

Paul's Letters to the Corinthians [message to today's church]

- Letters = powerful = because they connect people
 - thru thoughts / feelings / instruction / love
- Paul did not always have / chance to speak face-to-face w/churches he cared about = so Holy Spirit moved him to write.
- These were not ordinary letters = were read in churches
 - received as inspired messages from God
- What blessing that is for us today = because some of deepest truths in all Scripture = come thru Paul's letters
- Many those Spirit-inspired truths = came out of real church problems
- Certainly true of Paul's letters = to the Corinthians
- Paul wrote **1 Corinthians** while in Ephesus = had received troubling news from Chloe's household = things in Corinth were not going well
- Church was dealing w/ = division / immorality / confusion / disorder in worship / misuse of spiritual gifts / misunderstanding resurrection
- Not polished church = but troubled / immature / messy
- Yet it was still Christ's church = Paul did not give up on it
- Should encourage us today = because many churches now face similar struggles
- Still deal w/ = division / pride / worldliness / spiritual confusion
 - personality conflicts / and temptation to let
 - culture shape church = more than Christ does
- Corinthians / not just ancient history = living message for today
- **1 Corinthians 1:11–13** = Paul addresses factionalism
- "I am of Paul" / "I am of Apollos" / "I am of Cephas"
- Paul responds w/ piercing question: **"Is Christ divided?"**
- That is one of = great punchlines of his letter
- The church must never = center itself around human personalities
- The church belongs to Christ
- And is that not still relevant? Churches today can divide over

- Leaders / worship preferences / ministry styles
 - generations / theological emphases
- Sometimes = more loyal to our tribe / than to Christ Himself
- Paul's appeal still speaks w/ force:
 - Christ is not divided = His people should not be either
- Paul made elaborate arguments to Greek philosophers in Athens, but to church of Corinth = it was simplicity of Christ
 - **1 Corinthians 2:2** I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.
- **1 Corinthians 4:14** "I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you."
 - Paul not trying to humiliate them /but lovingly warning them
- That matters because correction in the church
 - must never come from = irritation / ego / superiority.
 - Biblical correction is rooted in love
- Paul wrote as spiritual father = whose heart was invested in / people
- Today / many believers are quick to criticize the church
 - but slower to love the church = enough to help it heal
- Paul shows us spiritual correction = must be both truthful / tender
- **1 Corinthians 14:40** says all things should be done decently / in order
- In **2 Corinthians** = Paul goes even deeper
 - Speaks of sincerity / obedience / simplicity in Christ
 - and using authority to build up / rather than tear down
- Perhaps most moving text is **2 Corinthians 2:4** = where Paul says he wrote "out of much affliction and anguish of heart... w/ many tears."
 - That tells us = how deeply he cared
- Paul did not write **cold** letters = to a difficult church
 - wrote w/= anguish / tears he wrote because he loved them
- That should make us ask = how much do we care about the spiritual condition of God's people?
 - Do we grieve over sin in the church?

- Do we pray over division? Do we weep over compromise?
 - Or have we become cold / critical / detached?
- Part of problem in Corinth = believers were being shaped
 - by surrounding culture = Corinth valued competition,
 - power / status / wealth / eloquence
 - Those worldly values = had begun = to influence the church
- Again = how relevant that is today
- Modern culture also prizes image / influence
 - Success / wealth / self-promotion
- If we are not careful = church begins to imitate those same values
 - We start measuring ministry by applause / numbers / popularity / visibility
 - rather than = holiness / humility / truth / love / faithfulness
- Paul was working to create = Christ-centered culture in the church
 - Teaching believers to see world = thru lens of the gospel
 - That is exactly what we need today
- Christ must remain = center / circumference of the church
- Church problems must be handled w/ both truth / love
- Church must not borrow its values = from surrounding culture
- Spiritual maturity matters
- Corinthians were not easy to pastor = but Paul loved them anyway
- They were flawed / but not forsaken = corrected / but not cast off
- And that gives hope for every church today
- No matter how many struggles may exist in a congregation
 - Christ is still able to restore / purify / unite mature His ppl
- If we will humble ourselves under His Word = receive His correction
 - and see our life together thru =lens of everlasting gospel
- Christ can make the church = what He intends it to be
- May Lord help us not merely to study Corinthians= as historical letter
 - but to receive it as = present word
- May He give us churches filled w/ = truth / humility / unity / love

- and hearts like Paul's
- strong enough to correct = tender enough to weep

Ephesians 4:15 (AMP) Rather, let our lives lovingly express truth [in all things, speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly]. Enfolded in love, let us grow up in every way and in all things into Him Who is the Head, [even] Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One).