

CGYG & LIFE Bible Study: Introduction & 1 Corinthians& 1:1-9

Review

Corinth in the apostle Paul's time was a cosmopolitan city of over 250,000. An important center for both land and marine commerce, it was prosperous but also had a reputation for immorality, due in part to the worship practices related to the temples of Aphrodite and Apollo that were located there. The church in Corinth was founded by Paul around 50 AD, during his 2nd missionary journey (Acts 18:1-17). It was an exciting, growing church (Acts 18:8-10) but also one with many problems and that caused Paul much pain and anguish. Written together with Sosthenes (1:1; likely a former synagogue ruler converted by Paul - Acts 18:17), 1 Corinthians was probably the second of up to 4 letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church. 1 Corinthians was written (1) to answer questions asked by the church; (2) to address problems in the church that he'd heard about; and (3) to thank the church for their financial support (16:17-18).

-What were some of the questions the Corinthians had for Paul?

7:1-2

-sex, singleness & marriage

8:1

-should they be eating good sacrificed to idols?

12:1

-questions about spiritual gifts

16:1-4

-what should they be doing about the collection he asked them to take up?

-What were some of the problems that the Corinthian Church was struggling with?

1:10-12

-divisions & factions within the church

4:1-3, 18-21

-arrogance among some church members; questioning Paul's genuineness & authority as an apostle

5:1-2

-sexual immorality, of a kind not tolerated even among pagans

5:6

-pride/boasting in their own spirituality

6:1-8

-Dishonesty (cheating one another) & enmity between believers; resulted in lawsuit(s) between believers

6:12-16

-improper understanding of sex & sexual immorality; some were having sex with prostitutes and thought it was OK

11:17-22

-divisions spilling over during church meetings; desecration of the Lord's Supper; rich humiliating the poor

12:21-31; 14:18-20

- abuse of spiritual gifts resulting in division/disunity in the Body of Christ, rather than unity

15:1-4, 12

-false teachings about the resurrection

-What is your impression of the Church at Corinth? (To bring it closer to home, what would you think if you heard these things about CGC or one of our neighboring churches?)

-for discussion

-In what ways are the problems and questions faced by the Church in Corinth in Paul's day similar to those faced by churches in our day?

-for discussion

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

-What is the "Church", according to Paul (v.2,9)? Several times in the first chapter (v.1,2,9,24,26), Paul mentions God's 'call'. What is this call (you might also consider Rom. 1:7; 8:28-30), and why does Paul place so much emphasis on it?

-the 'church of God'; those sanctified/called to be saints – i.e. set apart; called to be holy in God's sight

-those who call for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, not just in Corinth but everywhere

-those who believe in Him and submit to His Lordship

-those who have been called into fellowship with Jesus Christ (and are in fellowship with Him)

-call – i.e. God choosing & calling a people to Himself → called to be like Christ

-loved by God (Rom. 1:7); predestined to be conformed to Christ; justified & glorified (Rom. 8:28-30)

-focuses on what God has done/ is doing/ will continue do for us in Christ

-God is mentioned 6 times & Jesus Christ is mentioned 9 times in these 9 verses

→ Church is about Him, not (primarily) about us!

-What picture of the Church at Corinth does Paul paint in these verses? How does he feel about the Church? Knowing all the problems at the Corinthian Church, how can he paint such an optimistic picture? What is the basis of his confidence? (you might also consider: Acts 18:9-11, Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 5:25-32; Philippians 1:6)

-the picture in these verses is quite positive

-they are the Church of God, sanctified and called to be saints

-they have been given grace in Christ; the testimony about Christ was confirmed in them

-they have been enriched in Christ in all speech & knowledge; not lacking in any spiritual gift

-Paul is confident that God will sustain & preserve them to the end, blameless in Christ

-Paul is thankful for the Corinthians (gives thanks to God for them always); his affection for them is apparent in these verses

-this despite all he knows about the church, and the strong words he will have for them in the rest of the epistle

-Paul has this confidence because

-they've been called by God, and they belong to Him (cf. Acts 18:9-11)

-he's seen the gospel bear fruit in them (1:6), and evidence of God's grace at work in them (1:4-7)

-he's confident in God's faithfulness to complete the work that He's started in them (1:8-9; cf. Phil. 1:6)

-What encouragement do these verses give us as individual followers of Christ? as a church?

-for discussion

-God is at work in His Church and will see her through to perfection in Christ, in spite of all the problems & difficulties we might see & encounter

-What should our attitude be towards the Church, in light of these verses?

-for discussion

-same attitude as Paul – thankfulness, confidence that God has been/is/will be at work in His Church

-reflect Christ's love for the Church

-'get over yourself' and re-focus on Christ, and what He would have us do/how He would have us live

Reflection and application

For all her warts and ugliness, the church at Corinth was still the Church of God. Though she had her share of problems, she was nevertheless precious to God, and thus to Paul. Why? Because she had been called by God into fellowship with Christ, and purchased with His precious blood. As Ephesians 5:25-27 says, "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." Because He loved the Church at Corinth, Christ enriched them in every way (1 Cor 1:4) so that they did not lack any spiritual gift (1:7) (even if they may not have been using these gifts to their full potential). And having died for the Church, would He fail to keep them to the end, so that they would be blameless on the day of Christ (1:8)? How desperately we need to recapture, or rather, be captured by this love for the Church in our day! Too often, Christians are quick to criticize and leave churches over petty flaws and problems. Why? Often, it is because unlike Paul, we have no vision of what God has already done and what He will do in Christ. Yet, knowing that Christ so loved the Church that He gave Himself up for her, and knowing that He will be faithful to make her holy and to present her to Himself without spot or wrinkle or blemish, dare we love the Church any less?

What is your attitude toward the Church? Do you give up on her easily, moving from church to church (or leaving altogether) when something or someone offends you? If so, repent of this attitude. Learn to love the Church as Christ loves her, and commit yourself unreservedly to her, confident in God's desire - and ability - to present her to Himself unblemished and without fault.