

OUT OF BOUNDS

BLOWING THE WHISTLE ON TEAM CHURCH

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The Doctrinal Basis of Our Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

Alex Bauman, editor

Out of Bounds: Blowing the Whistle on Team Church

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Preface

The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth to coach the members on how to be an effective team. His instructions came directly from God, the owner of team church.

Paul's coaching revealed that Corinth's team church was in trouble. They were trying to conduct ministry but were so far out of bounds that almost nothing they were doing was constructive. So Paul blew his coach's whistle and called team church to the bench. There he instructed them in the basics of ministry. He got them to play inside the lines and to work together as a team so they might represent their owner well. He even had to take away their home-made jerseys and give them team church jerseys.

Paul's instructions are timeless. Every church needs to learn the basics of ministry and the importance of teamwork. Paul is a hall of fame coach. You will find his coaching helpful and instructional.

Allow 1 Corinthians to challenge you. Consider your part in your local team church. Are you out of bounds? Are you wearing the right jersey? Are you striving for the one goal of glorifying God?

Team Meeting

Scripture Focus

1 Corinthians 1

Theme

Believers need to be team players in their local church, humbly grateful for their salvation, and dedicated to growing in and glorifying the Lord.

Memory Verse

“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

GETTING STARTED

The church at Corinth was like a group of five-year-old children stepping onto the basketball court for the first time. Nearly everything they did was a violation of God’s plan for His church. They ran with the ball, stepped out of bounds, flagrantly fouled each other, and failed to see the value of teamwork. Paul, playing the role of coach, wrote team church at Corinth to blow the whistle on them. Their future, and the futures of those they were to reach for Christ, depended on it. They needed to learn to play in bounds and to work together as a team.

1. What is your reaction to hearing a coach’s whistle blow?
2. What memories does hearing a coach’s whistle bring to your mind, perhaps as a child or a parent?

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Every professional sports organization has an owner, a coach, and a team. Comparing such relationships within an organization helps us understand the relationships between God, Paul, and the church at Corinth.

Coach Paul

The church at Corinth was riddled with serious problems. As a team they displayed disunity, feuding, spiritual pride, carnality, covetousness, and immorality. Paul, playing the role of their coach, had a lot of work to do to get them game ready.

Paul opened his letter to Corinth with a reminder that he was speaking to the church as God's man with God's message. He was the *apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God* (1 Cor. 1:1). In presenting his apostolic (coaching) credentials, Paul supported his authority for reproving the church's sins, challenging their practices, and directing their behavior. When Paul firmly addressed team church in Corinth, they needed to recognize his authority and not bristle at his instructions because his message was directly from God.

3. What do you think would have happened to the church at Corinth if they had rejected Paul's coaching instructions?

Sosthenes (apparently the man mentioned in Acts 18:17 as the former *chief ruler of the synagogue* in Corinth) was with Paul when he wrote this letter. Perhaps he acted as an assistant coach. His role in communicating the message to the Corinthian church is otherwise not spelled out.

Team Church's Position

Every effective coach understands that he does not own the team. Rather, he works on behalf of the team's owner. Paul directly addressed the Corinthian believers by calling them the *church of God* (1:2). God had invested in the Corinthian believers. As their owner, He was intensely interested in seeing them become a successful team.

God's team in Corinth could be successful because God had sancti-

fied them, a reference to their salvation (1:2). Positionally, the Corinthian believers belonged to God. He set them apart to be His team to accomplish His will in Corinth. In setting them apart, God also equipped them to live as God desired them to live. God's team in Corinth, therefore, had no excuse for failure.

God called His team to be *saints* (1:2). *Saints are people set apart for God's holy use.* God desired that the Corinthian believers would live in a way that reflected their position in Christ. He wanted them to represent Him well in the world. That was a high calling and a difficult one to carry out in first century Corinth.

Investigating the location and cultural background of Corinth will help us understand why it was so difficult for the Corinthian believers to live up to God's holy calling.

Team Church's Purpose

The official Roman name for Corinth was Laus Julia Corinthiensis. An economic center of its region, Corinth had a population of approximately 600,000. Corinth was a strategically located, well-traveled commercial center. The city was modern for its time with paved streets, gutters, and pedestrian walkways. The city had even developed a system that allowed ships to traverse the isthmus on which Corinth was located. The shipping shortcut allowed ships to avoid the treacherous journey around the south end of the Peloponnesian Peninsula. This attracted many travelers and contributed greatly to Corinth's cosmopolitan culture.

Corinth also benefited from fertile fields and a good supply of spring water. But along with the prosperity came taverns and night clubs. Self-indulgence and unbridled pleasure seeking became the norm in Corinth. Not exactly an easy environment to live as holy unto God.

The pagan Temple of Aphrodite, with its one thousand priestesses, dominated the religious scene in Corinth. It contributed to rampant prostitution and widespread immorality. Eventually the term *corinthianize* came to represent any gross immorality and rampant drunkenness. Not surprisingly, the city was also known for crime.

That the believers who made up the church at Corinth struggled with immorality and pride is not surprising. But separating themselves from living like their neighbors, and in many cases from their former practices, was not an impossible task.

4. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9–11. What are the sins from which the Corinthian believers had been set apart by God?

God doesn't call believers to holy living without also making it possible for them to live holy lives. He has the power to deliver believers from gross sins even though they live in an environment where those gross sins are nearly universally accepted. The church at Corinth is a testimony to God's power to sanctify believers so they might do His will and glorify Him despite their environment.

5. Why is excusing oneself from sin because of one's environment so offensive to God?

God, Team Owner

Paul went on to remind team church that God, their owner, provided all the grace they needed to be a successful member of His team. They needed that constant supply of God's grace in order to be set apart in a practical sense for His use (1:3). As they experienced God's powerful, sanctifying grace, they would know His peace. Paul prayed for the supply of both grace and peace to come from the Father through Jesus Christ.

Paul was constantly grateful for the divine grace that had already reached the Corinthian believers through Christ (1:4). God's grace gave them the ability to understand (*knowledge*) and communicate (*utterance*) concerning spiritual things (1:5).

Discourse and wisdom were particularly important in the Greek culture that dominated Corinth. God enabled the Corinthians to communicate effectively in the public arena of ideas. They spoke the truth because Christ had taken hold in their hearts (1:6). They were indeed believers. They were part of God's team—a fact that became the basis for Paul's subsequent appeals for the Corinthians to live holy lives.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that they lacked no gifts necessary

for overcoming sin and for living a life of devotion to God (1:7). They were equipped with all the tools from God in order to live in a way that caused them to anticipate Christ's return.

6. Read 1 Corinthians 1:7. What characterizes the person who is waiting for Jesus' return?

By His grace, God kept the Corinthian believers spiritually strong until either Christ returned at the Rapture or they passed from this world (1:8). By such enabling, they could stand blameless before Christ in Heaven. They could trust God's faithfulness—not their own—to provide the grace for their daily growth in Christlikeness (1:9). They could be triumphant because of the grace they each had from God.

7. Read 1 Corinthians 1:8, 9. How should the truths in these verses affect your daily walk with God?

Paul moved from reviewing foundational truths to challenging the Corinthians to respond to them. He had praised God, their team owner, as their faithful equipper for life, but they needed to respond to His faithful equipping in order to be victorious. We could view the rest of 1 Corinthians 1 as a serious *team meeting* to try to change the team church's *losing streak*.

The Problem of Disunity

Paul took the Corinthians' failures seriously. He pled with them to change based on what they had just learned about God's grace in their lives (1:10). They needed to be united in their testimony and understanding lest the church split and become ineffective.

The Corinthian team members boasted that they were followers of either Paul, Apollos, Cephas (Peter), or Christ (1:11, 12). Each group claimed superiority to the other groups based on what their leader emphasized in ministry. Paul was called to minister mainly to Gentiles, Peter focused on reaching Jews, and Apollos was an excellent speaker

with rich knowledge of the Scriptures (Acts 18:24–28). Those who claimed to follow Christ apparently believed they had a special relationship with Him that the rest of the church did not. Such antagonistic divisions fragmented the church and spoiled its testimony.

8. Describe the reputation of a basketball team whose players foul each other and block one another's shots.

9. How would you respond if such a team invited you to join them?

In dealing with the church's disunity, Paul confronted the Corinthians with the truth that Christ deserves their singular attention and devotion (1:13). They were all on one team. Christ, not anyone else, died on the cross in their place. Paul did not and could not die for believers. So no one could rightfully claim to be *of Paul*. Paul went on to make that point abundantly clear.

Rather than thanking his followers or encouraging them to defend his status in Corinth, Paul deflated their pride by stating that he struggled to remember exactly whom he had baptized (1:15, 16). He named a few people and then as an afterthought added that he had baptized some of Stephanas's household. He remembered none of the other baptisms and didn't pause to try to bring any more of them to mind.

Note that Paul is not teaching that baptism is not important. Baptism is of high importance (cf. Matt. 28:19). But *his* part in the Corinthians' baptisms was not of prime importance. That is because baptism identified them with Christ and served as a testimony of their desire to live like Christ, not Paul. Living like Christ was the opposite of what the Corinthians were doing. The Corinthians needed to have the mind of Christ and start treating each other as team members rather than opponents.

10. Read Philippians 2:1–5. What characterizes the mind of Christ?

Paul again emphasized the importance of Calvary (1 Cor. 1:17). Christ sent him to preach the gospel without any human cleverness (*wisdom of words*). The gospel did not depend on philosophical arguments such as those used by the followers of Plato and Aristotle. Paul stated that adding anything to the message of the gospel renders it ineffective.

The Power for Unity

God called Paul, Apollos, and Cephas to minister in different ways and to different groups of people, but their different ministries were all about one gospel. As they ministered, it was the gospel that made all the difference in people's lives. Some believed the gospel and were saved, while others considered the gospel nonsense (1:18). Paul's point is that the gospel is powerful all on its own.

Paul went on to quote Isaiah 29:14 as proof that God hates any attempt to taint the gospel with human wisdom (1 Cor. 1:19). The gospel can never be improved. Paul's gospel was not better than those of Apollos or Cephas. Their messages were the same. And their one gospel message was completely void of any human wisdom.

11. Read 1 Corinthians 1:19. Why could tainted gospels never be effective?

Paul asked a series of questions in verse 20 to point out that the world's wisest Jews and Gentiles alike were nowhere to be found when it came to providing salvation. God exposed the foolishness of their attempts and wisely provided salvation through the simple preaching of the cross (1:21).

The message of the cross is that no one deserves anything from God except eternal condemnation. It proclaims God's inexplicable love, mercy, and grace. It serves notice that God accepts people despite their record—not because of it.

Not everyone, however, considered the gospel wise (1:22). The Jews rejected the gospel and requested a sign to prove that Jesus was their long-awaited king (Matt. 12:38). The Greeks requested a moral, philosophical standard to guide their process of salvation.

12. Read Matthew 12:38–40. What sign did Jesus give the Jews?

To the Jews, the cross was a *stumblingblock* (1 Cor. 1:23). They would not accept that their king would allow Himself to die on a cross. To the Greeks, the cross was *foolishness*. They scoffed at the notion that God would become a man and then die so weakly. They saw the cross as powerless in their quest for salvation through wisdom and philosophy.

So was the gospel insufficient for the Jews and Greeks? Did the gospel need help to be effective? No. The gospel was powerful in Paul's day, and it still is today. As we share it, God's grace works in the hearts and minds of some of those who hear it to help them see their need for salvation and respond accordingly. By grace God called individual Jews and Gentiles in a mighty demonstration of His power and wisdom (1:24; cf. 2 Thess. 2:13, 14). What so many perceived as foolishness and weakness on God's part was actually far greater wisdom and power than any person possesses on his own (1 Cor. 1:25).

The Practice of Unity

Paul transitioned to his final point in his *team meeting* by asking team church to consider their own backgrounds. They were living examples that salvation comes through the gospel rather than through human wisdom, might, or status (1:26). The word *mighty* refers to the influential, including the ruling class. The word *noble* denotes those in the upper classes, meaning the rich and powerful. Some people from those groups were saved by God's grace, but their salvations had nothing to do with their wisdom, might, or status.

The world despised most of the Corinthian believers and considered them foolish, weak, and base (1:27, 28). Yet God saved them and thereby demonstrated that all the wisdom, might, and status in the world is powerless to save a person from his sins.

13. Read 1 Corinthians 1:29. Restate Paul's point in your own words.

God united the Corinthian believers to His Son, and in Christ they had wisdom from God, righteousness, a holy separation unto God, and redemption, meaning freedom from slavery to sin and freedom to serve the Lord (1:30). They were complete in Christ. Paul, Apollos, and Cephas had

nothing to add to what the members of team church already had in Christ.

Paul summoned the church at Corinth to unity. Instead of forming their own teams within a team and claiming superiority over each other, they were supposed to follow the Lord in humility. Corinth was an especially wicked city that desperately needed the gospel. It was incumbent upon Corinth's team church to present a clear, unified witness about the saving power of the cross. In doing so they would glorify the Lord.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

14. Why do believers in a local church need to function as a united team?

15. What could you do to build a united team of believers in your local church?

16. What might threaten the unity of your church?

17. What loyalties in your life might get in the way of bringing unity to your church?