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Volume XVI
Issue 381

The Marriage Ideal

Did Paul Permanently Elevate Singleness Above Marriage?

(A Brief Survey of I Corinthians 7)

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

It is not good for the man to be alone (Genesis 2:18).

It is not good for man to be alone. This is the divine declaration. Although some are given a special gift of singleness, and certain extreme circumstances make marriage tremendously difficult, these are the exceptions rather than the rule.



Sorrow to those who are pregnant, and to those nursing in those days; for there will be great necessity in the land and indignation on this people (Luke 21:23).

For a narrower example, if you were just diagnosed with terminal cancer, it might not be the ideal *time* to start a family.

Adam was created *alone*. The situation in which Adam found himself was no accident. It was not a failure of God's plan. God did not make man only to realize that it was not good for him to be alone, and then scrambled to correct this situation. No! He created man with this need, and then finished His wise plan with the creation of woman. Eve was Adam's counterpart, thus,

Whoever finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor of the LORD (Proverbs 18:22).

Marriage is the ideal, not singleness. Marriage is the ideal, not divorce (which is a return to singleness).

EXCEPTIONS TO MARRIAGE

As a broad example of exception, if you had lived in Germany during the early 1940s (especially if you were of Jewish descent) it probably would not have been an ideal *time* for you to marry and have children. It could have added to your troubles and trials significantly, as it will with those who will live during the tribulation.

DID PAUL INSTITUTE A PERMANENT CHANGE REGARDING MARRIAGE?

Notwithstanding these examples of *present distress*, marriage, however, still remains the ideal.

In I Corinthians Paul is not laying forth the *doctrine* of marriage. This doctrine has already been laid out clearly in the Hebrew Scriptures. Elsewhere in his letters, Paul unmistakably supports and defends the standard of the Hebrew Scriptures (Ephesians 5; Colossians 3; I Timothy 3; I Timothy 5; Titus 3).

Among other things, in I Corinthians Paul is answering questions on various topics. In chapter 7 he

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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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Strictly Personal



Our Mailbox

In the last issue we shared upcoming opportunities for fellowship and study in PA & FL. I encourage you to attend if you can. The value of our interconnectedness is immense. We need each other!

Here is a reminder of some of the details.

Pennsylvania Regional Quarterly Gathering

February 17, 2013 * 1-4 PM

Teachers: J. Baskin; S. Hill; M. Zender; C. Pilkington

Location: Johnstown Airport (Conference Room)
479 Airport Rd, Johnstown, PA 15904

Additional Fellowship: For those who would like to arrive early, we'll be meeting 10:00 a.m.-Noon at:

Ponderosa Restaurant (2-½ miles from the airport)
406 Galleria Dr Johnstown, PA 15904

(The breakfast buffet is \$4.99; the lunch buffet is \$7.99 beginning at 10:45 a.m.). RSVP

Contact information: Clyde Pilkington
clyde@studyshef.com — 814-341-8462

Ft Lauderdale Spring Gathering

March 1-3, 2013

Teachers: M. Zender; D. Sheridan; W. Dabbs; C. Pilkington

Location: Tigertail Lake
580 Gulfstream Way, Dania Beach, FL 33004

Accommodations:

Courtyard Marriott Hotel 954-342-8333
Fairfield Inn and Suites 954-981-2700

Contact: Kate Horne chorne61@bellsouth.net

It'll be great to see you!

Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

Your work has been refreshing in ways I cannot even begin to describe. The book I just finished was *[Being OK with not Being OK](#)*. You again touched this weary and confused heart like your other work has done. Your service provides materials that open the eyes of the weary searchers, and we look forward to learning more from you. – *FL*

Thank you for the wonderful work you do. The *[Daily Email Goodies](#)* and *[BSN](#)* are so fantastic, and all the books I get from you. Father is steadily re-educating me and shaping the new creation.

Today's *Goodie* is a beautiful message and coincides exactly with what I have been thinking in the last 24 hours. Thanks to our loving Father Who knows what we need and has perfect timing. – *Australia*

I translated one of your *[Daily Email Goodies](#)* for my next week's newsletter. Those *Goodies* are appreciated by many of my readers. So you have a double result with them! – *The Netherlands*

The *[BSN](#)* is a study and teaching aid that I look forward to every week. I thank God daily for it. I continue to pray for your work. – *AL*

So many of us depend on you as Father gives us your labor and love for our growth and maturity. You plant new seeds of discernment in us and then water us with love and kindness and patiently wait to see some fruit of your labor; when Father chooses to give the growth. What a journey we're on! What a mission you have undertaken! What a privilege for me to witness, from a distance, Father's operations in your work! I still love you and your calling. – *LA*

I'm again reading *[The Church in Ruins](#)* and, with my current understanding, it is much clearer than the first time I read it. I appreciate your care in putting that together. – *WA*

Thank you so much for letting me stay with you all. Everything was wonderful and very enjoyable for me. Thank you so much for your hospitality. I really enjoyed the meal times and the conversation! I did feel like a part of the family and I felt close, even though, I was a stranger; so thank you for that. It was great getting to know ALL of you and fun to see visitors as well. A house of activity for sure. – *ME*

IDEAL (continued from front page)

is dealing with what they had written concerning the ideal of celibacy:

It is ideal for a man not to be touching a woman
(I Corinthians 7:1).

Because of extreme conditions, which we will consider in a bit, the Corinthians had questioned Paul as to whether or not singleness should be the ideal. Paul held forth, as a temporary exception to the ideal, the unmarried state.

G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1945) wrote concerning these issues in I Corinthians 7.

No attempt is made here to state the Christian doctrine of marriage in its fullness and completeness. That must be sought elsewhere, and will be found if we study his Ephesian and Colossian letters, and those to Timothy. There we have specific instructions on the marriage relationship.

Here it looks as though Paul considered the marriage state a little lower than the state of celibacy. However, he cannot be interpreted in that way, for do not forget that when he was writing to Timothy he spoke of “*forbidding to marry*” as a “*doctrine of demons*” (I Timothy 4:1).

If one is tempted to feel that he was undervaluing the marriage relationship, and suggesting that Christian people were better free from it, there is a reason for what he was saying: All of the teaching here is in answer to the questions arising out of conduct in Corinth.¹

PAUL'S MARITAL GIFT

The main theme addressed by Paul was the temporary ideal of singleness as it related to the “*present distress*” at Corinth.

While confirming the goodness and godliness of marriage, Paul also proceeded to give temporary advice based in part on his own personal experience.

Sexuality is a gift from God. Marriage is the stan-

1. G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1945), *The Corinthian Letters of Paul* (Revell, 1946).

dard of the creation model. Celibacy is an exception that requires a special gift from God, and Paul possessed this gift.

How appropriate that Paul was gifted to be single, considering that he traveled in such dangerous conditions, was continually persecuted and frequently imprisoned. Even as early as A.D. 60 he could write,

In beatings above measure, in jails more frequent, near death often. From the Jews five times received I thirty-nine lashes. Three times was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, three times I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the swamp; in frequent travels, in dangers of rivers, in dangers of robbers, in dangers by my own countrymen, in dangers by the nations, in dangers in the city, in dangers in the country, in dangers in the sea, in dangers among false brothers; in weariness and painfulness, in many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, in fasts often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which comes upon me daily, the care of all the called-out ones (II Corinthians 11:23-28).

Can we truly comprehend such suffering as presented in these six short verses? It is little wonder that Paul called these days a “*present distress*” – and his ministry wasn't even over yet. In the next half-dozen years or more he would suffer greater things than these – ultimately a dark Roman dungeon and death.

Beyond this, could one even imagine being responsible for a wife under these circumstances? How would he care for and support a spouse through such extreme conditions? It surely would have doubled his pain to have had a wife. The heartache he would have had for her would seem to have been unbearable. Can you picture Paul trying to protect and shield a wife? For surely a godly husband “*cares for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife*” (:33).

WIFE PLEASING

For a husband to “*care for the things of the world*” so that he may “*please his wife*” is a natural, God-honoring quest. However, under severe conditions, such as in Corinth, such a husbandly duty would be an extremely heavy burden to bear.

Wife-pleasing responsibilities were *only* negative when weighed against the reality of such dangerous circumstances as the Corinthians were facing.

PAUL'S ADVICE

It is important that we notice here the unique nature of this chapter, where Paul – by inspiration – makes personal observations and recommendations where God had not given direct revelation.²

(1) :6

But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment (KJV).

Now this I am saying as a concession, not as an injunction (CV).

(2) :12

But to the rest speak I, not the Lord (KJV).

Now to the rest am I speaking, not the Lord (CV).

(3) :25

I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment (KJV).

I have no injunction of the Lord. Yet an opinion am I giving (CV).

(4) :40

my judgment (KJV).

my opinion (CV).

Under the current conditions that prevailed at Corinth, Paul naturally advocated the position of his own marital status for certain reasons that he reveals. He does not, however, say that his gift is the standard for all. He does not say that there had been

a change in God's ideal. He was satisfied as a single man, and made a valid defense of his gift – just as a satisfied married man would defend and recommend the married state – under normal circumstances.

Of course, if Paul was happy and content with his singleness, why wouldn't he advocate it? It was his gift. After all, I am very thankful for my own marital lot – since it is my gift, it suits me well – and if asked for my advice and opinion, why would I not recommend it as the best?

THE "PRESENT DISTRESS"

From the vantage of *his* gift, Paul made the single state a recommendation to others based on what he saw as:

(a) :26

present distress (KJV, Diaglott);

present necessity (CV, Young);

present crisis (God's Word);

difficulties of the present (Phillips);

time of suffering (TCT);

time of stress like the present (NEB).

(b) :29

time is short (KJV);

era is limited (CV).

"Distress" from :26 is the Greek word *anagkē*, and is used in Luke 21:23 to translate the condition during the tribulation before the millennium.

*Woe to them that are pregnant, and nursing in those days! For there shall be great **distress** [anagkē] in the land ... (Luke 21:23).*

Paul uses this word also to describe the conditions of his persecution.

2. Paul's advice, preserved for us in the biblical text, is invaluable, for it allows us to see how appropriate it is to take the truths that we know and, with wisdom given to us by God, to make similar decisions in our own lives. Opinions, divinely influenced, can prove vital in the believer's life.

I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities [anagkē], in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake (II Corinthians 12:10).

We were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress [anagkē] by your faith (I Thessalonians 3:7).

Paul's marital advice must be viewed within the context of these statements. Others have recognized this important context:

The "present distress" was "the present persecution of the church." — Nathaniel Scarlett³

The "present distress" was "the critical condition in which Christians were placed by the spirit of persecution which then prevailed." — B.W. Johnston⁴

Under the present political circumstances, I think [it is best to remain single]. To take on the responsibility of marriage just didn't seem best [at that time.] Considering the possibility of persecution and some hard circumstances Christians already found themselves in, Paul couldn't give any other advice except to stay single. Persecution could have broken out at any minute. — J.J. Blanco⁵

3. *A Translation of the New Testament* (1798).

4. *The People's New Testament with Explanatory Notes* (1975).

5. *The Clear Word* (1994).

Thus this advice was not meant to be a permanent rule. — C.R. Stam⁶

[Paul's] judgment was for the time then present. It had to do with conditions pertaining to the distress of those immediate people. He is not saying this for all times and all [people.] It was advised as an expedient and temporary measure. — Roy Laurin⁷

Some pressing constraint lay hard on the Corinthians at the time of writing. ... Paul's friends were at that time in unusually difficult circumstances, and in view of the troubled times Paul felt it best for them to stay as they were. — Leon Morris⁸

Paul's advice here was for the present distress or persecutions. — F.J. Drake⁹

I do think that he was referring to local conditions ... to the pressure of circumstances in the midst of which the church was living at Corinth.

6. *Commentary on the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Berean Bible Society, 1988).

7. *First Corinthians: Where Life Matures* (Van Kampen, 1954; Kregel, 1987).

8. *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: I Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 1958, 1988).

9. *Dakes' Annotated Reference Bible* (1961).



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by — E.W. Bullinger

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Paul thus states the advantages of singleness as:

1. :28

Avoiding the additional troubles that are particular to marital life (either natural or circumstantial – as “*the present distress.*”)

2. :32-35

Undivided attention to the Lord.

PAUL’S LATER ADVICE

In A.D. 59, because of “*present distress,*” Paul advised singleness. However, later in his ministry – in A.D. 65 – his advice was a return to the original creation design of marriage.

I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully (I Timothy 5:14).

We can tell clearly by this advice given to Timothy, some six years later, that the earlier counsel was a temporary, localized exception to the divine standard of marriage.

A SUMMARY OF THE MANY RELATED ISSUES OF I CORINTHIANS 7

Before leaving this brief survey of I Corinthians 7, let’s consider an overview of some of the important teachings that Paul derives from the complex situation of marital issues at Corinth.

1. He began by confirming celibacy as being a temporary ideal (:2).
2. He displaced cultic prostitution as the answer to sexual needs (:2).¹¹

¹⁰ *The Corinthian Letters of Paul* (Revell, 1946).

¹¹ Misunderstanding of the *temporary* ideal had influenced some husbands and wives of Corinth to abstain (separate) from their sexual union. Due to continued sexual needs, this eventually resulted in a return to the heathen temple of Aphrodite for satisfaction of sexual needs with cultic prostitutes.

Cultic prostitution is both the historic as well as the larger con-

3. He presented the husband/wife model as the primary means of sexual satisfaction (:2-5).
4. He acknowledged that sexual inclination (single and married) is an individual gift of God (:7, 17).
5. He naturally defended his (current) sexual gift (:7).
6. He applied his singleness as a model during the current circumstances at Corinth (:8).
7. He said the unmarried and widows are free to marry (sexual union) (:8-9).
8. He taught that believing couples should not disengage (separate from) their sexual union (but are to remain married) (:10-11).
9. He told wives who were separated (abstinent with their husbands) to remain unmarried (sexually-unengaged) or be reconciled to their husbands (:10-11).¹²
10. He declared that unbelieving spouses desiring continued habitation with the believing should be allowed to do so (:12-13).¹³
11. He stated that the unbelieving spouses are sanctified by their believing spouse (:14).
12. He showed that if the unbelieving partner left, the believing spouse is no longer “bound” (or “enslaved”) by the wedlock (:15).¹⁴
13. He presented peace as the overreaching principle in marriage: “*God has called us to peace*” (:15).¹⁵
14. He encouraged believers not to seek (pursue) divorce (:26).¹⁶
15. He verified that it is not a sin for a divorced person or a virgin to marry (:28).
16. He affirmed that it is not a sin for a widow to marry (:39).

text of I Corinthians (6:9-10, 15-18; 10:7-8, 14; comparing its companion context of Numbers 25:1-9). A detailed study of this subject can be found in the author’s book *Due Benevolence*, chapter 12.

- ¹² This passage does not refer to those who are *divorced*. The instruction is not directed to *former-wives* reconciling with *former-husbands*, but with “*wives*” (current) who are merely separated (withdrawn sexually) from their husbands.
- ¹³ This instruction does not overturn Scriptures dealing with neglect and abuse (physical or otherwise). Not *all* believers are bound to stay with *all* spouses, simply because their abusive spouse desires them too.
- ¹⁴ This “bondage” is a reference to the “wedlock” of the husband/wife covenant (*cf.* Romans 7:2; I Corinthians 7:27).
- ¹⁵ *cf.* Amos 3:3
- ¹⁶ “Loosed” is in reference to the “bond” of “wedlock” (*i.e.*, divorced). Two things loose the bonds of the husband/wife covenant: death and divorce. This verse does not mean “death.” Of course you shouldn’t try to kill your mate.

Contradicting Contradictions

by — Stephen Hill

By the grace of God I am what I am (I Corinthians 15:10).

Throughout my life I have met many people who have rejected the evangel due to the many apparent contradictions in the Bible. For these people, faith in God becomes meaningless when they view God's revelation as inaccurate and unreliable. After all, if God's revelation is inaccurate in some passages, how can any of it be upheld as inerrant? When all revelation of God comes from Scripture, our ability to trust in that revelation's accuracy must be unshakeable. Apparent contradictions *must* be thoroughly examined in order for us to fully trust and believe the truths of God's Word.



Without a doubt, most of the apparent discrepancies in Scripture are due to nothing more than faulty translation. Avoiding confusion, then, begins with using a reliable version like the *Concordant Literal Version*; but even when using a reliable version, inevitably we will encounter a myriad of potential discrepancies in the text that will force us to dig deeper to uncover the truth.

In this article I will focus on one example of an apparent contradiction in the gospel accounts and will demonstrate through this “digging deeper” method that the Bible is, in fact, a reliable revelation worthy of our trust. While this one example is not proof of the validity of other passages, it serves as a model for the text as a whole and how to approach the various passages that raise suspicion.

The dilemma I will be examining is the number of men crucified with Christ and the timing of their deaths. Now, you would be hard-pressed to find a believer who does not believe there were two men crucified with Christ. Most people would not view this issue as one of vital importance. After all, it doesn't really hold any major significance to our understanding and faith. Yet it becomes *very* important when the vast majority of our English Bible translations contain a clear contradiction in relation to the issue. On its own the issue is insignificant; but when it calls into question the Bible's accuracy, it suddenly becomes *extremely* significant.

It's not surprising that nearly all believers assume that there were two men crucified with Christ when each of the gospel accounts focuses on two. Matthew 27:38 and Mark 15:27 mention two “robbers” crucified with Christ. Luke refers to two men in Luke 23:32 and calls them “malefactors” (criminals). As robbers are criminals, it is only natural to assume that Luke is referring to the same two men as Matthew and Mark. Still, Matthew is very specific in labeling the sins of the men he describes. They are “robbers” and their sin is theft. Luke, on the other hand, is very non-specific, which is ironic given that

Luke is generally considered the *most* specific of the four gospel authors. A malefactor can be guilty of any crime. Nothing in Luke's account proves that the men are guilty of the specific crime of robbery; but no major discrepancy exists until we read further in Matthew 27 and find out in verse 44 that both robbers “reproached” Christ. That is, they reviled and hated Him. Like many in their community at the time, they viewed Jesus as a false prophet who deserved a merciless fate.

If the men Luke refers to are the same men Matthew and Mark describe, it is a bit shocking to read further into Luke 23 that one of them defended Christ against the other while they were being crucified. Upon hearing one man next to Christ mock Him and challenge His authority, the other man in Luke's account replies,

Yet you are not fearing God, seeing that you are in the same judgment! And we, indeed, justly, for we are getting back the deserts of what we commit, yet this One commits nothing amiss (23:40-41).

It is highly unlikely that a man who reviled Jesus as a guilt-ridden false prophet throughout the crucifixion suddenly rushed to His defense and hailed Him as the true Messiah who had done “*nothing amiss*” when another challenged Him. This unlikely circumstance *is* possible, however, so there's more “deep digging” to be done.

Luke's account tells us that the “malefactors” were “*led to be despatched together with*” Christ and were crucified with Him at the same time (Luke 23:32-33). Matthew's account, however, says the Roman soldiers crucified Jesus, then divided His garments by casting lots, then sat down to keep watch over Him (events which would have obviously taken a good deal of time), and *then* crucified two robbers on either side of Him (Matthew 27:35-38).

So, Luke's account depicts two *malefactors* who were led away with Jesus and crucified *at the same time*, while Matthew's account depicts two *robbers* who were crucified *after* Jesus. Still, these differences do not necessarily prove a discrepancy. The time interval Matthew mentions may not be long enough to refute the notion that the men crucified “*together*” with Christ in Luke are the same men in Matthew. It is possible that Matthew and Luke may still be referring to the same men. We still have more “digging” to do.

Thus far, we have looked at the accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Now we come to John. John's account includes fewer

details than the others, but also mentions “two” crucified with Jesus in John 19:18. This verse in most English translations reads nearly identically. In the popular *ESV* we read,

*There they crucified Him, and with Him two others,
ONE on either side, and Jesus between them.*

This seems to settle the issue. According to John’s account in the *ESV* (and most translations), there were two others crucified with Jesus – one on either side. If this is true, then we are left with believing that Luke and Matthew refer to the same two men but with different titles, that one of them who despised Jesus experienced a sudden and mysterious change of heart, and that when Luke says that the malefactors were crucified together with Christ, he is choosing to omit the lengthy period of time which Matthew notes between Christ’s crucifixion and the other two men. All of this, while highly unlikely, is still within the realm of possibility.

As I stated before, most of the apparent discrepancies in Scripture are due to faulty translation. John 19:18 is no exception. In the original text, the Greek word for “one” does not appear. It has been added by scholars in an obvious attempt to uphold tradition. Without the negligent addition of the “one,” we read:

*There they crucified Him, and with Him two others, on
either side, and Jesus between them.*

The *CLNT* correctly omits the “one” and reads,

*... where they crucify Him, and with Him two others,
hence and hence, yet in the midst is Jesus.*

Correctly translated, John’s account reveals that there were actually two sets of two men: two on one side, and two on the other. This being true, the accounts of Matthew and Luke are easily reconciled and make perfect sense. The two malefactors in Luke were led away with Jesus and crucified at the same time – one on either side – while the two robbers in Matthew were crucified later, also one on either side. The two robbers both hated Jesus, while only one of the malefactors did. As the two

malefactors were crucified at the same time and next to Jesus, they were able to converse with each other and with Him.

Rather than describing the same two men in very different ways, we find that Luke described the two criminals who were crucified beside Jesus, while Matthew (and Mark) describe two robbers who were later crucified beside the two malefactors from Luke. John, then, mentions both sets of men.

The illustration below models the true biblical picture (R=Robber, M=Malefactor, and J=Jesus):

R M J M R

The final proof that four, not two, men were crucified with Christ is also found in John 19:32-33, which says that the soldiers broke the legs of the first two criminals but did not bother when they came to Jesus, seeing that He was already dead. If Jesus was crucified between two men, the soldiers would have passed Jesus on their way from the first criminal to the second on His other side and then backtracked to Jesus. This hardly makes sense. When we realize that there were two men on *each* side, however (4 total), it makes perfect sense that the soldiers broke the legs of the first two men and came to Jesus in normal order as He was third in the line.

At first glance the four gospel accounts seem to paint different pictures of the crucifixion and at the very least some highly unlikely circumstances, but upon in-depth study it becomes apparent that a long-held belief of Christendom is inaccurate and has been fueled by faulty translation rooted in tradition. Uncovering truth, such as with this example, often proves to be an exhaustive but worthwhile process. When we trust in God’s Word and commit to uncovering the truth, our faith in the Bible’s accuracy will only increase.

Learning that Jesus was actually crucified between four men, while interesting, is not a matter of major importance. What *is* important is understanding the process and necessity of digging deeper to find the truth in Scripture to enable yourself to trust fully in God’s Word. Contradict contradictions, and help others do the same. ■

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Bodies of Men or the Body of Christ

by — E.W. Bullinger (1837-1913)

I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it [or to receive it], neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal and walk as men [or marg., according to men]? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos: are ye not carnal? (I Corinthians 3:1-4).

The great central truth of Paul's whole argument is that the Corinthians were taken up with "bodies" of men, as we now call them, and they were therefore totally unfit to receive the truth of the "one Body" of Christ.

While they were putting the members in the place of the Head, they were carnal and not spiritual, and therefore not in a position to have "the wisdom of God in a mystery" declared to them (I Corinthians 2:7). Hence, when the apostle went to Corinth he determined not to go beyond the simplest elementary gospel teaching, to feed them with milk, to proclaim a crucified Savior (2:2); for they were not in a condition to hear about the glorified Savior – "the glorious gospel of Christ" (II Corinthians 4:4) – and all of the glorious things which are freely given to us of God, and which He has prepared with a view to their glory, the glory of the members of the Body in Christ their glorified Head in heaven.

Have we not here a practical subject for our own hearts? What is our condition before God? Are we taken up with "bodies" and divisions which men have made, and called by their own names, or the names which man has given them? If so, we too are not spiritually in a proper condition to hear or receive "the deep things of God" (I Corinthians 2:10).

No wonder blessed truth so early dropped out of the church of God! No wonder, when, in our day, it has been recovered, that so few care to know it. No wonder that many resent it; for it judges our Ecclesiastical position to the very core. It makes nothing of the sects and denominations for which the majority are contending; it writes folly upon our most cherished idols.

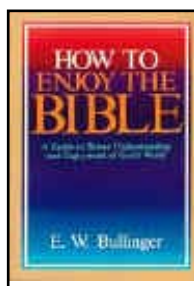


No wonder Christians are torn, divided and scattered, when they are "not discerning the Lord's Body" (11:29). No wonder the air is filled with false schemes for reuniting the scattered sects when such gross darkness prevails as to what is, subjectively, "the unity" of the Spirit and, objectively, the union of the members with the one Head of the Body in the glory which is about to be revealed (Galatians 3:28; Romans 6:8; Colossians 3:1).

Oh, to get back to this primitive truth! Here, and here alone, is the secret of reunion; for, though scattered among the sects and regarded by men as totally separated, the members of His Body are already and really "one in Christ." This is the only real union that exists in the world, and the more truly believers can now realize their position as "dead with Christ," "risen with Christ" and thus "one with Christ" and "in Christ," the more real unity will there be among the members themselves, one with another.

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