for division and discord

\(^{5^1}\) Corinthians 14  \(^{5^2}\) Corinthians 12:8-10  \(^{5^3}\) Corinthians 12:28,29  \(^{5^4}\) Corinthians 11:18
since all these gifts came from one and the same Spirit. The intention of God was that in the church there should be diversity in unity, or unity in diversity, for God, being one cannot be the author of division and strife.

In using this picture of the church as a body, Paul did not have in mind the church at large. It was aimed primarily at the life and spirit of this particular congregation, for within their own assembly these Christians had never learned to live as one body! Instead, they were divided and were using their gifts for self-exaltation in competition with each other when they should have been living in an intimate and harmonious relationship as members of one body, the church.

Also, Paul saw the church as a body in the sense that it was to be the begetter of unity. There was war and discord between nations, between faiths, between Gentile and Jew, and even within man himself, so it was the aim of God to reconcile and gather all men and all things into one in Jesus Christ. Christ was God's instrument in the reconciling of warring and divided things and persons into a new unity. By his life and death, Jesus brought to men the means to achieve that unity, but this means must be brought out throughout the world to all men, and that is the task of the church. He has gathered together Gentile and Jew within the church, for the middle wall of partition has been

55 Ephesians 1:10
broken down and we are reconciled into one body within the church. Thus, we can say that Jesus is God’s instrument of reconciliation, and the church is Christ’s agent of reconciliation. The church was meant within itself to be one body in its unity, and it is meant to be the begetter of that unity among men.56

Paul goes beyond simply calling the church a body and refers to it as the “body of Christ,” Ἱσῆς Ἰησοῦτος.57 He introduces this idea in the Corinthian correspondence and continues it in others of his epistles as well.58 However, there is more than one view of what Paul may have meant when he spoke of the church in this way. Some believe it must be taken in a mystical sense, and when a person enters into the fellowship of the church of Christ, in a mystical way he enters into the Body of Christ. The church is the Body of Christ because it is his complement. Chrysostom commended the Pauline idea in much the same sense.

The Church is the complement of Christ in the same manner in which the head completes the body and the body is completed by the head .... He has prepared the whole race in common to follow Him, to cling to Him, to accompany His train.... Observe how he (Paul) introduces Him as having need of all the members. This means that only then will the Head be filled up, when the Body is rendered perfect, when we are all together, co-united and knit together.59

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571 Corinthians 12:27  
58Colossians 1:18,24; Romans 12:5
When the church is called the Body of Christ it means that Christ and the church belong together as an inseparable unity. The church has its existence in and through Christ, and it has been described as an extension of the incarnation, so that just as God was incarnate in Jesus Christ, so Jesus Christ is incarnate in the church. When reference is made to Christ as "the head of the body, the church," the intention is not to describe how Christ is separated from the church since the head and body are different parts. On the contrary, the intention is to emphasize their inseparable continuity and unity.

There are, however, those who feel that this designation of the church as the Body of Christ should be taken in a more practical sense, or what might be called a functional sense. This interpretation rests at the point of the necessity of the work of Jesus Christ continuing even though Christ is no longer here in the flesh to carry it on. Therefore, whatever he wants done in this day, he must find men to do it. If he wants his message brought to people who have not heard it, he must find those who will take it. If he wants his help and his comfort brought to men, he must find those who will be channels for them. This is to say that Jesus needs the church as his Body in the sense that in the church he must find hands to do his work, feet to run his errands, voices to speak his message. The church must

60 Colossians 1:18
be the Body through which Christ acts. It is true, though, that these two views of the meaning of the phrase the Body of Christ are not mutually exclusive but there is a decided difference in the two emphases.61

In the Body of Christ, as in other organisms, direction comes from the head, and Paul certainly teaches the headship of Christ over principalities and powers,62 over men,63 and over the church.64 The basis of Christ's headship over the church, though closely related to his headship over all men, rests more particularly in his redemptive work.65

There are some specific ideas involved in this concept of Christ as the head of the church. First, headship involves subordination, and this is clearly seen in the Corinthian letter of Paul.66 The ranking order of relationships is quite clear as Paul suggests that the head of Christ is God, the head of man is Christ, and the head of woman is man. The order therefore, is God, Christ, man, and woman, but this does not imply inferiority on the part of Christ in his relationship with God. The headship of Christ over the church is intended to convey the idea of subordination of the church to the direction of Christ.

62 Colossians 2:10
63 I Corinthians 11:3
64 Colossians 1:18; 2:19
65 Ephesians 5:22-32
66 I Corinthians 11:2-16
Also, headship involves the element of interdependence. The head is dependent upon the other members to carry out his directions, to do his will and work. In turn, the members are dependent on the head for leadership and upon each other for cooperation in carrying out the functions of the body. This type of cooperation is essential to the proper functioning of an organism.

Then too, headship suggests the idea of inseparable union. All the parts are needed, and once they have been joined together in this body which is the church, it is very dangerous if they then begin to separate themselves into smaller groups under different heads, as the Corinthian Christians were doing.

One thing seems apparent in all of this. To regard the Body of Christ in its mystical sense is to see it as the extension of the incarnation and thus very closely identify Jesus with the church. However, it seems that with Paul there is a clear and definite distinction between Christ and the church. Christ is presented as the saviour of the Body. The church is seen as subject to Christ, and the body is presented as that instrument through which the decisions and purposes of the head are carried out. The Body is the agent of the head -- that without which the head is practically helpless. The church is the instrument, the agent.

67 Colossians 2:19, Ephesians 5:30
68 Ephesians 5:23,24
the organism through which the purposes and plans of Christ are to be carried out. It is through the church that Christ would bring light and salvation to men. This constitutes something of the glory of the church -- the necessary instrument in the hands of Christ.

But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?69

What Christ accomplished for men cannot avail for them until they hear of it and know of it and appropriate it for themselves. The task of the church is to carry to men the knowledge of this salvation which is offered.

It would seem, therefore, that Paul's concept of the church as the Body of Christ emphasizes the function of the church as the agent of Christ in making known to men that which he has provided for them, yet, not to the total exclusion of the mystical, personal relationship which exists when the individual claims Christ's atoning work, identifies himself with Christ, and becomes one of the great body of believers which comprise the Church. It is here that the other meaning of the Body of Christ comes in. If the church is to complete her task, if she is to be worthy of that tremendously important task which is hers, if she is to do the work for which Christ intended her, then she must live so close to Christ and be so much "in Christ"70 that

69 Romans 10:14 70 II Corinthians 5:17-20
her unity with him is such that she can be called nothing less than the Body of Christ in the mystical sense of the term. In other words, to be the Body of Christ in the practical sense the church must be the Body of Christ in the mystical sense as well. 71 Certainly, this proper concept of the church was important to the Corinthian Christians in helping them to understand the importance of their unity as believers in Christ and as servants of his, especially in the light of the discord and disunity which engulfed them.

It is apparent from Paul's treatment of the Corinthian problems that there was a definite lack of love within the Corinthian church -- a basic element, without which there can be no real unity, harmony, or effectiveness. In First Corinthians, chapter thirteen, the negative aspect provides a picture of the deplorable state of affairs that had arisen within the church. They were enjoying spiritual gifts but they were using them without love, for they were impatient, unkind, jealous, boastful, arrogant, rude, resentful, intolerant, and unjust. They were neglecting the best and most vital gift of all, that by which all other gifts must be animated and used if they are to be of any real worth at all. Paul, therefore, reminds the Corinthians of the more excellent way of love, and this is really the very heart of the epistle, for the root cause of so many failings and inconsistencies in life rests at this point of

lack of love.

Coupled with their failure in love, the Corinthians had also been deficient in the evaluation and use of their spiritual gifts. Thus, they had rated the gift of speaking in an unintelligible tongue higher than the gift of prophesying. The use of tongues impressed their immature minds as being more wonderful and spectacular, and therefore more desirable, so we can see again something of the pride which plagued them along with their lack of love. But Paul points out that prophesying should be more highly desired because it is comprehensible to all and leads to the edification, encouragement, and comfort of the whole congregation. On the other hand, speaking in tongues is unintelligible and therefore unedifying except to him who has that gift. Spiritual gifts are not granted to be used in a selfish manner, but the edification of the church must always be kept in mind. The first great principle of worship, then, is that all things should be done with the purpose of edifying, and this was worthy admonition for the factional Corinthians.

Another great principle of worship is that all things should be done decently and in order. Disorderliness had become a mark of the congregational gatherings at Corinth -- men speaking in tongues without interpretations, several prophesying at once instead of in an orderly fashion, women

72 Corinthians 14:5
73 Corinthians 14:12
74 Corinthians 14:26
75 Corinthians 14:40
speaking and asking questions when they should have remained silent. Had there been more love and more humility in the Corinthian Church, these things would not have been, so Paul deals with them through his letters in an effort to correct these serious conditions.

Sometimes in Paul's writings the church is set forth in terms of a building erected by and for God. Paul uses this idea in writing to the Corinthians.\(^76\) The whole church is like a building framed together. It is from this idea that we get the meaning of edification, which really means building up. As we have seen already, the words of the prophets build up the church,\(^77\) but the reason why the Corinthian Christians felt they had to excel in spiritual gifts was not to glorify God and edify the church so much as to glorify themselves. There was to be a "building up" within the church, a building up of the people through cooperative, loving concern one for the other. The Christian duty was to build up one another\(^78\) and ever pursue those things which would mean benefit in the spiritual lives of the members. Certainly, the "building up" of the Christians was not being accomplished within the Corinthian Church with its condition of discord and disunity, pride and self-esteem.

We can see in all this, as Paul hoped the Corinthians would see it, that the work of the church must ever be that of construction rather than destruction. Thus, the Christian

\(^{76}\) I Corinthians 3:9  \(^{78}\) I Thessalonians 5:11

\(^{77}\) I Corinthians 14:3-5
should not think of himself as an individual only, for he is really a small part of a greater structure. He is a stone in a building, and his purpose should not be to draw attention to himself but to add strength to that building of which he is a part. He should consider himself as joined to his fellow Christians as closely as stone is joined to stone in a well-constructed building.

Paul's Terms for Christians

The terms used by Paul when addressing or speaking of Christians also suggest the element of unity which must characterize the Christian Church. One of the most-used titles employed by Paul, when referring to Christians, is "saints." The Greek word from which this term comes is ἁγίος, and it is to be regretted that "saint" has come to have such a different meaning from that which the original would convey. The Greek is translated "holy," and it carries the basic idea of difference from ordinary things, of being set apart for a particular purpose. For example, the temple was holy for it was different from other buildings. A priest was holy for he was set apart from other men for a particular task. The sabbath was holy for it was a different day set apart from the rest of the week. God is holy, the supreme Holy One, for He is different from all men. So, to call a church member a "saint" was to say he was different from other men. However, this difference was not to

79 I Corinthians 1:2; Romans 1:7; 15:26
be expressed in withdrawing from the world or society, but by living differently within the world. Whatever this difference may consist of, it is to be seen in the everyday life and activity of the individual. The difference that this term expresses is that the man who is thus described lives his life in the constant awareness of the presence of Jesus Christ and in the constant and deliberate attempt to listen to the commands of Christ and to carry them out. His whole life is dictated by the standards of Christ. The title really means "Christ's dedicated people," for in the lives of those who were members of the church, Christ was to have the preeminence. The very use of this term by Paul in addressing the Corinthians spoke a challenging message to them in their fastidious condition -- in their failure to give Christ the preeminence He deserved.

Paul uses another title also, for the Christians to whom he writes. He calls them "the brethren." To set a bad example was to sin against the brethren. He says, "All the brethren greet you" as he writes to the Corinthians. He speaks of the brethren who came from Macedonia. Perhaps this was Paul's favorite manner of address to the Christians to whom he wrote. Within this term lies the tremendous truth that the church is meant to be a group of brothers. It is supposed to be a family of God in which

80 Corinthians 8:12 81 Corinthians 16:20
81 Corinthians 16:20 82 II Corinthians 11:9
men are brothers one of the other. So, when a church is divided in heart and spirit, when bitterness invades its fellowship, when an unforgiving spirit causes hurts that remain unhealed, the church then ceases to be a true church in the fullest sense of the term. Unity, oneness, brotherhood -- these are essential within the church! Christ is not divided and his church must not be divided either! The church was meant to be a band of brothers -- a body of believers!

Also used by Paul, in speaking of Christians, is the reference to "believers," or "those who believe." Thus, the church member is the man who accepts what Jesus Christ says as true and who lives his life with confident assurance that it is true. The Christian is the man who is thoroughly convinced that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of his soul, and who has made Jesus Christ the Lord of his life.

Therefore, in regard to the world, the church member is supposed to be a man who is different because he lives in the presence of and according to the standards of Christ. In regard to his fellow men, the Christian is the man who lives in the fellowship of brotherhood, in the spirit of unity with other Christians within the church. In regard to Jesus Christ, the church member is the man who has accepted the offer of Christ in terms of atonement and the demand of Christ for his life.

83 Romans 4:11; I Thessalonians 1:7
Summary Statement

It has become more and more apparent, as we have considered the problem of factions within the Corinthian Church, that Paul is emphasizing and re-emphasizing the vital necessity of unity within the church. Divisions and discord are incompatible with the true nature of the church and cannot be tolerated. The body of believers which is the church must be united in Christ in order to do the job which He has for it to do.

I like the summary of Robertson and Plummer in the *International Critical Commentary*.

The Church is neither a dead mass of similar particles, like a heap of sand, nor a living swarm of antagonistic individuals, like a cage of wild beasts: it has the unity of a living organism, in which no two parts are exactly alike, but all discharge different functions for the good of the whole. All men are not equal, and no individual can be independent of the rest: everywhere there is subordination and dependence. Some have special gifts, some have none; some have several gifts, some only one; some have higher gifts, some have lower; but every individual has some function to discharge, and all must work together for the common good. This is the all-important point -- unity in loving service. The Church is an organic body, an organized society, of which all the parts are moved by a spirit of common interest and mutual affection.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{85}Plummer and Robertson, *op. cit.*, 269, 270.
CHAPTER V
THE CONCLUSION

We have traced something of the establishment and early development of the Corinthian Church, and we have reviewed the problems which confronted the Corinthian Christians in those early days. Their problems were numerous and serious, worthy of the vital concern which Paul evidenced toward them. There was dissension, discord, disunity, pride, self-will, and lack of love within that early Christian congregation. Paul deals wisely with all these problems through his Corinthian letter, but our concern in this study has centered particularly in the factious spirit which prevailed and Paul's emphasis upon the spirit of unity which must characterize the church which is the Body of Christ.

The Christian life was not simply an individual life but a life in fellowship with other believers and with Christ. Upon that fellowship Paul laid great emphasis, and within that fellowship he stresses there must be unity! The members of the body of Christ form one whole because they are partakers of one common life. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free -- and all were made to drink of one Spirit." 1

1 1 Corinthians 12:13
The unity of those who together form the Body of Christ is not merely an achievement of man, but it can only be fully realized when Christ is given his proper place. Just as the life of the human body maintains all the various members and nourishes them and enables them to develop and grow, so it is within the Christian Church. The source and center of all is Christ. The head of the body is Christ, and all Christians comprising the body of believers which is the church must be united in him. The same spiritual life exists in all Christians, derived from the same source, supplying them with similar energy and desire, prompting them to live lives of harmony and love. They accept the Spirit of Christ, and are thus formed into one body, no longer being isolated, living for self, and each one fighting for his own way, but are now banded together for the promotion of one great common cause -- the cause of Christ and the gospel. There is no longer clashing between the interests of the individual and the interests of the group to which he belongs. The member finds his life, his function, and his highest purpose within the body of which he is a part.

Paul is also very careful to show that the real efficiency of the body depends upon the multiplicity and variety of the members of which it is composed, with all working together in harmony. The Body of Christ is highly organized and no one organ can do the whole work of the body. Therefore, there is diversity of gifts and abilities, but all must work together as a well-functioning body in order
to carry out the task which Christ has entrusted to the
church. One very important function of the church, there­
fore, is to show forth a spirit of unity and harmony while
at the same time utilizing every faculty for good which its
members possess. Actually, every one who comes into this
fellowship of the body of Christ has something to contribute
to its work and to its effective operation. Each member is
connected with that body because of the Spirit of Christ
possessing him and assimilating him to it, and he has an im­
portant role to play in bringing to realization the total
proper functioning of the body of which he has become a
part.2

For Paul, it was impossible to think of an indivi­
dual Christian as being unrelated to the church. Christiani­
ity for Paul meant Christ, and Christ meant the Church. Of
course, the initial decision of faith must ever be an in­
dividual affair, but the effective Christian life cannot be
an isolated, solitary existence lived apart from other be­
lievers or in small, self-centered groups. The church is
preeminently a fellowship of believers. It is a pure com­
munion of persons united to Christ, who is its living head,
and to one another through the Holy Spirit.

Within the Body of Christ there must be no depreca­
tion of one another. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I
have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I

2Marcus Dods, The First Epistle to the Corinthians
(New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1898), 287, 288.
have no need of you." All the parts are needed. Paul goes even further and reminds the Corinthians that the "parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensa-
ble." Even the less conspicuous parts play vital roles in
the functioning of the body and must not be depreciated in
value simply because they are not seen. The heart, the
brain, the lungs, and those delicate members of the body
that do its essential work entirely hidden from view, are
still vitally necessary. The Corinthians were reverencing
those who were their obvious leaders in the church, per-
mitting division and discord to develop, and were showing
contempt for the followers of groups other than their own.
Paul thus continues to emphasize the need of all parts work-
ing together effectively within the Body of Christ.

I believe Paul was seriously distressed by the con-
ditions which he learned were existing in the Corinthian
Church, but I wonder what his reaction would be if he were
to come among us today and view the church universal in its
present condition? No doubt, if he were here, he would con-
demn our ecclesiastical divisions as soundly as he condemned
the cliques in Corinth in his day. Within the confines of
our local congregations we view our disunity with complacency
or else overlook it entirely. We comfort ourselves in many
cases by saying that in spite of all our denominations we
yet have a spiritual unity with Christians in other churches.

We glibly sing, "We are not divided, all one Body we," but we wonder just how true the statement is? Certainly the words express a glorious ideal, but in actuality it has not been fully realized.

Paul dealt with the Christians in Corinth who were so proud of their possession of the Spirit that they forgot all need for corporate unity. When we look at all our denominations and divisions today, in which one seems to say, "I am of Calvin," and another, "I am of Wesley," and another "I am of Luther," it would be well for us to listen again to Paul's challenge ringing out, "Is Christ divided?" Also we might well hear him saying, "Were you baptized in the name of John Calvin? Did you profess your faith in John Wesley? Do you pray to Martin Luther?" Surely it is a task laid upon the minds and hearts of all Christians to work and pray for the healing of the broken body of our Lord.

What is the true mission of the Church in the world? It is God's will that the Church shall grow, healing the divisions of men and reconciling them to God and to each other until all is complete in Christ. This quest for unity and its consequent effectiveness has been evidenced down through the history of the church, and the outlines of a truly ecumenical church are again beginning to emerge in this, our day. The church of Jesus Christ is fitted by its

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message, its tradition and essential mission, to convey the uniting, healing word to a divided and troubled world. With what a tremendous impact the gospel of reconciliation could smite the evil things that plague mankind if all the members of the Christian Church could find grace sufficient to sit down at the same table and sing the same song, having mended the tears made in the seamless robe by the divisions and schisms and denominationalism of Christian believers.\(^6\)

Were Paul to stand among us today, his message might very well be the same that he shared with the Corinthians,

I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

Christian unity is essential!

\(^6\)Craig and Short, op. cit., 24.

\(^7\)I Corinthians 1:10
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