

# **Read the Bible in a Year**

Week 13 – August 29, 2021

**Read on Your Own this Week:**

*Psalm 37-39*

Luke 5-8

**Readings in Class:**

Numbers 31-36

1 Corinthians 1-16

1 Corinthians is another of Paul's letters, most likely written around AD 55 while Paul was in Ephesus. Next to Romans, it is one of the longer and more detailed letters, dealing with how the Church should conduct herself. Paul had received reports of the many problems and immorality that were plaguing the church. This letter was written to address these concerns and other questions he had been asked. This letter is still extremely helpful to congregations that are going through the same issues today.

Paul first visited the Corinthians as part of his second missionary journey. It is here that he met Priscilla and Aquilla. You can read about his year and a half there in Acts 18. Corinth was a large Greek city west of Athens that was well known for its sexual immorality. It had a large temple dedicated to Aphrodite, whose worship required prostitution. This sexual immorality had worked its way into the Church and is one of the many things Paul addresses. The people were also big on Greek philosophy and wisdom, something that Paul talks about in the first few chapters.

## **Whom do you follow?**

The first concern Paul addresses is that of divisions in the Church. The people were not just claiming to follow Christ, but also Paul, Apollos, or Cephas. Paul quickly sets them straight by asserting that he and the others are mere men, servants, sent by the Lord. How eloquent or wise the messenger is does not matter, only the message itself.

This perhaps brings up the question about our church's name "Lutheran." Aren't we doing exactly what Paul is warning against? The name Lutheran is actually one that Martin Luther himself originally spoke against. But the name stuck. It does not, however, mean we follow Martin Luther. The name, though, has become synonymous with a certain confession which we hold to. We recognize Luther as a servant of Christ Jesus and a major figure in Church history, but we do not follow him.

## **Sexual Immorality**

Chapters 5-7 largely have to do with sexual immorality. A man has his father's wife (probably the man's step-mother). This appears to be a misunderstanding of the freedom we have in Christ (see Romans). Paul tells them to excommunicate those who practice sexual immorality or their sin will infect the whole church. Excommunication is also meant to bring someone to repentance and thus save their soul. Paul also encourages the Corinthians to marry if they are unable to control themselves sexually. Since they were surrounded by sexual immorality, this was a daily temptation.

## **Idols**

The Corinthians would have been surrounded by idolatry. There were several temples dedicated to different Roman and Greek gods in the city. It would be impossible to even go to the market to buy meat that wasn't sacrificed to an idol. This is a question that the Corinthians posed to Paul: Could they eat meat sacrificed to idols? Paul's answer is that while the idols have no power, you could cause a brother to stumble if they think you are worshipping idols. Paul also warns them that you can't worship God and idols and uses Israel's history as an example of what will happen if you try.

## **The Lord's Supper**

Chapter 11 gives us the clearest explanation of the Lord's Supper. It appears as if the Corinthians were getting drunk at Communion. Most likely the rich were going ahead and eating and drinking everything and leaving little or nothing for the poor to have. Paul scolds them for this, even going so far as to say that their mishandling of Communion is what has caused sickness and death among them. We also get a clear understanding that Communion is not something to be taken lightly. It's not just some memorial meal. Jesus is really present. Paul says that if you don't recognize the body of Jesus, you eat and drink judgement upon yourself. And that if you take Communion in an unworthy manner, you are guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

## **Prophecy and Tongues**

Chapters 12 -14 have to do with spiritual gifts. It seems that perhaps the Corinthians were overemphasizing certain gifts and causing further division because of it. Paul sets them straight with the well-known passage about the Church being like a body. The various parts serve different roles, but all are important to the functioning of the body.

Just like some denominations today, the Corinthians seem to have been placing greater importance on the gift of tongues. Paul, however, says that the greater gift is prophecy (speaking the Words of God) because prophecy builds up the Church. Speaking in tongues is helpful to the one speaking and is a sign to unbelievers, but unless an interpreter is present, it does not help other believers. And ultimately no gift matters unless it is used in love. (see the great definition of love in 13:4-7).

## **Orderly Worship**

"For God is not a God of confusion but of peace." 14:33. Centered in much of the discussion for Paul with the various lists of abuses in the Church of Corinth is how each of these issues, (spiritual gifts, idolatry, sexual immorality and factions within the congregation) is how this appears in their worship.

The spiritual gifts have puffed them up and instead of orderly worship, everyone gathers to do their own thing during service. Communion is so abused that the rich are gorging on the meal, the poor are left out and some are drunk. Factions within the congregation might be even causing them to meet separately based upon which teacher they most favor. Idolatry may even be causing a mix of pagan worship practices (drunkenness, blessing of sexual immorality) to occur within the services of Christians as well.

Paul reminds them of the “One Lord” that they have been called to in Christ. How they are to speak “one after another,” how they are to wait for “one and another” at the table, and that all things have been given to them because they belong to the One Lord.

A touchy subject in our age is the verses discussing women being called to be silent and not speak.

Most likely what is happening in Corinth is that when someone was teaching, there would be women who would interrupt or dispute what was being said, or even preaching themselves. Paul reminds the congregation that this is not proper conduct and does not honor the order in which God created mankind and is thus reflected in worship. This point is one that Paul notes is the standard in all churches, not just Corinth.

Worship is done “decently and in order.” It follows a pattern, provides sound teaching and instruction and gives the gifts of Jesus Christ in Word and in Sacrament. The substance of worship is made clear in the style and form in which it is conducted in.

### **The Resurrection**

Chapter 15 is very often an Easter text. Paul makes it really clear the importance of the Resurrection. He goes so far as to say that if the Resurrection didn’t happen, then our faith is in vain. This is why in Verses 3-8 (which might be an early creed) he lists those who witnessed Jesus after he rose. Many of these people were still alive at the time he was writing this letter.

It is also in this chapter that we find out the fact that we, too, will rise from the dead. On the last day our bodies will be made new. We aren’t just going to be disembodied spirits for all of eternity.