

## Returning to Holiness

1 Corinthians 1:26-31  
February 8, 2004 @TIBC

The Massachusetts high court ruled Wednesday (February 4, 2004) that (only full, equal marriage rights for) gay couples (— rather than civil unions —) are constitutional, clearing the way for the nation's first same-sex marriages in the state as early as last May. Massachusetts has one of the highest concentrations of gay households in the country with at 1.3 percent of the total number of coupled households, according to the 2000 census. In California, 1.4 percent of the coupled households are occupied by same-sex partners. Vermont and New York also registered at 1.3 percent, while in Washington, D.C., the rate is 5.1 percent.

President Bush immediately denounced the decision and vowed to pursue legislation to protect the traditional definition of marriage. Church leaders also oppose efforts to allow gays to marry. And legislators were prepared to vote on a proposed amendment to the state constitution (which probably won't happen until 2006) that would seek to make the court's ruling moot by defining as marriage as a union between one man and one woman — thus expressly making same-sex marriages illegal in Massachusetts. (Associated Press)

How many of you would agree that we live in a sick world! The only way that this world would have hope is to have Christ. We as Christians, however, have the responsibilities to live a life of holiness so that the world will have Christ to have hope. Now, in the Bible there was also a place like the sick world we live in today – city of Corinth.

### **City of Corinth needs Unity in Diversity**

Corinth was one of the chief commercial cities of Roman Empire, famous for its arts, crafts, and wealth. The city of Corinth was destroyed in 146 B.C. and was later rebuilt after over a 100 years. The city immediately regained its prominence as a boomtown of the time, just like cities of HK or the like. In fact, this letter could have been used to write to a congregation in New York, Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur, Los Angeles, or Shanghai. These are all cosmopolitan, multiracial, multicultural places of socio-economic diversity, as it was Corinth. The people in Corinth were just like who we are. The city of Corinth, however, became exceedingly wicked and people lived in sin, sexual immorality, self-ruling for the good or bad reasons of everybody going out on yourself to get more knowledge, wealthy, power, beauty.

### **The church at Corinth needs to return to holiness of living**

The church had several problems, among them a leadership problem producing divisions in the church (1:10-17). Immoral practices were not being dealt with (5:1-6:20). An enthusiastic group in the church flaunted their spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40). A legalistic group was concerned about dietary laws (8:1-10:32). Some were abusing the Lord's supper (11:17-34), and others were offering false teachings regarding the resurrection (15:1-58). These matters – in addition to its multiethnic make up of Greeks, Romans, and Jews and a mixture of social classes, which is transient population typical of a port city, including rich, poor, and slavery – made for a unique and troubled congregation.

### **Divisions in the Church – be united not untied**

<sup>10</sup>I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.<sup>11</sup>My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. <sup>12</sup>What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." <sup>13</sup>Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into

*the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup>I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup>so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. <sup>16</sup>(Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.)*

*<sup>17</sup>For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

The King James Version, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769. "Now I **beseech** you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..." The word "beseech" is a strong word. It is much stronger than "ask" or "request." "**Beseech**" is fervent and feverish with passion. ... It means to entreat, to implore, to beg, to **plead**. NKJV '**plead with**'

### **What matters most is what God offers first!**

**Sowing discord** among the brothers is the sin God hates most of all; is caused by pride; and is seen in the church at Corinth. The book of 1st Corinthians is rich in information that our churches of today need to be aware. The problems faced there are still with us today, in so many ways. Perhaps in looking at this book, God can show us ways to face similar situations, and deal with them, so that we can accomplish much for His kingdom on this earth. There are, still today, many congregations that are full of pride, bickering and selfishness, which cause divisions. These things tear the church apart and keep them from fulfilling God's call in their life. Paul addresses this very sort of church when he wrote to the church in Corinth.

If there is ever a time in the history of our church when the Body of Christ needs purifying, it is now. In a church like TIBC where diversity is the norm, our unity is of vital importance. Let's remember to emphasize the centrality of Christ as Lord and of the saving power of the gospel; and the need to look to Christ rather than to human wisdom to determine how to go about doing things. Are we doing that? Let me propose you a set of questions for reflections - Seven Categories of Sins:

**Thoughts** – Matthew 15:8-9a Do you have longing to be in church and with God's people? Do you think far more about work and recreation than spiritual growth and serving Christ? Is Christ central in all your priorities, or does He occupy only a small corner of your thoughts and plans? Are you unwilling to pray for God's will, when it does not fit your plan?

**Attitude** – Ephesians 4:2 Is your attitude such that you feel you are better and smarter than others? Have you sought to reach out to other culture groups or have you settled into a social "comfort zone"? Are you fully resting in God's promises or are you frequently anxious? Do you respond with forgiveness and love when someone hurts you?

**Speech** – (Verse 10, another version says that you all *speak* the same thing) Are you careful to follow through with promises, vows and commitments you make to God and others? Are your speeches filled with an attitude of gratefulness and praise or grumbling and complaining? Are you guilty of any form of gossip or slander of others?

**Relationship** – Matthew 6:14-15 Are you bitter or holding grudges against people who have offended you? Do you neglect regular fellowship and meaningful service through your church? Are your family relationship consistent with God's word? Do you consistently talk to your children on spiritual values?

**Commission (transgression)** – Have you placed other things/people ahead of God? Do you ever watch TV or movies or internet that feature immorality and violence? Do you spend more time on TV and so forth more than you do Bible reading and praying? Have you been honest to fully tithe your money, time and talents?

**Omission** - James 4:17 Do you make excuses why you cannot serve God through your church? Have you failed to exercise your gifts with all diligence?

**Self-rule or Self-reliance** – Beyond question, many believers have uncrucified areas of self that seriously hinder the flow of Christ through their life. This is a primary reason many cannot find the victory God has so clearly promised. Have you been unwilling to lay family, relationship or work on the altar of surrender?

<sup>26</sup>*Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.* <sup>27</sup>*But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.* <sup>28</sup>*He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things -- and the things that are not -- to nullify the things that are,* <sup>29</sup>*so that no one may boast before him.* <sup>30</sup>*It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*

<sup>31</sup>*Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."*

Of all the verses in the book of God, Verse 30 which I have now read to you, is, I believe, one of the most comprehensive: what glad tidings does it bring to believers! What precious privileges are they herein invested with! How are they here led to the fountain of them all, I mean, the love, the everlasting love of God the Father. *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, righteousness, holiness (sanctification), and redemption.'*

### **Apostolic authority calls for Distinctiveness in lifestyle and relationships**

*1 Corinthians 1:1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,*

Paul clearly names himself as the author of the letter, and the fact that he calls himself an apostle suggests that there was a crisis of authority in Corinth. He mentions his apostolic authority in two different ways: the authority God had called him to, and also the authority he was exercising by the will of God. Paul was not a self-appointed apostle. *It was a calling, and God willed him to exercise this spiritual leadership.*

Look at how Paul addresses the recipients are addressed in verse 2: *2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--their Lord and ours:* There are two hints about these people here. There was a crisis in **living out the life that God had ordained for them, or their relationship with God**. And there was a crisis in **their relationships with one another**. Both of these issues are very important for us collectively and individually. We are called-out ones of God. Paul doesn't say that the church belonged to him, to the Corinthians, or to the elders in Corinth. No, it belonged to God, the one who had brought the relationship into being.

They were the church, the called-out ones. They were to be a fellowship of people who were called out of the world to live together, to love each other, and to serve together, with the result that the world would say, "The way you folks treat each other is so attractive!" He also says they were sanctified. That means individually they had been set apart to be used by God. Just as Paul had been called to be an apostle, these folks had a calling as well. (repeat 'beseech' in verse 10 again)

### **Invitation:**

Let's come to the altar and ask to cleanse us and empowers us to return to holiness of living. Cross-, the most shameful way to die, assumes the gospel is printed at the bottom of shoe, who could learn? Only the humbled who bow low to read. Any can be saved!