

1 Corinthians

1. Introduction

May 20, 2018

The late pastor John Michaels of Calvary Chapel Las Vegas once told us, "Las Vegas has the lowest crime rate in the United States as a metropolitan city, because just about everything is permissible." Pretty much everything goes in that city, like it did in the city of ancient Corinth.

Now decency and morality are going down with a complete headlong dive around the world, especially in America – drunk on wealth and immorality, the vice capital of the world, this Book can be retitled as "1st Americans" without anyone's objection.

The church in America is not very far from the world outside of the church's 4 walls. About 10 days ago, the Episcopal denomination in the United States has decided to scrap the terms "husband" and "wife" from its marital liturgy in its latest move to find favor with the homosexual community. This change aims to make the church's marriage ceremonies more "gay-friendly." Indeed, gay and lesbian Episcopalians have been increasingly vocal in their complaints that the language of the current liturgy is both offensive and exclusionary. Yes, some of the Protestant church denominations are going to hell in a handbasket of the devil.

A. BACKGROUND OF 1 CORINTHIANS

It is important to see the background of this letter to the Corinth church.

The city of Corinth. Fast and excessively showy, shallow and brassy, slick and sassy, sensual and busy Corinth. The Vanity Fair of ancient Greece. A sailor's favorite port. A prodigal's paradise. A policeman's nightmare. A preacher's graveyard.

A city of about 200,000 free citizens, plus a half million slaves. It represented a lifestyle of loose living. In fact, the immorality of Corinth became so widely known that the Greek verb "korinthiazomai," of which the definition is "Corinthianize," it was coined to describe a person who lived a sexually immoral life.

Due west of Athens, Corinth placed itself like a one-stop location on the narrow canal connecting the Aegean Sea in the east and the Ionian Sea in the west. Because of the location, it became a premier center of commerce and trade. Such flourishing trade, along with the protection of Rome's military machine and the attraction of the Isthmian Game – second only to the Olympic Games, made Corinth a prosperous city. Naturally, with prosperity came all the attending pleasures and perversions.

Shrines and temples to the gods were on every corner, the most renowned being the Temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. It employed hundreds of cult prostitutes who helped "worshippers" pay tribute to their goddess.

B. THE AUTHOR AND TIMELINE

Into the fast lane of this wicked city came Paul, who lived and worked among them, during his second missionary journey in A.D. 51. According to Acts chapter 18, He stayed with Priscilla and Aquila and joined them in their trade of tent-making to support himself while he taught in house churches for 18 months.

There was plenty of religious fervor, but no true faith; there were many temples, but not one church of Jesus Christ. Ultimately the apostle Paul came to Corinth and established a church there, but the new converts may very well have brought their bad habits with them right into the church. In the wild and crazy setting of Corinth, the hotbed of unbridled immorality, it is no wonder that it wasn't long before deep problems plagued the Corinthian church.

Paul's authorship of this epistle is widely accepted in the biblical scholarly community. About 4 years after Paul left Corinth to go to Ephesus, reports came to him that a rash of spiritual troubles had broken out in the Corinthian church. Although they were greatly gifted, they were also quarrelsome, petty, immoral, selfish, and carnal. In other words, the congregation of the Corinthian church was immature and unspiritual.

You may be surprised to know that this is not the first letter Paul wrote to the church at Corinth. The letter we call 1 Corinthians is really the second letter and the second letter the third. The first letter never made it into the canonization of Scripture. How do we know? Paul noted in 1 Corinthians that he had written to them earlier in chapter 5.

No ministry ever faced a greater challenge to survive and few churches ever experienced greater conflicts. This 16 chapter letter is comprised mainly of troubleshooting, confronting, exhorting, and correcting. No other NT letter gives the pastor of a church in conflict a broader base of preaching material to lead the flock into new territories of purity, holiness, and unity.

It is not just another material for preaching, but it is a great application material to apply in our 21 century with the same problem they faced in the first century.

C. SURVEY OF THE BOOK

This Book falls into two main sections:

- 1) **Rebuke for the condition of the divisions and disorders in the church** – *Chapters 1-6*
- 2) **Reply to specific questions** – *Chapters 7-16*

We will see many questions from the congregation of the Corinthian church and many answers from the apostle Paul in this Book:

Q1) Do we solve conflicts or do we let them fester? – 1:10-17

Once a conflict starts within a church, it doesn't go away by itself. We cannot just shrug our shoulders and hope that it will go away. This conflict spawns others: "Do we keep grudges and nurse resentments? Do we have a long lasting memory when it comes to offenses?"

If we want to be conflict solvers, we've got to learn from Jesus' life and His teachings about forgiveness and unity. We must deal with conflicts and divisions quickly, because if we ignore them, they will come back to haunt us.

Q2) Do we resist the temptation to boast in or even to worship another human being, or do we yield to it? – Chapter 3

"Don't worship any human," was essentially Paul's message in this chapter. He didn't object to the congregation to follow their pastor, but they shouldn't worship him no matter what. Because we belong to the Lord, not to any human leader. Our God alone is worthy of our worship, no one else.

I see so many Christians practically set their pastor on a pedestal. This is another reason that I don't care for the way Catholic people praise and worship their pope, almost as if he is a deity. But the people around the pope like it, because they, too, get to have more power, authority, and wealth.

Q3) Are we absolutely pure in our relationship with the other sex, or are we compromising? – 6:12-20

I like the apostle's simple command in v18: "Flee sexual immorality." You cannot open a newspaper or watch TV news without encountering another political or famous person involved in sexual misconducts these days.

Avoid even the appearance of evil. Don't even play around with it. You play with fire, you will get burned.

Proverbs 6:28 Can one walk on hot coals, And his feet not be seared?

Karen and I made a decision a long ago, we would not have a meal, including a simple business lunch, with the other sex alone unless one of us know the time and the location. It is not because we don't trust each other, rather it is being accountable to each other. If we're committed to purity in our relationship with the other sex, we will not tolerate immorality. We will not set ourselves up for failure or for compromise of our integrity.

Liberal people and media laughed at the Vice President Mike Pence who told others that he doesn't dine alone with women who aren't his wife if she's not around. They shouldn't be. Rather, they should commend him for his willingness to protect his marriage.

Q4) Are we using our spiritual gifts to build up all the members of the Christian community, or are we hoarding our gifts, or using them for our own selfish advantage? – Chapters 12 and 14

Paul clearly teaches us the diversity and unity of spiritual gifts in the church, the body of Christ. At the same time, he reminds us to use our spiritual gifts for the glory of God and the benefit of the body of Christ, not for selfish reasons.

Q5) Are our actions motivated by love or by some other inferior motivation? – Chapter 13

Paul didn't hesitate to give his answer:

1 Corinthians 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

It is love that unifies the church. It is love that must control all we are and all we do.

Q6) Are we givers or takers? – Chapter 16

How important of our behaviors and attitudes of giving and receiving? The Lord teaches us to be cheerful givers who generously and freely share with others what He has so generously given to us.

D. SOME THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS

The apostle Paul brought up some theological aspects to assure that the congregation of the Corinth church understood what they were supposed to do:

1) Marriage and Divorce – Chapter 7

The apostle Paul clearly laid out the guidance regarding Christian marriage and divorce. We are living in the world where sex is the hottest topic in the media and

entertainment. Satan is using media and entertainment to distract people from what they are supposed to do – keeping their marriage vows.

Our Lord makes it clear that there is nothing wrong, and everything right, about sex in marriage. Satan's great strategy, when it comes to sex, is to do everything he can to encourage sex outside of marriage, and to discourage sex within marriage. It is an equal victory for Satan if he accomplishes either plan!

2) Communion – Chapter 11

We remember the Last Supper was actually a Passover meal, when Jesus, together with the disciples, according to Biblical commands and Jewish traditions, celebrated the remembrance of Israel's deliverance from Egypt to the Promised Land, beginning in the Book of Exodus. The breaking of bread and the drinking of wine were important parts of the Passover celebration. Jesus took these important pictures and reminders of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, and added to them the meanings connected with His own death on the cross for us and deliverance from the eternal damnation.

The unleavened bread used at a Passover meal would have the scorch-mark "stripes" and holes from baking that would look like "pierce" marks. In the same way, the body of Jesus was broken for us. He was without sin – as the bread had no leaven, and His body bore stripes and was pierced – as the bread.

The Passover meal featured several cups of wine, each with a different title. The cup Jesus referred to was known as the cup of redemption, and Jesus added to the reminder of redemption from slavery in Egypt the idea that His blood would confirm a new covenant which would change our relationship with God.

While the Lord's Supper does look back to what Jesus did on the cross, it also looks forward to the coming of Jesus, and the marriage supper of the Lamb

Revelation 19:9 Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!' " And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

3) The resurrection of Jesus – Chapter 15

The apostle Paul explained the death and resurrection of Jesus by tracing back to the OT prophecies and the importance of Christ's resurrection for Christianity:

a. The foremost important reason for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is that Jesus claims to be a God who is above all power.

If He couldn't overcome His death, from the cross to a grave, it means that He is a liar and He is not a God whom He claimed to be. Death was the last enemy He had to destroy. But does it mean that death itself has power as a being? No, it is the devil who has the power of death.

b. The sovereignty of Jesus rests on the resurrection of Jesus.

c. Our justification from our sins and our glorification in heaven rest on the resurrection of Jesus.

E. APPLYING THESE

The tone of the letter is direct, even sarcastic and angry in places. There is a strong exhortation here; at times there is a firm rebuke. Some have mentioned that no other letter in the New Testament showed such a wide range of Paul's emotions. Clearly the Corinthians needed a good rebuking!

Paul expected that we Christians would shine our light into the dark places of their world by worshiping in a unified community that was accountable to one another. He expected that we would settle our problems internally, that we would encourage one another in the pursuit of purity, and that we would strive together by holding tightly to the hope of our bodily resurrection to come.

Many of the problems and questions the Corinthian church was dealing with are still present in the church today. Churches today still struggle with divisions, with immorality, and with the misuse of spiritual gifts. The Book of 1 Corinthians very well could have been written to the church today and we would do well to heed Paul's warnings and apply them to ourselves. Despite all the rebukes and corrections, the Book of 1 Corinthians brings our focus back to where it should be – on Christ. Genuine Christian love for the Lord and His people is the answer to many problems.