

"I CORINTHIANS, WALK THRU THE BIBLE."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for Sermon: I Corinthians 1:1-3; 10-13; 20-25; 6:18-20

Introduction.

I have chosen to skip over Paul's letter to the Romans since we have been in Romans in the morning and I plan to do an overview of the book as a conclusion to our Romans series in about a month.

We have come to the large section of the NT called the Epistles, or the Letters. We have 13 letters by Paul, arranged from longest to shortest, Romans to Philemon. Then there are 7 general letters, and Revelation as the conclusion.

Letters are best understood by reading them in one sitting, like you would any other letter you receive. And because they are personal letters from one person written to another person or group, it helps to know the occasion that prompted them to be written.

Corinth.

While on his second missionary journey, in a dramatic nighttime vision God called Paul (along with Silas and Timothy) to leave Asia and cross over into Europe, to Macedonia to bring the Gospel. He planted churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. But each time he was forced to leave. Finally arriving in Corinth, things changed. He met Priscilla and Aquila and took up residence as a tentmaker for 18 months.

After 18 months, Paul left Apollos to carry on. But it was precarious from the beginning being in the center of a most pagan of culture, known for lust, immorality, vice and pleasure seeking.

Second in the Empire only to Rome, Corinth was a major crossroads for both north-south and east-west trade. Several sea routes touched its two harbors.

Corinth was a cosmopolitan city, not unlike New York City, San Francisco, London, and Hong Kong today, it was one of the major crossroads in the Mediterranean and a strategic place for the gospel.

Religion and vice co-existed in Corinth as in most Roman and Greek cities. There were over 20 sacred places and temples devoted to the many gods of Roman-Greek mythology. As with any wealthy, prosperous seaport, money and sex flowed freely.

There was a huge temple to Aphrodite in Corinth. She was the cult goddess of Corinth, the ancient Greek goddess of sexual love and beauty. Her cult is historically associated with sacred prostitution and Corinth had a reputation as a "sin city" in the ancient world.

You know how people sometimes criticize the church for being full of hypocrites. Corinth is a prime example. They clearly had the gifts of the Holy Spirit in operation, but they were living like pagans in many other regards.

Salvation is meant to have an effect on a believers life, and be evidenced by obedience to God's Word. Obedience is not required to be saved, but it is necessary as a reflection and outflow of ones faith. Faith is all of grace, but grace brings with it the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit enables us to imitate Christ.

“The letter is highly relevant today, as it deals with such issues as the relationship between Christians and their surrounding pagan culture. When Paul wrote I Corinthians about what should characterize a Gospel-centered church, he did not address a church that had it all together. Far from it, in fact. But they did have the one thing that would lead them to becoming a healthy church. For all their problems, *they had Christ*.

We get the opportunity to peek over the apostles' shoulders as they deal with real problems that real churches were facing.”

Letter to Corinth

Paul has deep affection for this church, it is his baby, his child. And now this son as grown and is exhibiting great strengths and excellencies, as well as some most disturbing weaknesses.

In some ways this is Paul's most personal letter, since it tugs at his heart the most. His heart is on his sleeve, and so is his zeal and wisdom, his patience and his firmness.

About four years later Paul was living in Ephesus when he started receiving reports of how things were going in Corinth.

What we know as I and II Corinthians are probably actually II and IV Corinthians. We know from I Corinthians 5:9ff Paul refers to a previous letter that is now lost. And we know from II Corinthians 2:4 that there was another lost letter, a "severe letter," that was sent before our II Corinthians.

In I Corinthians 1:11 Paul refers to a report from Chloe's people. I Corinthians 1-6 deals with several issues reported to Paul by Chloe and others, division, incest, lawsuits, fornication.

Then in I Corinthians 7:1 Paul writes:

I Corinthians 7:1 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote ...

One of the uniqueness of this letter is that it is a response to a letter from a church asking questions of Paul. We see here the boldness of the Corinthian Christians.

I Corinthians 7-16 are Paul's answer to six specific questions addressed to him in a letter from Corinth.

Each of Paul's six responses in chapters 7 to 16 begin with the phrase, "Now concerning..."

Concerning marriage

Concerning the unmarried

Concerning meat sacrificed to idols

Concerning spiritual gifts and their diversity.

Concerning the collection for the saints

Concerning our brother Apollos

Without I Corinthians we would be bereft of Paul's defining of the true character of Christianity, as it is meant to be lived and practiced. This is

Christianity in conflict with culture, in conflict with the world, set apart from the world.

Purpose, theme

I Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

This is the crux of the problem and the statement of the solution.

While they were a Christian church in Corinth, there was still a lot of Corinth left in them. The culture was influencing the church as much or more than the church was influencing the culture. Every evil thing in the church to which Paul referred was prevalent in Corinth.

Because of this, there was a need for some radical spiritual surgery without killing the patient. That was Paul's mission.

The church of God is God's church, a reflection of God in the world. And the church is in the world, in the world at its sinful worst. Salt in a decaying world, light in a dark world.

The church and the world. This is the sharp contrast and conflict we see in I Corinthians. They were Spirit-filled believers who were acting like unbelievers, they needed their faith to penetrate to their actions. They were proud, divided, morally lax, selfish, doing what was right in their own eyes.

By addressing all these issues, this letter is the most diverse of all Paul's Epistles.

First Corinthians address a whole variety of sins that had corrupted and damaging the church. The church in Corinth is a mess. They are full of strife, division, and immorality. They are sinning against each other.

They wink at sexual immorality, even incest.

They are suing each other.

They are confused about marriage and divorce, and chastity.

They are at odds over eating food sacrificed to idols.
They are being rude and unruly and unloving in worship.
They are proud and compete against each other over gifts of the Spirit.

Paul boldly, courageously confronts them head on. Paul starts by addressing the division and *disunity* in the church. They were proud in their thinking and acting like pagans. It is a call to unity that reflects our unity in Christ.

He makes a serious and bold call for *purity* in the body of Christ. Paul exhorted them, “You have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (6:20).

It is a call to *holiness*, to holy living that reflects the Gospel.

We rebuke the immorality of "the city," not just by denouncing it but, what is more important, by overcoming it in our own lives. We do this by demonstrating the power of Christ's life within us by living morally pure lives by the Spirit's enablement.

It is a call to *love* one another and what call is most clearly stated in that glorious chapter 13, called the love chapter.

The Corinthians had forgotten the importance of Christ's command to love one another. We counteract the selfishness of our culture by practicing genuine Christian love. This means living for the glory of God and the good of others, rather than putting ourselves first.

And the book concludes in chapter 15 with Paul's magnificent exposition on the resurrection.

Jesus

The Corinthians had forgotten the central importance of the power of the resurrection of Christ. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in Christians today in order to enable us to live Godly, morally pure lives.

The power holy living is the resurrected life of Christ (ch. 15).

The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ are not just an epilogue; they are the practical solution to every ethical and relational crisis in the church. Jesus' resurrection motivates us followers toward unity, sexual integrity, toward loving others more than ourselves, and the hope of victory over death.

How would you say the power of the resurrection is most evident in you life?

- The cross of Christ humbles our pride, silences our boasting, and calls the church to unity around the gospel rather than personalities, preferences, or power (1 Cor. 1–4).
- The cross and resurrection provide both the forgiveness and the power needed to pursue holiness, sexual purity, and faithful obedience in a morally confused world (1 Cor. 5–7).
- The self-giving love of Christ teaches believers to surrender personal rights and freedoms for the spiritual good of others (1 Cor. 8–10).
- The resurrection guarantees the final defeat of sin, Satan, and death itself, giving believers unshakable hope for the future (1 Cor. 15:20–28, 54–57).
- Every problem addressed in 1 Corinthians—division, immorality, selfishness, pride, disorder, and discouragement—finds its ultimate answer in the crucified and risen Christ.
- Therefore, the cross and resurrection are not merely the conclusion of the Christian story; they are the foundation, motivation, pattern, and hope for faithful Christian living in the church today.
- The resurrection of Christ gives meaning to our labor, confidence in our suffering, and courage in our witness, knowing that our work in the Lord is never in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

I Corinthians 15:57-58 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

“Believing Jesus was raised from death is the foundation of Christian faith. And the truth of the resurrection means that the Gospel is not merely

moral advice or a recipe for private spirituality. The book of 1 Corinthians is all about seeing every part of life through the lens of the Gospel.”

Implications and application.

The Letter 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.

Once again we see Paul as pastor and father, a true father firm and loving, speaking the truth with love and compassion. This is soul care at its finest.

We feel his deep personal affection for them in his last words.

1 Corinthians 16:24 My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

I commend this letter to you that you may experience God’s love for you and care for your life, through the inspired words of Paul as he speaks to us today.