Let The Bible Speak Series

The Problem Church
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Corinth was often referred to as the “ornament of Greece;” “the Star of Hellas”
A renowned center of traffic between Europe and Asia. Such phrases as “Bridge of the
Sea” and “Gates of the Peloponese” distinguished her as one of the world’s most popular
and strategic cities. Located only 40 miles west of Athens, yet in some ways it surpassed
even the fame of that city. “Sport and business, pleasure and profit, luxury and pride,
riches and poverty, debauchery and crime, combined to make Corinth the most wicked
city since Sodom and Gomorrah.” Corinth was both luxurious and licentious: Aphrodite
had a renowned temple here. Attached to it were 1000 priestesses, consecrated court-e-
sans. The temple adorned the Acro-Corinth a hill towering 1750 feet as a backdrop to the
city. The exterior of the temple shone like burnished gold, silhouetted against heavens.
The reputation of Corinth was bad, even among the pagans. To behave as a “Corinthian”
was an expression used widely at that time to describe shameless immorality.
Such was this city of approximately 600,000 people when Paul entered into it around ‘52
A.D. Arriving from Athens, alone and obviously without means, he secured lodging with
“a certain Jew named Aquila a man of Pontus by race, lately come from Italy, with his
wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome; and
he came unto them; and because he was of the same trade he abode with them, and they
wrought; (worked) for by their trade they were tentmakers” Acts 18:1-2.
Among the first Corinthian converts there were some very gifted and influential people
such as: Aquilla and Priscilla (Acts 18:1-3), Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue,
Acts 18:8, Gaius, thought by many to be a man of wealth 1Cor. 1:14,
Sosthenes, who may have been a chief ruler of the synagogue, and Erastus, the city
treasurer Rom. 16:23.

However, at the writing of Paul’s first letter, it appears that the church is largely
composed of lower class people 1Cor.1:26-29.
It is a signal illustration of the grace of God, and the power of the gospel, that a church
was organized in this city of gayety, luxury and licentiousness.
It also shows “that the gospel is adapted to meet and overcome all forms of wickedness,
and to subdue all classes of people to itself.”
The conditions, however, that arose in the church at Corinth suggest both its problems
and character.
It is obvious even to the casual observer that the evil climate existing in Corinth, the city,
had a devastating impact on Corinth, the church.
This principle is taught repeatedly in the N.T.:
James 4:4 “…the friendship of the world is enmity with God.” “Friend of world--enemy
of God.” The idea here refers to “affection” for the sinful pleasures of the world. Any
friend of these is an enemy of God. 1Cor.15:33 “Be not deceived: Evil companionships
corrupt good morals.” The idea being that the toleration of any evil or evil person tends to
corrupt the one who allows such a relationship to exist.
PROBLEMS CONFRONTING BY THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

I. The problem of immorality.
   a. The city itself was extremely evil. The temple of Aphrodite encouraged immorality in the name of religion.
   Sins of the flesh were practiced by the Corinthians without conscience or shame.
   1Cor.6:9-11 “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, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God, And such were some of you, But you were washed, but ye are sanctified…”
   However, once they had made the change many of them fell under the influence of false teachers, and evidently confused what was morally right and that which was morally wrong.
   They apparently reasoned: since meats and fornication were both associated with pagan idolatrous worship, that since one could eat meat, then one could also commit fornication.
   In replying to this Paul in 1Cor.6:12-20 makes a distinction between the stomach and the body.
   (1) The stomach fulfilled its purpose when it uses meat to sustain life.
   (2) The body, on the other hand, fulfills its purpose when it is used to glorify God.
   Hence the body “is not for fornication but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.”
   In other words meat is not a perversion of the stomach’s intended use; however, fornication would be a gross perversion of the body’s use and purpose.
   He then gives nine reasons why fornication (immorality) is wrong:
   1. the body is not for fornication, i.e. the whole person
   2. the body is for the Lord, i.e. not for the gratification of its appetites.
   3. the Lord is for the body,
   4. the body will be raised, Just as Christ was raised with body, so shall we.
   5. our bodies are members of Christ,
   6. fornication is a sin against the body,
   7. our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit,
   8. our bodies have been bought with a price and belong to God,
   9. our bodies are to be used to glorify God. Body becomes an instrument through which we honor and glorify the Lord.

II. The Problem of Dealing With Immorality in the Church. 1Cor.5
The old morality of Corinth had been discredited, exposed, and revealed in the degradations and shameful debaucheries which invariably resulted from it.
The new morality had come to the church in the preaching of Jesus Christ.
The new ethic was characterized by Chastity, sobriety, honesty etc.
Paul was shocked by the sin, but more shocked at the attitude of the Corinthian church, which went on, being puffed up with pride.
Incest was practiced among the Gentiles, but it was unacceptable to them.
Two things concerned Paul in this matter:
1. The salvation of the man involved.
2. The protection of the church from further infiltration of immorality.
In order to achieve these two goals, the church is commanded to
(1) "deliver such an one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh" v.5
(2) they are to purge him from their congregational presence v.7
(3) they are forbidden to keep company with the fornicating brother v.11 (not to even eat with such a person.)
(4) they are charged to "put away from yourselves that wicked person." v. 13
Their glorying had failed to take any note of the cancer of immorality in their very midst. The continued presence of this man, without rebuke, among them posed a threat to the purity of the entire church. The continuation of such a situation could only lead to further cases of immoral conduct. Hence "a little leaven..."

III. The Problem of Division
a. Division and contention-- 1Cor.1:10 "Now I plead with you brethren that there be no divisions among you..." This was not a formal or bodily division, but one of sentiment that causes contention and strife. The pride of Corinth showed itself to a great extent in philosophical conceit. The citizens who vaunted their superior intelligence were divided into sects. (Plato, Aristotle etc) The church became infiltrated with the same intellectual vanity, and apparently sought to make Christianity the rival of philosophy by exalting her teachers to be heads of religio-philosophical sects, hence becoming rivals of Christ himself. Regarding this Paul gives an injunction covering three points:
(1.) Unity of speech, "all speak the same thing"
(2.) Unity of organization “perfectly joined together”
(3.) Unity of mind and judgment “same mind and same judgment”
Speech--speculative discourses, philosophical dissertations, unscriptural reasonings etc. a speculative argumentative spirit which genders strife and contentions.
Divisions-- These were mere party’s in the church, not sects disrupting it, nor organized denominations professing to be “branches of the church”

Unity of mind and judgment is the ideal.-- “Mind,” represents the inner state, the “judgment” the outward exhibition of it in action.
If this condition were not addressed, the result would ultimately be an open division in the body. So we can see the many problems that beset this group of Christians.
In our study last week we noticed the impact that immorality had on the Corinthian church, as we described some of the sins that were prevalent there. As a result of immoral conduct the church was faced with how to deal with those who committed sin and refused to give it up. That led to a confrontation with issues of discipline and how people who were living sinful lives should be handled. We also gave our attention to the problem of division and the havoc it caused in the spiritual body. Today we want to investigate the problem they had in going to law one against the other.
This is recorded in 1Corinthians 6:1-8 “Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, the things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even
one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother and that before unbelievers. Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?"
The litigation here described was that of brother going to law against brother before pagan judges. The matters under consideration were “smallest matters” i.e. trivial or trifling cases. Minor matters, or things of little value.
Doing so, was in direct disobedience to Mt.18:15-17. Which taught that they should go the brother and “tell him his fault between thee and him alone.”
The Lord laid down the rules for any brother who had a matter against another brother:
(1) a personal confrontation between the wronged and the wrongdoer,
(2) another attempt at reconciliation if the first failed, with witnesses present,
(3) a general examination before the whole church.
McGarvey said they “were not only disobeying the Lord’s command, but were also committing treason against their present brotherhood and their future status as judges.”
The teaching of Paul in these verses teaches the following:
1. Brethren ought not to seek to settle their differences, like those under consideration here, before outsiders.
2. Differences between brethren do arise and these differences need to be settled.
3. The congregation ought to make arrangements to assist brethren in settling such disputes. i.e. “before the saints.”
4. Every Christian should be careful to always guard and protect the influence of the church. And if necessary “suffer wrong” themselves rather than destroy the influence of the church.
Such behavior was just another indication of their failure to love and care for one another as they ought.

VI. Problems Over Abuses in the Lord’s Supper. 1Cor.11:17-22.
We learn that the services of the Corinthian congregation had become so corrupted that when they assembled they actually retarded rather than encouraged their spiritual growth. They were divided. It is a carnal spirit tends to division, a work of the flesh.
“The divisive spirit in the perverse and carnal, manifests, by contrast, the loving, united spirit of the obedient and spiritual, which is approved.” McGarvey.
The word division is a milder term than “factions.” The former represented parties separated by present or at least very recent dissensions, while the latter described matured separations and looked toward permanent organizations.
They were headed for deep trouble and greater problems if something was not done to change the course of their behavior.
Verse 20-21 indicate an indictment on three counts: There could be no communion supper when:
1. The parties did not eat at the same time, but some before and some after;
2. when each ate his own meal, instead of sharing in “the one bread”
3. when some ate to the full and others ate nothing at all, because there was nothing left.

The problem: The abuses of the Lord’s Supper had probably grown out of the “love feast” which the Corinthians associated with it. In Corinth this had been shamelessly
mixed with the sacred rite to the extent of corrupting it.
The factious spirit in Corinth caused the church to eat in different parties and at different
times. Some had plenty, others had none.
Their conduct made it impossible to eat the Lord’s Supper.
Paul might well have asked:
1. Why do you meet in a public assembly to eat your private meal? Don’t you know that
private feasts should be eaten in your own private houses?
2. Is it because you despise the church of God, and wish to show your contempt for it by
exposing the poverty of those who have no houses, nor anything else, making a parade of
your wealth before them?
3. Is it that you do not consider them fit to eat with?
The real problem was a lack of sharing, brotherly concern and love. A failure to receive
one another as equal in Christ. All this only underscored the divided state of the church at
that time. This letter was designed to correct the problems in this church whom Paul
loved. Several things are noteworthy:
1. It was a church of God even though it was beset with problems and trouble. It had not
at that time been written off by God.
2. They were worth saving. Time and longsuffering patience were called for as well as
great plainness of speech.
3. There is no indication that everyone in Corinth was in the same spiritual state.
Some had “sinned already” 2Cor.12:21 “lest when I come again, my God will humble me
among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of
the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced,”
while some walked in the light. 1Cor.1:1-5 “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.”
4. His final exhortation in 1Cor.16:13 was for them to “watch, stand fast in the faith, be
brave and strong, and let everything be done in love.”
5. This church had serious problems, and the only remedy was repentance and dedicated
devotion. So it is with every church not living up to the Divine standard.