

# WELCOME TO CORINTH

## 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-17

Often churches flatter themselves with the title, “[New Testament church.](#)” Their members are proud of the fact they go to a *NT church*... The pastor make it his goal to grow *NT believers*... and build a *NT church*...

*I once thought I wanted to be a part of a NT church, until I read Paul’s NT letter to the Church at Corinth.*

The Corinthian Christians were definitely a NT church, but they were a church fraught with problems.

*Theirs was a divided church... So much so, members were suing each other in the pagan courts...*

*Blatant immorality was tolerated... The God-given roles of male and female were being ignored... Communion had become an excuse for gluttony...*

*Spiritual gifts were being abused... Foundational truths, like the resurrection, were being questioned.*

*And perhaps worst of all, love had taken a backseat!*

I want our church to *embrace NT doctrine... And experience NT expansion... and enjoy NT fellowship... and exhibit NT charity... And exude NT power...*

But if being a NT church means following the *example of the church in Corinth... then forget it!*

The Corinthian church had problems that needed to be corrected - and of course, that was Paul's purpose in writing this enlightening and comprehensive letter.

On his Second Missionary Journey, Paul spent 18 months in the seaport of Corinth. This Greek city and the Roman empire had experienced a rocky courtship.

In the 2nd century BC, Corinth revolted against Rome. The city was destroyed by the Roman General Mummius. Corinth was a pile of rubble for 100 years.

It was Julius Caesar who recognized Corinth's geographic and strategic significance, and had the city rebuilt. It became the capitol of the Roman province of Achaia, and it grew to be a prominent commercial hub.

Located 48 miles south of Athens, Corinth's city center was built on the north side of the Acrocorinthus, a 1900 foot mountain that dominated the city's skyline.

Corinth is situated on a isthmus - a narrow strip of land connecting two larger land masses. This isthmus was the bridge between the Peloponnesus Peninsula and the Greek Mainland. The Isthmus of Corinth is four miles wide. To the west is the *Gulf of Corinth*. Eastward is the *Saronic Gulf*. Corinth had ports on both shores.

In the 1800s a canal was cut across the isthmus, so boats could navigate from the Ionian to Aegean Seas.

But in the first century there was no canal. Ships either had to sail around the Peloponnesus, or they could be pulled across the isthmus by slaves. The rail system they used was an amazing feat of engineering. You can see remnants of it even to this very day!

Because Corinth sat at a crossroads, its population swelled to 600,000 residents. Immigrants came from all over the world. Corinth was a truly cosmopolitan place.

But with the influx of people came every lewd and wicked practice known to man. Corinth was a microcosm of the Roman world. Not only its *politics and commerce*, but its *morality and spirituality* as well.

Above all Corinth was known for its lust and vice. The city was “*spring break*” on steroids. Corinth was the Las Vegas of the ancient world - a real sin city.

Corinth was home for the kind of people that appear on the Jerry Springer Show... the *wackos* and *sickos*.

Among her Greek neighbors the phrase, “*playing the Corinthian*” was synonymous for drunkenness. A “*Corinthian girl*” was another name for a prostitute.

The city of Corinth had a sordid reputation.

In fact, on the mountain above the city was the temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Every night in Corinth 10,000 so-called “*priestesses*” came from the Acrocorinthus, and hit the street to play the prostitute.

The tricks they turned raised funds for their Temple.

In Corinth, sexual immorality wasn’t just tolerated, it had been institutionalized as part of the local religion.

It’s interesting, read Romans 1:21-32, Paul’s graphic description of the *ungodliness* and *unrighteousness* of ancient Rome. *Morally, spiritually* Rome was bankrupt.

Currently, our Supreme Court is deliberating the legality of same-sex marriage, but the practice of *gay marriage is nothing new!* Caesar Nero entered into two homosexual marriages - one as a bride and the other as a groom. It's a perversion as old as Rome.

Read Romans 1 the Roman world was callous and calculating in its twistedness. People knew of God's judgment, yet nothing deterred them. They deliberately sinned and encouraged others to do the same.

And guess where Paul wrote *this expose' on evil*? **He was in Corinth!** The city of Corinth was his inspiration.

Yet rather than be *intimidated* by the city's corruption, Paul saw the people - *the hollowness in their eyes and the emptiness on their face*. Corinth was all about pleasure, so *why were so many people unhappy and unsatisfied?* Paul loved these people - he knew Jesus died for lost people - and this truth *motivated* Paul.

Walk the Corinthian streets and you'd rub shoulders with all kinds of folk - *Jewish rabbis, Greek merchants, pagan priests, salty sailors, rugged soldiers, busy shopkeepers, weary slaves, brazen harlots, street peddlers, jugglers, con-men, even athletes-in-training*.

Paul surveyed this kaleidoscope of lost people, and rather than wanting to get out of dodge as quick as he could, he thought, *what a great place to start a church!*

*It was in this den of sin* that the Holy Spirit used Pastor Paul to plant a vibrant and Spirit-filled church.

It was only after Paul left Corinth that problems developed in the church. In short, rather than *the Church influencing Corinth - Corinth influenced the church*. Paul was in Ephesus when he heard of the problems. From there he penned a letter of correction.

It's been said, "Boats are made to be in the water, but you don't want water in the boat." High seas and strong storms are no threat to a well-built boat. Ships are fabricated to stay afloat in deep water, rough water.

The danger though is if water ever gets into the ship... And the same is true of the Church in the world.

Jesus constructed His Church to survive, even thrive, on the storm-tossed sea of this world. He made us to be a witness! But if the world gets into the Church it can sink us. And this is what happened in Corinth.

Paul begins his letter in verse 1, "Paul..."

Today, we close our letters with a signature. Ancient letters began with a signature. Most correspondence was written on a scroll, and you didn't want your readers to have to unroll a long scroll to see who the letter was from, so you put the signature right up front.

The date of Paul's letter was 57 AD - about five years after his visit. And by this point Paul had made quite a name for himself. John Phillips writes of Paul...

“People loved or loathed him, admired or despised him, imitated him fondly or ridiculed him passionately, but they could not ignore him. He had turned the world upside down. He was at once a Roman citizen, a Greek cosmopolitan, a trained Jewish rabbi. Moreover, he was brave as a lion. All the forces of his giant intellect, his white-hot emotions, and his determined will combined to make him what he was - Paul!”

Apparently, “*Paul*” had two names. He also had a Hebrew name, “*Saul*.” In fact, he was known as “*Saul*” when he and Barnabas departed from Antioch, and sailed for Cyprus on their first missionary journey.

There, Saul saw his first Gentile convert, a Roman official named, “*Sergius Paulus*.” It was his first taste of a Gentile coming to Christ, and a “*Paulus*” no less.

He was a *Paul*... I think it whet his appetite for more.

Their next stop was Gentile Galatia, and from then on “Saul” is “Paul.” He jettisons his Hebrew handle and goes by his Greek name. It’s as if he was saying, *“my Jewishness, my legalism, is a thing of the past.”*

The Gospel is grace for every race... And to display that truth loud and clear, Saul became “Paul.”

He continues, “Paul, called *to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God...*” Paul did not appoint himself. He wasn’t a climber. His own ambition didn’t propel him to the place of authority he now occupied.

He was *“an apostle of Jesus through the will of God.”* Paul was called and installed by the Holy Spirit.

Paul writes along with *“Sosthenes our brother...”*

Acts 18 speaks of Paul’s time in Corinth. When he first arrived he held meetings in the Jewish synagogue.

When the Jews rejected his message, he wiped the dust off his feet, and set up shop next-door to the synagogue - at a private residence owned by Justus.

Paul started reaching out to Gentiles - to anyone and everyone in Corinth. The leader of the synagogue at the time was a man named Crispus. I imagine Chris



wandering over in the middle of the day, asking Paul questions. It led to the *Dude Jew's* conversion. What a victory this was for Christianity! The Gospel spread. Acts 18 tells us, that “many Corinthians” believed.

Back in the synagogue, Crispus was replaced by another Jewish leader named “*Sosthenes.*” He was determined to stir up trouble for Paul and the Church.

Sosthenes brought Paul before the city counsel on grounds of sedition - *but his plot backfired.* Gallio, the proconsul saw through the scheme. He was using the local tribunal to foster a personal, religious vendetta.

Gallio dismissed the charges against Paul...

And the Corinthians were so angry with Sosthenes for wasting their time, and for manipulating their system, they had him beaten instead of Paul!

Now look at how Paul addresses the Corinthian church. He writes along with “*Sosthenes our brother.*”

*Could it be? Could this be the same Sosthenes?*

Apparently Sosthenes concluded, “*if you can't beat them, join them.*” The Jewish community in Corinth was having a hard time keeping a rabbi in charge of the synagogue! *They all kept giving their lives to Jesus!*

Paul and Sosthenes write “to the church of God which is at Corinth...” *What a statement that makes!*

A group of people called out from this world, and called to God - living holy lives and bearing spiritual fruit in the most wicked city of its day! *What a witness! What a testimony to the transformative power of Jesus!*

Paul continues to address this church, “To those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be saints*...”

Over the centuries, the Church applied the term “*saint*” to special believers who did extraordinary acts of faith. But originally all believers were called saints.

The word means simply “set apart” or “dedicated.”

Once, two brothers stole a neighbor’s sheep. They were caught and punished. They both were branded on the forehead with the letters “ST” for “sheep thief.”

One brother was so ashamed of his failure, he fled from town to town trying to hide his mark. But the other brother was repentant. He took responsibility for his crimes, and despite the awful stigma, he stayed in the community, determined to rebuild a good reputation.

Years later a newcomer noticed “ST” on the man’s forehead, and he asked a townspeople what it meant.

The man replied, “I’m not sure, but I think it means ‘*Saint*.” Let’s all live in a way that marks us as a saint.

In the classic, “*Pilgrim’s Progress*,” John Bunyan writes of two earnest believers and their journey through life. He calls them “*Christian*” and “*Faithful*.”

One day they happen upon a fair. It was located in a town called “*Vanity*.” Listen to Bunyan’s description of the notorious **Vanity Fair**... “At this fair are all such merchandise sold as houses, lands, trades, places, honors, preferments, titles, countries, kingdoms, lusts, pleasures, and delights of all sorts, as whores, mistresses, wives, husbands, children, masters, servants, lives, blood, bodies, souls, silver, gold, pearls, precious stones, and what not...

At this fair are seen jugglings, cheats, games, plays, fools, apes, knaves, and rogues, and that of ever kind... Here too are thefts, murders, adulteries, false swearers, and that of a blood-red color (hot-tempered)”

Bunyan’s *Vanity Fair* was meant to be a picture of our world. It’s hollow. It’s empty. *Vanity* rules the heart.

All manner of vice, and lust, and pleasure, and pride are substituted for the meaninglessness people feel.

And *Christian* and *Faithful* are called on to walk through this Fair. As they do, they're mocked. Their clothing is different from the way the world is robed.

They speak a different language. But what makes the locals angry is their indifference to the wares for sale. *They refuse to buy what Vanity Fair is selling!*

Bunyan writes, "They cared not so much as to look upon them, and if they called upon them to buy, they would put their fingers in their ears and cry, 'Turn away my eyes from beholding vanity,' and look upwards, signifying their trade and traffic were in heaven."

In Bunyan's story, Faithful meets his martyrdom in Vanity Fair, and Christian barely escapes with his life.

But the parallel is clear. This world is a Vanity Fair.

All it offers is emptiness and *what it sells only masks what it lacks*. We as Faithful Christians have to make up our minds that we're not buying what this world is selling. Even if *peers laugh* and *people mock*, our trade and traffic involves the values and joys of heaven.

This was the challenge facing the Corinthian church *and every church - even our church*. We're a boat in the water, and we're trying to save people drowning in the surf, but we can't let the water get into the boat.

This is why Paul writes *“to the church which is at Corinth... with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours...”*

*“In every place”* includes Lilburn. This letter was not only written to the Corinthians, but to us as well!

Verse 3, *“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* Grace and peace are called the twins of the NT. And this means more to me, now that we have twins. Our grandkids, Luke and Kate, are a pair. They’re two years old and I don’t think they’ve ever been apart for longer than a few hours.

When I watch them, I imagine if they ever think, *“When is your mom going to come and pick you up?”* Or, *“Wow, this is the play date that never ends.”*

I’m not saying they want to, but if they did, they can’t escape each other. And neither can grace and peace.

Did you know there’s a Twins Restaurant in NYC. The eatery is owned by twins, Debbie and Lisa Ganz.

They employ 37 sets of twins. Each set of twins works the same shift, in the same outfit. If one gets sick - both stay home. If one gets fired - both get fired.

Every night 10-20 sets of twins eat at their restaurant. There's even twin chandeliers. Double Mint gum is on every table. Their motto reads, "You can only make a first impression once, we make it twice."

Well, "*Grace and Peace*" are a pair that would fit in nicely at the Twins Restaurant. They too work together.

Grace gains for us a right standing with God.

Peace is the result.

Grace *cooks it up* - peace *serves it up*. You can't have one without the other... And there's an order. You can't know God's *peace* until you receive God's *grace*!

Paul continues his greeting, verse 4, "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..." I love the language Paul uses.

This is what Jesus does in a life, He "*enriches in everything...*" **He makes everything better!** The day after I gave my life to Jesus the air seemed fresher, and the sun seemed brighter. I went about my normal activities but with a bounce in my step and a smile on my face. Life got better. Everything in life was enriched.

Jesus makes your marriage better, your parenting wiser - school more tolerable, work more enjoyable.

Yes, there's stuff in your life Jesus wants to eliminate, but He not only takes away, He adds to. He fills us up with good stuff. He enriches and enhances.

The Corinthians had been enriched **“in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift...”**

We'll find out later that God had blessed the church at Corinth in multiple ways, but not the least of which was with a wide array of spiritual gifts - **healings, words of wisdom, discernment, they praised God with unknown tongues and could interpret what was said.**

The Corinthians attended **a charismatic church.**

The term **“charismatic”** is a compound word. **“Charis”** is Greek for **“grace.”** **“Mata”** means **“gift.”** Which means the supernatural gifts that enriched the Corinthians were **grace-gifts.** And they're available to us if we humbly receive them by trusting in God's grace.

Some of us are living below our privileges as a Christian. There's a spiritual, supernatural component to our Christian faith that we're missing. Christianity

should be a miracle life. A life that God blesses us, and infuses us with power, and uses us to reach others.

*Calvary Chapel, I believe God has more for us than we've experienced!* The Holy Spirit wants to do a great and fresh work in our lives. Let's trust in His grace.

And notice, Paul says it's through these spiritual gifts that *"the testimony of Christ was confirmed..."*

Miracles don't produce faith - *faith comes by God's Word* - but miracles do confirm our faith. It's evidence.

As Mark says at the end of his Gospel, *"these signs will follow..."* Spiritual gifts are the results of faith.

Think of it this way, the atmosphere always holds a degree of moisture, but we realize it most when it rains.

And likewise, Jesus is always among us, but His presence gets *"confirmed"* through these spiritual gifts.

Later in the book we'll learn that the Corinthians were *misusing and abusing* spiritual gifts, but never does Paul suggest they stop *using* them. The presence of these gifts were always viewed by Paul as positive.



And we too, need a positive, *not a hesitant or reluctant*, approach to charismata. 1 Corinthians 14:1 says it best, “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts.”

Verse 7 speaks of our hope in the return of Jesus, “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.*”

When our Lord comes for His Church it'll be the final confirmation of the truth of His Gospel. It's the final proof that Jesus is able, and His blood is sufficient, to present us blameless before God in Christ Jesus.

And notice our posture toward the return of Christ. We should be “eagerly waiting” - *not despondent, or apathetic, or come-say-come-se*, but “eagerly waiting.”

Looking... hoping... longing for the day when we see Jesus! *He's coming. Let's live on the edge of our seat!*

Verse 9, “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

And notice why He cleanses us, and saves us... *so He can sit us on a shelf and point us out from time to time? No!* The reason for all God's effort is so we can have fellowship with Jesus. **He saves us to know us!**

A Christian's ultimate purpose is not to *do for Jesus*, or *go for Jesus*, or *grow for Jesus*... it's *to know Jesus*.

Our calling is relationship - fellowship! Hanging out, and spending time, and living life together with Jesus.

In verse 10 Paul tackles the first problem. **“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”** The church at Corinth had become fragmented. They lacked unity and harmony.

**“For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of *Chloe's household*, that there are contentions among you.”** A gal in the fellowship, *Chloe*, either wrote Paul or visited. She reported bad news. Chloe was upset. Cliques had formed in the church.

Understand up front, it's okay to have a church with specific distinctives. No two churches are exactly alike.

Every church has a little different flavor, and emphasis, and approach, and that's okay. To reach a diverse community we need a diversity in churches.

It's also okay to have a circle of friends at church... as long as that circle isn't closed. Our emphasis should always be to bring people in, not keep people out.

Problems occur when church members *polarize*.

It's wrong when one group thinks they're better - or more spiritual - than another group. Suddenly, God's family becomes a family feud - friction drives us apart.

Certainly, there are issues worth fighting for - hills to die on - and in those issues I'll lead the charge.

But all too often churches end up **majoring on the minors and minoring on the majors**. We divide and fight over petty, picky stuff... and this grieves God's Spirit.

*When Christians divide over baptism - do we dunk or sprinkle?... Communion every week or just once a quarter?... King James version or a more modern translation?... Hymns or praise songs?... Organ or guitar?... Robes or blue jeans?... Pulpit or no pulpit?... Pews or chairs... **We polarize over trivial stuff.***

I read the true story of Paul Loetz. Paul took a terrible fall. He punctured a lung, broke a few ribs, was bleeding internally. Paul was rushed to the hospital.

But while lying in the emergency room, he heard two doctors arguing over who would put the tube into his crushed chest. The doctor's argument became a shoving match. One of the physicians threatened to have the other one removed by the security guards.

Loetz cried out, "Please, somebody, save me!" Two other doctors had to step in and settle the dispute.

All too often this happens in the church. God brings hurting people through our doors, but we're too busy trying to out-do or upstage each other to provide them help. That's what happened in the church at Corinth.

In verse 12 Paul describes the problem further, "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."

The believers in Corinth had divided around personalities. They gravitated to their favorite teacher.

One group shouted, "Paul is cool! We're into Paul, he preaches liberty. You guys are all legalists."

The second splinter disagreed, "We like Apollos, he does deep. He gets into the Greek, and unlocks profound trues. We're more intelligent than you guys."

A third segment countered, "We follow Pentecost Pete, Ole Cephas! He walked on water. You can study the Bible if you want, we're into the power of the Spirit."

The final schism thumbed their nose at everyone, "We're too proud to learn from any human teacher. We take our orders from Jesus alone." How arrogant!

But Paul writes to this misguided church, "Is Christ divided?" What a ridiculous thought. Jesus is whole!

"Was Paul crucified for you?" Of course not. "Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" The answer to all the above is "no." Christ is not divided, and neither should His body be fragmented and splintered.

Christ died for us. We're baptized into Christ. Christ has given us teachers. Thus, the main thing is Jesus, and we need **to keep the main thing the main thing.**

Every church needs to keep its eyes on Jesus!

Paul is accusing the Corinthians of ripping apart the body of Christ - the body Jesus died to save and heal.

Once I read the story of a man who killed his wife and ran her body through a wood chipper to destroy the evidence. As repulsive as that might sound, this is what the Corinthians had done to the body of Christ!

They'd gotten a little chippy toward one another, and instead of focusing on their many and marvelous commonalities, they allowed just a very few differences to split them, and set up camp apart from each other.

Here's the lesson for us, don't be attracted to personalities! Pastors shouldn't foster for themselves a celebrity status. And we members shouldn't turn our pastors, mere servants of God, into spiritual celebrities.

Teachers *in the Body of Christ, sent from Christ*, are to *point us to Christ*. Jesus is the rallying point, not the teacher. Jesus is the commonality greater than all our differences. Focus on Jesus and we'll stay united.

In Ephesians 4:3 Paul challenges us, “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

It's the Holy Spirit that creates unity. I look around at our group, and I'm astonished. I tell people, “The only way you could get this group together without a fight breaking out is through the power of Jesus Christ.”

The Spirit of Christ produces our unity, but it's up to us to work at keeping it, and not doing stupid stuff, that would undermine and sabotage our precious unity.

There's a poem by Edwin Markham that speaks of this endeavoring, “He drew a circle that shut me out. Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout... But love and I had the will

to win. We drew a circle that took him in.” Let’s not let stupid stuff separate us. Let’s breed harmony.

In verse 14 Paul writes, “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.”

He’s responding to their silly divisions. Some of the Corinthians were saying they were baptized by Paul and that made them special. It gave them an unique spiritual birthright. Of course, Paul says “not so.”

Every believer is baptized into Christ - in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - not in the name of some specific leader, or denomination, or church.

When we baptize, we’re baptizing for Christ’s sake. You’re not being baptized into our church specifically, but into THE CHURCH corporately. When we take communion this isn’t *the CC table*, it’s *the Lord’s table*.

Paul doesn’t know how any of the believers claimed to be *baptized in the name of Paul*. He had deliberately avoided baptizing folks, just to avoid this controversy.

*“Lest anyone say, he was baptized in my name.”*

Of the hundreds, if not thousands, of new converts in Corinth, Paul only baptized Crispus and Gaius...

*And when he thought about it, he adds in verse 16, “Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other.”*

In other words, Paul had lost track of who and how many he baptized... *And this gives me great hope!*

It's so embarrassing when I ask a person if they've ever been baptized, only to hear them reply, “Of course Pastor Sandy, you're the one who baptized me!”

*That happened to even the Apostle Paul!*

While in Corinth, Paul had baptized only a couple of folks. Apparently, he suspected people might try to use the specifics of their baptism as *a badge of betterment*.

Paul writes, verse 17, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” This is provocative.

Notice, Paul makes a distinction between *baptism* and *the Gospel*. In his mind they were separate issues.

This is why he didn't worry about who and how many people he'd baptized. Baptism was a first step in a person's obedience - it jump-started their spiritual growth - but it wasn't an essential for their salvation.



Remember the thief on the cross wasn't baptized, but Jesus told him, "You'll be with Me in Paradise."

**A person is saved by faith and faith alone.**

There are Christian denominations, like the Church of Christ, that teach the necessity of water baptism.

If you haven't been dunked - then you're not saved.

But if that were true, it's hard to imagine Paul being so nonchalant about the subject. He's saying, "*I didn't focus on baptism - I came to preach the Gospel...*"

John 4:1-2 tells us, not even Jesus baptized His own followers. The twelve disciples handled those duties.

Baptism is important! In the early church a believer in Jesus wasn't taken seriously... *by the church, or even by the opposition...* until he or she was baptized.

Baptism was seen as the line in the sand. Once you crossed over, then everyone knew your faith was real.

When Texas pastor, Jim Denison, served as a missionary in East Malaysia he witnessed a baptism.

A teenage girl had given her life to Jesus, and had stepped forward to be baptized. During the service, Jim noticed a worn out suitcase leaning against the wall.

He asked the pastor about the luggage. The pastor pointed to the girl being baptized. He explained, “Her father told her if she became a Christian she could never go home again. So she brought her luggage.”

Hey, I’m not saying baptism isn’t important, *it is!*

But it’s my *response* to the Gospel, *not an ingredient of the Gospel*. It’s significant, but it’s not essential.

Paul says, “*For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.*” And next Sunday morning we’re going to examine the message Paul preached!