

Called

LIVING FOR CHRIST IN A CARNAL CULTURE

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 REGULAR BAPTIST
Press

Called: Living for Christ in a Carnal Culture

© 2021 Regular Baptist Press • Arlington Heights, Illinois

www.RegularBaptistPress.org • 1-800-727-4440

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RBP5531 • ISBN 978-1-64213-760-6

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Preface

The church in Corinth was looking for answers. As new Christians in a morally corrupt environment, they needed to know how to live. Apparently, Paul had written to them earlier (1 Corinthians 5:9), giving instructions for godly living, and they replied but had questions (7:1).

So in 1 Corinthians Paul answered their questions. He also wrote about issues the church was struggling with, including division, carnality, and immorality. And he addressed questions regarding marriage, divorce, and the Lord's Supper. Consequently, this letter is a wealth of practical information for the church today.

During the apostle's second missionary journey, he went to Corinth. Acts 18:1–8 describes his time there: Aquila and Priscilla had recently arrived from Rome, since Claudius had commanded all Jews to leave. Though Aquila and Priscilla had been uprooted from their home, they demonstrated hospitality to Paul, allowing him to share their new home and business in Corinth.

With his practical needs taken care of, Paul was able to teach and preach, and “many of the Corinthians believed.” Paul remained in Corinth about eighteen months. He wrote 1 Corinthians about three years later.

Corinth was a wealthy port city, famous for its temple to Aphrodite, “the goddess of love,” with its one thousand prostitutes. The Greek word *korinthiazomai*, which is interpreted “to act the Corinthian,” came to mean “to practice fornication” or “to be immoral.” The city was known for everything sinful.

As in the days of Corinth, we live in an ungodly world where truth is blurred. Today we struggle with much of what the church at Corinth struggled with. Paul's letter to the Corinthians gives us insight into how to answer the issues that plague

the church today, encouraging us to live for Christ in a carnal world. As you study, approach each lesson with an open mind, praying that God will make clear to you His answers for today's questions.

Unity in the Church

1 Corinthians 1:1–17; 3:1–9

THERE IS NOTHING MORE disheartening than division in the church. Dividing over theological issues is one thing, but that is rarely the case in local churches. More likely, division in a local church stems from power issues, personality clashes, or pride. Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians by addressing the important issue of Christians maintaining unity as they labor together for Christ’s glory.

Sanctified

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1–9. Paul begins the book with a greeting and an introduction before addressing the first issue.

1. Paul was traveling with Sosthenes, who was also sending greetings to the church. According to Acts 18:12–17, who might Sosthenes have been?
2. In 1 Corinthians 1:2 how does Paul describe the believers in the church at Corinth?
3. Who besides the Corinthians are “called to be saints”?

4. (a) Write a dictionary definition of *saint*.

(b) According to Ephesians 1:4, what are believers chosen to be?

(c) How does that fit with the definition of a saint?

5. According to Romans 8:29, what are believers predestined (“predetermined”) to be?

God’s plan is that believers become more and more like Him. His choosing in Ephesians 1:4 and predestination in Romans 8:29 have everything to do with being conformed to His image. That is what He has chosen for us! He will conform us and sanctify us (“set us apart,” “make us holy”) until we are glorified if we allow His Spirit to work in us. Paul reminds the Corinthian believers of this truth: we are saints—now act like it!

There are three stages of sanctification, or “santification.” The first is positional sanctification, which occurs at salvation. Therefore, this stage is in the past. God sees us as holy the moment we accept Christ’s blood offering to cover our sins. The second stage is progressive sanctification, which is in the present. From the moment we are saved, we are to be growing to look more and more like the image of God. The final stage is future, which is perfect sanctification. This will take place when we see Jesus and no longer have to worry about sin.

6. Read 1 John 3:1–3. What statements describe these stages of sanctification?
 - Positional

- Progressive
- Perfect

Guaranteed

Next, in 1 Corinthians 1:4–8, Paul gives thanks for these believers, even though his letter addresses numerous problems in this church. Paul views the Body of Christ in Corinth with grace. He knows the Corinthians aren't perfect, but he is still thankful for them and Christ's work in them. Can we view our church family that way—being thankful for the work Christ is doing in each one's life instead of focusing on how far each needs to go? Paul recognized the grace of God in his own life and extended it to others.

7. Read 1 Corinthians 1:5–7.

(a) What did Paul recognize in the Corinthian believers?

(b) What phrases show the origin of spiritual gifts (vv. 4–5)?

We cannot take credit when God chooses to use us—our gifts come from Him. Believers in the church at Corinth were gifted in knowledge and utterance, or reasoning and communication. They knew the Scriptures and were skillful defenders of them.

8. What guarantee in verses 8–9 is true for believers today as it was for those in the church at Corinth?

The Corinthian believers were “confirmed” unto the end, that is, guaranteed. Though Paul was going to confront the church in this letter, he reminded them that as believers in

Christ they were guaranteed until the end because “God is faithful” (v. 9).

9. What other verses do you know that show believers are guaranteed (“given security to”) until Christ comes again?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10–17 and 3:1–9.

10. After his greeting, Paul addressed the first issue in the church. What was it?

11. What two things does verse 10 encourage the Corinthian believers to do?

12. Read Philippians 2:1–8, where Paul also speaks of unity. How can a group of people with a variety of opinions be unified, according to verses 3–7?

Can you imagine how these attitudes would change the church community? There would be no self-promotion or prideful opinions, but a constant looking to the good of each other and the church. With each one serving the needs of the other, there would be no division.

Used by God

13. According to 1 Corinthians 1:11–13 and 3:4, what was dividing the congregation in Corinth?

In those days, baptism identified a person as a follower of the one who did the baptizing or of the one the person was baptized for. Consequently, the members of the church in Corinth were partial to whoever had baptized them or whoever had been influential in their salvation and growth.

14. According to 1 Corinthians 3:5–6, how do servants of God work together to bring someone to Christ?

15. Read 1 Corinthians 3:4–7.
 - (a) Describe how a variety of people could be involved in bringing someone to Christ.

 - (b) How did you come to Christ?

 - (c) How is salvation ultimately attained?

16. How does 1 Corinthians 1:17 affirm that salvation is apart from baptism?

17. Many servants of God may have a part in our salvation and growth. They are “laborers together.” What two words (metaphors) describe us in 1 Corinthians 3:9?

The field and the building belong to God. Those who plant or build are simply tools used by God, and each is simply one worker among many. We are to be followers of God, not people. While we plant, water, or reap, we need to remember we are only a hoe, a hose, or a sickle in the Master's hand—to seek His glory, not our own.

18. In 1 Corinthians 3:1–3, what words does Paul use to describe someone who is causing strife or division by elevating human leadership?

A carnal Christian is controlled by fleshly desires rather than by the Holy Spirit. When we are following our flesh, division will result. Strife, dissension, and division are all marks of immature Christians.

19. Read the verses below and identify the way we are to respond to those who cause division.

- Romans 16:17

- 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14

Sometimes churches with many staff members can become divided as people choose their favorite pastor. Even churches with several spiritual leaders or teachers can split because of allowing a person to take the place of God in their loyalties.

The problem can also come from power hungry leaders who, because of jealousy, promote themselves rather than the Savior. In trying to gain control, they divide the church.

Unity is, therefore, a sign of spiritual maturity and godliness. Paul speaks of the Corinthians as “babes,” who are not ready for meat because of their envying, strife, and divisions. In a dog-eat-dog world, the church should be a place of unity and humility.

Read John 17:20–22. Christ’s plan for the church is that Christians be one. It’s time to put the unity of the Body over our own selfish conceits or desires.

Application

How can you apply what we have studied?

First, support your church leaders. Do you remember you are following Christ, not a man? Do you have a favorite, and if you do, do you show favoritism? How can you support each church leader in that person’s role?

Second, be an integral part of the team. Every part of the body is important and is needed. How do you actively seek the good of the church and the glory of God as you “do nothing through strife or vainglory”? As you serve on a committee, be aware whether you are seeking the best for the church or are forcing your opinion. What do you do to bless the rest of the “choir”? How can you focus on encouragement to others rather than criticism?

Third, actively seek to plant, water, hoe, and reap! Share the gospel as the Holy Spirit gives you opportunity. Recognize that you are only a part of the process; do not get discouraged if the Word seems to fall on fallow ground. Your job is to spread the seed; it is God Who gives the increase. That tract you leave may be just the right words, or amount of water, for the seed already planted to sprout! What are you doing to prepare for opportunities to share the gospel?

As a mature, Spirit-filled Christian, you will be looking to sow unity, humility, and servanthood in your church. There is no better way to support your church leaders and bring joy to your pastor!