

Two Year Bible Trek
Week 90
1 Corinthians

Key Concepts: The key concept in this letter is that the church is called to both doctrinal and ethical standards which reflect the love of God in Jesus Christ..

Background: The city of Corinth was one of the most important and wealthiest cities in the Roman Empire. Paul arrived there on his second missionary journey and stayed for 18 months. The church he founded there, as we will discover, was plagued by a number of divisive issues. It is believed that Paul wrote at least three and possibly four letters to the church, though we have only two of them.

Brief Summary: Traditional Beginning (1:1-1:9) Paul begins his letter as he usually does, with a self-definition (he is an Apostle), a description of the recipients (the church in Corinth) and a word of thanks which is centered around the themes he will address later in the letter.

The Major Issues (1:10-6:20) Paul does not beat around the bush but gets right to the issues, the first of which is that the church is divided into competing parties. Each party believes that they are wiser than the others. The Apostle reminds them that the only wisdom that ought to matter is the cross of Christ. Therefore none of them are to boast about anything other than Christ. He continues with a discussion about the superiority of the person guided by spiritual wisdom rather than the person steeped in Greco-Roman wisdom/philosophy. He also warns the church's teachers that they too ought to be willing to be seen as "fools" in the eyes of the world, because the teachers are servants of Christ. This is Paul at his sarcastic best.

Paul next turns to a discussion of sexual immorality (a man sleeping with his mother-in-law). He commands them to rid themselves of these people because their actions imply that this is acceptable behavior. At the same time he makes it clear that Christians are not to remove themselves from the world, even though the world is filled with sinful practices. Paul concludes this section with two other concerns; lawsuits between Christian that are adjudicated in civil courts and Christian men visiting prostitutes (possibly at local Temples). He declares that both of these are unacceptable practices.

Responses to Questions (7:1-16:4) This section contains Paul's replies to questions upon which the church had sought his advice. The first has to do with marriage, (chapter 7) which Paul allows but does not encourage. In fact he discourages people from marrying because it takes their focus off of Christ. The second has to do with food sacrifices to idols (chapter 8). Paul admits that since idols are man-made objects that people can eat the meat that has been sacrificed to them. That is, as long as their eating that meat does not cause a fellow believer to go astray (perhaps believing that idols are real). He spends some time (chapters 9-10) defending his authority to make such pronouncements and warns against overconfidence. Next, the Apostle turns to matters of worship (chapter 11) including having proper respect for the Lord's Supper. Spiritual gifts are the next issue (chapter 12) and Paul reminds the Corinthians that all gifts are necessary and no single gift is better than any other. The one gift everyone ought to seek is love (chapter 13) which Paul says is a gift that will never pass away. Speaking in tongues receives its own discussion (chapter 14) including a reminder that this gift is not to be abused. The resurrection is addressed (chapter 15) as the heart of the Christian faith. Finally Paul speaks to the collection for the saints in Jerusalem (chapter 16).

Conclusion (16:5-16:24) He then concludes with some personal greetings and reminders.

1. Where have you seen a church divided into factions? What was the result for the church?
2. What might be some life-style choices today that should alarm the church?
3. How does Paul's discussion of the Lord's Supper impact how you understand this sacrament?