

1 CORINTHIANS

Applying the Gospel to Church
Issues

Introduction

- **Purpose for writing:** In AD 54, while in Ephesus, Paul received news about problems in the church from two sources:
 - A letter sent from members (7:1)
 - Verbal information given to Paul from the household of Chloe (1:11; cf. 5:1)
- **The many problems in the Corinthian church** stem from the cultural values and practices of Greco-Roman society infiltrating the church that some believers never abandoned

Introduction

- **Problems include**, but not limited to, opinions on what is superior rhetorical skills, divisions based on personalities, sexual immorality, social class separations, ranking of spiritual gifts, and inappropriate church worship meetings
- **Key Themes can be divided into two main areas:**
 - Divisions and quarrels within the congregation
 - Infiltration of secular non-Christian values into the church

Issue of Disunity (1:10-17a)

- A report from Chloe's household tips off Paul of quarrels (1:10-11)
- There were four factions—Paul, Cephas, Apollos, Christ
- The kind of leaders with whom we identify has an impact on our unity
- Teachers and leaders are simply servants of Christ
- The gospel is about a community of believers centered on Christ —“Is Christ divided?” (1:13a)
- Paul addresses the problem of hero worship in the context of baptism, a sign and seal of the work of Christ (vv. 13b-17)
- We must ground our identity in Christ, not on human wisdom (1:17)

True Christian Unity (1:17b-4:21)

- Paul exhorts Christians to reclaim our true identity by embracing Christ crucified as the solution to disunity
- Human wisdom is about strength found in the world—prestige and power
- In 1:19, Paul cites Isa 29:14 to show the futility of human rhetoric
- The job of the faithful preacher or herald is to proclaim the gospel (1:17b-2:16), which is true wisdom because it is the work of the Spirit

True Christian Unity (1:17b-4:21)

- Jesus is the great suffering servant of Isa 53
- All gospel workers are called to follow the same path, because true gospel ministry, which is based on true wisdom, will be a suffering ministry
- While ministry involves a suffering life, the gospel brings hope to eternal vindication, blessings, and the only commendation that matters is from God (1 Cor 4:3-5)
- Good preaching is not an act of rhetorical persuasion. It is the proclamation of the gospel—Christ crucified, even in the weakness of the preacher

Sexual Misconduct (5:1-6:20)

- Sexual immorality was rampant and Paul teaches the church to maintain its purity
- A man was having sex with his stepmother (5:3-5)
- Unrepentant sinners ought to be excommunicated
- Sexual immorality is not just like any other sins, because sexual and spiritual union are bound together (6:16-18)
- The gospel contradicts such behaviors, since Christ died for our sins and broken relationships due to sexual misconduct
- Just as Christ was raised from the dead, our bodies will be raised as well
- So, what we do with our bodies matter

Food and Idolatry (8:1-11:1)

- There were also disputes on food preferences between Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Christians
- Paul again appeals to the gospel for solutions
- Don't eat foods offered to idols, if it causes people to stumble
- However, you are free to eat, if no one will be misled
- The principle in deciding on such matters is the cross, where Jesus emptied himself of his infinite rights (Phil 2:6-11)
- Thus Paul says, "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbour" (10:24)

Worship Order and Unity (11-14)

- This long passage teaches that loving unity is vital in the church's life, particularly in the context of the Lord's Supper and the use of spiritual gifts
- The issue of the Lord's Supper has to do with social snobbery (11:17-34)
- The Lord's Supper was a full meal taken in large homes owned by rich and social elites
- Thus, the rich were normally served first, leaving very little for the poor, who came later in the day
- The Supper is not only divine communion but also communion of believers together (11:22-29)
- The gospel, expressed in the Lord's Supper, focuses on vertical and horizontal relationships

Worship Order and Unity (11-14)

- Some worshipers were having powerful experiences—tongues and prophetic teachings
- Church worship was a bit chaotic
- In 12:12-30, Paul uses the metaphor of the human body to explain the reality of spiritual gifts
- The body is diverse and has many parts, which are all necessary
- Paul argues that the Spirit works through the church in a unified way
- Central to the gospel is God's love, not which gift is the greatest (13:13)
- Love should compel people to use their gifts to build up the body
- Worship gatherings should be done in an orderly manner

Bodily Resurrection (15)

- There were some who believed that bodily resurrection was not important and questioned the resurrection of Christ
- Influenced by Gnosticism, they believed only the human spirit is with God when one dies
- Paul argues that the bodily resurrection of Christ is an indispensable aspect of the gospel
- The gospel is not just good news but it transforms lives, including the resurrection of our bodies
- Christ's resurrection is a source of life and power for our present and future hope

Closing Salutations (16)

- An identity crisis—between the wisdom of the world and the word of the cross—lies at the heart of church struggles
- Christians must filter out “worldly wisdom” from influencing the church
- At the heart of this letter is the reality of the cross and resurrection
- Paul exhorts the church to return to the logic and pattern of the gospel, so that pride is replaced with servant love and unity
- This letter is about the Christian’s need to view every aspect of life through the lens of the gospel