

# The Year of St. Paul

## The First Letter to the Corin-



### First Letter to the Corinthians---Part 2

In the third chapter Saint Paul uses several images to describe the relationship which Christians have with God. In one image Paul identifies Christians as “God’s co-workers.” This image helps to reflect on the active role that God wants us to have in our own salvation. God does not want us to be merely passive in our redemption, letting God do everything and doing absolutely nothing ourselves. Instead, God wants us to work with Him in His plan to save us. Of course, our active role is tiny in contrast with God’s almighty power, but our role is, nevertheless, active. In effect, God’s plan to save us involves our active faith in acts of faith, our active hope in acts of hope, and our active love in acts of love toward God above all things and toward others as to ourselves. We are saved by God in a community of believers, co-working with God to help one another toward our goal of heaven, while simultaneously helping ourselves toward the same heavenly goal.

Two additional images that Paul uses to describe the relationship that Christians have with God state that we Christians are “God’s field” and “God’s building.” In reference to the image of a “building,” Paul describes Jesus as the “foundation.”

In this context Paul speaks of a type of suffering which some Scripture scholars view as an indication of the existence of purgatory. Paul writes that

“...the work of each will come to light,...and the fire will test the quality of each one’s work. If the work stands that someone built upon the foundation, that person will receive a wage. But if someone’s work is burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire” (3:13-15).

According to this imagery, “the fire [that] will test” is the judgment that God makes of our lives. Receiving a “wage” means being rewarded with eternal happiness. To “suffer loss” refers to some form of punishment involving loss, and to “be saved, but only as through fire” means going to heaven, but only after having endured a temporary punishment of loss.

Another image that Paul uses to describe the relationship that Christians have with God is a “temple.”

Paul writes that Christians collectively are “the temple of God,” and that the Spirit of God dwells within the Christian community, as within a temple.

In the fourth chapter, Saint Paul identifies himself and the other apostles as “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God,” adding that he

became their “father in Christ through the gospel.”

Paul points out that, at the end of the world, Christ will be the One to pass judgment on each one of us and that thus we should not pass judgment on one another. He also warns the Corinthians against boasting.

In the fifth chapter, Paul teaches that Christ is “our Paschal Lamb who has been sacrificed.” This has become a well-known image of Jesus and a favorite Biblical text during the Easter Season. The annual Jewish paschal meal celebrates the escape from slavery in Egypt. At the Last Supper Jesus celebrated that paschal meal with His Apostles, and on the following day He allowed Himself to be sacrificed on the cross.

Paul then writes that any person who commits the sin of incest deserves punishment but that the punishment should be a type that encourages the sinner to become repentant. He warns the Corinthians not to associate with any of their fellow Christians who have committed serious moral evils. However, he acknowledges that they will not be able to avoid associating with non-Christians who have committed the same moral faults.

In the sixth chapter, Paul urges the Christians not to sue their fellow Christians in the public courts of the city of Corinth. Instead, he encourages them to settle their differences within the Christian community.

Paul stresses the teaching that not only did God raise Jesus from the dead but that God will also raise us from the dead at the end of the world. This is one of the principal reasons why the Christian faith can be proudly

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proclaimed as a religion of hope.

Furthermore, Paul points out that the life of every Christian is not really the private possession of the Christian. On the contrary, the life of every Christian has been “purchased [by Christ] at the price” of His crucifixion. Therefore, Christians are not their own. They belong to Christ.

As a follow-up to this, Paul writes that the bodies of Christians are members of Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit. In light of this inspiring description of the bodies of Christians, he warns the Corinthians to avoid acts of fornication, idolatry, adultery, boy prostitution, and homosexual acts. Then, in a positive way of speaking, Paul presents the challenge to “glorify God in your body.”

In the seventh chapter, Paul addresses the topic of marital status. He points out that a husband and wife have mutual authority and responsibility toward each other. He states that “a wife does not have authority over her own body, but rather her husband [has authority over her body], and that similarly, a husband does not have authority over his own body, but rather his wife [has authority over his body]. This teaching may come as a surprise to Christians, in general, who seem more aware of Paul’s statement ( in chapter 11) that the husband is the head of the wife---a view which was the prevailing attitude in the Greek culture at that time in history. Here, however, Paul stresses the mutuality of the marriage relationship.

Paul states that, at least ideally, husbands and wives should not divorce. However, he points out that if a Christian marries a non-Christian who later chooses to divorce the Christian, in that case the Christian is free to

marry again. Today this exception is referred to as the “Pauline Privilege.” The privilege is an exception to the Church rules regarding divorce and remarriage precisely because one of two individuals in the marriage was not a Christian and because it was this non-Christian who pursued the divorce.

In regard to the single adults, Paul writes that being unmarried is admirable and that, in his own personal opinion, virginity is preferable to marriage.

In this letter to the Corinthians, Paul recommends that free people and slaves should remain as they are. In effect, he does not condemn the practice of slavery, which was common at that time.

### **POINTS FOR REFLECTION:**

- 1. *How do you understand the role of the Christian as “God’s co-worker?” (cf. Chapter 3)***
- 2. *What would be a good way for Christians to treat a fellow Christian who has committed a serious public sin so that the sinner would be encouraged to repent? (cf. Chapter 5)***
- 3. *What is an example of how we can practice Paul’s teaching that our lives do not belong to ourselves but rather to Christ? (cf. Chapter 6)***
- 4. *How can Christians counteract a culture that overlooks many forms of sexual misbehavior, including ones mentioned by Paul? (cf. Chapter 6)***
- 5. *Identify some ways in which husbands and wives have mutual responsibility for each other and mutual authority over each other. (cf. Chapter 7)***
- 6. *Why has it taken so long for human beings to understand slavery as evil? (cf. Chapter 7)***

## **Overview of 1 Corinthians**

Opening (1:1-3)	Marriage and divorce (7:10-16)	The gift of love (13:1-13)
Thanksgiving (1:4-9)	Stay as you are! (7:17-24)	The gifts of prophecy and tongues (14:1-25)
Divisions in the community (1:10-4:21)	The unmarried (7:25-38)	Orderly worship (14:26-40)
Groups in the community (1:10-17)	Widows (7:39-40)	Resurrection (15:1-58)
The proclamation of the cross (1:18-2:5)	Food offered to idols (8:1-11:1)	Resurrection of Christ (15:1-11)
The true wisdom of God (2:6-3:4)	Issues and advice (8:1-13)	Resurrection of the dead (15:12-34)
Groups and the community (3:5-23)	Paul’s example (9:1-27)	Resurrection of the body (15:35-58)
The apostles and their ministry (4:1-16)	Examples from Israel’s past (10:1-13)	Other matters (16:1-20)
Travel Plans (4:17-21)	More advice (10:14-11:1)	The collection (16:1-4)
Immorality and litigation (5:1-6:20)	Order in Christian worship (11:2-34)	Travel plans (16:5-12)
The incestuous man (5:1-13)	Women & men in prayer & prophecy (11:2-16)	Final messages and greetings (16:13-20)
Lawsuits among believers (6:1-11)	The Lord’s Supper (11:17-34)	Closing (16:21-24)
Visiting prostitutes (6:12-20)	Spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40)	
Marriage and related matters (7:1-40)	The variety of gifts (12:1-11)	
Husbands and wives (7:1-7)	The body of Christ (12:12-31)	
Widowers and widows (7:8-9)		

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