

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

“The habit of preachers today is to address their people as though they were all Christians and just need instruction...men and women are being treated as saved who never knew they were lost.”

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The Wisdom of God and the Foolishness of Man – Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians

Part 1 – Saints by Calling Acting Like Mere Men

February 4, 2024

Sermon Text: 1 Cor 1:1-3

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor 1:1-31

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ,
His only begotten Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

On the third day he rose from the dead;

He ascended into heaven,
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;

from there he shall come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

AMEN.

.....

Two thousand years ago the

Apostle Paul traveled to a city called Corinth and preached the gospel there. A church was formed by those who believed. He left and when he is writing this letter to them, he is in Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) across the Aegean Sea from Corinth. The purpose of this letter is largely, as we will see, to deal with problems in the church which had been reported to him by three men from Corinth who came with a gift for Paul.

Let's look at several passages which contain information regarding Paul's ministry both while he was at Corinth and subsequent to his visit there:

Paul Preached Jesus Christ Crucified and He did so in Humility

1Co 2:1-5 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. (2) For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

(3) I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, (4) and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

1Co 15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

The content of his preaching there was the ABC's of the gospel

1Co 3:2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,

Paul is sending Timothy to them to teach them further, and Paul intends to come to Corinth himself once more

1Co 4:17-21 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my

ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church. (18) Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. (19) But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power. (20) For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power. (21) What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?

First Corinthians is not actually first

1Co 5:9-11 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; (10) I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. (11) But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one.

The Corinthians had written a letter to Paul, asking him to advise them concerning several issues

1Co 7:1 Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.

Paul is in Ephesus for the winter and wants to remain in Corinth for an extended time when he comes there again

1Co 16:5-11 But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; (6) and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go. (7) For I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits. (8) But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; (9) for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. (10) Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is

doing the Lord's work, as I also am. (11) So let no one despise him. But send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren.

A delegation from Corinth had come to Ephesus with a report on the church and a gift for Paul

1Co 16:17-18 I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. (18) For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.

Paul is also with Aquila and Prisca, Timothy, Apollos, and others

1Co 16:19 The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

There, then, is information on the situation taken directly from Paul's letter. We will be able to deduce other facts about the state of the church in Corinth as we go through

this Epistle.

Some Background on Corinth

“As much as for any other book in the New Testament – and more so than for most – the various sociological, economic, and religious factors that made up the environment of the city of Corinth have a profound impact on one's understanding of Paul's letters to the church there.” [Gordon Fee, NIC on the New Testament]

Corinth (see map attached) was in a very strategic location. It was on the Isthmus (a natural land bridge) which connected the mainland of Greece to a peninsula called the Peloponnese. This Isthmus separated two important gulfs and was thus used as a kind of overland shortcut between those waterways. Here is more information from Gordon Fee:

The Greek city of Athens enjoyed “golden years” around 400BC and Corinth flourished at that time. However, old Corinth was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC, lying dormant for over a

century. Then, in 44BC Julius Caesar refounded it as a Roman Colony. The Corinth the Apostle Paul knew then was 80 to 90 years old.

The new Corinth, like the old, had all the necessary ingredients for an economic boom – natural water supply, natural defensive location, the backing of Rome, master of two harbors, and was the site of the “Isthmian games,” ranked just below the Olympian games in importance. Thus Paul drew from these games as illustration (see 9:24-27).

Corinth, therefore, enjoyed renewed economic success almost immediately. Money, as Fee notes, “attracts people like dead meat attracts flies,” and Corinth saw an influx of people from West and East. While Rome had conquered Alexander (Greece), it was the culture of Greece (Hellenism) that continued and Corinth was no exception. The religions of Rome were present, but so were the religion, philosophy and arts of Greece. Throw into this mix the mystery cults of Egypt and Asia

and the Jews with their synagogues and “peculiar” belief in a single God (Fee). The “nouveau riche” French term describes many at Corinth –

“the characteristic of someone who has risen economically or socially but lacks the social skills appropriate for this new position. ‘Old money’ inherited from a long line of wealth would use this term in a derogatory manner for people who “struck it rich.”

In addition, there were thousands of slaves and individual small businessmen in the population. All benefitted from the wealth of new Corinth.

Gordon Fee also notes: “As often happens in such centers, vice and religion flourished side by side. Old Corinth had gained such a reputation for sexual vice that Aristophanes (450-385BC) coined the verb ‘*korinthiazō*’ = to act like a Corinthian, that is, to commit fornication.” You could visit the museum at modern Corinth and see examples of offerings to the gods

pleading for healing from venereal diseases.

And then there were the religions, and Paul referred to these idol temples and feasts in his letter:

1Co 10:6-8 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. (7) Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." (8) Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.

The Jews had their synagogue there as well. "All of this evidence together suggests that Paul's Corinth was at once the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world." (Fee)

The problems which Paul addresses in his letter indicate that the Corinthian church was reflected Corinth in many ways - In the mix of the types of people, Jews, slaves, freemen, rich and poor. But Paul's letter would

indicate that the church consisted chiefly of Gentiles, people who were formerly idolaters and thus Paul addressed the issue of dining in an idol temple.

Gordon Fee sums it all up this way:

"Thus, the picture that emerges is one of a predominantly Gentile community, the majority of whom were at the lower end of socioeconomic ladder, although there were two or three wealthy families. As former pagans, they brought to the Christian faith a Hellenistic worldview and attitude toward ethical behavior. Although they were the Christian church in Corinth, an inordinate amount of Corinth was still in them, emerging in a number of attitudes and behaviors that required radical surgery without killing the patient. And this is what First Corinthians attempts to do." [Ibid]

Why This Epistle is Important for and Applies to the Church Today

In his second letter to Corinth, Paul would write:

2Co 6:14-18 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? (15) What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? (16) What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (17) Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, (18) and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

Observe the visible church today. Are we seeing the church in the world, or the world in the church? Increasingly, it is the latter. It is not difficult to find examples of pastors and church members yielding to "woke" philosophy and practice. Sexual confusion and perversions,

acceptance of globalism, endorsement of homosexual "marriage," enmeshment with world religions, and MONEY. Money as a mark of success in "the Lord's work." A worldly mindset of what the church must be. The more thought we give to these things, the more we realize that we are not so different from the Corinth of 2,000 years ago after all.

Corinth and the Sin of Arrogance

There are 29 occurrences of the word "boasting" in Paul's two letters to Corinth. For example:

1Co 4:7 For who sees anything different in you? 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?

1Co 5:6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

Arrogance, pride in self, is a horrible and dangerous sin which is totally contrary to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It leads to more

sin and it leads to the destruction of a church. Corinth had a very large dose of it and this boasting was even resulting in some members holding Paul in derision. Pride cultivates a false gospel. It produces an idol temple where the church once was. And we are going to see this arrogance in Corinth before we get just a few verses into the first chapter.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to redeem us from our sin, and He came *humbling Himself*. He descended from the glory He had with the Father from all eternity to take on human flesh, born in a manger, eventually coming to Jerusalem mounted on a colt. He went to the cross for us. It is impossible to follow Him if we are walking in pride, boasting in ourselves, craving for fame and worldly success. Yet so many professing Christians today and local churches are doing just that. Paul's letter will burst the bubble of our boasting if we will listen and hear and obey.

Pride also does something even more serious. Boasting in a church

inevitably leads that church *away from Christ, away from the Word of God*. We cannot follow Christ, we cannot hear and obey God's Word, if we are seeking the world's ideas of "greatness." It must be one or the other. When I see huge church buildings constructed, properties purchased for a new "campus," budgets of millions of dollars, sanctuaries that are huge amphitheaters, I know with certainty that a false gospel is being preached there which is producing false Christians. It is Corinth reborn.

And something else happens when the sin of boasting creeps into a church – it inevitably distances us from the truth of God's Word. We will see this in Corinth. People in that church began to criticize Paul and this is what Gordon Fee means when he says:

"The basic stance of my commentary is that the historical situation in Corinth was one of conflict between the church and its founder (Paul). This is not to deny that the church was experiencing

internal strife (divisions), but it is to argue that the greater problem of ‘division’ *was between Paul and them*, and it had to do with the Corinthians’ understanding of what it means to be ‘spiritual.’

Paul, as we will see, came to Corinth preaching the gospel in this manner –

1Co 2:1-5 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. (2) For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (3) And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, (4) and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

To the worldly mindset at Corinth, this humility was a mark of worthlessness. A Christ crucified, this weakness and fear and much trembling, simply did not fit the

Corinthian view of greatness. A true teacher must use lofty speech and be such an orator that the listeners would be thrilled at his ability. But Paul refused to come to them in this way because to exalt himself would be to deny the cross and create a false church.

A false gospel always originates in a heart filled with pride. A false gospel appeals to pride. A false gospel produces false Christians, and a false church which pleases sinful pride and reproduces itself. A ‘church’ founded upon man’s pride is a false church which is not of Christ.

Rev 3:16-17 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. (17) For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

The Corinthians had not yet become Laodicea, but they were on the path to such a condition. If all these dangerous problems were to be corrected, this root sin of pride

and boasting had to be repented of.

Mat 16:24-25 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (25) For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

There will be plenty of occasion for each of us to examine ourselves for this sin of boasting as we proceed through this letter of First Corinthians. We can pray that the Lord will use this part of His Word to humble us, to open our eyes to the sins our enemy would tempt us with, and to make this church a truly faithful church of people who love the Lord in truth.