

# 1 Corinthians

## Bible Study

### Sin Within the Church

#### 1 Corinthians 4:3–5:5

Paul is continually reminding us that he was given a special stewardship of the mysteries of God. These mysteries are sometimes rolled up into one grouping called the Mystery (Romans 16:25; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 3:3; Colossians 1:26). Paul breaks down the whole body of information included in the Mystery (Which is contained in his 13 books) into separate pieces which he also calls mysteries (Romans 11:25; 1 Corinthians 15:51; Ephesians 5:32). Paul was given the position of apostle and a special message by Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1–5; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:1; Galatians 1:11–12). He is our pattern and example in the Body of Christ (1 Timothy 1:16). He was approved as an apostle by the Hebrew church at Jerusalem, by Peter and other apostles (Galatians 2:9). He is also the masterbuilder of this Dispensation of Grace (1 Corinthians 3:10). How is it even possible that most people miss this important position and message that God gave to Paul when Paul so clearly presents himself as our apostle?

Beginning with verse 3, Paul uses sarcasm to make his point that they are arrogantly thinking themselves to be more advanced spiritually than they really are.

#### **Judged by the Corinthians** (verses 3–7)

The Corinthians had their opinion of Paul, and it was not all that good. They had elevated themselves above him in thinking they were more spiritual than he was. However, Paul was not one to be influenced by them because he knew his position and authority came from God. As carnal Christians, they were completely incapable to make proper spiritual judgments. Paul knew God was His judge. God will be judging the inner motives of each man's heart at the Judgment Seat of Christ following the Rapture of the Church, the Body of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10).

The problem with the Corinthian church is that they were judging men according to human standards instead of judging the message by spiritual standards. Once they began to be swayed by various preachers, they left the doctrine of Paul to follow the man they most liked as a person. They were judging Paul by his speaking abilities and physical attributes instead of evaluating and accepting the doctrine he preached as the word of God (unlike the Thessalonians —1 Thessalonians 2:13).

#### **Incorrect self-image** (verses 8–13)

Many in the Corinthian church thought of themselves as being quite spiritual. They had put themselves on a pedestal and looked down on others whom they thought were inferior to them. They thought of themselves as wise in understanding spiritual things. In their eyes they were strong and were to be honored above others for their impeccable spirituality. They were proud of their great wisdom. By thinking they were so superior to everyone else, they thought of others, like Paul, as being beneath them. They thought they had a special ability to discern truth and lifted themselves above everyone else.

Unfortunately, they were just the opposite. They were so weak in spiritual things that Paul needed to feed them milk instead of meat (1 Corinthians 3:1–2). They were so lacking in their spirituality and so immature as Christians that Paul called them babes. Their carnality resulted in them evaluating their condition by man's wisdom instead of by godly wisdom. Since each person was using human wisdom to judge what was right and wrong, there were a number of different views within the church. This was how they became so divided and quarrelsome.

This is also how churches today become divided. As soon as a church does not embrace pauline doctrine, there is a good possibility that people will have their own humanistic ideas about what a

church should believe and how it should operate. A church that lives by pauline doctrine will very likely remain a strong and united church. A church that uses human wisdom and accepts various doctrinal beliefs that are not in agreement with what Paul teaches will often struggle to maintain proper unity. It is critically important for the people within a church to be firmly planted in the doctrines of Grace. This is what unites us and makes us strong (Ephesians 4:3, 13; Philippians 2:2; Romans 15:6–7).

### **Paul, their spiritual father** (verses 14–21)

Paul was instrumental in presenting the gospel to them and in forming the resultant assembly of believers into a church. He first visited them on his second apostolic journey, and within 4–5 years many had left his teaching and were struggling in their spiritual walk. Paul calls them his son and he their spiritual father. Like a father admonishing his son, his letter was written in an attempt to correct their bad behavior and get them back on track spiritually. He presented himself as the person they needed to follow as their example and role model. In his absence, he put them in Timothy's charge to guide them in their spiritual growth.

As a father, he admonished them to shape up or he will be forced to come to them to reprimand them for continuing to live ungodly lives. They have arrogantly placed themselves high above Paul on the scale of spirituality, and Paul needed to hold up Scripture to their actions to show them that they were actually living very ungodly lives. Paul was hoping he would not have to come to them with a rod, but rather to visit them in the unity of the Spirit. Paul was already on his way to Corinth while writing from Ephesus, so they were being warned of his impending visit. Will they continue to be puffed up in their human wisdom, or will they realize how far from God they actually have strayed and begin to grow by being grounded in God's word as Paul had previously taught them?

### **Specific sins**

Paul had been speaking in general terms, but now he gives the Corinthian church specific examples of how spiritually corrupt they have become. They were judging Paul by human standards, but Paul turns it around and judges them according to godly standards. As carnal Christians, they were not even aware of how serious the sin was within the church. Things accepted by the world as normal often go against godly norms as presented in Scripture. The Corinthians minimized sexual sin perhaps because it was something quite common in their culture. We need to study God's word in order to know what God views as a normal way of life.

The city of Corinth was a nautical hub with much commerce from around the world. All this traffic created an ungodly influence, especially in sexual sins. They even had a temple built to worship Aphrodite, the goddess of love, with hundreds of temple prostitutes. This type of sexual perversion was very common and normal for the Corinthians.

These ungodly norms were carried over into the church that was started by Paul. They took the doctrine of grace to an extreme by allowing a member of the church to be inappropriately involved with his stepmother (or possibly his own mother). They thought grace gave them freedom to sin, and that keeping this man in their congregation was showing love. Instead of taking action against this man, they allowed him to continue to worship with them in the church.

Paul told them to deliver this man over to Satan. I believe this man was a believer, but was living a carnal life. His ungodly actions were encouraged by the congregation. When Paul says that he should be delivered over to Satan, he is telling them to separate this man from the only godly influence available in that area, thereby handing him over to Satan's domain.

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