

Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

Week 47: 1 Corinthians, *Paul's Advice to a Sinful Church*

Welcome to Week 47 of the Bible reading coach podcast. My name is Karl Vaters and I'm here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks.

As we saw, in the last half of the book of Acts, Paul spent the final segment of his life traveling to plant and follow up on churches in cities all over the Mediterranean, which for them at the time was the known world. It was the limits of the Roman Empire. Corinth was one of those cities that he went to in Corinth, a huge port city. Corinth had a reputation for sin and corruption that was unparalleled and maybe only exceeded by Rome. In fact, when a young man who was innocent would leave for a year or two from home, and if he came back corrupted, they said he had been Corinthianized. Even if he hadn't been to Corinth, it was called being Corinthianized.

So Paul went there to this big city of Corinth, he planted a church there. And by the time he wrote his two letters back to Corinth, they had been letting the corruption of Corinth work its way back into the church. So the books are First and Second Corinthians First Corinthians especially are especially helpful. If you live in a culture where this is happening, where the corruption of the culture is seeping its way back into the church again, and the church is compromising as a result of that. If you live in a culture where that sounds familiar at all, First Corinthians is going to have some real world application in your life right away. So let's get right to it, shall we?

This is a fascinating book, the book of First Corinthians. So Paul starts in Chapters one through three talking about various divisions that were going on in the Corinthian church. After a short reading, he gets right to the point, starting with First Corinthians one, verse 10. He says this, "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another and what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you'd be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household, have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean, is this. One of you says, 'I follow Paul,' another, 'I follow Apollos' another, 'I follow Seavus' still another, 'I follow Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?" and then he goes on to criticize them for these divisions.

Now, what's happening is this divisions in the church are nothing new. We look around and we think all of the church is so divided today, I wish we could go back to the first test, New Testament Church. I mean, like the church in court that was divided, it's always been divisions, the enemy has always wanted to sow division within the body of Christ, because he knows that disunity is one of our great Achilles heels. The apostle Paul even tells them that these divisions are a sign of immaturity. In fact, later on, he tells them, this, these divisions are such a big sign of immaturity, that they are so immature, that he wants to teach them deeper things. Now, he basically says, I've been teaching you a lot. I want to go deeper, but I can't because you're too immature to handle them. These divisions in the body are evidence to me that you are not mature enough to handle deeper things. He calls it the difference between drinking milk and eating solid food and chapter three, verse one.

Now I want you to notice when we get to this, it says, I follow Paul, I follow Apollos. He's the pastor who followed Paul, I follow Cephys. That's another name for Peter. So they were

saying, I'm a follower of Paul, I'm a disciple of Paul's, I'm a disciple of Peter, and others saying, I follow Christ. And you think, well, that's what we should all be right? But no, he uses these people who say I follow Christ as yet another division. Well, how can that be? Well, there are some of us, and at times, we're all tempted to use the correct terminology, and say, Well, I'm only going to follow Jesus. And I'm not going to worry about any of those other theologies or definitions. And we often will use the language of following Christ as a way of making ourselves seem better than other Christians, which is causing further division. So even in the language of saying, I follow Christ, we can do it badly. And what he's saying is we should all be following Christ together, and not using anything to divide us at all.

Then in chapter four, he talks about his authority as an apostle. Why is that? Well, there were some Christians in Corinth, who were not accepting the authority of Paul. And so he says, Well, I'm gonna send Timothy as my emissary to see these things in person. And basically he says, you really want it to just be Timothy who comes. You don't want me to show up in person because I'm pretty mild in these letters, but if I show up in person there's going to, heads will roll. Okay? He feels like a parent talking to an unruly child or unruly children at this point, he even closes chapter four, this way, chapter 4:18. Some of you have become arrogant as if I were not coming to you.

And then jumping to verse 21. What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline? Or shall I come to you with love and with a gentle spirit? Doesn't that sound like a parent to a child going? Alright, I'm coming in that room. Do you want me to come in happy? Or do you want me to come in angry? Get yourself together here, okay? That's what he's saying here. He's the one who planted that church there. He has authority in that church. He's hearing about problems, he wants to correct them. And there are people going "Aa, that Paul, he doesn't know what he's talking about." And he's like, You really want me to show up in person and tell you what I'm talking about. I don't think you want that. It's really a fascinating read in chapter four.

We then move to Chapter Five, which is one of the most crazy chapters in the book. The sin and the corruption of Corinth was so deep, that at this point, there was a man in the church, who was having a sexual relationship with his father's wife with his own stepmother. And the Corinthians had so misunderstood, so corrupted the idea of grace, that they were applauding this man who was having sex with his stepmom. And Paul reminds them not only is this sinful, but even pagans look at that and go, "Eew!", you're committing and applauding a sin that even pagans go, "Come on. That's a bit much," right. So there are real problems in Corinthians, chapter five is just a small indication of that.

In chapter six talks about further problems that were going on. Chapter Six says there are some church members who are suing other church members in open court in secular courts. And he reminds them of this fact, when we get to heaven, we Christians, the saints, we're going to be judging angels, like the angels aren't going to be in charge of us, we're going to be in charge of the angels. So if we're going to be judging and in charge of angels, we should be able to figure out how to settle our own disputes here without having to go to the courts. Right, let's not do that.

And then we moved to chapter seven. And chapter seven, verse one, a shift takes place in the book. Let me read seven one, and you'll see the shift where I'll lay it out for you. Okay, chapter seven, verse one says, now for the matters you wrote about, it is good for a man not to

have sexual relations with a woman. Now, there are two things about that that we have questions for. Okay. First one now for the matters you wrote about what he's saying is this up until the end of chapter six, Paul is writing to them about the things that matter most to him.

Starting in chapter seven, he says, Okay, now, we've been sending these letters back and forth, you wrote, and you asked me some questions. Now I'm going to answer your questions. Okay. And then he starts by answering a question with the phrase, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. He is not saying that's how everybody ought to live. And part of the challenge in answering questions about marriage in chapter seven is this. We don't know what the questions were that the Corinthians asked. So it's like listening to one end of a telephone conversation. So while we can get a lot out of the next several chapters of First Corinthians, We need to be careful about inferring too much from it, because we don't know the question he's asking. So there are going to be things that are going to be written that we're going to be really obvious, and other parts of it are gonna leave us scratching our head going, what does he mean here?

And to a certain degree, we won't fully know what he means because we don't know what the question was that he was answering. Like, what question is he answering? When he starts with the answer? It is good for men not to have sexual relations with a woman, when we know from later on in his writings, that he's very much pro sexual relationships within marriage. So he's not against sex. He is very much for sexual relationships within biblical marriage. So we don't know what the question is that he's answering. So as you're reading these next few chapters, just be aware of that.

We then go and he starts answering some of the questions in chapters eight through 11. And in the next few chapters, he answers questions about Chapter Eight food sacrifice to idols, chapter nine, about the nature of an apostle, chapter 10. He answers questions about Israel's history, about the Lord's Supper, and about freedom in Christ. In chapter 11 handshakes question about how to conduct worship services, and how to conduct the Lord's Supper. And take note when you get to the end of chapter 11. You're going to read a passage that may sound familiar, because it's the passage that most churches read whenever we receive communion together.

But I want you to notice as you get to it this week, at the end of chapter 11, a First Corinthians note that it's written in this segment to correct what they were doing wrong about communion. All right, take note of that, the context matters there. We then get to First Corinthians 12 through 14, which is a huge passage in the New Testament, and that we often disassemble in ways that aren't helpful to us. And here, here's how here's what I mean by that. In first Corinthians 12 through 14, we hear more from Paul teaching, about spiritual gifts, and about love. It's probably the most thorough teaching in the New Testament about spiritual gifts. And spiritual gifts are abilities that are given to us when we get saved when the Holy Spirit enters us. When we are born again, when we believe in Christ and are born again, by the Spirit of God, when we move from death to life.

At that point, the Holy Spirit actually comes and lives inside of us. And when the Holy Spirit comes, He brings stuff, he brings gifts he brings abilities that we can do, you don't receive the same gifts that I received, there are different gifts. And that's why when a church comes together, some people are able to teach and some people are able to pray in ways that have impact. And other people have the great gifts of hospitality and service and, and generosity. And

different people have different strengths in different things, because that's how the Holy Spirit works to make sure that different things are done by different people so that it all comes together.

Okay. So in chapters 12, and 14, he teaches about the spiritual gifts. And in chapter 13, we have what's called the love chapter. Now, here's how we often disassemble these three chapters in ways that aren't necessarily helpful. Because 12 and 14 specifically talk about spiritual gifts, we usually teach 12 and 14 and leave 13 out. And because 13 is talking about love, we often teach 13 and leave out 12 and 14. But Paul put them in this order on purpose. He comes in the middle of a big teaching about spiritual gifts to talk about love, why, because love should be the guide for all the gifts. If you have a gift of prophecy, but you don't have love as the Bible, as he says in verse 13, then your gift is useless. The whole point of the gifts is to demonstrate Christ's love. So he anchors it in chapter 13 with that.

So some of this you're really going to be familiar with, because you've seen some of this or heard some of this read at weddings, for instance, First Corinthians 13, is read at a whole lot of Christian weddings. So a lot of it, the beautiful, amazing poetry of this chapter, you'll feel you'll hear some of it that's very familiar to you. Then we get to First Corinthians 15, where the apostle Paul gives maybe the most important teaching on the entire New Testament about the importance of Jesus's resurrection. What was happening was that some people in Corinth had been saying that this world is all that there is. And when we die, we're not going to be resurrected into new bodies in heaven when you die, you'll just take a dirt nap, and that'll be it. Paul, at this point, challenges them by going okay, then why did Jesus rise from the dead? If resurrection from the dead isn't the point? Why would Jesus go through the trouble of crucifixion, and rising again on the third day, and defeating death if we're all just going to die, and that'll be the end of it, that the single event that is the most important focus of our faith is about physical death and physical resurrection, there is no reason for Jesus to have done that if we're all just going to die. And that's going to be it. Right? So that's what he's talking about.

When we get to First Corinthians 15, there were people who were saying, there is no resurrection from the dead, we're just going to die. And that's going to be it. So just try to do the best you can right now. And he says no, that's not what's happening here, the resurrection of Jesus as the single most important event for our faith, and he didn't need to do it. If we were just going to die. And that would be it. We will be resurrected in heaven, as well. So just as you read through these few chapters, here's what you're gonna see. First Corinthians 11, you're going to read a portion that's familiar to you if you've ever been in communion because it's often right at most communions. In first Corinthians 13, you're going to read pieces that are going to be familiar because they've been read at most weddings. And in First Corinthians 15, you're now going to read a piece that you often hear read at most Christian funerals. So there's gonna be a lot of familiarity. 11 we hear at communion, 13 we hear at weddings, 15 we hear at funerals. It's really interesting in just these few chapters in the middle, or near the end of the week.

And then we will conclude the week with First Corinthians 16, where Paul does two things in addition to his parting remarks, and saying hi to folks and remembering them. He also talks about the collection for God's people. And we'll talk about this a little more next week as well. Second, Corinthians deals with it a lot. But this is our introduction to an idea. That is one of the most important but overlooked aspects of the New Testament. In Jerusalem at this time, as Paul was writing this letter. The saints in Jerusalem are undergoing persecution for their faith.

They are losing their jobs. They're having to share what little they have with each other in order to survive.

And so everywhere Paul goes, he tells them, I want you to every time you gather every week, when you gather as the church, I want you to bring offerings, I want you to hold those offerings until I come. And then I'm going to receive the entirety of those offerings. And I'm going to bring them back to Jerusalem, so that you as Christians in Corinth and emphasis in Galatia, and in Thessalonica, and all these other places, as I'm going to take these gifts and bring them back to our brothers and sisters who are suffering in Jerusalem. This is one of the most important events that happened in the New Testament and one that we don't teach about often enough about the mutual generosity that Christians are supposed to have toward each other. This is the first we hear of it at the end of First Corinthians. We'll hear a lot more about it next week in Second Corinthians, but before we get to that, let's conclude this week.

First Corinthians is a very personal letter written from someone who knew the people he was writing to, and to people who knew the person who was writing to them, he comes across like a dad who loves his kids, but he's frustrated with them, because they're not doing the stuff they know they should be doing. It's got lots of practical advice about worship, and about love and about morality and about our Christian behavior. And it is especially helpful to Christians, or to a church that are living in a culture that's falling away from Christian behavior.

Or if you are a Christian who's in a church, whose culture is falling away from Christian behavior. This is a place you will go to to get practical advice about how to deal with it, about how to live above the fray yourself, and how to help bring the culture of the church and the culture around you back to a more Christian basis. It's very practical, very helpful, at times kind of confusing. But mostly, you're going to have some familiarity, as well as some real practical advice as you read it through this week, and we'll see you next week.

If you'd like to support this ministry, and help put resources like this into the hands of the people who need them the most, go to KarlVaters.com/support. For an outline of the entire Bible Reading plan, go to KarlVaters.com/bibleoutline. And if you'd like a transcript of this episode, it's available at KarlVaters.com/transcripts. If you're a church leader, and you'd like to get a transcript of each episode a week in advance, subscribe to our free newsletter at KarlVaters.com/subscribe. All these links are in the show notes. This episode was produced by Veronica Beaver. The theme music was written and performed by Jack Wilkins of JackWilkinsmusic.com. And me? I'm Karl Vaters and I'm your Bible Reading Coach.