

1 Corinthians

Removing Leaven

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 use of spiritual gifts.

There is no question that the truths of this letter are both timeless and timely

I. Introduction –

A. Author –

1. Paul wrote at least 13 NT letters
2. With the aid of Sothenes –
 - Only other mention of Sosthenes is in Corinth. He was the ruler of the synagogue after Crispus got saved. He was beaten for allowing Paul to minister to the Jews

B. Recipients –

1. The **believers** who lived in Corinth
 - Paul refers to them as **His spiritual children**
 - Do you have any spiritual children? People who you have led to the Lord?
2. “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, **with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus** Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours”

This is a universal letter

C. Date –

1. Written sometime around 55AD
2. Written from Ephesus
3. Paul had planted this church during his second missionary journey only a few years earlier
4. Written after Paul had spent 18 months establishing the church

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D. Corinth

1. Corinth was the **capital city** of the Roman province of Achaia.
2. *Derek Prime points out*

Corinth's importance in the ancient world was considerable.

- *It was the **densely populated** capital of the Roman province of*
- *A **busy commercial center**, and subject, therefore, to many outside influences.*
- *A thriving port city, it was **infamous for its sexual vice and immorality.***
- *Located on the route from Rome to the East, its **key geographical position** was **ideal for the spread of the gospel** as merchants and travellers from many places passed through it.*

E. Setting

1. The book of Acts divides into 2 section as it follows the ministry of Peter then Paul
 - Acts 13-28 follows the ministry of Paul
 - Paul's ministry is divided into 4 section
 - a. 1st Missionary journey
 - b. 2nd Missionary journey
 - c. 3rd Missionary journey
 - d. And his journey to Rome
2. It was on his **second Missionary** journey that Paul went to Corinth, preached the gospel and spent 18 establishing the church
 - In acts 18 Paul traveled to Corinth where he worked as a tent maker with Aquila and Priscilla. They soon became a part of Paul's ministry team and later disciples Apollos in the faith.

At some point **Timothy and Silas joined** Paul's efforts in Corinth where they spent 18 months establishing the church

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- Paul spent the Sabbaths in the synagogue persuading the Jews and Greeks to come to Christ

Persuade - convince or to win favor with. Paul sought to win people to Christ

2 Corinthians 5:11

Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

- As time move on many of the Jews rejected Christ and **Paul focused his ministry on the Gentiles**

They met **in the house of Justus**, which was located next to the synagogue

Paul saw the ruler of the synagogue come to Christ as well as many of the Gentiles

- With increased evangelism came increased persecution. As the persecution grew God gave Paul a promise

Acts 18:9-10

Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.”

- a. **This is one of the key principles behind church planting and evangelism.**
 - b. God knows those who are His long before we do
 - c. God had many in the city that Paul had yet to reach
- Later persecutions reached a place where **Paul was forced to leave** Corinth, but only after spending 18 months serving the church and reaching the lost

II. Situation –

1. The letter is **occasional** and was written both **in response to reports** Paul received about conditions in the Corinthian church, **and in response to a letter** Paul received from the Corinthian church.

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2. Problems

The apostle Paul founded the church in Corinth. **A few years after leaving the church, he heard some disturbing reports about the Corinthian church.** At least 5 areas where he corrects their behavior

- Divisions
- Contentions
- Carnality
- Sexual immorality
- Suing one another

One of the key verses in the book is:

1 Corinthians 5:6

"A little leaven leavens the whole lump"

And Paul sees the need of removing the leaven

Leaven is a reference to the **Passover** where Israel was instructed to remove all leaven from their home as they celebrated the feast. The **leaven** became a **symbol of sin** because of the way it spreads and infects a whole lump of dough. At Passover they removed all leaven.

During a ceremony called Bedikat Chametz, every traditional household conducts a final search for leaven throughout the house, gathers it together and burns it, after which the house is kosher for Passover.

Some purposely hide 10 pieces of bread in order to have something to find

"Two quick tips: 1) Make sure that the chametz pieces are wrapped well, so that no crumbs will be left behind. 2) Remember well -- maybe even write down -- the locations where you place the ten pieces. If you will end up finding only nine pieces, you are in a heap of trouble!"

**Among other things this letter teaches us that it is critical for any church that will have a lasting effect for the kingdom that leaven is removed.*

Divisions – (1:10) - They were creating division where they shouldn't and failing to create it where they should

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Dividing over who the best teachers were
Allowing wickedness to permeate the church

Contentions -(1:11) - quarrels, debates wrangling - long and complicated argument

The Corinthians spent much of their time arguing about things that did not matter or benefit anyone.

Paul explains the solution

1 Corinthians 1:10

*Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together **in the same mind** and in the same judgment.*

The solution to contention is not to compromise and come to an agreement, but for both parties to have the mind of Christ on the matter.

Carnality – (3:1-4) - Greek - sarkikos meaning – pertaining to the flesh, the body or the temporal

The Corinthians were living for earthly things rather than heavenly things, they were seeking to please the appetites of their flesh rather than pleasing the Lord.

Paul uses three terms to describe three different classes of people. We fit into one of these three categories

1. **Natural men** – 2:14

Unregenerate men, those who have yet to come to Christ and be born again

2. **Spiritual men** – 3:1

Those who are born of the Spirit and living for Christ.

3. **Carnal men** – 3:1

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Those who are born of the Spirit but still living to please the desires of the flesh

Romans 8:5

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

Sexual Immorality – (chapter 5) – Corinth was a culture not unlike ours. Sexual boundaries were constantly being pushed and immorality abounded. It was not long before immorality began to creep into the church. It is very common for Christians to try to press the mores of the culture unto the church. **Paul combats that by explaining that their behavior was unacceptable and must be stopped.**

In Romans 1 Paul spoke of those who practice sin as being guilty as well as those who approve of the sins of others.

The Corinthians were approving of immorality rather than addressing it as sin

It is important to keep in mind that Paul is addressing the immortality of believers. He expects sinners to sin and saint to repent.

Paul explains that a Christian who is living in sexual sin should be confronted and removed from fellowship if they refuse to repent.

1 Corinthians 5:10

Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

Suing one another – the contentions within the fellowship had led to Christians taking one another to court. Paul addresses the issue by giving two reasons law suits between Christians are ridiculous

1. 1 Corinthians 6:2

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?

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2. 1 Corinthians 6:7

Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?

One of the bedrock principles of Christianity is that it is a life of self-denial, which has a focus on the betterment of others. Paul explained to the Philippians that we are to esteem others better than ourselves and Jesus said that we are to be like a grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies before it can bear fruit.

3. Questions -

Being that the Corinthians had come to Christ out of a totally pagan background, it is understandable that they would have many questions regarding the Christian life. At least three of these questions are regarding **marriage, liberties and spiritual gifts**.

Every Christian can be thankful that these questions were asked for Paul goes into great lengths to explain proper behavior regarding these issues to the Corinthian believers.

Marriage and dating – Having come out of the world the Christians at Corinth had a good understanding of a worldly way to have relationships, but they were interested in how a Christian should treat members of the opposite sex.

1. Marriage is a permanent bond

1 Corinthians 7:39

A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

3 ways out

1. Death

2. Adultery

3. Departure - does not release you to be wanton but to wait on the Lord

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1 Corinthians 7:16

For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

When facing difficulties in marriage don't divorce,
instead reconcile

- if your spouse is not a believer seek to win them to
Christ

2. 7:17 - Marriage nor divorce is the answer

1 Corinthians 7:27

Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife.

1 Corinthians 7:28

Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you

In every culture it seems that the unmarried think their problems will be solved if they could only find a spouse, and the married think theirs could be solved if they could find a different spouse

3. Paul gives some practical advice for those who are married

- a. Intimacy is important in a marriage relationship. Since we marry partially in order to avoid sexual misconduct it is important that intimacy have its rightful place within a marriage.

It is also important that intimacy is done right. Each person must seek to minister to the needs of the other. We run into problems when we expect our spouse to meet our physical or emotional needs rather than seeking to meet theirs.

- b. 7:29 – Paul explains that although we are married and many responsibilities come with that we should continue to live for eternity.

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1 Corinthians 7:29

But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none,

One of the keys to a successful family life is to learn to serve the Lord together.

- c. 7:33 – care about your spouse. It is possible to use ministry as an excuse to mistreat those closest to us. Since we chose to marry we also chose to make sure that our spouse is first on our ministry list

1 Corinthians 7:33

But he who is married cares about the things of the world — how he may please his wife.

- 4. Finally Paul gives advice to those who are not yet married

- a. DO NOT TOUCH

1 Corinthians 7:1

Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.

- b. If you are misbehaving - marry

But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry.

Christian Liberties – One of the great difficulties the Corinthians faced had to do with eating food purchased at the local markets. Because the people were idolators they often offered the animals as sacrifices before they butchered them. This put many Christians in a difficult place. Should they eat this meat or not. Many Christians ate without a problem while others struggled to determine what was the right thing to do. Paul addresses this issue and explains

1. An idol is nothing and there is only one true God
2. However since some still struggle Paul presents a principle that should govern the use of all Christian liberties

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1 Corinthians 8:9

But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.

1 Corinthians 8:13

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

Spiritual Gifts – The Corinthian church was an extremely gifted church. Many members had the gift of tongues, prophecy and other speaking gifts. The problem was not with having the gifts but with using them properly.

Paul writes to give an extensive list of spiritual gifts as well as to define and explain the proper use of tongues and prophecy

1. Definition of tongues and prophecy

1 Corinthians 14:2

For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.

Tongues is a means to communicate with God in order to express praise and perhaps petitions

1 Corinthians 14:3

But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.

Prophecy is not always predictive but is designed to reveal the heart and mind of God

2. Proper use of tongues and prophecy

Prophecy is designed to benefit the whole body, tongues just the individual. As a result, tongues will have an extremely limited place in public gatherings.

All things must be done in proper order

Paul explains that:

- a. He uses tongues conservatively in public
- b. No more than 3 people should be allowed to speak out in tongues at any given meeting
- c. In private tongues can be spoken or even sung

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III. Outline -

1:1-9 – Introduction

1:10-6 -Addressing problems in the church

7:1-15-58 – Answering questions and explaining doctrine

16:1-24 – Conclusion