

Place: Lurgan Baptist 26:1:2016

## A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

### 47. THE BOOK OF 1 CORINTHIANS

Many Christians imagine that the Christian life would be a lot easier if we could recover the conditions of a previous era. Some look back wistfully to the 1859 revival which swept through our province. For others it is the Welsh revival of 1904 still others go back to the Methodist revival of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and for others they look back with longing to the Puritan era. But perhaps the most popular choice would be a return to the days of the New Testament. It is assumed that if we could return to those times all would be well. We forget, that the church of New Testament times, had problems too. Take for example this church at Corinth. No church founded by Paul had more problems than this church yet we can be thankful to the Lord, that because of the difficulties in this church we have these two marvellous letters. My .... there is almost no modern day local church problem that is not covered in 1 Corinthians. This church was filled with theological, moral, and personal problems.

1. They were following human leaders: ( 1:12 )
2. They were bragging about what little wisdom they had: (1:20 )
3. They were like babies spiritually: ( 3:3 )
4. They were defiling their bodies: ( 3:17 )

5. They were puffed up: ( 4:18 )
6. They were tolerating sexual sin in the church: ( 5:1 )
7. They were suing each other in heathen courts: ( 6:1 )
8. They were confused about marriage: ( 7:1 )
9. They had abused the doctrine of Christian liberty: ( 8:9 )
10. They were not dressing properly in the house of God: ( 11:6 )
11. They had made a mockery of the Lord's Supper: ( 11:30 )
12. They had corrupted the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially tongues:
13. They were confused on the subject of the resurrection: ( 15:1 )
14. They had not been giving properly: ( 16:1 )

It has been said that if sins were horses this church could have filled many stables. You talk about problems. I tell you this first letter to the church at Corinth captures the problems and temptations we face as believers in our own culture. Of all the cities we find in the New Testament Corinth most closely resembles Western Society today. Think for a moment about,

#### 1. THE CITY:

Do you see ( 1:2 ) ? Corinth was a wealthy city of the Roman Empire. It was situated on a narrow neck of land that joined the southern part of Greece to the northern part. It had two harbours one facing eastward toward the

Aegean Sea and the other facing westward toward the Adriatic. Because of its location Corinth became the marketplace of the rich trade that flowed between the eastern and western parts of the Empire. So,

**Corinth was a city of Commerce:** Through its two harbours came all kinds of goods from all over the Roman Empire. It had a cosmopolitan population Jews, and Greeks. Over seven hundred thousand people lived in this city. The Isthmian games, one of the two most famous athletic events of that day ( Olympic games ) was hosted by Corinth causing more people traffic.

**Corinth was a city of Culture:** The Corinthians prided themselves on their culture, refinement and dignity. It was a city that drew the great thinkers and speakers of Greece who would gather in the public forums and talk endlessly about ideas and issues.

**Corinth was a city of Corruption:** Indeed it became so morally corrupt that its name became synonymous with filth, To “ *corinthianize*,” came to represent gross immorality and drunken debauchery. In ( Ch 6 ) Paul lists some of the specific sins for which the city was noted and which had previously marked the lives of the believers there. You see, Corinth was devoted to the worship of the goddess of sex. In the city there was a temple dedicated to the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite. Some 1,000 priestesses who were “ *religious*,” prostitutes lived and worked there and came down into the city in the evening to offer their services to male citizens and foreign visitors. My .... it was into this city of commerce, culture and

corruption came the apostle Paul with the message of the gospel. You see,

## **2. THE CHURCH:**

In Corinth was founded by Paul on his second missionary journey. ( Acts 18:1 ) Concerning the Corinthians we read “ *And many of the Corinthians hearing believed and were baptized.*” ( Acts 18:8 ) Paul stayed in the city of Corinth for eighteen months and it seems that the work of God there was also established by Apollos. ( Acts 18:27 ) You know, ***the two biggest battles*** for any church is how to keep the church in the world, *that is evangelism*, the other battle is how to keep the world of the church that is *holiness*. Most pastoral problems can be put under these two main headings and that was especially true of the church at Corinth. Here they were. On fire for God. Spiritually gifted. Wonderfully transformed, then the devil got in. Soon sin began to express itself and in the apt words of Dr Alan Cairns “ *the city was infecting the church more than the church was influencing the city.*” Thus,

## **3. THE CORRESPONDENCE:**

To the church was written by Paul out of concern to what was happening. Paul went from Corinth to Ephesus then to Jerusalem and then back to home church in Antioch. On returning to Ephesus on his third missionary journey Paul was disturbed to learn about sin in the Corinthian church. A verbal report came from Chloe’s household, a letter ( 7:1 ) was also brought from Corinth asking a

number of questions. So it was in reference to all of these things that Paul wrote this epistle in Ephesus.

( Acts 19:20-21 ) Now I have divided this letter into five sections. Look at ( 7:1 )

### **(1) Concerning Divisions in the Church Ch's 1-4**

Think of it. Four full chapters dealing with party strife.

Dr. S. Baxter says, “ *Let us learn at once and forever the fatal folly of factious denominationalism and of leaning wrongly on human leaders.*” Now these opening chapters are all about divisions in this church, for this letter is the epistle of church order. By dealing with what was wrong at Corinth, Paul shows how to do what is right in our own local church. Notice there was,

#### **(a) *SUPERIORITY: 1:11-1:17***

I mean here is a local New Testament church hopelessly divided into four groups with each group claiming superiority over the others. “ *Our man is the best man,*” was the concept. Thus today we have churches that follow Calvin, Luther and churches that follow John Wesley and others that follow John Knox. So in Paul's day this sectarian denominational spirit raised its head. One group said “ *we are of Paul,*” Paul is a great doctrinal preacher. Another group said, “ *We are of Apollos, Apollos is so eloquent.*” “ *No,*” says another group “ *Peter is our man, he is solid he is the one who took the lead at Pentecost.*” Another group said, “ *We are of Christ. We are gathered to the Lord's name alone. We are not a denomination we are the church. We understand assembly truth.*” You see,

these divisions within the church were contradicting its essential nature as a united body. ( 12:12-27 ) Paul would have none of it. He lumps them all together and throws out such a party spirit. “ *Is Christ divided ? Was Paul crucified for you ? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul ?*” ( 1:13 ) You see, when we allow divisions in the church we are mutilating the cross of Christ and the cause of Christ. (a)

#### **(b) *PHILOSOPHY: 1:18-2:13***

For these Corinthian's were favouring human wisdom in place of the theology of the cross. They wanted to express the gospel in terms of Greek philosophy. They wanted to clothe the body of divine truth with the robe of the wisdom of the city. In effect they were complaining “ *Paul, you are not giving those things. You never do anything but preach the fundamentals of the faith.*” What is Paul's answer ? He brings them to the cross. ( 1:23 ) I mean how many people ever got to heaven by attending Greek schools ? Why should anybody desire to turn from the message of the cross to the philosophy of the world ? Yet it happens all the time. Our children leave Bible believing churches to attend secular universities where the Bible is denied, denounced and degraded. The result ? They turn to the philosophy of the world. Yet the wisdom of this world damns everybody who comes to it, but the cross of Jesus Christ saves all who come to it. (a) (b)

#### **(c) *IMMATURITY: 2:14-3:7***

It's interesting that in this section Paul divides all men into three categories. He talks about the Natural Man: the Corpse in ( 2:14 ) he talks about the Spiritual Man: the Conqueror in ( 2:15 ) but he talks about the Carnal Man: the Cry-baby in ( 3:1 ) Do you want to see a Carnal Christian ? Then just look at a young child. You could sum up a young child in one word. Immature. Is that you ? Are you just an overgrown spiritual baby ? Like a new-born babe are you helpless ? Still on the milk instead of the meat ? Walking and talking like an unsaved man ? Comparing spiritual leaders instead of spiritual truths ? My .... have you forgotten the day of,

**(d) ACCOUNTABILITY: 3:8-:3:23**

The believers at Corinth had. They were forgetting future judgment so Paul introduces the truth of the judgment seat in ( Ch 3 ) What a moment that will be when we stand before the Lord and our *Service will be Reviewed*: ( 3:11-15 ) and our *Motives will be Reviewed*: ( 4:5 ) and “ *Bye and bye when we look on his face ....*,” the Corinthians would for they were marked by,

**(e) FLATTERY: 4:1-4:21**

Paul writes that they are “ *puffed up*,” ( 4:6 ) it's a picture of the blacksmiths bellows being filled with air, or a balloon ready to burst. It's a picture of spiritual pride and arrogance. It's kind of like the girl who went to her minister to confess her sin. She said to him, “ *I want to confess the sin of pride*.” He said, “ *Well, what did you*

*do ?*” Well, she said “ *Every-time I look in the mirror, I admire myself, I just think I am beautiful*.” He said, “ *Young lady that's not pride that's a mistake*.” Many Christians today who have not seen themselves as they really are think that they are something when they are nothing. Let me ask you this question. “ *What hast thou that thou didst not receive ?*” ( 4:7 ) My .... do you see now why there were divisions in the church at Corinth ?

**(2) Concerning Disorders in the Church Ch's 5-6**

There were two serious social problems in the church at Corinth. There was,

**(a) A MORAL PROBLEM: CH 5**

People who were saved from fornication and adultery went back to their former sin. Do you see ( 5:1 ) There was incest taking place in the church, without any discipline being exercised. Do you see Paul's response ? ( 5:4-5 ) The Greek word for destruction ( *olethros* ) here has a reference to the act of spoiling or marring something. Paul was saying “ *If this fellow is having so much fun in his sin, then remove him entirely from your fellowship and let Satan kick him around a little. Let him taste what its like to face a hostile world without the prayers and ministry of a local church*.” Now the demand for instant excommunication was not intended to be the end of the matter, rather it was to help the man find his way back to the Lord and it worked. For this man did repent. ( 2 Cor 2:6-8 ) My .... God never condones immorality in the Christian and there needs to be purity in

the church so that sin will stop spreading. ( 5:6 ) Here again we see a parallel to the church today. Is it not tragic to see certain religious leaders openly advocating sexual immorality ? Encouraging young folk to sleep together to live together, commending people for the ministry who are living openly in immoral relationships ? Now listen, if we want our young folk to stay sexually pure we must help them understand that sex is more than just a matter of “ *thou shalt not.*” They need to understand that their bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. ( 6:19-20 )

Everywhere we go He is with us and in us. Everything we do is done in the presence of the Son of God Himself. Would we drag the Saviour into a house of prostitution ? Would we drag Christ into the presence of pornography ? Paul says, “ *What ? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God and ye are not your own ?*” ( 6:19 ) (a)

### **(b) A MATERIAL PROBLEM: CH 6**

Do you see ( 6:1 ) ? You know, it is bad enough when believers squabble. It's worse when they squabble before the unsaved. It's worse still when they squabble over the matter of money. It is worst of all when there is deliberate fraud involved. What should we do ? How can we solve the problem ? How should Christians settle personal differences ? Well, those matters should be settled quietly according to the principles of ( Matt 18:15-17 & 6:5 ) However, if that fails to produce results the spiritual thing to do is to defer the case to the court of heaven and leave the matter in God's hand. Does that mean I could suffer

loss ? Does that mean that I could be defrauded ? Does that mean that I could lose out financially ? Yes. But is it not better to lose your money rather than your testimony and bring shame to the name of Christ ? (1) (2)

### **(3) Concerning Difficulties in the Church: Ch's 7-11**

Four basic difficulties surfaced, which Paul had to resolve for the believers at Corinth. There was the difficulty concerning,

#### **(a) MARRIAGE: Ch 7**

Paul views various domestic situations. He talks about those marriages in which both partners are saved. ( 7:1-11 ) Where there is to be physical harmony. He talks about unmarried Christians ( 7:7-9 ) and Paul says that believers should not think themselves unspiritual because they are single or that they are especially spiritual because they are married. Then Paul talks about those Christians married to unsaved partners. ( 7:10-24 ) You see, believers are only to marry believers ( 7:39 ) But some of the Corinthians were saved after they had married. *What should they do ? Should they leave their unsaved mates ? What if the unsaved mate wants to end the marriage ?* Paul's counsel is clear, stay where you are and use every opportunity to win the lost mate. ( 7:15 ) My .... in a day when every other marriage in our land is falling apart, let us guard our homes. The Lord intends for marriage to be a happy experience. *It is intended to be holy wedlock not holy deadlock. When we get married we ought to be standing at the very gates of heaven instead of at the gates*

*of hell.* Mind you, singleness is perfectly honourable way of life. Marriage is not a necessity though it is often an advantage but marriage can also be a problem. (a)

**(b) MEATS: CH 8, 10**

This may not appear to be much of a problem for us but in fact it has far reaching ramifications. The question in Paul's day was this. ***Should a Christian eat meat that was sacrificed to idols ?*** The church was spilt on the issue. Some said it made no difference if it was offered to an idol since idols were nothing. A Christian had freedom of conscience to eat what he liked. On the other hand there were those who said that a believer should not eat such meat. It was a serious form of compromise. Some would go further and say there were all kinds of things about which a believer should have scruples. This is the whole point of this passage. *How far should a Christian integrate into the heathen society around him ? To what extent must he isolate himself from it ? Is this not a relevant question ?*

You see, in our day, the question for us might not be what should we eat, but what should we drink ? Should a Christian drink wine ? Should he go to the movies ? Should he read certain books ? Should he go to a dance ? Should he have a channel on his television that shows dirty movies ? My .... are these questions not right up to date ? ( Acts 15:28-29 ) Alan Cairns summarizes Paul's response like this.

*Maintain a total separation from that which promotes the cause of the devil. To the Corinthians this meant refusing to eat what they knew to be a sacrifice to idols. ( 10:20 )*

*In matters indifferent seek to do what is spiritually profitable and edifying. ( 10:23 )*

*In all things maintain a good testimony and be particularly careful not to lead a weaker brother astray. ( 8:9-13 )*

*Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ( 10:31 )*

**(c) MINISTERS: CH 9**

You see, the Corinthians had a problem with Paul's apostolic authority. Indeed they were judging him. Do you recall his words in Ch 4 ? He says “ *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you.* ” ( 4:3 ) In ( Ch 9 ) Paul renounces his privileges for he does not want to hinder the work of the Lord. But they were questioning Paul. By what right did he presume to command them ? *I suppose it's the question of authority in the church versus spiritual anarchy.* I mean is that not a modern problem ? We are living in a day when people recognise little or no authority in the church. When someone is disciplined in one church they simply go to another church. No questions are asked, and the second church will gladly receive the disciplined person gladly. It's the days of the Judges all over again. “ *Every man did that which was right in his own eyes.* ” ( Judges 21:25 ) My .... is this not a reason why every Christian should be in church

membership ? All of us are to be spiritually accountable and answerable to men whom God has placed over us for our good, Christian preachers included. (a) (b) (c)

#### **(d) MEETINGS: CH 11**

You see, there was a radical feminism in the church at Corinth. In fact the women said since they were equal with men they were going to act as the men did. They said “ *why should the men be allowed to worship with heads uncovered and we have to have ours covered ? We are as good as they are. We demand equality.* ” Of course in essence men and women are equal the difference is in the area of function. Men and woman are equal when it comes to Grace, but they are not equal when it comes to Place, they are equal when it comes to Acceptance with God, but they are not equal when it comes to Authority from God, for God has given the headship to man. Now how is this matter of headship demonstrated in the church ? Well look at ( 11:4 ) If a Christian man comes to worship with a hat on his head he dishonour’s ( disgraces, puts to shame ) his head, Christ. Conversely, if a Christian woman comes to worship with no veil on her head she dishonour’s ( disgraces, puts to shame ) her head, the man.

By covering her glory she joins the man in proclaiming that in the assembly of the saints, Christ has all the glory. Now tell me, is this letter not relevant ? My .... what was raising its head in the church in Corinth sadly, holds sway in most local churches today. But there was another difficulty in the meetings in Corinth. The church was turning the Lord’s Supper into an orgy of eating and

drinking. You see, in Corinth the Lord’s Table was preceded by a love feast. What was happening however was a travesty of love. For the rich man sat at one end of the table and ate sumptuously, and the poor man sat at the other end of the table with his meagre meal ( 11:21 ) Then immediately coming on top of this alleged “ *love feast*,” came the observance of the Lord’s Supper. But you see, the two things contradicted each other. The original idea of the “ *love feast*,” was sharing but that idea had been lost. Some of the members were even getting drunk. It’s likely that this weekly “ *love feast*,” was the only decent meal some of the poorer members had, and to be treated scornfully by the richer members not only hurt their stomachs, it hurt their pride.

My .... disgraceful scenes marked this gathering, so much so that Paul declares it had lost its true character. It certainly was not for the honour of the Saviour, nor did it reflect the unity and oneness of the saints. Now while this particular abuse may not enter into our observance today yet it does remind us that when we come to “ *break bread*,” we must be careful how we approach the Table ? How do you approach the Lord’s Table ? ( 10:21 ) Do you approach it **Regularly** ? Do you see what ( 11:26 ) says ? “ *As often ....*,” in ( Acts 20:7 ) we read, “ *Upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread.* ” Do you approach it **Reverently** ? With quiet contemplation ? Do you approach it **Righteously** ? With no unconfessed sin, no bitter spirit, and no proud heart ? Indeed do you come to the Lord’s Table at all ?

#### **(4) Concerning Diversity in the Church Ch 12-14**

Do you see what he says in ( 12:1 ) ? I suppose there is no element in the church's life about which there is as much confusion as there is about spiritual gifts. Do I have a spiritual gift ? Where do the gifts come *from* ? *Are there some gifts that are temporary ? Are there other gifts that are permanent ?* Spiritual gifts are listed in four chapters in the Bible ( Rom Ch 12: 1 Cor 12: Eph 4: & 1 Pet Ch 4 ) When you combine the lists you end up with nineteen different gifts and offices. Peter in his letter seems to summarize these gifts into categories. He says this, “ *If any man speak let him speak as the oracles of God, if any man minister let him do it as of the ability which God giveth.*” ( 1 Pet 4:1 ) “ *If any man speak,*” so there are **Speaking Gifts**, and then “ *if any man minister,*” or “ *serve,*” so there are **Serving Gifts**. Then are also **Sign Gifts**. ( 14:22 )

**Now the Sign Gifts:** apostleship, prophecy, healing, miracles, knowledge, tongues and the interpretation of tongues were given during the 1<sup>st</sup> century and then phased out. For with the completion of the Canon of Scripture the Sign Gifts became unnecessary. ( 2 Tim 3:14-17 2 Pet 1:16-21 ) **The Stationary Gifts:** the gifts of wisdom, faith, discerning of spirits, helps, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, showing of mercy, evangelism, and that of pastor-teacher are given on a permanent basis throughout church history. Now in ( Ch's 12-14 ) Paul is talking about the diversity of gifts within the body of Christ. He talks about,

#### ***(a) The Endowment of the Gifts: Ch 12***

Now remember “ *a spiritual gift is a God given capacity through which the Holy Spirit supernaturally ministers to the body.*” Now these gifts are **Distributed Individually:** Do you see ( 12:7 ) ? Do you know what that means ? Not one Christian is excluded. Every believer is given one spiritual gift or more. This rules out self-pity and self-depreciation in the body of Christ. No one can say “ *There is nothing I can do for God.*” These gifts are **Distributed Diversely:** for the Lord bestows on His church a variety of gifts. The gifts given to me have been withheld from you and vice-versa. But all have been gifts for the common good of the body. These Gifts are **Distributed Sovereignly:** Look at ( 12:11 ) Today we often hear of people seeking certain gifts. But my .... you can't seek a gift. For they are given as God chooses and wills.

That's why there is no room for any person to brag about anything he or she does in the Lord's work. Why in this book Paul says “ *What hast thou that thou didst not receive ?*” ( 4:7 ) Richard Baxter says “ **Each of us is just a pen in the hand of God and what honour is there in a pen ?**”

#### ***(b) The Energy of the Gifts Ch 13***

For these gifts need to be exercised in love. Dr. H. Willmington says: “ *the spiritual gifts may be thought of as God's divine bricks to be used in the construction of his holy and earthly temple. In the analogy love serves as the “ celestial cement, which holds the bricks together.”*

My .... theology without love leads to dead orthodoxy and love without theology leads to outright heresy. (a) (b)



### ***(c) The Exercise of the Gifts Ch 14***

Everything must be done, “*decently and in order,*” following the Word of God. ( 14:36-40 ) Paul says “*if you are spiritual, you will prove it by obeying the Word of God.*” You see, the Spirit of God never works apart from or contrary to the Word of God and nowhere is this principle more needed than in the area of spiritual gifts.

### **(5) Concerning Doctrine in the Church Ch 15-16**

For it seems that some in Corinth were denying

#### ***(a) The Doctrine of the Resurrection: Ch 15***

My .... what would any of these truths be worth if we did not have the living resurrected Christ to make them real ? You see, without the resurrection of Jesus Christ Christianity collapses, for a denial of the doctrine of the resurrection is a denial of the doctrine of salvation. In ( 15:12-19 ) take time to ring the 7 “*ifs,*” seven tragic results occur if there is no resurrection. You see, to deny the resurrection is to deny the faith. But bless God the resurrection was a real event. It did not occur in someone’s imagination, it occurred in history. Jesus Christ is alive. “*But now is Christ .....*,” ( 15:20 ) Christ arose and so shall we. His resurrection is the unconditional guarantee of ours, and we shall a body “*like unto his glorious body.*” ( Phil 3:21 ) Do you know something ? When the the rapture dawns there is going to be a duet that will be sung. Those who are alive at the Lord’s coming will cleave the skies with the triumphant shout

“ O death .... sting ?” Those who have died before the Lord’s return will leap from their tombs shouting, “ O grave ..... victory ?” Just before concluding with a few final greetings ( 16:19-24 ) Paul speaks of,

#### ***(b) The Duty of the Redeemed: Ch 16***

Regarding the collection for the needs of the poor in Jerusalem ( Acts 11:29 Rom 15:25 ) Paul says that we should give Periodically: “*the first day of the week,*” that we should give Proportionally: “*as God hath prospered*” that we should give Purposefully: “*that there be no collections when I come.*” Paul wanted no high pressure appeals. He concludes this letter with some personal comments and a powerful challenge. “*Watch ye stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men be strong. Let all things be done with charity.*” ( 16:13-14 ) “*If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ let him be Anathema Maranatha.*”

The word Anathema means “*fitted for destruction,*” ( 9:3 Gal 18-9 ) the word Maranatha means “*the Lord comes.*” Having instructed the Corinthians to live looking backward to Christ’s Cross, he now tells them to live looking forward to His Coming. Do you realize that this is God’s way whereby the church ***effects*** the world and world does not ***infect*** the church ? Will you seek to live in the light of His Cross and His Coming ? By so doing we will share Paul’s assurance “*thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore my beloved brethren be ye steadfast unmoveable always abounding in the work of the Lord.*” ( 1 Cor 15:57-58 )

