

Themes Of I Corinthians (Part 3)

Judging Righteous Judgment

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It is interesting, and not coincidental that I Corinthians was written around the time of the Passover, and the Days of Unleavened Bread.

The church of God at Corinth, as we have found out, was in great need of instruction on the inherent meaning of the festivals of God.

I have shown in these last two sermons (I hope) that the members of the Corinthian church were exposed to perverse and shameful sins on a daily basis. They lived among the most wretched moral circumstances of their time. Not only was Corinth known far and wide for its cultic prostitution to Aphrodite (Diana), it was full of other sexual sins. Corinth was also full of idolatry—there were many temples there in Corinth. Paul mentions in one place that the city was full of extortion, and drunkenness, and who knows what else was there in the vice-city of the day.

Paul's message to the Corinthians, in an overall sense I think, can be boiled down to the lessons of this particular festival season. Like I said, he wrote it down about this season of the year. These ideas were on his mind. He was thinking about this and applying it to their situation.

And those lessons are these—that we have been redeemed from such a life of sin; that we have been called out of the world full of sin by the Father; and that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ has covered us—redeemed us.

Our job, after we believe and repent, is to make sure that we do not fall back into those sins; and we do this through maturing as a Christian.

Now, we saw last time in I Corinthians 3 that the Corinthian church was very young, and as Paul said, very carnal. They were babes in Christ. And, they had the disadvantage of living in "Sin City," 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

So, not only did they have the baggage of past corruption that they had to overcome, they had almost constant temptation to return to their former lives of sin.

So, how does Paul deal with this less than ideal situation? He could have advocated that the whole church just pick up and move to some remote valley in the mountains

somewhere and practice their beliefs in lonely serenity. But as we will see, in Corinthians 5 he rejects this outright. Perhaps he had heard while speaking with the other apostles of Jesus' prayer, which would one day be written by the apostle John in his gospel account, chapter 17. And, in verse 15 of that chapter, Jesus Christ said that He asked the Father not to take them out of the world, but that He should protect them from the Evil One.

So, if mass exodus from the environment of sin is not the answer, then what course is left? Turn to John 5 and I will show you the answer to this question from Jesus' point of view. Jesus Christ, of course, is our model. His life shows us the way to live. And, listen to what He says when He is asked certain questions here:

John 5:24-30 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment [this is important to this sermon] also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. I can of Myself do nothing [this is the most important verse of this passage]. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.

Now, turn to chapter 7. This, here, is an answer to a question that had been asked of Him, and they were wondering why Jesus was so wise. How was it He had the answers to all these things? This is also important to keep in the back of your mind.

John 7:16-18, 24 Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or *whether* I speak on My own *authority*. He who speaks from himself [so very important] seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him...Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

That should set us up for this sermon today. I have just given you the theme of this sermon, judging with righteous judgment.

Now, we notice (if you would think about this for a minute) that the Father did not have His Son live out His life in obscurity in a desert place where He might be in contact with only a few people coming through. But rather, He had Him live in the cities and towns of Palestine among the people, despite being surrounded by sin. And we know from what was written in the gospels that there were prostitutes, and self-righteous Pharisees; there were people taking advantage of one another; there were crooked tax collectors stealing and extorting the people; there were the Romans and their cruelty, and other such things and sins in Judea at the time. And despite this, Jesus maintained a sinless life.

How?

In His own testimony from John 5, and John 7, He sought not his own will, but His Father's will in everything. And because of this, He judged every matter with righteous judgment. He could live sinlessly in the midst of corruption because He could make righteous judgments and follow them, always seeking to please His Father. He always had that at the forefront of His mind.

In any situation that comes up, you say, "Okay—How am I going to glorify God in this? What did God teach me? What is His will? Okay, then that is what I will do." And He did it. We should too.

He had a much stronger will than most of us have. And of course, with some practice, He was able to make these decisions promptly on the spot. And, that is the perfection—the maturity—that we are trying to get to and reach.

So, today, we are going to look at the Corinthian church from the perspective of the Feast of the Days of Unleavened Bread, and see (as we have just done in this little precursor) Paul's solution to their carnality, and the ever-present temptations that were there all around them at Corinth. And we will see this unfold as we go through this.

But, before we get to the Corinthians, we have to go back to Exodus 12. I am going to read this passage for two reasons. One, because it is the holy day, and it is good to touch bases on these very basic elements of the holy day, but also (two) because Paul draws on this material for part of his teaching in I Corinthians 5.

Exodus 12:3, 5-8, 11-20 Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: On

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

the tenth *day* of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of *his* father, a lamb for a household...Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take *it* from the sheep or from the goats. Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. And they shall take *some* of the blood and put *it* on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread *and* with bitter *herbs* they shall eat it...And thus you shall eat it: *with* a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It *is* the LOORD'S Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I *am* the LOORD. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you *are*. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy *you* when I strike the land of Egypt. So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LOORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance [which we all just kept Sunday evening]. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day [like today] *there shall be* a holy convocation, and on the seventh day [next Monday] there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but *that* which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you. So you shall observe *the Feast of Unleavened Bread*, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance. In the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether *he is* a stranger or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread."

I just wanted you to hear these things because this sets up the symbolism and meaning that Paul is going to draw from. Note that the Passover lamb, whose blood saved the Israelites from the death angel, is obviously a type of Christ's blood. He is the Lamb without blemish. That blood, then, was put on the doorpost, and it is a type of covering

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for our sins—redeeming us from bondage to this world—saving us from death. And, as we know, this same blood opens the way for a relationship with the Father.

As it says in Hebrews that Christ has gone through the veil, and is our Mediator before the throne of God. So, we have a connection to the very God of the Universe, the One who is called The Father.

This is all very basic stuff. I am going over this so I can lay the groundwork.

The dominant symbol of the feast of the Days of Unleavened Bread is leaven, or the lack and absence of leaven. Leaven is a symbol of corruption.

Most of you know how yeast works. We have been through this many times.

When yeast works in dough, it causes fermentation to occur. And, fermentation is a process of breaking apart, or breaking down.

When fermentation occurs, one of the byproducts is carbon dioxide gas, and this is trapped in the dough causing it to puff up, expand, rise, and inflate, until it is nice and light—and we enjoy eating fluffy soft bread very much. It even produces a slightly sour taste in the finished product. As a matter of fact, the Hebrew word for leavening means, "to sour." So, fermentation regardless what form it takes causes the thing to sour somewhat.

Now, if left to continue in the dough—not stopped by cold (refrigeration), or heat (baking)—the yeast will eventually utterly consume the dough. That is what it is feeding on. (Sugar, yes, but yeast also converts starch to sugar.) And of course, once it gets to that point, the dough is useless.

This action of the yeast in the dough is nearly a perfect parallel to the working of, the spread of, and the effects of sin in a person, and in a group. Once it infects a person, and the person is allowed to remain, the sin begins to spread from him to the others. It is just a true principle. It is like a law of the universe.

We now have the background to what Paul is about to teach the Corinthians.

I Corinthians 5:1-8 It is actually reported *that there is* sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus [disfellowship him]. Your glorying *is* not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.

Now, this problem and situation of this very perverse sin in the congregation was perhaps the most pressing problem among those in the Corinthian church. And, Paul needed to deal with this quickly because of its potential to corrupt. And already, in fact, as he mentions here, another sin had sprung from this one. And, it was one that was also very bad and insidious—the proud, self-righteous attitude of some of the brethren over their very tolerant and lenient stance toward the sinner.

That was their problem. They were treating this sinner with kid-gloves and allowing him to remain among them. And, Paul, who was hundreds of miles away, saw clearly and plainly enough to say, "Get this man out of there! He is going to affect all of you in a bad way! Get him out!"

So, he is very pointed, and very strong in telling them to get this guy out of the congregation. Twice, Paul invokes the name of the Lord as his authority, "Get him out!"

Of course, Paul did not do this in any vindictive way. He wanted to wake the man up to the seriousness of his sin, and spur repentance in him if possible. And, he also did it to protect the rest of the church. So, he had two reasons here. He wanted to help the man, and protect the church.

Of course, things had already started to go bad, and so he had some work to do to make sure that the sin was overcome.

Now, verses 6 through 8 focus on the church's puffed up attitude. And, what he tells them, is that their attitude stinks. "You guys have this all wrong! And moreover, it had already corrupted the whole lump," he says. The whole church—everybody—had been

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

infected one way or another. Their tolerant, proud reaction to this very perverse sin—so perverse that the gentiles would not condone it—told Paul that the whole congregation had been infected by a wrong spirit. And this spirit needed to be purged. And, he perceived (if you read between the lines) that they had dragged this wrong spirit in with them from the world. How do I know that? Because Paul calls it, "old leaven,"

They had dragged it in from the world, and their old lives before their conversion.

Now, if you will remember that Paul uses an image of the old man and the new man. And here, he uses a similar one of old leaven, and the new, unleavened.

So, whatever it was that they brought in with them, they had either never really repented of it, or they had reverted back to it. Either way, there was something that had lingered from their previous time in the world, and they had never seen the seriousness of it, and therefore, had never dealt with it; or because of their immaturity or their weakness, they had actually gone back to it.

So he commands them to purge, or clean out the old leaven—the corruption left over from their old man—the one who was suppose to die in baptism with all his baggage. So, all this old baggage, their old habits, the old ways of thinking from before their conversion needed to go.

He urges them to purge these sins so that they will truly be new creations.

I was telling David Grabbe yesterday, as I was talking through some of this, that I think that this might be the first time that he uses this symbol or image of old versus new. Because, I believe that Corinthians was written earlier than the other books where he also mentions something similar. I am not exactly certain of this. But Paul is getting the ground work going for this image that comes to be much more prominent in later letters.

In any case, he wants them to purge these sins so that they will truly be new creations—a new lump. He tells them Christ died for their forgiveness (and ours too), and their redemption. That has happened, "for indeed, Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us." So, He covered them, He justified them at the time of their baptism. So, we can truly say that we are unleavened. He had done His part. What Paul is telling them to do is to make sure that they remained unleavened by purging anything of corruption from themselves, and to continue the work—every sin, every bad habit, every wrong attitude that had been allowed to return, or had never really been dealt with yet.

So, Christ has done His part; now it is time for them (us) to do their (our) part by purging

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

out what remained.

Turn to I Peter 4 and we will see a similar exhortation.

I Peter 4:1-3 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of *his* time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we *have spent* enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.

He is talking about a lot of the same things that were plaguing the Corinthian church.

Turn to Ephesians 4, and we will see how this imagery finally developed.

Ephesians 4:17-24 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

So, even though we have been unleavened, there is something for us to do beyond that. We have to continue to purge, and we have to do what we can to remain unleavened. Or, we can say, "Go on to perfection."

So, going back to I Corinthians 5, he encourages them, as he closes that section in verse 8, to make the Feast of the Days of Unleavened Bread a turning point in their lives.

Celebrate the Holy Days free of their old attitudes, and of mental, verbal, and behavioral sins; and on the other hand, be filled with pure and true thoughts, words, and deeds.

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

So, as we have always said, get rid of the old, and put in the new, the better, the Godly.

Now, what was it about these Corinthians that had to change? What was the prime factor that Paul chose to target in these Corinthians? I have already given you the answer in my introduction. He decided to target their ability to make proper judgments. They were not making good choices. And this had to change. They had to learn to make right and Godly decisions. But, their pride—puffed-up status—was not allowing them to.

Turn to I Corinthians 5 again, and we will read the next section.

I Corinthians 5:9-13 I wrote to you in my epistle (a previous one not in the Bible) not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet *I* certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world [the rejected idea of mass exodus to some remote place]. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what *have I to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside [obviously not]? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."

He comes right back at it and says it again, just in case they did not get it the first time. "Disfellowship this man with this sexual sin."

Now, we can see that he focuses on judgment as he wraps up his comments on this situation, here, with this man. He had written a previous letter, and had said to them not to fellowship with sexually immoral people. Yet, even this simple instruction confounded them. It seemed to confuse them. They misunderstood Paul. They thought he was talking about the people in the world. And he said, "Hey! What do we have to do with those people in the world? We have been called out of that world. My instructions were to you, and your own in the church. We have a responsibility to maintain order among ourselves. We do not have any power like that outside the church. God has not given that to us; He has reserved that to Himself."

He tells them essentially, "What you thought was ridiculous." So Paul meant that they were to disfellowship church members who are egregious persistent sinners. "Our bailiwick is the church. We do not have jurisdiction over those who are outside the church of God." They were not judging with righteous judgment. In fact, what they were

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

doing was turning righteous judgment on its head. They were doing the exact opposite to what they should have been doing.

What they seem to have been doing was condemning the perversions of the citizens of Corinth, to the point of shunning contact with them, but they were being tolerant and charitable to the same types of sins inside the church among the brethren.

Like I said, that should have been the exact opposite.

We, as a church—not just the ministry—but as a church have the responsibility to guard the virtue and the witness of the church of God by judging the conduct of church members, and enforcing certain disciplines, which includes disfellowshipping people.

Now, these are to be done in love and mercy, and they are to be done according to the scriptures and instructions that have been laid down. They are always done in order to spur on repentance, and to protect the flock.

It was easy to see that there was something screwy in their thinking. If they were to take something as simple as, "Do not fellowship with sexually immoral persons," and turn it on its head, there must have been something wrong in the way that they thought—in the patterns of their thinking—in the way that they came to decisions. Something was wrong. It was certainly carnal. We know that from chapter 3 where Paul tells them that they are still carnal. He could not speak to them as mature because they had not grown up yet. They still had to have the milk, the basics, of the word because they were still babes in Christ.

Their understanding and their ability to apply God's instruction was very immature. It would almost be like if we were to ask a six year old child to hand down a verdict on corporate tax evasion. Could they really understand what they were deciding about? They would not understand the basics, like the Ricoh Statutes, or any kind of finance. To them it would be gibberish.

These Corinthians did not have the spiritual wherewithal, and they did not have an experienced minister at the time, either. Remember, I mentioned in the other sermon, that after Paul left, they sent Apollos, but he was only there a short time, and then he left. And there is no indication that he left anyone there. And so, they were adrift and floundering. They were still very young in the faith.

Okay. I have approached this from a certain direction. As a matter of fact, I have approached this from the exact opposite way that Paul did. Instead of going forward in

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

the book, I am going to be going backwards toward the front because Paul had hit these things from the beginning.

I needed to give this to you in this manner to help you understand where I am going.

Remember, Paul said that they were puffed up.

I Corinthians 4:6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.

I Corinthians 4:17-21 For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church. Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God *is* not in word but in power. What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?

I Corinthians 5:2 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.

I Corinthians 8:1 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.

I Corinthians 13:4 Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

Colossians 2:18-19 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in *false* humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase *that is* from God.

I Timothy 3:1-2, 6 This *is* a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;...not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil.

What we have just read are all of the occurrences of the term, "puffed up." And, all of these were used by the apostle Paul. It is from the Greek word which sounds like the word it describes. It means to inflate; to blow or puff up; to cause to swell. It is a figure of conceit, arrogance, pride, self-importance, and haughtiness.

Through all the examples we have just seen, we can add this to explain their problems with making righteous judgments.

They had pride. Something was making them arrogant in the way they made decisions. They were allowing their pride in something they possessed to trump deciding to do what was right—something that they thought was right. Something that they thought was wise was becoming greater in their minds than what God said to do, or Paul said to do with the authority of Christ.

So, they were, in essence, being self-righteous. They were putting something higher in their own minds than the righteousness of God; something of themselves; something that they had learned; something they had come to understand; something they had started to value, or had valued for a long time; and it was trumping the wisdom and righteousness of God—the will of God.

What was it? The answer was in I Corinthians 8, verse 1:

I Corinthians 8:1 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.

Now, you can tell that this was on Paul's mind throughout the writing of this whole epistle because by the time you get to chapter 13, he is telling them that love does not puff up.

I Corinthians 8:2 And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.

That is a rather bold statement. He is essentially calling them a bunch of know-it-alls, and, a bunch of good-for-nothing know-it-alls, too.

Their problem was that they thought they had knowledge, and they may have been very smart, very intelligent people. Actually they may have been very knowledgeable. But,

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Paul makes it clear that theirs was the wrong kind of knowledge.

Now, perhaps what we are dealing with is that they had rudimentary Gnostic ideas along the lines of what later became known as Nicolaitanism.

Nicolaitanism is the idea that what is done in the body is of little consequence since all that really matters takes place in one's spirit.

Now, if we understand it from this point of view, their tolerance of the man who had his father's wife begins to make a bit of sense. They were thinking, "Oh, it is just a physical thing. We know that he is a believer. We know that he loves Christ. We know that he is committed to this way of life. So, let him stay among us, it will be better for him to stay among us because we can help him."

They coddled this incestuous man, firm in the knowledge that despite his unmentionable marital situation, he was a Christian.

Does that sound familiar?

This sounds like a lot of stuff I read in current Protestant journals dealing with people and their problems. They are not aware that what they are doing is following a Gnostic idea that has been around for a couple of thousand years or more.

Now, notice verse 3. Paul gets right to the answer here. This is Paul's answer to their being puffed up. This is hard to understand, though, because of the way that it has been translated:

I Corinthians 8:3 But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

That is Paul's answer.

Now, you really have to think about this one. The answer is not just straight out.

What he says is, "What we know, as carnal human beings, matters little or nothing." That is the first thing we have to understand. "That God knows us, that He has a relationship with us, is everything."

Did you notice how Paul turned it around?

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

They were saying, "Oh, I am a very spiritual man! I took a course in Greek logic one time, and now I know how to approach all these different situations!"

And Paul says, "You have got to be kidding me! What you know means nothing! But that God knows you, is everything!"

I have not explained it all yet. First he gets them to turn the situation around. He says, "You are looking in the wrong place, buddy. You are thinking about you, you, and you! And what you should really be thinking about is God, God, and God—what He has done, and what He continues to do, and that He is still our Father. Get that straight. Remember what Jesus said. He always made righteous judgments because He always did those things which pleased the Father."

Okay. Now that we understand that we are to change our point of view on this, what is our part in the relationship?

Paul tells us right here. Love God! That is your part to play. Love God!

Agappa is the word here. Loving God is an action. It is not a feeling, necessarily. There are feelings involved, but the loving part, here, is a verb. Love is an action word. It is doing something.

Paul is implying behavior, conduct, and adherence to a standard. What did Jesus say? "If you love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

Later, the apostle John would write, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." (I John 5:3)

Loving God is keeping all the commandments. That is a very basic way to put it. Even more generally speaking, "Loving God is doing His will in all things." That is basically what the commandments are, they codify His will in various situations. They cover everything.

So, in essence Paul tells the Corinthians, "I do not care how much you know, but I do care whether you are living God's way of life. And that tells me whether you love God, and your brothers, or not."

We will now turn to I Corinthians 13. Now we know why this chapter is in I Corinthians! This is the love chapter. The love chapter, I Corinthians 13, is a weapon against their puffed up prideful knowledge. He is trying to get them to understand that they were

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

thinking of themselves as being elevated, because they had this Greek learning, and that they need to forget all that, and start practicing the love of God. Notice how he goes through all this:

I Corinthians 13:1-7 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have *the gift of prophecy*, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

It would be an interesting study to go through there and check to see how many have to do pride!

I Corinthians 13:8-12 Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. For [listen to this] we know in part and we prophesy in part [preaching, or speaking eloquently]. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away [in the future]. When I was a child [notice this], I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things [quit being babies in the faith]. For now we see in a mirror, dimly [their understanding was cloudy], but then [in the future] face to face. Now I know in part [incomplete], but then I shall know just as I also am known [by God].

When we get to that future time, we will know, just as well as we are known. It is going to be a long haul before we get to that point. Not all knowledge will come in this lifetime. But, what is most important is that God knows us, and we know Him.

"Then I shall know just as I am known..."

We will have the same love of God that He is showing us, and then we can then show

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Him.

I Corinthians 13:13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.

And, that is what they were lacking.

I hope this love chapter becomes more understandable in terms of the people there in Corinth. Their pride and their immature carnal knowledge was skewing their ability to judge righteously. That is, they could not judge based on Godly love. They were relying on knowledge that they received from the world. No wonder they could not make judgments based on love. They really had not developed any, or very much. As we might say, they had a boat-load of old leaven that they needed to purge before they could judge with sincerity and truth, which are based on the love of God.

We will now turn to I Corinthians 2. Remember I said that he started with the solution. All of this works together. There are themes going in and out of his discussion here, and they are all focused towards one thing, correcting the Corinthian church, and getting them set on their feet, but they are all over the place.

I Corinthians 2:1-5 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

He makes it very plain, here, right away in chapter 2, where their confidence and pride lay—the wisdom and knowledge of men.

They were puffed up with their pseudo-intellectual vanity. They thought the Greek wisdom was tops. That is why he started out in chapter 1 talking about the foolishness of preaching, or the foolishness of the message. He was saying to them that it seemed to be foolishness because they were still stuck on this worldly wisdom that they thought was so great.

So, Paul made a point of not seeming to be overly knowledgeable as an example to

them. He toned down his rhetoric, and gave them the simple truths of Christ's work of salvation. And he backed it up with Godly works infused with God's power. Perhaps these things were like healings. Perhaps he rebuked a few demons.

But, more likely, this spiritual power that he showed was in things like giving wise counsel in helping people actually change their lives, and being able to see someone who once walked the streets suddenly become a virtuous woman. Maybe the powerful spiritual works were in sound reasoning from the scriptures, giving them powerful truths which answered the great questions of humanity—Why am I here? Why was I born? What is man? Is there a God? If there is, what is God doing? Where is all of this headed?

And Paul was able, by the spirit and power that God gave him through the spirit, to answer these questions. And he did not have to use rhetoric that raised the roof. He did not have to have people dancing in the aisles because of their ecstasy over his beautiful words. He just gave them the simple truth as it says here, "of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

He answered all the questions.

In verse 4, where it says, "in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power...," 'demonstration' is a very general word. It might be better translated as, "irrefutable testimony." It is a word they used in court of somebody giving clinching evidence that would seal a case.

He said, "The Holy Spirit, and the power that came through it, was able to give me irrefutable evidence that what I was saying was true."

And, where it says, "of the Spirit, and of the power..." might be a "Paul-ism" where he is actually saying spiritual power—the power that comes through the Holy Spirit. So, he used the two terms—of the spirit, and of the power.

And it parallels that in verse 5 where it ends with, "power of God." He is basically saying the same thing in both verses.

So, Paul humbly let God work through him, and he said that this was far more effective than any kind of wisdom or rhetoric that he may have been able to stage for their benefit. He is showing them an example, opposite to theirs, and asking them to discern which is more effective—Paul's example of humbly and faithfully in love allowing God to work through His Spirit, and give irrefutable evidence; or, the Corinthians' example of

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

spouting Greek philosophers, and believing they were so wise while letting sin dwell in their midst.

Which is more effective? Which is more Godly?

I Corinthians 2:6-10 However, we speak wisdom [the same word] among those who are mature [there is great and deep knowledge in Christianity], yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

He is telling them that if they have a desire for these mysteries, these deep things, this wisdom, it is there in Christianity. You cannot plumb the depths of God's word. It is too deep for all of us, no matter what our intellect.

But then, he says,

I Corinthians 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

"Because you are too carnal!"

"I'd love to be able to give you the hidden wisdom, the mysteries. But, you are not able to handle it right now. It would blow you away!"

So, he is giving them an enticement to hold on, and continue on, giving them encouragement to mature. "Yes, there are good things in here. We will get to them later. Just hang on and practice the love of God, and we will get to them. But, you need to be more spiritual. You cannot understand them now."

I Corinthians 2:11-12 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world,

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

It opens up a whole new vista of gifts and understanding!

I Corinthians 2:13-16 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

Now, as Herbert Armstrong taught us many, many years ago, often and repeatedly, the human mind can comprehend only physical things by observation through the senses, and then applying his own human reason.

But, the things of God are hidden from the human mind unless and until the Holy Spirit is present to receive, compare, and discern the truth of them.

God's Spirit, then, is the key to real Christian wisdom and understanding, because it provides the means and power of spiritual comprehension. If we do not have God's spirit, if it is not actively working within us, the things of God are not going to make sense.

And so, what will we fall back on?

Human wisdom, our own carnal reasoning, and worse, our own lusts, desires, pride, and then we will begin to live sinfully, making foolish, wrong decisions.

The important point of this theme of I Corinthians, Judging Righteous Judgment, is what Paul says in verses 15 and 16. He said that a truly spiritual person is qualified, and able to make sound Godly judgments because he has the mind of Christ. He is able to discern what is truly important versus what is peripheral. That is, he will be able to prioritize things properly. He could be given a whole series of things that he could do, but if he is working with the mind of Christ, if he is allowing the spirit to flow through him, he will chose the one best thing that will not only be a right thing, but it will also bring glory to God.

There may be several right things, but a mature person with the mind of Christ will choose that one best thing that will give God honor. It might happen in a situation, let's say, where there are several choices, and it might be the choice of living, and dying. Perhaps someone is pulled before the Inquisition, and there is a way to live, and a way to die. Both ways are open. And maybe there is a way to live that does not compromise the truth. We do not know the situation. I have not explained enough. It is just off the top of my head. But, maybe the decision to die is actually better than the decision to live.

Would we have the spiritual wherewithal to make that decision? Jesus did.

He said, "I will die. That is what I came for. That is what will bring the most honor and glory to God and do the greatest good work for all of mankind."

Maybe that is an extreme situation, but that is how the spirit works. It is there, guiding us, giving us the ability to receive, compare, and discern the truth of the matter, and then make the best decision.

A person who is using God's Spirit understands what God's will is, what God's purpose is, what God's goal for us is, and what God requires of us. And then, he decides, and then he acts.

The Corinthians on the other hand were making such horrible judgments because they were still using the same patterns of thinking in the same false standards of knowledge that they had used before they were called. They were still carnal.

This is what Paul urged them to purge from themselves. And also, this is what we need to heed. Is God in all our thoughts as we make decisions? Do we base our thinking on the word of God, which is the foundation of all knowledge? Is our Christian walk modeled after the example of Jesus Christ? Do we really have and use the mind of Christ?

To close, turn to II Corinthians 10, as Paul is still thinking about this same idea, because the problems continued, although they did get better.

II Corinthians 10:3-6 For though we walk in the flesh [we are still physical], we do not war according to the flesh [we do not physically fight our conflicts]. For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal [physical, human] but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds [which follow], casting down arguments [wisdom of men] and every high thing that exalts itself [pride, conceit, arrogance] against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)
captivity to the obedience [commandment keeping] of Christ, and being
ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.