

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JANUARY 1ST - 2ND, 2022 // BOOK OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

## THE FIRST LETTER OF PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS WHO WROTE 1 CORINTHIANS?

- 1 Corinthians is a letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in the city of Corinth around 53-54 A.D. while Paul was in Ephesus.
- Paul writes 1 Corinthians to address five major problems within this church.
- His letter shows what it means to think about all of life through the lens of the Gospel and how that should change everything about how we live.

## WHO WERE THE "CORINTHIANS"

- Corinth was a prosperous Roman city in Greece that connected two trade routes and became a popular place of business between traders from all over the world.
- In Corinth, you could find the cults of the gods of Egypt, Rome, and Greece - in fact, a massive temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, stood atop the AcroCorinth.
- Paganism, materialism, greed, drunkenness, and promiscuity were all common in Corinth.

## BACKGROUND & HISTORICAL SETTING OF 1 CORINTHIANS

- Paul came to Corinth from Athens, which was about 45 miles away, where he met Aquila and Priscilla and worked with them to make tents.
- His year and ½ stay in Corinth resulted in the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles, so the church was made up of both.
- Although most members were of lower socioeconomic status, some were powerful and maybe even of noble birth (1 Cor. 1:26).

## WHAT IS 1 CORINTHIANS ABOUT?

Issue #1 - **Division within the Church** (Chapters 1-4)

- The church in Corinth had split into factions, tribes, and cliques centered around their favorite teachers or leaders ("Paul, Apollos, Cephas").
- Paul gets them to see that Church is about Jesus, not your favorite leader, teacher, or tribe.

Issue #2 - **Sexual Purity** (Chapters 5-7)

- Sexual sin was rampant in this city, and unfortunately, that same attitude towards sex ("it's just sex, it's not a big deal!") had crept into the church.
- Paul teaches about sex, marriage, singleness, and divorce and shows that being a follower of Jesus means no compromise in our sexuality.

Issue #3 - **Differences in Convictions** (Chapters 9-10)

- The specific issue at hand was eating meat that had been offered to idols (for us, it might be how we approach politics, how we educate our children, alcohol, gambling, music/movies, vaccinations/masks, etc.)
- Paul teaches that the core principle behind all of this is to be **love** - not self-righteousness or pride.

Issue #4 - **Charismatic Chaos** (Chapters 11-14)

- People in this church were very confused about the gifts of the Holy Spirit and were being disruptive in exercising their gifts of prophecy and tongues.
- This resulted in chaotic, disorderly, confusing worship that caused the church to feel like a madhouse.
- Paul is going to instruct on spiritual gifts and lay out some guidelines on how they're to be used.

Issue #5 - **The Resurrection** (Chapter 15)

- Some were saying that the resurrection of Jesus wasn't important and all that mattered was what Jesus taught and how He lived.
- Paul is going to explain why the resurrection - an actual, physical, bodily resurrection - means **everything** to the Christian!

## GREETINGS & THANKSGIVING (1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9)

Paul begins his letter by identifying himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus" (vs. 1) - he wants this church to know that he's an ambassador for Christ, and he cares deeply about them because God has called him to do so.

- Paul's call to be an apostle was by "the will of God," not by an elected office or through appointment - the words he'll write are inspired by God.
- Sosthenes (Acts 18:17) may have been the scribe or secretary helping Paul with this letter.

With all of the problems and issues of the Corinthian church, one would think that Paul would greet them with a stern rebuke.

- Instead, he calls them "the church of God...sanctified in Christ Jesus...saints" (vs. 2).
- Yes, they had sin problems, doctrine problems, and authority problems - but their issues were all due to the fact that their behavior wasn't matching their true identity as "saints."

"Grace to you and peace from God..." (vs. 3) - one would think that the last thing this out-of-control church needed to be extended was grace.

- But the true empowerment of God's grace isn't a license to continue to sin (Rom. 6:1).
- Our understanding of God's grace is reflected by our willingness to gratefully stand on what Jesus has done for us and let His power reshape our behavior, which leads to peace.

## CORINTHIANS HAD RECEIVED RADICAL GRACE (VS. 4)

When Paul first came to preach the gospel in Corinth, Satan has opposed him violently-persecution was intense! (Acts 18)

- And yet, the church in Corinth was founded on a promise of God, when He told Paul in a vision, "...I have many in this city who are my people" (Acts 18:10).
- God had poured out His radical, sovereign grace on these people in such supernatural ways.

## THE BELIEVERS IN CORINTH WERE RICH IN SPEECH AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD (VS. 5-6)

Yes, these believers had their problems, but they also had their strengths.

- God's grace and their testimony was confirmed by their "speech and knowledge" of the Lord.
- They were talking about Jesus a lot and wanted to learn more about Him!
- Can even this much be said about many churches today?

## THE CHURCH IN CORINTH WAS ABUNDING IN SPIRITUAL GIFTS (VS. 7A)

Paul thanks God for the gifts of the Holy Spirit that had been given to this church, even though they were causing some trouble (chapters 11-14).

- The problem wasn't the gifts themselves, but wrong attitudes and beliefs about the gifts.
- These believers had a supernatural element to their lives - which is something many of us lack.

## THESE BELIEVERS WERE EXPECTANT FOR CHRIST'S RETURN (VS. 7B-9)

As they waited for "the revealing of the Lord Jesus," Paul praises God for their positives and expresses confidence that God will take care of their weak points and "sustain them to the end" so they can stand before Him "guiltless."

- That seems like a tall order when you consider the sin in this church! But God is faithful (vs. 9).

## DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH (1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-17)

The encouraging words are over, and now Paul gets right to the first issue at hand - division within the church.

- Paul's appeal is three-fold, and it is that they would "agree," "there be no divisions," and that "you be united" (vs. 10).
- Paul is calling for unity within the church because he's received a report of "quarreling" among them. What is unity, and why is it so hard?

Unity is not compromised - Paul never desires unity at the expense of truth (Gal. 2:5, 11, 5:12).

- Unity is not uniformity - there is room for disagreement and diversity of convictions in the church (Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 9-10).
- At the heart of most division within the church is self-righteous pride - that pride is manifested in a type of spiritual elitism that says, "My tribe and I are the only ones that have it right".

These "tribes" that the church was dividing into were centered around church leaders (Paul, Apollos, & Cephas or Peter) (vs. 12).

- And then there was the **super** spiritual tribe that said, "We follow Christ!!".
- We do this too! We do this with church movements & denominations, favorite pastors/speakers/authors, and theologians.
- It's not wrong to follow a leader/movement, but it becomes folly when we identify ourselves by them.

"Is Christ divided?" - Jesus doesn't belong to a party! Cliques and tribes ignore the truth of unity amidst the diversity of the Church.

- Spiritual elitism is toxic in **all** of its forms.
- "Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in Paul's name?" (vs. 13).
- Even more foolish than "dividing Jesus" is to center parties in the church around men! To focus on anything other than Jesus is absurd.

Paul is very grateful that he didn't baptize more people in Corinth and thereby add more fuel to this petty partisan debate (vs. 14-17).

- Paul wasn't even sent to Corinth to baptize but to preach the gospel.
- Paul was apparently not an impressive man (2:3), and His presentation of the gospel wasn't even with eloquence or wisdom, but rather simply pointing to Jesus and the cross (vs. 17b).

## WHEN THE CHURCH LOOKS LIKE THE WORLD

- Our culture is more divided and fractured now than it has been perhaps since the American Civil War (1861-1865).
- Intense, angry division exists over politics, ideologies, morality, lifestyle, and policy.
- The anger, animosity, and the overall temperature of our conversations regarding such things are at an all-time high...even within the Church.
- The most counter-cultural, revolutionary, otherworldly, supernatural trait we can display as the body of Christ right now to an unbelieving world is unity.
- Unity is not compromised, and unity is not uniformity.
- Unity is choosing to be identified first by Christ, and then to show love, humility, and understanding to those who also are first identified by Christ in spite of any differences that may exist.

## GOSPEL, IMPORTANT, & SECONDARY DIFFERENCES

- **Gospel differences:** Jesus is the only way, the Bible is God's word, heaven and hell are real, salvation by grace through faith, etc.
- **Important differences:** Disciple-making (the mission of the church), Christian worldview, Christian ethics, etc.
- **Secondary differences:** Non-salvific theological questions, cultural complexities, worship styles, ideological perspectives, and matters of personal conviction.
- We insist on the Gospel and stand our ground.
- We prayerfully and graciously work in the community towards a unified understanding of the importance.
- We show grace, humility, and understanding towards each other on the secondary - **we will not divide and argue over these things** (Titus 3:10).
- It all comes down to Jesus - is He our primary identity?
- When we display prideful, self-righteous, and "spiritually elite" attitudes -that leads to toxicity, quarreling, division, arguing, and us shooting at our own.
- When we do this, we rip apart the body of Jesus.
- When the body of Jesus gets ripped apart, He's the one who bleeds.