

ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

BIBLE FOR ALL (BFA) MATERIAL FOR SMALL GROUPS DISCUSSION

1 Corinthians – Building Community

Sermon Series

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FIRST CORINTHIANS INTRODUCTION

Paul spent 10 years in the Roman provinces of Cilicia and Syria (see Galatians 1:21). Then a Syrian believer called Barnabas called him to Syrian Antioch. After a while, the church in Antioch commissioned Paul and Barnabas to evangelize the provinces of Cyprus and Galatia. The two men succeeded in founding churches in several cities. The mission to the Gentiles was so successful that the apostles in Jerusalem invited Paul and Barnabas to a council to clarify exactly what God expected of Gentile believers (see Acts 15). Paul spent the eight years after the council in Jerusalem planting more churches. He went first to Macedonia, where he founded churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (see Acts 16:1-17:15). He faced troubles from Jews in Macedonia and therefore went south to Greece. He received a cold reception in Athens, so he travelled to Corinth. Paul then spent a year and a half in Corinth to found a church in this important city (see Acts 18:1-18). When things looked solid in Corinth, Paul sailed back to Antioch and Jerusalem, then travelled west again to plant a church in Ephesus. Meanwhile, another Christian leader named Apollos arrived in Corinth to teach the faith and debate Corinthian Jews who opposed Christianity (see Acts 18:24-28).

Toward the end of his 3 year stay in Ephesus, Paul began to receive disturbing news from Corinth. He wrote a letter (now lost) instructing the Corinthian believers not to associate with church members who practiced illicit sex (see 1 Corinthians 5:9). Sometime later, members of the household of a believer named Chloe brought news that the Corinthian church was splitting into factions, each of which claimed some prominent leader as its authority (see 1 Corinthians 1:11). Then 3 members of the church brought Paul a letter from the whole body (see 1 Corinthians 7:1, 16:17). This letter was full of questions about various issues, but the messenger also reported scandalous information: incest, class snobbery, and other problems were infecting the church. In response to these ills, Paul dictated a long letter – 1 Corinthians.

Predictably, wealth, loose morals, and intellectual pride lay at the root of the troubles in the Corinthian church. There were divisions between members who liked Paul's simple style and those who preferred a more sophisticated and philosophical approach to religion. There was strife between those who thought freedom in Christ meant liberation from outdated taboos about sex and food, those who thought that Jewish rules must be kept strictly, and those who believed something in between. And there was bitterness between the rich and the poor. All this Paul addressed in his letter, while dispatching his aide Timothy to help sort things out in person.

GENERAL GUIDE FOR BIBLE STUDY

Bible study follows a progression. First you observe: What does the passage say? Then you interpret: What does the passage mean? Lastly you apply: How does this truth affect my life?

Some of the "how" and "why" questions will take some creative thinking, even prayer, to answer. Don't let your study become an exercise in knowledge alone. Treat the passage as God's Word and stay in dialogue with Him as you study.

It is important that you prepare for each study and write down your answers as this clarifies your thinking and helps you to remember.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN ON THIS STUDY

It is much easier to study a book passage by passage if you have first examined it as a whole. An overview is especially necessary if you have never studied the book before. Do take time to read through the entire book of 1 Corinthians at least once before you begin this study series.

05 Jan 2020

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Living as Christ's End-Time Church

INTRODUCTION

The news from Corinth has spurred Paul to dictate an urgent letter, but he is not abrupt, as is customary in Greek letters – he begins by politely identifying himself and the letter's recipients, and he continues with a few kind words before the meat of the message.

OBSERVATION AND INTERPRETATION

1. Paul never wastes words – he chooses his words carefully in identifying himself and his readers.
 - a. How does Paul choose to identify himself and his readers?

 - b. In light of the topics he will discuss later on, why do you think he chose to identify himself and his readers in this way?

2. It was Paul's custom to begin his letters by thanking God for the best traits of his readers.
 - a. What traits of the Corinthians does Paul thank God for? (see 1:49)

 - b. How is this thanksgiving relevant to the rest of the letter? (Consider 4:7; 12:1; 12:4-26)

3. How is the "testimony about Christ" confirmed in a person? (1:6) In other words, how does a person become a living confirmation that the Gospel is true?

4. Why does Paul need to emphasize to the Corinthians that Christ will be revealed on the coming day of the Lord (verses 6-8)? Think about 15:12-34.

APPLICATION

5. How are the following statements true of you personally and of ORPC as a church? Explain.
 - a. In him [Christ] you have been enriched in every way. (1:5)

 - b. [You are] "confirming [the] testimony about Christ among you". (1:6)

 - c. "You do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus". (1:7)

 - d. "He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless." (1:8)

DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS

God's people are first and foremost defined by the peace and grace given to them through Jesus Christ, which in turn is a basis and mandate for their sanctification. Our calling is not just to fellowship with God through Christ, but also a call to new identity and mission.

Because the day of the Lord is still to come, the Church must live a life of faith and obedience as we wait for Jesus' return. This faith in a certain future is not only a comfort but also a summons to intensity, as the days are short, and we must urgently live for Christ.

The Church is called to God and called to His mission to make His glory known in all the world. How are we at ORPC living as Christ's end-time Church?

GROUP/PERSONAL REFLECTION

What truth from 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 would you like to take to heart this week?

How do you already see this truth affecting your life?

How do you fall short or want to grow in this area?

What can you do to cooperate with God in letting this growth happen?

How can you make sure to do what you have planned?

12 Jan 2020

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Living as a Cross-Shaped Community

INTRODUCTION

God has called you to be in fellowship with Jesus Christ (see 1:9). This is no idle cliché. It has direct relevance to what is going on in the Corinthian church. Are the Corinthians living out the implications of fellowship with Jesus?

OBSERVATION AND INTERPRETATION

1. Verses 10-17 introduce the topic that Paul discusses from 1:10 to 4:21. Describe the problem in the Corinthian church that has been reported to Paul.

2. In Greek society of Paul's time, to speak and reason intellectually were considered the most important skills of a cultured person. Paul deliberately sets himself in contrast with the kind of men who impressed the Corinthians - those who specialized in eloquent speech and human wisdom.
 - a. What is wrong with preaching the gospel with wisdom and eloquence (see 1:17)?

 - b. Why does this empty the Cross of its power?

3. What is Paul's main point in verses 10-17? What has this to do with what he said in 1:4-9 and what he will say in 1:18-25?

APPLICATION

4. How are there similar factions in the church today who follow certain prominent Christian leaders or teachers? How can you apply this passage in countering such factions?

5. "For Christ sent [you] to preach the gospel - not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power." How is this statement true for you and how can you apply it today?

DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS

The storyline of the Bible has some obvious patterns. One is when God's people stop trusting in God's Word, they begin to quarrel. This is true of Israel with Moses, and true of the Church today. Paul points out that unity will come if we focus on Jesus Himself and His work.

Christ's work on the cross is the focal point of all we do as Christians. While gifted preachers and Christian ordinances such as baptism are wonderful and admirable, we must respect their purposes, and that is to draw us back to the glory of the cross. The cross is to be the power of preaching, the significance of baptism, and the basis of Christianity. When the cross is central in local churches like ORPC, competitiveness, grumbling, and unholy allegiances will dissolve away.

GROUP/PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Take time to reflect on the implications of 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 for your life today.

What did you learn?

How have you been shaped?

How might you walk more fully trusting the Lord?

DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS

Human weakness highlights the power of the Spirit in true gospel proclamation. Preaching is not an act of rhetorical persuasion where human strength and dynamism are on display. It is a heralding of good news where Christ's crucifixion is proclaimed, even in the weakness of the preacher. True preaching is faithfulness to the message, an act of trust that God alone can persuade and transform the listener. Proper listening recognises God's power and presence in the preacher, and receives the message accordingly.

GROUP/PERSONAL REFLECTION

Are the unbelievers you know more like the Jews who wanted miraculous signs (practical evidence) to prove the gospel, or more like the Greeks who wanted philosophical proofs? What does this passage teach about how can you get through to such people with the truth of the gospel?

How can you live in the wisdom of the cross, and not in the wisdom of the world, today?

Praise God for making the wisdom of the world foolish and for choosing what is weak, foolish, and despised in the world to shame the wise and the strong.

Thank Him that you can boast in nothing but Christ.

Thank Him that the message of the Cross is the power of God in your life.

26 Jan 2020

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

Living with the Mind of Christ

INTRODUCTION

Paul has deliberately made himself and the gospel sound foolish in order to debunk the Greek pride in human reasoning. However, there is a wisdom that Paul teaches. The Corinthians thought of themselves as spiritual in the common Greek sense – they were aficionados of the lofty, intellectual, mystical things of the spiritual realm. Paul's idea is quite different.

OBSERVATION AND INTERPRETATION

1. Why did Paul think that it was good that he came to Corinth in weakness and fear (see 2:3, 2:5)? How is the Spirit's power demonstrated in Paul not preaching with eloquence?

2. What do we know about God's wisdom from 2:6-16? Observe especially how it differs from the wisdom of this age.

3. Verses 15-16 are open to several interpretations, some of them misleading. Taking into account what other parts of the Bible says, what do you think Paul means by the following statements?
 - a. "The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments (2:15; compare 4:3-4).

 - b. "We have the mind of Christ" (2:16).

APPLICATION

4. How have you experienced the Spirit enabling you to understand God's wisdom and gifts (see 2:12)? What can you do today to seek such wisdom and gifts?

5. Do you have the mind of Christ, as Paul did? How can you be sure and how should you act in light of this?

DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS

The Holy Spirit not only inspired the text of Scripture in its initial formation and final form, he also speaks and works through Scripture today. This notion is essential to Paul's argument in this passage. We do not need to worry about using flower or eloquent words because it is the work of the Spirit to take a faithful proclamation of the gospel and change hearts with it.

When we have the mind of Christ, it is in contrast to the wisdom of man (verses 5-6). It involves wisdom from God, which was once hidden (verse 7) and it cannot be understood by those without the Spirit (verse 14). When we have the mind of Christ, we have discernment in spiritual matters (verse 15). We will look at life from our Saviour's point of view, with a perspective of humility, compassion, and a dependence on God.

GROUP/PERSONAL REFLECTION

When believers have the mind of Christ, we understand God's plan for the world and understand that He wants to bring about His purpose.

Do we share Christ's desire for the following? If so, how can we act on this desire today? If not, what is preventing us from having this mind of Christ?

A desire to bring glory to God.

A longing to bring salvation to sinners.

Humility and obedience to God.

Compassion for people.

Prayerful dependence on God.