

Impressiona from reading of paul's letter to the corinthians

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Interpretive Reading of Corinthians

Introductory Issues

The authorship of 1 Corinthians has never been disputed. Generally, everyone agrees that Paul was the one who wrote this letter to the church at Corinth. In the salutation of the letter of 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul clearly states that he is the one writing. The letter itself shows all the historical and literary evidence that would suggest that Paul wrote it, and even the most critical modern scholars consistently accept this letter to be genuinely written by Paul. Paul's authorship of 1 Corinthians is attested by Clement of Rome, who, in the mid-90s, wrote 1 Clement to the Corinthians. 1 Clement 37: 5; 47: 1-3; 49: 5, gives documentation to the fact that Paul was the author of 1 Corinthians.

The dating of the letter of 1 Corinthians is fairly uncertain, with scholars ranging the date from A. D. 52 to A. D. 57. It is known that 1 Corinthians was written when Paul was at Ephesus, so based on that we get a good timeframe of when it was written; although, there are more factors that one can look at try to better date the letter. These factors being: the dating of the edict of Claudius which testifies to Paul's visit to Corinth and also dates the proconsulship of Gallio; the time of Paul' departure from Corinth and travel to Ephesus; and the length of time that Paul stayed in Ephesus. The variance of the dating comes from trying place and judge when and how long these events take place. Based off Acts 18: 12-17, which talks about Gallio in office, we can place Paul's arrival in Corinth at about A. D. 49-50. Paul left Corinth around A. D. 51-52 and then traveled to Ephesus, where he

ministered for two or three years based off Acts 19: 10; 20: 31. Since Paul wrote it during his time at Ephesus, the dating most generally agreed on is sometime between A. D. 52 and A. D. 55.

The occasion or purpose Paul wrote 1 Corinthians was to respond to questions and issues that came from the church at Corinth. Some passages that highlight the issues that Paul addresses are 1 Corinthians 1: 12; 3: 22; 9: 2-5. 1 Corinthians 1: 12 and 3: 22 identify the issue of the Corinthians being divided by whose leadership to follow, like Paul, Apollos, or Peter. 1 Corinthians 9: 2-5 identifies the issue of the Corinthians were doubting his apostleship. Most of the problems and questions that Paul answers can be traced back to the Hellenistic culture that was prevalent in Corinth, and the key question was over what it meant to be "spiritual". There are three sources that tell of the problems and issues at Corinth. These sources being: a report from Chloe's household (1 Cor 1: 11); a personal visit and report from three Corinthian men (1 Cor 16: 17); and a letter from church at Corinth that asked questions (1 Cor 7: 1, 25; 8: 1; 12: 1; 16: 1, 12). Responses to each of these sources are respective found in 1 Corinthians 1-4, 1 Corinthians 5-6, and 1 Corinthians 7-16.

The recipients of Paul's letter were addresses as "the church of God in Corinth" (1 Cor 1: 2). This church was founded by Paul on his second missionary journey when he visited Corinth around A. D. 50. The church itself was made up of mostly Gentiles, and it is to be noted that the population of Corinth was very racially and culturally mixed. The letter seems to point out a couple of different types of people in the church: Greeks who very proud of

philosophical traditions; elite Romans; Gentiles who had been attending the synagogue; and converted slaves. The church at Corinth had received their gospel from Paul, but conflict and questions concerning the gospel soon arose after Paul left. These conflicts and problems came about mostly because of the Hellenistic culture of Corinth that had pervaded the minds of the Christians at there.

Interpretive Summary

Paul's letter to the Corinthians can be split up into five different sections: his introduction (1 Cor 1: 1-9); conditions reported to Paul and his response (1 Cor 1: 10-4: 21); questions asked of Paul and his response (1 Cor 7: 1-16: 12); and his conclusion (1 Cor 16: 13-24). The structure of his letter is very similar to the rest of his letters. The main theme throughout Corinthians is what it means to be and live unified in the Spirit. The word for spirit is used fourteen times in this letter, compared to only being used four other times in his other letters. The reason Paul stresses this idea of being unified in the Spirit is because of all the division and ambiguous beliefs that Hellenistic thinking caused.

1 Corinthians starts off with Paul's salutation to the church at Corinth. This type salutation is typical of ancient letters, and it identifies who is writing and who the recipients are, along with a short greeting. In 1 Corinthians 1: 1-3, he first introduces himself and a fellow brother, and then identifies that he is writing to the church at Corinth. In the rest of the introduction, 1 Corinthians 1: 4-9, Paul gives his thanksgiving for the Corinthians as he normally does in his epistles.

At his point in the letter, Paul starts to address conditions and issues that were hurting and dividing the church at Corinth. Paul does this from 1 Corinthians 1: 10 to 6: 20. After the introduction, Paul leads into a strong exhortation to the unity among believers. The first major problem that Paul addresses is the division in the church of Corinth, which were causing it to be fragmented. 1 Corinthians 1: 10-17 is where Paul presents the problem of following different Christian leaders as if one was better than another one. The Corinthians could not see that Hellenistic thinking had crept into their minds, and they failed to realize the important issues of ministry that they traded for superficial matters. In 1 Corinthians 1: 18-2: 5, Paul points out that the gospel is not simply human wisdom, but it is the message of Christ, which does not appeal to human wisdom. He also says that the world would think that anyone who follows this gospel is foolish. He even says that his own preaching was not very impressive, but yet it is powerful. He says all this to tell the Corinthians that elegant speech does not exactly mean someone wise. Paul goes on in 1 Corinthians 2: 6-16 to talk about the Holy Spirit and its ministry of revealing the wisdom of God. He does this to help the Corinthians understand that their way of thinking needs to change. Instead of pursuing wisdom, they should let the Holy Spirit enlighten them to God's wisdom. In Corinthians 3: 1-4, Paul tells them they had not being looking at life through a spiritual lens, and Paul calls them to change that. 1 Corinthians 3: 5-17 explains the role of leaders, like Paul himself, and how the Corinthians should view him and his fellow servants of Christ correctly. In 1 Corinthians 3: 18-25, Paul starts to combine his arguments together. If the Corinthians kept looking at different leaders through a Hellenistic lens, then

Paul would call them “fools” (1 Cor 3: 18). Rather than boasting about belonging to human leaders, Paul stresses that they should boast about belonging to Christ. 1 Corinthians 4 deals with; Christians judging and being judged (1 Cor 4: 1-5); a contrast of boasting Corinthians and apostles (1 Cor 4: 6-13); Paul’s authority and plans with regards to his opponents’ charges (1 Cor 4: 14-21). Paul continues to address the reports brought to him in 1 Corinthians 5-6, in this case the lack of discipline in the church. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul is dealing with incest in the church. It is clear that the crisis of authority in the church resulted in lack of discipline in the church. Paul goes on in 1 Corinthians 6: 1-11 to talk about lawsuits in the church. He states that they should not go to a judge outside the church to solve the issue, but that they should be disciplined enough to resolve it themselves. The last issue that was reported to Paul is addressed in 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20, which is the issue of sexual immorality in the church.

Paul then shifts his epistle to address the matters that the Corinthians send to him in a letter. These questions are answered by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7: 1-16: 12, which is basically the remainder of his epistle except for his conclusion. The first thing addressed was that of marriage and other related matter in 1 Corinthians 7, and the theme Paul lays out is this idea of “stay as you are”. Paul gives advice to the married or previously married in 1 Corinthians 7: 1-16. He then lays out some basic principles and reasons for them to continue to live as they are in regards to their marital status. The last but of the chapter, 1 Corinthians 7: 25-40, Paul give advice concerning the unmarried.

Paul then goes to address food sacrificed to idols in 1 Corinthians 8: 1-11: 1. In all of 1 Corinthians 8, Paul is trying to persuade them that acting in love is more important than acting in knowledge in of Christian conduct. He has the knowledge that eating meat sacrificed to idols is not wrong, but instead of eating it, he does not out of love to prevent others from sinning. In continuation with the discussion of eating sacrificed food, Paul goes on makes a defense of his apostleship in 1 Corinthians 9. He does this as an illustration to show the proper attitude toward another's freedom in Christ. Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 10: 1-22 and addresses the sinfulness of idolatry, and he warns against participating in pagan rituals. 1 Corinthians 10: 23-11: 1 continues with the same issue, but specifically addresses food that had been sacrificed to idols being sold in the marketplace. He once again affirms that eating this food is not sinful, but that they should stray from eating it if their conscience or another's conscience is troubled by it.

Then Paul goes on to address the Corinthians' questions concerning propriety in worship which he talks about in 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16. He addresses the issue of covering one's head in church in these verses, and he argues about this in three different ways: a argument from culture (1 Cor 11: 2-6); a argument from creation (1 Cor 11: 7-12); a argument from propriety (1 Cor 11: 13-16). The next question is about the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11: 17-34. Paul identifies how the Corinthians had been abusing the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11: 17-26, and in 1 Corinthians 11: 27-34, he gives corrections to the Corinthians.

In 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul shifts the focus from outward worship to talk about inward issues of spiritual gifts in the church. This issue gets the most attention by Paul in regards to amount of writing he did on it. From 1 Corinthians 12: 1 to 12: 31, Paul writes about the spiritual gifts and the need for all varieties of spiritual gifts to fulfil the work of Christ. Paul then gets into this discussion on love in 1 Corinthians 13, and he tells them that having love surpasses all spiritual gifts. Paul tells that without love all works mean nothing (1 Cor 13: 3). 1 Corinthians 14: 1-25 tells for the need for intelligibility in worship. Paul argues that speaking in tongues means nothing unless someone can interpret it, if not, then there is no use for it in the church. In the rest of the chapter, 1 Corinthians 14: 26-40, Paul gives some structure and advice on the order in worship at the Church at Corinth.

Paul goes on in 1 Corinthians 15 to give understanding to the resurrection of Christ, in order to help mature the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11, Paul shows them that the gospel is based on Christ's resurrection. He goes on in 1 Corinthians 15: 12-34 to give some basic doctrine that the resurrection of believers is same as the resurrection of Christ. Then Paul answers questions about the resurrected body in 1 Corinthians 15: 35-49. Lastly, Paul gives assurance of victory over death to the believers at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 15: 50-58, which is essentially the climax of his discussion of the resurrection.

The last chapter, 1 Corinthians 16, is basically two parts. The first part is Paul addressing the Corinthians about the collection for the Jerusalem believers in 1 Corinthians 16: 1-12. He talks about the arrangement for the collection in 1

Corinthians 16: 1-4. Then, in 1 Corinthians 16: 5-12, Paul talks of his travel plans and other apostles' to possibly return to Corinth. The second part, 1 Corinthians 16: 13-24, is Paul's conclusion. In 1 Corinthians 13-18, Paul gives his final exhortations to the church at Corinth, which stands as a summary exhortation for the whole letter. Lastly, in 1 Corinthians 16: 19-24, Paul gives his final greetings and benediction, in which he calls them to love the Lord, to end his epistle.

Sample Exegesis

1 Corinthians 13: 4-7 is in the section of Paul's letter addressing the use of spiritual gifts. Paul is making his case that without love works and spiritual gifts are basically worthless. In these verses Paul points of the qualities of love that make it so important. Paul starts in 1 Corinthians 13: 4 his description of love. He calls it "patient" and "kind". Like, love, these are aspects of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5: 22). Patience is a passive characteristic of love, and kindness implies an active characteristic. Both characterize "God, Christ, and true Christian behavior". These traits of love are being contrasted with the Corinthians use of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 13: 1-3, and they reveal that the Corinthians were "impatient, discontented, envious, inflated, selfish, indecorous, unmindful of the feelings or interests of others., suspicious, resentful, censorious" in their use of spiritual gifts. After giving two positive aspects of love, Paul lists of seven different aspect that love is not. This list includes how love: does not envy; does not boast; is not proud; does not dishonor others; is not self-seeking; is not easily angered; and keeps no record of wrongs (1 Cor 13: 4-5). All of these aspects of what love is not were being demonstrated by the

Corinthians, so it is clear that Paul is directly confronting them in these verses. From 1 Corinthians 14: 4-5, we can tell that: love does not plan or devise evil; love can do no evil; and love is not resentful but forgiving. Paul goes on in 1 Corinthians 13: 6 to describe two more aspects of love. He writes that love takes no delight in evil, but that it takes delight in what is good and true. " Love rejoices together with the truth" seems to be the theme Paul is going for here, trying to sympathize love with the gospel and spiritual gifts. Christian love does not hide the truth of the gospel, but rather it boldly shares it even in the face of opposition. The last verse, 1 Corinthians 13: 7, lists out four more things that love is and does. He states that love always protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres. Love puts up with everything and does not shame those who have messed up. Love trusts and believes others, giving them the benefit of the doubt. Love is hopeful in others that they have a chance and not just subject to failure. Love endures all things and is not overwhelmed, but it perseveres through difficult times. Paul gives the Corinthians this description of love to make his point that love should rule over their actions. We see these characteristics of love most clearly in God and Christ, and they should be the example that the Corinthians and all Christians follow.

Concluding Thoughts

Paul's letter to the Corinthians reminded me just how important it is to live in unity with fellow believers. The disunity in the church of Corinthian concerned Paul greatly as you can tell in 1 Corinthians 1-4. He also hinted at the reasons why they were not unified, and it was partly the leaders' at the church in Corinth fault. Since I am planning on being a leader in the church

one day, I know that I must try to help unify the church that I am in. This letter challenges me to try to live more surrendered to the Spirit, which unifies believers. I also am challenged to love more. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13: 1-7, shares that acts without love do not mean anything. I also enjoyed being reminded in 1 Corinthians 12: 14-31 that different people have different spiritual gifts, but that we are all needed to carry out the work of Christ. Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 7 for keeping the same marital status was somewhat interesting. However, I do realize that this probably more of a pastoral prescription for the Corinthians' issues rather something that all Christians should follow. Overall, I generally enjoyed working through 1 Corinthians, and I was reminded of some good things and noticed other things that I previously skipped over.