

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 69: Introduction and Outline, Book of 1 Corinthians

Introduction:

Paul founded the church at Corinth on his second missionary trip. In fact, he stayed in that city for eighteen months to establish its leadership (Acts 18).

There is little doubt that he wrote the letter based on both internal and external, historical evidence within the first century church.

Much had happened between the time he was there and when he wrote his first letter to them. It was around AD. 55, near the end of a three year ministry in Ephesus, and during his third journey and:

1. Apollos had come to Corinth from Ephesus and was having a deep impact with his eloquent speaking gift (1).
2. The powerful influence of the surrounding pagan culture was infiltrating the church and they were not dealing with its problems (5 and 6).
3. Competition in the use of spiritual gifts had become the norm (12-14).
4. A party of Judaizers brought division in the body (8-10).
5. The Lord's Supper was being abused (11), doctrine warped (15), and they seem to have ignored a previous letter warning them of the dangers of associating with immoral people and instructing them to, "*Remove the wicked from among yourself*" (5:9-13).

Paul received information and requests for help and advice from a number of the members of the church and he responded with Apostolic power, pastoral concern, and parental authority. *It is a case study of pastoral theology.*

His child church was sick and needed to be treated with a radical cure.

The City:

In order to understand the problems of the church at Corinth we need to understand the city itself. Archeologists have brought the ancient city of Corinth to life and we could spend many pleasant hours discussing it. Let me try to capture it briefly.

Corinth was the most important city in Greece and one of the chief commercial cities of the Roman Empire. It is located on a 4-mile wide isthmus between the Aegean and Adriatic Seas making it a busy two-port city and commercial center.

To avoid a dangerous trip around the southern tip of Greece, ships were either dragged across the isthmus or their cargo was unloaded on one side, carried over land, and reloaded in the opposite port. It was, therefore, called the bridge of the seas, gateway for all routes from the north to Greece, the Mediterranean, North Africa, Italy, and Asia Minor.

The city boasted of an outdoor theater that accommodated over 20,000 spectators, athletic games second only to the Olympics, and a large Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Oriental population.

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Corinth had two patron deities. Poseidon, god of the sea, was the protector of trade and travel. Aphrodite, Greek goddess of love, reflected the cities' reputation for immorality.

Like most Greek cities, Corinth had, at its center, an acropolis or "High City," a hill that rose 2,000 feet above the rest, for the purposes of defense and centralized worship.

The most prominent building on this high place was the great temple of Aphrodite with its 1000 priestesses, who were really "religious" prostitutes. They lead men into ecstatic "worship" in the temple during the day, and ventured into the city below to offer themselves to male citizens and foreign visitors as well. Their income supported both priests and city government.

The extent of immorality in the city is evident in the fact that the term "to corinthianize" came to define the acts of fornication, drunkenness, debauchery, and all other forms of sexual sin including incest. Surrounding non-religious pagans would never stoop so low, but Corinth did.

The Church: Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

The church was a tapestry of converts who came out of this world (6:11).

They were a multiethnic group made up of Greeks, Romans, Orientals, and Jews. A mixture of all social classes including the rich, poor, and even slaves which made for a unique and troubled congregation.

The gospel was first preached by Paul in Corinth about AD. 50 when he, as usual, preached in the local synagogue. He lived and worked as a tent maker with Aquila and Priscilla, ministering with them and later was joined by Silas and Timothy. They faced much opposition, but Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and his family were converted along with many others. (Acts 18)

After a year and a half Paul left, with Aquila and Priscilla, to go to Ephesus and then he returned to Israel.

The Christians at Corinth were unable to break completely from their culture. They struggled with sin and the corruption that surrounded them. They felt pressure to give in, to compromise, to adapt to their environment.

They were free in Christ, but what did that freedom mean in relation to idols, sex, marriage, church. They were being undermined by acts of immorality and immaturity. Their faith was being tried in the crucible of everyday living in an immoral world, and they were failing the test.

Does this letter have anything helpful to say to us? I think so!

Are we living in a nation that glorifies immoral sex, glorifies evil men rather than God, and wants the church to yield to its standards, or at the very least to tolerate them? I think so!

So . . . Let us dive into this practical pastoral epistle

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OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF 1 CORINTHIANS

Introduction:

In Paul's introduction he thanks God for the people in the church at Corinth:

He thanks God for giving His grace to them.--**They are saved by grace.**

He thanks God that they have been "*enriched in Him in all speech and all knowledge.*"--**They are well taught in the word and the truth.**

He thanks God that they are gifted.--**They "are not lacking in any gift."**

He thanks God that they will preserve. "*God is faithful . . . to confirm, or guarantee, you*"--**God will justify them.**

It is because they are saved, well taught, gifted, and kept by God that Paul can strongly admonish and plead with them. And so he does!

I. DIVISION IN THE CHURCH (Chapters 1-4)

The first major problem in the church at Corinth was division and, as Jesus himself said in Luke 11:17, "*a house divided against itself falls.*"

And so Paul pleads in verse 10 that, "*there be no divisions among you, but you be complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.*"

A. Cause of Division (1-2)

Church members are separating based on the teaching or personality of their favorite teachers. Some like Paul, their spiritual father: some Apollos, the golden tongued orator; some Peter, the patriarchal rock.

Which of these men deserve or desire that acclaim? None of the above! Did they die for man's sin? Is it in their name one is baptized? As Paul often said, "May it never be!"

This nonsense makes the cross of Christ null and void. They have made the messenger more important than the message. The minister is more important than the ministry.

1. Message (1:10-2:5)

The message is not clever oratory presented by powerful men. It is "*to Jews a stumbling block, and to the gentiles foolishness.*" (v 23)

The message is not delivered by the wise, mighty or noble; "*but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and the weak things of the world to shame the things that are strong.*"(v 27)

Why? "*that no man should boast before God.*"(v 29) and "*that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.*"(2:5)

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2. Ministry (2:6-16)

The ministry is not natural. but supernatural because, *"a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."* (v 14)

How than does a man understand? *"we have the mind of Christ."* The ministry then is not of man, but of the Holy Spirit.

B. Consequence of Division (3-4)

What happens if we divide the body by running after different men? We hinder our Christian life in two areas.

1. Growth (3:1-9)

The division in the Corinthian church, focusing on man rather than the message, caused a defect in the body. It stunted their growth. So much, in fact, that Paul had to give them milk rather than solid food.

Mature Christians realize that, *"neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth."* (v 7) *" . . . we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."*

2. Reward (3:10-4:21)

If we divide rather than cooperate in the body building process by concentrating on the messenger rather than the message (which is Christ Jesus) we are building with wood, hay, and straw and those works disappear in the fire and we lose our reward. Paul then presents himself and fellow workers as a perfect example of these principles.

II. DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH (Chapters 5-6)

The church had allowed itself to compromise its integrity and to accept a lower standard of morality, maturity, and maintenance of its walk.

A. Moral Issue (5)

1. Problem (5:1-2)

The first problem had to do with an act of immorality that was so bad even the "Gentiles" considered it evil. There was incest in church and, not only did they not do anything to deal with the sin, they were actually proud of their tolerance. (*Familiar?*)

2. Solution (5:3-13)

Paul's solution is simple. Put him out of the body before he taints the entire body. Allow him to travel through a world that is under the control of Satan without the protection and support of the members of the body. (Other sins deserve the same-v11)

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B. Material Issue (6:1-8)

1. Problem (6:1-6)

The second problem was Christians taking other Christians to the civil courts to settle disputes rather than solving their grievances within the body.

2. Solution (6:7-8)

There ought to be, within the body, *"one wise man who will be able to decide between his brothers."* (v 5)

Perhaps this is where there should really be a separation of church and state.

C. Mastery Issue (6:9-20)

1. Problem (6:9-10)

The third area of problems dealt with a dabbling in a sinful way of life when the members of the church were supposed to be *"washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."*(v 11)

The old life habits were returning. The old desires of the flesh were winning over a walk in the Spirit. The evil world around them was luring them as they were drawn away by their own lust.

But, not just bad things affect them. Their freedom has become an excuse for indulging in things that are not profitable, things that master them and draw them from God.

2. Solution (6:11-20)

The solutions are threefold:

1. Their body is not their own, but the Lord's. (v. 13) It can be like using a borrowed car in a demolition derby.
2. Flee immorality. Fighting is never suggested in this area. (v. 18)
3. *"You have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."* (v. 20)

Next, Paul deals with a whole raft of subjects that must have been presented as problems or questions by fellow workers and members of the Corinthian church:

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III. DIFFICULTIES IN THE CHURCH (Chapters 7-14)

A. Personal Walk (7-10)

These four areas of teaching have to do with one's personal walk:

1. Marriage (7)

Sexual activity should not be practiced by unmarried people. Once married, sex should not be withheld as a weapon. Celibacy is a gift from God which allows commitment to service. Marriage is permanent and remarriage of widows is proper.

2. Meats (8)

Much of the meat at markets, especially the best meats, came from various temples. To many believers, who had come out of pagan worship, this could be troublesome. Paul points out that since idols have no reality the meat is not forbidden. But, it would be better not to eat the meat if your conscience is offended or you lead a weaker, fellow believer into sin.

3. Margins (9)

Paul practiced these principles as he preached them. As a believer and an Apostle he had certain rights and privileges, such as demanding to be kept while he ministered. But Paul always stressed submission to others for the sake of the gospel.

A life of service is more important than a life of practiced freedom.

4. Manners (10)

A Christian's manners are determined by his attitude toward himself--**do not be self-indulgent**; toward the world--**do not take part in evil practices**; and toward others--**always act in a spirit of love, seeking the welfare of your brother**.

B. Public Worship (11-14)

The next three have to do with a believer in his worship.

1. Separation (11:2-16)

Men and women had different roles in the public worship services. The key to Paul's praise seems to be the spirit in which the men and women responded to these rules.

2. Supper (11:17-34)

Paul was upset because the Lord's supper had become a rowdy party in which many partook in place of eating at home and others got drunk.

He reminds them of its purpose and explains that it should be the time of most unity in the body rather than division. They needed to examine their motives as they came together so as not to partake in an unworthy manner, keeping in mind what it represented.

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3. Servant hood (12-14)

Paul spends three chapters discussing spiritual gifts. The key to this teaching rests in the fact that God gives gifts, by His Spirit, for the benefit of the body. If all function, the body is healthy. If some do not exercise their gifts, the body is crippled.

Every member is vital, none is unimportant, and often, the seemingly insignificant member is the most important. So, he warns them not to seek the spectacular gifts but to operate with the gifts the Spirit gave.

This portion, ends with the declaration that love is the greatest of the three abiding gifts: faith hope, and love. Paul reminds them, once again that gifts are given by the Spirit for the building up of the body rather than personal gain.

IV. DISBELIEF IN THE CHURCH

A. Resurrection of Christ (15:1-9)

Paul knew there were doubts at Corinth about the validity of the resurrection. He affirmed strongly that the resurrection is at the center of the gospel message.

1. Believing (15:1-11)

The consistent testimony of the church was that Jesus died for our sins, rose again, and appeared to numerous witnesses.

2. Denying (15:12-19)

If some members of the Corinthian church insisted that resurrection was not possible, then even Jesus was not raised. If Christ has not been raised, all hope is gone, and all preaching is vain.

B. Resurrection of Christians (15:20-58)

1. Christian's Hope (15:20-50)

The resurrection of Jesus also carries with it the promise of resurrection from the dead of all believers. But He did rise; therefore we have a great hope of being with Him again. This hope encourages men and women to become believers. This same hope provides us with boldness to share the gospel.

2. Christian's Victory (15:51-58)

The bottom line of our response to Jesus is the final victory of Christ over death. *"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? but thanks be to God who give us the victory through out Lord Jesus Christ."* (vv. 56, 57)

But, what does this do for us now? **READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:58**

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Conclusion:

Paul finished his letter with three personal items of business:

1. A Collection for the Saints in Jerusalem

Paul told the church at Corinth that he had set aside money each week of his ministry in Ephesus to help the persecuted, starving and struggling church in Jerusalem. He would take it with him when he went there later. (2 Corinthians 8-9)

2. A Plan to Visit Corinth

Paul planned to stay in Ephesus and minister there until Pentecost because there were doors of service opening and great opposition as well. He then planned to travel through Macedonia and stay in Corinth for a considerable time. He would meanwhile send Timothy, perhaps with the letter. He did pay a visit at a later date for a much shorter time than he had intended.

3. A Closing Pep Talk and Benediction

Paul closed, as he generally did, with an exhortation to "*Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.*" (v. 14) He instructed them to do everything they undertook in love.

He greeted his friends and fellow laborers and closed with a typical Pauline benediction, "*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.*"

Lessons:

1. The Corinthian church was much like the church today: proud, affluent, tolerant, and unwilling to be too "weird."
2. We need to be careful to keep ourselves focused on living a Spirit-filled life free from sin.
3. We need to exercise our gifts so that the body of Christ is healthy and active.