

## Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet

*1 Corinthians* | *The Local Church: in Christ, in Community, and in Culture*

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**INTRO:** Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet.

- OT
- Gospels
- Acts (the history of the early church)
- Letters that were written during those early years of the church...
  - Most were written by the Apostle Paul
    - Last week, we looked at his letter to the church in Rome
    - This week (and next week) we'll be looking at two letters that he wrote to the church in Corinth.

### CONTEXT

- Paul is writing to a church that he planted (**Acts 18:1–17**)
- He knows this church. He knows the people. He is a spiritual father in their lives.<sup>1</sup>
- To receive a letter from the Apostle Paul would have been a precious treasure to them.<sup>2</sup>

### CORINTH

- This church was located in the city of Corinth, which was one of the most **important** cities in the world at that time (certainly the most important city in Greece).
- It was a center for all kinds of entertainment, a hub of worldwide commerce, a destination sight for idol worship...
  - It was something like Las Vegas, Minneapolis, and New York all combined...
  - And in this cosmopolitan metropolis, there was one local church.

### PURPOSE OF THE LETTER

- Paul writes this letter to help this young church (full of new Christians) figure out how to do life together in the midst of a pagan culture.
- He writes like a father writing to his children who are struggling to find their way.
  - As you read through 1 Corinthians, it is clear that this church was working through their share of problems...
    - Bickering within the church (**1:11**)
    - There is gross sexual immorality happening within the congregation, and the church is tolerating it (**5:1–2**)
    - People in the church are taking each other to court (**6:6–7**)
    - Totally twisted understanding of sexual purity (**6:12–20**)
    - Struggling to understand the sacredness of marriage (**7:1–16, 39**)
    - Abusing the Lord's Supper (**11:18–22**)
    - Misunderstandings regarding spiritual gifts (**12**)
    - The regular worship gathering appears to have been just chaos (at least occasionally (**14:6–40**))

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor 4:15, "...for in Jesus Christ I have begotten you through the gospel."

<sup>2</sup> Personally, some of my most precious possessions are letters that Dad has written to me over the years.

- Q. If you wrote a letter to somebody who was in a church like that, what advice would you give?  
Q. What would **you** do if you found yourself in a church like that?

Well...if you are an average church-attender in modern day America, the answer is easy: you leave. You say, "*Man, this church is way too messed up; I'm just going to go find a different church.*"

Q. But then what do you do when you go to a different church and (two years in) you discover that this church has all kinds of problems too?

Again, for many people, the answer seems pretty obvious: give up on church altogether.

- We gather up all our judgments and all our complaints and all our frustrations about how everybody around us isn't doing things *the way that Jesus would*...and then we walk away.

Is that what Paul says in his letter?

- "*Look, y'all are so messed up – and there are so many problems – you people don't have a clue of what the church is supposed to look like – you are misrepresenting Christ to the community around you – you aren't taking God's Word seriously – this church is full of sin and selfishness and hypocrisy and division... y'all should just leave and find a better church...*"
- "*Gather up all your bitterness and all your hurts and all your pride and all your self-righteousness and use that as the foundation for starting your own church; fill it with people who see the world exactly the same way you do and who understand the Bible exactly the same way as you do and who worship exactly the same as you do...and then this world will finally have a perfect church without any problems.*"

No. That's not what Paul says.

- He writes to a church that was as messed up as could be,
- and **he calls them** to spend their lives growing up with one another in the love and unity and humility and maturity of the gospel.

Yes, your church has problems (in reality, your church probably has way **more problems** than you will ever know; it is **more broken** than you realize; its leaders have **more weaknesses** than you would ever guess; and its people are **more messed up** than you could even begin to image).

- God's Word is calling you to **love** the local church; not to **leave** it.

I've titled the message: "***the Local Church: in Christ, in Community, and in Culture***"

We see in **1:2** that Paul is writing to the local church (in particular) and then to every local church (in general).

To the church of God which is at Corinth,  
To those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints,  
With all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.  
~ **1 Corinthians 1:2**

This letter wasn't written for "lone ranger" Christians. The apostle Paul did not have a category for a Christian who wasn't part of a local church. If you were a Christian, you were part of the local church. It wasn't optional in Paul's mind.

So, he's writing to Christians who have been called to do life together as a covenant community of believers called the church.

And he's writing to talk about what it means for a local church (both Corinth & North Center)

1. To be in the culture
2. To be in community together
3. To be in Christ

## THE CHURCH IN CULTURE

1. God is calling us to be a church (a people, a family) that looks to the Word of God as our guide (as our model) for how to leave...instead of looking to the culture around us.

Yes, the Corinthian church has some massive problems, but these problems don't seem to be coming from a heart that is in rebellion against God.

In his letter to the church in Rome (*which we looked at last week*), in the very first chapter Paul talks about people who were living in willful rebellion against God. They knew God, but they didn't want to know God. And so they lived their lives in rebellion against God, and that rebellion resulted in all manner of sinfulness.<sup>3</sup>

But that doesn't seem to be what's happening in the church here in Corinth. As you look at Paul's introduction, he refers to the church as a people who...

- Are sanctified in Christ Jesus (1:2)
- Are called saints (1:2)
- Are calling on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord (1:2)
- Have received the grace of God (1:4)
- Have had the testimony of Christ confirmed in them (1:5)
- Are eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:7)
- Were called into the fellowship with one another in Jesus Christ (1:9)

You get the sense that Paul is writing to true believers who have the Spirit of God living inside of them and who truly desire to live for God.

**Q.** So then why does their church look so much like the culture around them?

**A.** Because they are looking to *the culture in the world* instead of looking to *Christ in the Word*.

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<sup>3</sup> Rom 1:21–32.

- **Culture says:** if your neighbor wrongs you, take him to court and sue him.
  - And so that's what they were doing (**6:1–11**)
- **Christ says:** if your neighbor wrongs you... love them, bless them, do good to them, and pray for them (**Matt 5:44**)<sup>4</sup>

Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you  
 That you go to law against one another.  
 Why do you not rather accept wrong?  
 Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?  
 ~ *1 Corinthians 6:7*

Where is Paul getting this teaching from?

- Not from the culture, that's for sure.
- He's getting it from the Word of Christ.

And this seems to be the pattern for every problem in the Corinthian church.

- They were surrounded by a godless culture (a culture that was loud, pervasive, persuasive, alluring...), and they used that culture as the standard for their ethics (morality, right and wrong) instead of looking to Jesus.

This book is so good for us because we are surrounded by the same temptations.

- I wonder which source has greater influence in how we spend *our money*...?
  - The Word of God...or the American dream.
- I wonder which source has greater influence in *the way we dress*...?
  - The Word of God...or the current fashion trends?
- I wonder which source has greater influence in how we view *marriage, sex & sexuality*...
  - The Word of God...or decades of Hollywood indoctrination?
- I wonder where we get our ideas of *commitment* and *humility* and *sacrifice*...?
  - The Word of God...or a culture that is pervasive in its advertising that you deserve the best.
- I wonder where we get our ideas for how we engage in *Sunday morning worship*...?
  - The Word of God...or a culture that spends billions in being entertained.

God's Word was calling the church in Corinth to be in the world together, **but not to be of the world**. They were to be in the world (together), but they were **to look different** than the world.

- They were to have a different compass.
- A different model. A different foundation. A different vision.
- With different priorities. And different practices.
- Revealing a different kind of love. And a different treasure.
- Because we serve a different God.

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<sup>4</sup> See also Matt 5:38–42

- While this world, and this culture, and this city, and these suburbs serve a god of pleasure (*of money and food and entertainment and comfort and security...*<sup>5</sup>), we serve a God who is infinitely better than all these things.<sup>6</sup>

You will show me the path of life;  
In Your presence is fullness of joy;  
At Your right hand are pleasure forevermore.

~ *Psalm 16:11*

In Him [is] life, and [this] life [is] the light of men.

~ *John 1:4*

...All things were created through Him and for Him.  
He [comes] before all things, and in Him all things consist.

~ *Colossians 1:16–17*

That is the God that we serve.

And this (the Bible) is our guide as following Him as a family together.

## THE CHURCH IN COMMUNITY

2. God is calling us to be people who love the church, not people who leave the church.

For the next couple of months, every book that we are going to look at was written to the local church. *Why?* Because Jesus meant for His people to do life *together* as a family.

If God meant for His people to be in perfect churches (*or in churches that were close to perfect*) then half of our NT wouldn't exist because the majority of it was written to local churches that had all kinds of problems – as we will continue to see...

Yes, your church has problems (more than you probably know)... but that doesn't mean you *leave*: it means you love (one another) and you look (to what God wants to teach you in His Word).

## CHURCH

- The church wasn't man's idea; it was God's idea (**Matt 16:18**)
- The church isn't a program or an association; it's the body of Jesus Christ (**1 Cor 12:27**)

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

~ *1 Corinthians 12:27*

- And we don't build the church; God builds His church (**Matt 16:18**)
- And we didn't pay for the church; God purchased the church (**Acts 20:28**)<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Phil 3:19.

<sup>6</sup> "Better" by Pat Barrett. "We know that...there is no other God..." (1 Cor 8:4).

<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor 6:20; 7:23.

Therefore take heed to yourselves [*elders*] and to all the flock,  
among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,  
to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

~ *Acts 20:28*

And He has commanded us in His Word to love the church, not to leave it.

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,  
Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some,  
But exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

~ *Hebrews 10:24–25*

- What does it mean to “*stir up love and good works*”?
  - Read 1 Corinthians!
  - Because that’s what Paul is talking about.

Let all that you do be done with love.

~ *1 Corinthians 15:14*

- What should it look like when we are “*assembling...ourselves together*”?
  - Read 1 Corinthians!
  - Because that’s what Paul is talking about.

Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts,  
Let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.

~ *1 Corinthians 14:12*

How is it then, brethren?

Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue,  
has a revelation, has an interpretation.  
Let all things be done for edification.

~ *1 Corinthians 14:26*

- What does it look like to “*exhort one another*”?
  - Read 1 Corinthians!
  - Because that’s the whole point of this book.

It means that we come alongside one another (in our weakness, in our brokenness, in our sin) and with love and humility, we continue to point one another to the glory of God, the gospel of Jesus, and the truths in this Book.

## THE CHURCH IN CHRIST

For you see **your calling**, brethren,  
That *not many wise* according to the flesh, *not many mighty, not many noble*, are called.

But **God has chosen** the *foolish things* of the world to put to shame the wise,  
and **God has chosen** the *weak things* of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;  
and the *base things* of the world and *the things which are despised* **God has chosen**,  
and *the things which are not*, to bring to nothing the things that are,  
that no flesh should glory in His presence.

But of Him you are in Christ Jesus,  
Who became for us **wisdom** from God  
– and **righteousness** and **sanctification** and **redemption** –  
that, as it is written,  
“He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.”<sup>8</sup>  
~ *1 Corinthians 1:26–31*

The local church is not perfect.

As you look around the local church...

- You won't find many who are wise.
- You won't find many who are mighty or noble.

But, by God's grace, you **will** find Christ because we are in Him.

When the world looks at the church, it sees:

- Foolishness
- Weakness
- Base things
- Things which are despised
- Things that are nothing...

But, by God's grace, the world will also see Jesus because we are in Him.

## CONCLUSION:

**1 Cor. 10:31**

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<sup>8</sup> 1:2, 9, 30; 3:11; 12:27; 15:3–9, 54–58.