

***Becoming
a
World Class
Christian***

Developing a Biblical Worldview

Volume one

By Dr. Perry J Hubbard

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Prologue

One of the key discussions today relates to becoming a world-class Christian. It focuses on the issue of what it means to be involved in and connected to the world around us as a Christian. A key part of this discussion includes a second thought which has two aspects: a discussion on what is a Christian Worldview, and what is a Biblical Worldview.

At first glance one might think these three – World-Class Christian, Christian Worldview and Biblical Worldview - are just three ways to define the same thing. Yet they are not.

If we start with the middle phrase, then we open the door to many problems. The reason is because there are many differences among the people who call themselves Christians; differences in attire, lifestyle, priorities and an infinite number of other categories of how life is lived and perceived. This can lead to one group of Christians using their culture to define what a Christian Worldview consists of. This is, in fact, what has happened on many occasions in the past. People of the western world used their culture to determine what a Christian should be and look like. This became the basis of defining a Christian Worldview using western values.

This practice usually had one of two possible results. One result was that those desiring to become Christians had to abandon much of their cultural values and lifestyle and become like those who brought the message. This caused division, strife and rejection among the people who refused to change. The second result was a rejection of the western system and the message that it was bringing.

Initially the rejection was fairly complete. The gospel was viewed as “western” and it did not belong in the new setting. It was seen as destructive to their values and way of life. Over time this was modified. Some decided that the message was desirable, but that the package it came in was not. They sought to establish a new approach, a new definition of a Christian Worldview - one that respected the people and the values that were good, and allowed the gospel access to their lives and freedom to bring about changes from within, instead of being forced from outside.

Often this decision was not accepted by the established churches. This resulted in churches splitting and founding new independent churches. It also resulted in the formation of large numbers of syncretistic structures, which mixed spirit worship and magic overlaid with a good helping of Christian practices. They borrowed practices from all in order to cover all possible options in dealing with the realities and necessities of life. The end result was a growing number of definitions of a Christian Worldview.

As you can see, the process of defining a Christian Worldview can lead to many problems, most of them centered around the issues of ethnocentrism. This results in everyone thinking that they are the ones who should define what a Christian Worldview should be based on their concepts and ideas.

However, if we decide to start from the perspective of defining a world-class Christian we will have many of the same problems. To make my point clear we need to have an idea of what is meant by the phrase a “world-class Christian”. Paul Bothwick ([How to be a World Class Christian](#) - 2005) makes the following statement, “A world-class Christian is one whose lifestyle and obedience are compatible with what God is doing and wants to be doing in the world.”

This statement left by itself will create a number of problems. Whose lifestyle is to be the example. Who defines what God is doing and how does one defines what I should be doing? One group could focus on compassionate ministries because they are important. Another group focuses on education and development. Another on evangelism. Another on church planting. This will result in different approaches to describing a world-class Christian.

The concern I have is with the term 'class.' What does this mean? Are we looking at a class such as in a type of social system? Is this based on a system of values that defines what it means to have class or worth as a Christian, to be identified as a person of value? Are we opening the door to set up an evaluation system to determine what constitutes acceptable action and activity? And don't assume that because we are attaching it to the word 'Christian' that somehow that prevents us from creating a structure that can then be used to determine who is valuable and what actions are to be valued. The phrase "Christians don't do that" should be a reminder of the problems and conflicts that come from such an approach.

You might think that I am being rather petty in my comments on Bothwick's statement. And you would be right, to some extent, for I am clearly focusing on only one statement that he has made. We do need to keep in mind that he states that our actions should be compatible with what God wants to be doing in the world. This is a good concept to always keep in focus. But what does that really mean? How do we know what it is God really wants us to be doing? How do we know what it means to have a lifestyle that is compatible with what God wants? How do we know what it is to be obedient, and for that matter, what we are suppose to be obeying?

It is not just about getting involved. It is not just about responding and doing something. No, that is not enough. We have seen what happens in our churches when people try to be good members and do good. All too often it ends up in conflict. Why? Because they were trying to be good members, good Christians. But they did not have a clear idea of what that meant. They only had their idea of being a productive member of the community or church. Being productive is not what defines being a Christian, much less being a world class Christian. Too much emphasis is placed on the doing and not on the being.

What we really need to do is go back and find out what it means to have a Biblical Worldview. To discover what God wants us to be. The quote above is correct in that it states that a world-class Christian is one whose life is compatible with what God wants and so does what God does. It is about seeing the world the way God does. It is about entering the world the way God does.

The best way to define a Biblical Worldview is to go back to the bible and see what it has to say.

There are many ways to do this. We could do a systematic theological study of the Bible. That would be a great way to learn what God has to say about Himself and all that He created. This is a useful way to organize the information of the Bible but would probably be too general for what we are trying to do. Keep in mind that understanding who God is, and what He has done are critical to building a solid definition of a Biblical Worldview.

We could do a word study. These are often fruitful ways to learn what the Bible has to say about a specific topic. Unfortunately for us the term 'worldview' is not used in the Bible. Nor are phrases like 'Christian perspective' 'Christian lifestyle' or similar phrases.

So how do we find out what it means to have a Biblical worldview? How do we then define what it means to have a Christian view of the world and so be able to be a world-class Christian?

For me, the best way would be to study the letters of the early church. Searching through the letters of Paul, Peter, James, John, Jude and the author of Hebrews. These individuals had to wrestle with this very issue. They then had to communicate with the churches what they were learning about God, the gospel, and how to live as Christians in many different environments. They had to take the knowledge they had of God from the Old Testament and apply it to the current setting. They had to define for themselves and others how God saw the world - a Biblical worldview. Then they had to define what it meant to be a Christian living in the world - a Christian Worldview. Finally they had to wrestle through what it meant to live a life compatible with what they had learned with what God wanted and was doing - to become a World-Class Christian.

That is the focus of this book and the studies it contains. It searches through the lives and experiences of those God called to serve in a new and dynamic way. Hopefully as we proceed we will be able to understand God's view of the world (a Biblical Worldview) and through that define what a Christian's view of the world should be (a Christian Worldview). This will allow us to know how to live a life compatible with what God is doing and wants us to do (be a world-class Christian).

Each Inquiry looks at a scripture and what we can learn from what was being taught. At the end of each study are three items to help do further study. They are as follows.

BS - Scripture and questions to expand on the idea of the study.

PR - Questions or comments to help one evaluate their life and apply the lesson to their life

BWV - Questions or comments designed to help further understand how this passage relates to helping a person develop a Biblical Worldview to help them develop as a world class Christian.

Inquiry 01

In the News

Romans 1:8-17

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because **your faith is being reported all over the world.** ⁹ God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how **constantly I remember you** ¹⁰ **in my prayers** at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

¹¹ I long to see you so that **I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—** ¹² **that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.** ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

¹⁴ **I am obligated** both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵ That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.

¹⁶ **I am not ashamed of the gospel,** because it is the power of God for the salvation of **everyone who believes:** first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,⁶ just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

When we describe someone to another person we create an image for others to respond to and interact with. This image can help or hurt the one being described. Positive comments are always welcome and negative ones are difficult to change. So it is important to consider what should be included in such a description.

Or, what is often sadly true is that the first things we describe about others relates to their physical attributes and manner of

life. Or, we see the clothes, the structures, and the environment. We come in contact with the food, the smells, and the sights. We experience the differences in relationships and activities. Then, when asked to describe to others what we know and have learned, these observations take priority over everything else and impact what we have to say about their relationship to God and their commitment to the work of the church.

How many pictures have we seen of people who dress differently, behave differently, and eat differently? We focus on the differences between us and them. How many times has our conversation about them revealed that their lifestyles and attitudes are different towards things we think are important? Our focus is not on building unity but creating distance, nor on building trust but maintaining control.

If we get past this level of comparison we then tend to focus on what we have, what we do, what we think, how we relate to others, how others respond to us. We focus on what our priorities are, how we spend our time and resources, and our opinions about the people and world around us. This includes our understanding of what it means to be a Christian. We create our concept of what a 'world class Christian' based on our perspective of the people and world around us.

I find it an interesting concept to reflect on, especially as I review the ministry God has given my wife and I. We have lived in five countries and been involved in various types of ministries. More recently, the work has allowed one or both of us to visit 25 countries in the Caribbean and Latin America.

As I think about this, I sometimes wonder what the people think of us or remember about us. Do they remember the clothes we wore? How we acted while staying in their homes? How we responded to their questions? While these are part of what is remembered, I would hope that they also remember us for our relationship to God, commitment to the work, and for helping them grow in their relationship with God.

This idea is the focus of Paul's opening comments to the Romans. The introduction gives an enlightening look at what Paul thought was most important about being a member of the family of God, and what he hoped they and others saw in him and his relationship to God and to others.

Several sections have been highlighted, in the passage above, that emphasize this reality. Let's review what Paul focused on to determine what it meant to be guided by God's view of the world and how to define a world class Christian.

1. Recognition of value – Paul recognized the value of the faith and testimony of others. He believed that his ability to be effective was clearly connected with the faith and commitment of other Christians. For example, the value of my faith is only as great as the value I place on your faith. If your faith has little or no value, then of what value is my faith?

Paul, because of the value he placed on the faith of others, took the time to be aware of what others were doing and the results of their faith. He believed strongly that what was happening in one location or ministry could and did have a significant relation and impact in other places. Likewise, we are not independent entities whose ministries have no effect beyond this time and place.

2. Recognition of encouragement – Paul saw the need for mutual encouragement. Prayer and support were not to be a one-way street, but always flowing from one source to another. Paul saw the ministry and action of others as a source of encouragement for his life and sought diligently to act and serve so that he would be an encouragement to them as well. Encouragement was to flow both ways.

He wrote how he was in constant prayer for them. He wanted to go to Rome so he could share with them, be

an encouragement, and receive from them encouragement. He made it clear that their lives and commitment to God had been a blessing to him and he desired that he could be a blessing to them as well.

The goal was stated clearly, that they would be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

3. Recognition of commitment – Paul shared his sense of commitment to them. He talked about the extent of his desire to go and be with them. He used the word obligation as a way of emphasizing the nature of that commitment. He had already recognized their commitment. He thanked them for it and the fact that it had resulted in the encouragement of many and the strengthening of the church. He was very confident that when he arrived, there would be a harvest among them. Such a comment was not possible without a clear belief in the commitment of others and their willingness to share in the ministry.

This sense of obligation included caring for the needs of those who had not yet heard the gospel. Paul was absolutely committed to reaching others. He was obligated to the lost. The fact that he shared this in the opening of his letter, without an extensive prelude or explanation, to me, implied that he believed that the church in Rome had the same commitment, the same sense of obligation.

4. Recognition of equality – Paul believed strongly in working together with others. A partnership of equals. He used a number of terms that let us know that he considered them equals. He respected them and it seems clear that those receiving this letter respected Paul as well.

It would seem then, that being a world class Christian and having a Biblical Worldview has less to do with our outward appearance and more to do with our inward attitudes and how

they affect our appearance to others. You can be dressed in the finest clothes available and still be a fool, while the person next to you, dressed in common every day clothes, is the one who is truly wise.

Paul was concerned about what people thought of his life and ministry. But He made sure that they knew of his concern for them, and he took the time to know about their life and ministry.

It is not just about what others know about us. More importantly, it is what they know about what we know about them. More than that, it is the level of respect we have for who they are and what they are doing.

Others value our prayers for them. Do we know and value their prayers for us? They know and value our help and encouragement. Do we know and value their help and encouragement as much, or at all? Do we believe they are equals and do we allow them to serve as equals? They know our commitment to the mission of God. Do we value their commitment as highly and allow them to share in the responsibility.

What is it then that really defines a world-class Christian? His actions or his relations? What do we want to be remembered for? What we did for them or how we _____?

Paul concluded with the phrase 'I am not ashamed of the gospel.' Why, because it is the power of salvation for all who believe. It creates equality. It makes us memorable; not because of who we are but because of the relationship it creates, between us, God and others. World Class Christians are known by their relationship to God and their love for others.

BS – Read the following texts Romans 1:12; 15:32; 2 Corinthians 7:4-7, 13; I Thessalonians 3:7-10; 3 John 3-4. Write a definition for the word 'mutual.'

PR – Have you ever been in a situation where you received more than you gave? What do you think made that possible? How could this happen?

BWV – When we interact with others from a different church, different background, different culture, what does God expect from us as a member of His Kingdom?

Inquiry 02

The Only Hope

Romans 4:2-5

If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about — but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

"Works" is a key concept that we will have to wrestle with in understanding who we are as a WCC (world class Christian). The highlighted phrase above makes a very interesting comment about the benefits, or lack of benefits, of any work we do in relation to our status before God.

But in order to understand Paul's comment here we have to keep in mind two other texts. Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" and Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death." These two scriptures place in stark reality man's state on this planet. Everyone of us has sinned. This means that the net result of anything we do, no matter how good it may appear, is tainted and is of no value. That means that the wages that will be paid out for anything we do, because it is tainted by our sin, is death.

Being good or doing good works only appears that way to those around us who, because of their sin, also have a tainted view of the value of anything we do.

Doing good works is not a new discussion. We just try to dress it up in new styles and new concepts from year to year. Then we repackage it and try to get people involved and believing that they can do something that is good and will find value in it.

Many people commit themselves to 2-3 months of short term service on a mission field and later put on their resume that they have served as a missionary. They have done something 'good.' However should they really receive higher 'value' in the eyes of others? We forget so easily that what we do cannot be defined as good or be banked in any way to gain status or position in the kingdom. We misunderstand what works is all about and forget the place of faith in determining the value of anything we do.

Paul tells us that our works are not a gift. What we do cannot earn us anything or bring any benefit to anyone. They exist as an obligation that is due, as a payment on a debt that can never be paid. The only real choice in this situation is whether we will carry out our duty, do the work, as a blessing or as a burden. We are expected to do the work without question. The blessing available depends on our attitude towards the work. A bad attitude makes it difficult for God to use our work. A good attitude allows for God to access and expand on the work that we do and that is where the blessing and benefit lies.

In Romans 4:2 Paul emphasizes this reality, when talking about Abraham's status and relationship to God. If he were to justify to others his place before God as a result of his works, (his activity), then he could only boast before men about what he had accomplished and expect some form of honor or recognition from

men. Unfortunately what impacts the people does not have the same impact on God. Self-justification never works. We cannot come before God and say how good we are or 'look at all the good we have done.' He sees it for what it is, selfishness or pride.

The baseline is that without God's direct involvement and activity in our lives nothing we do will have any value. You don't earn points for doing what you are expected to do. You don't pay a debt by only paying the interest on the debt.

Even as our salvation is based on faith in what God does, our activities, our work, will only have value as we believe that God can work through us and make use of what we do. That means having faith that God can accomplish His purposes through that work. My act of kindness, without God, may change, for a moment, what is happening. But it cannot change their status before God. But with God's presence and faith in His promises, my act of kindness can open doors to a relationship with God and a future of eternal possibility.

Please keep in mind this reality. No matter what we do, no matter how good it looks, the wages of any and all activity, without God, is death. Further, even if we could do something good, we could not do enough to begin to pay the debt we owe. If it weren't for Christ we would be forever under obligation to pay a debt that can never be paid no matter how much "good" we do.

Paul wrestled with the implications of this fact when it involved his decision to preach the gospel. Read what he had to say about obligation and his voluntary participation in doing what was right and good.

1Co 9:16-18

Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!¹⁷

If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.¹⁸ What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.

The issue then was not in what he did but the attitude he had in doing it. Doing 'good,' or in this case preaching, was an obligation. If he did it voluntarily then there was a reward; others would hear the truth, the truth committed to him, and God would be able to speak to that person through the good that he did.

Is this confusing? It can be. Look at this way. Paul had choices. First he had to choose if he would fulfill his obligation to God. If he chose not to then he would place in jeopardy his relationship with God. But, if he chose to obey then he had to decide if he would do so grudgingly or willingly. If he chose to do so grudgingly, under protest, then clearly there would be no benefit, no "well done, good and faithful servant." There would be no expression of faith in God and the blessings of that faith. Without that, what kind of response could he expect from his preaching? Probably God could still work, but the blessing that might be available to Paul would be lost.

If he chose to do so willingly and with joy, then God could bring good from that activity and Paul would receive the reward of seeing others respond and experience the same relationship that he had with God. For Paul it was not about what work he was doing. He had little concern for the nature of the work. For Paul the concern was why he was doing the work. He worked so that God would be honored, so that God could have access to him and work through him.

That is the key. The work we do has no value. The work God does through us has eternal value. The work we do only serves as a payment on an obligation we have. If we are seeking to justify ourselves to others and gain recognition for the work we do, then it has no value. But if our goal is to allow God to work through us, then and only then there will be a reward.

We need to think less about what we are doing and more about letting God work through us. Being a missionary or doing a specific good work will not make you a world class Christian. There are people who have never left their hometown who do more for God, then others who spend a lifetime serving in places far from their home. The difference is in the relationship and understanding who is doing the work.

BS – Read Matthew 20:1-16 and consider why everyone got the same pay at the end of the day. Now read the following passages from Romans 9:32; 11:6, 35 and explain the relationship between faith, grace and works.

PR – What value do you place on the good work you are doing? Why do you believe it is good work? Do other people agree with you that you are doing good work? Why?

BWV – What is the most important work that you can do as a World Class Christian? Why is that good work?

Inquiry 03

All Inclusive Message

Romans 10:8-15

But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for,

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

One of the most difficult questions we are often asked is in relation to those who have never heard the gospel. Usually it takes this form, "How can God judge those who have never heard?" It is a question that needs an answer and that answer will affect our decisions and actions in regards to communicating the message of God's love.

Paul was very clear in Romans 2 about the status of all mankind. We have all chosen to take our own path in life and not listen to the direction that God gives us. All have a knowledge that there is something greater and that they are responsible to act in a certain manner. In Romans 3:23 and 6:23 he states clearly the results of our ignoring the truth we have received. We all have failed and we are all under God's judgment.

God has left witness to mankind of His presence, His power and His expectation regarding our behavior. It does not matter what belief system or code of conduct you accept and use to guide your life. The result is the same, we all fail to keep the rules and so we all fall under judgment. This is the truth that we all must deal with. We cannot keep the law, any law, whether given directly by God, developed by man based on his knowledge of truth, through the conscience he has been given, or created by man. We all will fail and bring ourselves under judgment.

It is interesting to note how severely we treat those who break the law, whether God's or our own. We do not like it when we are betrayed by those who fail our standards. We can be incredibly severe in our treatment and judgment. And yet when we fail, we expect leniency, as if our failure is nothing like the failure of others.

At this point the message that we have for others is very negative. Judgment awaits all because of their failure. We don't like this message and want a way of escape. As a result, people become very concerned about options. What can be done to get around the problem, the reality of judgment? Some people suggest there are many roads to God. If there is more than one way, then maybe there could be more than one standard.

The reality is that this brings us back to the same problem. No matter what road you choose you have to deal with the reality that you cannot keep all the rules and so you will fail. The only way around this is to create a scale of obedience. For example, if a person does more good than bad then how can God judge and condemn them. A difficult question to answer. Consider this idea. If I am traveling on a road to another location and I stop 1 mile before my destination, have I arrived? If I do all but the last step in an assignment, have I completed the assignment?

It really does not matter how much good I do, it will not be enough to overcome the bad I do. It will not make it possible to reach the destination or complete the task. We need help.

That is the message we have. God has provided the help we need to complete the journey to God, to complete the work needed to make us whole. It is a message that everyone needs. There are no exceptions.

Paul deals with this reality in two areas: the need of the people to hear and respond, and the need of those who

understand to make it possible for others to hear and respond.

The reality of the need is part of every person's knowledge of truth. We all know we need something more than we have. Everyone is seeking a truth to believe in, a truth that will bridge the gap between them and the God they know exists. The very way in which we structure our lives reveals this truth. People create systems of belief and action in an attempt to find a way. Even atheists have created a system of belief so that they can explain who they are, why they exist, and how they should behave in order to create value.

But belief in manmade systems is insufficient. It only highlights the problem and creates more awareness of our failure and inability to accomplish the goal of being good enough. No matter what we do we are left with doubt and uncertainty about the end result. Even the sacrificial system of the Israelites had this same result. It was not enough. It had to be repeated over and over. In the end it involved a step of faith, that God would provide what was lacking.

That is the message we have. We can provide the missing piece - God has acted, and there is more than just the laws, the systems. God is more than just a judge, he is also our advocate. In Jesus we have the payment required to bridge the gap between what we do and what needs to be done.

Belief is needed - belief that Jesus has paid the necessary price. Confession is needed - a clear confession of our personal failure and so of our need for His help. Commitment is needed - a clear commitment of our lives to His sovereignty. Belief, leading to confession, leading to commitment, makes possible trust in the one who is providing our salvation; and in the salvation being provided.

But this leaves us with a second dilemma. Without knowing the critical information of the gospel, this decision to believe cannot be made. Because how can you believe in something you have never heard or seen the proof of? It is not just enough to tell someone the truth, they have to see evidence that supports what you say. Imagine trying to convince someone who has never seen a car of its existence and what it can do. Until they actually see a car and ride in it they may never believe what you have to say.

This is the point of Paul's next series of statements. How will people believe if they never hear? How will they hear if no one is available to speak to them? How will that person be able to speak to them if they do not go to those who need to hear? Finally how will they go if no one sends them?

It now becomes a two-part dilemma.

1. Part one - There are people who are lost and facing God's judgment every day. They will be judged based on what they know. What they know provides them with a very slim possibility of finding God. The Bible is pretty clear that this is not a good option. Not a good way to go.
2. Part two - There are people who have the critical information but are doing nothing about sharing this information. Again the Bible is pretty clear about the responsibility of those who have the information.

We have the opportunity to do something about the problem. Unfortunately, many Christians, instead of helping deal with the problem, become part its perpetuation. Every day that we enter the world and say or do nothing about communicating what we know we help to condemn all those who have not heard, not had a chance to respond, or have received inadequate or

distorted information about God's love and offer of salvation.

The condemnation is real. Hearing the message may not change the situation. People may reject what we have to share. But it could change everything. It could give those who hear, a clear explanation of the situation and a viable way to find the salvation and hope they need.

The message is all inclusive in that everyone who calls themselves a Christian is responsible to share it with everyone who has not yet heard. The decision to get involved means understanding clearly the situation. Everyone IS lost. Everyone WILL be judged. Their only real opportunity to be found and be redeemed is through the message God has given to us to share with them.

We can be part of those who hide from this reality and responsibility or we can accept our role in communicating the message to the world, to every tribe and nation. Some will go to those who have not heard, some will help them go, but all should communicate with everyone they meet, wherever they meet them, the message.

BS – Read Romans 10:3 and answer the following questions. How do you feel about the fact that all are condemned to eternal judgment? What do you think the chances are that someone will find God and have faith in Him without hearing the gospel message?

PR – What value do you place on the lives of the people around you? What value do you place on the lives of the people of a foreign tribe? How does that compare to the value God places on those lives? What should you do to show that others are as valuable to you as they are to God?

BWV –Respond to this comment. Until we take seriously our responsibility to go, we are helping to condemn millions to an eternity in hell.

Inquiry 04

Strengthened through Weakness

Romans 14:1-4

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the lord is able to make him stand.

Do we realize just how weak we are in this world? Do we realize that our ideas of what is correct behavior, of what determines who has the stronger faith, actually reveals our own weaknesses?

I remember how bold I was as a youth in my proclamation of my faith. I felt my lifestyle and my actions were the best (and at times the only) way to communicate with others the truth of God's love and forgiveness. As the years have passed, I have changed my opinion drastically. I have come to realize that the greatest barrier to communicating to others what faith in God means is: me.

I have begun to understand how critical God is to the process of witnessing and communicating God's truth. I am a weak and frail vessel, whose life and preferences are, more often than not, the greatest barrier to effective communication of the truth. I have begun to realize just how important the work of the Holy Spirit is in making it possible for anything I say to have an effect on the life and attitude of one who does not believe.

My opinion that another person is weak is not based on facts, but on their differences. According to me, they do not know what is right, nor do they know what God really wants them to do or how they should act. I mean, really, how can someone who eats dog be a servant of God? How can someone who dresses like they do be a good witness to others of God's presence? How can someone who smells like they do and lives in that kind of environment understand anything of God's care and provision?

But such attitudes only reinforce the reality of how weak I am and how limited my faith is. For each of those questions could also be applied to me. Others see me as different. They can easily believe that I don't know what is right, because I am always making foolish mistakes or cultural errors that even children know better than to do. They could say that I have no idea of what God wants me to do or how to act. They can say that because of what I eat, or don't eat. My foods are as strange to them as theirs are to me. They may consider my dress as immodest and inappropriate, a bad witness to others. They could say that my environment has prevented me from understanding basic truths about relationships and has left me weak and incapacitated. And they would be right.

Maturity as a WCC involves moving beyond this kind of comparison to realize that faith is not about what we eat and

drink or how we dress. It is not about using culturally defined limits to define the correct way of serving God. Maturity is about understanding how these relate to the life and ministry of a person. My limits are not the basis of the level of another person's faith. Nor is my lack of limits to be used to determine who is right or who is wrong. Each of us is serving God, and doing so to the best of our ability and knowledge.

With this clearly in focus then we can begin to understand what Paul is trying to communicate. The level of our faith can be restricted by our position on what he calls disputable matters. These are matters of personal taste, matters defined by cultural standards, matters that have been determined by the environment we live in. Consider this example. If there is no source of cotton available how can someone make clothes out of cotton? If the only source of materials are animal hides or plant products, how then can we say that these people are indecent or inappropriate in their clothing? How can we say they are weak and immature?

Maturity is about seeing the person and not the situation. It is about seeing how they apply God and his truth to the setting in which they live. It is about understanding that, if the goal is serving God and sharing his love with others, then they are the good and faithful servant that God desires all of us to be.

Too often we are quick to judge others based on appearance and actions. Some of us are called by God and expected by God to learn to eat everything; I mean everything that is placed in front of us, no matter where we are. Some of us will only be able to eat what we have been brought up to eat. Does that mean our faith in God is somehow different or less? Some of us will learn to adapt our lives and actions to the culture and attitudes of others. Some of us will never be comfortable in such situations. Again does

that mean we have a scale of greater to lesser faith? Some of us will travel widely and experience the lives of Christians from other lands. Others will never leave their neighborhood. Does that mean we have more or less faith in God to use us?

Paul's question to all of us is, who are we to judge someone else's servant?

We do not have the right or privilege of such an action. Our responsibility is to help each person wherever they are, and wherever we are, to grow in their faith in God. The truth is that some people who never leave home, who never try exotic foods or adapt to exotic settings are called on to perform great acts of faith right where they are, to reveal God to those around them. They are giving, praying, and serving in ways that only they can do where they are. And what they ate for lunch or dinner has absolutely no relation to what God has asked them to.

There are others who must go. They must do so to reveal God to the people of other countries, other cultures, other languages, other tribes. Their act of faith in going will often be tied to their ability to adapt to very different environments. And in truth, what they ate for lunch and dinner may become a critical part of expressing that faith to those they have been sent to serve. It will be evidence that they too are acceptable to God; where they are and in the context in which they live.

I cannot use my ability to eat anything, (well almost anything), to be a factor in judging the level of the faith of those who cannot imagine eating what I have eaten. I cannot use my ability to live in and adapt to other cultures as a measuring rod of another person's faith. It just won't work. The measure of one's faith is to be based on how well they are serving God where they are. Are the people around you experiencing God through your faith?

BS – Read Isaiah 42:1-7 Here is the description of God's perfect servant and how he is expected to act. Compare this with the description of the unfaithful shepherds in Ezekiel 34:1-6. What relationships can you find between these passages and Paul's comments in Romans 14:1-4?

PR – By what standards do you measure the level of another person's faith? (Attendance at church, level of Bible study, involvement in ministry or etc.) Reflect on why you do this and how it affects your ability to serve and encourage others.

BWV – Why do we place so much stress on how people act and behave (the same or differently from ourselves) as a way of determining the level of their faith and commitment to God?

Inquiry 05

Be the Bridge

Romans 15:14-20

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through

me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.

Do we understand the importance of a bridge? Do we really know the function of a bridge?

In the physical world a bridge provides a shorter and much simpler route between two points. But that is a very simple understanding of the concept. Bridges involve access to critical resources and locations. They represent an investment of energy and resources in their construction and an investment of trust that the bridge will not be used to harm those who live on either side of it. Bridges also involve rights and responsibilities, the right to use the land involved and the responsibility to maintain what has been constructed.

Over the years I have seen many types of bridges. Some were so poorly constructed that they collapsed as I crossed them. Some were built out of materials that made me fearful for my safety. In Papua New Guinea, some of the bridges were in such poor condition that each time we needed to use them we had to repair them before attempting to cross. We did so because there were no alternative routes to use, at least for our car. I have also seen walking bridges made from tying the tops of bamboo trees together so people could walk across. I have seen bridges made from bundles of sticks that amazed me with their strength.

Bridges usually span open spaces on a specified route. Spaces like canyons, valleys, or rivers hinder our progress in traveling from where we are to where we want to be. Without the bridges, our ability to travel on the chosen path would be more difficult and sometimes more dangerous. The construction of bridges represents great expense and takes a great amount of time to build. The greater the space, the greater the expense and time involved.

There are other kinds of bridges that span the spaces that exist among people. Keep in mind that some of these bridges can be built quickly and others take a great deal of time.

The simplest bridge building involves connecting people. One person acts as a bridge between two others. This can take the form of a simple introduction. "John I would like to introduce you to Jane." This bridge can function in many ways once constructed. It can serve as a one time opportunity to meet that person, it can serve as an access point to allow the flow of information between the two people or it can also become a well worn path that allows for the development of a deep lasting relationship. All these options are possible because someone acted as a bridge between two others.

A more complicated type of bridge is that of parenthood. Parents act as bridges between their children and the future. They build a bridge of teaching, experience, and example that, in time, allows their children to cross over into adulthood. The space to cross from childhood to adulthood appears vast, and the effort involved represents a huge investment of one life into that of another.

If the family bridge is built well and meets the needs of those involved it will be available for use for the lifetime of those it was built for. It will also allow the children to return to their

parents for further assistance if needed and maintain the relationship between the parents and their children. However, if it is poorly built or poorly planned it will make it very difficult for the child to cross, possibly causing great fear and dependency. The result may be that there is little desire to return to use the bridge when there is need for further help. This is because crossing the bridge involves great risk and fear of being trapped on the other side. It could also result in harm because it could collapse in the child's attempt to cross. In this situation the bridge may never be properly completed and may be more of a barrier than a bridge.

One of the most complicated bridge-building settings is when we enter into another culture. The physical act of entering a culture often only reveals the depth and breadth of the chasm that exists. There are many bridges that need to be built: bridges of language, bridges of acceptance, bridges of understanding. Learning a language may represent only a basic bridge, like a rope bridge that can be fearful to cross. However the more we learn, the better the bridge becomes. Our ability to build this type of bridge is often dependent on our ability to build a relationship with a key person of the culture who then acts as a bridge for us.

We have been involved in this type of process on several occasions. In Sierra Leone our bridge person was Kempson. He taught me the language and helped me learn how the culture functions. He showed me how to live among the people and how to communicate effectively. He also helped them understand why I was there and what I was doing.

Paul is writing about this type of bridge; the kind that connects people to people and people to information. He wants to go to new places, to new people and he is explaining why he desires

this. Paul also talks about what it means to build good bridges when seeking to communicate the gospel. Good bridge-building means understanding how to gain the right to speak, the right to teach, and the right to guide others in their search for the truth, and the right to lead people into lives of holiness and purity.

Paul also discusses the access that good bridge building will provide. It will give us access to critical evaluation of our lives and activities. It will give us access to relationships among those we are seeking to reach. They will begin to trust us and have confidence in our lives and so give us access to their thoughts and questions.

Finally, Paul reminds us of why we are building the bridge. We are reminded that the source of our bridge-building is in God. He is the source of our ability to serve. He is the source of the power we need to build an effective bridge. He is the source of the resources that will make the bridge possible. He created us and those we are seeking to cross over to. Our ability to communicate, our ability to comprehend, our ability to share in a meaningful way all find their source in God. Through Him, it is possible to build bridges and reach others with the truth.

In this passage, Paul speaks of what he has accomplished as a Jew, a person of a specific cultural background, who has bridged the gap to the Gentiles, peoples of many cultures and backgrounds, to share with them the gospel of Christ. He also makes it clear that the success of this bridge-building is a result of Christ's work in him and the power of the Holy Spirit.

The concluding phrase provides a guideline to help us in our bridge building.

Those who were not told about him will see
Those who have not heard will understand. (Romans

15:21)

Effective bridge-building allows people to see Christ and to understand what God has to offer. Paul states in verse 18 that the focus is on what Christ accomplished in him. This resulted in words and deeds that built a bridge so that the people could see and understand. It allowed the people to respond and obey God. It was about proclaiming the gospel, not a culture. About being a minister of Christ, not of the Jews; about leading people to God.

The better I do at building the bridge, the better the people will respond and see what God has for them and can do in their lives.

BS – Read Isaiah 55, 66:18-20. Consider God's plan to reach the nations. Who is the witness? Who will God send? What are they to proclaim?

PR – Observe your life and the role you play in the lives of others. What kind of bridge are you and what kind of bridges are you building?

BWV – What do you think are the most important activities in building a bridge? Consider the following concepts as you reflect on this question: the nature of the foundation, the type of bridge, the function of bridge, the nature of the gap to be spanned.

Inquiry 06

The chance to choose

Ro 16:25-27

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him— to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

The key phrase in this passage is ‘that all nations might believe and obey him.’ We could easily restate this to be that “everyone will have the chance to choose to believe and obey.” Either way the key concept is making it possible for people to have the opportunity to choose.

It is about so much more than just going to the world and proclaiming the gospel. Anyone can do that. Anyone can stand up and tell others that they need to confess their sin and be saved. But, doing that does not always make it possible for someone to choose to believe.

A clear presentation involves revelation; the process that allows people to evaluate the information. To do this means presenting the material within the context of the people so that they can compare it to what they already know and are able to see what is different about what they are hearing.

A clear presentation involves wisdom. That means knowing what to say, when to say it and how to say it. It is easy to get on a soapbox and proclaim the end of the world and the judgment of sin. It is much different to get to know the people and help

them see how they are contributing to the coming judgment and the part they are playing in the destruction of this world.

A clear presentation involves obedience. Not just obedience to the letter of the law. It is easy to keep the law. It is another matter to learn how to live in the spirit of the law. A clear presentation shows the difference between keeping the law out of obedience and keeping the law out of love.

Giving people a chance to choose involves understanding their choices because of material benefits and their choices because of what has been revealed about the truth. How many times have good-intentioned people used gifts of food, clothes and other resources to attract people to the truth? Helping people is an essential part of showing God's love, but it is not for the purpose of gaining converts. It is to open doors so we can share the truth and create the opportunity to make an informed decision, not because of material benefits, but because of what we teach and how we live.

I struggle with people who preach judgment, using the threat of an eternity in hell to convince people to make a choice. When you think about it, people will choose the safe route, even when it involves denying the truth, so that they can avoid a clear threat or danger. People are very willing to give lip service to a dictator or despot in order to stay alive. They are willing to commit crimes and do what is considered evil, even when they know it is wrong, to protect themselves, and gain a greater level of security.

Even last night, as we hosted several non-Christian friends, such realities became clear. One expected a sermon or at least a comment from us about their need for Christ before we ate. Another asked what the occasion was for inviting them over. They know we are Christians. They know what we represent, are aware of the message we wish to share and they are observing

our lives. We wanted them to know that we are happy to be their friends and are available to share the gospel with them without them feeling any obligations. It became clear that they were thinking about who we are and the message we have. They have the chance to choose to believe.

If you go back to chapter 15 of Romans you will see this idea repeated over and over. Verse 2 says we should please our neighbor for his good. Verse 7 talks about accepting one another in order to bring praise to God. Verse 8 talks about being a servant on behalf of the truth in order to confirm the promises. Verse 18 focuses on how Christ worked in Paul's life in order to lead the Gentiles to obey God.

In Romans 16:18 Paul warns that smooth-talking and flattery may win people, but, in reality, they are being deceived. They make the choice to respond for the wrong reasons. This kind of activity causes two problems. 1) The deception of those who are hindered from a clear evaluation and decision. 2) The angry response of those who see what is being done and so reject the truth because of the abusive nature of our false presentation.

As a WCC we need to be aware of how people make good choices. We need to avoid actions that could be interpreted as bribery. We need to be careful of using innuendo and threats to force or pressure people into making choices. We need to avoid using shortcuts. Getting to your destination faster does not always mean you have succeeded. It may result in failing to obtain needed information and resources that are only found when following the main route. It may result in an unnecessary increase in danger.

Inappropriate methods of bringing people to a point of choosing might result in a choice built on a weak and poor foundation.

These decisions could easily be changed at a later date because there is inadequate development and preparation to maintain the choice in the face of challenges and threats.

Choices that last come from a clear presentation of the truth through a life clearly committed to that truth, based in the confidence that God's Word can change people and that the Holy Spirit is at work. Our task is to present the truth so that there is time for the questions to be asked and answered. Time for the challenges to be faced and dealt with. Time for them to see the truth lived out in our lives. Time for them to have a true chance to choose.

This is the focus of Paul's life - going to the nations, presenting the message, teaching the people the revelation of God and allowing God to lead the people to a choice. In this way, all the nations will have the chance to hear and the chance to choose.

It is not the easy way but it is the right way. It takes effort, but the effort will be worth it because the choices made will last for eternity.

BS – Read Isaiah 40:27-31 Shortcuts are for the lazy and those who tire easily. Reflect on this statement and what God promises to do for those who trust in His wisdom and follow His ways.

PR – Reflect on how you made your choice to follow God. How did the process affect your ability to grow and serve God?

BWV – Read Daniel 2:20-23. Daniel and his friends had to make choices about how they would live their lives in a foreign land. They chose to follow God and His wisdom. Why did they make this choice and how did it affect their lives and ministry?

Inquiry 07

Undoing the Division

1Co 1:2-14

To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ — their Lord and ours: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way — in all your speaking and in all your knowledge— because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful. I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?

One of the saddest situations in the church today is its fractured state. There are Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Catholics, Wesleyans and so on. Only in very rare situations can a person say 'I am a member of God's church' and not have someone ask what denomination they belong to. We often are more concerned about our membership in a specific group than our membership in the church of God.

I have seen situations where a specific denomination is doing a good job of ministering in a particular tribe or region. Then a different group arrives under the guise of doing evangelism and missions, but instead of reaching out to the lost, they spent most of their time stealing members from the original group. They used offers of food, medicine and other resources to coax the people away from the original church. Then they report that they are having great success in evangelizing the lost. They behave as if only they can provide the truth and lead people to God.

This is not a new problem. As you can see in the above passage Paul faced this same dilemma. People began to divide the church according to who they thought was the best teacher or leader. (Actually this is how the divisions in the church got started.) In time, these groups attracted others and formed denominations. It was not about maintaining the truth or proclaiming the gospel, it was usually about personalities, control and other human desires.

Today we have people who are attracted to those who say they have the best understanding of the truth. There are some who say that only "their group teaches the truth" and "only those who are members of their group are really saved." They attack other groups and ministries as flawed in their teaching. They seek to gain control of Christ to gain honor and prestige for themselves.

In the early church, the first group to behave in this way was a group called the Judaizers. They wanted everyone to become Jews before they could become Christians. This opened the door for a second group called the Legalist Group. They wanted to establish a specific set of rules to evaluate who really was a Christian so that they could exclude everyone else.

Paul uses his greeting to the Corinthians to deal with this problem. He focuses first on how Christ is the source of their blessing, how Christ is the one who saves and sanctifies them. He reminds them that all gifts come through their relationship with Christ. It is Christ who will keep them strong so that they will be blameless when they come before God. It is Christ that makes possible our fellowship with each other and with God.

Paul talks to the church of God in Corinth. He doesn't talk to the followers of Apollos, or of Peter, or of Paul or of any other person or structure. He clarifies that it is not "who" baptized you or "what" teacher you listen to that makes you a member of the church. These leaders were not sent to build their own churches but to build the church of God and preach the gospel.

But do we really understand what Paul is trying to communicate to us or do we by our lives and actions, continue to divide the church and mislead people about what the Church of Christ really is?

Review the passage above. Paul uses three very important phrases in talking to the people.

1. Church of God in Corinth
2. Those sanctified by Christ
3. Those who call on the name of Jesus

These are true marks of a Christian and how they become a member of the church of God. A World Class Christian (WCC) is clearly a member of a church that is under the direction of God. The name is not what is important. What is important is its relationship and obedience to the One who is the source of their existence.

A WCC is one who clearly knows who has made their new life possible. Again the name is not important. What is important is that Christ is the one who calls, Christ is the one who sanctifies and Christ is the one who assigns to the person the work to be done. The church cannot do any of these. It is only a channel.

A WCC is one who clearly knows who to call on. He calls on the name of Christ for his salvation. He calls on the name of Christ for his strength, protection and ability to serve. He calls on Christ to represent him before the throne of the Father. He calls on Christ for guidance in all aspects of his life. The church cannot do any of these except as it serves as a channel for the activity of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Using the name of a denomination or church can do none of the above. It is not the church that saves, it is not that church that represents the person to the Father. It is not the church that sanctifies. Belonging to a specific denomination does not guarantee any of the above. I am not saved, sanctified or anything else as a result of my membership in a church.

What the church does is act as a channel through which God can act. It is the means through which God provides needed teaching and encouragement. It is the structure through which God works to create an environment of fellowship and encouragement. It is

the medium God uses to carry out the work of evangelism and discipleship.

The reality is: the church is not ours and none of the names that we put on it can change that. The church is not the answer to the world's need for forgiveness or need for help. No matter how much good is done in the name of the church, it cannot forgive or save. Using the name of a church will not change God's decision or His judgment of your sin. Being a good Baptist, Wesleyan, or Congregationalist means nothing if you are not first and foremost a true child of God.

Following Paul, Peter, Apollos or any other person only divides the church and confuses the people who are listening to the message. How many people have been lost over the claim that only 'our' leader, 'our' group, 'our' denomination has the truth. This is how false cults get started, by claiming only they have the truth. Only they have received a clear word of prophecy, clear vision of what God wants. Only those who follow their teaching and are members of their group will be saved.

Being saved in this church, baptized by this person is irrelevant and deceptive.

There is only one church of God, but there are many ways to organize it and share in its ministry. There is only one church of God, but it is made up of many tribes and cultures and so expresses itself in many different ways. There is only one church of God, but there are many different types and ministries for it to be involved in.

This is not an easy situation to deal with. We have a tendency to be divided and not united. We tend to depend on ourselves and our understanding and not let God have control. And so the question is: How do

we deal with the divided nature of the earthly church and still communicate to others the unity that exists because we are all part of the church of God no matter where it is?

Do we understand that we are not called to be good Wesleyans, good Baptists, good Lutherans, or good Catholics? That what we are called to be is God's holy people; a people set apart to do His will, to proclaim His gospel. That only as we are truly "the church of God" can we be a good member of a local church, no matter what denomination it is a part of.

Do people see you as a member of a local church or do they see you first and foremost as a Christian?

BS – Read Galatians 1:6-9 Can a denomination become the source of a different gospel or a perversion of the gospel? Explain why or why not this is possible.

PR – When people ask you about your faith, how does your membership in a denomination affect what you say? How does that affect what they think of you and what you want to share with them?

BWV – What will it take for your church to become the church of God and not just a member of a specific denomination or group of churches?

Inquiry 08

Clarifying the Message

1Co 1:18-25

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

We use the word 'clarify' routinely in our conversations and activities. We use it when we want a clearer definition of a term or subject. We use it when we need clearer directions. We use it when we don't understand what others are saying and want them to make things clear for us.

The dictionary definition for the word 'clarify' has three parts. The first deals with the process of making a liquid clear or free from foreign substances that make it dirty or cloudy. The second deals with the removal of confusion from one's thoughts or comments. The final involves making something understandable. There are two related words; 'clarification' which relates to the process involved in making something clear or understandable.

The other is 'clarifier', which relates to anything used to help make things clear.

A discussion of what is involved in making a liquid clear may be useful in helping us understand what is also involved in clearing up confusion and making a point clearer to understand. In doing so we may gain insight into the process involved as well as to what is needed to do so.

When trying to remove unwanted materials from a liquid there are several possible techniques that can be used. The most basic of these is time. Many substances in a liquid are large enough so that if we allow sufficient time they will settle to the bottom of the container. Once they have settled, the liquid becomes clear and we can then pour it into another container, thus separating the unwanted material from liquid. In Guyana the water supply to our house always had particles of dirt in it. They quickly settled to the bottom of any container.

The second process involves filtering. We use materials like cloth, sand, charcoal and others to create a barrier that only the liquid will pass through. Depending on the nature of the material used for the filter we are able to remove ever smaller sizes of the unwanted materials from the liquid. In Sierra Leone we pumped our water from a well near the swamp. While it looked clear we knew we had to filter this water to remove bacteria and other materials from it.

The third process involves the use of external forces to separate the liquid from the unwanted material. Boiling, electricity, and chemicals are used to cause changes either to the liquid or the materials present in the liquid. Usually there are several steps required in the process and need active involvement of a person in the process. We had a coworker who always boiled her water

to remove certain materials and to sterilize it, removing wanted bacteria and minerals.

What is interesting in the above illustrations is that the processes involved depend on the nature of the liquid being clarified and the nature of the material that has polluted the liquid. Let us use water as an example with the goal of having water we can drink. If the water is from a muddy river then we may need to let it settle and then filter it. If it is from the ocean then we will need to desalinate the water. If the water is from a well that has sulfur or iron content then we will need a different process to purify it.

Some materials are easier to deal with than others. Some only require patience and simple techniques. Others require a greater understanding of the nature of the liquid, what is in it and more preparation and care to avoid creating other types of problems. If chemicals are needed, these can be dangerous; handled incorrectly can result in the loss or damage of the liquid that is being clarified and maybe harm to the one involved.

In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul is talking about making the message of the gospel clear. This message, for many people, is still unclear and needs to be clarified. The issue here is that the lack of clarity varies with the nature of the groups that are receiving the message. One group can't understand it because they cloud the discussion with a desire for miracles, another with a desire for it to fit into a specific form of wisdom, and for others it just doesn't make sense or they have their own expectations of what the gospel should contain.

For each of these groups there is a need to make the gospel clear. In 1 Corinthians 2:1-15 Paul tells what he did to help make the message clear. He states that he did not focus on making eloquent speeches or some form of superior intellectual discussion. He

focused on keeping it simple and depending on the Holy Spirit's power to work in the lives he was speaking to.

He reminded the readers of the letter that the gospel can be understood by those who are wise but not necessarily wise in the knowledge of the world. This wisdom is dependent on the Holy Spirit who knows exactly how to reach each person's heart with the truth. In the same way, our ability to communicate this message is dependent on a form of wisdom freely given to us by God. That means that both the ability to communicate clearly, and to understand clearly, are dependent on the presence and direction of the Holy Spirit.

So how does this relate to each of us and our role in the process of communicating the gospel and making it clear to others? What is our role in the clarifying process?

To understand the answer we need to understand a little more about Paul. He was a highly educated man. He attended the finest theology school of his day and was thoroughly trained in God's Word and the current philosophy. Paul also went through a period of further development and training by God. Paul was clearly a student of the cultures around him. He had seen the wonders of God and the power of miracles performed by others and through him.

With all of this background, Paul could easily have tried to use his ability, his knowledge to convince people that he had the truth. Yet, based on this passage that is not what he did. Instead, he was willing to allow the Holy Spirit to decide the most appropriate way to clarify the message he was sharing.

As we read about Paul's life it becomes clear that each setting he ministered in was different. Consider the following examples.

1. Berea – Here, Paul taught the truth and then had to leave. The Bereans began a personal search of Scripture to verify what Paul had taught them. This was much like letting a liquid settle. Paul gave the people time to think through what we have said. This is often an effective way for the message to become clear.

2. Ephesus – Here, Paul rented a hall to do teaching. Each day people came to listen and interact with him about the gospel and its implication. This would be like a filtering process. Paul was used as a filter to discuss the meaning of the message and its potential in the lives of those who came to be taught and interact.

3. Athens – Here, Paul became involved in serious debates with various groups over the meaning of the gospel. He was prepared to answer their questions and took the time to debate with them. This can be like the final stage in clarifying. We need to be ready to see clearly the nature of the questions and debate and take the time to be prepared to deal with those questions. The right use of discussion and apologetics will clarify the discussion. A wrong approach here will drive people farther away.

The message of the gospel is very clear, but man has a way of muddying up the water. Sometimes it is easy to clarify the message. It could be as simple as just living a life that is a clear example of what the gospel means. With time and patience the issues will resolve themselves. At other times, it is not as simple. We will need to be ready to have people watch us and question us. They will use us as a filter to test their thoughts and ideas. And there will be times when the process could be very difficult, as we encounter people whose beliefs will need to be challenged. In this process, our belief will be tested and we will need to be willing to enter into a serious time of exploration and interaction.

The key for us is, knowing where a person is spiritually and how we should respond to that person. We should never assume that because of our knowledge, our training, and our experience, people should respond to what we have to say. This could result in our appearing to not have any faith in the message, or worse, that the message is dependent on what we have to say. In this situation, we might fail to discern what the Holy Spirit is doing and become impatient, not waiting for the Holy Spirit to work or even to appear presumptuous, assuming that our insights are somehow critical to God's activity.

Actually the key in clarifying a liquid is realizing that we do not know the extent of what needs to be done. We cannot see what is hidden and could do too little or too much. Likewise, we truly need God's wisdom and the direction of the Holy Spirit to know what is necessary as we share God's message of salvation.

Remember Paul's comment in 2:1-2, "I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom...I resolved to nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

So, clarifying the message is really about communicating, first and foremost, Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, with salvation for all who believe. If there is more need for clarifying, then the Holy Spirit can be trusted to guide us. All our education, development and understanding are of no value unless we submit it all to the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Only He knows just how dirty the water is and what it will take to clarify it.

BS - Read Isaiah 45:22-23; 55:9-11; Romans 11:33-36. Take time to reflect on God's wisdom and the power of His word.

PR – When communicating the gospel what impact does your experience, your education, your culture have on whether the

message is communicated clearly? Why could these also be a factor that makes the message unclear?

BWV- A person with a Biblical Worldview believes they have the only answer, the only solution for the problem of sin in the world. Do you agree with this statement? How will this belief affect your ability to communicate clearly the gospel?

Inquiry 09

Where the praise comes from

1Co 4:1-5

So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

When I was involved in applying to be a missionary, one of the key questions that was on every application form was "what are you doing now to advance the kingdom?" It focused on current ministry, current evangelistic activity, and current involvement in personal discipleship of myself and others.

I have often thought about those questions and their value; especially in the light of this passage and the comment by Paul that “those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.” The questions on the application forms were related to my current activity and how that connected with the preparation for my missionary call. It was apparent that going to the mission field would not happen in one easy step, but over a process of time. The focus was not on how fast I could get there, but on being sure I was ready and would prove myself faithful once I was given my missionary assignment.

At one point in the process I was asked to wait another three years and serve as a senior pastor. Again, my desire to get to the mission field as soon as possible was delayed. At first, the focus was on my preparation and activity. Now, it was on my ability to work as part of a team and be able to involve others in ministry. It involved a time to be proven faithful in ministry. This process taught me many things and gave me practical experience in several key areas: 1) servanthood, 2) continuity of ministry, 3) faithfulness in service, and 4) motives for ministry.

To be honest, the three year delay (yes, I saw it as a delay), was not something I wanted to deal with. I felt I had already waited many years. I also had completed many years of training and felt I was ready. So why should I wait another three years? It would not be until I had finished those years and received my first assignment overseas that I would understand the reason. It became apparent to me that without that time of additional service and learning I would not have been able to do the task assigned to me.

My impatience is not unusual and seems to be common in today's society. We have been taught that it is easy and fast to

obtain what we want. Fast food, fast tracking, and fast service are part of our everyday world. We are taught to expect that everything should be ready instantly. It doesn't matter where you live in this world; this is the message being received. We give little thought to what we might be missing along the way, or the impact such a desire for speed may have on those around us.

Maybe a simple illustration can help. There are many times when we have a task to complete or a trip to make. Generally we look for three things, the fastest, simplest and least expensive way to complete the task or arrive at our destination. If one is not careful, it is possible to make the wrong decision in each of these areas and end up with an inferior product or a trip that is more costly than expected.

It is a commonly held belief that shortcuts usually result in some other difficulty to overcome. To understand why this is true let us take each of the three reasons above, (faster, cheaper and simpler), and consider why we decide to take a short cut and what the consequences may be.

Faster. First, we need to decide why we think it will be faster. Usually, on a car trip, we decide to take a shortcut because of the amount of traffic that we encounter or some obstacle that is causing us to go slower than what we think is normal or acceptable. We think we can travel faster via another route. Our desire to get there faster may be because we think we are late, or we are impatient, or we just want to be there before anyone else.

Generally, when we take a shortcut, we are traveling in areas not designed for faster speeds or heavier traffic. There may be more turns and stop signs or others may decide to take the same route we are. There may be other risks and dangers that do not exist on the regular road, which can cause further delay and even be more

dangerous than staying in the normal flow of traffic. If enough people choose use the shortcut then nothing is gained and in reality it may take even longer. The fact is that shortcuts, more often than not, do not result in arriving at our destination faster.

Cheaper. We think we can do it cheaper. Our first thought is to find materials that cost less, workers that will accept a lower wage and tools that are less expensive, and so on. Yes, all of these will result in doing the job cheaper, but will also result in a product of lesser quality and in the end, may cost as much or more.

Using cheaper materials means the product won't last as long or be as good. This means it will have to be replaced more often. Poor quality products bring with them a stamp of disapproval and low value. People only buy these when they cannot afford anything better. Paying lower wages means hiring people with lesser skill. This opens the door for inferior assembly and errors. This affects one's ability to guarantee the work and means constant claims to repair or replace faulty products. Using cheaper tools means tools don't last as long, work as well and have the same problems as the product we are trying to build; poor quality. We will have to replace them more often which will affect the cost of what we do. Cheaper is not better.

Simplest. This is based on the idea that there has to be a simpler way to do something. Less work, less time, less cost. Sometimes simpler is possible without sacrificing quality and effectiveness. But that usually represents an investment in time and energy to figure out what is being done and how it could be done more simply. In that case, simpler comes at a cost. The fact remains, that whatever is being left out, skipped or ignored will create a problem. Phrases like 'so simple anyone can do it' become our

motto. But is this really a good way to operate? There are some things that are not simple and require the development of skills and resources that are not simple. They involve development of tools and techniques that are not simple.

Now back to our passage above. Paul is talking about; 1) servanthood, 2) continuity of ministry 3) faithfulness in service and 4) motives for ministry. He is talking about the process involved in receiving praise from God and not from man.

God is not interested in shortcuts. He is interested in seeing who will be like his Son. Shortcuts in life are about doing what we think is necessary to get where we want. Service in God's kingdom is about being proved faithful. This is based not on how soon we get to the mission field or into ministry, but how we get there. Not on how many shortcuts we take to shorten the time, cost and complexity of the process, but on how well we handle the tasks we are given and the priority we give to them

Consider this. What is the difference between an unskilled, unprepared person doing a job or a fully trained and skilled person doing the same job?

Now consider this. What does it take to go from unskilled and unprepared to skilled and capable for the work?

Finally, why do people try to take shortcuts? It is usually about motive. The central motive is often to gain something as soon as possible. To gain reward and praise are high on that list.

Today many people think they are ready for ministry when they are not. The key problem is they want to take a shortcut. They don't think they need to be discipled. They don't think they need more experience. They don't think they need more training. They

become the judge of themselves and so the source of their own praise. The truth is we need to learn that it is God who is the one who determines if we are worthy of praise, not our family, our church, or our friends and especially not ourselves.

If you are your own judge will people really regard you as a servant of Christ, one worthy of being entrusted with the ‘secret things of God?’ Remember Jesus spent 30 years in preparation, submitting himself to his heavenly and earthly fathers.

A shortcut may get you there faster, but you may be unprepared for the work. The end result? Unproductive effort and being judged as unacceptable by others. Being patient and taking the time needed to be trained and prepared may appear like a delay but most likely will result in being more effective in the work. When we are more effective, the work is done better and the people will understand God’s words more clearly.

Faster, cheaper, and simpler, don’t really work in the kingdom. With that in mind, we should focus on doing what is required to receive a great trust, to be one who will be proven faithful and whose motives are clear.

BS – Reflect on the lives of Moses, Samuel, and David. How long did they have to wait before they began to carry out the work God had given them to do? Reflect on the life of Paul. He was highly trained but his first attempts at ministry failed. What happened to him before he was finally called into service?

PR – Have you ever tried to do something before you were ready or without proper instructions? Think about a time when you purchased something that required assembly. Did you follow the instructions or try to assemble it without the instructions? What happened in either situation? How important is it to have the

proper training, adequate experience and good directions as a servant of God? Who do you look to, to determine if you are truly ready?

BWV – What happens when we send a person who is not fully prepared to serve as a pastor or missionary? What are some of the problems they will face? How difficult will it be for them to succeed? How does being properly prepared relate to being a world class Christian?

Inquiry 10

Serving for free

1Co 9:1-3; 15-19

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. Don't we have the right to food and drink?

But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast. Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.

Free service. Free food. Free gift.

All of these sound wonderful, and we all want to benefit from such offers, **but**

That is the big problem. We all want something free and don't want to know anything about what comes after the 'but.' **JUST STOP THERE AND GIVE US WHAT YOU ARE OFFERING FREE.**

But is anything really free?

There are many things in this world that we receive without charge. We receive the air we breathe. We receive the sunlight. But are they really free? We receive many gifts in our life, material goods that we didn't pay for and were given to us without paying for them. But are they really free? Stores offer free gifts or a free chance to win a prize. The first ones to enter get something free; the first names drawn win the free prize. But are they really free?

Actually none of the above is free. The air you breathe involves the expenditure of a great deal of energy and effort. Plants in the water and on the ground labor relentlessly to clean the air we breathe. The sunlight you enjoy each day comes as a result of an incredible outlay of energy. Those free material gifts come at a cost to others. They are based on the time and effort of building a relationship that results in giving and receiving gifts. The gifts and prizes in the stores come at a price. Everyone is charged a little extra so that the recipients can think they have received something free. There really is nothing that is free.

The free meal offered in a soup kitchen. The free night in a bed for the homeless. The freedom to do what you want to do. All of these come at a cost. Someone had to pay something - money, time, or even their life so that others could enjoy what we call free.

Wait a minute, isn't the gift of God given free. Yes, that is true in the sense that it does not cost us anything. But... (there is that word again) it cost God a great deal to offer the gift without charge to us.

So what does Paul mean in this passage when he talks about being free and offering himself and the gospel free (vs 1, 18, 19)?

In the attempt to define what he means he discusses his rights. His right to food, clothing, finances and the support of others so he can be free to do the work. In making his claim, Paul does not intend to suggest that there is no cost, no responsibility. He makes it clear that there are costs involved in ministry. The reality is that unless someone provides financially for the work, or the person supports himself in such a way as to have time free to do the work, then nothing will be done.

However, it is Paul's fear that people will begin to think that in order to receive the gospel they will need to pay for that privilege. This is the very thing he is trying to avoid. His concern is not over who is paying or how his work is supported. It is about how those being reached are impacted by his ministry.

Go back to the prize being offered by the store. The store manager really wants everyone to believe that what is being offered is free. So he does not spend any time informing his clients that to make the prize available he is going to raise the price on every item in the store. And generally, to be eligible for the prize, a purchase must be made. That means that everyone, winners and losers; have to pay something so that someone will win. The problem is that only a few win. There are never enough prizes for everyone.

The truth is: missions, evangelism and church ministry are not free. They come at a cost. However, the goal is to make the gospel available to anyone who needs to hear it, to be taught in the Word – free of charge. Free in the sense that there are no strings attached. No purchase required.

Paul is concerned here that people know that hearing the gospel and receiving forgiveness is not dependent on their ability to make a purchase. It is not based on their ability to do something; rather it is based on his ability to make it available, free, at no charge.

This is a big question for each of us. Who pays the price for sharing the gospel with others? How do we determine the cost and how it will be paid? This is a question that must be wrestled with at a personal level. That is what Paul is doing. He is sharing with us the struggle and discussion that he had with himself about his rights and how they could affect the availability of the gospel to those who had not heard and did not know.

So often membership has its fees. We pay fees to be part of many types of groups. Gymnasiums, unions, clubs; they all have their dues. If you don't pay you lose your membership and all the benefits. This is something Paul wants the church to avoid. So he focuses on what he has learned is needed to make sure there is no confusion.

He talks about providing for his own needs so there is no confusion. He talks about denying his rights as the one who brought the gospel. He talks about denying anything and everything that might get in the way or suggest there is a price to hearing the gospel; from monetary costs to costs that come from cultural issues. His goal is to offer it free, no purchase required.

For this to be possible there will be a need for people who will give of their resources and lives. Give to make it possible for others to share, without charge, the Word of God. Give to make it possible for others to go, without the burden of providing for themselves and so limiting the time available to proclaim, teach and disciple. The key is that the giving is not done for what can be gotten in return. It is done so that more can be given.

Serving for free comes at a cost to those who understand and know the need to make the gospel available without cost. That

is exactly what God did. Our salvation comes at a cost. But we are not expected to pay. God took care of that. He paid so we could receive it freely. We can share in that process. We can share in the cost of making this information available to all who have not heard.

Will we serve for free? Will we go without concern for a reward? Will we risk our lives without a desire for recognition (a form of payment) by those who send us and those who receive us?

Serving for free involves knowing the cost, personally and for others.

Serving for free. Free from the bondage of this world, this life, and its dependence on self and not God

Serving for free. Knowing that my gift will reap a harvest beyond my ability to understand.

Serving for free, to win the grandest prize, A SOUL.

BS – Read the following scriptures 1 Corinthians 4:10-13; 2 Corinthians 11:7-10; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9. What more can you add to the idea of serving for free from these discussions by Paul about his life and ministry?

PR – Consider your own life. What do you expect others to do before you will share the gospel? What is the payment you expect for your efforts? What do you expect from those who you have shared the gospel with? What do you expect in return for the good you do?

BWV – Jesus repeatedly told the disciples (and us) to think about what kind of treasure they were seeking and where they were storing it. Yet He did not criticize or turn those away who gave toward His ministry. And though He had no home, it is never said that He and the disciples were hungry. In what way are you to be responsible for making the gospel free to all who need to hear? How does our understanding of who God is affect

our activities and use of resources? Reflect on Jesus' life and think about what it means to be free and to serve for free?

Inquiry 11

Motivating the missionary

1 Corinthians 9:17-18

If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.

How does one discharge a trust that has been committed to their care? How does one get a person to give up his rights, his goals, his life to be willing to accept such a trust? Consider the following steps and what will be involved to motivate a person in this process.

Step One: Involves great challenges

Step Two: Involves great possibilities

Step Three: Involves great resources

Step Four: Involves great satisfaction

Step Five: Involves great focus

Step Zero and Six: Requires the presence of God

Step One

Life is filled with challenges. The very fact that we are alive fills our days with a category of challenges that are basic to every living being. These challenges include the basic needs for sustenance, protection, and safety. We all need food, we all need protection from the elements and we all need to feel safe. These

challenges fill much of our lives as each day we are confronted with the need to overcome these challenges.

Our ability to deal with these challenges will depend greatly on the resources available to meet and deal with them. Those resources include our environment, parents, friends and others that help us learn to identify the challenges and learn the skills needed to deal with them. Other resources come from within us. Each of us has abilities and skills that will make it easier or harder to deal with each of the challenges we face. For some it will take all of their time and ability to succeed, for others it will not be as difficult. Another type of resource is found in our environment. Where we live (or choose to live) will provide different types of resources which will affect how well we can meet the challenges we face. The fact is, because we are living, our days are full of challenges.

There is another category of challenges that exist because of the people with whom we come into contact with. These challenges are further defined by the society in which we live in. The expectations of others, from our family, to our friends, our enemies and our Creator; from the groups we associate with, to the groups we avoid. Each is involved in the development of expectations which are shaped into challenges that we must deal with.

As a member of a family, there are the challenges of learning to live together and establishing identities within the family. This is also true of any group we may join. Always there is the challenge to establish who we are, what we will contribute and how we will benefit. Even an outcast is part of a group and faced with the challenges common to that group.

This is even truer of being a member of God's family. There are clearly defined challenges that relate to becoming a member and developing that membership.

Step Two

In all of these challenges, there are possibilities. There are always possibilities. In some settings they are limited and in others they are vast. The two most basic possibilities are those of success or failure. We successfully face the challenge before us or we fail. A simple example would be the quantity of food available. Either we have enough or not enough. How much is enough becomes another type of possibility. Enough for only me, for my family, for my friends or for strangers. Now the possibilities start to expand.

As we begin to look beyond ourselves, the range of possibilities grows. How far it grows will depend on how we handle other areas of possibility: what we learn from others, what we share with others, what materials we can obtain, how far we are willing to go to gain them and so on. This leads us to the next step.

Step three

Possibilities are dependent on our access to resources. The more resources available, the more possibilities, and so the more likely it will be that we can deal with the challenges that we face. But all of this depends on how we define our resources that limit or expand the possibilities.

Resources require that we see what we can do by ourselves and understand what we cannot do, requiring the help of others. This will be limited by our beliefs about who can help us and whether we see them as a reliable resource. The same can be said of the

physical resources as well. For some, a specific object is an essential resource; to another it has no value. Unless there is a change in ones' view of what is of value, they will never see it as a resource.

This becomes more evident as we look at the world around us. There are all kinds of settings, all kinds of people and beliefs. All of them provide for us access to resources. The key is: can we see the resource and make use of it. This leads to the next step.

Step four

The more effective we use our resources to expand our possibilities and successfully face our daily challenges, the greater will be our level of satisfaction. This is a key aspect of motivation.

Satisfaction is based on our ability to face the challenges of life, whether it is finding food, earning money, making friends or any other of the challenges of life. Being satisfied is a key aspect of what drives us and helps us deal with life. We find food to satisfy our hunger. We establish friendships to satisfy our need to belong. This requires one more key step.

Step five

To reach a point of being satisfied requires us to be focused long enough to identify the challenge, see the possibilities, make use of the resources and accomplish what is needed to be satisfied. Sometimes we need to maintain the focus for long periods of time. If we have to grow our own food, then the focus covers the time from planting to harvesting to storing enough so that we can start the cycle all over again. If it involves education, that could take years of focus. Actually most of the challenges in life require

fairly long periods of time or the constant repetition of activities over time for a person to be successful in dealing with the challenge. Temporary solutions are just that, and will eventually require us to change our approach or focus if we are to truly be satisfied. This is a key flaw for most of our activities because they focus on short-term realities.

There are so many challenges in life that it is easy to get lost in the maze of the challenges that exist and lose sight of the greatest challenge, that of knowing God and sharing that knowledge with others. This requires a balance and focus that is difficult for man and is constantly compounded by his sinful nature.

Step Zero

To balance and focus our lives we have to create a step zero where we introduce God into the process and seek His guidance as we navigate through the challenges. This is important so that we assign the right amount of importance to each so that we can deal with them and still have the time and energy to be motivated to accept the special challenges God has for us.

Step Six

This also means we need a step 6. We need to make God the final step or goal in the entire process. If God is not in sight then it will be easy to lose the focus needed to carry out this work or do it in a way that brings little or no benefit to us or others. Keeping God at the beginning and end will impact our effectiveness in sharing God's love with others.

This process (steps zero – 6) is dependent on Christians who understand what is involved. It is about becoming a child of God, like Paul, who sees the importance of the trust and sees that the

greatest benefit, the greatest satisfaction in his life comes from helping others be motivated to carry out the trust God has given... them to help others sort through all the challenges and focus on God...to help others see that the greatest possibilities for success lie in God...to help others see that the greatest resource available is God...to help others see that the greatest satisfaction available in life is serving God, because there lies the greatest reward. Seeing others find the same peace and satisfaction that I have found in God's love and forgiveness is my greatest challenge and greatest joy.

Motivation for this work comes from an awareness of the following

1. The encouragement of others who have obeyed God and are a proof of what is possible
2. The rewards and blessing that are available from God to those who accept the challenge (the trust) and share it with others.
3. The evidence of true satisfaction that is visible to all when we do what is right and good
4. The impact on a life that reveals that they have been chosen by God

Paul saw the challenge and saw the choice he had to make. He could do the work willingly and be a blessing to others and so experience his reward. This attitude would motivate others to act out of love and open the door to the same blessing and reward. Or, he could carry out the work as if it were any other task, as an obligation. This would likely result in others accepting what he said because it was true, but create a structure based on

obligation. This is not a healthy way to build a church or relationship with God.

So why are you here reading this material? As an obligation to be fulfilled or as an opportunity to learn more about God and become better motivated in caring for the trust you have been given. In doing so, you will be an example and motivation to others.

BS Read 1 Corinthians 3:8-15. How does this passage help to further define what motivation is and what the results are of good and bad motives?

PR What do you think are the blessings and rewards of carrying out the trust God has given you? How are you a motivation to others?

WCC – Does it matter where you live? How does your location affect your ability to carry out the trust God has given you? Do earthly resources restrict or expand a person's ability to carry out the trust God has given them to be a motivation to others?

Inquiry 12

Being a servant

1Co 9:19-20

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.

. Slavery - the ownership of one person by another - is a concept that we have little understanding about. The

control of a person's life so that everything they do is determined by the one that owns them and is done for the benefit of the owner. Even eating, sleeping and taking care of themselves is for the benefit of their owner so that the slave will always be ready to do what is required of them.

We are taught to reject this idea and see it as evil. Wars have been fought to bring an end to such treatment of individuals. Laws have been written to protect people from being enslaved and today there is a great movement to bring an end to human trafficking, which uses children and women for forced labor and sex.

Yet, here Paul is saying that his greatest desire is to be just that, a slave. And not just a slave to one person but to all whom he comes in contact with. He goes on to describe what he is willing to do, willing to give up, willing to risk so that he can win them, to save them, so that they can share in the same blessings of becoming a slave in the kingdom of God. This seems so strange to us. Why would anyone give up their freedom to submit to the control of another?

The Bible makes a number of comments regarding slavery. It does not speak out against slavery, but it clearly places limits on the nature of slavery. There are rules about how slaves should be treated; rules that restrict the length of time a person may be a slave and so on. (Leviticus 25:39-41)

Yet in the midst of the presentation of rules regarding slavery, an interesting comment appears. It is allowed that a person may choose to remain a slave for life (Exodus 21:6; Deuteronomy 15:17). The person making such a decision must declare in the presence of the judges that they love their master and his family, enjoy the benefits received as a slave and is willing to be marked so that all will know the decision he has made. What a decision -

giving up one's rights to serve another because of their love for that person and what they have received.

Forced slavery is clearly wrong. To forcefully take away a person's freedom; to force them to be burdened and placed at risk to satisfy the needs of others; to force them to suffer the loss of all their dreams and hopes because another person owns their life. Yes, forced slavery is wrong.

But when you think about it, just how free are we? What is the real difference between being a slave and being paid for my time and effort?

Consider these three different concepts in relation to serving another person.

1. Charges – my service comes at a cost to the employer. I can choose to leave if I don't like what I am receiving. The employer can also choose to fire me if I do not work in a manner that is satisfactory. This also means that anyone who wants access to the product or service we provide will have to pay as well. In this situation everyone has to pay. The employer pays for the worker. The worker pays in the form of skills and time. The buyer pays in money or service or goods.
2. Restrictions – Generally, my service as an employee is only available at certain times. I cannot be called on at any hour to perform the task I have been hired to do. If I am asked to do, so, my time comes at a higher cost. In reverse, the employer may restrict how much time he will allow a person to work. This can be done to restrict benefits and reduce the level of responsibility the employer has for the employees. There will also be limits on the product or service

that is being supplied. This forces others to pay more and so on.

3. Control – The employer controls how much he is willing to pay and supply. The employee controls how much time he is willing to commit and how effective they will be in doing the work. The clients seek to control, or at least try to control what they will pay, and try to find a way to impact the quality of the work and guarantees related to what is provided. In reality, everyone is fighting for some form of control and influence until it seems like no one is in control.

Employment actually appears to be its own form of slavery. While no one person owns another, the end result is that the system controls everyone and determines what is each person's role and responsibility is. The effort to not be a slave seems to result in another form of slavery. Slavery to the system. Even our free time is bound by the requirements of the system. We really can't go where we want and do what we want, when we want. So why is it that we want to be free?

At the end of the day there really only appears to be small differences between slavery and employment. As a slave my owner provides me with food, clothing and shelter. As an employee, I am paid and then have to provide my own food, clothing and shelter. I may have the freedom to choose what type of food, style of clothing and location of my shelter but also have all of the burden involved in making those choices etc.

Yet, Paul is telling us that he wants to be a slave. Why? Is choosing to be a slave, based on love, any different?

It is about focus. An independent person focuses on providing for their needs. To do this will require charging others for their service. They may work for someone else

or for themselves, but that decision is based on issues that are determined by their life and goals. They may be linked in some way to that of the person or company who hires them but in the end it comes back to a focus on my desires and needs and how they are going to be met.

A slave has a different focus. It relates to fulfilling the needs and desires of the person who owns them. Remember please we are not talking about those forced into slavery. We are talking about those who, as a result of love for the owner choose to remain slaves. This is a direct result of the nature of the one who is their master. The master is seen as one who cares about them and their needs. The focus here is about knowing what is required of them by the master is seen as valuable and worthwhile as defined by the master. It is not hard to serve someone who does what is right, cares about others and treats those in his service as individuals of worth. The focus here is on the needs of another person and through that focus having the hope that my basic needs will be met.

Paul knows that his relationship to God is much more than just the service of a slave. It is the service of one who has learned to love his master because he understands the master's love for him. This love, this relationship, is liberating.

Paul realizes that he can now be free in a unique way. He does not have to focus on his needs and desires. The loving master will take care of them. Paul realizes that since God is taking care of everything, providing what is needed, then he is completely free to do the master's work. You see the master is responsible for supplying the needs of the servant or slave. The master is responsible for supplying what is needed to carry out the task.

With that in mind, Paul enters into this discussion. He will become a slave to all. This is only possible because he is already a bond slave to God. He can let go of all his

expectations and be open to do that is needed for those he has been told to care for. This is what is so special about this unique situation. The work of the master is not about caring for the needs of the master but about carrying out the work of the master. Therefore Paul is a slave to everyone.

Since Paul is now freed from the need to care for himself, he is released to care for the needs of everyone else. He can let go of his ideas of what is necessary to learn what the person really needs. He can help the person let go of the slavery they are bound to by the world around them to discover the common ground that everyone has in God. His service opens the way for people to look beyond how culture and life define freedom to learn how God defines freedom. His service opens their eyes to see the bondage they are in and the road to freedom.

All of this is possible because Paul is not serving himself. He is not a slave to his needs and ideas. He is serving God and is freed to serve others in ways that are otherwise impossible.

We need to learn something strange and unique. Something normally seen as evil when forced on people, is something potentially wonderful when it is a personal choice made as a result of love. There is much of value that we can gain in learning what it means to be a bond slave of love; one who is completely submitted to the service of God; one who is freed to truly serve others; one who is freed from bondage so that others may also be freed from their bondage.

We need to learn this and learn it well so that we too can enter into God's service and declare with Paul,

“I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.”

BS – Jesus made many statements about what it meant to be a member of the kingdom of God and the role of being a servant. Read the following discussions Matthew 20:26-28; 23:8-12; Mark 10:43-45; Luke 14:7-11. Write a set of guidelines on how to become a true servant (slave) in the kingdom of God.

PR – Think about a time when you were asked to fill the role of one who serves and were not reimbursed in any way for the work you did. How did your attitude affect the quality of your service? What were you hoping to gain by your service? What does it mean when a person says they are glad to serve?

BWV – Do you know a person who is truly a servant? Take time to observe their life and then sit down and ask them why they are willing to give up what they want to be able to serve others? Why is this such an important attitude for a Christian to have as they enter into the world? Why is servanthood so important in God's view of who are good citizens in his kingdom? Why does God view servanthood as an important quality of a citizen of heaven?

Inquiry 13

Running is the prize

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not

fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

If we are all to run the race, and there is only one prize, then what does Paul expect us to do? It doesn't make sense. If we all are competing for one prize then what hope do I have of winning that prize? How does one compete against the Apostle Paul, John Wesley, Martin Luther or Billy Graham? If that is the list of competitors, then I don't have a chance of winning.

Actually, I don't think this is what Paul had in mind. There is a story in 2 Samuel 18 about an event in David's life. General Joab was ready to send the message that they had won the battle. He had selected one man to run with the message but another came and wanted to run as well. The general agreed and both messengers left. The man not chosen arrived first, the other man came second. Both accomplished the task, both ran and successfully carried a message to the king. The race was not about who arrived first but about carrying out the task. But to carry out the task both men had to be qualified. They were both known as men who could successfully run the distance. Both men had trained; both men knew how to pace themselves based on the distance. Both men knew what was required and both men arrived with sufficient energy to deliver a message.

Today there are similar examples of such efforts. The most significant is the Olympics. While winning the gold is the ultimate goal, many see successfully qualifying to compete in the Olympics as winning a grand competition. The pride of being approved to compete and represent their country is a grand prize. But to accomplish this involves doing the training, paying the

costs involved and successfully reaching the goals set to qualify. It takes a special level of commitment to do so. A person must organize their life, make the necessary preparations and avoid activities that are counterproductive, or as Paul says a “flailing of arms.” The moment the competitors enter the Olympic stadium and participate in the opening ceremony, they have won the prize of being qualified and can now compete for the next prize, a gold medal.

Another more interesting example is something called the Special Olympics. In this competition the only thing required of the participants is a willingness to try. While they are limited in their physical abilities and many face serious challenges to even make an attempt, they have the courage to try. They are willing to face their fears, their limits, the obstacles, and accept the challenge and try. The joy is not in who wins the race or competition. The joy is in running the race.

To make it possible for this special group to compete requires training, planning, organization. It requires a group of assistants who work hard to keep things in focus so that the participants will not waste their energy and be able to successfully complete the race or challenge before them.

There is one more situation where winning first place is not the goal of everyone who participates. The goal is finishing. These events include long distance races, like marathons and triathlons. In these competitions there are usually two groups of people who register for the event: those who are seriously trying to win and those who are seriously hoping to finish the race. In the first group only one person will win the prize. In the second group everyone who finishes the race within a specific time receives a medal for successfully reaching the finish line. These races often

have time limits that vary according to age, gender and physical handicaps which determine who has truly finished the race.

This final group illustrates in a unique way the idea that the “prize” is in the running of the race and reaching the finish line. It also illustrates that to accomplish this task involves careful planning and preparation. While the goal and the prize may be different from the first group and requires a different level of planning and preparation, failure to think through what is involved can have serious consequences. Not only will a person fail to reach the goal but can also put himself at risk.

There are several issues to consider in the “running of the race.”

1. The realization that only total commitment is enough.

There is no room for half-hearted preparation and training. A marathon requires serious commitment no matter how fast you plan to run. Twenty-six miles (41 kilometers) is a long way to run. If you are not committed to the training and reaching the goal you will not make it. Likewise, there is no room for part-time Christianity. People are not convinced by the half-hearted, weekend Christians who reveal their lack of commitment in their attitudes towards others at work and at play. Until we realize that total commitment is required, we will never be able to share the truth with others and see them commit themselves to the truth of the gospel. Until we give 100%, there is no chance of running the race much less completing the race.

2. The realization that only a clear focus on what the goal is will make it possible to succeed.

If we don't know what our goal is, and keep it in focus, then the likelihood of failure is very real. In verse 20 Paul clarifies this.

He is ready to do whatever is necessary in order to win some to the gospel. He is not trying to win everyone, for that is not possible. There will always be those who resist the good news, those that will never admit they are sinners. But everyone of us can reach those that will respond. Also, Paul did not set a number or percentage as a marker to determine how to know if he was succeeding. He avoided this so that the focus would remain clear. The focus is on running the race so that we give the gospel to those we meet and do it in such a way that some will be able to respond.

3. The realization that only proper training will gain the desired results.

Training to compete in a triathlon requires training in three unrelated sports; swimming, cycling and running. They each use different sets of muscles. While there may be some overlap, each event requires different actions from the muscles. Failure to train properly can result in failure in one of the three areas, and so, failure in the entire race. Training to be a witness is the same. We need to train ourselves in the word of God, train ourselves in the questions and issues of the people around us, and train ourselves in how to live the truth in the world around us. Failure to prepare in any of these can, and will, result in the failure to communicate the whole gospel to those we are seeking to reach.

4. The realization that only a clear understanding of the conditions that are part of the event will allow us to compete effectively.

Having a clear understanding of the goal will help us avoid wasting our energy and missing the opportunity to succeed. A missed punch in a boxing match is costly. Too many of these and the boxer will tire and not have the strength to continue boxing.

Expending too much energy at the wrong moment can result in not having enough energy to reach the finish line.

Failure to consider each of the above points can result in our being unprepared and unable to proclaim the truth so others can hear it, understand it and respond to it. This results in our flailing about; like a boxer who only hits the air and never makes contact with his opponent or a runner who has not prepared properly and collapses before reaching the finish line. Flailing results in wasted energy, loss of focus and the potential for failure. Flailing about, or not being prepared, is dangerous because the people who need to hear the message do not and we begin to lose sight of the goal and get lost in our failure. We forget what we are doing; begin to depend only in ourselves and our strength. Being unprepared, and undisciplined is unacceptable and preventable.

In one of the paragraphs above the idea of preparation was discussed which focused on training. We now need to focus on three other areas of preparation that help us to train.

Proper preparation also involves:

1. Knowledge – To successfully compete, one must have a about the nature of the race and the nature of the resources available. There is so much more involved in the Olympics or triathalons than just running the race. An effective race is based on the knowledge that there is a system in place to support those involved in the competition. It is a system designed to help a person succeed. There are supply stations and support teams along the way. Each of them designed to supply key resources - water, food, spare parts and medical help if needed. To run effectively means understanding how to run the race and how to make use of the resources available. The runner knows that he is not alone and help is available.

As Christians running the race and sharing the gospel, we have resources as well. We are told that God is ready to supply our needs as we serve him. We are told that the Holy Spirit is always with us to guide and strengthen us. We are told that Jesus is always near to encourage, to restore and keep us safe. The Bible gives us detailed information about the race we are running and the resources available.

2. Investment – Running a race requires investment; any activity involves investments. You probably have heard many sermons on investing your time, energy and finance in the kingdom of God. All of these are true. But there is another aspect of investment we must keep in focus. Investment is not a one time event, where we make the investment and then sit back and do nothing. Wise investing involves taking the time to research and understand the best way to use our resources. Wise investing means preparing ourselves for what comes after the investment. We must know how to evaluate the results, how to make changes and how and when to access the investment and put it to work.

Do we know what we are investing? Do we know where we are to invest our lives? Do we know how long we must maintain our investment? Do we trust the One we have invested our lives in?

If I am going to run a marathon, then I will need to make a number of investments to make that possible. Then I will need to determine when I have invested enough to enter the race.

Investing in training, investing in relationships, investing in God, all need to occur if I am to run the race.

3. Insight – This idea may seem a bit strange. How does one prepare in the area of insight?

Actually there are a number of ways.

1. Talking with those who have experience. The best way to understand how to run a marathon is by talking with those who have done it. They can share tips and ideas that can help guide us as we begin the process of entering the race. This is a key reason Paul is writing his letters. He wants others to have access to his insight his experience in the process of running the race, sharing the gospel.

2. Observing those who are actually involved – Many sports use videos and photos as a means of showing the athletes how to improve their performance. A good way to learn how to swing a tennis racket is to watch someone else. A good way to understand how to swim is seeing someone else swimming. Understanding is gained from observation. The same is true in sharing the gospel. Watching others share their faith helps us and encourages us. This is a key part of what is called discipleship.

3. Practice – There is nothing like practicing to give us greater insight into what needs to be done to effectively compete in a race or competition. The more we practice, the more opportunities there will be to find the weaknesses in our skills and so improve in those areas.

Without clear insight into the race, all our investment and training may not be enough for us to run the race and we will have wasted our time and energy.

Missions is just such a race. It is a race that everyone can participate in. Successful participation is measured by the fact that people of other cultures and tribes hear the gospel and respond. In fact, it is the race in which all Christians must participate in. It is the focus of Paul's discussion in this passage.

He is talking about what he is doing in order to effectively participate in the race to carry the good news to all the world. This is a key mark of a world class christian, the desire to participate and successfully reach the finish line; successfully make the gospel available to others around the world.

For this to happen we must begin to think like Paul. We must begin to train ourselves. We must enter the race and start running. The joy before us is in running the race so that others will see, and at least some will respond and join us in the race of reaching the world.

BS –Read Ecclesiasts 9:10-11;Psalm 147:10-11; Isaiah 40:38-41. What can you learn from these passages about how to run the race and serve God more effectively?

PR – Have you ever been in a competition that you did not win? How did you feel? Why did you or others want to enter the competition? What did you gain from enetering the competition, even though you didn't win the first prize? What prize are you hoping for in running the race of serving God?

WCC – The greatest prize that can be won as a Christian is the salvation of a person who is lost in sin. Do you agree with this statement? Why? Compare your response with the call of God to carry the gospel (a race to the nations) to the nations.

Inquiry 14

All that and no love = no mission

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

These first three verses of 1 Corinthians 13 contain a list of critical areas of training and preparation for those who wish to understand fully the mission we have been given and be effective in that mission. These areas include critical knowledge that must be learned. They also contain one more crucial factor. Without this key factor, (which will be discussed at the end), our effectiveness will be greatly restricted, even counter-productive.

Knowledge of language – Communication is at the heart of life. Everyone learns how to communicate. It is critical to be able to share the gospel with others. But even though we may speak the same language there is still a need to learn more about communicating effectively. Each person fills the words they use with unique content based on their experiences. To be effective in our communication means learning how to relate those experiences to the message we wish to share.

This is even more important when seeking to communicate with someone who speaks a different language and is part of another cultural group. We know that we have to learn a new collection of words and sounds and learn the meaning of each. We also have to learn the meanings assigned to various gestures,

expressions and activities. We need to learn about their culture and its communication so that we can appropriately communicate what we wish to share with them.

Knowledge of truth – The text uses the term “prophecy”, which in the Old Testament context involved the ability to take the truth of God’s word and apply it to the lives and activities of the people of God and to others. To be effective as a prophet required that the person know the Word of God, the Word of truth. Without that knowledge it would be easy to misuse one’s position and gain control over others. People who do this are called false prophets.

The more we know of God’s truth the more effective we will be in helping others to understand that truth. It will also make it possible to see how to apply that truth to the lives and situations of those whom we are seeking to minister to.

Knowledge of Culture – The text uses the phrase the “mysteries of life” which can mean a number of things. Life is filled with mystery and every culture has its unique way of dealing with those mysteries and explaining them to its members. These explanations are sometimes very obvious and are in the form of rituals, ceremonies and symbols. Others are less obvious and are intricately interwoven into the fabric of life. They become the basis of how one acts, makes decisions, develops relationships, lives and dies.

Even in one’s own culture there is a need to stop and observe the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of how we live and act. Failure to do so can result in missed opportunities at understanding those around us and how to be effective in developing relationships that will open doors to receiving the truth we have to share. This becomes even more important when dealing with other cultures. We may be

focusing on the same issue but because of our lack of knowledge of the culture we miss the opportunity to respond effectively at critical moments.

Knowledge of the power of God (faith) – The focus here is on how well we know God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It is not about our knowledge of the Bible, rather the level of our relationship with God and how that impacts our decisions and actions. It is about how we allow God to be active in our life.

Faith is built on decisions made that reveal our trust in God and in his ability to carry out His promises in relation to us personally and in relation to the world around us. This daily application of faith creates an understanding of God's power and how He works in us and through us.

Knowledge of sacrifice – Each day, in all of our activities we are expected to pay a price for what we do, what we have, and what we hope for. We learn to make sacrifices in time, finances, resources, relationships and desires. Some of the sacrifices are easy to make and require a minimal understanding of sacrifice. Some require much more and deepen our concept of the cost involved in reaching specific goals.

Most of us are willing to make sacrifices on a limited basis because we can clearly see the outcome. We see the benefit of spending the time and money needed for an education. We see the value of sharing and working together, through the process of mutual sacrifice. We are often times challenged by the sacrifices involved in marriage, raising children and investing in a career. Still, we make these sacrifices because we can see what is possible based on existing examples.

The most difficult sacrifices relate to investing in people and causes where the outcome is unknown or at least uncertain. Many times such activity requires a personal sacrifice for someone or something that we have no certain guarantee of having.

As we review each of these specific areas of knowledge, a further comment is added. None of them will work, none of them will have meaning, none of them will accomplish their purpose without love. The text makes it very clear that our possession of all this knowledge will have little value or eternal impact if we are lacking in one other area; love. Without love what we have or do has little value. Love is the key to making our knowledge valuable and effective.

Knowledge of Language – Love is essential if people are to believe what we say and understand why we want to learn their language.

Knowledge of truth – Love keeps us from becoming a false prophet or a false teacher. So many, out of a desire for power and personal gain, have twisted the truth to satisfy their desires. Love keeps our purpose clear and in focus.

Knowledge of culture – Learning a culture can be a long, difficult and frustrating process. It is often filled with false starts, pitfalls and mistakes which further test our commitment to understanding the mystery of another culture and how they interpret the mysteries of life. Without love we will quickly lose the motivation needed to keep going. Love helps us deal with the challenge and gives us a clear reason for taking the time to learn about another culture.

Knowledge of God's power (faith) – Our knowledge of God's power gives direction to our faith and our trust in God. Love

helps us know how to use that knowledge and apply our faith to any given situation. Great acts of faith are based on that knowledge but without love they have no meaning. Doing something just to prove we can do it is egoistical and selfish. Being impressive is what happens when love is not present. Without love, our faith will lose its focus and become centered in satisfying our needs and not on caring for others.

Knowledge of Sacrifice – Sacrifice is a part of every aspect of our life. We gain nothing; we learn nothing, without some form of sacrifice. But sacrifice can be done in one of two ways; for selfish reasons (what I can gain from what I sacrifice), and for selfless reasons,(what others can gain from what I sacrifice). We all sacrifice for personal gains. It is harder to sacrifice for others. A sacrifice that expects nothing in return is only possible when love is present.

Without love, our words have no meaning. Without love, our understanding and teaching of God's word is empty. Without love, my understanding of the mysteries of life and culture has no purpose. Without love, my faith and my actions are selfish and misdirected. Without love, my sacrifice has no value.

Does this sound harsh? Does it make you stop to evaluate your life? Does it open your eyes to look at what you are doing and ask why? It should.

Being a world class Christian is not just about love and it's not about actions. It is about the love expressed through those actions. How will I know you love me if there are no actions to reveal that fact? Look at God's example. He said He loved us. Then He sent his son who learned a language, taught the truth, learned a culture, depended on His father and expressed his faith, and sacrificed his life so that all would believe God loves them.

We are expected to behave in the same way and learn how to love the world, that is, everyone who is created in the image of God.

BS – Read Matthew 21:18-19. Compare the fig tree to a person who is without love.

PR – Reflect on how the presence of, or lack of, love has impacted your service towards those who do not know Christ as Savior.

BWV – Write a definition of your mission based on the five areas of knowledge and the role of love.

Inquiry 15

Building the right foundation.

1Co 13:4-5

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

In the 60's and 70's several key leaders began promoting the concept of the power of positive thinking. The idea was that if you could think positively about yourself and your abilities, you could gain control of difficult situations, overcome disabilities and fears and so build a secure world for yourself. The focus was on increasing one's self-esteem and value as a person. Building up others was seen as secondary or something one did as a means to improving one's world.

In this passage we have something very different and much more powerful; the power of positive relations. There are nine attitudes presented here that will shape our relationships and our ability to become a Christian who is truly world class. Two are stated as attitudes to obtain and the other seven are attitudes to avoid. (Actually you can state them as desirable [positive] attitudes or undesirable[negative] attitudes.) There is a ninth item that acts as a summary statement or as a directive. Observe

1. Patience

Desirable – Allow others the space to grow and make errors.

Undesirable – Lose control of your patience when others frustrate you with their unwillingness to act in a way you consider appropriate.

2. Kindness

Desirable – Take time to help those who are experiencing pain and struggling with their life.

Undesirable – Be insensitive to the hurts and struggles of others

3. Envy –

Desirable – Celebrate the accomplishments and successes of those around you, no matter how small or insignificant they are.

Undesirable – Complain about how unfair life is to you and how others are always getting what they want and you never do.

4. Boasting –

Desirable – Share with others how they have helped make it possible for you to succeed and how important they are to you. Take pride in what others do and let them know it.

Undesirable – Remind everybody constantly of how good you are, how successful you are, how you don't need anybody else.

5. Pride

Desirable - Let people see your limitations and your dependence on the help and encouragement of others; and let them know that they make it make possible for you to be who you are.

Undesirable – Never listen to the thoughts and criticisms of others because you never make mistakes and so are never wrong.

6. Rude

Desirable – Give people the benefit of the doubt and allow space for others to share their thoughts and explanations. Be willing to allow others to go first.

Undesirable – Criticize others for their failures and attitudes. Emphasize how they have made your life difficult and not allowed you to have what you want and deserve.

7. Selfish

Desirable – Share with others the resources and benefits you have received. Trust them with your possessions and life.

Undesirable – Create rules and restrictions that protect what is yours. Make it very difficult for anyone to have what you have or use anything that is yours.

8. Anger –

Desirable – Allow yourself to be upset with the wrong done to others, and use that energy to change what is clearly contrary to God's law of loving and caring for a neighbor.

Undesirable – Be critical and harsh with people. “Attack and destroy” is your mantra, no matter what damage it may cause as long as people know that you believe they are wrong.

9. Keeping records –

Desirable – Remember the good that people have done. When there is something bad use it as an opportunity to help others grow and overcome.

Undesirable – Remember the good others have done and praise them often so that it becomes a means of gaining control of their lives and influencing them to do what you want them to do. Remember the bad in the same way so that you will have leverage in their lives to blackmail them if needed.

Summary – Keeping records has value only as we see those memories as something that can be built on to give guidance to our future actions or as a way of helping another person grow and improve.

The difference between using an attitude in a positive or negative way is the presence of love. Without love we will be negative, we will seek to advance ourselves over others. A negative attitude that focuses only on “me” results in building a base that is very unstable and can shift at any time.

Love helps us see the value of others and caring for their needs. When we are willing to love others and invest in their lives we will find that our lives will be built on a more stable foundation. We will have the ability to see each person’s value to God. This makes it possible for us to carry out the mission of God which is to carry the gospel to everyone, neighbor: fellow countrymen, enemy, and those of other cultures.

Love is essential to carrying out God's mission no matter where we are and who we are dealing with. How love works in our lives will determine if whether we are merely another ordinary and common person in this world or a member of God's kingdom and are living as a WCC. A person who is a citizen of the kingdom of God and who can see the needs of others and apply God's love is a WCC. In this way their actions provide the means to effectively reach out and touch those lives in a positive manner. When these nine areas are under the control of love we can be used by God to open up a heart that would otherwise be closed to God's truth and forgiveness.

BS – Read Romans 14:12-19. Substitute the word love for the word peace in verse 19. Now review what Paul is discussing and how our love towards others can make a difference in our actions and our decisions.

PR – What happens when a person is positive in all but one of the nine areas? How will that affect your ability to show love to those who do not know Christ, and their ability to respond to what you are saying?

BWV – Jesus told us to love our enemies and pray for them. Reflect on which of the nine items above where you are weakest. Write your own definitions or guidelines showing how you can use that attribute to love someone who is your enemy.

Inquiry 16

Face of Evil

1Co 13:6-7

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

Evil makes me uncomfortable. Even more so when included in a discussion about love. It seems so obvious that love would not delight in evil and yet Paul includes the statement. It becomes a summary statement to the discussion of discussion in the previous verses of what love is and is not.

What is even more disconcerting is that that the previous discussion has not been about murder, rape, robbery or physical abuse. Those we can easily define as evil because they involve destruction of life and hope. But this passage suggests something more. It suggests that a lack of patience, a lack of kindness is evil. It tells me that envy and boasting are more than just reflections of a poor attitude, but they are indications of the presence of evil. It is humbling to realize that being rude can be equated with evil, but that is the implication of this short sentence.

Love does not delight in evil.

The reason I am uncomfortable is fairly clear. I want to see myself as something less than evil. But to do so I have to create levels of error, or sin. I lie to think that a “really bad sin” is evil. But, other “minor offences” simply represent lapses in thought and errors in judgment. At least that is what I want to believe and to convince others of.

Love does not delight in evil.

In the garden the original sin was not about murder, rape, robbery or anything so dramatic. It involved taking a bite out of an apple: an action that was judged as the greatest evil act to ever occur in all of man's history: an act that opened the door to lying, to the first murder, and the rejection of God.

Love does not delight in evil.

That act contained all that evil represents.

That day Eve was not patient. She was not willing to wait until God would reveal the truth. Her impatience affected the life of her husband.

That day, kindness was destroyed. Did Eve realize the scope of her mistake? If she did, (and it is likely that she did), she committed the greatest act of unkindness in all of history by involving another in her sin.

That day, envy became the basis of man's decisions. Out of envy for what God had and was unwilling to share, they ate the fruit. Envy became the driving force of much of the evil in the world.

That day, man thought he would know what God knew. But it did not have the expected or desired result. Instead of making them like God, their act revealed how small and weak they had become.

That day man sought to be proud. He used his position as the highest form of creation, a place of honor, and used it to destroy himself and everyone else, for that matter.

That day, man became rude. They hid from God. They tried to ignore Him in His own garden. They hid in an attempt to avoid God.

That day, they became self-seeking. Instead of accepting their responsibility they blamed someone. Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent. The only one who was honest and clearly knew his place was the serpent. To be self-seeking means to hide the truth from ourselves and others in an attempt to protect ourselves or advance our position.

That day, anger became the final act. God was angry with their failure. He had a right to be angry. But his anger didn't mean he forgot their needs. He drove them out but still provided them clothes. He drove them out but they still had access to food. He drove them out but was never far away. They were warned that their future would be one where anger was common; anger over the difficulty of life, anger over the pain of having children, anger over the consequences of their actions.

That day, the book of records was started and the first record entered. A record of all the evil, of all the failures to do what is good. It would take a great act of love to erase a name from that record.

Love does not delight in evil.

The truth is we exhibit evil behavior all the time. While we may not celebrate that evil, our lack of recognition of the presence of evil and how it affects our relations with others may give the appearance of delight. Think of it as an addiction we struggle to get rid of and why it is so difficult to defeat that addiction. The truth is, we delight in something that we gain as a result of that addiction. It doesn't matter how wrong it is or how badly we want to quit, what makes it difficult is the fact that we continue to remember the delight it brings to us.

Love does not delight in evil.

Until we see evil for what it is, we will never escape the lure of the delight we experience. Consider this. Why do we enjoy boasting? Is it because we enjoy feeling good about ourselves and superior to others. We delight in the feeling that for just a moment we are the god of our world. And in that moment we lose sight of the great evil we are committing; the very same evil that destroyed Adam and Eve and is still seeking to destroy us today.

Love does not delight in evil.

Love is about understanding how evil works in us, through us, and how that evil affects others. It is about understanding how deadly the delight for Adam and Eve was. A simple taste of the fruit, and all was lost. For us it could be a simple moment of envy, and the hope of drawing another person to God, will be destroyed.

Love does not delight in evil.

When we understand the nature of love we will begin to understand how dangerous the wrong attitude can be. Evil is so prevalent in our lives and in the lives of others that only love, love patterned after God will reveal the truth to us. Only love can help us to deal with our evil and keep us from becoming the face of evil to others.

Love does not delight in evil.

Love helps us see ourselves and make the changes needed in our lives so that we become the face of God's love for all.

BS – Read Proverbs 2:12-15 and Psalm 119-9-11. Consider how wisdom, law and love are related to each other and can make it possible for us to delight in the presence of God and avoid evil.

PR – Look at yourself in the mirror. What do you see? What do you think others see? Would your face and the expressions seen on it be enough to convince others of your love for God and for them?

BWV – Ecclesiastes 10:10 makes a very interesting point about life in general. Consider who the axe is, why it is unsharpened and what kind of strength will be needed to overcome the problems. What skill does God want us to develop to be his representative, his face to the world.

Inquiry 17

Protection quadrangular.

1Co 13:4-7

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

A well-built fort provides protection from an attack from any direction. This is a given no matter the shape of the fort or where the fort is located. Of course, the best locations allow limited access from the least number of directions. But if it is not on the side of a mountain or near a cliff or river, then the fort needs to

be built so it can be defended from any attack, from any direction.

For the purpose of this discussion let's build a fort in the shape of a square. This is based on the idea that there are four key points on a compass - north, south, east and west - so we need to defend ourselves from an attack that may come from any of those directions. The square also allows for quick reinforcement from two connecting sides should the attack be strongest from a given direction.

Since there are four sides to our fort, we need to build four walls to provide the protection we need. Let us consider these walls as different aspects needed for our fort to provide the best protection for those inside against those who are outside wanting to destroy us and take control of our area.

Wall One - Protection

This may seem like repetition. Of course it must provide protection. But there are two aspects of the idea of protection. 1) Protection from the attack that comes from outside and 2) protection that allows for continued activity inside the fort. For a fort to be truly effective it needs to provide sufficient internal protection for those defending the fort so they can go about their activities. What good is our outer protection if, once an attack starts, we cannot move from our internal post? Without sufficient protection inside our fort we won't be able to obtain needed supplies, no one can come to relieve us, no one can bring us food, we won't be able to go to the aid of

others. The walls need to be designed to provide for our complete protection through the use of passages within the walls and tunnels between different parts of the fort. Thus we will be protected inside and outside.

Wall two – Trust

The nature of the construction of our wall is critical. Where we build it, the materials we use in building it and the design of what we build, all provide us with confidence defending ourselves against attack. Hastily built walls, using inadequate material, will not last or provide the protection needed for our continued presence. The stronger the wall, the greater our trust; and the more likely we will stand firm in facing the attacks that will come.

Wall three – Hope

Well-built walls that we can place our trust in make it possible for us to have hope. Hope believes in the possibility of surviving what lies ahead. It even begins to see what might be possible in the future; the possibility of a new life because of the fort that exists now. Hope helps us consider the possibility of moving out of the fort to explore, to establish new activity, to expand our world. This is possible because we believe in the fort's protection and security needed, always knowing we can retreat back into the fort when necessary. The fort represents permanence in this area and a source of protection for our activity.

Wall four – perseverance

For the fort to function requires perseverance at two levels: the perseverance to build the fort and the perseverance to remain in the fort and survive the attacks. These require planning. The fort must be well stocked and well organized. The people in the fort must be committed to stay, to cooperate in its defense, to participate in providing the supplies needed for the fort to function and carry out its purpose. All of this requires a willingness to make sacrifices, to take risk and to overcome whatever challenges make come. It requires perseverance.

All four walls are based on a key purpose - providing the protection we need so that we can live and survive in a given setting. Our fort has two functions. The first is to protect our land, our way of life, and to shield us from those who seek to destroy it. The second function allows us to enter into new territory and expand into new areas. Many people think of this in terms of conquering the people of another land. While this may be true in some cases, it can also be seen as a means of entering into new lands that have not been occupied, or reclaiming territory previously lost to an enemy. The fort is the first thing built and exists as a symbol of intent to claim the land around it for our use.

Another factor to keep in mind is that not all of the attacks that we face come from other people. We need protection from the climate and from wild animals as well. The Maasai tribe in Kenya build structures to protect themselves from lions and other wild animals. The Eskimos build structures to protect themselves from the cold and snow of the Arctic. All are built to

provide for our protection, to provide trust, to provide hope and require perseverance to be effective.

Now how does all of this relate to love?

Wall one – protection

Love in its grandest form provides us with protection. God sent His Son so that we could find protection from the attacks of Satan and from the devastating effects of sin in our lives. This love becomes a fort where we can live and deal with all the dangers that life may bring our way. When we receive God's love and protection, we can share that love with others and expand the walls of our fort to bring them in. We can become a fort for them to because our love provides a place of protection for others to come to and learn about God and his salvation.

Wall two – trust

Love is based on and creates trust. God's love is trustworthy. We can depend on Him to provide the protection we need. We can move about freely knowing that we are protected. Love creates in us a confidence in what we have received. This same love makes it possible for us to share what we have received with others. When there is love there is freedom to trust in the one who has built the fort and live a life free from fear. This is how we are to live in the world, as forts for others to come to; as places where they can trust and be trusted.

Wall three – hope

When love is present there is always hope. Love makes it possible to see beyond the moment, beyond the current struggle to a time when the struggle will be over. Love represents a place we can always come to and know we are secure, and, in this security, expand our horizons beyond the moment. Love gives people a place to come to so they can have a hope for tomorrow. Love makes it possible for people to believe in all that God has done and see all that is possible when we live in his love.

Wall four – perseverance

Nothing is possible without paying a price. Love helps us understand the value of sacrificing our time, our resources and our life. Love is what encourages us to keep on working, keeping on striving. Love provides the energy and helps us see the purpose of all our efforts. Love perseveres because it knows what is possible. It reveals what we can be and the relationship we can have with God. Love creates the opportunity each of us needs so that we can become all that God intended us to be.

This is the ministry of a world class Christian; to become a “fort” to everyone they encounter. A place where others can find protection, where they can learn of trust, where they can receive hope and where there is enough time (perseverance) for them to grow and become part of the greatest fort of all the Kingdom of God.

BS – Read Psalms 92 and 18. Use these Psalms to help you define how to build a fortress of love for others to enter and find the ultimate fortress.

PR – Evaluate the nature of your love for others and your activities. What kind of fort are you?

BWV – Based on the above discussion, define your role in relation to the four groups of Acts 1:8. How does your perspective of life compare with God's perspective when considering another's need to experience love in this way?

Inquiry 18

Avoiding Failure

1Co 13:8

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

We need to clear up one concept before we can move forward with a discussion of this passage and the highlighted phrase 'love never fails.' We need to understand what the word "fail" means. I can think of two clear definitions in this setting. "Fail" means not completing a task or promise. It suggests that there is some limit or factor that has caused a person or an object to not accomplish what is expected of them. An example would be a person failing to do the work assigned to them. Or a part of a machine failed and the machine could not function. In this context there is a flaw that causes the person or part to fail. Such failure causes an interruption in activity or performance, because it is unexpected or unplanned for.

The other definition relates to the end of the expected usefulness of a plan or object due to parts wearing out or changes in conditions. This usually happens when an item reaches its expiration point or there are changes in the operating conditions which make something no longer functional. At that point it fails.

The reality is, everything is subject to both types of failure. Breakdown can occur at any time. Even if there is no unexpected failure, everything will eventually reach an end point. Our bodies will breakdown as we reach the end of the normal life expectancy. Plans no longer function because of changes in the conditions on which they were based.

Now that we understand what “fail” means, we come to the phrase above about something that never fails. It never breaks down and never ceases to function or to be applicable. There is no end to its guarantee. It never fails to fulfill its purpose and never fails to be available to carry out that purpose. Love never fails.

This fact is placed in contrast to three of the five original structures, mentioned in verses 1-3, that require love in order to be effective. Communication, prophecy (truth), and knowledge (culture). This same statement can be applied to faith and sacrifice. Consider what Paul is trying to tell us about the importance of love for our ministry and our life. Then, consider each of them and why Paul would make such a statement. Why will each of these areas fail but love will continue?

Communication – One of the great struggles in communication is the challenge to make things clear enough for all to understand what we are saying. Paul says that there will come a time when our tongue will be silenced. This could relate to a time when we will no longer need to struggle to communicate. There will be clarity because there will be only one language.

We are told in Revelation 7 about a time when all peoples of all tongues and tribes will be gathered and celebrate together before the throne of God. There will be no more focus on how

one communicates or what one communicates. There will be no more need for language as we know it. We will all be able to proclaim with absolute clarity one thing, our love for God and all that he has done for us. We will be united as one voice with one song. Love will be our language and it will communicate all that is necessary.

Prophecy – Prophecy (teaching) is based on the inability of people to do two things, understand the Word of God and fulfill the Word of God. Prophets, or teachers, are required to both teach and explain what that Word is and how it relates to our lives every day. We need these people to help us understand how love works and how we are to respond to that truth.

We are told that a day will come when we will no longer need this type of help. It is said that the truth will be revealed, and we will know even as we are known. The day we stand before God there will no longer be a need for someone to teach us how to understand God's love because we will be with God and know his love at a level never before possible. There will be no more teaching, exhorting or judging. We will know.

Knowledge (mystery of life-culture) – One of the greatest problems we deal with is trying to understand each other and why we exist. These are questions that are central to reflecting on the mystery of life and our existence. Because of man's limitations and inability to fully place his trust in God, he creates a great deal of confusion through his human attempts to gain knowledge and explain these mysteries. It is part of what Job experienced when God asked him to explain the universe and its operation. Job could not do it.

Our need to explain will one day come to an end. We will be in God's presence and we will be part of the new creation, the new heaven and earth. We will have intimate knowledge of what God is doing. We will also have an eternity to explore all of creation and interact with the one who created it. The greatest mystery, God, will no longer be hidden from us and we will have unlimited access to his presence.

Life will no longer be confused by our attempts to explain how we came into existence and what our purpose is because we will no longer have to guess at the why's and how's. We will know the answers.

Knowledge of God's Power (Faith) – Throughout our life on earth there is a need to take what is called the leap of faith. This is because we only have access to our five senses, sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. Anything that exists outside of the realm of these requires an act of faith to accept it as real. Relationships require acts of faith because it is not possible to read another person's mind and know their thoughts. Our knowledge of spiritual realities involves acts of faith because we exist in the physical realm and cannot cross the barrier that exists between the two realms.

Our knowledge of God's power is dependent on our willingness to accept his existence without empirical evidence; that physical reality which would confirm the presence of God and the actions that result from his presence. The greater our faith, the greater our understanding of God's presence and power.

There will come a time when we will no longer be limited by our physical senses. We will receive a new level of sight and awareness that will allow us to see God and all that exists in the spiritual realm. We will receive a new body and existence that will not be bound by the restrictions of our current body. Faith will become a reality and will no longer be needed.

Knowledge of sacrifice – We understand sacrifice to be a willingness to let go of what we have here, in order to receive something of greater at a later point in time. We also understand that for others to participate in a heavenly future and its blessings there will be a need for sacrifices on the part of many.

This truth brought Jesus to earth to give his life for us so that we would have a future with God. It was a driving principle in the life and teaching of Paul. He was willing to sacrifice his rights, his freedoms, even his life so that others would have access to God's gift of salvation. This sacrifice was based on the promise

that a time would come when all debts would be settled and Paul would receive God's blessing and eternal life.

The time will come when there will no longer be a need to make sacrifices. Our life here will end and it will no longer be possible to make those sacrifices. Judgment day will come and all will stand before God. Everyone will receive their reward, whether for good or bad. The days of sacrifices will have ended and payments will be made.

In every one of these areas the one thing that remains constant is love. Love guides each area, and uses each area, to bring us into God's presence; a place where only one thing remains LOVE.

This fact should help us become more involved in carrying out the actions and responsibilities represented by each. We should work harder to communicate now, we should be more diligent in teaching the truth, and we should make every effort to understand the mystery of the person next to us. We should grow more and more in our ability and desire to place our faith in God. We should be willing to make every sacrifice possible for the development of our relationship with God and toward bringing as many as possible to God. Why? So that in the end everyone who receives this will be there on the day when we come to a full knowledge and experience of God who is the source LOVE.

Everything else is temporary. When history comes to an end, and we are before God, only love will remain.

With this in mind we need to begin to live our lives accordingly. We need to live in love because that will be the basis of our existence in eternity.

BS Read Psalm 33 Consider the discussion of God's love and its importance. How important is God's love in your life? Why is God's love so essential to David?

PR – Think through your life and moments when you felt loved or another experienced your love for them. What affect did it have on your thoughts, actions and attitudes?

BWV – This Psalm is a reflection on the life and history of the people of Israel and the eternal nature of God's love. Take time and put your life and history in this psalm. Think about what it means to experience God's love. Think about how what you learn can impact your view of the world and how people can experience the eternal love of God.

Inquiry 19

Dangerous Crutches

1Co 13:10-11

but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

Do you know more than a child knows?

What does an adult know that a child does not know?

Let's find out. To do so we will use Paul's four points - speech, thought, reason and actions.

SPEECH

What is the difference between the speech of a child and adult? Many would say that a child has a limited vocabulary and grammar. They do not know all the words an adult knows. Also they do not have the same level of understanding of how grammar works and so cannot effectively communicate with others their needs and desires.

Yet, is that correct? Is it really about the extent of one's vocabulary and ability to speak in grammatically correct sentences?

There are children who are able to find the right words to ask questions that adults have a very difficult time answering. They ask about death and life and how things work. They ask why some people are born in poor countries and why some people are sick when others aren't. Even the greater vocabulary of an adult stumbles when trying to adequately explain these questions. It is a known fact that children have a gift for asking impossible questions and making incredible comments about the reality around them.

This does not represent all of the conversation of a child. While they can surprise us with their questions and statements, most of their conversation focuses on other issues that represent the major focus and activity of their lives. They are more concerned about getting what they want when they want it. Their conversation is filled with comments that are selfish and inconsiderate or at best reflect a lack of awareness of others and how their lives and words affect those around them. Much of the conversation of children reflects a lack of understanding of what it means to wait and what it means to share.

What is sad is that many children never learn how to move beyond this and continue to speak in a childish way even when they are adults. To be an adult suggests that we move beyond this manner of using language and speaking. However it is not about the extent of our vocabulary or our ability to use language. It is about what we focus on when we are talking.

THOUGHT

This discussion of speech is a reflection of the way we think. Children have a great capacity for thinking in depth about what is happening around them. They often have moments of revelation that surprise adults. But when this happens we do not think of them as wise or great thinkers but as children who are growing up. These moments of insight are not considered the norm for a child.

The thinking of a child again focuses on immediate needs and immediate solutions. The most common question asked by a

child is “why?” But, this question does not mean they are thinking deeply. They are just curious and exploring the world around them. It does not take much to distract them from their questions. In general they do not have the ability to pursue a thought at length or work through the impact of what they learn.

Children’s thoughts generally relate to this moment, to this event, to this activity; which relate to personal desires and concerns. As a result their ability to respond is limited by their experience and exposure to other possibilities. Again, it is evident that there are adults whose ability to think through what is happening around them reflects the fact that they are more like children than an adult.

REASON

Reason is an even more complicated concept. It involves creating connections between events. This is ability to deal with cause and effect and the process of understanding what has happened and is happening. This process allows us to take important decisions to help us deal with a given situation. Reason is the ability to make mental connections so that we can explain an event and then act in an appropriate way.

Again, children, at times, have a unique knack of putting things together and knowing what they should do. On the other hand, how many times has a parent had to explain something to a child with a clear awareness that the child does not understand? The end result often depends more on the level of trust the child has in the adult than their ability to reason.

One of the most common forms of reason for a child relates to what they feel they deserve. I can remember this was a part of a discussion about why I could stay up later than my younger brothers. It didn’t matter how well my dad explained the decision to my brothers they still felt that the decision was unfair and that they should have the same rights as their older brother.

Being an adult means moving beyond this kind of reasoning - from creating answers that solely satisfy my desires and protect me from my failures or reasoning that focuses on what I feel I deserve and my right to do what I want.

CHILDISH WAYS

The final phrase is “childish ways.” At first glance this would appear as a summary of all the above. The use of language is a childish way, the thought process and the reasons that a child uses in controlling its world are childish ways – right?

What does Paul mean by the phrase “childish ways?” As we read many children can communicate in profound ways, they can have deep and profound thoughts, they can figure out events that might puzzle and adult. So “childish ways” is not just about words, thoughts, and reasoning. It is about living in a way that makes other people responsible for our lives, for our care, and makes others responsible to satisfy our desires.

“Childish ways” is about limiting ourselves by talking about nothing that is important. We limit ourselves by thinking only about what relates to us and our desires. We limit ourselves to a process of reasoning that solely find answers that protect us and maintains what we have. This is not about a person’s age, but about the limits one creates by a lack of desire to move beyond the life of a child.

This type of person may appear to be an adult but is really a child. This type of person may have many abilities and talents but they use them as a child uses their limited abilities. This type of person may appear to be thoughtful and have a great capacity to use their reason to solve complicated issues and problems but the end result they seek relates to them and their comfort. Others may benefit, but it is clear that they are the center of the process, just like a child.

Until love enters, this remains the dominant theme of the life of every individual. Love, true love, changes this situation. Love

makes it possible to leave behind those childish ways and the limits they create in how we see the world and others.

Love causes parents to sacrifice their comfort, their resources and even their lives for their children. Love causes a young man or woman to focus on the needs of their spouse ahead of their own, and seek to create a unique life based on helping each other grow beyond what was possible when they were alone.

Love allows us to use our language to communicate at a new level. Love allows the possibility of thinking about life and its events in a different way. Love allows us to apply our reasoning ability to find new levels of connections, solutions and answers to what is happening around us. Love makes it possible to stop behaving in childish ways.

This is true because love opens the door for us to see the imperfection around us and accept the truth about ourselves and others. This acceptance of reality makes it possible for love to work and show us what we can do to help others face the truth about their lives and their world. Love makes it possible because it creates an environment where we can fail and not be rejected. We can make the mistakes of a child knowing there are those ready to help us grow beyond those mistakes.

Love reveals the existence of what is perfect and reveals a way to reach that perfection. Love brings words of forgiveness; love brings thinking that allows us to connect with our Creator. Love reveals there are reasons for all that exists even if we don't understand everything. It further reveals the one we can rely on who will one day make it possible to understand. Love not only exposes how we have been childish, but how we can leave that childishness behind and find our true purpose.

Without love we are left with our childish speech, our childish thinking, our childish reasoning and our childish ways. Relying on them is like relying on crutches that are cracked or rotten. They are dangerous, because at any moment they may break and the fall that results from such an accident, almost certainly will leave us in a worse condition than we were before.

Love helps us see the danger of relying on such childish actions and ways. Love provides us with the support or crutches we need to move from our brokenness into wholeness in God.

God wants to use us to help others see the danger they are in, the nature of the crutches they are depending on, and how to help them find what will be strong enough to support them until they are made whole in Christ. For this to be possible, we must possess love and know how to apply it to our life and to the lives of those around us.

BS – Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-3; 1 John 3. Describe how love, or its absence, affects our ability to live as mature Christians in this world.

PR – Reflect on your attitude, how you talk, how you think, your reasons for your actions. Are you acting in a childish way? What do they reveal about the presence and impact of true love in your life?

BWV – Think about how this passage relates to Hebrews 6:1. As a WCC, how does love help you move beyond elementary teachings? How will this affect your attitude to those around you?

Inquiry 20

Uncluttered Vision

1Co 13:12

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror;
then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part;
then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

Everyone is seeking for that situation, that relationship, that work situation where they know everything they need to know to succeed. To get to this level of knowledge we will expend great amounts of time, money and energy. All

in a bid to figure out the system and succeed. We fuss and fume when someone alters anything in our world that will cause us to lose that elusive sense of knowing what is needed.

Some people will go to great extremes to gain control of what is out of their control and beyond their ability to know. It doesn't matter where you are in the world, every group, every culture, every system seeks to create the opportunity to know what is unknown and gain control of the world around them in order to succeed.

People will buy love potions, visit a psychic, and buy the latest self-help book. They will study horoscopes, market analysis, and practice transcendental meditation. They will use dating services, social networks, media analysts. They do this because they want to see what is beyond the curtain called "today," to see into the minds and thoughts of others, to see what is really happening.

In the midst all of this activity man relies on various beliefs to tell him what he can and cannot see and determine how much control he can have over his life. These belief systems range from fatalism - where there is no possibility of knowing anything and therefore no possibility of seeing and controlling anything in life - to those that suggest that with the right training, (spiritual, mental, emotional) - it is possible to gain control of one's destiny.

Beyond these systems are those that involve religious avenues that provide sight. Some can be negative in the sense that they say we have no control and are doomed by something called "fate." Fate, by definition, can be totally outside our control or can be influenced by us in some way. But even if we have some level of influence, the final roll of the dice, so to speak, is something that remains unknown.

At the other end of the spectrum are religious structures that believe there are beings that know the future and are willing to share that knowledge. Their willingness to reveal this knowledge is based on fulfilling various conditions by an individual. The nature of these conditions are dependent on the nature of the being, (good, bad, indifferent); nature of the its level of ability and power (spirit, demi-god, god); and relationship of the being to the individual (from seeking to control and dominate to seeking to love and develop).

Another group looks at something called "luck." Luck is a power that with the right actions and attitude, can be harnessed for a person's benefit and allows the person to gain what they have set their sight on. The problem is that there is also the existence of bad luck which can have the reverse effect, which is to ruin any possibility of getting what is desired.

All of the above exclude a key factor. They are all about what man can do to improve his vision, his ability to see into tomorrow. That means that man is furthered flawed by the fact that he is dependent on what he knows, what he can do and what he can see. These factors create a number of limits, such as:

Seeing what is really needed – Who can really see what is needed? There is no one who has enough information to see this. We are all controlled by personal desires and plagued by gaps in our awareness of all the details involved in seeing what is really needed.

Seeing the best way to respond – Is there such a thing as a perfect response? Even the most powerful governments with all their spy networks and information gathering continue to make mistakes in evaluating a situation and responding perfectly or even

close to perfect. A lifetime of contact with someone may still not be enough to see the best way to respond.

Seeing the best time, place and reason – Timing is always an issue. And timing is affected by location. It may be right for this moment but totally wrong at another moment. Deciding the time and place is affected by the reasons for the action or lack of action. So many options, so many variables, so many possibilities acting like a great dense fog bank that blocks our ability to see where we are, where we are going and knowing when we will get there.

By now one begins to feel like the goal of seeing anything clearly is almost a hopeless task. It can make one wonder why they get out of bed each day and place their life at risk. Since nothing is certain (well other than death, and even that event is shrouded in mists of darkness and uncertainty) why attempt anything, why care about anyone, why, why, why? Yes it sounds incredibly futile, doesn't it?

1 Corinthians 13:12 which declares that in this time, in this life, the truth is nothing is absolutely clear. But a time will come when the fog, the mist, the shroud of darkness will be lifted. It will be lifted because of the existence of love. That is what this chapter is focusing on. All our activity, all our ability is like a blind boxer trying to defeat an opponent he can't see. Occasionally he gets lucky and makes contact. All our efforts are like that, and leave us feeling frustrated and filled with the futility of life.

Then love comes. Love tells us what we need to know, love opens our mind to what is hidden, love reveals a path that can be followed, but for now, only one step at a time. Love reveals the reason for making sacrifices and taking risks. Love prevents us from:

Giving up – Love gives a direction and purpose to our lives. Love allows us to see, if only for a moment, what lies ahead and the possibilities that exist when we move forward in faith. Love gives us the courage to try again because love opens our minds to a new level of sight.

Restricting – Love redraws the boundaries of what is necessary and what is possible. Without love, we are trapped in a cage that we cannot see. Without love, we live in fear of taking the wrong step and destroying what we have. Without love, we begin to restrict our willingness to look at the mirror because we are afraid to see the truth. We restrict ourselves, we take away the possibility of seeing the truth and what could be possible if we seek one who can help us. Love makes it possible to look beyond our failures, beyond our limits. Love prevents the past from restricting the future.

Erroneous evaluation – Love, true love, makes it possible to be honest in our evaluation of what we see. When our vision is dim, when it is clouded with our sin and failure, it is easy to make errors in our evaluation of our responsibility, our response and our resources. Without love we make evaluations based on our abilities and limitations, or a false idea of what these are. Love makes it possible to see the truth of who we are, what we are doing and what is possible.

Keep in mind that we are not talking about just any kind of love. We are talking about God's love. The kind of love that is built on unrestricted vision, unrestricted knowledge, and unrestricted resources. God already knows us face to face and, through his love, is working to bring us fact to face with him. God already knows us completely and is working to bring us from a partial knowledge of him to complete knowledge.

We may be looking at a dim mirror, but God does not have that problem. And his goal is to remove the poor reflection and replace it with his image in us.

Yes, now we are looking at a rotten mirror always wondering how to make the image clearer, how to improve our sight. Love allows us to take the risks involved. Love allows us to grow. Love allows us to see, not perfectly, but in the knowledge and context of the one who loves us perfectly and sees perfectly.

Love allows us to see others and know that what we see is not all that can be seen. There is so much more for them. With love's help we can lead them to God and the promise that in God all will be made clear.

BS Read Philippians 3:12; James 1:23-25. Now read Psalm 16. Reflect on the difference between using ourselves or others as mirrors and using God's word as a mirror to see our lives and the world around us.

PR – Our lives are filled with times of evaluation. We are evaluated through tests in school, we have evaluations at work, and our friends and family are constantly evaluating what we say and do. When was the last time you asked someone to evaluate your life? Why did you do this? What did you learn? When was the last time you read the Bible with the purpose of letting it speak to you and evaluate you? If you haven't done either of these then the question would be, why are you avoiding looking in the mirror?

BWV – Reflect on the phrase "love is blind." As a Christian living in the world, what does this phrase mean? Is God's love blind? How can you improve your vision of yourself and the way you see others?

Inquiry 21

Winning the trifecta

1 Corinthians 13:13

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.
But the greatest of these is love.

In the world of horse racing and betting there is something called the trifecta. It means picking the first, second, and third place winners of a horse race in the correct order. The odds of winning a straight trifecta, picking those three horses in the correct order, are 1320 to 1. That means you would have to place a bet every day for three years 2 months and 10 days. That is just the activity of placing a bet. To be able to do this effectively means you have to take the time to study each horse, each rider, each race track and every individual race in making your decision. Plus you need to know the odds of a given horse winning on that day, at that racetrack, etc. All of this makes the odds of winning even more complicated. But if you win, the payout is big; one \$2 bet paid out \$133,000.

To be successful requires a thorough knowledge of all aspects of racing and the willingness to risk your resources on something that is totally unknown until the horse crosses the finish line. That and the fact that there are more people who lose than win, significantly more, makes this one of the riskiest forms of betting. However, it is like any other lottery, it is based on the willingness of a large number of people who are willing to risk losing, in order to have one chance in thousands of winning. They win at the expense of all the others who lose.

But we want to talk about another type of trifacta, or triple win. Paul comes to the end of this chapter and lists three things we should seek to have in our life. It is a trifacta of spiritual benefits. He makes the list,

faith,
hope
and love.

This is one of three groupings of three that Paul presents in chapters 12 and 13. In the beginning of chapter 13 he lists three activities or ministries that are based on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, 1. Speaking (tongues), 2. Teaching (prophecy) and giving (sacrifice). In chapter 12 he discusses and lists many of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, initially without any specific order or value. He then discusses how all of the gifts work together and talks about the gifts in the context of the type of people they represent. It is at this point that he provides us a list and what he feels are their order of importance. Three of these are listed as the most important, Apostles, first, prophets, second, and teachers, third. A trifacta of gifts and ministry. Everything else is of lesser importance but still necessary to round out the field.

Does this sound strange to you? Treating the gifts of the Holy Spirit like it was a horse race and each of us is trying to call the winner, or better yet, make the gift we think we have seem more important than the position it really has.

For example, we sometimes treat the list as a stepladder to greater blessing. You know what I mean. I can heal, but someday I will be a teacher and then I plan to work my way up to prophet and then earn my apostleship. Or, maybe I compare my status with yours. Yes, you have the gift of tongues and miracles, but I have those gifts as well as the gifts of miracles and prophecy. I am closer to being the head (or in the lead) than you are. When I get there you can be my hand, you will fill that role better than me.

Thus we define the gifts in terms of what makes you a winner. When one has one of the lesser gifts then they are what are termed “also rans” (the ones who raced but didn’t win). So forget what you have and try for something farther up the list. Or we try to level the field by saying everyone must have a certain gift before any other gift has any value.

If we didn’t have chapter 13 then we could have some serious problems involving competition for what is deemed the best position or the best ability. Don’t you wonder why Paul placed the discussion of the church being like a body in the middle of the discussion of the gifts and their value?

To avoid that possibility Paul writes chapter thirteen and introduces it with phrase “now I will show you the most excellent way.” He talks about all of gifts and how without love they mean nothing and have no value. He keeps on talking, not about gifts and position but the essential nature of love. And then he arrives at verse thirteen. All the gifts, all the titles, all the positions are left behind. In this race, (forgive the metaphor, since serving in the kingdom is not about competing with each other for better gifts, or a higher status, but about learning to serve God) our abilities, our position signify nothing.

I wish I could enter into Paul’s mind as he wove his way through this discussion and brought everyone to this point. It is both like and unlike the trifecta. It is like the trifecta in that there are three important concepts that we must indentify and place in proper order. But it is completely foreign to the trifecta in that it does not involve competition. It does not involve analysis. Nor is it something that changes constantly every day because of the constantly changing nature of life and the environment.

Paul has taken all of the normal things we would look to in trying to determine the best combination, the most effective method, the greatest potential for success and status and ignored them all. There is only one trifacta that exists because there are really only three things that are important, and only one is guaranteed to accomplish exactly what God wants every time.

Paul informed us that all of the others are nothing without this. He described its essential nature. He revealed how it will last beyond everything else and will reveal to us all that is currently hidden and unknowable. He tells us that the winning trifacta involves faith, hope and love, but clearly the leader in all is love. Consider the following

To have faith that it is possible
without love, makes it useless and dead

To have faith in God
without love, makes God a despot

To have faith in the possibility of salvation
without love, makes us egotists

To hope that what we desire is possible
without love, makes life futile

to hope that God is there
without love, makes for fatalism

to hope that one can be saved
without love, makes for anarchy

Without love, the work of faith is cold and empty

Without love, the work of hope is without focus

Without love, there will never be an answer to the question "Why?"

To be a Christian that sees the world the way God sees the world means that we place all the information in its proper perspective. Seeing the world and serving in the world is not about what gifts we have or what position we have. It is about perspective; it is about seeing three things very clearly.

1. None of the of the positions matter if we have no hope. But not just any hope but a hope – rather that which is based in a love that comes from God and gives purpose to what we do and the knowledge that what we do will make a difference in our lives and the lives of others in regards to their relation to God.

2. None of the gifts matter if we have no faith. But not just any faith but a faith – rather that which is based in a love that comes from God and gives purpose to our actions and the knowledge that what do in faith will yield a true result, a result that will reveal God to us and to others.

3. Neither of the above, faith or hope can function without love. They have no clear direction, no clear purpose, no effective result if they are not based on love, God's love, (and we need to be perfectly clear about this fact, no other type or level of love will do). God's love is the reason we can have faith, it is the only true basis for hope.

And this trifacta is a guaranteed winner every time. We will never lose

We can be a world class Christian. We can have a biblical worldview. We can live and be victorious for Christ. We just need to see God's winning plan and commit ourselves to it. When we learn to love as God loves, we will learn faith so that we can live and receive a hope that will take us into eternity. We have

already won the trifecta and received an incredible treasure, we only need to make use of the prize we have gained.

BS Reread 1 Corinthians 1-13. Reflect on God's love, and how it works to change us and those around us.

PR – What is that you are seeking from God, what do you desire the most in your life? How does it relate to God's desire for you to have and experience the love described in chapter 13? How are your desires getting in the way of what God could do in and through you if love was your supreme desire?

BWV – Reflect on what man desires to possess, seeks to promote and works to create. Reconsider what God is telling us to possess, to promote and to create. Think in terms of learning to possess love, promote faith and create hope.

Inquiry 22

Serving the servers: part one

1 Corinthians 16:16-17

You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it. I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition.

This passage contains several challenging comments about the relationship between the church and those who

serve. Let me list them first and then we can try to understand what Paul is saying about that relationship.

1. The individuals have devoted themselves to the service of the saints.
2. The church is instructed to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work
3. They have supplied what was lacking from you.
4. They refreshed my spirit and yours.
4. Such men deserve recognition.

Here we have a view of what Paul thinks should be the relationship between the church and those who serve. From the context it appears that there are two types of service that exist; the service that all Christians should render to everyone who is their neighbor and a service that is rendered to all called into specific ministry on behalf of the church. In the context of Paul's life, this would refer to serving those called to carry the gospel to the world - missionaries. He includes in this group all who join in the work and labor at it. This could also refer to those whose give all of their life and time to ministry and so are dependent on others for their support.

If we agree that this is who Paul is referring to, then the five statements are an interesting commentary on what Paul expects from the churches and its members.

1. They, the men listed, have devoted themselves to the service of the saints.

Paul identifies a specific group of people who have focused their lives and activity on caring for the needs of a specific group of people. They are serving the saints. This statement requires that we understand two key words, 'devote' and 'saints.'

To devote oneself is a term often used in marriage ceremonies and represents a commitment to the total care of another individual. This involves a sacrifice of personal resources, and priorities so that the other person will have all that they need to live and to grow. This is a commitment that is not limited to a moment in time or a specific need but to the entire life of the relationship and to any and all needs that may arise during that period of time. Actually the words of the traditional marriage vow may be of great use in understanding what this devotion represents.

Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, in sadness and in joy, to cherish and continually bestow upon her your heart's deepest devotion, forsaking all others, keeping yourself only unto her as long as you both shall live?

Let me rewrite it in the context of a pledge of support or devotion to a missionary.

Will you love, comfort, honor and care for your missionary, in sickness and in health, in times of bounty and times of scarcity, in good times and difficult times, in times of failure and times of joy and success, to cherish and continually impart to your missionary your deepest level of commitment, setting aside all else, focusing on their life and ministry as long as they are serving as a missionary?

That is an incredible statement. What would happen if all Christians treated missionaries in this manner and not simply as another item in the

budget? Paul seemed to think that such devotion should be the norm and not the exception.

The other word is 'saints.' Who are the saints? In the context of this passage the saints are those called to dedicate their lives totally to the ministry and work of God, in this case, more specifically the work of carrying the gospel to those who have not heard. He talks about three specific people who came to him. They represented a deep devotion to Paul and his ministry.

Even as I make this comment I am reminded that the word saints also has a broader meaning. It can mean anyone who has consecrated their life to God. Actually Paul uses both concepts in his writings. He refers to all the members of a local body of believers as saints (Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:12; Romans 15:25, 31). He also seems to refer to a specific group of people among the saints (Romans 16:2; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 5:10). So we have the 'saints' all those who believe and then we have the 'saints' in service - those with a special call to give their lives in service and who are dependent on others for their care.

Paul praises this group who recognized this difference and have devoted themselves to the care and support of the saints who were called to serve.

2. Brothers, submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work.

This phrase challenges us to find the deeper meaning and responsibility that lies within the word submit. Paul now tells everyone else to behave in the same way and even take it to another level, by telling them to submit to these

people and to those who are active in the work of the saints.

Submission is a word that we don't like to hear. We do not like the idea of setting aside ourselves, our dreams, our desires. Nor do we want to allow the dreams, desires and needs of another to control our lives and determine what we will do. But that is what submission is all about. It is the placing of another person ahead of ourselves. That is what Paul talks about in Ephesians 5 when discussing the relationship between a wife and a husband. Submit. Not because it is the law, but because of your devotion to that person.

Submission is not hard to do when both parties are heading in the same direction; when both are submitted to God and are allowing God to direct their lives and activities. When we are both going in the same direction then submission is much easier. However we still don't like the term. We, all too often think of submission as a loss of our identity, when in reality, true submission is the way to find our true identity.

Again, in marriage, the true identity of the husband and wife cannot be revealed until they submit to each other. It is in that submission that each is allowed to grow to their greatest potential and so be able to create the greater identity that can only exist as the two become one.

This is the point of Paul's comment. When we learn to change our attitude and submit to the dreams and desires of another, especially one who has the same mindset, then we do not lose our identity, we actually open the way for a fuller expression of who we are individually and who we are as partners in the work of God. Since we are both seeking the same thing, our true image as children of God, then it makes sense to serve those who are involved in helping others find that identity. It is in that service that

we will have the greatest opportunity to discover what God has for us as well.

Hence Paul's statement to honor those who have committed themselves to the service of the saints in service. It is in following their example of service and submission that we will learn and grow in our true identity as a child of God.

Missions from this perspective has a dual ministry. The main activity is clear to us, to carry the message of the gospel to those who have not heard. The other aspect of mission is to create a special relationship of devotion within the church that will make it possible to carry out the main function of mission. Without the devotion of the saints of the church to the saints in service there will be no mission.

What would happen if the churches treated their missionaries from this perspective, one of devotion? If we treated it as a relationship with a person who is our brother, our representative, our marriage partner, our image who is seen by others? What would happen to missions if we operated from this point of view?

And from the missionary's perspective - what would happen to the ministry of the missionary if he truly saw it as an extension of a body of believers, the saints of a specific church? If he saw his service as a submission to the desires of that body of believers to carry out their goal of reaching the world? The missionary becomes more than a person employed by the church, more than a diplomat representing the kingdom. He becomes the living, breathing representative of the body to those who have not heard, who have not seen and who have not had the chance to know what it means to be restored to the family of God.

What if?

BS – Read Philemon 4-7. Paul honors Philemon for his faith and service to the saints. Consider how you and your church could express your love for those in service as Philemon did for Paul.

PR – Do you have a relationship with a missionary or pastor? What are you doing to serve them, to refresh them, to reveal your devotion to them?

BWV- Service is not a one way activity. True service makes possible greater service on the part of the one receiving the service and the one serving. It builds a new level of confidence and hope and opens the door to new depths of relationship and understanding. Apply this concept to those in service for the church. What can we do to better serve those in ministry, to become truly devoted to them and what effect will that service have on their service?

Inquiry 23

Serving the servers: part two

1 Corinthians 16:16-17

1Co 16:15-18

You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it. I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition.

In part one we saw that this passage has several challenging comments in it about the relationship between those who serve and the church. Previously, we dealt with the first two items listed below.

1. These individuals have devoted themselves to the service of the saints.
2. Brothers, submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work
3. They have supplied what was lacking from you.
4. They refreshed my spirit and yours.
5. Such men deserve recognition.

Remember, we are talking about the church and those who provide for the saints who are being sent by the church to carry the gospel to the world.

3. They have supplied what was lacking from you.

What is it that could be lacking from the church in sending individuals as missionaries to the world? What was it that Stephanus, Fortunatus and Achaicus brought with them that was lacking?

One of the toughest aspects of being a missionary is not the lack for funds, nor the need to learn the culture and language. It is often the isolation and loneliness that is part of the work. The missionary is disconnected from those who are like him emotionally, physically and culturally. There are none who speak the mother tongue or understand what they are feeling.

While it is true that over time friendships will develop, understanding will increase and some of the needs will be met by those of their adopted culture and country, there is a sense in which the missionary is a person who lives between worlds. Even when they return home they discover that things have changed. Time; technology,

friendships are different, and the missionary has changed his thinking, attitudes and lifestyle.

In 1 Corinthians 16, these three men came to Paul and filled two gaps in his life. The first gap was the one of loneliness. The gap of not having anyone to talk to who understood how he thought and why he would think that way. These three provided someone to share with, reflect with and use as a sounding board. They also became a source of encouragement and approval of the sending group for Paul's life and ministry.. They brought much needed support, encouragement and approval from friends and family.

The second gap involved filling the need of allowing others to see what Paul was dealing with and be able to communicate that reality with the sending church. The men would be able to bridge the gap that would naturally grow the longer Paul lived in a new culture and was separated from his home culture. They provided a bridge between the missionary and the church that sent him. They helped to maintain the connection.

4. They refreshed my spirit and yours.

There is nothing like sitting down and sharing your vision, your hopes and dreams with someone who is truly interested in what you are doing. It doesn't matter how tired you may be, how frustrated you may feel, or how difficult the situation may be. Being able to talk with others who share in the dream, share in the desire to reach others brings a renewal of spirit and strength.

For example, someone may contact me to learn about my ministry. The process of sharing brings encouragement to me and also encourages them. They, in turn, are empowered to share what God is doing and my dreams, with others in the church. That person in the middle becomes a conduit of renewal for both groups. Paul says that the presence of these men was refreshing.

It brought new strength, new energy and a refocusing of his efforts. In turn, his report brought the same results to the church that sent these men to visit Paul. They were encouraged; they were challenged and were able to become more effectively involved in what God was doing through Paul.

These two points are significant. We need people who help to maintain the connections between the church, the missionary and the mission. A church that only depends on the reports of the missionary will lose its focus over time or it will over tax the time and energy of the missionary. Without the 'middleman' the missionary would have to be in contact with every person in the church in order to keep everyone informed and involved. Imagine the time involved in trying to maintain such a flow of communication. To do so will detract from the effectiveness of the missionary and create a negative concept of what the missionary should be doing.

It is also not possible for every person of the church to go visit their missionary. The cost and time involved would be prohibitive, plus place a burden on the missionary who would need to care for all those coming to visit. It would detract from his/her time and ability to carry out the task they have been assigned.

So this group of three provided an environment that allowed Paul to communicate as needed and still be free to carry out the work assigned. It also created a group of people in the church who could effectively communicate to the church what was happening in Paul's ministry as well as keep him connected to the life of the church.

Actually one of the great weaknesses today is a lack of people who help to keep missionaries up to date with what is happening

back home. Victories on the home front can bring great encouragement to those sent to the nations of the world. These people are critical to maintaining the health and attitude of both.

This brings us to the final point

5. Such men deserve recognition.

These people are critical to the work of missions. They are a resource to both the church and the missionary. They help keep both groups connected and encouraged. They accept the responsibility of representing the missionary by keeping his/her needs and victories before the church so it can pray effectively and know what is needed to fully support the one they have sent, whether that is financially or in other areas.

They also provide an anchor for the missionary; a place to go when there is a need, someone to listen to them when they are lonely or feeling isolated. They are special people with a critical responsibility. They deserve to be recognized and encouraged.

Actually every person should be involved in the support of those who are serving as missionaries. The form that it takes for each of us will be specific to who we are, what our gifts are and the resources that God has given us.

The issue is, are we acting in such a way that it can be said of us that we are providing what is lacking for the saints? Are we one of those who have devoted themselves to serving the saints, in this case, those specifically called to ministry and missions? When the saints see us and our activities are they refreshed, do they feel that we have provided them with something that was needed in their lives today? Perhaps a word of encouragement, a

scripture, thankfulness for what they are doing? Is their evidence that we are actively supporting the saints in what they are doing?

This is an interesting passage and one that all of us need to reflect on as members of the body. These three men physically visited Paul and brought refreshment. Today we have so many more options to bridge the gap. Every church needs those who act as the conduit, so that the blessings will flow. So that each of us can participate in the encouragement of those in service and receive the refreshment that can only come from such a partnership in service.

BS – Read John 14:25-26; 15:26-7; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13; Romans 8:26; Ephesians 2:18 How is the Holy Spirit an example for how we can be in service to the saints.

PR – Make a list of how you are a source of refreshment to others and act as a conduit of blessing between individuals and the church.

BWV – Compare the attitude of the world which focuses on meeting selfish needs and not on meeting the needs of others. Compare this with God's attitude towards you and how Christ came for the purpose of connecting you with God and God with you. Consider whether you are following the focus of the world or of God.

Inquiry 24

Being effective in the work

1 Corinthians 16:8-9

But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost,
because a great door for effective work has opened
to me, and there are many who oppose me.

We all want to know how to be effective and how to measure the effectiveness of what we are doing. But how do we know when we have been effective and whether what we are doing will pass the test?

Paul states that a door is open for effective work. The only comment he makes about this door of opportunity is that opposition against him has arisen from many. In order to understand better what is happening, we need to review the history we find in Acts about Paul's ministry in Ephesus.

Earlier in Acts Paul wanted to go into Asia but was prevented by the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:7). Now several years later Paul arrives in Ephesus, the capitol of Asia. He goes through his usual custom of visiting the synagogues and as usual is rejected by a group of leaders. The record tells us that he doesn't move on but decides to rent space or time in the hall of Tyrannus and begins a teaching, discipling ministry that lasts for 2 years. Acts 19:9 reports that "all of the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord."

During this time several things happen that are worthy of comment. 1. God does extraordinary miracles through Paul, 2. There is the incident involving the seven sons of Sceva and the demons testimony about Paul, 3. There is the public confession of sins by believers, 4. A large quantity of scrolls of sorcery are destroyed, and 5. There is growth in the power of the word of the Lord. Also mentioned in this passage are two groups who

opposed Paul: 1. Some of the leaders of the synagogue who forced Paul out of the synagogue (16:9), 2. The silverworkers of Artemis who tried to start a riot to discredit Paul and the Christians (16:28ff).

What results can we see from all of this?

1. The gospel reached all of Asia.
2. Paul was given greater opportunities to teach and disciple.
3. The church was protected from the opposition of two key groups:
 - a. sorcerers of the city.
 - b. those who felt threatened by the impact of the gospel on their chosen way of life and belief in other gods.
4. Events resulted in the local government taking a position that provided further protection for the church.

We can gain further insight into what happened by reading the letter to the Colossians. This church was started as a result of the Paul's work in Ephesus. This letter describes the work of one of Paul's disciples, Epaphras. Here Paul talks about how the fruit this man's labor and his faith are now being reported all over the world.

Much more time could be spent on reviewing the history of this ministry but we have enough to begin to understand what Paul meant by his statement of "... a great door to effective ministry has opened for me."

Without this background we could easily think that the mark of success and effectiveness of Paul's ministry was based on the nature and level of opposition. But that is not the whole story or a reasonable way to measure how effective his work was. Actually, opposition was only a minor point in the discussion.

I say this because opposition may exist for any number of reasons that have nothing to do with the gospel. We may experience opposition because of our politics, our citizenship or

social status. We may become the source of opposition because of who we are as individuals, or because our attitudes, culture and behavior may cause negative results. These are unrelated to the gospel, yet impact the effectiveness of our work.

In Paul's situation there was serious opposition to the ministry but it did not cause the work to be ineffective. Instead, it highlighted the gospel and further revealed the power of God's word. The opposition came from those who were not happy with how the truth was impacting their lives. The Jews did not like the judgment that they on them as a result of their resistance to the truth. The sorcerers did not like the loss of power and prestige as their falseness and selfishness was revealed. The Silversmiths did not like what was happening because it directly impacted their economic and social status.

When we are effective there will be opposition. This brings us back to understanding what Paul meant by a door to effective ministry. As noted earlier it involved evidence of God's power, a clear testimony in the world that God was active, confession of sin, separation from the world and spiritual growth. Each of these represents key ideas about evaluating the effectiveness of one's ministry. The first two are of less importance and may have limited impact. The other three are essential.

The first two represent highly visible events. When there are miracles and key people of the world are talking everyone takes notice because of its uniqueness. But these two do not indicate effectiveness. Once people are healed do they move on and forget? Once people have heard the news or see that the government is permitting this group to function, then what?

While miracles catch the attention of the people and attract great interest, they will not save anyone. In fact, it is not really clear if the presence of miracles indicates that a ministry is effective. For example, Moses performed incredible miracles and yet the people rebelled and complained constantly. An entire generation was destroyed because of their attitude. This was the very generation that witnessed the ten plagues, crossed the red sea

and ate manna every day. Jesus, too, performed incredible miracles but it was not enough. The leaders rejected him and the people agreed to allow his death by crucifixion. Miracles, then, are merely the means to open hearts to God's presence.

Recognition by key people also attracts attention. The demons recognized Paul and the power he had in Christ (18:15). The authorities chose to publicly endorse or allow the continued existence of the new church (18:35ff). But this approval did not lead to the salvation of anyone. It simply made the ministry easier to accomplish. But was that a true measure of effectiveness?

The last three items represent a clearer indication of the effectiveness of ministry. Confession, repentance and discipleship led those involved to carry the message to others; neighbors, enemies and beyond (as in the case of Ephraim).

We can know that what we are doing is effective when we see God working. The evidence is clear and dramatic in its own way. People, individuals began to confess their sin. This is the true evidence that the Holy Spirit is present and using us to carry out his primary work, that of convicting the world of sin (John 16:8). The key question here is this; 'is our life and ministry such that the Holy Spirit uses us to create a standard sufficiently clear that the people around us will understand what they are missing and what their problem is?'

Repentance (not just the type that leaves people feeling sorry for what they have done, but the type that leads them to choose to change and follow through on that choice), is the next level of an effective ministry. Many people confess but not all are truly repentant. When people choose to leave behind their sinful practices, change the way they treat each other, and seek Paul's "most excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31), that is a true measure of an effective ministry.

The final measure is about permanence. It is about people, not only confessing and repenting, but moving on to learn how to grow in their relationship with God. They desire to become not

just hearers but also doers. They want to become disciples. People who not only want to see their lives change but help others to experience that change as well. They want to become part of the ministry and extending it to others.

This kind of effective ministry can often lead to opposition. But this opposition is not based on who we are, how we act, or the differences in our culture. Rather opposition based on Satan and those who desire to maintain control of their world, themselves, and others at all costs. Opposition based in an unwillingness to change.

Here is a thought to keep in mind. Opposition comes not simply because we are Christians but as a result of effective ministry. Why would Satan bother creating opposition if we were not effective? But our ability to be effective is dependent on our allowing God to work in and through us. We must to allow the Holy Spirit to use our words and our actions to convict and bring about repentance. We must share and communicate effectively what God has already done in our lives.

Effective ministry is not about how many people respond or how much opposition we experience. It is about lives being brought into the presence of God, and lives being changed and renewed by God because we were willing to go where we needed to go so that those who needed to hear, heard the word of God.

BS – Read Revelation 3:7-8. What two actions of the people of the church in Philadelphia caused God to provide them an open door of ministry? Use these two actions to evaluate how you decide to be involved in the mission of God. What changes do you need to make so that your ministry can be effective?

PR – What will it take for you to become involved in a ministry that is effective? How can God use your limitations to effectively reach others?

BWV – Reflect on the role of miracles in communicating Gods message to others. Are miracles essential to the life and growth of the church? Do miracles cause growth or restrict it and cause a false concept of effectiveness? How will your answer impact the view of nonbelievers regarding the nature of the kingdom of God?

Inquiry 25

Job opening - Embassy employee - qualifications for position

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Paul uses a particularly powerful word in describing the role of each Christian in this world. He calls us ambassadors. He also describes the key function of an ambassador as being that of reconciliation. Further he states that an ambassador is one who reveals to others what it is like to be a citizen of his country and finally he includes the idea that God makes an appeal to others through his ambassadors.

Commented [p1]: the highest-ranking person who represents his or her own government while living in another country

This is an interesting combination of concepts. Most people understand that an ambassador is the representative of one country who is sent to another country for a very clear purpose. That purpose can involve establishing a relationship between the two countries, it can also be to protect and provide representation for people visiting and living in the other country. It can also be for the purpose of resolving conflicts that may arise between the two countries.

Paul uses these and one other concept

This term carries within it four distinct concepts, diplomat, envoy, representative, and emissary. To fully understand the position we are called to fill we need to look at each of these concepts.

Let us start with the last of these terms, emissary. An emissary is one sent on a mission with the purpose of representing a group or organization and its position to others. The task is simple and clear. Tell the others our position related to the topic under discussion. In this setting the emissary has only one task and that is to share information. This packet of information is called the Gospel. As emissaries we are also given a great deal of freedom in the methods chosen to communicate this message.

As God's emissaries we have the task of communicating with the tribes and peoples of the world the information that God has given us. This information includes telling them who God is, why he is interested in establishing a relationship with them and the conditions involved in having a relationship with him.

Commented [p2]: One skilled in the art of diplomacy

Commented [p3]: a person who is sent by one government to represent it in dealing with another government

Commented [p4]: someone who acts or speaks for or in support of another person or group

Commented [p5]: person who is sent on a mission to represent another person or organization

The next term is that of representative.

The first is diplomat. A diplomat carries the concept of negotiator, a person skilled in presenting the position of their group to another. This requires that the diplomat have an understanding of the situation and what is at stake. In the political world a diplomat is involved in establishing treaties and agreements. The nature of the negotiations that will take place is dependent on the status of the parties involved. The stronger the position of the diplomat the more likely he will be able to establish an agreement favorable to his country. If the strength of his country is physically and economically strong enough then the diplomat will have the ability to dictate the terms of the agreement.

We represent the kingdom of God. God is seeking to develop relations with all tribes and peoples of the world. He has established the guidelines and key principles on which this relationship is to be based. These are the non-negotiable aspects which we are to present to the tribes and nations of the world. We are also responsible to help work out how this relationship is to be expressed and lived out in each context. What will be the structures and rules that reflect the life of that group and reveal its connection with the kingdom of God without destroying the identity of the people.

The danger in this situation is that a diplomat can use that position of power to take advantage of the other party. A wise diplomat keeps in focus the needs of both parties and works on establishing a fair agreement. One that satisfies the needs and goals of both parties. When this is accomplished then both parties will work to maintain and protect the agreement. At times being

willing to exceed the minimum requirements so that there will be no breach in the agreement.

We are called to be ambassadors. We represent the kingdom of God and have been sent into the world to establish relations with those in the world around us. We have the superior position and the might of God to support our activity. When we deal with those who are outside of the realm of God we are called on to present the terms that have been established by God for any agreement with such individuals. The terms are exceedingly fair and the benefit to those who receive this offer and impossible to match by anyone else. We are challenged to do everything we possibly can to present the offer. We are also called on to do what is necessary to restore the relationship when there is discord and confusion. The slogan is "never give up until the end."

Promote one's country to others

Represent country in various settings

Enter into agreements

Negotiate peace

Explain benefits and results of peace

Exchange knowledge and resources

Present offers

Explain context

Reveal results