

7 PROBLEMS IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

Introduction:

1. The church in Corinth faced many spiritual problems, which Paul addressed in his first letter to them. Although they had been called into the fellowship of Christ, they were struggling with division, immorality, disorder, and doctrinal misunderstandings. Instead of growing in maturity, they were acting in ways that weakened the church and damaged their witness.
2. Paul's letter was not only a rebuke but also a guide for how they should correct these issues and live in a way that reflects Christ. The problems in Corinth are not unique to the first century—many churches today face similar challenges. By examining these seven key issues, we can learn valuable lessons on how to maintain unity, uphold moral purity, worship in an orderly manner, and remain faithful to biblical truth.
3. Each of these problems had a spiritual solution, and Paul consistently pointed them back to Christ as the foundation of their faith. As we study these issues, let us also reflect on how we can ensure that our own lives and congregations align with God's will.

1. Divisions Among Believers:

Introduction:

The Corinthian church was divided, with members forming factions based on their allegiance to different leaders. Paul strongly rebuked this division and called for unity in Christ.

- a. **Factions In The Church:** The Corinthians were aligning themselves with different leaders—Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or Christ. Paul challenged this thinking, asking, “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Corinthians 1:13). He emphasized that such divisions had no place in the church.
- b. **Spiritual Immaturity:** These divisions were a sign of their lack of spiritual growth. Paul described them as carnal, saying, “For whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). Their quarrelling revealed their failure to grasp the deeper unity found in Christ.
- c. **The True Role Of Preachers:** Paul reminded them that preachers are merely servants of God, not to be elevated. He wrote, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?” (1 Corinthians 3:5-7). The church was meant to be united under Christ, not divided by personal loyalties (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Conclusion:

The church must not divide itself over human leaders. Paul's message reminds all believers that unity in Christ is essential, and spiritual maturity requires seeing past personal preferences to embrace the oneness of God's people.

Application:

While the Corinthians were divided over men, divisions can arise in a congregation for many reasons. Some may be over doctrine, where differing beliefs lead to disputes. Others may be over personal preferences, where opinions on worship styles, leadership decisions, or traditions cause rifts. Some divisions may even be social or cultural, where personal biases separate believers instead of bringing them together.

Paul emphasizes that there is “one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6). Maintaining unity requires humility, patience, and love. Instead of focusing on differences, we must strive to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, recognizing that Christ is the foundation of the church, not men or opinions (Ephesians 4:2-3).

2. Sexual Immorality:

Introduction:

One of the most serious issues in the Corinthian church was the presence of open sexual immorality among its members. Instead of addressing this sin, the congregation tolerated it, showing a lack of spiritual discernment and holiness.

- a. **A Scandalous Sin:** A man in the congregation was living in an immoral relationship with his father's wife—something even the Gentiles considered shameful. Paul rebuked them, saying, "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife" (1 Corinthians 5:1).
- b. **The Church's Wrong Response:** Instead of mourning over this sin, the church was puffed up with pride, failing to take action. Paul instructed them, "And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you" (1 Corinthians 5:2). Their failure to act showed a dangerous complacency toward sin.
- c. **Paul's Command To Purge The Evil:** Paul made it clear that such sin could not be ignored. He commanded, "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (1 Corinthians 5:6). Sin spreads if left unchecked, corrupting the entire congregation. He instructed them to remove the immoral person from their fellowship, saying, "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Corinthians 5:13).

Conclusion:

Paul's instructions show that the church must not tolerate open and unrepentant sin among its members. The purity of the church is at stake, and failing to act allows sin to spread and weaken the body of Christ.

Application:

Although this specific case involved sexual immorality, sin of any kind—if left unaddressed—can damage a congregation. Whether it is dishonesty, gossip, divisiveness, or doctrinal compromise, sin must be confronted with love and firmness. Paul warned that sin, like leaven, spreads if tolerated.

Church discipline is not about harsh punishment but about restoration. Paul later urged the church to receive back the repentant sinner with love, saying, "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many... confirm your love toward him" (2 Corinthians 2:6-8). Discipline should always have the goal of bringing the sinner to repentance and restoring them to fellowship.

3. Lawsuits Among Believers:

Introduction:

Some Christians in Corinth were taking fellow believers to court over civil disputes. Instead of resolving these matters within the church, they were bringing their cases before unbelieving judges, harming the reputation and unity of the church.

- a. **Civil Disputes, Not Criminal Cases:** The lawsuits Paul addressed were not about serious crimes like murder or violence but civil matters—disputes over property, money, or business dealings. Paul rebuked them, saying, "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?" (1 Corinthians 6:1). Instead of handling disagreements among fellow believers, they were dragging each other before pagan judges.
- b. **The Saints Will Judge The World:** Paul reminded them that believers will one day judge the world, and even angels, so they should be capable of handling small disputes within the church. "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?" (1 Corinthians 6:2-3). Their failure to resolve conflicts internally showed a lack of wisdom and spiritual maturity.

- c. **Better To Suffer Wrong Than Harm The Church:** Paul taught that it was better to accept being wronged than to damage the unity and testimony of the church. “Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?” (1 Corinthians 6:7). The Corinthian Christians were more focused on winning legal battles than maintaining peace within the body of Christ.

Conclusion:

By taking each other to court, the Corinthians were prioritizing personal gain over spiritual unity. Paul’s rebuke challenges Christians today to handle disputes with wisdom, love, and a desire for reconciliation rather than seeking revenge or personal victory.

Application:

Churches today can still face conflicts over civil matters—disputes over finances, property, leadership decisions, or personal offenses. Paul’s message remains clear: believers should strive to resolve these issues within the church rather than airing them before unbelievers.

This does not mean that Christians should avoid legal action. Governments are ordained by God to carry out justice (Romans 13:1-4), and serious crimes must still be handled by civil authorities. But when it comes to personal disputes, believers should seek peace, act with integrity, and pursue reconciliation rather than division. Jesus taught, “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother” (Matthew 18:15). The goal should always be restoration, not retaliation.

4. Disorder And Confusion In Worship:

Introduction:

The Corinthian worship assemblies were chaotic and lacked order. Instead of coming together in reverence and unity, their gatherings were marked by confusion, competition, and improper conduct. Paul addressed several key issues that were disrupting their worship.

- a. **Speaking In Tongues Without Interpretation:** Some members were speaking in tongues without an interpreter, creating an environment where no one could understand what was being said. Paul rebuked this disorder, saying, “If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church” (1 Corinthians 14:27-28). Worship should be understandable and edifying to all present.
- b. **Speaking Over One Another:** Instead of waiting their turn, some members were speaking at the same time, leading to confusion. Paul instructed, “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40). Worship should reflect the nature of God, who is not the author of confusion but of peace (1 Corinthians 14:33).
- c. **Issues Concerning Women Speaking In The Assembly:** Paul also addressed the role of women in the assembly, instructing them to remain silent in that specific context. He wrote, “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law” (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). This was to maintain order and avoid disruption during worship.

Conclusion:

Orderly worship is essential for the edification of the church. Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians remind us that worship should be conducted with reverence, understanding, and a spirit of unity, reflecting God’s nature of peace rather than confusion.

Application:

The issues in Corinth serve as a reminder that worship is not about personal display or competition but about honoring God and building up the church. True worship should be conducted with reverence, self-control, and love, ensuring that all things are done for edification (1 Corinthians 14:26).

Paul’s teachings still apply today. Worship should be orderly, meaningful, and focused on God rather than becoming a place of chaos or division. By following biblical principles, the church can ensure that worship glorifies God and strengthens the faith of those who participate.

5. Misunderstanding Spiritual Gifts:

Introduction:

The Corinthians were misusing spiritual gifts, particularly speaking in tongues, leading to confusion and division. Instead of using their gifts to build up the church, some were treating them as a way to elevate themselves, creating disorder and envy among believers.

- a. **The Purpose Of Spiritual Gifts:** Paul reminded them that spiritual gifts were given to edify the church, not to bring attention to individuals. “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” (1 Corinthians 12:7). Every gift had a role, and no one should think of their gift as superior to another (1 Corinthians 12:14-25).
- b. **Speaking In Tongues Versus Prophecy:** The Corinthians were emphasizing speaking in tongues, even though it did not always benefit the congregation. Paul stated, “I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying” (1 Corinthians 14:5). Prophecy was more valuable because it provided instruction and encouragement that could be understood by all.
- c. **Worship Must Be Orderly:** Paul taught that all gifts should be exercised in an orderly manner: “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:33). He instructed that speaking in tongues should only happen if an interpreter was present and that everything should be done in a way that strengthened the church (1 Corinthians 14:27-28, 40).

Conclusion:

Spiritual gifts were meant to bring unity and edification, not pride and division. Paul’s teaching shows that using gifts for personal status goes against the very purpose for which they were given. Everything in worship should be done for the strengthening of the church.

Application:

Although miraculous spiritual gifts have ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8-10), the principles in Paul’s teaching still apply today. Some people desire recognition for their talents, whether in preaching, teaching, or other roles in the church, rather than focusing on how they can best serve others. Paul reminds us that every ability and opportunity given by God should be used for the benefit of the church, not self-promotion.

Believers today should focus on using their abilities with humility and love, remembering that God values faithfulness over personal recognition. As Paul said, “Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Corinthians 14:26).

6. Denial Of The Resurrection:

Introduction:

Some in the Corinthian church were questioning the resurrection of the dead, undermining the foundation of the Christian faith. Paul strongly opposed this false teaching, explaining that if there is no resurrection, then Christ Himself has not risen, and the gospel is meaningless.

- a. **The Heart Of The Gospel:** Paul reminded them that the resurrection of Christ is at the very core of the gospel. “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Without the resurrection, their faith would be in vain.
- b. **If There Is No Resurrection, There Is No Salvation:** Paul argued that if the dead do not rise, then Christ has not risen, and if Christ has not risen, then faith is worthless. “And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (1 Corinthians 15:14). Without the resurrection, believers are still in their sins, and those who have died in Christ have perished (1 Corinthians 15:17-18).
- c. **The Resurrection Is Assured In Christ:** Paul affirmed that Christ’s resurrection guarantees the resurrection of all believers. “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20). Just as death came through Adam, life comes through Christ, and at His return, all who belong to Him will be raised (1 Corinthians 15:21-23).

Conclusion:

The resurrection is not an optional belief but an essential part of Christianity. If Christ has not risen, then there is no victory over sin and death. Paul's teaching to the Corinthians reminds all believers that their hope and salvation rest on the reality of the resurrection.

Application:

Even today, some question the resurrection, either denying the afterlife or believing in a purely symbolic resurrection. Paul refutes these ideas by showing that Christ's resurrection is a historical fact and a guarantee of the believer's future hope.

Christians must stand firm in this truth, knowing that their faith is not in vain. Paul encouraged the Corinthians, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Believers should live with confidence, knowing that because Christ was raised, they too will be raised in glory.

7. Issues With The Lord's Supper:

Introduction:

The Corinthians were treating the Lord's Supper improperly, turning it into a self-indulgent meal rather than a sacred act of remembrance. Paul rebuked them for their irreverence and reminded them of the true purpose of this observance.

- a. **Selfishness And Division:** Instead of coming together in unity, the Corinthians were eating separately, with some having plenty while others had nothing. Paul rebuked them, saying, "For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? Or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not?" (1 Corinthians 11:21-22). Their selfishness was dishonoring the church and disrespecting the Lord's Supper.
- b. **The True Meaning Of The Lord's Supper:** Paul reminded them of the words of Jesus when He instituted this memorial. "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:23-24). The Lord's Supper is a solemn act of remembrance, not an ordinary meal.
- c. **Partaking Worthily:** Paul warned that taking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner brings judgment upon oneself. "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Corinthians 11:29). He urged the Corinthians to examine themselves before partaking, saying, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup" (1 Corinthians 11:28).

Conclusion:

The Lord's Supper is a time for reverence, self-examination, and remembrance of Christ's sacrifice. Paul's correction to the Corinthians serves as a reminder that this sacred observance should be approached with the utmost respect and unity among believers.

Application:

The same principles apply today. Christians must ensure they partake of the Lord's Supper with the right mindset, focusing on Christ rather than allowing distractions or routine to diminish its meaning. Paul's instruction to examine oneself before participating still holds true.

The Lord's Supper is an opportunity for believers to reflect on the sacrifice of Christ, renew their commitment to Him, and maintain unity with their brethren. As Paul emphasized, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (1 Corinthians 11:26). It is a reminder of the past sacrifice, the present fellowship, and the future hope of Christ's return.

Summary:

- 1. Divisions Among Believers** – The Corinthians were dividing over loyalty to different preachers instead of being united in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:10-13). Paul reminded them that spiritual maturity means focusing on Christ, not human leaders.
- 2. Sexual Immorality** – A man in the congregation was living in open sin, and the church was tolerating it instead of addressing it (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). Paul commanded them to remove the unrepentant sinner to protect the purity of the church and encourage repentance.
- 3. Lawsuits Among Believers** – Christians in Corinth were taking each other to court over civil disputes rather than resolving conflicts within the church (1 Corinthians 6:1-7). Paul taught that it is better to suffer wrong than to harm the church's unity by airing disputes before unbelievers.
- 4. Disorder And Confusion In Worship** – Their assemblies were chaotic, with members speaking in tongues without interpretation, talking over one another, and causing confusion (1 Corinthians 14:26-40). Paul instructed that all things should be done decently and in order.
- 5. Misunderstanding Spiritual Gifts** – Some Corinthians were using spiritual gifts selfishly rather than for the edification of the church (1 Corinthians 12:7-25). Paul taught that all gifts should serve the body of Christ and that love is greater than any gift (1 Corinthians 13:1-13).
- 6. Denial Of The Resurrection** – Some in the church were questioning whether the dead would be raised (1 Corinthians 15:12). Paul refuted this by showing that Christ's resurrection guarantees the resurrection of all believers (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).
- 7. Issues With The Lord's Supper** – The Corinthians were treating the Lord's Supper irreverently, turning it into a common meal and neglecting its true purpose (1 Corinthians 11:20-29). Paul reminded them to examine themselves and partake in a worthy manner, remembering Christ's sacrifice.

True Or False:

1. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for dividing over their favorite preachers, including himself, Apollos, and Cephas.
2. Paul told the Corinthians that lawsuits between believers were acceptable as long as they were handled fairly by pagan judges.
3. The Corinthians were correctly observing the Lord's Supper with reverence and unity.
4. Paul taught that speaking in tongues was the most important spiritual gift.
5. Some Corinthians were denying the resurrection of the dead, which Paul refuted by pointing to Christ's resurrection.

Questions:

1. What was the main issue causing divisions in the Corinthian church?
2. What specific sin did Paul rebuke in 1 Corinthians 5, and how did the church respond to it?
3. Why did Paul criticize the Corinthians for taking one another to court?
4. What disorderly practices were taking place in the Corinthian worship assemblies?
5. What did Paul say about the purpose of spiritual gifts?
6. What false belief did some Corinthians hold about the resurrection?
7. How were the Corinthians misusing the Lord's Supper?
8. What did Paul teach about how the Lord's Supper should be observed?
9. What did Paul say about the importance of prophecy compared to speaking in tongues?
10. What final encouragement did Paul give concerning the resurrection?