

## Summary: Paul's "First" Letter to the Church in Corinth (First Corinthians)

### Chapter 1:

- Be unified
  - "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." (v2)
- Don't quarrel:
  - "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers." (vv. 10-11)
- Have the "mind of Christ," not a worldly, "natural" mind.
  - Our faith isn't about our words or eloquence, thank God. Not about being intellectual.
    - "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power." (v. 17)
    - "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ

Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"(vv 26-31)

## **Chapter 2:**

- There is a fundamental difference between the worldly person and the spiritual person: the Holy Spirit.
  - "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by god." (v. 12)
- So much so that the natural person will think Christianity is "folly."
  - "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of god, for they are folly to him and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." (v. 14)

## **Chapter 3:**

- It had been reported to Paul by "Chloe's people" (1:11) that there was quarrelling among them.
- By quarrelling, the Corinthian believers were behaving as worldly people and not Spirit-filled believers.
  - "[A]re you not merely being human?" (v.4)
- Specifically, people were quarrelling about following different saints, as opposed to following Christ.
- Don't miss the point: We follow Christ, not individual people, not this world's wisdom.
- Starts the analogy to the believers in God's church being the building.
  - "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys Gods

temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple." (vv. 16-17)

#### **Chapter 4:**

- Ministers must think of themselves as being judged by God, not men (1-4).
- But, as believers, we are in the same position. So don't think too much of ourselves and become intellectuals.
  - "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" (v. 7)
- Instead, imitate the imitator.
  - "I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ as I teach them everywhere in every church." (vv. 16-17)
- Some of the big Corinthians intellectual talkers had become puffed up and challenged Paul because he didn't think Paul would return. Paul had some thoughts for them: Intellectual sounding worldly wisdom sounds good but it is powerless. And when Paul returns with the power of the truth of Christ, that will be seen.
  - "Some are arrogant as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?" (v. 18-21)

## **Chapter 5:**

- In addition to this worldly intellectualism, it had been reported to Paul that there was sexual immorality among them (v. 1).
- But because they were so self-righteous, the Corinthians had an attitude of arrogance, when instead they should be mourning what had happened in the church.
- Become what you are (pure, given Christ's sacrifice; unleavened), not what you used to be (defiled; leavened).
  - "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (vv 6-8)

## **Chapter 6:**

- Believers within the church were bringing their disputes with one another in lawsuits, being judged by unbelievers. They should be able to handle their own disagreements themselves (vv. 1-11).
- The church must flee from sexual immorality.
  - "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (vv. 18-20)

## **Chapter 7:**

- In addition to the things Paul had heard from “Chloe’s people,” Paul also used this letter to respond to particular questions that had been sent to him in a letter from the church at Corinth. We don’t have the precise questions, but we do have the answers.
  - First, sex is intended by God to be had only within the marriage of a man and a woman.
  - Second, there is nothing wrong with singleness. In fact, it has advantages for the kingdom of God.
    - This was especially true for those who were in the Corinth church and single. Paul emphasized that they needed to focus their undivided attention on Christ and not take on the distractions and anxieties that come along with marriage.
  - Third, divorce is bad.
- We can serve God in a variety of capacities, as God has assigned to us.
  - “Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him.” (v. 17)

## **Chapter 8:**

- (Recall that these are intellectuals.) You have knowledge, and you have freedom in that because you know God and his ultimate focus on or heart over mere actions. But, others who are watching you do not get that. Be considerate not to exercise your freedom in a way that will be a stumbling block to others who will misinterpret your actions. For example, while we know eating food offered to idols won’t save you or damn you, others seeing you eat such food may misinterpret that and therefore be misled.

- “This knowledge puffs up but love builds up.” (v.1)
- “But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak” (v.9)
  - Note: This is not to say “abandon your principles.” This is seen later in Chapter 10:27-31, where Paul explains that we are free to eat what our host provides for us without worrying about where it came from, but if someone tells us that the food has been offered as a sacrifice to a pagan God, then we must abstain from eating it for the sake of misleading the person who offered it.

### **Chapter 9:**

- Paul applies this to himself, as an example. So that he can effectively and strategically advance the gospel, Paul does not insist on his rights as an apostle, or as a Roman, or as a Jew. Rather, he puts personal preferences aside and focuses on what matters.
  - “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel . . . Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.” (vv. 22-24).

### **Chapter 10:**

- Remember the OT history. Although the Jews were God’s chosen people, they fell prey to idolatrous conduct. Just like sexual immorality, we cannot fool around with idolatry. Even though God has provided a way of escape from it, we must “flee from idolatry.” (v. 14).
- (Paul also returns here to his example re: being all things to all people. If we are offered food by a host, don’t question.

But if we are told it is a sacrifice to pagan god, then for the sake of the person providing it, we must abstain.)

### **Chapter 11:**

- On head coverings. (VV. 1-16.) Good opportunity to remember what we learned in Growth Group re: supra-cultural versus timeless application.
  - Paul is commanding a timeless principle that worship be orderly, God honoring, and not unnecessarily contentious with the surrounding cultural preferences.
  - At the time, that mean head coverings for women.
  - Paul is not saying that God commands women to veil themselves in public!
- Explains the purpose of the Lord's Supper.
  - All of those verses that you hear when we take Communion? Yeah, those come from First Corinthians.
    - "[T]he Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying. "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (vv. 24-26).
  - Overarching point: On this issue, like so many others, some in the church in Corinth were being selfish. Remember that this symbolizes something being done in unity (as a body), for a purpose (remembering Christ and his sacrifice for us).
    - They would take the elements individually because they were hungry, as if it were just a

normal meal, to the exclusion or detriment of others.

- Or they would fail to recognize the purpose by taking it mindlessly, without examining themselves.

## **Chapter 12:**

- On spiritual gifts.
  - God gifts people spiritually “for the common good.” (v. 7).
  - Spiritual gifts listed.
- Using that as an example, Paul gives the well-known analogy of how the church of Christ should function as a human body--unified, with each member (eye, foot, hand, etc.) serving its own important part. Even though God has given members different gifts and has ordained different offices (elders, teachers, administrators, etc.), each member plays a critical role.
  - “But as it is God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.” (vv. 18-19)

## **Chapter 13:**

- Paul beautifully defines and explains “love”--agape love. The kind of active love focused not on the worthiness of the recipient but rather on the will of the giver of that love. Kind of love Christ showed us.
  - “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all

things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” (vv. 4-8)

- Note: This is not an abstract definition read at some Biblical wedding. This was a critical element of what was lacking in the church in Corinth given its divisiveness, selfishness, and intellectual snobbery.

#### **Chapter 14:**

- Given that background, Corinth was commanded to “pursue love.”
- Paul then commands that the Corinth believers stop trying to build themselves up by showing off but rather to “strive to excel in building up the church.” (v. 13)
- Paul tells the believers in Corinth that they need to have orderly services, intended to build up the body and not just individuals.
- Church should not be chaos.
  - “For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.” (v. 33)
  - “[A]ll things should be done decently and in order.” (v. 40)
- Note: There will be at least two challenging topics in this passage:
  - Speaking in tongues;
  - The role of women in the church.
    - “For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” (v. 35)
  - These topics will take some real study on our part!

#### **Chapter 15:**

- Longest passage in the Bible on the Resurrection.

- Apparently some in Corinth were saying that there was no resurrection (v. 12).
- Paul starts by reminding the Church in Corinth of the Gospel, of its factual occurrence by the testimony of various factual witnesses (including Paul himself via later manifestation), and its centrality to Christianity (vv. 1-11).
- Paul then explains in detail how their position--i.e., there is no such thing as resurrection of the dead--is nonsensical given the evidence, contrary to what they themselves think they are preaching, and ultimately a foolish argument for purposelessness. (vv. 12-34).
  - “If the dead are not raised, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” (v. 32)
- Description of our heavenly bodies, and how they will be distinct from and superior to those on earth. (vv. 35-49)
- We have great hope because, one day, as believers, we will move from our perishable earthly bodies to our imperishable heavenly bodies. (vv. 50-58).

### **Chapter 16:**

- Paul closes out the letter with some strong admonishments:
  - “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.” (vv. 13-14)
  - “If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!” (v. 22).