

Lessons from 1 Corinthians 9-16

Chapter 9

The Right and Principle of Support

Paul notes that workers are worthy of their hire, utilizing everyday examples and the Old Testament.

- **The Soldier and Farmer:** Soldiers do not fund their own warfare, and planters eat the fruit of their vineyard (1 Cor. 9:7).
- **The Ox Muzzle:** Paul cites Deuteronomy 25:4 ("Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn") to show that God intends earthly and material compensation for spiritual labor (1 Cor. 9:9–11).

Wise Adaptation in Evangelism

Paul outlines his methodology of reaching diverse groups of people by identifying with their contexts (1 Cor. 9:19–23).

- **Becoming All Things:** To the Jews he acted like a Jew, to those under the law as under the law, and to the weak as weak, to save some (1 Cor. 9:20–22).
- **The Law of Christ:** Paul clarifies that while adapting to others, he is "not without law to God, but under the law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21).

Spiritual Discipline and Self-Control

Paul shifts to athletic imagery from the Isthmian Games to describe the Christian journey (1 Cor. 9:24–27).

- **The Incorruptible Crown:** Athletes exercise temperance and strict self-control for a perishable laurel wreath, whereas believers strive for an imperishable crown (1 Cor. 9:25).
- **Subduing the Body:** Paul declares, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27).

Chapter 10

Warnings from Israel's History

- **Spiritual privileges do not guarantee salvation:** Paul notes that all Israelites shared in miraculous blessings—the cloud, the sea, and the spiritual Rock (Christ)—yet most fell because of disobedience.
- **Avoid lust and idolatry:** Believers are warned not to lust after evil things or participate in idolatrous feasts, remembering that modern idolatry can be anything that takes God's place in the heart.
- **The danger of murmuring:** Complaining against God's leading brings spiritual ruin. SDA commentary emphasizes that grumbling reflects a lack of faith in God's providence.

Faithful Deliverance from Temptation

- **Promise of escape:** Verse 13 assures believers that God is faithful and will provide a way of escape so they can bear every temptation.
- **Human cooperation:** According to writings rooted in the SDA tradition (such as Ellen G. White's commentaries), God does not force the soul to be saved; humans must actively cooperate with divine power to resist and overcome sin, just as Christ overcame in the wilderness.

Practical Christian Living and Temperance

- **Consideration for others:** Paul teaches that personal Christian liberty has limits. Believers must look out for the welfare and conscience of others rather than selfishly seeking their own gratification.
- **Do all to the glory of God:** 1 Corinthians 10:31 ("Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God") is a foundational text in SDA health reform. It highlights temperance in daily habits, emphasizing that physical eating, drinking, and lifestyle choices should be governed by health principles rather than unbridled appetite.

Chapter 11

Headship, Order, and Modesty in Worship (1 Corinthians 11:1–16)

- **The Principle of Authority:** Paul outlines a symbolic chain of order—the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God. Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) theology views this as a functional and relational order in creation rather than a statement of personal worth or inferiority.
- **Cultural Expressions of Respect:** Paul discusses men and women praying or prophesying with covered or uncovered heads. SDA biblical scholarship notes that wearing a shawl or head covering was a local cultural custom denoting modesty, propriety, and respect in ancient Corinth rather than an eternal moral mandate for all cultures.
- **Interdependence:** Paul balances hierarchy by noting that in the Lord, man is not independent of woman, emphasizing mutual reliance and their ultimate source in God.

Abusing the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17–22)

- **Rebuke of Divisions:** The Corinthian church turned the communal meal (Love Feast and Communion) into a source of division. Wealthy members ate ahead and left the poor hungry, while some even overindulged.
- **The Social Test of the Gospel:** Paul stresses that selfishness and social elitism at the communion table contradict the very nature of Christ's selfless sacrifice.

The Institution and Meaning of Communion (1 Corinthians 11:23–26)

- **Memorial of Christ's Death:** Paul recounts how Jesus instituted the bread and the wine on the night He was betrayed.

- **Symbolic Nature:** Seventh-day Adventists emphasize that the bread and wine are rich, sacred symbols representing Christ's broken body and shed blood, not literal physical flesh and blood.
- **Proclaiming the Advent:** Verse 26 notes that observing Communion proclaims the Lord's death "*till he come*," providing a forward-looking, eschatological hope that resonates deeply with the Adventist focus on the Second Coming.

Self-Examination and Re-establishing Reverence (1 Corinthians 11:27–34)

- **Unworthy Manner:** To partake "*unworthily*" means to consume the emblems carelessly, in a spirit of division, unconfessed sin, or prideful self-sufficiency without recognizing the sacrifice behind it.
- **The Call to Examine:** Believers are instructed to examine their own hearts, promoting personal repentance, humility, and unity with fellow believers before partaking in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper.

Chapter 12

Source and Unity of the Gifts (Verses 1–11)

- **One Spirit, Many Gifts:** Paul stresses that the source of every gift is the same Holy Spirit, the same Lord (Jesus), and the same God (the Father).
- **The Common Good:** Gifts are not given for individual pride or selfish display, but for the "manifestation of the Spirit" to profit the whole church community.
- **Listed Gifts:** These include the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, divers kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. SDA commentary notes these gifts operate according to God's sovereign will, not human technique.

The Human Body as an Analogy for the Church (Verses 12–27)

- **Baptism into One Body:** By one Spirit, all believers—regardless of background, race, or social status—are baptized into one spiritual body of Christ.
- **Interdependence:** The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of thee".
- **No Elitism:** SDA teachings highlight that humbler or less conspicuous ministries in the church are just as vital and must be treated with equal honor, preventing division or jealousy.

Order of Ministry and the More Excellent Way (Verses 28–31)

- **Apostles, Prophets, and Teachers:** God has set specific functional offices within the church to guide, edify, and correct. Seventh-day Adventists particularly recognize the manifestation of the prophetic gift as a foundational characteristic of the remnant church.
- **Coveting the Best Gifts:** Paul concludes by encouraging believers to earnestly desire the best gifts, while immediately pointing them to chapter 13—the "more excellent way" of Christian love (*charity*) without which spiritual gifts are meaningless.

Chapter 13

Superiority Over Spiritual Gifts (Verses 1–3)

- **Empty noise:** Speaking in tongues or having grand eloquence without love makes a person like a "sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal".
- **Drawn to nothingness:** Possessing prophecy, profound theological knowledge, or mountain-moving faith yields no spiritual value if love is missing.
- **Sacrifice without motive:** Even giving all possessions to the poor or martyrdom means nothing if not driven by a heart of love.

The Practical Nature of Love (Verses 4–7)

- **Active attributes:** Charity "suffereth long, and is kind"—it is an active, enduring grace, not a passive emotion.
- **Rejects self:** It "envieth not... vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up", directly addressing the pride and rivalry inside the Corinthian church.
- **Refuses malice:** It is "not easily provoked, thinketh no evil", keeping no ledger of past offenses. SDA devotionals emphasize letting go of a hypersensitive self-focus to embrace this grace.
- **Anchored in truth:** It "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth", upholding God's moral law and reality.

The Permanence of Love (Verses 8–13)

- **Temporary vs. eternal:** Prophecies, tongues, and specialized knowledge will "vanish away" or cease when their immediate purpose ends. Love never fails.
- **Spiritual maturity:** Present human understanding is like seeing "through a glass, darkly", but eternal life brings face-to-face clarity with God.
- **The greatest virtue:** Faith, hope, and love endure, "but the greatest of these is charity" because love is the very character of God and will continue throughout eternity.

Chapter 14

Prophecy vs. Speaking in Tongues

- **Superiority of Prophecy:** Paul ranks prophecy higher than uninterpreted tongues in public worship because a prophet speaks to people for "edification, and exhortation, and comfort," building up the whole church.
- **The Nature of Tongues:** Speaking in an unknown tongue without an interpreter only edifies the individual speaker and leaves the congregation's mind unfruitful.
- **Intelligibility:** Paul uses the illustration of musical instruments and trumpets (like a flute or harp) to show that sounds must be distinct and clear to be understood; otherwise, the speaker is just "speaking into the air".

Rules for Orderly Public Worship

- **Regulation of Tongues:** If tongues are spoken in a public meeting, there must be an interpreter. At most, only two or three should speak, and they must do so in turn rather than all at once. If no interpreter is present, the speaker must remain silent and keep the matter between themselves and God.
- **Regulation of Prophecy:** Prophets should speak two or three at a time, and the rest of the congregation should judge or weigh what is said. If a revelation comes to someone sitting by, the first speaker should yield the floor.
- **Self-Control:** SDA commentary stresses Paul's rule that "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets," proving that true divine inspiration never robs a person of their self-control or leads to chaotic frenzy.

God of Peace, Not Confusion

- **The Central Maxim:** Paul explicitly states, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints". Wild, unruly behavior mimics surrounding pagan rituals rather than the sober, orderly working of God's Holy Spirit.
- **Decency and Order:** The chapter concludes with the overarching directive: "Let all things be done decently and in order".

Chapter 15

The Core Gospel and Eyewitness Proof (Verses 1–11)

- **The Foundation:** Paul defines the essential gospel: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures.
- **Historical Fact:** He lists reliable eyewitnesses, including Cephas (Peter), the twelve disciples, and over 500 brethren at once—most of whom were still alive to be cross-examined.

The Logic of the Resurrection (Verses 12–19)

- **No Empty Faith:** Paul argues that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ was not raised either.
- **The Stakes:** Without Christ's resurrection, Christian preaching is useless, faith is empty, and believers remain in their sins.
- **The State of the Dead:** SDA theology heavily highlights verse 18 ("Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished") to prove that the dead do not fly off to heaven or hell immediately; if there were no future resurrection, the dead would simply stay dead in a state of unconscious sleep until the final awakening.

The Order of the Resurrection (Verses 20–28)

- **Christ the Firstfruits:** Jesus is the "firstfruits" of a grand harvest, guaranteeing that a physical resurrection awaits humanity.

- **The Timeline:** The resurrection happens in a specific order: Christ first, and then *at His coming*, those who belong to Him. Adventists stress this "at His coming" phrase to validate the literal, premillennial Second Advent.

The Transformed Body and the "Mystery" (Verses 35–54)

- **The Seed Analogy:** Paul compares the buried body to a seed that must "die" to produce a new plant. The resurrected body is glorious and spiritual, yet real and recognizable.
- **The Final Trumpet:** Adventists view verses 51–52 ("We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed... at the last trump") as the ultimate climax of history. When the last trumpet sounds, living and resurrected saints simultaneously receive immortality, refuting any concept of a secret rapture.

Victory Over Death (Verses 55–58)

- **Death Swallowed Up:** Paul cries out, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" framing death as a temporary, defeated enemy that sleeps until Christ eradicates it forever.
- **Practical Appeal:** Because victory is certain, believers are urged to stay steadfast and active in the Lord's work, knowing physical effort and sacrifice for Christ are never in vain.

Chapter 16

The Principles of Systematic Giving (1 Corinthians 16:2)

- **Private and Planned:** Paul instructs believers to "lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper" on the first day of the week (Sunday, marking the end of the secular work week when accounts were calculated). Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) commentary clarifies that this verse describes a private, personal act of setting funds aside at home rather than a formal church worship service collection.
- **Proportional Benevolence:** Giving should mirror the individual's financial blessing ("as he may prosper").
- **No Last-Minute Pressure:** Organizing funds ahead of time ensures that giving is thoughtful and systematic rather than an emotional reaction to a sudden collection drive when Paul arrives.

Christian Fellowship and Leadership (1 Corinthians 16:10–18)

- **Valuing Young Workers:** Paul asks the church to receive Timothy respectfully and send him forward in peace, showing that the early church had to consciously protect and encourage younger ministers against intimidation.
- **Recognizing Selfless Service:** The household of Stephanas is praised as the firstfruits of Achaia because they "addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints". Believers are urged to submit to and appreciate those who labor deeply for the gospel.

Final Exhortations and the Blessed Hope (1 Corinthians 16:13–22)

- **Five Soldiers' Commands:** Paul calls the church to “*Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong*”—using alert, defensive military language to urge believers to stay unified and spiritually vigilant against compromise.
- **The Supremacy of Love:** “*Let all your things be done with charity [love]*” acts as a capstone reminder that even the strongest doctrinal defense is empty without Christian love.
- **Maranatha:** Paul ends with a sobering warning regarding genuine love for Christ and the passionate looking-forward to the Second Advent (“*Maranatha*”, meaning “The Lord cometh”), a theme deeply cherished in SDA eschatology.