

BOOK OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

1. The book of Romans laid the foundation for the Gospel/Christianity. It revealed God's righteousness and the creation of a new race under Jesus Christ. The Church was unified (both Jews and Gentiles) and served as a model church. However, the churches in the New Testament still faced many problems. Remember that the book of Romans was written much later than those epistles addressing specific church problems.
2. The book of First Corinthians recorded the worst church in the New Testament. They were divided, immoral, sued each other and disagreed over trivial issues. They also had no idea about the precept of resurrection.
3. Sanctification is a long and difficult process because our old and sinful nature struggles against a renewed mind. It is not about how fast you go but if you are going in the right direction. The potential to be more like Christ is up to us to grasp by faith. We can ask for His patience, kindness, strength, etc. whenever we are faced with temptation. Sanctification is a moment by moment journey by faith as in Habakkuk 2:4 which says that the righteous shall live by his faith. . It is not like the Justification by Faith, which is a one-step process.

Background on the City of Corinth

1. Corinth was an international port like Singapore. The city was situated at the Isthmus and was very prosperous.
2. Corinth was a religious place with a huge temple of the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite. . They worshipped this goddess by having sex in the temple and were estimated to have 2000 temple prostitutes. It was a very immoral city; sex was normalised, much like today, where it is used often in advertisements.
3. The city was under the Roman law, and they sued one another, even as church brethren.
4. The people there were very Greek in their philosophy, like us, due to their education system e.g. western medicine was not seen holistically where mental stress can cause physical illness. Just like Christians who do bible study everyday but never once spread the Gospel. The Bible says, "The last shall be the first" as in Matt 20:16. Scholars may not even be at the end of the queue in heaven.

History of the Corinthian Church

1. See Acts 18. Paul went to Corinth to preach at the synagogues and Crispus, the ruler of a synagogue got saved. Paul stayed there for 18 months and built the Corinthian church before moving on.
2. When Paul was in another city, a lady called Chloe reported to him the bad condition of the Corinthian church together with a letter full of other questions. Paul addressed those questions in that epistle as well as the practical problems that the Corinthian church faced.

Theme of the Book of First Corinthians

1. The theme is about seeing every aspect of life through the Gospel, through the crucifixion of Christ and His resurrection. Jesus' crucifixion was emphasized at the beginning of this book whilst His resurrection was emphasized at end of the book. These are important bookmarks and everything in-between should be viewed through these bookmarks to see how to live life correctly. We have to view life through the lens of the Gospel.

Chapters 1 to 4 – Issues about Divisions in the Corinthian Church

1. 1 Corinthians 1:13
 - a) There was division in the church; people argued about who belonged to Paul and who belonged to Apollos. Apollos was a Greek philosopher so he was more popular in the church. The newly rich people of Corinth were excited to exercise their ability to choose. People chose teachers whom they liked. Therefore, there was division in the church.
 - b) Paul asked them, "Is Christ divided?" Paul and Apollos were not crucified for us, only Christ was. Paul reminded them to view things through the Gospel lens. Paul urged them to check if he had been faithful in the preaching of the Gospel and not about how well he spoke.
2. 1 Corinthians 2:1. Paul did not preach with lofty speech and spoke nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Similarly we must check if our preachers preach on this.
3. 1 Corinthians 4:7.
 - a) Cliques happen when we think we are better than others. Instead of being one family in Christ, we become divided.
 - b) What makes you different? If you are smart or rich, who gave these to you? He reminded them that all blessings are from God, the Gospel in Christ.
 - c) Divisions are caused by pride and arrogance, looking down on others, and expecting others to serve us. This is a very self-oriented way of living.

Chapter 5 – Sexual Immorality Issues

1. 1 Corinthians 5:1. One man in the Corinthian church was immoral and had sex with his step-mother. Paul said this was not even acceptable in the pagan's world, yet sex worship was normal and prevalent in the Corinthian church.
2. 1 Corinthians 3:16-19. Greek philosophy divides spiritual things from physical things, they thought they needed to behave well only in church and that what they did with their physical bodies was a separate issue. These verses remind us that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The people behaved as if the body is for indulging, be it in cosmetics, food, or sex. We behave as if it is our body and we can do whatever we like with it.
3. Paul concluded that our body is for God, and not for self. See also Romans 12:1-2.

Chapter 6 - Issues about Roman law and Suing one another

1. Church constitutional law becomes very complex and most discussion is about the law rather than the spiritual condition of the church. We have to be careful about this.

Chapter 7- Issues about Status

1. You dress in your "Sunday best" out of reverence for God and not to show off.
2. 1 Corinthians 7:21. What you are in this world, your social status, is no big deal because in resurrection, everyone is of equal status.
3. 1 Corinthians 7:29-31.
 - a) The present form of the world is passing away, so born again Christians should not be overly concerned about life in this place e.g. creating a bucket list of must visit places before these places are demolished.
 - b) In verse 15, Paul emphasized the bodily resurrection. People think that after resurrection, they will not have a body to enjoy life with. But we will have resurrected bodies and will find our bucket list stupid. Again, the Greek idea thinks the physical body is left behind and we only get a spirit. No, we will have the same recognisable body, but a better one with no pain or fatigue.

Chapter 8: Issues about food offered to idols

1. There were many temples around in Corinth so it was common to see food offered to idols.
2. We should abstain from eating food offered to idols if it affects those who are weak in faith. By eating food offered to idols, the weak in faith might think that we worship other gods too.
3. However, if there is no one around and you know these idols really mean nothing, then you can go ahead and eat such food offered to idols.
4. 1 Corinthians 8:13 says do not stumble your brethren by the food you eat.

Chapter 9 – Paul’s apostleship was questioned

1. 1 Corinthians 9:1. Why did they question Paul’s apostleship? See verses 19 to 22. Paul did not look like an apostle; he looked like a servant to the newly rich people. He served everyone, including the poor. He did not have an impressive look nor was he well-dressed.
2. Very few people will be proud of their pastor if he looks like a servant or gardener.

Chapter 10 – What can we do as Christians?

1. There are hundreds of laws in the Torah. Are we under such laws? What is lawful for us?
2. 1 Corinthians 10:23-24 say that all things are lawful but not all things edify and build up others. Always think about how to help, serve, and build up others.
3. 1 Corinthians 10:31. Do all things to glorify God (includes eating and drinking).

Chapter 11 – Issues about coverings on the head and the Lord’s Supper

1. 1 Corinthians 11:3 says that the Head of man is Christ and the Head of a wife is her husband. Therefore, a man should not cover his head because he is the head of the

family. This issue arose because many newly married rich women in the Corinthian church wanted to be the head of their households. This was the early feminist movement. A woman is to cover her head to remind herself that she is not the head of the household.

2. 1 Corinthians 11:27. In those days, the Lord's Supper was a whole meal and part of it was the breaking of the bread and drinking of the cup. But the purpose was lost. People ate as if it was a buffet and even got drunk. To many people today, the Lord's Supper is just a ritual. Paul emphasized the purpose of the Lord's Supper in the latter half of Chapter 11.

Chapter 12 – Spiritual gifts

1. The Corinth church had lots of spiritual gifts such as healing and speaking in tongues. Gifted people will naturally show off such gifts and become proud unless they realise that their spiritual gift is for serving the body of Christ.
2. 1 Corinthians 12:22-26 emphasize that weak members are necessary.
 - a) If one member suffers in the church, all suffer. Gifts are given to help others weaker in that area. E.g. If you have the gift of teaching, help those who lack knowledge. If you have the gift of healing, help the sick.
 - b) Members of the body should protect and help each other, e.g. your hands will automatically protect your eyes if they are under attack. The ribs protects the heart. Therefore, all weak and vulnerable parts need protection because they are important.
 - c) Gifts are not for showing off.
3. 1 Corinthians 12:30 reiterates that not all will possess the gifts of healing or speaking in tongue. We are to desire the best gift which is the gift of love. See Chapter 13.

Chapter 13 – Agape Love

1. 1 Corinthians 13:1 says if we have no love, then all spiritual gifts are nothing. The Greeks have 3 definitions of love:
 - a) Eros – sexual love (lust for another)
 - b) Philadelphia – brotherly love (like each other)
 - c) Agape – Love of Giving (to another)
2. Agape love is seldom used in Greek literature because it cannot be found in the world easily and what appears most usually is Eros or Philadelphia. Agape love means having the ability to love and to give to whoever is in need.
3. God is Love. This does not refer to emotional love. God loves Israel because Israel needed His love. This Agape love can only come from the cross and it is only when we have tasted this love, can we then give it to another person in need even if he is a horrible person.

Chapter 14 – Issues about Speaking in Tongues

1. In Acts 2, you can see the definition, and it is a real language that the person with this gift has never learnt before.
2. What's the purpose of Gift of Tongues?

- a) 1 Corinthians 14:5 says the gift of Prophecy is greater than the gift in Tongues because Prophecy can edify but speaking in Tongues cannot unless it is interpreted.
- b) 1 Corinthians 14:12 says gifts are for building up the church. Every time you exercise a gift, regardless what the gift is, ask yourself if you are building up someone.
- c) 1 Corinthians 14:26. Three 3 times the word “build up” or “edify” mentioned.

Chapter 15 – Issues about Resurrection

1. This church did not quite understand the precept of Resurrection in the Gospel.
2. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Christ rose again the third day according to scriptures. To the Corinthian Christians who were very Greek in their thinking, they regarded the body as useless junk, for sex, and enjoyment of food. So they believed that when one dies, the body will be left behind and only the spirit goes to heaven. They therefore find it hard to accept the precept of bodily resurrection.
3. 1 Corinthians 15:19. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, thinking that after this life, we only become a spirit floating in the cloud, then, we are of all people most to be pitied. Can you imagine one day, when you get to heaven and you meet the guy you sued? You will be too embarrassed to even eat with him. All the divisions you had will make you feel very embarrassed. . You will realise that you had all the money but did not help your neighbour. All those you should have helped but did not, and now you will have to face them for eternity. See James 4:17.
4. This chapter on Resurrection ties up everything about why Paul tells them the things in this book.

What is the purpose of learning about First Corinthians?

1. It is about Agape love.
2. It is about the God who served us
3. 1 Corinthians 1:1. Paul served his church but they did not recognise the Agape love he demonstrated. Do it for others, not for ourselves (E.g. Do not sue your brethren for self-interest.)
4. God is Love. God is a servant. Christ chose to serve us (See Mark 10:44-45) on the cross. The Holy Spirit chose to live in us to serve us.
5. The question is, “Do you go to church to serve or to receive?” Do you complain that your church does not fit you because you do not like the pastor or the music?
6. We should see how God loves the horrible nation of Israel and how He loves us regardless of how terrible we are. (See 1 Tim 1:15). A lot of people out there can be reached by you with the gifts and resources that God has blessed you with. Therefore, pray that God will cause in you an outflow of this Agape love to others.