

Foundations Bible Study – I Corinthians
Lesson 1

Scripture Readings:

- **I Corinthians Chapters 1 & 2**

Lesson

First and Second Corinthians are some of Paul's most used writings in the church today. As we begin, I want to look at the city of Corinth and how the church began there, then we will begin the study time with the first two chapters of I Corinthians. Corinth was a port city in the Gulf of Saros, about 50 miles west of Athens. There were three port cities located here on the west coast of Greece that were very important to the economy and shipping interest not only for Greece, but also for the Romans. Paul first tried to establish a church at Athens, but had little luck. After that experience it seems he moved to Corinth and found a city and surrounding cities ready for the gospel message of Christ. This was mainly due to the amount of Jews living there and the Jewish influence which was lacking at Athens. Paul spent several years at Corinth and established a strong vital church there. After he left Corinth to continue his ministries, many problems developed. It seems these problems were the primary reason for the letters to Corinth.

Paul begins as usual with his introduction of himself, then he moves on to say who he is writing to. (1:2) Wow... to the sanctified and holy people of Corinth. How does the church measure up today? How do we define the church? Who is in or out of the church? Do we have a test we give folks? What does this all mean to the United Methodist Church.... Open doors and all? Paul in my mind has a very narrow view of the church here at the beginning of the letter, but later with all the problems we see a much more diverse church. It all seems a little strange to me as to why the difference of opinions, and why such holy and righteous language here at the beginning? I think Paul is trying to set the stage for what is to come and also trying to validate his authority in these matters.

Next comes thanksgiving. I'm afraid we lose out on thanksgiving often in our zeal for the good and right things in life and the church. We see the wrong in most things in our lives before the right. I'm sure that is not a good attitude to live by, at least most of the time. I do love it how Paul shares the good things to be thankful for..... Right before he drops the ax on the bad things happening in the church.

Now Paul lets them have it. You all are following these different persons and fighting over "who's who". How can this be in the church, how can Christ, God, and the Holy Spirit be divided? As we read these first two chapters Paul is trying to communicate two different messages. Both were very important then and still are. First Christ and His suffering, teaching, resurrection, and ministry, are

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unifying not divisive. Christ is unifying... Christ unifies... Christ is unifying! Why can't we get it?

Second there is a strong spiritual component to the teaching of Paul here early in the letter. (2:6-16) To me these verses have spoken volumes the past two weeks as I studied them. There is more to life than money and power, and there is more to the church than "who's who" and "what's what". We are all called to a deep commitment to God through Jesus Christ. This is both a personal and communal connection to God. It takes time and discipline, but the rewards are great. Personal peace and Christian unity.... God help us all.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. How would you define who is the church today?
2. What are you most thankful for in the church?
3. What causes divisions in the 21st century church?
4. What unifies the 21st century church?