

# The Year of St. Paul

## The First Letter to the Corin-



### First Letter to the Corinthians---Part 3

In the eighth chapter, Saint Paul teaches that there is only one God. This teaching would not have been a new idea to Corinthians who had been Jewish and who became Christians. Jews steadfastly held to the belief that the God who saved them from Egyptian slavery was the very same God who created the world. Belief in the true God was at the core of their faith.

However, Paul's teaching that there is only one God would indeed have been new to other people living in Corinth, who were quite familiar with the practice of worshipping a variety of so-called gods. Some of these gods were statues. Other gods were related to nature, such as, the seas, the wind, fire, light, speed, fertility, and so forth.

However, when Paul wrote that there was only one Lord and that this Lord was Jesus Christ, his message was initially new to everyone in Corinth who became a Christian. Telling people about a certain man named Jesus was not contested insofar as Jesus was described as a human. But calling this Jesus "Lord" meant that He was also divine. In effect, the term "Lord Jesus Christ" means that the human male named Jesus of Nazareth is simultaneously Almighty God, Master of creation.

Paul urged the Christians in Corinth to avoid behavior that would shock people with weak consciences. "Shocking" others is different from "scandalizing" them. Scandalizing other people involves committing a sin which is either observed or later becomes known to other people who did not think that the scandalizing person would ever do such a thing. On the other hand, shocking other people involves doing something which is sinless but which other people think is wrong. As an example of shocking, Paul mentions the act of eating food that had been previously offered to some so-called god or idol. While the act of eating that food would not be wrong, other people may think that eating such food is wrong. They are thereby shocked.

In the ninth chapter, Paul asserts (in the form of rhetorical questions) that he is an Apostle and that he has seen the [risen] Lord. Most Christians throughout history have not seen Jesus risen from the dead. Moreover, some people who did happen to see Jesus risen from the dead are not Apostles. What constitutes someone as an

Apostle is a combination of two traits: a vision of Jesus risen from the dead and an assignment from Jesus Himself to act in His name and with His power.

Paul writes that anyone who preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ deserves to be supported by those who receive that ministry. This is the rationale for the obligation of Christians to finance the living conditions of bishops and priests.

Then Paul points out that it was his intention to mingle with people of various groups in order to convert them to belief in Jesus Christ. Paul intended to mingle with Jewish people in order to convert them to Christ, to mingle with non-Jewish people in order to convert them to Christ, and to mingle with people who were weak [in faith] in order to convert them to Christ, or to strengthen their faith. In general, Paul wanted to mingle with all kinds of people not only so that he might convert them to Christ but also so that he, too, might share in the rewards that Christ offers to those who believe in Him. While using the imagery of athletics in which winners of various events are awarded prizes, Paul asserts that the prize that Christians can win is far greater than anything that an athlete can win. Christians, assisted by the grace of God, can gain an "imperishable" crown of eternal life in heaven.

In the tenth chapter, Paul writes about the Christian

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worship service that we commonly call the “Mass.” Without using that particular term, Paul stresses our belief in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ as the consecrated bread and wine that becomes His body and blood. Paul proposes two questions to which he expects the Corinthians to answer “yes.” He asks, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” We Catholics, who live among many people who disagree with us, can find reassurance that in this letter, written by Paul during the first century, the Christians at that time clearly understood that in the consecrated bread and wine, they were sharing in the real Body and Blood of Jesus.

Paul then continues by stating that, since Christians who worship together [at a Mass] share in the one Body and Blood of Jesus, Christians---all of them together---become as a group one body. In 1949 Pope Pius XII used the term “mystical” to clarify this teaching of Saint Paul. The Christian community, that is, the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ.

In the eleventh chapter, Paul recounts the scene at the Last Supper when Christ instituted the Eucharist as the sacrament of His Body and Blood. Paul states “that the Lord Jesus, on the night He was handed over, took bread, and after He had given thanks, broke it and said, ‘This is My body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’”

This is the earliest Christian writing about the Last Supper---a real treasure for us and a gift to us from the Apostle Paul. He acknowledges that, in writing this to the Corinthians, he was, in fact, handing on them an instruction that he had received from the Lord. To this summary of the story about the Last Supper, Paul then warns the Corinthians that “Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the Body and Blood of the Lord.”

Wheel taken from “Reading the Acts, Epistles and Revelation by Kingsley E. Dalpadado, OMI, St. Paul Editions

### **Points for Reflection:**

*What would be an example of “shocking” other people, as distinct from “scandalizing” them? (cf. Chapter 8)*

*What kind of financial support should Christians be expected to provide for their bishops and priests? (cf. Chapter 9)*

*What are some ways in which Christians can mingle with people of other backgrounds in order to attract these other people to faith in Christ? (cf. Chapter 9)*

*Many people who become Catholics as adults have mentioned that the Eucharist is one of the main reasons for their interest in our faith. Reflect on what receiving the Eucharist means to you personally. (cf. Chapters 10 and 11)*