



## 1 Corinthians: God of Unity

**Memory Verse:** 1 Corinthians 1:18 "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

### Background

The Letter of 1 Corinthians is the 46th book of the Bible and the 7th book in the New Testament. The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in Corinth while he was in Ephesus around 55-57 AD. Paul had helped found the church in Corinth during his eighteen month stay there on his second missionary journey three years earlier (Acts 18:1-11). The Greek city of Corinth was one of the largest, richest, and most important cities on the main trade route of the Roman Empire. Corinth was a commercial metropolis with an international population making it a strategic center for the Gospel. However, it was so notorious for its immorality, especially in the areas of materialism and lust, that the term to "act like a Corinthian" became synonymous for debauchery and prostitution. Idol worship was also prevalent, especially to the Greek goddess Aphrodite with her temple and its more than 1,000 religious prostitutes. Opportunities for sinful behavior without apparent consequences were everywhere in Corinth. In this environment, it was not easy for new converts to Christianity to break from their past and the pagan influences around them. While Paul was in Ephesus, he received firsthand reports of serious problems and disorders in the church (1:11). Paul had also received a letter with questions on certain matters from the church itself (7:1). The Letter of 1 Corinthians was Paul's response to the church's letter and the reports he had received. This letter would have significance not only to the Corinthian Church but also to the church worldwide as divinely inspired by God.

### The Short Story

Paul confronts problems with sin in the church and exhorts believers to be unified in Christ.

### What's the Big Idea?

Paul doesn't shy away from the problems in the church, but addresses them directly. He begins his letter to the Corinthians by speaking on divisions in the church and arguments over leadership. Paul exhorts them towards Christian unity as he writes, "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought." (1:10). Paul also speaks to the issue of sexual sins, calling believers to flee from sexual immorality and live a life of purity. "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies." (6:19-20). Paul deals with other problems in the church such as lawsuits among believers, marriage and singleness, Christian liberty, order in worship and the proper use of spiritual gifts, the Lord's Supper, and the resurrection of the dead. Additionally, Paul speaks on "the most excellent way" (12:31), the way of love. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." (13:4-8a). Paul concludes his letter by encouraging the recipients to "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love." (16:13-14).

### So What? Why is this book so important? What was God's purpose for the book?

In writing 1 Corinthians, Paul provided a model of how the church was to handle the problem of sin in its midst. Settling problems internally, personal purity and self-discipline, and doing all things in love are vital to the unity and success of a church. A church that is unified in Christ with believers living out their commitment to Him is a light in even the darkest of places. As we live out our faith in Christ, we do so with the truth of the resurrected Christ and the living hope of our own bodily resurrection and glorification in Christ. "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." (15:51-52).

*\*Material taken from various sources.*

## Teaching Text

"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought." 1 Corinthians 1:10

## Sermon-Based Discussion Questions

- What were the sources of division in the Corinthian church?
- What does Paul proclaim as the only source of unity (c.f. John 17)?
- What biblical principles can we employ to restore and regain unity?
- Does unity imply uniformity? How so?
- How does Paul instruct the church regarding "disputable matters"?

## Practical Application

- In your Christian life where have you witnessed disunity?
- What were the root cause sources? How was it addressed?
- Where are you personally challenged with respect to unity in the church, your family or elsewhere?
- How is the Lord leading you to respond and pursue authentic unity?

## Hitting the Highpoints

- 4:5 "Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time ..."
- 9:7 "Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? "
- 10:8 "We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did..."
- 11:21-23 "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: "
- 13:5 "It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking,...."

## Bonus Feature: Conflict– Getting to the Heart of the Matter

Jesus provides us with clear guidance with respect to responding to conflict. During His earthly ministry, a young man approached the Lord and asked Him to settle an inheritance dispute with his brother. "Jesus replied, 'Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?' Then he said to them, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions'" (Luke 12:13-15). This passage reveals a common human pattern. When faced with conflict, we tend to focus passionately on what our opponent has done wrong or should do to make things right. In contrast, God always calls us to focus on what is going on in our own hearts when we are at odds with others. Why? Because our heart is the wellspring of all our thoughts, words, and actions, and therefore the source of our conflicts. "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:19). *Excerpted from Peacemaker Ministries, "Getting to the heart of the matter" <http://www.peacemaker.net>*

## Personal Takeaways and Notes