

Community Group Discussion Guide

April 14, 2024

1 Corinthians 1:1-17 | God is Faithful

MOTIVATE

Starter Question:

- ⇒ *Can you describe a time when you've been in a group or on a team that struggled with internal strife and conflict? What did this result in?*
- ⇒ *Can you describe a time when you've been in a group or on a team that focused on an external goal and you were unified in this mission? What did this result in?*

DISCUSS

In Paul's day, Corinth was a large and prosperous city with a population of over 200,000 people. Given the city's location on a key trade route, it was a melting pot of people with a diversity of wealth, religion, and moral standards. This threatened the city and the Corinthian church with corruption, idolatry, and worldliness. Charles Spurgeon commented that "amongst them, you would not find another church sunk so low as this one, although it was the most gifted."

Paul authored 1 Corinthians in order to address these problems within the church, as well as answer questions that those in the church were asking. Primarily, Paul sought to call the Corinthian believers to pursue unity and holiness in the way they lived and interacted with those inside of the church, as well as with those outside of the church.

- ⇒ *Why might a church like Corinth that was located in a prosperous and diverse city struggle so much with disunity and worldliness?*
- ⇒ *In what ways is the city we live in similar to Corinth? In what ways is it different?*

1 Corinthians 1:1-3 *Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, 2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

In the initial greeting of this letter, the apostleship of Paul is made clear. This theme of Paul's authority is carried throughout his letter to the Corinthians. Paul's calling to this role is emphasized as being in accordance with the "will of God." Given Paul's history, it is only by the grace of God that a man who was once so against the gospel could be called "an apostle of Christ Jesus."

Paul also mentioned that he wrote this letter alongside Sosthenes. Sosthenes would have been someone well known by the Corinthian church at the time and is most likely the same Sosthenes mentioned in Acts 18:17.

Paul then addressed the audience of his letter. While many of Paul's letters were written to believers in cities, only a few of his letters were specifically written to a church like the one in Corinth.

Paul described his letter as being written to "those sanctified in Christ" and "called to be saints together." First, Paul's use of "sanctified" ("hagiazo") means to make holy and refers to the Corinthians' positional sanctification. Many times in Scripture sanctification refers to experiential or progressive sanctification, which is the process of continually being made more like Christ. However, here Paul was referring to positional sanctification which is the holiness that believers have from the moment of conversion. Next, Paul's use of "saints" refers to "holy people." The use of these two words together indicate that Paul wanted to remind the Corinthians of their sure standing in Christ, even with the issues Paul wrote to address.

- ⇒ ***What is the difference between positional sanctification and experiential (or progressive) sanctification? Why is it important that we understand the difference between the two?***
- ⇒ ***Given that Paul's letter to the Corinthians is primarily one of correction, what is the significance of Paul opening his letter by affirming their positional sanctification?***

Beginning his theme of encouraging the believers in Corinth to pursue unity, Paul reminded them that they are all part of the same body, but also that the church is not limited to one location. The church is comprised of all those who are "called to be saints" and who "call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." In this we can see the sovereignty of God in that He calls His people to Himself, but also the human responsibility to call upon Him.

- ⇒ ***Can Christians begin to believe that a church is theirs instead of God's? How is this a dangerous belief to hold?***

Paul finished the greeting portion of his letter by reminding the Corinthians that grace and peace were given to them by God. Even with their corruption and sinfulness, because they trusted in Christ, the Corinthian believers were recipients of God's undeserved favor and blessing.

- ⇒ ***Does Paul's greeting to the Corinthian church differ from what you would expect given what he knows about them? In what ways does grace inform Paul's greeting?***

1 Corinthians 1:4-9 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, **5** that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge-- **6** even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you-- **7** so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, **8** who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **9** God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul moved into the initial part of his letter with a prayer of thanksgiving for the Corinthians. He called them to focus on God and the grace He has given them. Paul then reminded them that they were given spiritual gifts as provisions until Christ returns. Later in 1 Corinthians,

Paul will address the arguments that the Corinthian believers were having over which gifts were more important. But here, he sets the stage by reminding them that they have every gift needed to live the Christian life.

⇒ ***What is the means by which God gives gifts to believers? What are believers to do with the gifts that God has given to us?***

Paul continued his prayer by acknowledging the faithfulness of God – that He will sustain them until the return of Christ, and that they will be presented blameless before Him on that day. God has promised to sustain believers to the end, and we will persevere not because of our own strength, but because of God’s faithfulness in keeping His promises to us. This is Paul’s hope and confidence for the Corinthians and all believers, that even in the midst of the brokenness that exists, we will all one day stand guiltless at the throne of God.

⇒ ***What does it mean that God will sustain believers to the end? In what ways does He do this?***

⇒ ***Discuss this quote. "It was a characteristic Corinthian error to concentrate on the present with its religious excitement, and to overlook the cost at which the present was purchased." -- C.K. Barrett***

○ ***What is the danger in overlooking Christ’s life, death, and Resurrection?***

⇒ ***How have you seen the faithfulness of God in your own life? How is God’s faithfulness primarily seen through Jesus?***

1 Corinthians 1:10-17 *I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. **11** For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. **12** What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." **13** Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? **14** I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, **15** so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. **16** (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) **17** For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

Following his prayer for the Corinthians, Paul addressed one of the first issues within the Corinthian church. He began with a gentle exhortation (“I appeal to you”) and followed with the basis for his appeal (“by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”). This full title of Jesus gives heightened importance to the appeal, and prefaces where the Corinthians focus should be in light of what Paul was about to call them out for. Paul pointed out to the Corinthians that what was in their minds was manifesting in their actions.

⇒ ***What does it mean to be of the "same understanding" and "same conviction?"***

⇒ ***In what ways do Christians attempt to justify their divisive and quarrelsome attitudes and actions?***

At the time, there was divisiveness and quarreling in the church that had manifested due to various allegiances to different pastors within Corinth. Some believers were claiming to follow Paul, who founded their church, while others declared allegiance to Apollos, who was an eloquent and popular preacher in Corinth. Others asserted their loyalty Peter (“Cephas”) who was a Jewish apostle and a pillar of the church. By dividing into factions based on allegiances and who had administered baptism to them, the believers in Corinth were damaging the church’s reputation and effectiveness to their community and the world.

One of our church’s values is “compelling love” which means that we demonstrate the love of Jesus by respecting the dignity of every person, sacrificing for our neighbors, and cultivating unity with our faith family. When a church cultivates unity, there is something compelling to the outside world about that. When a church demonstrates disunity, there is something off putting to the outside world about that.

- ⇒ ***In what ways does division in the church damage the church’s reputation and impede the advancement of the gospel?***
- ⇒ ***In what ways does pursuing and demonstrating unity within the church make the gospel compelling?***
- ⇒ ***Does the idea of unity in the church mean there must be complete agreement on every issue? Why or why not?***
- ⇒ ***What are the essentials that Christians must be united around?***
- ⇒ ***Discuss this quote: “The church is at its best when it is on the battlefield fighting the real enemies of Satan, sin, death, hell, and the grave. The church is at its worst when she is in the barracks fighting her own members.” – Adrian Rogers***

Paul closed this section by reminding the Corinthians that the substance of the gospel, and hearing and believing it, is more important than the style or method of how it is delivered. Paul acknowledged that his eloquence in preaching did not measure up to the high standards of the Corinthians at the time, but he reminded them that this allowed the power of the gospel to be the focus.

- ⇒ ***How have you seen the power of the gospel message in your life?***
- ⇒ ***What does this passage teach you about God’s work in salvation?***

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: Paul’s letter to the Corinthians reminds us that we are to also pursue unity and holiness in the way we live and interact with those inside of the church, as well as with those outside of the church.

- ⇒ ***In what ways are you pursuing unity with believers in the church?***
- ⇒ ***In what ways are you living out your faith to those outside the church?***

2. Pray: Give thanks to God for His grace in calling us to Himself and for equipping us with everything needed for life and godliness. Praise Him for His faithfulness to us in keeping His promises. Ask that He would protect our hearts and minds from division and disunity. Pray

that our church would be “united in the same mind and the same judgment” and that this unity would lead to the advancement of the gospel.

STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *NIV Life Application Study Bible, pages 1910-1914.*
- *ESV Study Bible, pages 2187-2193.*
- *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 Corinthians, pages 3-23.*