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## **Corinthians**

**Key verses:** 1 Corinthians 1:10; 4:1-2; 6:9-13; 2 Corinthians 4:5; 9:7; 5:20

**Key personalities:** Paul and his companions

**Timeline:** The Church is established and grows by the Power of the Holy Spirit and the multiplying networks of Paul, 35-66 A.D.

**First Corinthians** was a church planted by Paul on his second missionary journey. This is a letter to that church that lost its way after Paul moved on; the church at Corinth became steeped in problems with divisions led by false teachers. These conflicts were disconcerting to the Corinthian church and took away from the Truth of Christ the Lord and His precepts. This happens in many churches are today. Immorality, doctrinal deviations, chasing pagan trends, and false teachers are running the show. Paul shows this church the significance of their new life and urges them to really follow Christ. Paul, by the power of the Holy Spirit, encourages the church at Corinth (and us) with careful, proper instructions on fellowship, church organization, and unity without infighting. He gives them instruction about the unity of Christ, proper ethics, how to worship, and Spiritual Gifts. Paul reminds them what love is and the meaning of the Resurrection.

**Second Corinthians** is the personal "hard letter," written just a few months after first one, and address the church's concerns. Paul defends his authority as an Apostle and his right to write to them in the first place as the one to address their problems and give proper solutions. The first letter did not go over very well because of their immaturity in Christ and their ignorance of the things of God. Paul does not give compliments to this church as this church is steeped in corruption and confusion; they were following bad leaders of various factions, not the Word of God. He gives them further encouragements to get it right as children in Christ. Paul gives them instruction. Paul gives his autobiography not to brag, but to model how he poured himself out to Christ and them. Paul clarifies what it means to share with one another as proper stewardship. (Paul may have written more letters to the Corinthians that have not been found. If this is the case, we still know precisely what we need to know according to the Will of God as He provides all that is needed, and He does not hide Himself.)

The city of Corinth was one of the richest and greatest ancient port cities in Greece and Rome with a population of over 500,000. It was a center of commerce as well as sin, prostitution, idolatry and wicked relationships. This church was struggling with sin all around them including some sin that should not have occurred amongst their congregation--its people suing and retaliating against one another. Instead of loving one another, they were being hateful and awful. Paul responds to their concerns to show us that God is patient and gracious to us. This is the fruitful path and way for our Christian lives and walk, not vengeance and exalting conflict. As Christians, we are to imitate Christ. We are to work and live and play within His parameters--always love. To cement this, Paul gives an epic description of love sandwiched between his instructions on church leadership, Spiritual Gifts and church order. Paul's ideas of love are a character description of who Christ is, and it must be the character description of our actions--behaving responsibly in all that we do (1 Cor. 6:8).

Many of the issues did not get resolved because of the infighting and refusal to acknowledge Paul's instructions. Perhaps, it took decades to resolve as these issues went on. This is a a testimony to our church today. We must heed Christ as our Head or we will never get it right with God or our call to those around us.

**Key Happening:** God's appeal to a disconnected church in conflict!

First and Second Corinthians challenges its original hearers (and us) who questioned God's order and precepts. They hosted home church fellowships and were insolent and not centered on what Jesus was all about. These arguments centered on whether food offered to pagan gods could be consumed. Trivial

matters were taking center stage and causing arguments and strife, when the Gospel is meant to bring people to Christ and create healthy relationships. Thus, if one is immoral or doing the opposite of God's call, the evidence of faith and fruit is absent; that person is not following the principles of the Gospel. Why is this so important? Because, as Christians, how we treat people reflects on our Lord. We are His ambassadors, and we represent Christ. He was never rude, except to point out hypocrisy in leaders (Matt. 23; 2 Cor. 5:20).

**What are and how are we to use Spiritual Gifts? They are one of the principle calls of the believer. 1 Corinthians 12:8-30:**

- There are two areas of ministry in the church for Spiritual Gifts. First are the "assigned offices" such as ministers, elders, and deacons, etc. These are the "offices" of (Acts 6:1-6; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5-7; 1 Tim.3:8; 5:17; James 2:15-16), leadership roles. They must have the appropriate gifts of leadership, as well the gift in their area of ministry (1 Cor. 14: 3-40; Eph. 4:7-16; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; Heb 13:17), all working together in love and cooperative unity.
- The Spiritual Gifts are: Word of wisdom, Word of knowledge, Faith, Healing, Miracles, Prophecy, distinguishing of spirits, Tongues, Interpretation of tongues, apostle, Teaching, Helps, Administration, Serving, Exhortation, Giving, Leading, Mercy, Evangelism, Pastor/Teacher, and Speaking.
- Second, Spiritual Gifts are assigned to each believer. Each and every one of us has at least one. These are the abilities to do a specific function in ministry to glorify Christ with the display of attributes of Christ's character in a specific function that strengthens the church. Examples are "pastor/teacher" for the minister, or "mercy" to those who visit the sick. It is the believer's responsibility to find and develop and exercise the gifts given. This is how we are to behave and interact with each other. When we refuse, we not only hurt ourselves, but each other, too. We hurt our Lord! Satan does not want you to discover your gifts; he wants you to ignore your responsibility and nurture of one another (Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11; 1 Peter 4:11).

**What is and how to use Love. 1 Corinthians 13:1-13:**

- We are to do nothing and say nothing without love! If you can speak any kind of language, do any kind of thing beyond what you think you can do, and you do not have love working in and through, then what do you have? You have a life that is meaningless, noisy, stressful, disconnected, and even miserable. You would be just like a pagan, clanging his instruments of noise and war, if your words were without love and deeds were without joy. Our efforts and ministry would still be aggravations and a detriment to others, even those who are close to you or those to whom you want to be close. There would be no effectual relationships, no contentment or joy. Even if you were the greatest statesman or Christian preacher, writer, or famous personality the world over, would this be meaningful if you did not have real, effectual love taking place in and out of you? What about having a great amount of faith and able to do the impossible? Does life matter without love? The fact is, nothing of either greatness or simplicity matters unless there is love! The question is *what is love?*
- There are 14 descriptions for love, half in the positive of how we are to be and the other half in the negative of how we are not to be. Paul is showing the Corinthians the reason for their problems, and he is showing them the solution they need for positive relationships and reconciliation.
- *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, 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. Love never fails.*
- Paul's point is the importance of Love--nothing is comparable to it. Love is the essence of the Gospel. To be a healthy Christian and to have a healthy church, love must impact us so we are influenced by His love. On, through, with and because of Christ's love for us, we ponder love, are energized by it, and let it flow from us even when we do not actively think of it or in times of stress. Love is used as

the subject of hymn and was sung of in the early church. Love was and is an essential instruction on how we are to be and behave. This letter to the Corinthians is the quintessential template and archetype that sets us up for what love is. There is no vocabulary or prose in the history of humanity that can correspond to that which God is clearly communicating to us. The point is that in order to be real, *love must move us beyond our culture, our time, and ourselves.*

**The point of love is the point of the Gospel. Even if we live out our Christian lives with great commitment and diligence and we do all we can in ministry and service to our Lord, it will be meaningless and of no value unless we are fueled by love.**

- *Love is/Charity.* The Greek word is *Agape*, which means "self-giving" and "sacrificial," that is more concerned with others than self. It conveys the idea of a person giving all his or her love, or favor, to someone else other than one's self. It is a love that is not earned; rather, it is relational and given freely. It also refers to parents giving all of their love to their child as God gives to each of us all of His love. It is a love that is bestowed without expectations of a response from the other. It takes the initiative, as Christ did with us, and fosters the Fruit of the Spirit and brotherly love. *Agape* love is also the most common word used both as a noun and a verb in the New Testament. The greatest example of *agape* love is what our Lord Jesus Christ did when He died for our sins. God showed His love by taking our place and the wrath and punishment for our sins. He kindly took our interests over His and paid that price through His sinless life and His sacrifice on our behalf (Mark 12:28-31; John 3:16, Matt. 22:34-40; John 3:16; 13:1, 34-35; 14:1; 15:9; Rom. 1:31; 5:10; 12:10; 1 Cor. 13; Eph. 2:4-7; Phil. 2:2; Col. 1:1-6; 3:12-14; 1 Thess. 1:3; 2:8; 3:6; 12; 4:9-10; 5:8; 13; 2 Tim. 3:3; Heb. 10:24; 1 John 4:7-12).

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul hones his essential point to understand the role and impact of the Resurrection. Without this we have no hope or reason to be a church or to live life without misery. In connection to this, a Christian looks to the resurrection we have in eternity that also gives us life now and hope for tomorrow.

### **What is and how to use Stewardship. 2 Corinthians: 8-9**

The word, *stewardship*, simply means to manage someone else's property. For the Christian, everything belongs to God; we manage the property of our Lord. Since everything belongs to Christ, we need to have the attitude and view that our things are His things. Our stuff is His stuff--all of it. All we could have now, all we have lost, all we will ever have is His. This includes our very bodies and spiritual gifts. We are mere lessees of the property, money, relationships, talents, time, and even our lives. That means all that we are and all that we have are not really ours to begin with. It all belongs to God. The duty of the Christian is to learn how to become responsible stewards of our Lord's resources that He has entrusted into our care. It means to manage everything to the best of our abilities for His glory. It was important for the church in Corinth then and it is important for us now and to come that we understand this in order to live life and build a better church for His glory (1 Cor. 4:2).

**God is concerned with what is in our hearts, and a good heart has responsible character assigned to it. That is what being a good steward means.**

As Christians who take the Bible seriously, we also need to take to heart the seriousness of being a wise steward. Stewardship is an act of worship and gratitude by the Believer, in response to His grace. With good stewardship, we acknowledge God's power and authority over our lives. This leads us to the realization of and response to His love, by caring about what He brings into our lives. This includes everything--our relationships, spiritual gifts, time, material goods, our monies, and even our very being. This act of stewardship is in response to the marvelous gift of His amazing, wondrous Grace given to us. We begin by being thankful. Our thankfulness leads to the care of everything in our lives. Our gratitude for what we have leads us to faithfully take care of the business of life. Gratitude is also the worship and response to God for first loving us.

In midst of our difficulties, we pray. We get into the Bible. We trust Christ. We think through with His precepts. We take hold of the Truth of the God's Word, and we are better able to accept and stand with others, believing in the best in others. We can swallow our anger and the bitterness that some

relationships can bring us by acknowledging the extreme favor of the Lord and practicing patient and kind love. So, we should trust in God's timing and providence. It is because of God's patience that He has the will to save us, for we tempt His patience all of the time (Gen. 6). We are *just* in God's sight; we are *just* because He declares us so!

**Key Takeaway:** The evidence of faith is demonstrated by love that is confirmed by how you lead your life--how you treat people. Christianity and our churches are demonstrated by our actions. Our actions are determined by our thinking, faith development, and behavior. The Church is either hindered or it grows by how we treat one another inside our walls and outside of them. Christ is glorified by how we incorporate His principles into our lives. If you really are a follower of Christ, it will be proven by the way you lead your life. If you are a person who is rude or prideful, then proof exists that there is no impact of faith in you. You can be saved and be a rotten person, but there is no fruit from your attitude or action. You are an "emperor with no clothes". Faith in the saving blood and body of Our Lord Jesus Christ and our gratitude for God's amazing Grace will be evident by how we let Him work in and through us. This is not always a quick process, but it is evident. As they great hymn goes, "And, they'll know we are Christians by our love. Yes, they'll know we are Christians by His love."

**The Call to the Church?** God's chosen leaders are to lead by His character description of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the personification of how God deals with us. This is also the pattern that we are called to emulate. Just like the *Fruit of the Spirit*, it is who and what God is that He invests in us and what He expects us to be and do in the lives of others. This is real godly leadership. It is also a call to think upon what God is and is doing, what real love is, and to make sure we correctly define it, correctly practice it, and lead others with it to Christ.

### Questions to Ponder

1. Have you experienced divisions in the church? How do these two letters address what you experienced?
2. What causes divisions in churches and families? How can we best prevent them? How can we best resolve them?
3. How do trivial matters take center point and cause arguments and strife, and ignore the Gospel and create healthy relationships?
4. How does the world today define love? How is that different to God's definition?
5. How important is the proper understanding of love to you? What about your church? What about how your church interacts to the neighborhood?
6. What happens when we have a skewed idea of what love is? How does this harm our relationships?
7. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul explains the importance of the Lord's Supper. How is this important to you and your church? Why?
8. What does 'heart' mean to you? What does a Christian need to do to have a good heart?
9. What would Christianity be like without the hope of heaven? What would be the point?
10. The Corinthians believed their physical bodies did not matter, so it did not matter what we do to them, even sin. How is this like today?
11. What is stewardship? Why do many Christians fear this? What can we do to have a better attitude of what belongs to God and what our role in that is?
12. How we treat people reflects on our Lord. What can you do to be more conscious of your temperament and character? How would this improve your life and relationships?