

THE BIG READ (7)

1 Corinthians

A. Introduction

1. The New Testament begins with the four Gospels that tell the story of Jesus' earthly life, and Acts which traces the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome

After these, the remainder of the New Testament is made up of epistles or letters that were sent to individual Christians or churches.

These letters address specific situations in the lives of believers and through them we are taught how to live as God's people.

Following Romans, 1 Corinthians is the next of the New Testament letters written by the apostle Paul.

Paul wrote this letter while he was in Ephesus some time around AD53 or 54.

"I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me." (1 Corinthians 16:7-9)

2. A few years earlier Paul had planted the church in Corinth, and spent a year and a half there, establishing and strengthening the church.

But after he left, some serious issues had arisen to do with the beliefs and behaviour of some of the members of the church.

Information came from some of the servants of a Christian lady called Chloe.

"My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you." (1 Corinthians 1:11)

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you." (1 Corinthians 5:1)

So in response Paul wrote a letter to them (we don't have a copy of this one).

"I have written to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people." (1 Corinthians 5:9)

The Corinthians responded with a letter of their own where Paul was made aware further problems that existed.

"Now for the matters you wrote about." (1 Corinthians 7:1)

Paul wrote to them a second time, this letter which we know as 1 Corinthians, to tackle these issues that he had heard about.

3. The apostle Paul addresses five main problems that were present in the church.

Chapters 1-4: Divisions

Chapters 5-7: Sex

Chapters 8-10: Food

Chapters 11-14: Worship

Chapter 15: Resurrection

B. Things to look for

1. The problems that existed in the church.

There were divisions.

"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; and still another, "I follow Christ." (1 Corinthians 1:10-12)

"For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?" (1 Corinthians 3:3-4)

There was sexual immorality.

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud!" (1 Corinthians 5:1-2)

There were disagreement over eating food sacrificed to idols.

"Now about food sacrificed to idols." (1 Corinthians 8:1)

There was disunity and disorder in the worship gathering.

"In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it." (1 Corinthians 11:17-18)

"Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant." (1 Corinthians 12:1)

There were people denying the resurrection.

"But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (1 Corinthians 15:12)

2. The cause of these problems.

The Corinthians were being worldly not spiritual.

"Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3)

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16)

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19)

3. Paul's response to these problems.

Paul's response is to remind them of the gospel and to apply it to each of these problems found within the church.

"Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve." (1 Corinthians 15:1-5)

The gospel reminds us that the church follows Jesus Christ not one of His servants.

"What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task." (1 Corinthians 3:5)

"For no-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:11)

The gospel tells us that Jesus died for sexual sins and because we are united to Him, what we do with our bodies matters.

"Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast – as you really are. For Christ our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." (1 Corinthians 5:7)

"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." (1 Corinthians 6:11)

"You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

The gospel empowers us to love those who love Jesus

"Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling-block to the weak." (1 Corinthians 8:9)

"So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment." (1 Corinthians 11:33)

"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12:7)

The gospel is meaningless with the resurrection of Jesus.

"And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." (1 Corinthians 15:14-19)

C. Who is Jesus?

1. Jesus is revealed in 1 Corinthians by the character the church should have.

Paul says the character of the church should be a reflection of the character of Christ.

"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?" (1 Corinthians 6:15)

"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (1 Corinthians 12:27)

2. Jesus is One.

"Is Christ divided?" (1 Corinthians 1:13)

"Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live." (1 Corinthians 8:6)

"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ." (1 Corinthians 12:12)

For this reason there should be no divisions within the church.

"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." (1 Corinthians 1:10)

3. Jesus is holy.

"To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours." (1 Corinthians 1:2)

"And that is what some of you were. 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." (1 Corinthians 6:11)

For this reason the church is to be different from the world and be sexually pure.

"Flee from sexual immorality." (1 Corinthians 6:18)

4. Jesus is loving.

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (1 Corinthians 13:4-6)

"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15:3)

For this reason the church should be marked by love with members seeking to build one another up.

"...so that the church may be edified." (1 Corinthians 14:5)

5. Jesus is alive.

"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." (1 Corinthians 15:20)

For this reason the church should live as those whose hope is their own resurrection.

"And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven." (1 Corinthians 15:49)

"Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

D. How then shall we live?

1. Live like Christ.

"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1)

2. Labour for Christ.

"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:58)