

**The Hope of Holiness**  
**Discovering 1 Corinthians:**  
**Holiness in a Corinthian World**  
**1 Corinthians 6 & Acts 18**

Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth is addressed to a congregation that is rife with division and sinful practices about many things. The letter combines extreme patience with firm correction as the Apostle pleads with the believers in Corinth to set aside everything that is not in conformity to the person of Jesus and to present a Gospel-centered lifestyle that is distinctive and attractive to their Corinthian neighbors.

The letter addresses reports that Paul received from Chloe's household, as well as a letter he received from the church itself (1 Corinthians 7:1) about four years after he founded the church in Corinth.

In this letter to the church, Paul covers several different issues related to both doctrine and life (what the BF&M calls 'faith and practice'): divisions and quarrels, sexual immorality, lawsuits among believers, marriage and singleness, freedom in Christ, order in worship, the significance of the Lord's Supper, and the right use of spiritual gifts and a profound teaching on the resurrection.

**First: Set the Book in Context**

Before we begin to talk about the book of 1 Corinthians, we need to discover its place in God's redemptive story.

- 1 – Creation
- 2 – Fall
- 3 – Israel
- 4 – Jesus
- 5 – Church
- 6 – New Creation

This is a 'church' age story. And what is God doing in this timeframe?

During his incarnation, Jesus created this ecosphere in which he:

- Reviewed Eden – This is what life looked like before the Fall
- Previewed Heaven – This is what life will look like when the curse is gone

As he left, he commissioned his disciples to carry on the Edenic work he began in Genesis.

Acts 1:8 – “...you will be my witnesses in –

- Jerusalem
- Judea and Samaria
- The end of the earth

Just as Eden’s Garden was intended to fill the earth, the Gospel is now reclaiming the fallen world for Christ.

Mark 1:15 - *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.*

God has called the church to repent and believe in the gospel – the good news that the kingdom of God is at hand – and share that good news with the world. Why?

Because the kingdom of God is both here and coming. It is here in part and is coming in fullness. It is here in salvation now but is soon coming in judgement.

When we repent and believe in the gospel, i.e., repent of living with self as the hero of the story, and place Jesus at the center of our lives, it replicates the ecosphere he built. This is not something we do as much as it is something God does through us. Remember, the Bible is not a manual for better behavior but a telling of God’s story in creation.

And so,

- Just as the Father gave Jesus His Spirit (Luke 3:21-22), so
- Jesus gives the Spirit to His people (Acts 2:1-13).

God’s goal in the church is a representation – a re-presentation- of the life and world he has intended since day one of creation.

This perspective enables us to better understand all of Paul’s epistles and particularly the two letters to the Corinthian’s. In effect, God is calling the Corinthians to the lifestyle and community he intended for Adam and Eve, for Israel and now for the Church. Paul writes to define that life and community and rebuke any deviation from the divine blueprint.

### Second: Define an Important Word in 1 Corinthians

T - 1 Corinthians 3:17 - *God's temple is **holy**, and you are that temple.*

T - 1 Corinthians 6:19 - *do you not know that your body is a temple of the **Holy** Spirit within you,*

A temple is where God meets with humanity. Here is a list of some of those temples in the Bible:

- Eden
- Tabernacle
- Jerusalem Temple
- Jesus
- Church
- New Jerusalem

Holy/Hebrew = *kodesh* = set apart for a purpose

Holy/Greek = *agios* = separate, distinct

We get our words, 'sacred' and 'saints' from these words.

We, as individuals and a church body, are where the world sees and meets God.

This concept of 'separateness' or 'distinctiveness' is completely in line with God's redemptive plan.

He has always intended to:

- a) Create a place for a people
- b) Create a people for himself
- c) Dwell among his people

This helps us understand why the Exodus rules about the Tabernacle and the Leviticus rules about the sacrifices are so specific. God isn't trying to be difficult or complex. In fact, he's trying to be very simple. This is what it boils down to: There is only one God and there is only one way to approach that God and live in fellowship with Him.

In the Fall, we cut ourselves off from God and in the process, cut ourselves off from -shalom – peace & wellness. Remember, shalom isn't the absence of conflict, it's the presence of wellness.

This concept of holiness is God's aim for the Corinthians – and us - who, like Adam and Eve, and like Israel, are tempted to be like Lucifer and the 7-nations, respectively. There are a lot of temptations in Corinth....

### **Third: Look at Paul and Corinth**

Paul traditionally set his sights on the major cities of Roman provinces thinking that if the Gospel penetrated those cities, it would naturally travel to other part of the Roman world.

- Paul initially visited the city in AD 50-51 for about 18 months (Acts 18:1-18)

- He lived with Aquilla and Priscilla with whom he worked as a tentmaker
- He debated the Jewish leaders every Sabbath
- In Corinth, Paul decided to evangelize Gentiles
- Paul was brought before a Roman tribunal who dismissed the charges against him
- He fled to Syria with Priscilla and Aquila

**Acts 18:1-18a** (5-11) - *Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. <sup>6</sup> And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."* <sup>7</sup> *And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. <sup>8</sup> Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. <sup>9</sup> And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people."* <sup>11</sup> *And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.*

- Paul left a newly birthed congregation in Corinth who struggle with Judaism and paganism

Remember Jesus's mission: to 'get the Hell' (James 3:6) out of us and Heaven into us – to translate us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light (Col 1:13)? In this scenario, it's to 'get the Corinth' out of these new believers.

#### **Fourth: Picture the City of Corinth**

- Corinth is the capital of the province of Achaia
- Athens razed the city in 146 BC
- Julius Caesar re-established it as a Roman colony in 44 BC, shortly before his assassination
- The city became a melting pot for Romans, Greeks, Syrians, and Jews
- **Picture #1 - A commercial city:** It's geographical position as a 'land-bridge' with a port on either side, between the Greek peninsula and the Peloponnese peninsula making it a commercial hotspot. It is 435 miles around the Peloponnese (The Corinth Canal – like the Panama Canal was started by Nero and finished in 1893). It is 3 miles long, 26 feet deep and 69 feet at top and 82 feet at water's surface  
**Picture 1a. Picture 1b. Picture 1c. Picture 1d.**
- **An entertainment city:** Every two years, one year before and one year after the Olympic games, Corinth hosted the Isthmian games which attracted the Roman world
- **A religious city:** It was an exceptionally religious city with its temple cult
- All the cults were tied to solidarity with Rome and only Jews were exempt

- Aphrodite, the goddess of love, was the protector deity of the city and Corinth boasted three temples, the largest on the Acro-Corinth.
- **Picture #2** - The *Acro-Corinth* (above Corinth) was the most famous. It stands 2000 feet above the city and on a clear day, Athens can be seen 45 miles away. **Picture #3**
- It was the home to more than 1,000 male and female temple slaves/prostitutes and the city was wealthy because of it
- In Paul's time, Corinth suffered from famine due to Egyptian crop failures and this only increased the worship of Aphrodite
- Corinth was such an immoral city that the term *corinthiazesthai* (to behave like a Corinthian) was well known throughout the pagan world. It was the original 'sin-city.'

**T - 1 Corinthians 6:9-11** - *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,<sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

Do you see the contrast between the two cities: Corinth and the New Jerusalem?

**2 Peter 3:13** - *...according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

**T - Revelation 21:1-8**

Two cities are at war within us: The city of Corinth and the city of God, the city of Johnson City or Jonesborough or Elizabethton, of Washington, Carter and Sullivan counties and the city of God.

- We have been saved from the penalty of sin - justification
- We are being saved from the power of sin – sanctification
- We will be saved from the presence of sin – glorification

It is:

- Holiness versus Hell,
- Shalom versus sin,
- the Spirit versus the flesh.

**ILL – ‘Cut-outs’**

### Fifth: Define Christian Living According to 1 Corinthians

We are 'saints' set apart for God's purposes and this is why it is imperative to know God's purposes.

- Who am I?
- Why do I exist?
- What are the consequences of my life?

1 Corinthians was written to help these new believers align their lives with God's redemptive mission in the world. That's the point of the whole Bible. Scripture is not a moral code that God commands and wipes out all our fun. The Bible is the revelation of God and what he is doing in the world. As saints, 'holy ones,' holiness is aligning yourself to God's work in the world.

Corinth was supposed to be, Heritage is, and each one of you are, the blueprint for what God is doing.

- God is moving from Creation to New Creation, reconciling all things to himself
- Holiness is going in the same direction as God
- Sin is going in any different direction

Corinth was not cooperating, and Paul wrote to close the gap between the way the Corinthians were living, and the way God intended for them to live in holiness

Leviticus 11:44 & 1 Peter 1:15-16 - ...as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, <sup>16</sup> since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

The hope of holiness is health, wellbeing, fulness, satisfaction, harmony with self. It looks like this –

Genesis 1:31-2:1 - *And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. <sup>2</sup> And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. <sup>3</sup> So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.*

Could we call it, 'seventh day living?' Live like it was the 7<sup>th</sup> day; "very good, finished rest, blessed..."?

This is the life God is calling us to. It is a review of Eden and a preview of Heaven.

## Sixth: Christ and Corinth

Just like the original creation, only Jesus can make us Christians/saints. For this reason, Paul always links what is troubling the Corinthian church to the Gospel, the pronouncement that Christ has set us free from sin by the power of the cross.

- a) Division – there is only one Jesus. Unite around him
- b) Sexual immorality –The same power that raised Jesus also enables you
- c) Lawsuits – Forgive as God has forgiven you in Jesus
- d) Physical bodies – God raised Jesus’s physical body and will raise yours
- e) Singleness & Marriage. Jesus is our model, single yet married to the church
- f) Food offered to idols. Jesus surrendered his rights to save you
- g) Head coverings – The Father is Jesus’s authority and Jesus is our authority
- h) Abusing the Lord’s supper – Jesus sacrificed his life for you. Do likewise
- i) Fighting over spiritual gifts – The love of Jesus moderates our life together
- j) Denying the resurrection – Jesus is raised to raise you

Whatever ails you. Jesus is the answer.

### Conclusion:

Like you, your unbelieving friends, relatives, neighbors, and co-workers are striving for this also. Democrats, Libertarians, Republicans, Independents, and a-political people are striving for this. Muslims, Buddhists, atheists, are as well.

The key is the means:

*Matthew 1:21 – (angel to Joseph)...you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins*

*Acts 4:8-12 – Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, <sup>9</sup> if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. <sup>11</sup> This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. <sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

*1 Corinthians 15:1 - Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, <sup>2</sup> and by which you are being saved*

We believe that:

- the holiness we all need
- to create the shalom we all want
- is only through Jesus!

Paul's instruction to these new believers was not to retreat from their city. Instead, he directed them to live out their Christianity as a model for Corinth. They, and we, are just one more example of what the world was and will be when Jesus reigns supreme in our lives. This is the Bible story; that Jesus is the Savior of the world and no one else, nothing else can save anyone.

### **Community Groups:**

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

- 1 – Where in the six-step Bible overview do you place Corinthians?
- 2 – What does this tell you about what God is doing (wanting to do) in the Corinthian church?
- 3 – Where in the Acts 1:8 scheme is Corinth?
- 4 – Can you list some of the temples in the Bible?
- 5 – What was the purpose of the temple?
- 6 – Define holiness.
- 7 – How do we see holiness exhibited in our lives?
- 8 – How is holiness a key to reading, understanding, and applying this book to our lives?
- 9 – What does it mean that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit?
- 10 – Read Acts 18. How/when did Paul go to Corinth and what was accomplished there?
- 11 – What do we know about Corinth in Paul's time?
- 12 – What were some of the issues facing the church in Corinth?
- 13 – What is Paul's main point in this book?
- 14 – How is the Gospel/Jesus the answer to what ails this church?
- 15 – How is our modern world like Corinth?
- 16 – What might Paul's letter to us read like?

