

1:11 - Contentions: Holding up in pride one man over another. To glory in men and to quarrel with others in the assembly over those men. One says, *“I am of Paul, another, I am of Apollos...”*.

5:1 - Fornication: Disregarding a divine order of authority in a relationship. For example, to physically take another man’s wife is disregarding the authority of that man given to him by God over his own wife to be for him alone. This is adultery and it is called fornication.

Spiritual fornication is very similar. It is placing yourself under any spiritual authority that is not God. When one serves a false god, for example, he is committing spiritual fornication since he is acknowledging a spiritual authority that is not the true God—and giving it his affection and adoration.

11:18 - Divisions: Essentially, this progresses beyond spiritual fornication. It not only disregards the divine authority, it removes that authority altogether by suggesting that Christ has never risen from the dead! If He never rose, then He is dead and can be no authority at all! This will lead to people who are religious but not saved – *divided* from the body of Christ.

Overview of Introduction: (1:1-1:10)

Before the problems are addressed, there is an introduction. The introduction reveals the main audience as a local church- *“unto the church of God which is at Corinth ... with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord...”* (1:2). For though there will be instruction to the individual Christian in his daily walk, the issues at stake have to do primarily with the collective mindset and action of the local church in its relation to the One they call, **“Lord.”**

The first instruction of the book is given in verse 1:10. This instruction essentially sets the target of the letter. It is the main reason Paul wrote: *“...that there be no divisions among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same **mind** and in the same **judgment.**”* That mind is Christ’s (2:16) and that judgment comes from using the mind of Christ (2:15).

God’s idea of unity in the church is not simply all in agreement, but rather all having the same judgment (evaluation of right and wrong) as the Lord

He is the Lord. He is given that title six times in these verses. We are not free to do as we please with His church. If we call on His name (i.e. His authority) in our local church then this letter is addressed to us collectively. Its instructions are not optional, for they come from the risen **Lord** Jesus Christ, not Paul (14:37).

Overview of Contentions (1:11- 4:21)

The first major movement of thought in this book will be marked by the statement of Paul that a problem has come to his attention: *“For it hath **been declared unto me ... that there are CONTENTIONS among you**”* (1:11). In this discussion on the problem of contentions in the Corinthian assembly, Paul will reveal the reason that these contentions exist.

Their mindset is such that they are glorying in men. This must be corrected, for if an individual is glorying in men in the assembly, it is quite possible that this individual, in time, will desire that others in the assembly be impressed with him. This kind of thinking will affect what a believer does in the assembly and it will affect the very character of the entire assembly. The assembly is for the Lord, not men. *“He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”* (1:31).

In explaining and correcting this problem within the assembly, Paul uses the logic of the gospel. He points to the cross of Christ, not simply the death of Christ, to illustrate the bankruptcy of man’s wisdom. It was man’s wisdom to put Christ on the cross, and it is man’s wisdom that causes a believer to be *“puffed up for one against another”* (i.e. to be contentious. See vs. 4:5).

Paul will also show that it is **God** who is the supplier and sustainer of the assembly and every man within it. Therefore, to be so impressed with someone so as to call yourself after him (I am of Paul...) is ludicrous. If **God** then is the giver of everything, what point is there to glory in a man? What really has the man done? *“Therefore, let no man glory in men”* (3:21).

Overview of Fornication (5:1-11:16)

The second major movement of thought in this book is marked by the statement, *“It is reported commonly that there is FORNICATION among you”* (5:1). In this discussion, Paul will once again reveal the reason that the stated problem exists.

Sexual immorality in the assembly is a serious thing indeed, but it is only a symptom of a greater problem. Fornication in the assembly is the result of one’s disregard for God’s established order of authority. God has given authority to fathers over daughters (7:36-38), to husbands over wives (7:39-40), to wives over the bodies of their husbands (7:4), to the assembly as a whole over those in fellowship (5:1ff, 6:1-6), etc. The greater issue here is not the actual fornication, as sinful as that is, but rather the mindset that drives it—and the mindset in the assembly which allows it.

This problem in mindset is further demonstrated as Paul points out the greater problem of spiritual fornication (see verses 8:1; 10:7, 20-22). Spiritual fornication is a logical progression from physical fornication. If one disregards the divine order of authority in human relationships, what is to stop him from disregarding the order of authority which has the Lord Himself as the head? Fornication is a serious problem indeed.

The solution is again back to the gospel. The believer is reminded that he is not his own and that he has been *“bought with a price”* (6:19-20; 7:23). One who is bought is a slave. He is not free to act under his own will. He must obey his master. As bond-servants of God, we must submit to His will and seek His interests above our own. *“My master may do what He wants but I must do what He tells me”* is the servant’s attitude. These are the truths emphasized in this section.

In seeking God’s interests, one will often be called upon to sacrifice legitimate freedoms such as eating meat (see 8:4-13; 9:19-27; 10:23-11:1). It is in the interest of God that the body be built up. It is in the interest of God that the lost be evangelized. And it is in the interest of God that we maintain a testimony toward this world. For these reasons, freedoms in Christ must often be sacrificed. A good servant not only obeys his master’s direct commands, he also seeks and upholds all his master’s interests.

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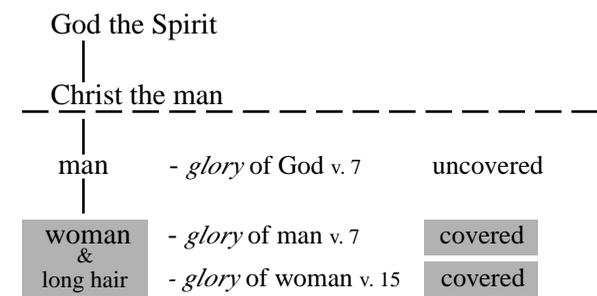
When God gave Israel instructions concerning their behavior as His people He repeatedly *commanded*, **“thou shalt put the evil away from among you.”** They were to discipline and put away the sinning member of Israel. (Deut. 13:5, 17:7, 19:19, 21:21, 22:21, 22, 24).

The reason was that God dwelt among His people and He is holy (separate from sin). He was the authority over His people for He had redeemed, or bought, them out of Egypt. It was by His **Name** they were called (Israel = “Prince of God”). All things were to be done His way. No decisions were to be based on feelings - including discipline. Whatever happens in the place where God dwells reflects on His Name.

Climax of Section 2 The climax of this section that deals with the mindset of the Corinthians toward God’s order of authority will teach explicitly what that order is (11:2-16). God is the head (authority) over Christ. Christ is the head over man. And man is the head over woman. This headship is all symbolized by the literal headcovering, which hits at the heart of both physical and spiritual fornication.

On the physical level, the head covering shows the woman submissive under her God ordained authority, man. On the spiritual level, the covered woman symbolically shows the glory of man hidden while the glory of God remains visible by the uncovered head of man. And when obeyed it shows the angels that God’s new creation is under God’s authority in Christ the Lord.

The headcovering demonstrates Christ alone as the authority and glorified One of His people.



spiritual, let him acknowledge that the

Overview of Divisions (11:17-16:23)

This third and final major movement of thought in 1 Corinthians begins with the same pattern as the first two: Paul declares that he has heard of something wrong among them. “... *when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be DIVISIONS among you...*” (11:18).

As in the prior movements, the stated problem is only a symptom. And as the solution in the first two movements was found in aspects of the gospel (“The cross of Christ,” and we were “bought with a price”), so too in this section.

The heart of the problem this time actually lies in the heart. The Lord Jesus died for them. He was buried for them. And He rose up again from the dead for them. Why? Because He loved them. Do they love Him in return?

Much of this section will deal with the actual assembling of the believers, “the assembling of the assembly”: what the Spirit terms, “in the church.” Issues such as how they should meet and for what purpose they meet together are addressed here.

“In the church” to remember the Lord Jesus - “*when ye come together into one place ... this do in remembrance of me*” (11:20-25). Paul reminds them that they meet not to have their “own supper” but “the Lord’s supper.” And the Lord’s supper is in remembrance of Him who gave His blood for them. Why? Because the Lord loved them. Are there some that He loves and others that He doesn’t? Certainly not. Therefore, no believer should be separated in divisions. Divisions reveal a heart upset because self is not satisfied. The primary purpose of assembling is to remember (i.e. honor or memorialize) Him, not self.

“In the church” to edify the Lord’s body - “*when ye come together ... let all things be done unto edifying*” (14:26). Why does this one body have gifts; were they not given to the body by the Spirit of God? Therefore, they must be used not for self glorification or self edification, but for the glorification of Christ and the edification of His body. Motivation is to be love for the Lord— and His body. Otherwise, the gift is useless.

When one loves the Lord and His body, he will be obedient, understanding that the assembly is not for him-

things that I write unto you are the

self. He will understand that the assembly is for the Lord Jesus Christ who died for it. His love for the Lord will not permit him to misuse his gift or corrupt the local church in any way. He will understand that the assembly is the Lord’s and, therefore, exists for Him and His pleasure alone.

When men employ man’s wisdom and man’s methods, man is glorified. When man is glorified, man is deprived (11:21).

When men employ God’s wisdom and God’s methods, God is glorified. When God is glorified, man is edified (14:12, 31).

In review, the church problem simply started with a contention, where one man is held by some in higher esteem than another. Thus, arguments result in the assembly over which of them is greater. They are glorying in men. This easily will lead to problems with authority. Men, when held in higher esteem “*than that which is written*” (4:6), inevitably have authority which it is not lawful for them to have—whether having that authority was their intent or not. When men have the authority, Christ does not.

When men are looking to men as their authority, the next logical progression in error is going to be, in time, divisions within the body and divisions from the body (i.e. a loss of the gospel itself; division from Christ).

Paul launches the book of 1 Corinthians like a projectile. It will follow a specific path or trajectory until the target is reached. The book is occupied with the local church (1:2). As a result, the arrangement of the text follows the same trajectory on which every local church needs to be.

The intended target is that in the end, “*God shall be all in all*” (15:28). Throughout the book we see how man’s ways carry the assembly further and further off course. At first, the deviations seem small and insignificant, after all, what is so bad about “a little debate” over who is a better preacher? Then the next “small,

commandments of the Lord. 1Cor.14:37

insignificant” deviation takes the assembly even further from its intended course. After a period of time, if these errors in course are not corrected, it is inevitable that the gospel will be lost and the target completely missed.

If a projectile is only 1 degree off when shot, it will end up missing the mark greatly.



Because the church was looking to men (good men), their judgments were off on virtually everything.

The Lord Jesus Christ must be preeminent. He must be glorified. He must be obeyed. And He must be loved. Even the slightest deviation from any of these things will result in severe spiritual error over time.

Conclusion:

We must do more than simply acknowledge His Name and obey Him. We must seek to glorify Christ alone, obey Christ completely in all things *and* love Christ *above* all things!

It is our love for Him that will bring about our obedience. It is our love for Him that will cause us to glorify Him alone. It is love for Him that will enhance our ability to glory in Him to the point where He is at the highest place and completely preeminent in our assemblies and lives. And so the epistle closes, “*If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ let him be Anathema Maranatha.*”

As has been suggested in this chronicle, there are very significant reasons for the problems addressed and the order in which they are addressed. Without doubt, errors in the assembly must never be ignored for any reason, for God deeply cares about the activity of the local church since it is the local church that reflects His Name, character and gospel. *J. Wilbur*

Chronicle #46b of “*The Bible of God*” series will provide a table of contents for the first epistle to the Corinthians. It will focus on the epistle’s introduction: verses 1:1-1:10.

Mailing list - Information - Copies

R. P. Amos

c/o Northgate Gospel Fellowship

240 McGuire Rd.

Rochester NY 14616



The Chronicles of the

Bible of God

46a

1 Corinthians an overview

Chronicle 46a in the Bible series will deal with a broad overview of this 46th Spirit-inspired epistle. Further details will follow in subsequent chronicles.

Without doubt, there were many problems in the Corinthian assembly. Though today problems are commonly overlooked in the name of love or evangelism, Paul does not ignore them. He deals with them head-on because the local church is God’s temple (1Cor. 3:16,17). And God is concerned with the activities going on within *His* house.

Among the many problems addressed, only some were in answer to the Corinthian questions (7:1, 8:1, 12:1, 16:1). Other problems, not inquired about, are intermixed with these in a very deliberate fashion. Together, they all fall into one of three 3 categories: *contentions, fornication, and divisions*. The Holy Spirit has provided a coherent thought-flow through the arrangement of the epistle which gets to the heart of each of these matters.