

From the Garden to Glory

First Corinthians

Author: Paul the Apostle

Written to: The Church in Corinth

Timeline: c. 56 - 57 A.D. written from Ephesus on Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 19)

Theme: Correcting a Worldly and Carnal Church

Purpose of writing: Paul wrote to the Corinthians responding to a letter that he received from them with questions concerning different issues. Paul answered their questions, corrected their carnality and gave instructions in spiritual matters.

Introduction:

Paul founded the Corinthian church on his second missionary journey (Acts 18) and ministered there a year and a half. After he left, serious problems developed in the church such as: divisions, immorality, legal battles, marital problems, abuses of the Lord's Supper, disorderly conduct in the assembly, and the use of spiritual gifts. Paul addressed all these issues in his epistle. The church in Corinth was carnal through and through. As Moffatt put it so concisely, "*The Church was in the world, as it had to be, but the world was in the Church, as it ought not to be.*" This carnality is still common in many congregations today. Let it not be so in our own lives.

As we begin our study of the book of 1 Corinthians consider the following questions and write your responses:

1. Corinth was a busy and prosperous city, probably similar to much of the United States today. What are some of the benefits of living in a culture of busyness and prosperity? What are some of the dangers?

2. Even by the pagan standards of its time, Corinth was known for debauchery and immorality, again similar to many large metropolitan areas of our day. What are some problems that Christians who come from this kind of immoral background might face? In contrast, what are problems that those who come from a *religious* (but non-Christian) background might face?

3. Paul spent more time establishing the church in Corinth than anywhere else except Ephesus. Even so, he seemed to be unappreciated there, constantly defending himself to them. How do you remain encouraged and loving when you feel that you are unappreciated?

Division in the Church

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-17

1. In Paul's salutation (verse 2), he referred to the church of Corinth as *the church of God*. He seemed to be reminding them (and us) that the church belonged to *God* and not to *man*. How would a church that is God's differ from one that is man's? As you consider your own area of ministry in the church, what are you doing to insure that it remains the former?

2. How many times did Paul use the name of Jesus or a pronoun referring to Him in the first ten verses of this epistle? Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is a corrective one. Why is it important to keep the focus on Jesus when giving correction? How do you do this?

3. Read verses 10-17. As Paul began to rebuke the Corinthians for the division in their midst, he addressed them not as adversaries but as *brethren*. What would this have done in the mind of the hearer? What can cause division in the church today? Why is division so

harmful? What do you do personally to avoid division in the body of Christ?

Human Wisdom

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16

1. Read 1:26-31. How have these verses become a reality in your own life? What does it mean in practical terms: *He who glories, let him glory in the Lord* (verse 1:31)?
2. Make a note of what you learn about human wisdom from 2:1-5. Why was Paul determined not to address the Corinthians with human wisdom? Look at verse 5. How is faith in man's wisdom the opposite of the faith in the power of God?
3. What do you learn about godly wisdom from 2:6-16? Read verse 16 carefully. How has the Lord instructed you? What does it mean to *have the mind of Christ*? List at least one way that having *the mind of Christ* has changed the way you view some aspect of life.

Worldliness in the Church

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-23

1. Define the word *carnal*. Paul said that carnality among the brethren led to problems such as *envy, strife and divisions*. What are you doing to make sure that you are not leading a carnal life?

2. Consider your own life as you read verses 5-8. In practical terms, what does it mean *to plant* and *to water*? Is the Lord calling *you* to plant or water at this point in your life? What are you doing to obey this call?
3. In verses 18-23 Paul exhorted the Corinthians to avoid *the wisdom of the world*. Name some forms of *worldly wisdom* that are currently being believed in our world?

Immorality in the Church

Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

1. Paul spoke against sexual immorality in verse 1. Why is sexual immorality such a danger in God's church? It is necessary to be aware of this danger and to have a plan for protection (see 1 Corinthians 10:12). List several specific ways that you guard your heart, mind and body so that you do not fall into temptation and sexual immorality.
2. Look at 5:2. Paul uses the term *puffed up* at least five other times in this epistle (4:6, 4:18, 4:19, 8:1, and 13:4). What does it mean to be *puffed up*? How could being *puffed up* lead to immorality and divisions? Ask the Lord to search your heart for any areas of your life where you are *puffed up*. Confess anything He reveals and walk in the freedom of forgiveness and humility.
3. Read verses 9-13, concentrating on verse 11. Why is it necessary to avoid keeping company with a brother or sister in Christ who is living in immorality? How could such disobedient believers cause a problem if they are allowed to remain in fellowship with those who are obedient?

The Lord's Supper

Read 1 Corinthians 11:1-34

1. Read verse 1. To whom might you say these words? What does it mean to imitate Christ? What is one area of your life where you need to imitate Him more consistently?
2. Summarize what you learn about participation in the Lord's Supper from verses 17-34.
3. Paul directs his readers to examine themselves in verse 28. How do you examine yourself? Be specific.

Hymn of Love

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

1. Look at verses 1-3. Paul's point is that as wonderful as good works and spiritual gifts are, they are hollow without love. Why does *love* need to be the motivating force in a Christian's life?
2. It has been said that verses 4-8 are a description of Jesus Christ. As you look at this many faceted definition of love in verses 4-7, consider the Lord's love. Share how each of these describes the Lord's love for you.
 - suffers long
 - is kind
 - does not envy
 - does not parade itself

- is not puffed up
- does not behave rudely
- does not seek its own
- is not provoked
- thinks no evil
- does not rejoice in iniquity
- rejoices in the truth
- bears all things
- believes all things
- hopes all things
- endures all things

3. Look at verse 13. Why is *love* the greatest of these virtues?

The Resurrection

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-58

1. Verses 3-4 give a wonderful definition of the Gospel, the Good News, of Jesus Christ. Take some time today and meditate on the Good News of Jesus Christ. Record your thoughts.

2. Read verses 12-19. Paul said that if Jesus is not risen then their faith was empty and futile. He also said that *if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable*. In your own

words, how would explain the significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ to an unbeliever?

3. Look at verse 58. How does knowing that *your labor is not in vain in the Lord* cause you to do each of the following?

- be steadfast

- be immovable

- always abounding in the work of the Lord

Summary

As you conclude your study of the book of 1 Corinthians consider the following questions and write your answers:

1. What is the most significant thing that you have learned from your study about the Lord, His character, or His attributes? How does this encourage you? Take a few moments to thank and praise the Lord for the things that you learned about Him.

2. What is the most important lesson or new insight that you have learned from your study of this book? How can you apply this lesson in your life this week?