

I CORINTHIANS

I. Churches Keeping in Touch
and Seeking Advice & Help.

A. Source of news

1. Chloe's people, I Cor. 1:11
2. Stephanus, Fortunatus, & Achaicus,
I Cor. 16:15-18
(Member of Cor. church)

3. A letter from the church to Paul,
I Cor. 7:1 (now lost).

B. The importance of churches & Xtn ministers & leaders staying in close touch.

C. Was 1st Cor. Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth? ANS: No; see I Cor. 5:9.

This early letter is either lost, or 2nd Cor. 6:14 to 7:1 may quote part of it.

This is an abrupt change of subject, and it interrupts the thought of what comes before & after it.

D. Paul's "severe" letter to the Corinthians, referred to in 2nd Cor. 2:4 and 7:8.

Part of the letter may be preserved in 2nd chapters 10-13, and its tone is much more severe than the rest of 2nd Cor (Chapters 1-9) which is like a letter of reconciliation.

E. These letters show the early apostles used both rebuke and reconciliation, as the occasion required, in shepherding the early N.T. Xtn churches in a very difficult time.

III. The Church had a serious problem of disunity,
I Cor. 1:10 - 4:21.

A. Partisans of religious loyalty to various leaders, I: 10-17.

B. The greatest problem of the Greeks was their inability to unify even against common enemies.

C. The Key to Church Unity is the Message of the Cross, 1:18-3:4.

1. Christ, not Paul or Peter or Apollos, is the one who was crucified for us.

2. Christ crucified is the power and wisdom of God. Paul uses these words over and over again.

D. One solution to the Disunity Problem is to help "Babes in Christ" grow up into mature spiritual Christians, 3:1.

Three Kinds of People
1 Cor. 2:6-3:4

I. The Lowest Level, 2:14

The "unspiritual" or "soulish" person (not having the spirit), or the "natural" man (RSV Margin).

These are people who are willingly deaf to the gospel and blind to Christ.

They cannot discern or judge, or examine, or investigate the things of the Spirit, vs. 14-15.

- The unsaved, unredeemed - like a stone or a dead seed, having no life.

II. The Middle Level

Babes in Christ, 3:1

No response to the light, except to blink or squint.

Undeveloped, immature Christians.

Not living up to the potential of their faith.

Like stunted plants

See contrast of the same words "natural" and "spiritual" in 15:44-46.

III. The Highest Level (2:15).

Mature Christians, 2:6

Advanced in the Word and Spirit.

A mature, spiritual attitude toward all of life.

Like fruit-bearing plants.

If you shine a light around the mature Christian, he will do more than blink his eyes; he will find his way by it.

IV. The Marks of the truly "spiritual" Christians

A. Contrasted with the "unspiritual" persons

- Marked by discord & quarreling

B. "Spiritual" Christians are people who promote harmony & unity.

C. They recognize all Christian leaders as "fellow workers with God" -- Paul and Apollos and Cephas.

The different apostles are not rivals, but fellow workers.

V. How else the Apostles were Regarded:

(He had already used the term "workmen," 3:10f)

A. As Servants of Christ, 4:1.

Bondslaves, not Masters.

B. As Stewards of the mysteries of God, 4:1.

They were responsible to administer faithfully what belonged not to them but to another.

What they administered was "the mysteries of God." "Mystery" signified what had been previously secret but was now revealed; for Paul this usually included the revelation that the Gentiles, and indeed all people throughout the whole world, could now be saved by Faith in Jesus, rather than the Jews alone having the possibility of God's redemption.

C. As a "spectacle" to the world, to angels and to men, vs. 9. The word denotes "a theatrical performance," like a drama, either a comedy or a tragedy. There is something of both in the ministry of the gospel, comedy in the sense of being regarded as a "fool for Christ's sake," (vs. 10), and tragedy in the sense of their having to endure so much suffering, "like men sentenced to death," vs. 9. and hungry, thirsty, ill-clad, buffeted, homeless, reviled, persecuted, slandered, and treated like "the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things," vs. 11-13. (Vs. 8-13 are partly sarcasm or irony; far from claiming to be VIPs, they were at the bottom of the heap).

D. These first three things Paul speaks of in the plural, using "we" or "us" of himself and the other apostles (Cephas, Apollos, etc), but now he uses the singular (vs. 15-16).

He reminds the Corinthians that he alone is their "father in Christ Jesus through the gospel," (vs. 15). He admonishes them as "beloved children," (vs. 14). He urges them to imitate him, vs. vs. 16. They had no other Christian role models to follow; they had been brought up in paganism.

His enemies and critics Paul calls "arrogant," vs. 18, 19.

The Apostle Paul could come to them either with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness, vs. 21. There is sometimes a place for either approach in the Lord's work, although today I would say that the greatest danger is for the pastor to lead with the rod too often. As their father in Christ, and as an Apostle of Jesus Christ, as the chief spiritual or pastoral leader of the church, he had certain authority, but he seems hesitant to use it unless it is really necessary. It is not the authority of the military officer, or government bureaucrat, or judge, but of their "father in Christ Jesus." In those days, more than now, the father's word in a family was the last word.

A MORE EXCELLENT WAY
I Cor. 13

INTRODUCTION: Paul gives two lists of "spiritual gifts" in this context, 12:8-10 and 27-30, which are not identical. The point with which he ends chap 12 is: "Desire the higher gifts," but he goes on to show them the more excellent way, the one spiritual gift without which all the other gifts are nothing, and every other one is a poor second. Paul sees nothing wrong in this kind of spiritual ambition, that is, a wholesome desire for great and unusual spiritual capacity and power. But what he does find wrong, or tragic, is to mistake a lesser gift (such as the gift of tongues, for example) for the greater gifts which he is going to discuss in chapter 13.

Remember that Paul had been dealing with the problems of the disunity and carnality in the church at Corinth. He is going to demonstrate now that the one surpassingly excellent Christlike way in the church is the way of christian love. The one law of life within the Body of Christ is the Law of Love.

The Greek word used here is quite rare in the classic Greek literature, although it is found in the Greek translation of the OT. Jerome used the Latin word "caritas" here, probably to avoid the earthly and sensual connotations of the word "amor." John Wyclif translated from the Vulgate Latin instead of from the Greek, so he used Jerome's word "charity" in English. The King James translators in 1611 also were influenced by Jerome's choice of "caritas" or "charity" in English. But in the more than 370 years since then the Eng. word "charity" has changed its meaning, and has come to mean primarily acts of pity, which is inadequate to convey the meaning of the Greek word "agape." This is the word that is used when the love of God is mentioned. It is this kind of love which the Holy Spirit imparts in grace to the child of God. It is not purely emotional, but it included rational judgment and the will of the individual, deliberately exercised as a matter of principle and duty.

This kind of Christian love may include emotion or feelings, but only as a result of something that has also been intellectually grasped, and then strengthened or confirmed by the free choice of the will.

Christianity almost had to coin a new word for what it meant by "love." The Greek world was much like our modern Hollywood and secular humanistic world, and they had dragged the word "love" through a lots of mud and filth, always suggesting some physical sex desire and not much else. That meaning still survives in our English word "erotic," from the Greek "eros." They had another word for a kind of love like a pale friendship, but it wasn't much better as far as the early Christians were concerned. They had no common word that could express the Christian experience of the love of God himself, or the love that is poured out even on the unlovely and unlovable, a love that sent God's son to suffer and die for us. A new word was needed which would describe the attitude of Christians to one another, which would reflect the total un-self-seeking quality of God's love and go far beyond the always partly selfish desire that often goes by the name of love in the non-Christian world.

The writers of the NT took a word that was not brand new, but it was really quite rare outside of the Bible, it had not been corrupted by all the ugly qualities associated with the other words for "eroticism" and "friendship." It was more of a literary word than a common word of their every-day language. In English it is pronounced "ah-gah'-pay. There is really no English word that translates it precisely, but it is certainly something much more than "charity," which suggests the patronizing gifts of money or baskets to the poor.

The best way to understand what this unique Christian love is all about is to read I Cor. 13 as much as you can in as many translations as you can, and meditate on it, and pray over every verse, and practice it in your life; only then can you know the meaning of Christian Love.

This chapter is so perfect and beautiful, that all of us preachers feel as someone has written, that when we attempt to expound on it we come away feeling like we have only left the mark of soiled and clumsy hands on a thing of beauty.

G. Campbell Morgan has suggested that he finds three natural movements in this chapter:

I. The Values of Love, vs. 1-3.

Here emphasizes the necessity for love.

A. It is the strength of service

B. It is the energy of equipment for service.

C. It is the dynamic of devotion.

II. The Virtues of Love, vs. 4-7.

The fruitfulness of love.

A. There are 7 statements dealing with love as concerning the individual.

B. Seven statements concerning love in its wider relationships.

III. The Victories of Love, vs. 8-13.

The duration of love.

A. Love never falls out of its course.
It never becomes inefficiency.

B. As Shakespeare wrote in one of his sonnets:
"Love is not love,
Which alters when it alteration finds."

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