

## Corinthian Parallels To Sodom

Paul Faced Problems Similar to Our Own

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My last few sermons have focused on Jesus' use of the days of Lot and the flight that he made from Sodom, and He issues a warning to us about the end-time. I have also been thinking about the New Testament city of Corinth and its similarities to the city of Sodom, which we learned about in these other sermons. I have also added to this stream of thought that I have been having—putting these things together—the modern church.

So we have the days of Noah (the time before the Flood), we have Sodom, we have the city of Corinth, and we have the modern church, and there are interesting similarities among all of them. They all seem to be parallel to one another.

We will find, as we go through this, that the parallels are not exact—they cannot be. They are different places, different times, different people. But they are close enough that they warrant some examination, especially if we are going to learn something from them.

So we will find that the book of I Corinthians is very relevant to us today. It is relevant and useful, not because it is a book of systematic doctrine like the book of Romans. If you go through the book of Romans, you will find that Paul explains things in a very orderly way from one subject to the next, and he combines them into an organization that helps us to understand what Christ has done for us and where we are now as Christians.

But I Corinthians is not organized that way. I Corinthians instructs us in practical Christian living. It certainly contains doctrinal material, obviously. I Corinthians 15 is all about the resurrection; I Corinthians 13 is all about love—we have these various chapters that take care of various doctrinal positions.

But its primary focus is on a Christian's daily walk, the things that he might run into, encounter, as he goes through life. It answers the question: How does a member of God's church conduct himself, or how does he live in a godly manner, in an un-Christian world?

We probably all agree that the world that we live in is becoming increasingly post-Christian. Islamists are eager to end Christian civilization altogether. So we have got

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them on the outside, doing the things that they do, but we also have liberal humanists—post-modern multiculturalists—that are trying to beat them to the punch. They want to deconstruct Christian America and remake it in their own image. We are not necessarily becoming more pagan. (We are hearing about people becoming witches or whatever. But that is a very small segment of the population).

The problem these days is that we are becoming more secular and atheistic, which is pushing God out of everything. It started, back when we started pushing God out of the schools, and it has only ramped up ever since, that we are now pushing God out of the public square almost altogether.

Growing up in this, our young people have grown up, in many cases, entirely without God; or, if their parents went to church, it was not something that their parents necessarily had them do *with* them. And then, the popular thing today is ‘Well, let the children decide’ and they just give them no Christian education whatsoever.

So we are beginning to see it has struck on so far that even foundational institutions like marriage and the family are under constant assault. What I found in my studies is that cosmopolitan first-century Corinth is an ancient counterpart; that they were going through a lot of the same types of things.

In Paul’s day, Corinth was an important and wealthy Roman city. It was very wealthy. It was also a crossroads of peoples, trade, and ideas, and it became a very free-wheeling, highly sexualized, multicultural society there in the middle of Greece. So Corinthian church members were exposed to perverse and shameful sins on a daily basis.

Not only was Corinth known all over the world for its cult prostitution, but the city was full of other kinds of sexual sins, which Paul mentions on occasion throughout his letters to them. But they were also known for their idolatry; believe it or not, they were known for extortion, very high usury and interest rates and that sort of thing. They were also known for drunkenness and gambling. Very interesting slice of life there in Corinth.

It is very similar to our world’s very diverse and tolerant, essentially ‘anything goes’ lifestyle, as it has developed here in America. We have high-end technology; we have far better communication and transportation systems; and an astoundingly superior access to information and knowledge. But the attitudes and the ethics and the morals are pretty much a carbon copy of the way it was in Corinth.

The places are different, the faces have changed, but human nature remains unchanged. So, in our day, we are liable to confront the same problems that Paul dealt

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with in Corinth. The situation may be a little different, but the underlying situation is very similar.

Consider this: Are there factions in the church of God? Do church members still act carnally? Do some get involved in sexual sins? Do we see legal and business problems among members of the church? Do we have marriage problems? Is there concern about young people marrying? Are there controversies over food? Do members still question having a paid ministry? Are there problems with dress, modesty, and decorum in the church of God? Well, the answer to all these is, of course, yes. These are still problems that are plaguing the church and these are among the problems that Paul addresses in the first letter to the Corinthians.

So what I want to do pretty much with the rest of the sermon is to survey I Corinthians. In Ambassador College they had Old Testament Survey. Well, we are going to have I Corinthians survey today. What I want to do, I just want to show, in an overall way, how apropos I Corinthians is to our situation in the church right now, as we try to live godly in a Sodom-like world.

We can take Paul's instruction, which is very clear, and we can adapt it to our own situations to help us, not just to cope in this time of trouble, but to overcome and grow in Christ-like character in an increasingly anti-God world. So we do not want to just cope; we want to grow, get better, become more righteous and more holy.

Before we actually get into the survey, I want to explain in a little more detail why Corinth was really a kind of first-century Sodom. We need to know a little bit about the geography, just for starters.

The city of Corinth was pretty much in the center of Greece. It was a Greek peninsula and Corinth was in the center of it. There were two inlets—from the Aegean Sea on the one side and the Adriatic Sea on the other—and they met at Corinth. Corinth actually had two ports—one on each sea—and so they had ships coming from both sides.

The reason why ships would come in there and not just go around the end of the peninsula was because it was very treacherous for them to do that. Most of the shipping at that time stayed fairly close to the shore, and there were currents and things that made it very dangerous.

So, instead of making that long trip around the tip of Greece, they would stop in one port and take the cargo out of the ship and transfer it over land to the other port on the other side, put it on another ship, and go; or, if their ship was small enough, they would

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actually take the small ship out of the water and transport it over land, put it in the other bay, and off they went.

And, right in the middle, sat Corinth. Everything that came in one port and went to the other was taxed or bought or sold, so that they made tons and tons of money.

I said a few minutes ago that they were known for extortion. Their fees were high. They could pretty much charge whatever they wanted because to the ship's captains, the ship's owners, it was worth it to pay the high fees to go through Corinth rather than to go around and lose the whole cargo. So they were very, very wealthy.

Now this also meant that because they were this very attractive seaport city, it attracted people there from all over. It was, as I mentioned, a transit hub, a commercial giant, and so its inhabitants were quite cosmopolitan. East met West in Corinth. So you had Romans and Greeks and other Europeans living cheek by jowl with Jews, Egyptians, Syrians, Africans, and people actually from all over the world. It just attracted every slice of humanity.

Even though it was a Roman colony and the capital of a Roman province, its inhabitants were very diverse. So what you had was a multicultural *mélange* of people. It was just everybody all together and they all had different ideas.

On top of this, it was also a very religious city. It had sanctuaries for just about every Roman or Greek god or goddess, because all these people were from different places, and they wanted to worship their god or goddess there in Corinth.

But they had a particular cult to Aphrodite. Aphrodite was the goddess of love and of sexuality, and so that is why sexual sins were quite prominent there in Corinth. And there was cultic prostitution that went along with her worship. There were mystery religions that had their meeting homes there. The Imperial cult was very strong there—the ones that believe that Caesar was a god and they had to sacrifice to him or pour libations or whatever. And we should not forget that there were a fair number of Jews in the city as well as a small Christian congregation. So all kinds of different religious ideas in the city.

So with such a diverse religious and cultural landscape, its citizens and travelers going through were exposed to all sorts of ideas and practices.

And the Romans—they did not care. They were very happy to let these things flourish as long as the revenue kept coming in and the peace was kept. That is all they cared

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about—money and peace. And peace makes money. That is what they wanted. They wanted the wealth that keeps piling up and them not having to expend any money for soldiers or war and that sort of thing.

So we could say, kind of as an overall description, it was a first-century laissez-faire society. As a matter of fact, we could say that Corinth's motto was 'anything goes.' And it did.

This is a paragraph or two from Nelson's Bible dictionary:

The city soon became a melting pot for the approximately 500,000 people who lived there at the time of Paul's arrival [big city]. Merchants and sailors, anxious to work the docks, migrated to Corinth. Professional gamblers and athletes, betting on the Isthmian Games [which occurred nearby every two years], took up residence. Slaves, sometimes freed but with no place to go, roamed the streets day and night. And prostitutes (both male and female) were abundant. People from Rome, the rest of Greece, Egypt, Asia Minor—indeed, all of the Mediterranean world—relished the lack of standards and freedom of thought that prevailed in the city. These were the people who eventually made up the Corinthian church. They had to learn to live together in harmony, although their national, social, economic, and religious backgrounds were very different.

So what we see here is a very wealthy city, a very multicultural city, a city that had many different religious ideas. The main idea, it seems, that kept everybody together in the city was that they did not care what anybody else did as long as it did not hurt them. So this allowed all their sexual things, and what-not that they were known for, to flourish. So that is the setting of I Corinthians. That is what the people of Corinth were seeing and experiencing everyday.

So let us go to Luke 17. I want to just read verses 26 through 29 so that we can get a quick review of Sodom's characteristics.

**Luke 17:26-29** And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven

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and destroyed them all.

I came here because this is a very good quick summary of what Jesus thought about, both the time before the Flood and the time of Lot; and it reveals a lot of things about Sodom. (I am particularly focusing on Sodom here.)

Everybody knows, and Jesus really did not have to say anything about the sexual perversions that were occurring in Sodom. Everybody knows about the homosexuality. We have made it a byword of 'sodomy', 'Sodomites'—that sort of thing. We know that.

But Jesus implies here, by the words that He chooses, that Sodom's citizens were successful people. They were workers. They were people who really tried to get ahead. They not only ate and drank, but it says that "they bought, they sold" (they were merchants), "they planted" (they were farmers), "they built" (they were construction workers, developers, whatever you want to say). They were people that were very interested in work. Why? Because by work, they would get ahead. You could make a lot of money in a place like that, remember?

The area of Sodom was compared to the Garden of Eden. It was paradise. You could throw a seed out and it would spring up overnight and pretty much be fruited by the next afternoon. That is not quite accurate, but that is kind of the implication you get because Lot looked on that area and said, "Wow! I want to go there. I can make lots of money. My flocks and my herds will do just fine. I can plant and make a lot of money. I can put my tent up here because it's a great mercantile city and I can just make a killing in Sodom." So he pitched his tent, as we saw, as far as Sodom. That is where he really wanted to be.

So those people of Sodom, for all their faults, were nose-to-the-grinding-stone pursuers of getting ahead. They had the American Dream, you might say, in mind, and they were going to do whatever they could to fulfill it—or maybe the Sodom Dream, the City of the Plains Dream.

I will not go there, but you might want to jot down Ezekiel 16:49 which says that the inhabitants of Sodom were proud, they had an abundance of food, they had time to spare, and were so self-centered that they failed to help the needy. This gives us a bit more description about these people.

They had an abundance there of food. So they did not have to worry about that. They were not living hand-to-mouth, which means that they had time to spare, or idleness.

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They could go do other things and get into trouble because they had too much time on their hands. And of course, self-centered, in that they wanted all that money for themselves and they would not help the poor.

Jeremiah 23:14 adds that they walked in lies, meaning, as I explained in the other sermon, that they were lies that they lived as a way of life. These were ideas that they considered to be true but were not, and were actually sending them off the cliff—morally and spiritually. And it also says they strengthened the hands of evildoers. They were willing to back bad people in order to get ahead.

It does not take much imagination to realize that Sodom and Corinth have a great deal in common—from the sexual things to the making the money and various other things, the crossroads aspect come in, a lot of different ideas coming through, that sort of thing. These are the things that we need to keep in the back of our minds as we go through I Corinthians.

So now we are going to start that survey. I have 45 minutes and we are going to fly through the book of I Corinthians. I would like you to turn to it and follow along as I go through this. I am going to go through it chapter by chapter by chapter. So I am really going to have to do a good job of getting through this by the end of the sermon. But I am not going to be very detailed; I am not going to read a lot.

I am banking on that you know, generally, what is in the book of I Corinthians, and also that you could read the headings of the paragraphs (some of the Bibles that you have may have paragraph headings that tell you what is going on). We will occasionally read a verse, but it should be pretty clear what is happening in the book. There are two sections that I do want to go into a little bit more detail, and that is the very first few verses and then some of the last verses in chapter 16.

So let us start here in I Corinthians 1, and I want to read verses 1-3 because Paul sets up here what he is aiming at.

**I Corinthians 1:1-3** Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's initial comments here are very pointed and just about every word is important. I just want to bring out four things very quickly that he mentions here because what it does is it sets the foundation for everything that he is going to say through the next 16 chapters.

The first thing—he opens every letter this way, but it is especially significant to the Corinthians: He says he was called to be an apostle by Jesus Christ. What he is doing is that he is setting out his credentials—that he has authority to say what he is going to say. That is the first thing.

The second thing he says is that the Corinthian's were set apart by Jesus Christ and called to be saints. He is saying that they—as members of His church—were specially selected by Christ, they are where they are supposed to be, but they were called to be saints. It was not just a calling into anything, but they were called to be holy people. What this is, this is a double inference—that they were called to be saints and that they were sanctified by Christ. Those are two different ways of saying that they are to be holy; that they are to be different; that they were called out of this perverse society that they were living in and called to be different. That is what 'holy' implies: Different. That whole different category.

The third thing after "called to be saints," he says, "with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ." What he is saying here, in his own inimitable way, is that whatever he writes here, this epistle has application to all Christians in every place and, if we can add, in every time. So it is not just them who are called to be saints, but he is saying everyone in every place can learn from what he is going to say. So that includes us, all the way down in our time.

Then he says, "call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." This fourth thing he says is that we all have the same Master—Christ. So this should give us unity, right? We should be equals and brethren under Christ. God has not divided us away into various groups. We are all one—in this place and every other, in this time and any other. We are all the same under Christ. We are all brethren. We have all been called into His body, which he gets into in chapter 12.

But he wants to make these four things known right away. They are very important foundational points because they address some of his concerns about the church. So he has to have his authority established right away. He has to establish that God's standard, His holiness and difference from this world. He has to establish that God's instruction is universal to everyone in the church; and as a matter of fact, it is universal to everyone in the world. It is not just 'apply it to one person one time and that is it.' It is

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always current and helpful and useful. And then, that we are unified in and under Christ. Those are four things that he has to let them know right away so they have the right mindset.

He then goes on in verses 4-9 to confirm that they are under God's grace and that they have been endowed with spiritual gifts. So it is not that they are better or worse than anyone; they have been treated by God in the same way that He has treated all of His children, and He has given them everything that they need to succeed. He emphasizes then in verse 9 that God is faithfully working with them to bring them into His Kingdom, and we can count on Him to make it work.

He has to encourage them like this, telling them that they have got God on their side, they have got the spiritual gifts, because He is going to correct them pretty harshly. So they have to have this encouragement going in. With this foundation, Paul then can launch into the specific problems.

Chapter 1, from verse 10 on, is mostly about division in the church. This is why he had to speak about unity, or he had to mention that we are all unified under Christ.

The Corinthians had begun to separate into cliques, each proclaiming loyalty to a certain minister. That is similar to what happened in the church of God now, it has splintered into various groups that are loyal to certain ministers in those churches. But Christ, he says, and His church obviously should not be divided. That is not what God wanted at all.

He says, as he goes on, that what is important is the message. It is the message of the cross. It is what Jesus has done for us and where we are headed because of that. This is not something that they could find out of Greek wisdom. This is something that has been given through preaching. The Jews and the Greeks may not like how it is proclaimed, as he says, but this is what is really important—the message that Christ brought.

At the end of the chapter, he says Christ is our wisdom. We may be foolish, we may be weak, but we can have encouragement because Christ is everything to us. If we depend on Him, we can give Him the glory. So, what he is getting at here is that Christ is our unity. He is the One, that if we are all submissive to Him and we do what He says, we should have unity. If we are doing what He says, if we are obeying what He tells us to do, if we are being loving, if we are being humble under Christ, then we should not have these problems that divide us. And He then gets all the glory. So if we humbly agree with what He taught us, then we should be well on our way to being unified.

Paul opens up chapter 2 that he had exhibited this humble 'Christ first' mindset when he lived and preached among them. He was a perfect example of how to do this. He had really tried hard because he knew he had to give them a good example. Since they were new converts, they needed to see somebody living God's way as perfectly as possible; not that he would not do this otherwise, but he really focused on it. He did not try to wow them with rhetoric when he preached to them, he says, but he tried to just preach them the Gospel and showed the Holy Spirit at work, and how effective and powerful it was.

Most of the rest of the chapter is an explanation of how God's Spirit allows us to understand spiritual things and that is the key. We have got to be using God's Spirit to understand the things of God. People outside in the culture cannot understand them because they do not have access to the Spirit. But people that have been called by God and converted have the Holy Spirit working with them, and so they can understand these things. We have got to use spiritual wisdom, he says, to live in a world like this.

But the problem was they were not using God's Spirit because their judgments about each other and what was going on in the church of Corinth were just wrong and perverse in many cases. And the reason he could say this was because they were divided. It was obvious that they were not using God's Spirit.

In chapter 3 he starts immediately by saying that he could not teach them as spiritual people because they were still carnal. They were still thinking like the normal people in the world who had not had any instruction. So we could say, in a nutshell, they were thinking like they were unconverted. Their dividing into cliques proved that they were still thinking with a party spirit ('you versus me,' 'us versus them'). That is not the way true Christians are supposed to act.

So he reiterates that Christ is the Master, and he then goes on and says ministers are just servants. "So why are you building them up? They're not the ones that need to be glorified. Christ is the One that we should glorify." So he says: "Why do you make me the leader of one of these groups? Why do you make Apollos the leader of one of these groups? Or Peter? We're just all servants. We've been given a job. But Christ is the One who gives the increase."

Christ is the real Master. He is the one that makes things work. Ministers are just His laborers given a unique job, given gifts to do those jobs, given a certain amount of authority to do those jobs. But really they are brethren. We should not be glorifying the minister; we should be glorifying God. That is the problem: They were giving to men what should have been given to God.

So, he says, ministers, even though they have been given this authority and the gifts and all, they have to give account for their faithfulness to their calling, and they have to give account to how they handled the temple of God. And here, in I Corinthians 3, the temple of God is the church that he is talking about. He goes through here, between verses 10 and 17, and he is talking about how ministers handle their responsibility, how they build on the foundation that is Christ. And he says they are going to be judged according to how well they have built.

Then he says, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone [he means a minister] defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him.” He is talking about ministers being faithful and doing their duty that God gave them to do. If they do not do it, they are going to be held accountable. God will hold them accountable because these people—the temple of God—are God’s people, they are His sheep; and the shepherds better not mess with the sheep. They are to lead them and guide them and help them along toward the Kingdom of God. They are not to abuse them. How many times in Scripture is there talk about good shepherds versus bad shepherds?

Paul is trying to get across to these Corinthians that he understands that he is under judgment, and he better do what God says. This means that, with Paul’s character, he is going to give them the best care that he is able to. So he is giving them confidence in himself and in Apollos because they are good examples of the way true ministers should be.

He concludes chapter 3 with an exhortation to the Corinthians not to deceive themselves thinking that they are wise in following one minister versus another. He essentially says that it is not a good idea to be too picky because God is the one who is in control; if you have faith, the minister that you are under is the one that you need. Maybe it sounds strange, but it has to do with whether we believe that God is sovereign and if we believe also that God is judge and He is going to make things work.

So if they are true ministers, they are Christ’s servants and given to the church for its benefit. That is what it says in Ephesians 4—that the ministry is God’s gift to the church, and there are things that we can learn from every true servant of God. We may not particularly like his personality, we may not like his speaking style or writing style, or we may not like the way he dresses, or we may not like the way he does this thing or the other thing; but if he is a true minister of God, he is there for a reason and we best just take things easy about being judgmental.

Because that is what they were doing in one calling Paul, one calling Apollos, one calling Peter. They were not necessarily saying, “This one’s good,” “This one’s better,” “This one’s good for this and this one’s good for that and this one’s good for another thing.” They were saying, “I want to follow Apollos because he’s the best speaker.” In saying that, what they were saying was that Paul was not a good speaker, that Peter was not a good speaker. They were judging, they were making distinctions; and they were not necessarily good ones. So that is what he says: Do not become too wise in your own opinions. Because if we believe that God is sovereign, He has set the ministry where He wants them, so then there is something to be learned from those particular ministers.

It continues in chapter 4. Ministers are servants and stewards, he says, and they are accountable to God and to no one else. That sounds kind of harsh these days because we all think we have the freedom, the right to criticize, but Paul says, “No, you don’t.” Not something that falls on our ears very well these days, but this is Paul speaking—an apostle of Christ—and he says that these men (the ministers) are accountable to God and not to the church members. If a minister is wrong, he says, time will reveal it and God will bring him into judgment; and as James says, in James 3:1, it is a strict one. So the minister has to be aware that he is under judgment and he better watch his step with the people. This was a really big problem with the Corinthians. He really gives it to them straight. He does not hold any punches. He tells them to get off their high horses because they were judging the ministry, thinking that they know more than the ministers who have had long experience and that they could do it better themselves.

Now we have got to remember, the Corinthian’s were or had been converted just a couple of years and they were already exhibiting this proud ‘I know better than Paul’ attitude. They had been given so much knowledge and such spiritual gifts that now they were so superior to Paul and to Apollos and Peter that they felt they should be running things. That is kind of what Paul is hitting at here.

As he gets into about verse 8 or so, he gets really sarcastic: “You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us.” See the attitude that he is pointing at here? He says that, really, apostles like him, and elders and evangelists like Apollos, they are usually the ones that are made a spectacle of. True ministers end up actually taking a lot of guff and having to sacrifice quite a bit to do what they do. So when you get a good minister, it is a very good thing: one who is faithful. That is what is really important—one who is faithful to God and to his calling and to work that he has been given to do.

He ends chapter 4 by asking them to check their attitudes toward the ministry. If you

want to come down to it, that is really what he is getting at: “Really take some time to think about what you think about the ministry.” Because their attitude toward the ministry will determine how the ministry will react to them. That is what he says. He says: “Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?” He is saying, “Check your attitude, because do you want to make the minister your enemy and so he has to be harsh, or do you want him to be your friend and brother—which he is trying to be—so that he will be loving and gentle with you and patient and forbearing and helpful?” So he says this is a reciprocal relationship that we have here. We have got to be careful how we deal with one another and not be too judgmental, not too critical, because God is in control.

Chapter 5’s subject is familiar to us. Every year in the spring time we usually come into chapter 5. This is the tolerance of the Corinthian church with the man committing incest. The real problem was, again, they were proud people. They were thinking that they were wise and loving when they were actually accommodating sin. So this, again, was a perversity of reasoning, of judgment. They were not discerning things properly, and he tells them such blatant sinners must be put out of the church so as not to infect the church with sin and divide it. This is one of the clearest sections on disfellowshipping.

In chapter 6 the members in Corinth were allowing worldly judges to decide lawsuits between them, and Paul says “It shouldn’t be. We should handle these things inside.” The bigger issue, which we have been hitting a little bit here and there, is the Corinthian inability to make godly judgments. They were too immature and too carnal to make really good godly judgments. We will see this as we go through. But why should they defer it to ungodly outsiders? He says they should really be developing this kind of discernment themselves.

Now notice here, I Corinthians 6. This is the kind of people that the Corinthians had been:

**I Corinthians 6:9-11** Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the Kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

So he is reminding them that they were like those unjust judges that they were going to.

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“But do you really want those people that were like this to judge us? We’ve been called out of that. We don’t want to have anything to do with that sort of thing, and so make a clean break”, he says, “with those worldly people who are doing these things.”

The last half of the chapter deals specifically with the assertion that is found there in verse 12 that “All things are lawful for me.” Some had evidently taken the freedom in Christ in a very libertine manner and were doing all kinds of various sexually immoral practices because they thought they were free to do so—they had been freed from the law and so they could pretty much do whatever they wanted. This is another symptom of their inability to make sound judgments. They were clearly ignoring the seventh commandment, which prohibits sexual immorality, and they were forgetting that they had been redeemed from such things.

Chapter 6 talked about being one flesh, and so he then goes on to cover marriage. Remember that marriages were also a problem during the days of Noah. So this is another link to those times. This is interesting because he begins with their assertion—which is totally opposite to what had been asserted before—that one should be abstinent. On the one hand, people were saying that they could be free to do whatever they wanted, and on the other hand there were people there saying a man should not touch a woman. So what we have here is something that was very prevalent across the Greco-Roman world and that is there were these opposite extremes. That on the one hand people would be hedonistic and on the other hand, there would be groups that would be ascetic. So Paul, then, has to lay down the truth about marriage from God’s point of view; and not only marriage, but separation and divorce.

I should mention that, as he gets toward the end of the chapter, he is also dealing with the expectations of Christ’s return. So he advises wisdom in determining whether it was good to marry at the time. He ends up being wrong because here we are, 1900 years or so later, and Christ still has not come. But the general principle is true. In times of upheaval, war, persecution, that sort of thing, it is probably better not to marry. But even then, it is up to the individuals involved. What he is getting at, again, is making wise judgments—getting the facts, doing what God would want us to do.

Next is chapter 8. Here we get into eating meats offered to idols. Food factors in both of Jesus’ warnings about the days of Noah and the days of Lot; He said they ate and drank, in both places. So there was something about eating and drinking that drew Jesus’ attention. Also you might want to jot down I Timothy 4:1-4 because it says, in the end-times, there are going to be problems with food again. Very interesting.

The primary principle, though, is found in verse 1. The thing that he is trying to get

across is: “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.” What they were doing was they thought that they were smart; they thought that they knew better, and they were going ahead and doing what they wanted to do based on this knowledge. What it was doing was it was making them very proud against other people who had a different opinion. And so Paul’s answer is: “Show love towards your brother. If he doesn’t think that it’s good to eat, then don’t eat it, certainly not in his presence. Don’t offend him by your freedom to do so. Think about how you can love your brother rather than how you could be right. Maybe you are right, but your nose stuck up in the air is telling that you are also very proud of being right.” I am pulling no punches here. I think he was very stern with them and told them like it was. So we should be deferring and submitting to each other rather than forcing our own opinions on one another. This will help calm down strife and help avoid division, if we do.

Now chapter 9. We do not need to go into this very much. This is pretty much all about the subject of ministers being paid. Paul says that he has the right (all ministers have the right) to be supported by the church. But some ministers like him did not take advantage of it because they did not want to be obligated to the church. They wanted to be able to preach the Gospel freely without somebody saying, “Hey, I’m paying your salary. You do it this way.” So he said his way was full commitment, discipline, and self-control, and that is the way he conducted his ministry, and he was going to continue doing that. He encourages them to also be disciplined, self-controlled, and committed to God’s way of life like he was.

In chapter 10 he illustrates the parallel between the ancient Israelites and themselves. He cautions the Corinthians not to follow the Israelites’ bad example, and he mentions certain specific sins, and he does this for a reason. He mentions lust, idolatry, sexual immorality, tempting Christ, and complaining. We all end up complaining over something at some point. But he ends up concentrating particularly on idolatry. It is very logical because we saw that Corinth was full of paganism. But what was happening was that people were still kind of hanging onto some of their old devotions and what he is telling them is: “You can’t mix the worship of God with the worship of idols. Not at all.” This is called syncretism—the mixing of different beliefs into one. God wants our full devotion and commitment. He finishes the chapter by reiterating his teaching on eating foods offered to idols, concentrating on the matter of conscience and on not offending other’s consciences. So he keeps getting back to these various things, going in and out, as he goes through and approaches them from the little bit different perspective.

The first half of chapter 11 deals with head coverings and hair length, which may sound funny to us, but there are still problems occasionally. I actually get an email every once in a while about whether women should wear hats or veils to church, and I have to go

through all this with them. But, really, the overall principle in this particular chapter is authority, and submission to authority. What Paul explains is that depending on where we are, when it happens, what the situation is, we are all in authority and we are all under authority. It just depends on the circumstances. We have to learn how to fill those particular roles whenever we come upon them. So we have to learn both to be a leader and we have to learn how to be a follower. We cannot just be a leader all the time and we are not always just a follower. There are certain God-ordained roles that must be filled, and so a Christian, in love, should do his or her best to fill them gracefully with love.

Now, today, we have the world's influence on things like "equal rights" and "gender equality", but in the church we have to submit to God's order and the way that He has set things up. Because if we believe that He is wise and He is sovereign, He is going to give us the best instruction and it will work the best if we follow it.

The second half of chapter 11 covers the Passover and people's behavior at Passover service. This points out that the Corinthian church had a need of order, decorum, and solemnity in the proper circumstance. Not every gathering of the church is a party; and that is what they were doing. They were bringing in their booze and they were having a big feast. We have to temper our fellowship to fit the occasion. So he gets to the point where he is saying that the Corinthians were not showing love for one another. They were not being courteous, they were not being patient. So, again, the problem is improper discernment. They were showing poor judgment in their behavior. They were showing a lack of love, a lack of concern. It was that worldly influence of 'laissez-faire,' each man for himself, that was coming in and affecting their fellowship, of all times, at the Passover service. You can see this was a church that we would think of it as wild. This is what Paul had to deal with.

Chapter 12 is the well-known chapter on spiritual gifts and unity of the body of Christ. The main point is that we are all gifted by God. He has granted gifts to all of us, as He seemed fit, but our gifts are different. Some people have the gift for piano-playing and others do not; some people have the gift for languages, others do not; some people can speak publicly, others cannot. We all have different gifts. Some people are very good at communicating one on one. Some people are very good at showing concern. Some people are very good at praying for other people. Some people are very good at sending notes and encouragement and various other things. We all have gifts. We all have something that we can add.

And what he is saying here is that we cannot all have the same gifts. We cannot all even have the best gifts. But whatever we do have, whatever God has given to us, they

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are for the benefit of the church, and we should use and develop them for the good of everyone. And do not look down our noses at other people who have lesser gifts; or do not complain, on the other hand, thinking that we have no gifts or that our gift is worthless, because you are actually calling God into account. God has given us these things, we need to use them. So our gifts do not make us better or less than others. We are brethren. We are all in this together.

Chapter 13—the famous ‘Love’ chapter. The most excellent gift of all. If we could show love toward one another, man, would we be in “heaven,” if you know what I mean. Things would really work well in the church. Whatever we do, we have to do it in love for the brethren. Love is not a feeling; and what Paul shows here is that love is an act. There are things that we do, whether it is being patient, whether we are not rude—all those other things that he says there in chapter 13—they are all things that we *do*. So he implies at the end there that living by love—making love the center of our activity, our behavior, is spiritual maturity. If we can get to the point where we are living in love toward everyone that we come across, we are very far along toward the Kingdom of God. So we need to put away our childish self-serving behavior and put on the love of Christ. That may be the bottom-line thing that he is trying to get these Corinthians to do.

Chapter 14 is the ‘Tongues’ chapter. It was a spiritual gift that was being abused because it was thought of too highly by the people. They thought that if they had the gift of tongues, well, they were ‘too hot to touch.’ Paul shows that speaking in other languages, though it might be helpful, is not as important as prophesying or preaching or instructing others in God’s way. It is better to impart a fitting word of instruction than to speak eloquently in a foreign tongue. Again, the overall principle comes down to correctly discerning or judging the spiritual benefits of the thing. They had a hard time with judgment. They just did not know how to make a right decision. They were just a very immature people—very carnal.

We can go on to chapter 15. This is the ‘Resurrection’ chapter. We have probably been through the resurrection chapter many, many, many times. We usually go here during the Feast of Trumpets. But what was happening here was that they were having trouble with the resurrection because they were allowing a worldly philosophy—essentially Platonic thought from the Greek philosopher Plato—to undermine their belief in the resurrection. They were believing what Plato said versus what Jesus said. If you go back to Acts 17, you will find that when Paul preached the resurrection to the Athenians, they had the same problem: They could not take this resurrection thing. Corinth was just down the road and they were subject to the same philosophies there, or influenced by those same cultural beliefs.

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We have got to be careful in this day and age because the power of outside beliefs is even stronger. The reason for that is that this is the Information Age and we invite those beliefs into our houses via television, movies, and of course, the Internet, and we are subject to the way the world thinks on these things and we have to be very careful that we do not accept them as true, when they are not. But, again, he is getting at syncretism—trying to mix two different beliefs that really are incompatible.

Paul wraps up things up in chapter 16. I will read a kind of a summary of what he has been trying to teach the Corinthians. He says:

**I Corinthians 16:13-16** Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave [interesting], be strong. Let all that you do be done with love [remember I said that might be the thing that he was really trying to get across]. I urge you, brethren—you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints—that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us.

**I Corinthians 16:22-24** If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

These commands that he gave, particularly in verse 13, summarize what he has been trying to get across to the Corinthians, and I just want to, in the next few minutes, go over these four commands (actually there are about six things here, but the first four are found in verse 13).

He says, “Watch.” If you remember from my first sermon that I gave on Sodom, I talked about watching. ‘Watch’ is a loaded term; it does not simply mean ‘look’ or ‘look around’. In Christian thinking, ‘watch’ implies not just seeing but being vigilant, being ready. And it is vigilance not just of the times and events that are going on during our time, that is part of it; we do need to watch what is going in the world; we do need to know the things that are happening to move things along toward the return of Christ. But that is not the important thing.

When the Bible talks about ‘watching,’ it is much more *personal*. What he is implying here is that they have to be acutely aware of their own spiritual state; in effect, they have to *watch themselves*. I mentioned in one of the other sermons that we can

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concentrate this down to: just how close is your relationship with Jesus Christ? That is what we have got to watch. Like he says, “Do you love Christ? If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed.” That is what will happen. If we allow our love for Christ, our relationship with Christ to slip, our spiritual state is going to go down the drain and we will end up accursed, apart from Christ. We must not fall away. And he is trying to warn them. They were in a dangerous situation there in Corinth. So they needed to watch.

Then he says, “Stand fast.” This suggests firm belief and uncompromising practice of the doctrine. You cannot run, as Peter says, with your old comrades in the way that you used to run in dissipation. You have to make the break. You have to firmly believe what you have been taught, and you have to be committed to it and not stray.

He says, “Be brave.” The reason they had to be brave is because they were going to stand out like a sore thumb in Corinth, and everybody who saw them would know that they were different and that would probably bring persecution. So in order to live a godly way of life, unfortunately, you have to have courage.

He then says, “Be strong.” You have got to be strong along with being brave because the tests are going to be hard, and if we are going to endure it to the end, we need to have some intestinal fortitude to pull our way through, if we have to. We have got to be strong and trust in God. So he says we do it all in love—that is the bottom-line (do it in love)—because that is all that we aspire to do as Christians.

And he says in verses 15 and 16 that if we have a good relationship with the ministry, things are going to go a lot better. Because we are all in this together, we are all trying to reach the same goal. So if we have a problem with the ministry, it may derail both of us—the ministry and the laity. But, no, we are all in this together; we are all brethren; and the dividing line is a matter of helping—that the ministry has been given to help. If we understand that and we help one another, then we are going to walk further along in our preparations for the Kingdom of God.

So if we love Christ and we are hand-in-hand in with one another, we walk in love, we are doing these things like watching, standing fast, being brave and being strong, then we will, as Peter puts it, hasten His coming (in II Peter 3:12). What are you doing to help hasten His coming?

Revelation 3 is the letter to the Laodicean church. Just listen to the things that Jesus says.

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**Revelation 3:14-16** “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot [you could say that they had one foot in the world and one foot in the church], I will vomit you out of My mouth.’ ”

He cannot stand it. He cannot stand His people to be of two minds about Him versus the world. He wants you hot, of course, but He would rather you were cold than lukewarm. Because if you are cold, He could work with you later; but if you are hot now for Him, that is what He really wants. But He is saying, “You’re lukewarm, that just makes me vomit.” That is what cold water does. So He wants them to ‘fish or cut bait,’ as the saying goes.

**Revelation 3:17** “Because you say, ‘I am rich [is that not one of the things Sodom and Corinth had in common?], have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ [they were self-sufficient and proud]—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—”

What is He saying? “You can’t judge your own situation. You think you’re rich and wealthy and don’t need anything, but really, the way I look at you,” He says, “You are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.” So the Laodiceans also have a problem with judgment.

**Revelation 3:18-20** “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see [they needed to have spiritual discernment]. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous [be dedicated, be on fire] and repent [He says]. Behold, I stand at the door and knock [it is late in the game]. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” [then there can be a relationship].

So what do we have? Days of Noah, days of Lot, the Corinthian church, the Laodicean church, and us. Do you see any similarity? If you do, then, as Jesus says here: “Be zealous and repent.”