

Sunday, Sept.21, 2008
Living Hope EFC

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Corinth: A Church You wouldn't want to Join!

Nicoll, Intro to Corinthians, *The Expositors Greek Testament*

Robertson Nicoll introduces the church in Corinth in his commentary...

"The first Christian society planted upon Greek soil exhibited the characteristic qualities of the race - qualities however of Greece in her decadence rather than her prime.

[In the Church] "The Greek intellectualism...betrayed a childish conceit and fondness for rhetoric & philosophical jargon (1:17)

"Even the gifts of the H.S. were abused for purposes of display...The excesses which profaned the Lord's Table (11:20) and the unseemly conduct of women in the Church meetings (11:3; 14:34), were symptoms of the lawless self-assertion that marred the excellencies of this Church, and turned the abilities of many of its members into an injury rather than a furtherance to its welfare.

"Still graver mischief arose from the influence of heathen society. For men breathing the moral atmosphere of Corinth, and whose earlier habits and notions had been formed in this environment, to conceive and maintain a Christian moral ideal was difficult in the extreme.

"Deplorable relapses occurred when the fervor of conversion had abated, and the Church proved shamefully tolerant towards sins of impurity (5:2; 2 Cor.12:20)...The 'liberty' ... claimed by Paul for Gentile Christians was by some construed into a general license, and carried to a length which shocked not merely the scruples of fellow-believers but the common moral instincts (6:12, 8:9-13, 10:23, 11:13). The social festivities of Corinth, bound up as they were with idolatry and its impurities, exposed the Church to severe temptation. - 731

"The disbelief in bodily resurrection (15) and the indifference to bodily sin manifested at Corinth had a common root. They may be traced to the false spiritualism, the contempt for physical nature, characteristic of the theosophy of the times, which gave rise a few years later to the **Colossian heresy** and was a chief factor in the development of **Gnosticism**.

"No reference is made in the Epistle to Church officers of any kind."-732

Within this stronghold of paganism and focus of Greek corruption Paul planted the cross of his Redeemer...confident that in the word of the cross which he preached there lay a spell to subdue the pride and cleanse the foulness of Corinthian life. - 734

Corinth was a Roman Colony rebuilt by Julius Caesar in AD44.

- It had two ports. Its location made it a center for trade routes passing from east to west. Prosperity brought luxury & immorality.
- It was the capital of Roman Greece and perhaps the 4th largest city in the empire; a focus of pagan civilization.
- It had 12 heathen Temples to various gods.
- The most famous: Temple of Aphrodite (goddess of love). At one point it had 1,000 temple prostitutes serving in religious rituals.
- Immorality was so widely known in Corinth that the verb "**Corinth-ianize**" came to mean "to practice sexual immorality," much as today the word "Sodomize" (from Sodom) means sexual perversion

PROBLEM: The spirit of Corinth was also in the Church!

The book of Corinthians, by-and-large, is a book of corrections to unchristian behavior and doctrines mixed with pagan philosophies, within the local church in Corinth.

A catalogue of misconduct. As a byproduct, we receive positive teaching on the areas Paul corrects.

ITS FOUNDING

Acts 18, Spring AD51. Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey.

- Priscilla & Aquila were there. Paul stayed with them – 1 ½ years.
- He then went to Ephesus for almost 3 years, wrote 1 Corinthian here

OUTLINE

1 – Chap.1-4: Divisions in the Church.

- Some members of Chloe's house came and informed him...1:11.

2 – Chap.5-6: Sexual immorality & lawsuits in the Church.

- 5:1 – Someone brought Paul disturbing news about immorality.
- He had written to them previously about immorality: 5:9-10.

3 – Chap.7-16: Paul addresses questions brought to him from Church.

- 7:1 – "Now about the matters you wrote me."

PAUL'S PURPOSE IN WRITING...To help this Church grow in practical Christian faith & conduct, correcting error with truth.

- [There is not a more relevant book in the N.T. for the Church today!](#)

OVERVIEW: A look at the Church & Paul's revolutionary teaching!

Subtitles:

- > Things to avoid if you want to grow into a mature church.
- > How Christianity differs from the world – in beliefs & lifestyle.
- > A catalogue of comparisons between carnal behavior & attitudes, and the true Spirit controlled counterparts.

Chapter One: Paul addresses the issue of divisions in the church.

1:10-17 – Beware of making idols out of pastors & other leaders!

- **Issue:** people in the church were choosing up sides...as to which teacher was best, not understanding that all were on the same side
- **μεν:** This puts pastors & leaders in a difficult position – to keep unity.
- **δε:** It threatens to polarize factions & jeopardize unity in the church.
- **Q:** Do we take a certain pride in who baptized us? Our *old Church*.

What was the source of these divisions?

1 – Misunderstanding about the message of the Cross & the source of true wisdom & spirituality (1:18-2:16).

2 – Judging God's servants – by human standards & bad theology (4).

It's heretical views of wisdom & spirituality:

Although not likely developed in its full religious tenants, many believe the philosophy which distorted Christian doctrines in Corinth were the errors of early Gnostic theosophy.

GNOSTICISM: (From Greek: "knowledge.") It's early beginnings.

-Source: *Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity*, 98-100.

Gnostics were followers of a variety of religious movements in the early Christian centuries that stressed people could be saved through a **secret knowledge** (gnosis) – or *wisdom* about *spirituality* (Ch.1-2).

- Some tried to integrate Christianity with Gnostic philosophy.
- Much of what we know about them come from Christian writings in the 2nd C., that viewed them as heretics & perversions of Christianity.
- 19th C discoveries of Gnostic writings confirm earlier understanding.
- Gnosticism enjoyed great success in the ancient world.

WHAT DID THEY BELIEVE?

1. **Dualism:** The *spirit world* is the higher ideal, good. The *material world* is evil. Some taught that the creation of the world came about from the fall of Sophia (wisdom). God had no intent to create a “material” world. All matter is evil.
2. **Man:** Man's body then, is evil; a prison from which he must escape!
 - Sparks of divinity have been encapsulated in the bodies of certain 'spiritual' individuals destined for salvation, but they are *ignorant* of the heavenly spark within them.
3. **Salvation:** God sent a redeemer to save these, by sharing with them the “secret knowledge” about themselves.
 - This awakening / knowledge = salvation. At death they finally put off for good the prison of their bodies & become spirit being
4. **Savior:** Some taught that Jesus was not born of a real woman, with a real material body (matter is evil). It just “seemed” real (Docetism, 2ndC)
 - Others believed Jesus was merely a man upon whom the Christ consciousness descended as a dove. As Christ could not suffer, he departed from Jesus before the crucifixion. (The Qur'an also teaches this. “They slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so.”)
4. **Resurrection:** Christ did not bodily rise from the dead (15:12-13f).
 - Man does not rise from the dead, bodily. Only spiritual exists.
5. **Ramifications for living, treatment of the body:**
 - Since the body is not true reality, doesn't exist eternally, it doesn't matter how we treat it or what behavior we participate in.
 - Some – **indulged** in extreme immorality & debauchery, even urged believers to sin. Consider chap.5 & 6.
 - Most – were radical **ascetics** toward sex & marriage.
 - The creation of woman was the source of evil, procreation simply multiplied the souls in bondage to the powers of darkness.
 - Consider chap.7:1-7; Colossians 2:16-23.

APPLY: Do you recognize these false notions in any religions today?

Mormonism: Believes people exist as spirits before birth and can become gods. Book of Mormons – secret wisdom we must know.

Jehovah's Witnesses: Jesus = not God, He did not rise bodily from the dead. Once a man, now he is an exalted spirit being.

Secret Knowledge = New World Version (reworking of KJV)

Christian Science: Teaches only *mind* & *spirit* is real, matter is evil.

Matter is only an illusion. Salvation is a process of learning to slough off the illusion of matter by learning & studying special secrets & mysteries.

"God" is in everyone (spark of divinity).

Jesus didn't die physically, nor rise bodily, Sin doesn't exist.

People are spirits, bound by the illusion they are made up of matter.

Scientology: People's souls are gods. Human reason will produce perfect behavior. God/ Bible are useless. L.Ron Hubbard's Dianetics & other writings are the secret knowledge to become extraterrestrial race

POINT: Bad theology will corrupt good morals & cannot discover God.

- Paul's point in 1 Cor.1:18-19; 1:30; 2:5-10, 14.

Chap.3:1-4. The church was immature, full of worldly philosophy, not sound doctrine.

(Remember: Paul had taught them for 1 1/2 year!)

- They hadn't built on Christ: 3:11.
- They didn't realize they comprised God's Temple: 3:16-19!
- Their actions against one another, were acts against God's Temple!

Chap.4:1-5 – In their carnal immaturity they were judging Paul's ministry!

- 4:8-18 – They had bought into an "Over-realized Eschatology."

Chap.5: A case of incest in the church – was gloried in, not repented of

- Here is a clear misunderstanding of "Grace."
- The godly response would have been grief, and discipline (v.2).

WHY: (1) To protect the church-v.6, 9-11.

(2) Testimony of the church v.8. Corinth's standards & behavior – are what these people had been saved out of!

(3) Restoration of the Christian living in sin –Gal.6:1.

(4) It is God's standard for His children –**6:12-20**. If sinners will not be allowed in heaven, what makes you think living in sin is acceptable to God – on earth? **Sin is not less sinful in a Christian!**

- **6:13** – THE BODY IS GOD'S! On loan to us! Have we forgotten?
- Liberty that sins against another – is not loving – **13:4-7!**
- This is a major issue in the church today! People want Christ, without Christian morality. We belong to Christ –**6:19-20!**
- This same body we have today will be ours in heaven–**6:14**; 15:35-44
- We, individually, are united to Christ in Spirit – now! **6:15**.
- Immorality injures oneself! **6:18**.
- Christ died, as a man, on the cross, to redeem us body, soul & spirit.

POINT: The body is not something that will just *perish*. **It will be raised imperishable!** And as we will see eternally – Christ, bodily, so us!

Chap.6: Lawsuits among Christians.

- Paul's answer: v.7-8. There's a difference between how the world handle's its differences, and how the church handle's theirs.

Chap.7 – Marriage, singleness, divorce – Christian styl3 – 7:35.

SUMMARY

The Church is seen as the TEMPLE of God, and the BODY of Christ in

1 Corinthians. More is said about it, and how we are to conduct ourselves as a local Church – than in any other Epistle.

As God's Temple – we differ from pagan temples. IN us resided the Spirit of the Living God! Destroy the Church – and you touch God's Temple!

As the Body of Christ – we are united to Him a His bride! We are His extension in this world. We are bought & belong to Him.

2,000 years later, we face the same issues as this first Century Church. What have we learned? Are we better?

In **10:6-13**: Paul says Israel's sins, and consequent discipline/ deaths – were written as examples & warnings from which the Church is to learn. The wages of sin is death! Even among Christians.

- We can learn by example, or by our own demise!

JOKE: Lion, Donkey and Fox – went hunting together.

At the end of the day the lion said: Mr. Donkey, why don't you divide the day's catch into 3 piles: 1 for each of us.

- Donkey divides all the catch into 3 equal piles. Sits down. The lion pounces on the Donkey, stacks the animals into one stack with the donkey on top.
- Lion: "Mr. Fox, why don't you divide the days catch into 2 piles, 1 for each for us?" FOX – skeptical, goes over and takes on dead crow off the pile for his meal & leaves the rest for the lion. Sits down
- Lion: "Where did you learn to divide so equally, Mr. Fox?"
- FOX- "The donkey taught me..."

POINT: Has an overview of the Church in Corinth taught us anything?

- Each church must make its own choice. Sin kills. Fellowship with Christ (1:8-9) gives life! God called and set us apart for life.