

The Deception of Corinth and Laodicea

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Over the last few years, some Church of God leaders have made some incredible, unbelievable predictions. A man that I know said that Christ was going to return last Pentecost and that he and his wife are the two witnesses. The problem is that he is in jail right now serving three and a half years for tax evasion.

Another Church of God leader said that he got sick (I saw this in writing in a post that he made.) He got sick and asked an elder to anoint him before a meeting. During the anointing process, the elder asked God to provide an extra measure of His spirit. So now this man, because of that experience, claims he was ordained a prophet. He now claims to be a prophet.

Another Church of God leader mentioned not long ago that three major Church of God leaders would die by fire on or about August 30th, and that all the churches that were under them would fold into his church. He said those who did not fold into his church would lose their salvation, ministers and members alike. He also went out and spent multiple millions of dollars on new property to accommodate all of these people that were allegedly going to come into his group. Even though during that time he was publicly preaching that Christ was going to return immediately. So the head-scratching question is, why spend millions on property if Christ is going to return immediately? Maybe someone can figure that one out.

This is nothing new. We've all read these before, but when you read these things, there's one of two possibilities going on: (1) whoever is making these outrageous statements knows they are wrong; (2) they are purposely lying to keep their position or an attraction or to lure some people.

They are deceived, but they don't realize it. They are legitimately deceived.

By way of introduction, let's begin with one of the scariest scriptures in the Bible. We know it by heart, but let's turn there. Normally this time of year, we focus on the second half of this scripture, but today we just want to look at the first half.

Jeremiah 17:9. *"The heart (referring to the heart of mankind) is deceitful above all [things], And desperately wicked (which we normally focus on); Who can know it? (NKJV)*

The word "things" is in italics.

The New Living Translation says:

Jeremiah 17:9. *“The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? (NLT)*

The point is that the heart, we are told, is deceitful. However, the problem with being deceived is if somebody is deceived, they don't know they're deceived because they are deceived. That's a real problem. Some people have fallen into the trap of thinking that people with God's holy spirit cannot be deceived. I heard a minister say a few years ago, “I cannot be deceived because I keep my nose in the Bible,” Is that true? Can somebody with God's holy spirit be deceived? I think we all know the answer. Yes, people with God's holy spirit can be deceived and we're going to show some have been deceived and will be deceived.

Let's ask the question, again by way of introduction: Who was the first one to delude himself? Who was the first one to be deceived? Isaiah 14 has the answer. Let's go there. We're talking about Satan. We'll read verses 12 through 14. This is the first being to be deceived. Notice what it says.

Isaiah 14:12. *“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!
13) For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars (angels) of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation, On the farthest sides of the north;
14) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’
(NKJV)*

He's saying, “I should be up to the level of God at a minimum.” Satan was the first one to deceive himself. He did the deceiving. No outside force deceived him. He is the most deceived of all because he thinks he is smarter than God and he thinks he is more powerful than God. How deceived can one be?

So while we may have God's holy spirit, our minds are still subject to the influence of this being who is himself deceived and wants to deceive the whole world, as we know. Revelation tells us that.

This is an important subject as we approach the Passover about the possibility that we can, we might be deceived. So today in the sermon we are going to look at two groups of God's people. Both groups are members of the church and have God's holy spirit, yet both groups have also deluded themselves and are deceived. We are going to look at these two groups and see what lessons we can glean from this investigation to help us prepare for the Passover. The title of the sermon is:

The Deception of Corinth and Laodicea

We will start with Corinth because that is in history and is documented. Let's talk about the background of Corinth. Corinth is located 45 miles northeast of Athens in modern day Greece. It's the capital of the Province of Achaia. By 750 BC, Corinth was the

wealthiest city in ancient Greece. They maintained that economic power for almost 1,300 years. Think about that, 750 BC. They remained an economic power through the Grecian and Roman Empires. It was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire. The population of the free people was estimated to be about 200,000, at the time of Christ. Depending on whose numbers you look at, there were either a half million to 700,000 slaves. That would make it larger than the present day population of Seattle or the present day population of Vancouver, B.C. It was not a small city. It was a city of wealth and luxury. They had an 18,000 seat amphitheater; 18,000 people would go there to watch a play. It was also the most immoral city in the Roman Empire, and that says a lot. It was the center for the worship of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. In fact her temple, where she allegedly resided, was in Corinth. It was built on the top of the highest "mountain." Here it would be called a hill. It was located on the highest mountain surrounding Corinth. It was 1,800 above the level of the city itself. Her temple was built on the top of that hill. In that temple there were over a thousand prostitutes in the service of Aphrodite. They were called "Corinthian girls". To Corinthianize was a common term in the Roman Empire. To Corinthianize meant to live a life of debauchery. Let me read what Fausset's Bible Dictionary says.

The immorality was notorious even in the pagan world." (Again, this says a lot.) "So that to Corinthianize was proverbial for playing the wonton. The worship of Venus was attended with shameless profligacy." (Profligacy means giving yourself over to complete debauchery.) "A thousand female slaves being maintained for the service of strangers.

Eusebius was an early church historian and he says, "In Corinth, men and women vie with one another to honor their shameless goddess. Husbands and fathers let their wives and daughters publicly prostitute themselves to please Astarte." Can you imagine!

The definition of "Corinthianize" out of the Encyclopedia Britannica says:

To live like the Corinthians, hence to live a life of licentiousness and debauchery. The sensuality and licentiousness which had made the word "Corinthianize" a synonym for self-indulgence and wantonness, became roots of bitterness, strife and immorality.

That is the state of Corinth at the time of Jesus Christ and the early New Testament.

Also in Corinth was a synagogue. In fact, in an archeological excavation they found a rather large piece of white marble, and engraved on it was, "Synagogue of the Jews." So we know there was a small Jewish contingent in Corinth.

The church was founded by Paul probably in the fall of 50 AD. We read that in Acts 18. His letters, 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, were written approximately five years later in 55 AD. 1 Corinthians 5:9 says that Paul wrote a previous letter, so actually he wrote three. The last two have been canonized as 1 and 2 Corinthians. The point is that the

Corinthian Church was a new church. When Paul wrote these letters in 55 AD., they were only five years old. As a result, they had no long-time grounded members. The oldest member was converted no more than five years prior to that. The majority was Greek. Some were Jews and some were other Gentiles. The book of 1 Corinthians was written by Paul likely from Ephesus. If you look at a map, Ephesus was about three hundred miles to the east as the crow flies, but across the Aegean Sea. So it was a hefty journey from Ephesus to Corinth. He wrote 1 Corinthians in the spring of 55 AD. We glean that by the references to Unleavened Bread and Passover. So he had been gone from Corinth, by the time he wrote 1 Corinthians approximately three years. He founded the church and he wrote 1 Corinthians three years later. As we're going to see, a lot happened between the time he left and the time he was forced to write this letter. In writing the letter, he realized the church was in complete disarray. If you go through the whole book, I've counted over ten or twelve major problems. We're going to cover five major spiritual problems that Paul had to address in the Corinthian Church that has relevance for us today.

The first spiritual problem: There was a misplaced loyalty whereby brethren were looking to men, not to God and not to Jesus Christ.

Let's go to 1 Corinthians 1 and begin in verse 10. I'm going to read from the New King James. Paul is using the word "plead" which is a strong word. He says, "I'm begging, I'm pleading with you, brethren."

1 Corinthians 1:10. Now I plead (beg) with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ ... (NKJV)

The Greek word for "name" is "onoma" and it means *the character and the authority of Christ*. "I'm pleading to you by His character and through His authority."

10b) ... that you all speak the same thing... (NKJV)

We're going to see in a few minutes that they weren't speaking the same thing, because one was loyal to this guy and another was loyal to that guy.

10 continued) ... and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind ... (NKJV)

The Greek word for "mind" is "nous" in English, and it means *understanding*. He said, "I want you to be of the same understanding of God's word. I want you to have the mind of Christ and have the understanding of Jesus Christ."

10 continued) ... and in the same judgment. (NKJV)

That's how you decide or look at things.

11) *For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. (NKJV)*

It was so bad that somebody from Chloe's household, perhaps Chloe herself, either wrote a letter to Paul describing what was going on in the church or took the long journey to Ephesus to talk to him face to face.

12) *Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," ... (NKJV)*

Apollos was a Jewish convert. You can look at Acts 18:24 for that. He was born in Alexandria. He was an eloquent speaker and he was mighty in the scriptures we are told. We are also told that he only knew of John the Baptist, not Christ, and Aquila and Priscilla instructed him. But because he was a mighty speaker, people were saying, "I am of Apollos."

12b) *... or "I am of Cephas (Peter)," or "I am of Christ."*

13) *Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (NKJV)*

Well, of course not. He's trying to point out the foolishness of these different factions and each faction is claiming superiority over the other because they are loyal to a certain man. The overriding fact is that the church belongs to Christ and Christ is head of the church. If they were truly looking to Christ, why would they be so divided? They obviously were not at all. Look at chapter 3:1. Paul is upset and he is launching right into them. He doesn't hold back.

1 Corinthians 3:1. *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people ... (NKJV)*

How would you like somebody to say that to you? He said, "I can't talk to you in a spiritual way."

1b) *... but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. (NKJV)*

The Greek word for "carnal" is "sakikos" and it means *made of flesh*. He said, "I have to talk to you as though you were made of flesh. I cannot talk to you about God's spirit or through or by God's spirit." The point is that the Corinthians were more in tune with the physical than with the spiritual.

2) *I fed you with milk and not with solid food... (NKJV)*

The milk of God's word are the basic doctrines: the Sabbath, the holy days, tithing, etc. He could not talk to them about the more advanced teachings. We find those in Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians where Paul says that it is better that we return evil with good. He says that it is better to be defrauded than to fight back. That is the meat of the word. He said, "I couldn't even bring that up. You are not ready for it."

2b) ... for until now you were not able to receive it (the spiritual meat), and even now you are still not able; (NKJV)

He said, "I couldn't do it when I was there three years and I can't do it now. You are treading water or you're going backwards spiritually."

3) for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? (NKJV)

The Jewish New Testament says: *You are living by merely human standards, focused on the physical.*

4) For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal? (NKJV)

You see, the Corinthian Church was like the world. They were allowing Satan to divide them and they were looking to men. It's just like the world does.

Look at what is happening with Putin today. The whole nation in Russia is looking to Putin because he is their man now. He's on the forefront. He's getting their land back. People are looking to men. The sad thing is, today in the church, nothing has changed. What did Solomon say? "There's nothing new under the sun." What happened yesterday is going to happen tomorrow. We have people in God's church saying, "I am of this guy; I am of that guy; I'm following this guy because he's going to lead me where I want to go."

So the first spiritual problem they had was that they had woefully misguided loyalty. They were looking to humans and not to God and Christ, and this continues to this day.

The second spiritual problem: As crazy as this sounds, they had a member having sexual relations with his stepmother, and the church had a horrible reaction to that.

This made Paul understandably upset. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 5:1. He is just astounded.

***1 Corinthians 5:1.** It is actually reported (probably by Chloe or one of her household) that there is sexual immorality among you (in your midst), and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! (NKJV)*

He put it in those terms because this woman was his stepmother. She is not addressed in the letter. He is put out, as we know. She was not mentioned at all which indicates that she was not a member of the church. As we discussed, Corinth was known for its sexual immorality, and Paul is saying, "What is going on in the church shocks even the

people of Corinth which have a level of immorality that's higher than anywhere in the Roman Empire. It shocked the Gentiles in Corinth.

We understand that God does not categorize sin. Christ doesn't categorize sin. Sin is sin, but this sin openly set a horrible example. That is why he is so strong in coming against it. Keep your finger here and let's notice how God views a situation like this, contrary to the way the Corinthians were looking at it. Let's go to 1 Chronicles, chapter 5. We will read the first verse. The discussion here is about the inheritance; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Jacob's sons. The inheritance of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

1 Chronicles 5:1. *Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel ... (NKJV)*

That means the inheritance should follow through Reuben's line.

1b) ... he was indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the genealogy (Reuben's genealogy) is not listed according to the birthright; (NKJV)

Reuben had relations with Jacob's concubine and God stepped in and said, "This is not going to go on. We've got to stop this." The penalty that Reuben paid was that his birthright was lost.

That's how seriously God views a matter like this. In Corinth it was even worse because the sexual relations were with the stepmother, his father's wife. How do you think God would look at that?

1 Corinthians 5:2. *And you are puffed up (means arrogant), and have not rather mourned (NKJV)*

They were not sorry about this at all. They were not mourning and grieving that this was going on in their midst.

2b) ... that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. (NKJV)

Paul is saying, "If you let this guy stay here as a member in good standing, what will happen is other people are going to start thinking there is no need to repent, because it's acceptable in the church.

3) For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. (NKJV)

He said, "I don't need to come personally because it's obvious what is going on." In verse 4, you cannot get any stronger than this.

- 4) *In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,*
5) *deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*
6) *Your glorying ... (NKJV)*

That Greek word for “glorying” means “boasting.” They were actually boasting about this.

- 6b) *... is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? (NKJV)*

They didn't realize that if you ignore this sin, like leaven does with bread, sooner or later it would permeate the whole church. In fact it was doing it at that time. The naïve Corinthians were boasting that their example of love and tolerance would cause the sinner to change. It sounds like today, doesn't it? They're saying that essentially this clean dough will somehow purge out this lump of leaven. That is not the way it works. We know that is not the case. The lump doesn't kill the leaven. The leaven spreads throughout the whole lump and pretty soon all of it is leavened. Paul is using that analogy to say that if this continues, the whole church is going to be leavened to the full. The fact is that Paul is trying to stress that, like leaven spreads, sin infects. If not dealt with, like leaven, it spreads.

- 7) *Therefore (NKJV)*

Because it's going to infect the whole church ...

- 7b) *... purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump (an unleavened lump), since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. (NKJV)*

They could be unleavened because of the blood of Jesus Christ, that we will commemorate not very far from now. The old leaven was referring to this unrepentant sinner in verse 1, but it also can refer to any sin that is not repented of.

- 8) *Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven ... (NKJV)*

Not the way you've been doing it.

- 8b) *... nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness ... (NKJV)*

You've got to be sincere in your practice.

- 8 continued) *... but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (NKJV)*

You can't decide for yourselves what is right and what is wrong.

Now malice and wickedness are obviously referring to the young man that was doing this. Also, malice and wickedness was referring to those who tolerated such sins, and those who refuse to separate themselves from those sins. You see, the Corinthians were pleased with their tolerance. "Look at how accepting we are. Look at how tolerant we are." They were feeling that, "If this guy was just around us long enough, he would come to see his mistakes." I guess my only question would be ... Well, if their example was so good, why did he sin in the first place? The fact is that the Corinthians were pleased with their level of tolerance.

The same thing is true in the church today. I got a call from a lady three weeks ago. She's been in the church almost sixty years. She said, "I've had it! I'm done. I can't stand it!" I said, "What on earth is going on?" She gets our DVD's and watches them for her Sabbath services. Occasionally she goes to one of the big groups for fellowship. She said that on the previous Sabbath she went there and a lesbian couple was invited to church. It was welcoming in other people. She said, "I just wanted to plug my ears and run out screaming." Again, there's nothing new under the sun.

So the second big problem was the sexual immorality and the tolerance of it in the Corinthian Church.

The third spiritual problem: The brethren were suing one another in Corinthian courts.

They didn't work it out in the church. They sued one another. This was apparently over civil issues. They weren't going to the Roman court over doctrinal issues; it was over civil issues. Look at chapter 6 and we will begin in verse 1.

1 Corinthians 6:1. *Dare any of you, having a matter (NKJV)...*

The NIV says, *having a dispute.*

1b) ... against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? (NKJV)

He says, "How dare you!"

2) Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? (NKJV)

He is saying, "How can we judge the world in God's Kingdom; how can we judge angels as we're going to see in God's Kingdom if you can't even judge among yourselves? How can that be?"

3) Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?

4) If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? (NKJV)

The reason he says that the world's courts are least esteemed is because the world's courts adhere to the laws of men, not the laws of God. Therefore, they are least esteemed. Obviously we must adhere to God's law. He says, "You're getting yourself out from under God's law and putting yourself in the hands of those who look to men and man's law to make these judgments ... least esteemed.

5) I say this to your shame ... (NKJV)

He is getting strong with them.

5b) ... Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? (NKJV)

It's sad to say, apparently in the Corinthian Church, not one man was capable of making judgments that could prevent people from going to civil court.

6) But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! (NKJV)

He is just astounded.

7) Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. (NKJV)

Now he starts talking about the meat of the word instead of the milk.

7b) ... Why do you not rather accept wrong? (NKJV)

Christ said to turn the other cheek and walk the extra mile. He says, "Why don't you do that?"

7 continued) ... Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? (NKJV)

Christ said, "If someone wants to take your coat, give him your cloak also." He says, "Why don't you do that?"

8) No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren (in the church)! (NKJV)

The biggest issue was not that they were going to court, it was failing to live by and apply God's law. They showed no love. In 1 Corinthians, in chapters 12 and 13, Paul was directing them toward love. They were not expressing love whatsoever.

So the third spiritual problem is suing one another in the court of men.

The fourth spiritual problem: Division over meats offered to idols.

This is something that is foreign to us. I'm going to spend a little more time here because we have no experience in that in our lives today. Now recall the Jerusalem conference in 49 AD. We find that in Acts 15. The gospel had been opened to the Gentiles. The temple was still standing. There were Jewish converts to Christianity who said, now that the door was open to Gentiles, that the Gentiles must first become Jews before they can be baptized. The males have to be circumcised, they have to do the rituals at the temple, they have to become Jews first and then they can be baptized. The Acts 15 Conference was called to settle this issue because it created an uproar in the church. Paul was upset and Peter was upset, so they had to settle this issue. Let's go to Acts 15 and begin in verse 12. I gave a sermon on that two or three years ago.

Acts 15:12. Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.

13) And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me:

14) Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. (NKJV)

Calling Gentiles, a new concept. In verse 19, James is still talking.

19) Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God,

20) but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. (NKJV)

He said, "We should write to them and tell them to be careful to do four things." Notice the very first thing he mentions:

Abstain from things polluted by idols

Abstain from sexual immorality

Abstain from things strangled

Abstain from blood

All four of those have to do with worshipping at a pagan temple. It's important to realize that this prohibition is in place because the Gentiles coming into the church at that time were obviously pagan. They weren't Jews, and the vast majority of them had grown up going to pagan temples and worshipping pagan gods.

What we find in Corinth now is that some members in Corinth were likely challenging the decision of the Acts 15 Conference. They're saying, "No, we don't have to do that. We don't have to do that at all." Now this was six years later from that conference and

there are people that are saying, “No, we don’t have to abstain from meats offered to idols as James says.” Clearly these were meats used in a pagan temple.

My suspicion is that these Corinthians reached this conclusion not through the use of God’s spirit, but the use of Greek logic. That’s just my opinion. Let’s understand that temples were everywhere in the Roman Empire. They were all over the place, because the vast majority of the people went to those temples and worshipped and sacrificed. There was no way the local pagan priest could use all the meat that was offered to idols. What they did is sell the meat in the pagan temples and they apparently had, we would say today, a café or restaurant on premises where they could come and eat the meat. They could make money by selling the meat to people who wanted to come and eat. They also couldn’t sell it all that way. They also sold the balance of the meat to meat markets. So if you were a Christian and went to a meat market, you wouldn’t necessarily know where the meat came from. It could come from a local farmer or it could come from the local pagan temple. You wouldn’t know.

With that in mind, let’s go to 1 Corinthians 8:1. Paul is addressing this issue that Chloe or somebody from her household brought regarding this issue.

1 Corinthians 8:1. *Now concerning things ... (NKJV)*

The Jewish New Testament says “food offered to idols.”

1b) ... offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up ... (NKJV)

The Greek means *breeds conceit*.

1 continued) ... but love edifies. (NKJV)

He’s hinting about what he was going to talk about later in chapter 13.

2) And if anyone thinks that he knows anything... (NKJV)

Particularly he’s talking now to people who have Greek education, use Greek logic and have Greek vanity.

2b) ... he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.

3) But if anyone loves God, this one (the one who loves God) is known by Him (God). (NKJV)

Now Paul starts to address the argument used by those who were openly flaunting the fact that they were eating meat that had been offered to a pagan idol. They were doing it out in the open. Everybody knew.

4) Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world ... (NKJV)

Yes we do. Idols are wood and stone. People bow down to them. He says they are nothing.

4b) ... and that there is no other God but one.

5) For even if there are so-called gods... (NKJV)

In the Greek Empire and later in the Roman Empire, they worshipped multiple gods in multiple locations. The worship and temple was on a high hill and they believed the god had influence within sight of that high hill. There were gods everywhere. There were gods for all kinds of purposes. As you see in the Catholic Church today, there are saints for all kinds of purposes for people to pray to and to worship.

5b) ... whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords),

6) yet for us (converted Christians) there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live (exist). (NKJV)

That last sentence, the Jewish New Testament says about Christ: *From whom all things come and for whom we exist.*

7) However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now (this very day) eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. (NKJV)

Remember the church is only five years old. Understand that the vast majority in the church were Gentiles. Some members were so engrained in idolatry; they had been engrained in it for decades before coming into the church. They believed that idols were real. They believed idols could influence food and come into the food. They believed by eating that food the idol could then influence them. They probably still had lingering beliefs even though they had been baptized one, two, three, four or five years, that idols were indeed real. It was an emotional response. When we came into the church, it took us many times years to get over our emotional responses we had coming out of Catholicism or Protestantism. So undoubtedly some members of Corinth believed that idols were real, in the back of their mind even though they had been taught differently. The emotion was still there. It is sad because they didn't even understand the milk of the word.

8) But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. (NKJV)

Food is only directly involved in our worship of God during the Passover when we take the bread and wine, during the days of Unleavened Bread when we eat unleavened

bread and during Atonement when we have no food at all. That is the only extent to where food enters into our worship of God.

9) *But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours ... (NKJV)*

Those who were eating meat offered to idols.

9b) *... become a stumbling block to those who are weak. (NKJV)*

It's interesting, the Greek word for "liberty" is "exoucia" and it can mean, in addition to liberty, it can mean *delegated authority*. He is hinting here that "You are delegating to yourselves the authority to decide for yourselves whether you should eat meat offered to idols despite what James and the Acts 15 Conference declared." That was six years prior. Some of these new converts, the youngest would have been no longer than five years, were arrogant. They were going to decide for themselves.

10) *For if anyone sees you who have knowledge ... (NKJV)*

It's interesting, the Moffat Translation says: *If anyone sees who have enlightened minds ...* Moffatt points out that Paul is being sarcastic. He says, "You who have these enlightened minds that are far above all of us."

10b) *... eating in an idol's temple ... (NKJV)*

They were doing it openly. They were eating meat offered to idols in the idol's temple.

10 continued) *... will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened ... (NKJV)*

The New Revised Standard says *encouraged*.

10 continued) *... to eat those things offered to idols (despite the conclusion of the Acts 15 conference)? (NKJV)*

So we see here in verse 10, this meat is unquestionably from the temple, not talking about something that was doubtful in a meat market. They were eating meat in the idol's temple, so you knew where the meat was coming from.

11) *And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? (NKJV)*

Even though the idol was nothing, what happened here is both parties have sinned. The one who watched it and then ate meat violated his conscience. The enlightened ones, as Paul called them, sinned because they knowingly ate food offered to idols. Then they were showing no love and concern for their brother or sister at all. They set a bad example for them.

12) But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. (NKJV)

This is the epitome of arrogance, wanting their own way. Paul says, “Because of everything I’ve said up to this point ...”

13) Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. (NKJV)

The Jewish New Testament says, *cause my brother to sin.*

So Paul again reinforces the Acts 15 Conference. Look at chapter 10 and verse 19. Paul is spending a good bit of time here because it was a serious problem.

1 Corinthians 10:19. *What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? (NKJV)*

No, because idols are not real. The following verse is what we need to understand and they needed to understand then.

20) Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.

21) You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons. (NKJV)

What he is saying is, “You come to keep the Passover, to take the bread and wine, and yesterday you were eating food offered to idols in an idol’s temple?” He said, “You can’t do that. You can’t have it both ways.”

Let’s turn to James 1:27. Keep your marker in 1 Corinthians. Here Paul is trying to show them that if we want to please God and Christ, we cannot have one foot in the world. We can’t have it both ways.

James 1:27. *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (NKJV)*

The Corinthians weren’t just spotted, they were hosed down by the world. They were into it up to their hips. It’s like back in the old days, the 1800s and early 1900s, a man and woman walking down a sidewalk or a boardwalk. The man would always walk to the outside because the roads were muddy and dirty. When it rained, a passing carriage or car would splash mud, so he was protecting the woman from being spotted by the mud. The analogy is that we can’t let that happen to us. We have to remain unspotted. The Corinthians had a fire hose of mud all over them. They just didn’t

understand and they thought they could have it both ways. We have to come out of the world.

In the greater church today we see the same thing. People want it both ways. There is arrogance, wanting my own way.

The fifth spiritual problem: They were perverting the meaning of the Passover.

This is almost hard to comprehend, but when you think about what happened with the breakup of Worldwide, you can see a hint of that. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 11:17.

1 Corinthians 11:17. Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. (NKJV)

Paul is leading up to keeping the Passover.

18) For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.

Verse 19 we have talked about many times. People ask why there is division in the church and this is the reason.

19) For there must also be factions (divisions) among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. (NKJV)

The word "approved" we know, is the Greek word "dokomis" and it applied especially to coinage. If a coin was dokomis, it meant that it was legitimate in weight and in purity. He is saying that there have to be divisions so that those who are legitimate Christians, legitimate ministers will be made manifest or apparent to you.

20) Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. (NKJV)

He is clarifying the fact that when you come to take Passover, this isn't a meal. We are not coming here to have a potluck.

21) For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. (NKJV)

One comes to Passover hungry, probably a slave and another comes in drunk. This is probably someone who is wealthy, a slave owner and had everything they wanted as far as food, drink, and wealth.

22) What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you. (NKJV)

What was their focus on the night of the Passover? Was it on the body and blood of Jesus Christ? It was on food and drink, sad to say.

23) For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you ... (NKJV)

He received it when he was directly taught by Christ out in the wilderness after his experience on the road to Damascus.

23b) ... that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread;

24) and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you ... (NKJV)

Paul was astounded. He said, "Christ suffered the way that He did for each one of you and you come to drink and to eat." What a shame.

24b) ... do this in remembrance of Me."

25) In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

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

We know here in verse 25 and 26, Paul is not giving permission to have Passover whenever we want or as often as we want. We understand that.

27) Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy ... (NKJV)

The Greek means *irreverently*. None of us are worthy to take the Passover. We would say today in modern terms, carelessly, not discerning what you are doing. He said if you do that carelessly or irreverently, you are going to be guilty of killing Christ all over again.

27b) ... manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. (NKJV)

Now to verse 33:

33) Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

34) But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come. (NKJV)

Nothing has changed in the church. A couple of weeks ago I found out that a man who is married was living with a prostitute and that man wanted to take the Passover under

those conditions and made a totally illogical argument that the patriarchs in the Old Testament had multiple wives, so therefore this is okay. Can you imagine? Nothing ever changes. What happened yesterday is going to happen tomorrow. He was not only told he could not take the Passover, he was told he couldn't attend services, he couldn't attend the Feast, and he was a reprobate until he got himself straightened out. The fact is, nothing changes. These are lessons for us today.

So let's summarize. We've seen that the Corinthian Church was a mess. We've seen five spiritual problems in the church:

- Misplaced loyalty: I am of this guy. I am of that guy.
- A member sleeping with his stepmother
- Members suing each other
- Members buying meat at a temple, eating it at the temple in front of other church members who were new church members most likely.
- Perverting the meaning of the Passover

The church was in horrible shape.

They knew they needed help, right? The Corinthians knew they needed help and they were reaching out to Paul for help. No. Just the opposite.

Let's go back to 1 Corinthians 5:2. They weren't reaching out for help. They weren't sorrowing. They weren't mourning. They weren't on their knees before God begging for forgiveness.

1 Corinthians 5:2. *And you are puffed up... (NKJV)*

We read that earlier. "You're arrogant," he said, "You are not even in mourning over what you are doing. You're not in mourning about letting the sin permeate you and all the other things you are doing.

2b) ... and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. (NKJV)

The pride of the Corinthian Church was so great that they thought this sinner needed them, needed contact with them, that their example of tolerance and mercy would somehow influence him to straighten his life out. It was important for this man to see them and their wonderful example, and if they were around him long enough maybe they could get him to change. That was their attitude. As I said earlier, if their example was so great, why did this man sin in the first place?

So here we have a group that is in great need of spiritual help because they were so spiritually weak. He could just barely feed them with milk. They were too arrogant and prideful to see it, to realize it because they were deceived. The whole church was deceived.

Now let's stop here and ask the question. Everything we've described about the Corinthian Church, does it remind you of another group? Does it remind you of a group that Christ criticized in a similar manner? It thought it was strong but was deceived. It was weak, poor, blind and naked. Let's go to Revelation 3:17-18. See if this doesn't sound like Christ could be just as easily talking to the Corinthian Church.

Revelation 3:17. *Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' ... (NKJV)*

Corinth was the wealthiest city in the Roman Empire, a financial capital. It needed nothing.

17b) ... and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked ... (NKJV)

He's making the same condemnations that Paul made to Corinth. He is making them to Laodicea.

Let's look at Laodicea and the sources of Laodicea's pride. They were proud of the fine garments that were made in that area. They had sheep there that had raven black wool and that wool was harvested and made into fine garments. Laodicea was extremely proud of those garments. They were known throughout the Roman Empire. Another source of their pride was in 60 BC, Laodicea experienced an earthquake. Rome offered to help and offered money to rebuild. Laodicea said, "No, we don't want your money. We're going to do it ourselves. We have need of nothing." Then they had pride as the originators of a well-received eye salve. The historian Strabo mentions that there was a medical school in Laodicea, and there was an ophthalmologist that practiced at that medical school. Laodicea lies within the boundaries of ancient Phrygia and some of the minerals there were ground into powder. It was called Phrygian Powder to make the eye salve, and apparently it was effective, so they were proud about that. In verse 18, Christ says:

18) I counsel you (who need nothing) to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments ... (NKJV)

This is a play on words given the fact that the Corinthians were proud of their black garments, He says, "You need white garments which is the righteousness of the saints." We understand that. He says, "You're so prideful that you want to wear black and show it off to everyone. You need white garments.

18b) ... that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. ... (NKJV)

How ironic is that? It's another play on words because they were so prideful of the eye salve that originated there. He says, "You guys originated eye salve. You don't have a clue. You need spiritual eye salve to wash your eyes out." The Living Bible says:

18 continued) ... and to get medicine from me to heal your eyes and give you back your sight. (Living Bible)

What Christ is saying is that the end time Laodicean Church is spiritually blind and is deceived. Christ elaborates on that in Matthew, chapter 24. He's talking about the end time and the era at the end time.

Matthew 24:3. *Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately... (NKJV)*

This isn't a big group of those that were curious about Christ. These are the disciples and they are having a private conversation. They are saying to Christ:

3b) ... saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (NKJV)

Notice Christ did not do two things. He didn't reprimand them for asking a dumb question and He also didn't say, as in other cases, "You don't need to know." Daniel asked and Christ said, "No, it is sealed until the time of the end. You don't need to know." He didn't say that. Notice verse 4. Notice the first thing that He said as a sign.

4b) And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. (NKJV)

He is talking to them then, of course. They asked, "What are the signs of the end of the age?" He said, "Take heed that no one deceives you." So this clearly says that at the end of the age some or many will be deceived as we said in the introduction. Many will be deceived. In verse 11 He brings it up a second time.

11) Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. (NKJV)

That's not all. He does it three times.

24) For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. (NKJV)

The Complete Jewish Bible says *the chosen*.

25) See, I have told you beforehand. (NKJV)

He answered their questions. "I'm telling you before, the big thing that the Laodicean era has to watch for is deception." You have to watch out for it. Satan's influence is

one of deception. We know he has deceived the whole world. He deceived himself and he is deceiving us so that we are self-deceived. Even God's people can be subject to that.

So in conclusion, let's think this through. We've seen that Corinth and Laodicea have much in common. The start of the New Testament church very early on to the very last of the New Testament church, we've seen that God's people have been deceived, can be deceived, will be deceived, but they won't know it because they are deceived. So what hope can we have? He says, "Don't be deceived." So what hope can we have that we won't be deceived? Yet if we are deceived we don't know we're deceived because we are deceived. How does that work? Paul gave the answer. He gave the solution. Let's go back to 1 Corinthians, chapter 11. He gave the answer in his first letter in 1 Corinthians and in 2 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 11:28. *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. (NKJV)*

Examine yourselves. Be in the state of examination when you take the Passover.

29) For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

30) For this reason many are weak ... (NKJV)

In the past I heard so many sermons talking about physically weak. No, this is spiritually weak. We are to examine ourselves spiritually. We're not examining our cupboards to see if we have enough health food. For this reason many are weak spiritually.

30b) ... and sick (spiritually) among you, and many sleep. (NKJV)

We're not talking about being dead. We're talking about being asleep spiritually.

31) For if we would judge ourselves (put ourselves to the test; examine ourselves), we would not be judged. (NKJV)

There would be nothing to judge us on because we are following the correct path.

32) But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. (NKJV)

That's one admonition. The second one is in 2 Corinthians 13:5. We focus on this at this time of year.

2 Corinthians 13:5. *Examine yourselves ... (NKJV)*

Twice, in two letters, He is encouraging them to do this. What are we supposed to examine?

5b) ... as to whether you are in the faith ... (NKJV)

He's not saying whether you have faith. He says whether you are in the faith. That term encompasses everything. Do you have God's holy spirit? Are we exercising God's holy spirit? Am I thinking like Christ? Am I talking like Christ? Am I acting like Christ? Do I love my Father with all of my being and do I love my neighbor as myself? Am I willing to sacrifice my interests and put them behind somebody else's interests? Then He said:

5 continued) ... Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves (You had better know yourself), that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified (reprobates). (NKJV)

That is what we are supposed to examine. Is Christ in me or not? If Christ is in me, then I should be developing the fruits of God's spirit. It should be evident to others, my mate, brethren in the church. I should be exhibiting the fruits of God's spirit. Do I do that or not? That's the big thing we have to be examining ourselves on, Christ in us except we be reprobates.

So Paul told this messed up dysfunctional church twice ...he sent two letters and once in each letter, he told them to examine themselves. Laodicea needs to examine itself just like Paul encouraged Corinth to examine itself. We must do that, particularly at this time of year because we're going to take, in symbol, the body and blood of Jesus Christ. We are going to recommit our decision and commitment at baptism, counting the cost.

The good news is that we don't have to repeat the sins and mistakes of Corinth. We don't have to be deceived. The way we overcome it is self-examination. So let's examine ourselves between now and the Passover to see if we are indeed in the faith.