

1 Corinthians Overview

- a. **Author**
- b. **Audience**
- c. **Date**

The Portrait of Jesus by Paul in 1 Corinthians

1. Images of Jesus in 1 Corinthians (Borchert, pp 103-23)

- a. _____ and _____ of God

- b. The _____

- c. Lord of _____ not _____

- d. Our _____

- e. The _____ of _____

- f. New _____

2. Questions for Reflection (Borchert, p 123)

- a. The Corinthians were convinced that they understood the implications of the gospel. But in what ways did Paul show them that they were biblically illiterate? How does this treatment of knowledge have any relevance for us today? What are the implications of Paul's advice for us today in terms of our generation's views of sexual immorality?
- b. How do you think Paul would confront us on the matter of idolatry today?
- c. Where do you stand on the role of women in the church? What is the significance of baptism and the Lord's Supper for your faith community? How does your church treat the issue of speaking in tongues? How important is the role of the Holy Spirit for you? For your church? Is the resurrection of Jesus central in your life? Explain.
- d. Are you ready to challenge your faith community to take Jesus as the model for life? What implications may follow for them and for you?

Homework

1. Read the Gospel of John at least once and in one-sitting, if possible.
2. Read Borchert chapter 6, pp 129-60.
3. Think about your response to the *Questions for Reflection* on p 160.
 - a. Since there seem to be a number of delineations, sketches, or poses in the portrait of Jesus presented by John, which ones are the most encompassing? Which ones appeal to your mindset the most? Why?
 - b. How does the death and resurrection of Jesus fit into your primary sketches of Jesus? How does Jesus' relationship with the Father fit into these sketches? What about the Holy Spirit?
 - c. Why do you think John goes back to the creation event to portray Jesus for his readers?
 - d. What descriptors would you choose to describe the Christian's relationship with Jesus?
 - e. How does Dr. Borchert's organization of this Gospel with two introductions, three cycles, and two story lines (death and resurrection) affect your developing an overall portrait of Jesus?
 - f. Why do you think Borchert regards the Johannine Gospel as the climactic book in the New Testament? To what extent do you agree? Disagree?

Portraits of Jesus

A Portrait of Jesus by Paul in 1 Corinthians

A. 1 Corinthians Overview

1. Author

- a. There are two main sources of evidence within this letter supporting Paul's authorship.
 - 1) "Paul, called (Gk., *kletos*) to be an apostle (Gk., *apostolos* = "one sent; an authority") of Christ Jesus by the will of God (Gk., *thleματος* - not by his own initiative but God's initiative)" (1:1a).
 - 2) "I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand" (16:21).
- b. The grammar, vocabulary, style of the letter are consistent with other Pauline letters.
- c. Most scholars affirm that 1 Corinthians is an authentic Pauline letter. However, there are some scholars who do not accept all of the letter as originating with Paul.
- d. In regard to Paul's command for silencing women in the church (14:34-35), Borchert states, "Many scholars have grave doubts about these verses being authentically Pauline, especially since the statement goes against what is said in 1 Corinthians 11:5 concerning women praying and prophesying/proclaiming publicly" (Borchert, 118).
- e. Where do you stand on the role of women in the church?

2. Audience

- a. The letter's salutation states it was written to "the church of God in Corinth" (1:2a).
- b. Corinth had been destroyed by the Roman legions in 146 BCE and rebuilt as a Roman colony by Julius Caesar in 44 BCE.
 - 1) Corinth grew rapidly because of its position on the neck of a narrow isthmus connecting two parts of Greece. Ships were towed overland across the four-mile wide isthmus.
 - 2) Corinth was the third most wealthy and influential city in the Roman world. Only Rome and Alexandria exceed it.
 - 3) Corinth was a young city where excess was the norm in treasures, philosophies, fads, pagan temples (e.g., Apollo/war and Aphrodite/love). There was great sexual freedom, and all the forms of vice/debauchery one would expect in a major port city.
- c. Borchert writes, ". . . Paul probably began his evangelization of Corinth in AD 50 or 51 when he also appeared before the *bema* (the judgment seat) of the Proconsul Gallio, a Roman Senator (cf. Acts 18:12-17)" (Borchert, 103).
 - 1) Paul visited Corinth 100 years after its rebuilding on his second missionary journey (cf., Acts 18).
 - 2) There was a Jewish synagogue in which Paul preached "every Sabbath . . . trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4).
 - 3) The Jews opposed Paul and became abusive. "Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God . . ." (Acts 18:7).
 - 4) Paul stayed in Corinth "for some time" before sailing for Ephesus (Acts 18:18).

3. Date

- a. Borchert states, "[Paul] wrote a letter (which has been lost) concerning immorality, idolatry, greed, and a few other matters (cf. 1 Cor 5:9-13)" (Borchert, 103).
- b. From the responses that Paul made in 1 Corinthians to the "matters" (e.g., marriage and personal relationship questions in chapter 7) raised by the Corinthians, it appears that the Corinthians most likely had written a letter back to Paul.
- c. Paul stated that he had sent Timothy (cf., 1 Cor 4:17) to give them more details on his views. Most likely he sent the letter we know as 1 Corinthians along with Timothy.
- d. Based on this implied exchange of letters, most scholars suggest that 1 Corinthians was a letter sent by Paul to Corinth during his stay in Ephesus, which would make the date of this letter somewhere between CE 53 to CE 57.

B. The Portrait of Jesus by Paul in 1 Corinthians

1. Images of Jesus in 1 Corinthians (Borchert, pp 103-23)

a. Power and Wisdom of God (2:20-25; 3:1-16)

1) Read 1:20-25.

2) The message of the cross is foolishness (Gk., *moria*) for “those who are perishing” (Pf,Ptc – on the way to Hell unless they repent) (18)

a) Jesus is the power (Gk., *dunamis*) of God for those “who are being saved” (Pf,Ptc – salvation is a life journey)

b) The opposite of the world’s foolishness is not wisdom but God’s POWER.

c) What the world evaluates as foolishness, Christ crucified, is actually the power of God!

3) We want powerful signs and irrefutable wisdom, but God offers us only the cross. (22-23)

a) The Jews demanded “miraculous signs” (22a).

i. The idea of a crucified Messiah was beyond Jewish belief. It truly was foolishness.

ii. The Messiah was to be God’s powerful, vindicating servant; not a powerless, vanquished criminal dying on a cross (cf., Dt 21:23b2 – “. . . anyone who is hung on a cross is under God’s curse.”).

iii. The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ Jesus is the sign of God’s power to save the world.

iv. However, the cross became a “stumbling block (Gk., *skandalon* – “death trap”) to Jews” (23).

b) The Greeks (Gentiles) also looked for their own “wisdom” (22b).

i. The Greeks loved their philosophers: Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Pythagoras.

ii. They loved logic and systematic approaches with precise and provable conclusions.

iii. The cross is neither logical nor provable.

iv. The cross became “foolishness” (Gk., *moria*) to Gentiles (23).

v. In the eyes of the world, the cross of Christ appears to be weakness, defeat, and foolishness.

c) God works NOT through strength but through weakness. (25)

d) The cross of Christ is the greatest demonstration of God’s power as he worked through the weakness of the cross to reveal his powerful plan for human salvation through Jesus Christ.

4) Borchert concludes, “The message of Jesus does not seem to make either logical or demonstrable sense (1:22-23). But the reason is because God will not fit into the teacups of human minds. Nor can God be accessed by computer chips of today. Human wisdom, knowledge, and skills are incapable of defining or encapsulating God’s Son or his ways” (Borchert, 105).

b. The Foundation

1) Read 3:10-15.

2) Borchert says, “[Paul] identifies himself like the architect (Gk., *architecton*) who is engaged in building them—his children in the faith—into a temple. He is convinced that he has laid the correct foundation, which is Christ” (Borchert, 106)

3) Human leaders build up God’s people. (10)

a) A leader’s skills and abilities come to him/her “by the grace of God.” (10)

b) A leader holds a position of trust, authority, and responsibility.

c) A leader directs the work but cannot do all the work alone.

d) Leaders guide the church to move from where it is to where God wants it to be.

- 4) Human leaders must always remember the ultimate leader is Jesus Christ. (11)
 - a) In building a church, there is no other foundation than Jesus Christ.
 - b) If we lay any other foundation than the gospel of Jesus, then what we build is not a Christian church.
 - 5) Human leaders must use quality materials in building a church. (12-15)
 - a) Paul contrasted two types of building materials: 1) cheap – wood, hay, straw; 2) expensive – gold, silver, costly stones.
 - b) Paul was not speaking about physical building materials but spiritual building materials.
 - c) What we build on the foundation of Christ Jesus must be worthy of that foundation.
 - i. We must be sure that our doctrine is sound and that our practices are true to the gospel.
 - ii. We must teach/nurture disciples of Jesus—both building and growing are processes.
 - iii. We must build for the long term and not the short term.
 - iv. We are building up God’s temple, that is his people the church in whom his Spirit dwells.
- c. **Lord of Self-Sacrifice Not Selfishness**
- 1) “It is clear to [Paul] that [the Corinthians] have hardly understood the coming of the self-giving Christ. Do you see then how important Paul’s living portrait of Christ is for his thinking?” (Borchert, 108)
 - 2) The Corinthians were convinced that they understood the implications of the gospel. But in what ways did Paul show them that they were biblically illiterate?
 - 3) Paul addressed two critical problems that plagued the Corinthian church.
 - a) immorality (chs. 5-7)
 - i. **Read 1 Cor 5:1-5.**
 - ii. Borchert comments, “The force of this text can only mean that Paul must believe that God’s amazing power resides through Christ in the community of faith! If there is a lack of such power in the church today, perhaps the reason is that the church does not take the powerful ‘presence’ of Christ seriously” (Borchert, 107).
 - iii. What are the implications of Paul’s advice for us today in terms of our generation’s views of sexual immorality?
 - b) idolatry (chs. 8-10)
 - i. **Read 1 Cor 8:9-13.**
 - ii. Borchert says, “What is important for all Christians to understand is that Paul believes that the power of God can deal with difficult issues in life” (Borchert, 109).
 - iii. How do you think Paul would confront us on the matter of idolatry today?
 - 4) In conclusions, Borchert writes, “I must add that over the years I have become more careful about judging others who have patterns in life that are different from mine. As children of God, we should be people who are concerned about those who need God’s power by sharing with them both the forgiveness of God and the amazing grace of Christ without necessarily accepting their weaknesses or foibles. The creator is able to re-create—even me! Our task in the church is to model the gracious spirit of the one who called us to wholeness when we were helpless. May God help all of us never to forget that, except for the grace of God, we also would stand condemned” (Borchert, 109).

d. **Our Model**

1) **Read 1 Cor 11:1.**

- 2) Paul first said to follow “my example (Gk., *mimetai mou*)” but quickly added that he follows “the example of Christ.”
- 3) Borchert notes, “Imitation (*mimites*) was a major theme among the philosophers of his day, and Paul was prepared to give himself as a model because his model was in fact Christ!” (Borchert, 114)
- 4) What is the example of Christ that we should imitate?
 - a) Jesus put the good of others before his own good by giving up his rights in heaven and gave his life for the good of others by opening the way to eternal salvation by his death/resurrection.
 - b) He never causes anyone to stumble but is there to pick them up when they do.
 - c) He brings glory to God the Father in all that he says and does.
- 5) Are you ready to challenge your faith community to take Jesus as the model for life? What implications may follow for them and for you?

e. **The Body of Christ**

1) **Read 1 Cor 12:12-20.**

- 2) Borchert notes, “This perspective is radically different from the thinking of most people in the world; humans are self-oriented and basically narcissistic. In contrast the gifts of the Spirit should be viewed as constructive for the whole church—Christ’s body—and not seen as divisive self-oriented characteristics (cf. Eph 4:11-12). Because his concern is for unity and interdependence among Christians, Paul inserts the famous hymn on love (chapter 13) into this section that is focused on dealing with the great divisiveness being experienced in the church” (Borchert, 116-17).
- 3) There was a lack of unity in the body of Christ in the church at Corinth.
 - a) Paul spoke about the diversity of spiritual gifts given by the Spirit to believers.
 - b) Spiritual gifts had become a source of division and tension between believers.
 - c) Paul used a timeless analogy—the human body—to describe unity in diversity.
 - d) There is no hierarchy of rank or privilege in the body of Christ. We each have the same Spirit; we serve the same Lord; we are empowered by the same God.
 - e) Although we are unique and different in our spiritual gifts, talents, and abilities, in the end we come together as one in the body of Christ. unity in diversity

f. **New Adam**

1) **Read 1 Cor 15:1-8.**

- a) The resurrection of Jesus is central to the life of the church and our life in him.
- b) If we accept the declaration of God about the resurrection of Jesus, there are implications for us today.
- c) **Read Eph 2:1-10.** We are made alive in our resurrection with Christ today.
- d) The goal of Jesus is to bring us life. Life lies beyond resurrection. He wants us to be resurrected in him to an abundant and eternal life beginning right now.

2) **Read 1 Cor 15:20-24.**

- a) Through Adam’s (i.e., “man’s”) sin, death—both spiritual & physical—entered the world (cf., Gen 3).
- b) Through Jesus’ death/resurrection forgiveness and new life entered the world (cf., Ro 5:12-21).
- c) Borchert concludes, “Christ is portrayed as the new Adam who has made possible new life for those who trust in him, and he has provided them with hope in the kingdom of God (15:20-24)” (Borchert, 120).

C. Homework

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