



Expository Preaching from I Corinthians

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Lecture 1: Background and Introductory Comments

The undertaking of the study of a book like First Corinthians is beyond the scope of the time allotted within one semester and therefore demands selectivity. For the conservative student of the word, there are three basic objectives that must guide our selection, examination, and discussion of the materials connected to this letter. They are as follows:

1. To gain an understanding of the background and setting of the Corinthian Church in order to better understand the context of the correspondence.
2. To defend the historicity, authenticity, authority, and inspiration of the correspondence in order to refute the gainsayer. Hence our examination of things like authorship, date, unity, authenticity.
3. We must be able to interpret and apply the content of the document to our lives and to the lives of others in order to preach and teach this section of God's word accurately and meaningfully. Hence the identification and study of interpretational issue, theological themes, and the structure of the book.

I. General Background and Historical Context: The City of Corinth and It's People

A. History

- Corinth had a long-standing history
- Evidence of human settlement and activity on this site for 4000 years Had been established as a city as early as 1000 B.C.
- Because of its geography and strategic location (see below) the city grew rapidly and prospered.
- As Rome came to power in the 2nd century B.C., it find itself at odds with the Grecian city states in the region who had formed a unified front against Rome known as the Achean league. A key city-state in this league was Corinth.
- Things came to a head politically and militarily when the Achean league declared war on Rome's ally, Sparta.
- Eventually the Achean league was defeated in 146 B.C. by the Roman legions under General Lucius Mummius.
- After the battle, most of the members of the league were disbanded but allowed to live in relative freedom. However, since Corinth had been the leader of the league, Rome made her an example.
- The inhabitants of the city along with her leaders were sold into slavery. The city was looted and demolished.
- In 44 B.C. Julius Caesar rebuilt the city and repopulated it with people

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from three primary sources -these sources would shape the cultural and societal environment of this new "Roman Corinth".

- 1) Freedmen
 - 2) Veterans from the Roman Army
 - 3) Urban tradesmen and laborers.
- Julius Caesar recognized the strategic value of the city and determined to make it a Roman outpost/colony (much like Philippi) in order to secure a solid and loyal base for future campaigns to the East (perhaps to Parthia).
 - In order to insure the loyalty of this city- great freedoms were granted to its inhabitants.
 - 1) Roman Citizenship
 - 2) Right to participate in government as in Rome
 - 3) Right to own property
 - 4) Right to protection under Roman law
 - 5) Granting of broad powers and liberal resources to local city magistrates for the building of roads and public buildings (Corinth as a result became a city of public buildings and temples of all sorts)
 - 6) The ability to accumulate wealth and as a Roman outpost, relief from Roman taxes.
 - Consequently, Corinth became a very prosperous and desirable place to live. It eventually became the capital city of the whole region of Achaea which was the counterpart to the region of Macedonia (Greece)
 - Although it was heavily influence by Rome, it still maintained Greek connections as seen in its architecture, idols, and the Isthmian games.

B. Geography

- Corinth was located on a narrow neck of land that connected the Pelopmmesus to the south with the Greek mainland to the North. As such the major trade routes from North to South passed right through Corinth.
- Corinth was also strategically located next to two important harbors. The Aegean Sea on the east and the Adriatic Sea on the west.
- This narrow neck of land was also the location of an important shipping route across land known as the Diolkos- eventually it became a man made channel sparing smaller ships the torturous and lengthy voyage around the Isthums.
- The famous traveler Strabo noted of Corinth:
"Corinth is called wealthy because of its commerce, since it is situated on the Isthmus and is master of two harbors, of which one leads straight to

C. Significance/Importance

Corinth's geography made the city a strategic colony for Rome

1. Commercially strategic- trade routes
2. Socially Strategic -multi-ethnic
3. Politically Strategic- capital of Achaea
4. Militarily Strategic- Sentry City to all of Greece
5. Religiously Strategic -pluralistic

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D. Cultural and Societal Context in Paul's Day

As a result of all of the above, 4 observations can be made:

1. The city community and city culture of Corinth were fanned after a Roman model and not a Greek one. The multiculturalism and religious pluralism of Rome were a defining presence at Corinth.
2. The city community and city culture felt themselves to be prosperous and self sufficient.
3. The core community and core tradition of the city culture were those of trade, business, and entrepreneurial pragmatism in the pursuit of success.
4. The multi-cultural environment combined with success and the pervasiveness of pagan temple worship shaped and influenced the moral environment at Corinth.

Corinth was city of Temples

Famous Temple of Apollo

Temple of Octavia

Renown temple of Asklepios, god of healing

Most famous temple on the Acrocorinth- Temple of Aphrodite

(In earlier days, over 1000 religious prostitutes)

Corinth was a city of Immorality

Evidenced by the nature of the city- seaport city, commerce

Evidenced by the reputation she engendered (to corinthianize)

Evidenced by the votive offerings at the temple of Asklepios - genitalia affected by sexual disease.

- This was the environment in which the Church at Corinth existed.
- The Corinthian Christians were drawn from this background and lived and had their daily intercourse in this environ.

II. Critical Issues **related to Authorship, Dating, Provenance, and Unity**

A Authorship and Authenticity

1. External Evidence
 - a. Clement of Rome assigns to Paul
 - b. Polycarp assigns to Paul
 - c. Irenaeus quotes more than 60x and attributes to Paul
 - d. Marcion the heretic lists this as the 'head of Paul's epistles' in his mutilated canon.
2. Internal Evidence
 - a. Writer calls himself Paul (1:1)
 - b. Events mentioned coincide with Acts and Paul's other Epistles.

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- c. Although radical critics such as Bruno Baur refuse Pauline authorship, most other critics such as Knowling argue that "few if any, other books of the NT come to us with better credentials."

Note: Robertson and Plummer's comment- *"Both the external and internal evidence for the Pauline authorship are so strong that those who attempt to show that the Apostle was not the writer succeed chiefly improving their own incompetence as critics. Subjective criticism of a highly speculative kind does not merit many detailed replies, when it is in opposition to abundant evidence of the most solid character."*

B. Date

Evidence for consideration:

1. Record of Acts 18 and the founding of the Church -Paul stayed at Corinth for a year and six months.
2. Mention of Pricilla and Aquilla come recently from Italy (Acts 18) probably a reference to Claudius decree in 49/50 A.D. where he expelled Jews from Rome.
3. Mention of Gallio -the proconsul (deputy) of Achaia Delphi inscription dates him to 52 A.D.

Delphi Inscription: *Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Pontifex Maximus, in his tribunician power year 12, acclaimed emperor the 26th time, father of the country . . . sends greetings to the city of Delphi. I have long been zealous for the city of Delphi and favorable to it from the beginning, and I have always observed the cult of the Pythian Apollo, but with regard to the present stories, and those quarrels of the citizens of which a report has been made by Lucius Junio Gallio, my friend and proconsul of Achaia ... will still hold the previous settlement.*

- Gallio was the brother of Seneca
- He was in power during Claudius' 26 accolade as emperor which would have been in the first half of 52 A.D. Paul was here during Gallio 's proconsulship and was there for probably a year and a half

4. So the letter must be after 52 A.D. and if one takes into consideration the 1 ½ year stay, it can't be earlier than 53 or 54 A.D.

C. Provenance and Recipients - Church at Corinth

1. Provenance:
 - Probably written to Corinthians from Ephesus
 - In 16:8 we know that Paul was planning to pass through Macedonia and that he mentions being at Ephesus being at Pentecost.

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The phrase, "I will tarry" is better rendered I will remain at Ephesus until Pentecost and implies that Paul was there when he wrote this letter.

- This best matches up with Paul's 3 year stay at Ephesus and would put I Corinthians somewhere in the vicinity of 54 or 55 A.D.

2. Recipients:

a. ***Origins of the church Acts 18***

Account in Acts 18 shows a very unusual beginning. Only other comparable account is that of Ephesus. God assured Paul that He had many people in the city!

b. ***Paul's relationship to the Church***

Founding Father

Spent 1 1/2 years teaching and ministering there

Apparently felt he had to defend his authority (I Cor 9, 11 Cor 10-13)

so it must have been challenged Perhaps there was a faction in the church that was against Paul hence the warnings in I Cor 16 and the strong defense in II Cor 10-13.

c. ***Composition of the Church***

Born out of the conversion of Jewish synagogue leaders

Very obviously a Jewish presence

Most likely though that the majority were Gentiles who were former pagans - evidenced by much of the cultural desire for Greek rhetoric and wisdom in chapter 1 and 2, the familiarity and participation in law suits (6), the pagan immorality (6), the presence of slave and masters (7), the familiarity and practice of eating at temples (8-10).

d. **Problems in the Church-** carnality! One of the Paul's great themes is "stop being carnal!"

D. Unity and Issue of Correspondence

1. Not a shred of textual evidence in the mss of anything other than our existing I and II Corinthians.
2. There does seem to be a hint of additional correspondence.
 - a) 5:9 mentions a former letter that can't be I Corinthians. In this letter he warned against associating with immoral persons. Some, like Moffat, argue this is (in part) II Cor. 6:14-7:1 but there is no evidence for this and no apparent reason for such an interpolation.
 - b) The house of Chloe brought bad news to Paul (1:11)
 - c) A letter from Corinth came for Paul (16:17. Paul seems to be replying to questions they raised in this letter (7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12)
 - d) Paul wrote I Corinthians.
 - e) He is rejected in Asia (II Cor. 1:8-10) and made a quick visit to Corinth and was rebuffed (II Cor. 2:1). He then sends Titus to Corinth (II Cor. 7:6-7).
 - f) *According to some, he wrote a third letter- the sorrowful letter sometimes called the harsh letter. Some feel this is really II Corinthians 10-13.*
 - g) He meets Titus in Macedonia and gets the good report from Titus about the Corinthian's ultimate response (II Cor. 7:6-7)
 - h) He writes II Corinthians.

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My view- 3 letters and only two preserved.

III. Nature, Purpose, and Structure of the Letter

- A. Nature: It is an "occasional letter"
- B. Purpose: It is designed to answer questions and deal with/correct problems in their midst. As such it has a predominantly ethical flavor.
- C. Structure: The book is divided into two main sections with an introduction (1:1-9) and a conclusion (16:15-23)
 - 1. Dealing with Church Problems (1:10- 6)
 - a. Division (1-4)
 - b. Discipline (5)
 - c. Defrauding/Defilement (6)
 - 2. Answering Ethical and Practical Questions (7:1 - 16:15)

Note the pen- de construction

- a. Marriage and Divorce- Relationships (7)
- b. Exercise of Christian Liberty (8-10)
- c. Propriety in Public Worship (11-14)
- d. Theological Necessity of the Resurrection (15)
- e. Answering Questions about the Collection (16)

IV. Theological Themes in the Letter

- 1. Sanctification- Positional and Progressive
- 2. Unity- 4 chapters worth!
- 3. Nature and Message of Gospel
- 4. Union with Christ
- 5. Holy Spirit and Revelation/Illumination
- 6. Ministry
- 7. Corporate Purity and Church Discipline. _ Separation!
- 8. Relational and Personal Purity
- 9. Marriage and Divorce
- 10. Christian Liberty
- 11. Worship- Lord's Table
- 12. Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts
- 13. Reality and Significance of the Resurrection
- 14. Information and Encouragement for Giving and the Collection
- 15. Warning against Heresy and Heretics

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V. Key Interpretational Issues:

1. 1:30 Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus. who of God is made unto us wisdom. and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.
2. 2:9 What is the thing that eye has not seen or ear heard?
3. 1-2 Is the methodology of proclaiming the message neutral?
4. 2:13 What is comparing Spiritual things with Spiritual (explaining spiritual things through words of the Spirit.)
5. 2:15 -16 He that is spiritual judgeth all things yet is judged of no man (evaluates/understands/discerns). We have the mind of Christ (viewpoint, perspective).
6. Chapter 3-4
 - Note the 5 images
 - note comparison between minister and church
 - particular attention to image of builder (3:9-17)
 - Wood, Hay, Stubble?
7. Chapter 5
 - Separation
 - Deliver such a one to Satan- probably a reference here to excommunication
 - 5:9- previous letter- Not an epistolary aorist
8. 7:1 It is good for a man not *to* touch a woman- statement regarding sexual relationships and "spiritual marriages"
9. 8 Christian Liberty
10. 9:22 I am become all things to all men that I might by all means save some
11. 9-10 Metaphors, Baptism of Moses, Idolatry, Food aruwers
12. 11 Head Coverings
13. 12 Holy Spirit and role in spiritual gifts
14. 13:10 That which is perfect
15. 15:3-5 Essence of the Gospel
16. 15:12 Baptism for the Dead

VI. Theological Contribution (see Fee)

A. Eschatology

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- We are redeemed and in a sense already enjoy the permanent benefits of that redemption (sanctification 1:3; union with Christ).
- We are living in the "last days" as evidenced by the presence and gifts of the Spirit (2 and 12-14)
- However, we are also struggling with this present evil age (6) and we live in frail and sin plagued/influence bodies (IS) and as a result we often don't live redemptively as the already redeemed people of God (1:10; S:1 - 6; 7; 8-10; 11; 14). Therefore we have experienced the chastisement of God (5 -excommunication; 11 death).
- Death, although robbed of its ultimate power and sting, still exists for us as a present reality
- But, there is a consummation to come with resurrection and future glory (15)

B. The Gospel and Ethical life

- Paul makes it clear that the gospel is to have radical effect on every area of our life.
- From the way we minister the gospel
- The effect it has on our unity with one another
- Our ability to understand and receive spiritual truth even when we are not understood
- It affects our perspective and methodology on ministry
- It affects our relationships to each other as believers and even to our own body
- It has radical implications for all relationships in life (married both to save and unsaved partners; master/servant; child/parent)
- It affects our participation in all activities -we are free but not to live unto ourselves.
- Note: The gospel itself is at stake in the Corinthian's theology and behavior.

C. The Church

- Note Fee's Observation: "Perhaps the single greatest theological contribution of our letter to the Christian faith is Paul's understanding

III. Propositional Displays:

A. Note the foreshadowing that occurs in this opening statement. Paul is laying groundwork in a subtle manner for issues that he is going to have to correct.

A. *English:*

1. Called to be an Apostle (1:1) -deals with the arrogance of some against him. This is seen in that some have chosen to identify themselves with Apollos or Cephas over against Paul (1:10 ff). This theme is revisited in Paul's reminder that he and Apollos are simply laborers in God's harvest (3). He stresses his authority as an apostle in 9:1-10.

2. Church of God- this is an unusual greeting statement. Normally the church is identified only by its location. Here the stress is on the possessive genitive- it is God's church and not theirs, or Paul's, or

Paul,

and Sosthenes

called *as* an apostle
of Jesus Christ
by the will of God,

our brother,

Apollos'. Paul is going to address their divisions and selfish factionalism. To the church of God which is at Corinth,

To those who were given to exalting themselves above others- this was not their assembly. To those who followed a particular servant of God (Paul, Apollos) this was not the church of their teacher but of God. To those who desired to use their spiritual gift for self-serving ends, this was not their church -it is God's.

3. With all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours. This again is a foreshadow for what Paul is going to say about their lack of unity. In light of the proud and arrogant factionalism at Corinth, Paul is intentionally connecting them to the larger community of Christ. The "spiritual" faction that has opposed Christ and set themselves apart from and above others in the church are reminded that in fact, they are not the only ones who have called upon the Lord. Those who claim to be "unique" followers of Christ (1:10ff) are reminded in no uncertain terms that Jesus is not just their Lord- He is the Lord of all who have

to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling,
with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

their *Lord* and ours: Grace to you
and peace

from God our Father

called upon His name at Corinth and elsewhere. and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul focuses on their unity with the overall body of Christ.

Common calling- saints

Common Activity of God in their lives- sanctified

Common practice/faith -they all called on the same Lord and they have Him as Lord in common with each other.

B. Note the stress on "calling".

Paul is going to establish that he has received a special and weighty honor from the Lord- he has been called by God to be an authoritative representative. He would guard this authority and exercise it responsibly for the sake of the Gospel

2 7

Grace-

Paul's adaptation of the standard greeting- "rejoice" Both the idea of blessing and benefits

And the idea of permanent state or realm

Tied very closely to the nature and character of God Tied very intimately with the presence of God

Peace-

Concept here is much more than quietness or absence of conflict Idea here is harmony

Note- the Corinthians did not evidence peace in their midst. Not in harmony with Paul (I :!Off; 2:1-5; 9:1-5), each other 1:10; 5:1; 6; 7; II), or God (II- many were dead).

God and Christ-

Source of peace is not Paul but God

Note that-God the Father and Jesus Christ are both identified and connected in relationship to Grace and Peace.

The cross work of Christ is the essential element to bringing man into a state of grace and into a harmonious relationship with Christ.

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rather than for his own benefit (9). He would diligently protect himself and labor spiritually in order to avoid the danger of disqualification from such an honored call.

Like Paul, the Corinthians had also received a special and weighty call from the Lord- they had been called to serve as His "holy ones." Unlike Paul, they were not guarding their calling very well. Their careless attitude toward sin and carnality was unbecoming to their status and calling and Paul would warn them about the danger of disqualification and being set aside under the chastening of God (9) as was Israel in the OT (10).

Paul is not the only one who has been set apart for special duty- they had also been set apart. Like Paul they had a divine vocation- a serious and weighty one. Like Paul, they needed to take their vocation seriously and live accordingly.

C. Note the foreshadowing of our union with Christ- being in Christ (1:2). We have been sanctified- we have been set aside for God's special use and the spiritual arena where we now find ourselves permanently placed is "in Christ." Paul is going to develop this theme more fully by showing us several incredible benefits in 1:31.

D. Note the emphasis on sanctification and holiness. They have been sanctified- perfect passive (1:2). They are the "holy" of God- the saints.

OT connection to the term Qadosh- to separate or set apart in contrast to being in common use.

Like the temple vessels and priests of the OT, believers have been permanently set apart and identified as God's unique possession. Consequently, they are to reflect this holiness in their lives. (Note temple imagery in chapter 3 corporately and chapter 6 personally).

The perfect tense in 1:2 refers to the permanent and present effects of sanctification (positional), where the aorist tense in 6:11 refers more to the transitional and transformational event that occurred when the Corinthians came to faith!

E. Note the emphasis on Grace and Peace

Law and Grace- A Pauline Perspective

Lecture Five- Christian Liberty in First Corinthians 8-10

I Corinthians 9:22b *'I am made all things to all men, that I might by some means save some.'*

Introduction:

Christian observes of modern American culture are becoming increasingly alarmed at the growing secularization of evangelical Christendom. Some culture watchers such as Doug Leblanc even claim that American Christians are now living in a "post-Christian" culture (Moody, 1994). Modern culture has permeated the American church to the point that there is often no identifiable difference between the lifestyle of a professed believer and that of a non-believer. Modern Christians most clearly display this permeation through the choices they make in their personal conduct. Believers of past generations influenced the world around them by maintaining a distinct identity as children of God. They differed from members of the surrounding society in certain areas of personal conduct. Sadly, modern believers have often failed to preserve this distinct identity, making choices in their personal conduct that do not distinguish them from the secular world around them.

Although the majority of conservative evangelicals still feel that issues such as abortion and immorality are unacceptable behavioral choices, it is alarming to note that these same conservative believers are making behavioral choices that the previous generation viewed as unacceptable. This trend is evidenced by a survey of behavioral norms among evangelical students that revealed that 93% of those surveyed disapproved of smoking in 1951 compared to 70% in 1961 and only 51% in 1982. 98% disapproved of drinking in 1951 compared to 78% in 1961 and only 17% in 1982 (James D. Hunter, *Evangelicalism, The Coming Generation*, 59). These alarming trends have continued to degenerate since 1982 (Scaiacca, *Generation at Risk* and Barna, *The Barna Report*, 1992-1993).

Frequently, believers defend choices in these areas by arguing that such choices fall within the legitimate bounds of Christian liberty. Furthermore, many prominent evangelical leaders and preachers have widely advanced and defended this argument through their teaching and writing ministries. The leading champion for this new teaching emphasis is Charles Swindoll whose bestseller, *The Grace Awakening*, issues a decisive call to arms against those who would in any way oppose a believer exercising his Christian liberty to engage in behavior that many conservative believers consider worldly. It is not surprising to discover that many evangelicals defend their liberty by appealing to Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 8-10, and they often appeal to one specific verse: *"I am made all things to all men"* (I Cor 9:22). *Is this really the case? Do such choices really fall in the arena of legitimate Christian Liberty as presented in these passages? Clearly, a thorough and careful examination of Paul teaching in this pericope is in order*

Real problem here has to do with establishing the bounds of the proper and improper practice of Christian liberty.

- A. A. Contributing Factors: Why was this such a big issue at Corinth?
 - i 1. Polytheistic culture permeated by idolatry
 - 2. Diverse backgrounds (Jews/Gentile pagans)

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3. Different levels of spiritual maturity
4. Pervasive carnality
5. Personal selfishness rather than servanthood mentality

Note: All of these are present in the modern evangelical community

B. Central Flaws: There were two things that added to the above:

1. These believers were not operating out of selfless love but out of selfish arrogance- "knowledge" and "rights"
2. These believers failed to understand the basic nature and purpose for Christian liberty- this lack of understanding resulted in its misuse! (It

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by being involved in idolatry! Knowledge is not always reliable!
It is possible that my action that I think I have a right to do is actually causing me to sin before God.

F. The effect of an action on the Honor of God must regulate that action.
(I Cor.10:14-22; 31)

- I must learn to identify God's true concerns and protect them.

G. The legitimate interpretation of my freedom/action by another must regulate the exercise of that action. (10:27-30)

- Don't eat the meat if questioned by another believer!

IV. Misconceptions Refuted

A. A particular activity not expressly forbidden by scripture is permissible provided no violation of his conscience occurs.

- No specific prohibition for eating meat- Paul gives a general principle of loving your brother and then a specific application- don't eat meat!

B. To challenge another believer in his exercise of liberty is judgmental and unloving.
(Swindall's statement of Haggai)

Nature of Christian Liberty: God's gracious gift through the Gospel whereby men are no longer obligated to fulfill certain aspects of the ceremonial law. (Acts 10-11)

Purpose For Christ. Liberty: To allow the Gospel to spread beyond Jerusalem into the Gentile world (Acts 15).

Responsibility in Use of CL: Use it as a tool to advance the Gospel. Use it selflessly!

Problem at Corinth: They saw it primarily as a right or for pleasure or self enjoyment or convenience. God wanted them to use it strategically- they were using it selflessly. Result was division and destruction!

NOTE: When liberty is accompanied by spiritual destruction and division, then it is not being used properly! This is a sure sign that liberty is being misused!

C. At times the scruples of the weak must be violated in order to win the lost.

- Not what Paul commanded in 10:28-30. Do not adopt an end justifies the means practice when it comes to this area.

Only part of Paul's appeal to Corinthians was on his authority as an Apostle. Much of what he stated was based on OT passages that he used to bring authority to the words he was stating.

Conclusion:

1. The incorrect use of knowledge in Christian liberty= arrogance
2. The careless use of knowledge often leads to real spiritual danger in the life of a believer (ie., idolatry of the Corinthians)
3. An improper focus on liberty results in self-gratification rather than service

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3. !

