

Route Sixty-Six

Part Forty-Six

1 Corinthians

Not for Every Man is the Voyage to Corinth

(John 5:39; 1 Corinthians 11:17)

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
212-6999*

pastorpaul@branchofhope.org

www.branchofhope.org

8/16/2020

310)

Route Sixty-Six

Part Forty-Six

1 Corinthians

Not for Every Man is the Voyage to Corinth

(John 5:39; 1 Corinthians 11:17)

Now in giving these instructions I do not praise *you*, since you come together not for the better but for the worse (1 Corinthians 11:17).

Introduction

Underestimating the powerful influence of the cultures in which we have been raised can be a spiritually crippling error. I would be foolish to ignore, or think I have somehow escaped, being a child of the sixties in Southern California. The message in the music, the aggressive counter-culture dialect, the appeal of substance abuse, the heralding and lauding of spurning authority have created stains deep within my psyche.

These stains will often color the means by which I read the Scriptures and the conclusions I might draw. It is for this reason that I value reading the opinions of theologians who are foreign to my era and geography. At first, I found these theologians (often Reformers) difficult to read. Not only was the language odd to me, but they were stuck within the confines of their own age as well. More than once I would seek their opinion on a passage only to find they had launched into a tactless anti-Roman Catholic tome and tirade. But that was their era. And there continues to be value in their perspective.

We would do well, all of us, to examine our influences. To pray fervently that God would reveal those things that, perhaps unwittingly, we have allowed to grab our hearts. It may be more difficult today because we don't seem to live in some monolithic era. Influences are vast and they change rapidly. In 1973 George Lucas made a popular, nostalgic movie entitled *American Graffiti* which was set in 1962. How could eleven years produce nostalgia? Things are changing rapidly.

At times it is easier to see this influence in others than ourselves. When listening (and we should work hard at that) to those older or young

than myself, I can become confused (and sometimes dismayed) at conclusions drawn and directions taken, either morally or theologically.

I am challenging us in this respect because there may not be a New Testament church that fell deeper under the dark influence of their culture than the one we will study this morning. Corinth was of Roman government and Greek trade and was said to be as “vile and vicious as could be imagined.” Toward the end of the first chapter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul lists the worst of sin and degradation. It has been observed that he wrote Romans from Corinth. As a Jedi once said, “You will never find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy.”

In Corinth was the Temple of Aphrodite which, according to some reports, housed a thousand prostitutes. The common adage toward this licentious city was “Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth.” We learn in the eighteenth chapter of Acts that Paul had started this church and it flourished. Paul likely spent about eighteen months (Acts 18:11) ministering there and it would have been reasonable for him to expect some level of maturity. But instead, they were a church rife with problems. I live in no envy of the elders of that church.

A Survey of 1 Corinthians

Many scholars have broken 1 Corinthians into two parts. In chapters one through six Paul is addressing issues that had been reported to him (1 Corinthians 5:1). In chapters seven through sixteen he is answering questions that had been written to him (1 Corinthians 7:1). Note the order. Before he answered their questions, he addressed their faults. There were things they wanted to know, and he would get there. But there were things they needed to know. Their weakness and immaturity was not that of mere humble and uninformed Christian fledglings. They had become puffed up (1 Corinthians 8:1).

Instead of maturing, they evolved into a church of factions and personality cults.

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” (1 Corinthians 1:12).

Paul never mentions that there was anything wrong with these teachers. Just the disposition of the followers. These teachers (all good teachers) were to be *learned* from rather than *leaned* on. Even the “**I am of Christ**” said in a factious way, implied the inferiority of all other factions. It is not uncommon for someone to question an opinion with the words, “That may be your opinion, but I trust Jesus’ opinion” as if their own interpretation of a certain biblical passage is canon.

They had become a church seeking signs and human sophistry. Paul sought to direct them back to the cross-back to Christ.

For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:22-24).

Corinth was a church influenced by, and in love with, the world. Paul would not play that game. Though, little doubt, wiser than them all, Paul puts forth the Gospel army: the foolish, weak, base, despised and nonentities. Are you weak? Step in here behind the fools. By the world’s standards, laughable recruits. But it these religious Hogan’s Heroes who will have the true wisdom from above, “**that no flesh should glory in His presence**” (1 Corinthians 1:29).

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory,⁸ which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.⁹ But as it is written: “*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him*” (1 Corinthians 2:7-9).

They were confusing worldly wisdom with the “**wisdom of God**”. The wisdom of God accesses the riches of heaven found in Christ. The Corinthians were carnal in their sectarianism. It might be important to note that Paul is not creating categories of Christian-the spiritual and the carnal, as if we must make a leap or find a key. He is merely pointing out

that when they behave a certain way, they are being carnal (1 Corinthians 3:4).

They were a church standing in judgment of the Apostle Himself (1 Corinthians 4:3), similar to how many a church will stand in judgment of the Scriptures themselves. It is a sinister method of self-ascension that denigrates legitimate authority. As mentioned, I have found this disposition weaved into my own soul. And the fruit of this puffed quasi-leadership was to allow sexual sin (a sin worse than those outside the church) to go unchecked. They actually seemed proud of what they may have viewed as gracious and indulgent behavior.

And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you (1 Corinthians 5:2).

It is not without reason that Paul, along with Jesus (Matthew 18:15-20) taught on the importance of church discipline. It is the method by which the brethren are restored, and the purity of the church kept (1 Corinthians 5:6, 7).

The issues at Corinth go on. They were suing each other, viewing their liberty in Christ as license for sin. It is no act of Christian love to ignore the strong warning.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10).

Here Paul is not speaking of an isolated incident or a continuing struggle, but the embracing of a lifestyle. Being a Christian playboy or swinger is a contradiction.

Even as Paul begins to answer their questions (usually with the conjunction, "now"), his answers contain stout corrections. He gives instruction on marriage, on Christian liberty and conscience, on the proper supporting of Christian ministers (a support he denied, likely due to the immaturity of the church). Though, as we learned in Romans, Paul was not

one who viewed himself as having obtained righteousness, he was still mature enough to point them to his example. Twice, he calls them to **“imitate”** him (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1). The Apostle provides a supreme example of self-sacrifice. He did not always take advantage of the rights and freedoms he had as a Christian. It was a sacrificial effort on his part to **“become all things to all men, that [he] might by all means save some”** (1 Corinthians 9:22). We are in a race and we are to run receive **“the prize”** (1 Corinthians 9:24).

In chapter ten Paul sites Old Testament examples of faithlessness. The Corinthians (and all church members) should not think that their mere inclusion in the outward manifestation of the kingdom ensures our peace with God. We are to persevere. And we are to take comfort in the knowledge that God will not allow us to be **“tempted beyond”** what we are able (1 Corinthians 10:13). Paul reminds them what we all need to be reminded of, **“God is faithful”** (1 Corinthians 10:13).

In chapter eleven he begins to address what is appropriate and not appropriate in their times of meeting. He’ll speak of roles of men and women. He will again address their factions, which interestingly enough, he viewed as a necessary discomfort, that the truth might be ferreted out.

For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.
¹⁹ For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you (1 Corinthians 11:18, 19).

But these words are preceded by an eye-popping chastisement.

Now in giving these instructions I do not praise *you*, since you come together not for the better but for the worse (1 Corinthians 11:17).

Such a horrible thing to say about a worship service! But the Lord’s Supper, which should be an act of communion with God and each other, had descended into drunken thoughtlessness result in great judgments upon the church.

Then in chapters twelve through fourteen Paul seeks to place order in the pandemonium that had taken over their worship. Oddly, he reminds

them that they had once been “carried to these dumb idols” (1 Corinthians 12:2), as if to make some kind of comparison. Though there is most certainly instruction on gifts (how they are for mutual edification, how things need to be understood to be of value, etc.), it would appear that the overarching theme of these three somewhat controversial chapters is that all things should be governed by love (1 Corinthians 13) and “**done decently and in order**” (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Paul will complete this epistle by addressing a collection for the saints, his personal ministerial plans, and some final exhortations.

Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. ¹⁴ Let all that you do be done with love (1 Corinthians 16:13, 14).

But prior to these final words, he dedicates his longest chapter to the matter of the resurrection—both Christ’s and ours. It is the heart of the Christian faith. Will the victory of Christ change our lives and change the world? Most certainly! But the Christian faith as a lifestyle or even a world transforming force, pales in comparison to our eternal hope. He puts it thus:

For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. ¹⁷ And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! ¹⁸ Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable (1 Corinthians 15:16-19).

To deny the resurrection is to deny the Christian faith. Paul will appeal to the course of nature in his explanation and the apparent death of a seed.

Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies (1 Corinthians 15:36).

We despair not for the seed, for we know what it will produce. Such is the same for the resurrection of those who are in Christ. It is a full chapter of victory, but in summary, our bodies:

- Are sown in corruption but raised in incorruption.

- Are sown in dishonor but raised in glory.
- Are sown in weakness but raised in power.
- Are sown a natural body but raised a spiritual body.
- Are sown an earthly body but raised a heavenly body.
- Are sown flesh and blood but raised a changed body.
- Are mortal but raised immortal.

So grand is this victory that Paul will crescendo with the great mocking of death, followed by a call to stay the course.

So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "*Death is swallowed up in victory.*"⁵⁵ "*O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?*"⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:54-58).

Questions for Study

1. What are some ways you have noticed your culture having influence over your view of theology and morals (pages 2, 3)?
2. What kind of city was Corinth (page 3)?
3. In what way is 1 Corinthians broken into two parts (page 3)?
4. What was an initial problem Paul addresses in the Corinthians church (pages 3, 4)?
5. Describe the “Gospel army” (page 4).
6. Discuss the notion of a carnal Christian (pages 4, 5).
7. Why is church discipline important (page 5)?
8. Who are those who will not inherit the kingdom of God? Explain (page 5).
9. Review some of the difficulties Corinth was experience in its worship. How were they instructed (pages 6, 7)?
10. How important in the resurrection? Why? Unpack the beauty of the resurrection (pages 7, 8).