

VV STUDY NOTES: 2nd September 2023

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1st Corinthians Summary

(recommend that you read or listen to the whole book, more than once if possible)

The whole New Testament was written in a historical and cultural setting alien to our own. Many of these realities still exist in parts of the world.

- There were no democracies as we know them.
- There were no welfare or health care systems as we know them.
- Slavery & Indenture were the mechanisms of the day for dealing with many social needs.
- Multiple Gods, and Religions dominated the thinking and actions of the majority.
- Mechanisms for freeing slaves were mostly in the hands of the slave owners.

Cultural & Spiritual Challenges facing the Church.

- Slavery and the cultural reality of its acceptance.
- Stark divides between rich and poor and the class distinctions involved.
- Converts to the faith of polygamous families.
- Converts with cultural & spiritual heritages incompatible with the faith.
- The human desire for power and control has always been a destructive force.
- The factional impact of identifying with personalities constantly produced division, in society, and displays itself in the Corinthian church: **1 Cor 1: 10-17** “I am of”
Peter(Cephas) had already visited Antioch, and as the Apostle to the Jews visited other Jewish Christians in the diaspora. He and Apollos had obviously spent time in Corinth.

What others could be we add to this list?

How many still exist?

1 Corinthians is a mixture of CLARITY and UNCERTAINTY.

Paul had already written a letter to the church which we don't have (1Cor 5:9) and it specifically addressed the issue of sexual Immorality. Since that issue was stressed so firmly in the decision of the Jerusalem Council and communicated to all the Jewish & Gentile believers by Paul and the other apostles, it is not surprising that was treated as important.

Paul is answering questions that have been sent to him by a letter (or letters) from Corinth. **We do not know what those questions were,** which means we must be incredibly cautious when examining his answers. It becomes imperative that we take those issues and address them in the context of **all his** (teachings and actions) pertaining to those same issues.

In addition, he even uses the expression “**I, not the Lord**” (**1 Cor 7: 12**) indicating that he was open to giving advice even when he knew there was no clear mandate or teaching to affirm it. The simplistic views of VERBAL INSPIRATION totally fail to take these realities into account. There was significant division and confusion on numerous issues affecting the life of the church.

TO AID OUR STUDY, I will address all these issues later in the notes.

CLARITY ON THE SPIRITUAL BASICS OF THE FAITH

1. The Cross as the focus of Salvation history.

(1 Cor 1:18 - 1 Cor 2: 2)

"I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified".

2. Christ and the Holy Spirit as the powerhouse of the Christian Church.

(1 Cor 2:3 – 16)

3. Spiritual Gifts & Spirit filled Leaders. (1 Cor 12:1 – 14:40)

- **Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor 12: 1-12)**

Are Spiritual Gifts for every believer?

Do we choose the Gifts, or does the Spirit choose?

- **The Scope of Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor 12:12-30)**

Do all the gifts have a place in the life of the church?

Are the roles of Spiritual Leadership Gifts of the Spirit, or natural talent?

Apostles, prophets, teachers, etc....?

Is it wrong to desire specific gifts?

- **All the Gifts must be weighed in the balance of LOVE. (1 Cor 13:1-13)**

What is the importance of this Chapter THEN & NOW?

How has this chapter impacted your personal walk with God, and your relationship with others?

Does Love bind the church together and provide the integrity the church needs?

- **"Follow the way of Love and eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy" (1 Cor 14:1)**

Why would Paul make such a BOLD STATEMENT?

Does it require a much broader definition of the gift?

Do you think it is relevant TODAY?

- **Gifts in Church Meetings (1 Cor 14:2-39)**

As you read this passage pay particular attention to how it impacts the flow of communication within the church.

Can you see any resemblance to what goes on in a good Sabbath School Class, a good Bible Study, or indeed one of our VV SESSIONS?

Does Paul encourage a spirit of openness, respect, listening, and thinking as part of this sharing?

If this pattern was more prevalent in our communications as Christians, would we avoid some of the divisions within the Christian Faith?

4. Lord's return, resurrection, judgment, final victory over Sin & Death

(1 Cor 15)

This is one of the most comprehensive teachings on the final completion of God's Plan of Salvation. There is no scope here for the Platonic View of the Immortality of the Soul, which in essence makes the concept of resurrection pointless.

John Stott, N.T. Wright with other scholars have contributed to a wider appreciation of the final resurrection.

PROBLEMS IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

1. DIVISIONS

- **“I am of Paul, Apollos, etc...”** (1 Cor 1:10-12)
Paul does not spell out the exact nature of the divisions, but the letter suggests they are many and varied.
Were the appeals being made to be followers of the PERSONALITIES (None of whom were physically present to correct the behaviour) a way of claiming support for their OWN beliefs?
Are there “I am of ? used today?
(1 Cor 1:13- 3: 22)
What do you think of Paul’s response?
- **LAWSUITS** (1 Cor 6: 1-9)
Do you think this still has relevance today?
Have you ever made decisions based on these principles?

2. PAUL EXPLAINS HIMSELF (1 Cor 4:1-21)

3. PRACTICAL ISSUES ON SEXUALITY & SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

- **Issues such as marriage, the unmarried, virgins, sexuality, etc.**
1 Cor 7:1-40 (NOTE: v.1 ‘for the matters you wrote about’)

Paul is still living with the expectation that the RETURN of JESUS is probably associated with the coming destruction of the TEMPLE. Jesus has specifically identified that those days will be tumultuous.

That conviction shapes his whole understanding of the practical realities of living.

In these areas his own conviction about remaining unmarried is clearly displayed, yet he acknowledges that the need for sexual fulfilment cannot be ignored, and that current changes and challenges make many decisions complex.

He even used the phrase **7: 12“(I, not the Lord)”** to give some guidance where there is nothing Jesus said about the subject.

Do you find it refreshing he didn’t pretend that his advice was anything more than the best he could think of at the time, and that some of his advice was negotiable.

He also appeals to current practices within the church!

Do you think Paul would have been flexible enough to encourage CHANGES in how things are done?

4. ITEMS FROM THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

- FOOD SACRIFICED TO IDOLS

The Jerusalem Council instructed the believers: **“You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.”**

1 Cor 8: 1-13 PAUL significantly expands the range of complexities that apply regarding this issue.

1 Cor 10: 14-22 *Some lines shouldn't be crossed!*

1 Cor 10: 23-33 He adds even more freedoms into the mix!

What do you think he is really saying about this issue?

Does this indicate a more open-minded approach on these matters

- SEXUAL IMMORALITY

Paul focuses on one clear incident of Sexual Immorality. (1 Cor 5: 1-12)

It appears that this issue has been around for some time, and he had even addressed it in general in his missing letter. (1 Cor 5: 9-12)

To ensure that we grasp what Paul is really saying, we need to put it within the total picture of the book, and his teaching generally, and the total story of this one incident.

There are two important issues in this passage.

- a. SOCIETY IN GENERAL

The church has NO CALLING to try and impose MORALITY on society as a whole! Jesus told us clearly that we would be IN THE WORLD, not OF THE WORLD. *Scripture makes it abundantly clear that the idea of building a pure society in this current age is an irrational dream. Paul is affirming that reality here in Chapter 6.*

If you can find anything in Scripture that suggest the above statement is incorrect, please let us know!

Attempting to change the values of the world against the tide of human behaviour has always been a fruitless exercise, but there are times when the influence of god's people can unite with societal reform movements to bring about meaningful change. We saw this in the movement to abolish slavery, prison reforms, and other beneficial changes in society. In some cases, the reformers were being impeded by fellow Christians.

- b. THE CHURCH (1 Cor 5:11-13; 6:9-20)

Don't forget this is the book that contains the great chapter on LOVE!

Paul's concern here is not only for the individual involved, but for the church itself. The general attitude pervading the church was **“I have right to do anything, you say”**. It was being applied to various areas of life, including sexual issues. In Chapter 6 above Paul challenges that notion, as contrary to god's will.

The instruction he is giving is NEEDED by the church, as well as by the individual. (Gal 6:1-10) spells out the spirit in which church disciple needs to take place.

In **(2 Cor 2: 2-11)** Paul affirms that this was a hard thing to deal with, and that both the church and the individual needed to find healing having been bold enough to face the problem head on.

To take all this and formulate a system for discipline within the modern church would require a lot of humility, prayer, and love.

This whole area needs much study and attention.

“FOOLS RUSH IN WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD” ANY COMMENT?

c. THE LGBT+ QUESTION

1. I really believe we should not beat about the bush in this area.

There is no doubt that PAUL consistently identifies this area as being off-limits to the church.

The problem we have is what was Paul’s understanding of this issue as he witnessed it in his day. The Torah unquestionably condemned it, and Judaism did likewise.

We have already discussed the relationship of the church and society, and on that basis:

Would you agree that there is no justification for any discrimination or violence against the LGBT+ Community?

Should that be a worldwide principle?

2. **The next question is more challenging.**

Is there a basis in which members of the LGBT+ Community who identify with the Adventist Church, or other Christian Churches can find acceptance within the church?

Is that possible in a way that respects and accepts the fundamental concept of Sexual Immorality.

Have there been any developments within the LGBT+ scenario that could open a way for that to happen?

Can the heterosexual community impose standards which they don’t want to apply to themselves?

For the next month there will be some of us travelling here & there, and we may not be able to have as broad a discussion as these questions deserve. I hope we will explore some of these areas later.