

# What the Church Should Be

## An Overview of 1 Corinthians

**BI: Considering the many things the church in Corinth got wrong gives Paul the opportunity to show us what the church really ought to be.**

After reading the apostolic letter of 1 Corinthians if you didn't know any better you might think the author was communicating with an American church. After all, America was founded on the ideas of freedom and liberty. Our country is characterized by rugged individualism, personal fulfillment, immediate gratification and the exaltation of self. These are what characterized the church in Corinth and Paul wrote this letter in an attempt to correct some of the problems that grew out of this mindset. Such values may have their place in pioneering a new country, but when applied to a local church context, they are positively disastrous.

We have learned a lot from this letter over the past three years of our study, and this morning, before we move on to our next text, I want to take one last look at this letter as a whole and kind-of refresh ourselves on its content in one sitting.

The theme of Paul's letter is the Church. This is important for us today because, as Mark Dever puts it, "The idea of church, pervasive at different points in Christian history, has dissolved in the acids of the reigning individualism of today's culture. Too often, churches have become no more than expressions of the passing interests of their congregants." Truer words have seldom been spoken. The church in America is a mess precisely because we have allowed the world to creep in. Paul planted this church in Corinth, but now he was fighting to get Corinth out of the church.

A major shift needed to take place in the minds of the Corinthian believers. They completely misunderstood the purpose of the church. Here's a question: What is the church for? Think about it for a moment. What do you think the church is for? Let me give you a hint. The answer to that question does not begin with what the church can do for you. It begins by considering what the church can do for God. Clearly, the church benefits Christians in enormous and essential ways. It is God's primary means of grace, second only to His written word.

As Dever says, "When we begin to understand this, we turn the corner from a self-centered involvement in the church to full-blown, God-centered *life together* to which God calls us for his own purposes." You see, beloved, the church exists for God first and me second. Therefore, when I think about church, and when I gather with the church, my mind should not first of all be considering what the church can do for me, but rather what I should do for the other members of the body to magnify the glory of God.

With that in mind we are ready to ask the question, what should the church be? The answer to that question begins in 1:2 where Paul writes, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, 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."

### **I. The Church is to be Holy:**

1. No notice two words here in the NAS, “sanctified,” and “saints.” These are different forms of the same word. In the GK they are *hagiazō* and *hagios*. The root of both of these terms is the word “holy.”

2. What does the word holy mean? Well, it has two primary meanings. First, to be holy means to be set apart; to be different. When the Bible speaks of God as being holy, it means first of all that God is different from everything in creation. He is not a creature, He is the Creator. He is the Holy One. He is not like us. He is in a class all by Himself.

3. Christian people are called by God to represent God in the world. One of the terms Paul uses for salvation is “sanctify.” In other words, by grace, through faith God sets us apart as unique in the world. Jerry Bridges points out that the phrase “sanctified and saints by calling” literally means “Those who are separated in Christ Jesus, called to be separate ones” (Respectable Sins, p. 12) We are not like everyone else because we belong to Christ. This finds significant application among the brothers in Corinth as Paul begins addressing their worldliness.

4. Here in chapter 1, Paul begins combating the abject worldliness of the brothers in Corinth. Starting verse 10 he identifies their worldly divisiveness. Read 10-13.

5. Listen, wherever there are sinners there is going to be friction, but divisiveness should never be tolerated in the church. In Corinth, however, they were not only tolerating it, they were encouraging it! Why? Because that’s what the world does. The world is about individualism and selfishness and celebrity worship.

6. They also divided over education and the ability to sound wise. This is Greece, after all; the incubator of worldly philosophy, sophistry, and revelations. But beginning in verse 18, Paul compares worldly wisdom with “the word of the cross.” In contrast to their unquenchable thirst for wisdom and knowledge, Paul says (2:2) “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” In other words, true wisdom begins with God’s gospel of Jesus Christ.

7. Paul addresses their divisiveness all the way through chapter four. At the end of chapter three, however, he reminds them of how uncharacteristic it is for believers to be at odds with one another. We are holy. We are sanctified saints before God. We are like the temple of God in Israel. There was no other building in all the world like the temple of the living God. It was unique. It was set apart by God. It was holy.

8. Here in chapter three, then, Paul asks (3:16), “Do you not know that you (church) are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” In other words, You are holy. You have been set apart from the world by God Himself to show the world what He is like.

8. Do you realize that there has never once, in all of eternity, existed any division or conflict between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? They have always lived in perfect unity and absolute harmony. Therefore, unity should be important to us. When there is sin, reconciliation should be paramount of us. Why? Because the church exists for God. We live to glorify Him. That’s what it means to be holy. We are set apart by God. Therefore, the way we live and relate to one another

should not be indistinguishable from the way the world lives and relates to one another. To be holy is to pursue unity.

9. Second, the term holy not only means to be set apart as special and different, but it carries the idea of Moral Purity as well.

10. In chapter five Paul pounces on their cavalier attitude about immorality. A man in the church was actually sleeping with his step-mother (5:1). This was so contrary to their identity as a holy people that Paul commanded them to stop boasting about their tolerance of the immoral man and expel him from the church!

11. In chapter 6:12-20 Paul comes back to the issue again when he addresses the fact that some of the members of the church had a permissive view about prostitution. So he exhorts them (v. 18) to “Flee sexual immorality.” And then he once again appeals to the temple analogy. (19-20 Look at it with me) “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? <sup>20</sup> For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

12. You see, they thought the church was all about themselves. Paul knew that the church was all about God. It was His name that was at stake. It was His reputation — His glory that was on the line. What is the church to be? The church is to be holy.

## **II. The Church is to be United:**

1. We have already mentioned unity, but beginning in chapter six (v. 1) it becomes an even greater issue. There were actually people in the church who were so angry and embittered against one another that they were taking one another to court. Read v. 1

2. In Chapter 7 he had to address the disunity of divorce and remarriage. In Chapters 8-10 he addresses the disunity and confusion caused by flaunting their liberties. Once again, they thought the church was all about themselves — getting what they wanted, satisfying their own desires. In fact, their abuse of personal liberties were even having an effect on their ministry to the world because (9:12) it was becoming a hindrance to the gospel.

3. What is the proper perspective on liberties in the church? Paul says, (9:19) “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win the more.” You see, Paul didn’t live for his own agenda. He lived for God’s agenda. He understood that the church exists first and foremost for God.

4. This should have been obvious to them. Why? Because every time they took the Lord’s supper together it reminded them of God’s call to unity. Read 10: 16-17.

5. If the we are going to be united body, each individual need to understand the supremacy of God in the church and resolve to live not for themselves, but for the glory of God in our love and service to one another. A key verse in this section is Paul’s statement in 10:24.

6. Then he ties it all together in v. 31

7. But the Corinthians were missing the point entirely. Rather than the Lord's supper being a reminder of the unity God desired for them to have, it simply gave them another venue to exercise their selfish individualism. Read 11:20-22.

8. This divisiveness of theirs was scandalous to Paul. And God was so concerned about it at the Lord's table that some of them had been disciplined by him through sickness, and others had died because of it. Now that's serious!

9. There was disunity caused by women who refused to wear the customary sign of submission on their heads. And then, beginning with chapter 12 we learn of the disunity over spiritual gifts.

10. We know this was Paul's primary concern here because in 12:7, he says "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." And then, after explaining that they were to see themselves as different members of the same body, he explains (25) "so that that there may be no divisions in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another."

11. So the church is to be holy, and united. Third...

### **III. The Church is to be Loving:**

1. What was powerful enough to bind these uniquely gifted people together in one body? In a word -- LOVE (Chap 13). Read 13:1-3.

2. The fact is the gifts were given *NOT* to bring self-fulfillment, but to edify (build up) the body.

14:3 "The one who prophesies speaks to men for edification.

14:4 "The one who speaks in a tongue (gibberish) edifies himself."

14:4 "The one who prophesies edified the church."

14:5 "so that the church may receive edifying."

14:12 "Seek to abound for edification."

14:19 "In the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also rather than ten thousand words in a tongue."

14:26 "Let all things be done for edification."

3. This is what love is all about. It's not pursuing a desire to feel loved by others, but serving others, sacrificing for others, giving to other whatever they need that I have because God wants me to.

4. What will inspire you to love like that? How about a future orientation that is fixed upon the final resurrection (Chapter 15). The resurrection is what makes all of our sacrifices for one another and for the gospel meaningful. Indeed, (19) "if we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied."

5. You see, our hope is not in this world or in this life. We are the church. We have been called to be sanctified saints who live, not for ourselves and not for the present. We live for God and we live for the resurrection.

6. The promise of the resurrection is what inspires us and encourages us to be holy, unified, and loving in the church. The promises of one day being with God moves us to represent God faithfully while we await His appearing.

7. Read 15:51-58

8. And so, as Chapter 16 concludes, we give sacrificially, we develop ministry plans courageously, we honor one another, submit to those in authority, love Jesus and wait eagerly for his return. As Paul says in 16:22, Maranatha: "Oh Lord, Come."