

1 Corinthians When Faith & Life Collide

Study 1

The Gospel and the Divided Church

1 Corinthians 1:1-8

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“Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Background

1. **Comprehension question. What were the two things the city of Corinth was known for?**

- Vice (Sexual Immorality)
- Religion (Idolatry)

2. **Open ended question. The following are the issues plaguing the fractured Corinthian church. What should be happening in the church instead? (This question requires answers in your own words.)**

Issue	Expected Behaviour
Disunity	
Splits	
Pride-sophistication	
Immorality	
Law suits	
Compromise	
Asceticism	
Reject apostolic authority	
Question resurrection	

3. Comprehension question. What is the layout of the letter?

Chapter 1-4	Gospel Negates Human Pride
Chapter 5-16	Deals with Issues

1 Corinthians 1:1-2

“Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:”

4. Comprehension question. Paul asserts his apostleship at the beginning of this letter. What defines an apostle?

- Been with Jesus
- Witnesses resurrection

5. Open ended questions. The word “church” comes from the Greek word ekklesia, that is “called out ones”.

- a. What have we been called out from?
- b. What have we been called out to?

6. Discussion question. Paul writes to the “church of God” in Corinth. Why was this phrase used to address the Corinthian church?

- The emphasis is that the church belongs to God
- The disunity in the Corinthian church stems from their belief that the church belongs to certain leaders
- They were loyal to individuals/leaders
 - e.g. Paul/Apollos/Cephas/Christ

1 Corinthians 1:2

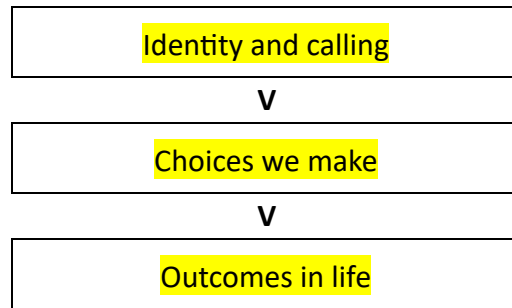
“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

A. The Nature and Calling of the Church

7. Comprehension question. Based on the video lecture, how is “holiness” defined?

- God’s holiness means that He is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honour

8. a) Fill in the blanks. One of our prime directives in life as Christians is to be holy. How should holiness affect us?



b) Reflection question. Give a practical example of the above.

9. Comprehension question. Based on what John Piper says, what is the essence of holiness?

- Happiness in God
- There is no such thing as holiness without happiness in God

10. Comprehension question. What do people mistake for holiness?

- Christian Service
- Theology
- Gifts - Miracles
- Position
- Achievement
- Reputation

11. Comprehension question. What is the difference between “made holy” and “called to be holy”?

- We have been made holy (legal status) by what Christ has accomplished - “sanctified in Christ Jesus”, completed
- We are called to be holy means to be called to holy living - an ongoing process, not yet complete

1 Corinthians 1:4-6

“I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you”

B. The Blessings of the Church

12. a) Comprehension question. What gifts has the Corinthian church been gifted with?

- Knowledge
- Wisdom
- Tongues
- Prophecy

b) Comprehension question. What are the gifts evidence of?

- Evidence of the effectiveness of the Gospel of Christ

1 Corinthians 1:12-17

“Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.”

C. The Unity of the Church

13. Discussion question. In a church, can there be both personal loyalty to the leader of the church or loyalty to the truth? Why or why not?

14. Comprehension question. What is the evidence of a leader's authenticity when preaching?

- The power of the Gospel preached

15. Discussion question. When one associates himself/herself with a famous individual, what does he/she want from that person?

- To share the glory of that person
- Social identity

16. Comprehension question. What are the signs that we are vulnerable to finding glory from others?

- Emotionally upset with lack of appreciation or others taking credit
- Praise from others
- Decisions driven by opinion of others
- Self confidence when others praise

17. What should be the basis of our unity in church?

- The Gospel of Christ crucified

18. What is the main reason for the breakdown of church unity?

- The loss of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Takeaway

- A. The Corinthian church was deeply divided and fractured**
- B. The reason for their division is because of their personal loyalty to individual leaders instead of loyalty to the truth**
- C. We are called to be holy**
- D. The essence of holiness is happiness in God**
- E. The basis of our unity in church is the Gospel of Christ crucified**
- F. The main reason for the breakdown of church unity is the loss of the Gospel of Jesus Christ**

Case Study

Case 1 – Clouded Judgement

Lee Cheow Hwa is very troubled as he comes from the Kalimantan Pentecostal Church , a multi congregational church where there has been great turmoil. The pastor Rev Moses Yong is known to be impatient and in his first meeting with one the congregation's leaders, he reacted badly to their criticisms of him and sacked all 5 in the committee on the spot. This caused much turmoil amongst the particular congregation who lost their leaders.

However as far as he is concerned the pastor has been good to Cheow Hwa as he ministered to his family when he was sick , down and out. Cheow Hwa is convinced he is a good man and defended him whenever there was any criticism about Rev Moses.

Some other leaders tried to mediate in the case and persuade the pastor to restore the sacked leaders who had to leave the church. They arranged for the 5 to apologise to Rev Moses in a meeting but Rev Moses stood firm - he instead doubled down and said the five were evil and would not restore them.

In the months that followed Rev Moses fell out with another two pastors and sacked them. One of them was because he felt he had no calling although he had been serving full time for the last 7 years and gave up his business to go full time. The other pastor tried to defend him and in the process upset Rev Moses who then did not renew his contract as well.

A portion of the church was very unhappy as they were attached to the pastors who were dismissed. Another portion was upset with Rev Moses because of the sacking of the 5 in the committee and then there was the faction who would support Rev Moses no matter what.

Other leaders grew unhappy and the church attendance dropped 50% over the ensuing year. Then came the time for renewal of pastor Rev Moses Yong's contract and he needed a 75% majority to continue but at this time many folk were not happy with him. The leaders in the church council stood by Rev Moses Yong but other leaders did not want him renewed. They said Rev Moses has the Lord's authority and wisdom and we must all listen to him.

1. What was wrong with Rev Moses and his fellow leaders? Why do you think that Rev Moses was not willing to forgive and restore the 5 committee members? In what ways does his actions cause divisiveness in church?

Pastor Moses Yong exhibits none of the love nor godliness in a leader. He has a judgemental and hard spirit. The leaders are clearly split basically because of personal loyalty. They are his board members and are too close to see the problem. His failure is also their failure hence they will tend to circle their wagons in a defensive mode and claim the authority of their position in order to stifle dissent. They are basking in his reflected glory in psychological terms. Any attack on Rev Moses is an attack on them. Mr Lee is also clearly conflicted as on one hand he is loyal to the pastor and on the other hand he clearly sees there is wrong in what he did. Rev Moses was not willing to forgive and restore as he was cornered into defending his pride and self-esteem as there was unhappiness against him by the congregation which has lost the 5 leaders. He could not admit he was wrong as he based his self-esteem on his spiritual standing as the pastor in charge and had to be right or seen to be right. He had to maintain discipline for them to respect him. He had to be feared by the rebellious leaders. His actions caused divisiveness along the lines of loyalty to him vs the loyalty to the sacked committee members and other pastors.

2. What was wrong with Mr Lee Cheow Hwa's actions in this debacle? What should Mr Lee Cheow Hwa have done in this circumstance?

Mr Lee let his personal loyalty to Rev Moses cloud his judgement in this crisis. Yes Rev Moses is

a good man but even good men have weaknesses and clay feet and the job of fellow leaders is to protect Rev Moses from letting his weaknesses imperil the unity of the church. Fellow leaders like Mr Lee should act to help Rev Moses grow and learn to repent in crisis like this. They cannot assume that their main pastor is a man who is without flaws and give blind loyalty. In 1 Cor 1 Paul writes that he himself was not crucified for them and cannot have the absolute loyalty that is due only to Christ.

Mr Lee should get an opportunity to speak to the leaders who have been sacked to hear their side of the story. He should look to the facts of the matter to focus on the issues and never to make decisions based on personal loyalty. He should then vote according to his conscience after having prayed about it. There is a reason Baptist churches place a 75% vote for the pastors as it is about spiritual leadership which cannot be practised if there is no significant mandate.

3. What can the leaders do?

The leaders on both sides of the fence should start to focus on the issues not on the person they are loyal to or they dislike in the case of the opposition. They should try to objectively review the pastors tenure with the church and they have already lost half the congregation who have voted with their feet and this alone should tell us that there is something intrinsically wrong with his leadership notwithstanding his bible knowledge or gifts. They should come to some sort of compromise, maybe he can remain as one of the pastors in teaching or other ministry but not as the main pastor of the whole church as he has lost too much credibility for that position to be tenable. Another lay leader can come into the fore and restore confidence and heal wounds. If the pastor cannot accept such a situation the leadership should withdraw support otherwise it goes to a bruising election where one side will be hurt and the church split. Prayerful compromise should be the order of the day.