

Advent Adult Faith Formation
Week 2 = Handout 2
Paul's First Epistle to the Church at Corinth

Written from Ephesus (54-56 CE)

2 sources for the letter:

Information brought by members of Chloe's household

Letter written from the church to Paul asking specific questions (letter is lost but Paul makes reference to it)

Paul's 18-month visit to Corinth is recorded in Acts 18

I Corinthians can be divided into 3 parts:

Chapters 1-6

Chapters 7-10

Chapters 11-16

Chapters 1-6

Salutation (Sosthenes) and thanksgiving

Expression of confidence that the believers will appear blameless before God

Internal divisions within the church (factions) and misguided "parties"...allegiance to a particular church leader (party of Christ is particularly interesting)

Jews live by the law, Greeks by wisdom. Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God

Because God's spirit resides in believers they too can know God's heart and act with his wisdom

3) Paul returns again to the factions within the church

Corinthian believers had not matured and the evidence is in their behavior

Sowing/watering. Paul "planted," Apollos "watered," but God caused the increase

4) Pride is a problem for the Corinthians, boasting in their materialism

Reference to the church as Paul's "beloved children" whom he had begotten through the Gospel

As their love

5) Notorious offender within the church, guilty of incest with his step-mother

The church has allowed him to remain a member

Blame placed on man (believer) and not on woman (non-believer)

Corinthian belief that they had freedom without limits because God's grace was without limits

Paul demands that he be expelled from the church ("hand over to Satan" is not literal but in the hope that the possibility would bring the man back to the church)

2 ways to live one's life: Flesh = living in opposition to God

Spirit = living a redeemed life in God

Phrase: "do you not know" used 10 times in I Cor. Always precedes an irrefutable statement, something that they should know

** Body of believers responsible for judging offenders within the church, but not non-believers

6) shamefulness of Christians suing each other when they should settle differences within the church

3 words describe what faith in Jesus Christ has resulted in them being made righteous before

God

Washed: spiritually cleansed by God

Sanctified: holy, set apart
Justified: declared righteous by God through Jesus Christ's work on the cross
"All things are lawful (permissible) for me, but not all things are beneficial"
Foods for the stomach: justifies immorality
Every sin is outside the body: justifies sexual immorality
The body is the temple of God

Chapters 7-10

- 7) discussion of first of 2 matters included in the church's letter to Paul (always begins with *peri de* = now concerning)
- Celibacy, Marriage, Mixed marriage
 - Paul is careful to distinguish what is his own opinion and what is from God
 - In the 1st century, 2 views to separate the physical and the spiritual
 - 1) Hedonistic: sin only affects the physical body
 - 2) Abstention: anything physical is evil, anything spiritual is good. To be truly spiritual, all physical desires must be suppressed
- 8) 2nd matter: food offered to idols
- Food offered to idols and then sold in the market
 - Food served at city-wide pagan feasts
 - Food served at communal meals
 - No idols really exist. There is only one God
 - Believer must be aware of non-believer friend, neighbor, family member
- 9) Another defense of Paul's apostleship
- Takes no profit from it
 - Comes from 2 sources:
 - He had seen Jesus Christ
 - The church at Corinth was proof of his legitimacy
 - Paul sees himself as "all things to all people"
 - Analogy to running a race and receiving the prize
- 10) returns again to meat offered to idols
- Recalls that what happened to the Israelites was just not a part of history but could happen to the Corinthians as well
 - *** everyone is tested but God will not allow you to be tested beyond what you can endure
 - ***with the testing he will also provide a way so that you can endure it
 - The believers have unity through the sharing of the body and blood of Christ
 - Partake of one bread and therefore are one body

Chapters 11-16

- Part 3 deals with certain errors and defects that had crept into the inner life and observances of the church; also with matters that the church had inquired about in their letter
- Spiritual gifts
 - The collection of the saints
- 11) The deportment of women and veiling their heads

No commandment from God, but a strong tradition
Paul then digresses (wanders) about man being the head of the woman, God is the head
of Christ, et al

Services held in homes

Worship followed by a full (agape) meal, followed by the Lord's Supper

Council of Carthage (397 CE) finally banned the meal between worship and the Lord's Supper

Severe censure is followed by a restating of the Lord's Supper narrative (vss. 23-26)

12) Diversity and yet unity of spiritual gifts

False beliefs about the gifts leads to confusion and jealousy, obscuring that "most excellent way"...the love which transcends them all (Chapter 13)

Paul's writings contain 3 references to the types of spiritual gifts:

Romans 12: 3-8

I Cor. 12: 7-11

Eph. 4: 11

Each of the Trinity has a role in spiritual gifts:

The Holy Spirit determines who receives which gift

Christ directs the believer in the specific way in which the gift is to be used

God the Father has created the gifts with equal importance

Paul's list of spiritual gifts was easily understood by the 1st- century Christians/much more difficult to understand today

- 1) Words of wisdom: ability to apply knowledge to specific needs
- 2) Words of knowledge: ability to study and explain information
- 3) Faith: ability to have complete trust in God
- 4) Healing: ability to serve as intermediary for God's curative powers
- 5) Miracles: ability to serve as conduit for God's power to alter nature
- 6) Prophecy: ability to receive and communicate directly from God
- 7) Discernment of the spirits: ability to discern between heavenly and demonic
- 8) Tongues: ability to speak in a language never learned or spoken
- 9) Interpretation of tongues: ability to translate the message

One body – many parts

The divisions of tasks within the church

Apostles/Prophets/Teachers/Deeds of power/Gifts of healing/Forms of
assistantship/Various kinds of tongues

All strive for the greater gifts....and the greatest of these is Love

13) Love is the greatest of the spiritual graces

Eloquent description of love and its characteristics

No one knows fully what is to come and when it shall come

Term "child" used repeatedly to show progression from spiritually immature to mature

God's love is not based on emotion but rather is a choice to make

14) Continues with the abuses of the gift of tongues

The issue of women being silent in church

15) Intended to refute a growing theological heresy against the resurrection of the body

Paul lays out proof through eye witnesses and that faith is of no value if this concept is discarded

- If Christ is raised, all must be raised
Corinthians practiced baptism by proxy for the dead
Earthly body dies, spiritual body is resurrected
- 16) Paul curses those who do not believe in Christ
The collection of goods and money for the “saints” (those in Jerusalem who were victims of the famine and hardship)
- 4 concluding instructions:
- 1) Watch (be on guard)
 - 2) Stand fast (firm) in the faith
 - 3) Be brave (act with maturity)
 - 4) Be strong (Paul used a Greek word for strong that is only found 4 times in the NT. It indicates a process rather than a one-time event
Everything they did was to be done with love
Final words: *marana tha* (Aramaic= Come Lord)
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Three Major Principles of I Corinthians

- 1) The “party” (faction) spirit
Factions created in the church and their unwillingness to seek the truth instead of the “party”
Petty schisms (not things of deep faith) that cut through the moral fabric of the church
- 2) The Christian conscience
Little things that become great stumbling blocks
Riding rough-shod over other’s scruples
- 3) The Power of the Cross
Exaltation of the cross of Christ as the power and wisdom of God unto salvation
Christianity begins and ends with Calvary and the open tomb