

1 CORINTHIANS 8-16 | WE WILL ALL BE CHANGED

1. **1 Corinthians 8.1- 13** | LOVE: the brothers
2. **1 Corinthians 9.1-18** | LOVE: the ministry
3. **1 Corinthians 9.19-26** | LOVE: the mission

4. **1 Corinthians 10.1-22** | FIGHT: against Idols
5. **1 Corinthians 10.23-31** | FIGHT: for the glory of God
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8. **1 Corinthians 12.1-31** | GIFTS: diversity
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14. **1 Corinthians 16.1-21** | LOOK: to the present

INTRODUCTION TO 1st CORINTHIANS | PART 2 READING A LETTER

As we have seen in the first half of the letter to the Corinthians, Biblical interpretation is not for the lazy. To simply throw open your Bible in an attempt to find some truth to apply to your life has led many to errors. Each and every book of the Bible is written in a specific form, by a specific person, to specific people, in specific circumstances. To get to the heart of this letter requires careful consideration of the medium as well as the climate that created its necessity.

Paul planted the church in Corinth, labored among the people for a year and a half and was deeply concerned for them. After he left them to go back to his home in Antioch, the church began to drift from his original teaching. Word came to him of these changes and he penned a letter to them warning them not to dilute the gospel with worldly 'truth.' This letter is contained in **2 Corinthians 6.14-7.1**, which says:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

"I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

The Corinthians received this letter, and because of their personal connection to Paul, they desired to live in response to it. They were confused; what did he mean? They wrote him back with questions that arose from his letter. As we read 1 Corinthians what we are reading is the 3 part of a conversation. It is important that we identify what their letter contained so that we do not misread Paul's response.

THE LETTER FROM CORINTH | *a hypothesis*

In order to read 1 Corinthians as a response to a letter it is helpful to read the letter that was sent to Paul. The problem is: it doesn't exist anymore. What we can do is use the responses that Paul gives, to construct what this letter may have looked like.

The saints of God at Corinth to the Apostle Paul, our faithful friend and brother in Christ. Grace and peace.

We pray that you may be in health, even as we are. We thank God for you, remembering you in our prayers. There have been some matters of discussion among us and some confusion that has arisen due to your letter. We are writing for your guidance in these matters.

When you wrote: cleanse yourselves from every defilement, did you mean for us to abstain from sex completely? Is it a good thing for a man not to touch a woman? Is it then better for all to remain unmarried?

When you wrote: do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers, what does this mean for those who were married to an unbeliever at the time of conversion, should they divorce?

When it comes to abstaining from defilement: should we eat things sacrificed to idols? Some say that we all have knowledge that no idol is anything in the world and that there is no God but one, others struggle with this issue.

We are maintaining the traditions that you left us with, but as more arise we are not sure how to respond. Is it better to have specific leaders, or should everyone have a part? Some of the women have begun to exercise freedom in the church, is this warranted? Many are speaking in tongues and expressing other gifts, should we constrain them?

We have been putting aside money for the church in Jerusalem, how long should we continue to do this? We long to see you again and we would also like Apollos to return. Send him back to us soon.

This letter is sent by the hand of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus whom you know to be faithful in the Lord. They will tell you more than what we have written. Gaius, and the church in his house, greets you. Cripus greets you. Greet Apollos. Greet Aquila and Prisca, and the church in their house. Rejoice.

PAUL'S RESPONSE | *a letter in 6 parts*

One of the great aspects of Paul's writing is his order. While Paul sometimes rambles on and is difficult to follow, the overall structure of his letters are precise. He tends to have a few major transitions in each of his letters as he shifts from one major focus to another. It is helpful to recognize which portion of the letter we are in, to better understand how it was intended to be read, and how we should apply it in a modern context. 1 Corinthians is organized in 6 major sections:

I. INTRODUCTION (1.1-9)

II. A CHURCH DIVIDED (1.10-4.21)

- a rebuke on the church for allowing their individuality to trump their unity
 - A. The Fact of Divisions (1.10-17)
 - B. The Causes of Division (1.18-4.13)
 - C. The Cure for Divisions (4.14-21)

III. PAUL'S HOLINESS CODE (5.1-7.40)

- a direct address on practical in issues that exist in the church
 - A. Disciplining an Immoral Brother (5.1-13)
 - B. Resolving Personal Disputes (6.1-11)
 - C. Exercising Sexual Purity (6.12-21)
 - D. Living to Reflect God (7.1-40)

IV. LIBERTY AND LOVE (8.1-14.40)

- a theological discussion of how liberty is guided by love
 - A. Concerning Meat Offered to Idols (8.1-13)
 - B. Concerning Motivation (9.1-10.33)
 - C. Concerning Equality: men/women, rich/poor (11.1-34)
 - D. Concerning Spiritual Gifts (12.1-14.40)

V. RESURRECTION: PAST AND FUTURE (15.1-58)

- a rehashing of the gospel by looking at Jesus sacrifice and return
 - A. The Evidence for Christ's Resurrection (15.1-11)
 - B. The Necessity of Christ's Resurrection (15.12-28)
 - C. The Nature of Believers' Resurrection (15.29-49)
 - D. The Assurance of Resurrection (15.50-58)

VI. CONCLUSION (16.1-24)

THE CULTURE IN CORINTH | *specific issues*

Every group of people has specific issues that they deal with based on their manner of living. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, he is writing to people who have erred in a certain way. It is important to have a grasp on the struggles of being a Christian in the Corinthian context to understand why Paul attacks things in the way that he does.

AUTHORITY

One thing that we see Paul addressing in this letter more than once is his own authority. Whether he is being compared to Peter and Apollos, or just plain ignored, he wants the people to acknowledge his authority. This is not just because he is worried about his reputation, but he knows their hostility toward any and all authority. They are trying to undercut Paul's authority because they would prefer to answer to no one. Paul contends for their need for earthly submission.

INDIVIDUALISM

Nothing described the culture of Corinth better than autonomy. Corinth was the place that you could go to be your own man; to reinvent yourself. This led to a church full of people who were concerned first and foremost with their own well-being. Paul's continual focus on the unity of the church and the need for love above all are in reaction to this overwhelming self-centeredness.

ESCHATOLOGY

Many teachers in Corinth had adopted an over-realized eschatology, meaning they acted as if heaven was already here on earth. This belief taught them not to be concerned with future judgment, or to interact with the world as if sin was still effective and destructive. Marriages could also be annulled, because there is no marriage in heaven. Basically, the freedom of Christ trumped all law and order. Paul's holiness code strikes at the heart of this misunderstanding, explaining how the law is written into our being, and its truth is from creation to Jesus' return. We also see Paul addressing this false teaching from a theological perspective in chapter 15.

WORDLINESS

As one commentator put it: *The church was in the world, as it had to be, but the world was in the church as it ought not to be.* The church did not look much different from the surrounding culture. The people saw Jesus as an addition to their life rather than a rebirth. Paul writes the whole first section to show how the interactions of the people of God are a stark contrast to what the culture teaches. The gospel changes everything.

LOVE: the brothers (8.1-13)

Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

Paul is once again concerned with the 'freedom' of the Corinthians. He makes it clear to them that while they have been shown the truth of this world, they still live in a world that is filled with spiritual blindness. We must be careful how we navigate our lives. If we embrace asceticism, we give off the image that our salvation is based in our action. If we embrace freedom, we give off the image that God does not care what we do. What Paul does is frames our action, not in regard to our relationship with God (that has been secured), but in relation to our brother. He makes it clear that the knowledge of God is not made manifest in theological discourse, but in how we love and care for those around us, especially those weaker than us. The context that we live in matters profoundly to how we live as Christians.

KEY VERSE

But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. (9)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What is necessary to have knowledge of God?
2. How can knowledge about God destroy a person? What is the antidote?
3. Who does Paul refer to as the stronger brother? The weaker brother?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. Why does Paul command them not to eat meat sacrificed to idols?
5. What is the conscience that Paul talks about? What does it mean to have a seared conscience?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. What are some of the cultural issues related to Christian freedom today?
7. Are you a weak brother or a strong brother in these instances? Why?
8. How can we love our brothers (both weaker and stronger) in relation to these issues?

LOVE: the ministry (9.1-18)

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

This is a somewhat confusing passage as Paul spends a portion of his time confirming his authority and thus his right to payment for his work as a pastor, and then explains why he doesn't exercise the rights he has been given. The reason it is so complicated is because there is nothing simple about being called to the ministry. The Christian life is a life of paradox, where you are: servant/leader, bold/tender, respected/ despised. The question Paul wants us to ask is: what does this moment require of us? What posture must we take to deny ourselves for the sake of the ministry.

KEY VERSE

For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. (17)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. Why is Paul willing to relinquish His rights? What is his goal?
2. What is the problem that the 'others' have with Paul? Why does this matter?
3. What argument does Paul use to defend his apostleship?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. How does Paul use the ministry of the gospel as the measuring stick for self-denial?
5. Paul makes a connection between the spiritual and the physical (11). How does this connection magnify the place of the spiritual in our lives/

WHAT DO I DO?

6. How can we distinguish between which rights we should celebrate and which ones we should deny? Give some specific examples from your life.
7. Are there some particular 'rights' that should be denied by the entire church? Or is this entirely individualistic?
8. How can we practice denial as a means of worship? How can this be abused?

LOVE: the mission (9.19-27)

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

This world offers us competing interests. As Christians, we live to serve Christ, we have fleshly desires to serve ourselves, we have peer pressure imposed by those around us, we have cultural norms we are told to follow. In all of these, our actions carry with them a reaction. If we deny ourselves, we feel slighted. If we reject what others want us to be, our reputation is negatively damaged. With all of these competing interests and impending results, life is fraught with complicated scenarios. Paul tells us here that our lives find a balance in service to Christ. We no longer run the rat race just to run, we have a goal: lives changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. If that is the goal, we can run with a purpose.

KEY VERSE

To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. (22-23)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. Who are the different people groups that Paul identifies himself with?
2. How has he made himself 'all things to all men'?

3. For what is Paul thankful in this passage? How does Paul's view of his mission differ from that of Corinth's view of his mission?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. How is the Christian life like a race?

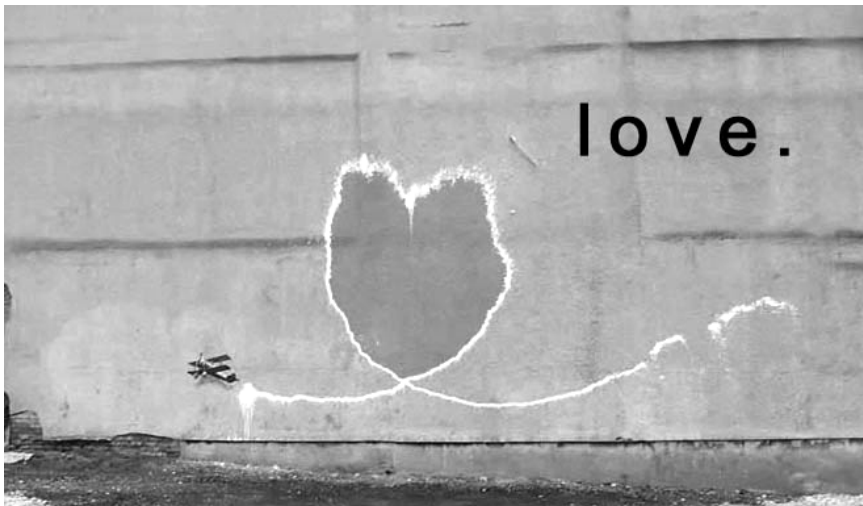
5. Abraham Lincoln said: *You can please some of the people all of the time, you can please all of the people some of the time, but you can't please all of the people all of the time.* Is it even possible to be all things to all men?

6. Rather than being universally accepted, what might Paul be calling us to?

WHAT DO I DO?

7. How did Paul become a Jew and a Roman citizen? What does this teach us about the work that God has done in our lives to get us to this point?

8. How can you be more disciplined in your life to prepare yourself for mission? Who would be a good workout partner?



FIGHT: against idols (10.1-22)

For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 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? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

Paul turns to the OT to comment on the false confidence of many in Corinth. There were many who thought that because they had taken an oath to Jesus, been baptized, and took communion, that this is what made them Christians. They opposed Paul's teaching and warnings because they thought they knew better. Paul says: take heed, lest you fall. Trust Jesus and you can overcome any and all temptation; trust yourself and you are not only going to fall into temptation, but find yourself as an unregenerate in the midst of the church. Take your holiness seriously.

KEY VERSE

Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. (11)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What is the connection between the 'fathers in the wilderness' and the believers in Corinth?
2. What are the four sins that Paul connects to the Israelites in the desert?
3. How have the people in Corinth abused the sacrament of Communion?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. What does Paul list as the reason the OT has been given to us? How do the first four verses bear this out?
5. Paul attaches the existence of temptation to the protection of God. Why does Paul stress the faithfulness of God in relation to their actions?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. How do the four sins described by Paul here manifest themselves in our culture? What should our response be?
7. How can an assumption of salvation be a dangerous thing? Have you seen this in your own life?

FIGHT: for the glory of God (10.23-11.1)

"All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Paul sums up most of the book in a brief statement about how to interact with the grey area issues: do all to the glory of God. All God has made is good, but because of sin can be used for evil: make sure you are using it for good. If you are living your life for yourself, then the question will always be: what can I get out of this? If you are living your life for Jesus, it becomes: how can I serve in this moment? If our whole life is for God's glory, then each and every thing we do, even eating and drinking, is an opportunity to bring glory to God.

KEY VERSE

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (31)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What is Paul's view of the things in the physical world?
2. How does he challenge the Corinthians to approach this world?

3. What is Paul's goal in everything that he does? How does he determine if he is accomplishing this?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. How is giving up our rights an extension of 'the earth is the Lord's and everything in it'?

5. What does Paul say about judging and being judged on what we partake? Why is he so concerned with this?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. What are some tasks/activities you do regularly? How would these look differently if done for God's glory or for your own?

7. Paul finishes by urging us to follow him in following Christ. How did Jesus model enjoyment of creation? Servanthood? Sacrifice?



FIGHT: to maintain traditions (11.2-16)

Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.

Paul makes a case here for the importance of tradition. Not just dead routine, but traditions that are designed into our personhood. He shows us that even things that are not 'salvation issues' are important to the life of the Christian. We were created in a specific way to reveal specific things, both of the nature of God and of humanity. When we go against these created distinctions (with gender used here as the example), we confuse our own sense of ourselves. As we rebel, like Adam and Eve did, because we don't understand God's ways or we think we know better, we place ourselves into a self-defining reality that has nothing supporting it but our individual thoughts on what is good or bad.

KEY VERSE

If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God. (16)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What is Paul getting at with all of the head covering talk?

2. How does the way a man and woman act in church reflect their home life?

3. According to the verse, why should a wife cover her head? Why should a man not cover his head?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. What does Paul mean when he says the man is 'head' over the woman?

5. Is Paul (as he has often been accused of) simply a chauvinist? Is he saying that women should 'know their place'?

6. How does this sermon make more sense in light of last week's sermon? How does it help us to see how important context is?

WHAT DO I DO?

7. How do your actions within the church need to be refined to glorify God and honor your spouse?

8. What is God calling you to in order to serve His body, the church? How is this different from what you would like to be doing? How should we approach God when He seems to be unfair?

FIGHT: together (11.17-34)

But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took 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." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

When we gather together as a church we gather as a unified body. Our gathering is not simply for enjoyment or social reasons, but has its roots in our union with Christ. So Paul turns to the meal that Jesus instituted: the Lord's Supper. He goes on to show how they have made that which was supposed to show their unity into a reason for division. They gorge themselves so that there is not enough for everyone. Paul points to the hypocrisy. He makes it clear that the way that we treat one another is as important as that which we are remembering. If you are simply going to church to go through the motions, it would be better for you to just stay home.

KEY VERSE

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (26)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. Paul rebukes them for not being unified and then says, *there must be factions among you*. What does he mean?
2. What is the purpose of the Lord's Supper? How were they treating it?
3. What does Paul say that they should do to remedy this situation?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. What does Paul say that we must do before coming forward to the table? Do you do this?
5. What are some practical situations in which you should withhold from taking Communion?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. How have you erred in your view of Communion (legalistic, nonchalant, for the wrong reasons, recognizing the wrong things)? How does your error toward the table reflect you sin towards God?
7. Can you think of behavior in the modern church that parallels the Corinthian error at the Lord's Table?

GIFTS: diversity (12.1-31)

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Paul addresses another concern in the church of Corinth: spiritual gifts. The problem with anything good that God gives is that we feel the need to rank His blessings. In Corinth, they were placing some gifts as supernatural and others as normal. Paul makes the case that all gifts require the Spirit and the work of God in the heart of the believer. This act of service is just as powerful as a healing. More than that, one person's gifts are not apart and distinct from another person. In the church, we are one body, a single unit, and our worship comes out in one unified voice. In order for this voice to be full and complete, we need all of the parts to be heard. If each part is needed, then each part must be valued.

KEY VERSE

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (26-27)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What is the easy test that Paul gives us for to test the words someone speaks?
2. What does it mean to be a steward of the mystery of God? What responsibility does this give us?
3. How does the humility of servanthood and the reasonability of stewardship lead to freedom for us?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. How can we be fully aware of our sin and yet it have no bearing on our identity?
5. How does hope drive the servant steward to live faithfully? What gets in the way of this faithfulness?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. What are the things of this earth that you allow to judge you? How do these things draw you away from the faithfulness to which you have been called?

GIFTS: perspective (13.1-13)

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

These are the verses that you will find on plaques in people's homes and hear read at weddings. This is the great chapter on love. But if you read it in the context of the letter, you will see that Paul is not attempting to define a marriage relationship at all. Instead, he is trying to give a framework from which to understand spiritual gifts. He ended chapter 12 saying: *earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.* Love is the better way; love is the higher gift. Paul wants the Corinthians to see that the gifts given to them are for them to be able to honor God, by doing what He has commanded them, which is grounded in love. Any conversation about spiritual gifts that does not begin and end with loving one another has lost perspective. Every other gift will pass away, but love is the gift that passes from this life into the next.

KEY VERSE

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. (12)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. Why are the gifts futile without love?
2. What negative qualities does Paul contrast with love? What positive qualities does he attribute to love?
3. Why is love, according to Paul, greater than faith and hope?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. How does the future perfect inspire and motivate love now?
5. What are the childish ways that Paul encourages us to abandon so that we may grow up?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. How do we show love to those around us (using the distinctives of love that Paul gives us)? How can we use love to measure our ministry and witness?



GIFTS: purpose (14.1-25)

Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. In the Law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord." Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

Paul builds here on his previous comments about gifts. Paul takes special aim at the gift of tongues, which was apparently the gift that was held in highest regard and was being abused to the greatest degree. In relation to the last chapter, he says that tongues are only as good as their ability to build up the church. If they are simply for the sake of the individual, they are not spiritual gifts. He contrasts this with the gift of prophecy: the ability to speak the Word of God. This gift should be sought after because it is in the Word of God that believers will grow in faith. The signs and wonders reveal the power and presence of Jesus, but it is only in His Word that we know who He is and understand what His presence means to us.

KEY VERSE

Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. (22)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. Why does Paul say prophecy is more important than tongues? When he speaks of prophecy, what does he mean?
2. What does Paul compare speaking in tongues to? What is he trying to say?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

3. Why is Paul concerned with the affect of speaking in tongues on outsiders? What might be some common reactions?
4. How is the gift of tongues being abused in Corinth? How do Paul's correctives give us a picture of disunity?

WHAT DO I DO?

5. What are other gifts, besides tongues, that are abused in the modern church? How can we apply Paul's directives here to build up the church and reach more people with the gospel of Jesus Christ?

GIFTS: order (14.26-40)

What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order.

Paul ends his discourse on the spiritual gifts by creating an order for their practice. Everyone, he says, brings something to the table, but for everyone to attempt to express their gift simultaneously would be of no benefit to anyone. He describes for them what a liturgy would look like, so that the people can be encouraged and learn together. He then moves on to give order to the women in the service: they are to submit to their husbands in the course of the gathering. The role of elder, the speaking positions in the gathered assembly are specifically assigned to men. Paul makes sure to point out that this does not mean that women should not be deeply involved in the church, but that there is a proper order to maintain in how that engagement is done, all for the sake of edification.

KEY VERSE

For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. (33)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. How does Paul order the use of tongues? What must be present?
2. How does Paul simultaneously remove barriers and put limits on the expression of the spiritual gifts in the gathered assembly?
3. What is God's command to women in the gathered assembly? What are some reasons this command had to be given?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. How is proper order within the church a reflection on God?
5. Why do you think Paul feels the need to pull apostolic authority at the end?
6. Why would women speaking in church be 'shameful' to God's order? What do you think Paul means by 'speaking in church'?

WHAT DO I DO?

7. Paul's final words seem to set these rules up against argument. How does the current cultural temperament argue against this order? How do your own personal beliefs conflict with Paul's order here?
8. How can a church practice order while still allowing room for the Spirit? What is necessary for this to happen?

LOOK: to the past (15.1-34)

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him that God may be all in all.

Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? Why are we in danger every hour? I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

The people of Corinth had begun to question the idea of a future resurrection. They had a hard time with the idea of people coming back from death and so they dismissed it. Paul points back to Jesus Christ and shows why we cannot set aside the miraculous. If there is not resurrection from the dead then our faith has no foundation. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are necessary for the gospel to have any power. Once that power is acknowledged, then any future act of Jesus is possible. The resurrection of Jesus means that He is alive, He is victorious, and He has a plan to come again to make all things new.

KEY VERSE

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. (17)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What is Paul's definition of the gospel here? Why does Paul lay it out in such a straightforward way to the Corinthians?
2. What is the false teaching that has been attached to the denial of the resurrection?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

3. Why is the resurrection of Jesus essential to our faith? What happens if you remove this from the gospel?
4. What does Paul mean when he says that Christ is the firstfruits?

WHAT DO I DO?

5. How does looking back at the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ change us? What role does good practical theology have in how we live day to day?
6. What aspects of Jesus have been dismissed by churches? How does this affect the nature of their salvation? Work? Worship?

LOOK: to the future (15.35-58)

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

"O death, where is your victory?"

O death, where is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Jesus is coming again! When He comes again it will not be as a humble, mild servant, but as a great king in glory. He people will live with Him forever in heavenly bodies, with no more aches, pains, or sickness. We will exist with Jesus in a way that we can not fully comprehend right now, but we are promised that all things will be subject to Him and all things will be complete as they were meant to be. As we live on this earth now, this future completion of God's plan compels us to act for His glory. As Paul says: *be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.* Our life now is a warm-up for eternity, so spend your time practicing what is good.

KEY VERSE

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (58)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What is Paul's description of the heavenly body?
2. How does Paul describe the resurrection of the dead?
3. Paul says: *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.* What does this teach us about the law and the existence of death? How does it display God's grace to us?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. From what Paul says here, what can we expect from the new heavens and the new earth? What does **Revelation 21** add to this?
5. What does the glory of the next life reveal about the flesh and blood of this life?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. If eternity is a continuation, or the plant born out of the seed of this life, how does this affect the way that you live and work?
7. What parts of your life need to be conformed to this worldview?

LOOK: to the present (16.1-21)

Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go. For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.

Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity. Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.

Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints—be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer. I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such people.

The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord. All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Paul ends the book with some practical advice for their current situations. He begins by addressing the collection for Jerusalem which they had asked about, Paul is asking them to think outside of their own small church to see the larger work of the kingdom. He then moves on to who is coming to visit. Timothy is coming, so is Paul, but Apollos can't make it. Whether these men can come or not, the people are to devote their remaining time on this earth to fighting for the faith. Paul then commands them to be in submission to earthly rulers of the church (knowing that he will not be with them much longer) and sending love from himself and others. All in all, Paul is saying: whatever happens, you know the past, you know the future, the present is for us to live in faith.

KEY VERSE

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love. (13-14)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What is the collection that Paul is referring to?
2. Who is Stephanas? Fortunatus? Achaicus? Aquila and Prisca? Why does Paul mention them?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

3. What does the collection for Jerusalem teach us about our connection to other churches? Who does this link us to specifically?
4. How do Paul's encouragements and recognition fit into the larger flow of his letter?

WHAT DO I DO?

5. How have you undervalued the work of the church because of its earthly state? What changes should happen in light of this?
6. Paul simplifies the Christian life (v.13-14). If it is so simple, why do we spend so much time trying to avoid it?



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