

SUMMARY AND REVIEW

Take 5-10 minutes to discuss last week's sermon.

1. What did you learn?
2. How did the message speak to you personally?

INTRO TO THE TEXT

As a major center for commerce and travel, Corinth had one of the most racially and ethnically diverse populations in the ancient world. Its athletic games rivaled the Olympic contests in Athens, and the major religion honored Aphrodite, whose temple was served by 1,000 prostitutes. International sailors and local residents reveled in its "party" atmosphere, so much that to *Corinthianize* was slang for immoral behavior.

Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, had spent about 18 months in Corinth after helping to establish the church there. This letter, written a few years after he left them, addresses problems that had arisen. Church members were divided about how Christians should react to and interact with a pagan culture in which decadence was celebrated. Cliques, personality cults, and power struggles were disrupting fellowship.

READ 1 Corinthians 1:1-17

ANALYZE THE TEXT

1. How does Paul identify himself? What does it tell us about him that he does not mention other "credentials" (trained as a rabbi, Roman citizen, founder of the church at Corinth, etc.)?
2. How does Paul describe the letter's recipients? How does this set the tone for what is to come?
3. What does Paul say about the Corinthians in verses 4-9? How does he use praise for them as a way of praising God? How is the gospel of Christ expressed in these verses?
4. How does verse 9 serve as a bridge from praise of the Corinthians to criticism in verses 10-17?
5. Paul does not appear to praise those who claim to be under the leadership of Christ. Why would he chastise them? What negative intentions might have been their motivation?
6. How does Paul describe his own motives?

A FEW THINGS TO CONSIDER

As was customary, the letter begins by identifying the sender and the recipients, followed by a blessing. The writer is Paul, along with Sosthenes, a fellow Christian who is not otherwise identified but was undoubtedly

known by the Corinthians. Verse 3 pronounces a blessing on the recipients, the Christians in Corinth. Verses 4-9 express thanksgiving for their faith, giving praise to God.

In verses 10-17, Paul begins to deal with the problems in the church that have been reported to him. Factions have formed based on which leader different groups claim to be under. Some claim allegiance to Paul, others to Cephas (possibly the Apostle Peter). Some claimed to follow Apollos, who is thought to have been a more polished speaker than Paul. Still others claimed, perhaps self-righteously, to have Christ as their leader. Paul refuses to be identified as the leader of any group, emphasizing instead his mission to spread the gospel.

APPLY

1. How is Houston like ancient Corinth?
2. What are some specific things about your church for which you are thankful? How do these characteristics of the church glorify God and encourage your faith? How do they promote unity within the body of Christ?
3. With which smaller groups do you identify within the church? How do they promote unity? How can we encourage participation in small fellowship groups without causing divisions or factions within the church?
4. Why do factions tend to occur around some church leaders? How is this detrimental to the mission of the church? How can we maintain respect for our leaders and appreciation for their ministries without elevating them to a position of hero-worship?
5. What do we learn from this passage about the purpose of the fellowship of believers? How does the mission statement of FPC express this purpose?

MEMORIZE

1 Corinthians 1:10 -- *I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.*

Suggestions for further reading: *Life Together*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.