

First Corinthians Book Report (May 8 2023)

1. introductory thoughts

- a. “if you think *your* church has problems, read First Corinthians”—there is some consolation in the common miseries of sin
- b. emphasis on ecclesiology (what it means to be the church)
- c. instructional and correctional (reformatory); correction requires confrontation
- d. Corinth was a true church that needed instruction and spiritual maturity; Paul addresses them as a father to a son (“parental”): Pastoral Relations—strengthening the churches with outside help; authority is not restricted to the local church
- e. only a few commendations for Corinth . . . but
- f. they had the gospel message and showed the fruits of conversion
- g. not a theological book but still rich in that regard
 - i. Christology as the point of unification in the body and the source of authority in the church
 - ii. Pneumatology as the power of God for salvation, gifting, sanctification
- h. doctrinal in matters of practice
- i. the gospel produced abundant fruit which led to chaos because of a prevailing selfish spirit
- j. they needed a little more “form” and a little less “freedom”—and that form was the motive of unselfish love toward one another
- k. corrective without being overly prescriptive (and restrictive)—still lots of freedom within the form
- l. addressed to the Corinthian church but intended for the whole church (then and now)
- m. we should expect this book to be edifying in all the churches—which is to say, that the problems in Corinth were not unique for that time and place
- n. there was too much Corinth in the church and not enough Christ; the culture is distorting their doctrine and life
- o. because the work of the Spirit was evident in their gifts, Paul would have had good reason to expect a favorable response

2. three marks

- a. preaching the gospel (corrections to worship)
- b. observing the sacraments (principle of unity)
- c. church discipline (necessity of holiness—personal and corporate)

3. major themes

- a. unity
 - i. locally
 - ii. globally
 - iii. universally
 - iv. constant address as “brethren” (28x)
 - v. Paul doesn’t pull rank or undermine local authority (on the contrary); he is addressing divisions in a way that wouldn’t make them worse
 - vi. surprising? no direct mention of officers, but they are right in the middle of the narrative (“egalitarian authority”); perhaps he is more concerned about urging submission without the elders having to resort to force
 - vii. the diversity in this church (especially in regard of loyalties and gifts) was a source of friction and faction

- viii. family/body theme: brethren; Paul as spiritual father and Corinthians as spiritual children who need to grow up; one body with many parts (and the most humble might be the most important)
 - ix. unity by division: “there must be divisions among you”: 5:13; 6:9-10; 11:19; 16:22
- b. orderly worship
 - i. disorderly worship dishonors God
 - ii. how to live in a culture of idolatry; idols are nothing, but conscience matters (take care not to offend your sensitive brethren)
 - iii. support for elders in the church (a right that Paul surrenders in his own case)
 - iv. gifts—especially prophecy and tongues; there are many gifts; they are not all equally important; most of them are temporary; they are given by the Spirit according to his will; they are given for the upbuilding of the church; the greatest gift is love
 - v. witness to outsiders—they should be convicted to the point of worshiping God
 - vi. sacraments—not about the one who performs it (baptism) or the elements as food (communion) but both demonstrate participation in the one body of Christ
 - vii. submission as a demonstration of order in the home and the church (the alternative is anarchy)
- c. holiness
 - i. the church can’t grow if individuals don’t grow
 - ii. individual growth requires instruction and correction
 - iii. the church has authority to impose sanctions
 - iv. examples of disobedience and discipline (past and present); failure to exercise discipline in the church invites the discipline of God
 - v. individual contentions that drag brothers into court
 - vi. priority of sexual purity, sanctity of marriage, and limits of divorce
- d. fellowship
 - i. knit together in love—concern for others (the antithesis of selfish ambition)
 - ii. caring for temporal and spiritual concerns
- e. future hope
 - i. looking “up”—knowing that this life is temporary and that our hope is in heaven
 - ii. Christ as the firstfruits is the guarantee that we will follow
 - iii. what is temporary must pass away; the corruptible natural body gives way to the incorruptible spiritual body
- 4. modern applications (each of which are an occasion for idolatry)
 - a. unity—in a culture that revels in factionalism, identitarianism, and associationalism
 - b. orderly worship—in the face of modern “innovative” commercial consumer-driven worship
 - c. holiness—especially the concern for separation from the world; we are inculturated to a degree that is beneath our conscious awareness (superficial, selfish, moralistic, hedonistic)
 - d. fellowship—based on a spiritual connection that is deeper and more permanent than the closest family kinship (even marriage)
 - e. future hope—as temporal creatures we put most of our time and attention on temporal (temporary) affairs; the promises of the gospel go beyond this life to eternity
- 5. sermon outlines
 - a. Unity in Christ
 - b. Gospel Power and Wisdom (everything depends upon the spiritual work of conversion)
 - c. The Power and Promise of the Resurrection
 - d. Being a Godly Church in a Godless Culture

- e. Worshiping in Good Order
- f. Marriage and Divorce in the Church
- g. Spiritual Gifts and Edification of the Body
- h. The Dangers of Worldliness and Modern Syncretism; church as a cultural oasis
- i. Authority and Responsibility of Leadership; honoring those in authority (with submission and financial support)
- j. Christian Liberty
- k. Love as the Greatest Gift (eternal)