

Striking Similarities (Part 2) – 1 Cor 1:1-3

1 Cor 6:9-11

Last week I introduced a new study and series from the book of 1 Cor, called **Issues**

Titled such, b/c Paul addresses so *many* of them

Issues the church in Corinth had, and issues from which we're not exempt

In fact, despite the separation of 2000 years, there are **Striking Similarities** between our situation and theirs . . .

And we'd do well to listen for ourselves, both individually *and* corporately, in order to learn the lessons of their day, and live the life in ours

In order to live as the church in the world without the world in the church

- To that end, I asked you last week to make 3 New Year's Resolutions
 1. Review your message notes each week
 2. Consider how the message applies to you
 3. Pick one action point – a thought to dwell on, a thing to do, or a behavior to avoid
- 3 very simple commitments that I hope will help us *address* the issues we *have*, and *preempt* the ones we don't

With that in mind, we looked at Acts 18 to find that the first striking similarity is that . . .

Similarity #1 – They were a new church, and so are we (Acts 18:1-11)

Founded by the Apostle Paul on his 2nd missionary journey . . .

They were 4 when Paul wrote this letter to them, and we're 5

We also found that in order for a church – a true church, not just a loose affiliation of attenders, but a cohesive, committed, faithful, sacrificial body of believers . . .

In order for a true *church* to be established and grow – the word of God must be faithfully preached, it must be heard and received by soft hearts, and God must be in it
3 lessons from Paul's experience, intended to shape ours – as we grow our church, and plant others

That was similarity #1, and part 1 of this message from last week

Part 2, and similarity #2 that makes 1 Cor *so* applicable to us, is that . . .

Similarity #2 – Their culture was corrupt, and so is ours (1 Cor 6:9b-11a)

It's confirmed by archeology, by other writings from that time, and certainly by the book of 1 Cor itself – like 6:9b-11a

Some of those in the Corinthian church used to be – sexually promiscuous, worshippers of idols, breakers of marriage covenants, practicing homosexuals, thieves, money-hungry businessmen, abusers of alcohol, and sharp-tongued abusers of others
IOW they used to be corrupt; messed up people

And given that the church is usually the tip of the cultural iceberg, it's likely that the *culture* still was

If some of those *in* the church were corrupt in the *past*, chances are, those *outside* the church are corrupt in the *present*

And when you add the input of archeology and the writings of history to the mix – you find at least **5 Contributing Factors**

5 factors that led to some of th corruption in th *first* place, and more *of* it as time went by

The first of which, is that they were . . .

1. Strategically located

This was not Hobbitville, tucked away in the green pastures of middle earth, and far removed from all things evil

They were in the thick of it

And you can see why with this *Google map* of the area

This is the big picture, where you can see N. Africa, Spain, Israel, and Europe . . .

With Greece in the center – that's where ancient Corinth was

As we **zero** in, you can see the boot of Italy take shape, as well as the southern portion of Greece

And a little **further** starts to bring us in on this narrow isthmus

And that little sliver of land, is why Corinth was strategically located

Ships could either go all the way around the horn (Peloponnese), a 6 day journey with treacherous **winds** . . .

Or they could *drag* their ships across this 4 ½ mile stretch of land

Which sounds daunting, but it was the route of choice, b/c the former was a death trap

Sailors used to say that if you were going around the horn, you better write your will and forget your **home**

So they would dock on either side and enlist the help of slaves to pull their ships across a brick-paved road

And 5 miles to the West, sat the city of Corinth at the base of this mountain, called the Acrocorinth

And it was located there, b/c the mountain provided a safe haven from attackers, a fresh water spring . . .

And the primary religious focal point in that culture – the temple of Aphrodite which sat at the **top**

All of which made Corinth *the* route for *North-South* travel on the Greek **peninsula** . . .

And the route of *choice* for E-W shipping lanes in the N. Med *****

Put it all together, and every Tom, Dick, and Harry; Sailor, traveler, and troublemaker . . .

Descended on Corinth to ply their wares, turn a buck, and satisfy their desires

Leading to a melting pot of cultures, and an atmosphere of corruption

Now, that's not say that it was some cowboy town like those of the Old West – far from it
In fact, it was . . .

2. Surprisingly sophisticated

With a free population of some *200k* at its peak, it was a surprisingly sophisticated culture

They had regional-wide sports festivals that lasted for days and sometimes weeks – including contests for women

It was a tourist attraction complete with professional entertainers and orators who spoke in the theaters – including one that held 18k people

There were art shows, exhibits, social clubs of various sorts, trade unions, business associations . . .

A thriving import/export business based on capitalism, competition, and free trade
Lawyers, bankers, and brokers to manage it; A working class to support it
And a well-oiled and well-staffed government to keep it all in order

It was a surprisingly sophisticated, wealthy, extravagant culture – with large homes, large egos, and large bank accounts
The love of which contributed to its corruption

Especially when you consider that in addition to its free population of 200k, there were another 500k slaves
In fact, the population of Corinth consisted of a *very* wide spectrum of people

And though they lived in close proximity, they were . . .

3. Socially divided

As you might expect, there were natural divisions due to the affinity of similar cultures and languages – nothing wrong there . . .
But the divisions went well beyond that

The rich snubbed and oppressed the poor . . .
The poor despised and stole from the rich . . .
And the gulf between the two grew wider and wider

In fact, in the book of 1 Cor, we'll see divisions on almost every page
Divisions due to different socio-economic levels . . .
And second, divisions due to their *egotistical attitude*

- They were a society, especially the wealthy, that was preoccupied with public status, public recognition, and self-promotion
So much so, that public boasting became an art form, and a person's self-worth was based on the wild enthusiasm of followers
Just think movie stars/music icons, and the people who obsess over them – same thing

Vanity and self-*sufficiency* was in – not humility and community
Social-climbing and getting *ahead* were the virtues – not servant-hood and generosity
And it created more and more division

- To make matters worse, they had a *pragmatic mindset* where truth didn't matter as much as impact, results, and perception
Can you say sports, business, and politics?

Then, as now, Corinth was riddled with the rhetoric of influential people, who were more concerned with applause, than truth
With getting ahead, than getting it right – the similarities are stunning

Put *that* all together – the socio-economic divisions, the self-absorbed egotism, and the all-out pragmatism at the expense of truth . . .
And you get an increasingly corrupt culture

4. Openly idolatrous

Strategically located, surprisingly sophisticated, socially divided, and openly idolatrous

That's the fourth factor that contributed to their corruption

There were no less than 26 different sacred/religious places in and around Corinth . . .
Devoted to as many different gods
But none so prominent as the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love
Which, as I mentioned, sat just up the hill from Corinth, overlooking the city

And it was there, that they sacrificed animals to her – which Paul indicates were actually offerings to demons (ch10) . . .
And then held "love" feasts to eat the meat

Forms of worship, with the hope of finding favor from an idol – favor on everything from prosperity, to healing, to protection, to fertility
You name it, they sought it
Complete with miniature idols in their homes or businesses – just like you see in our day

They were openly idolatrous, and it led to more and more corruption

And that's just the religious part
That doesn't include the *self*-idolatry we just talked about . . .
Or the *materialistic* idolatry fueled by an insatiable desire for more and more stuff

5. Blatantly sinful

In addition to the idolatry of Aphrodite's temple, there were some 1000 prostitutes available there as well – remember, she was the goddess of "love"
So as part of your act of worship, you'd pay money, which went into the temple coffers, and have sex with a temple prostitute
And given the rampant homosexuality at the time, it's not unlikely that some of them were male
It's no wonder their life expectancy was so low, with all the diseases that were passed around

Add to that the incest that Paul addresses in the *church* of all places (ch5). . .
And the brothels and taverns most commonly associated with sailors . . .
And the suggestive entertainment of upper echelon parties . . .
And you have a blatantly sinful culture

So much so, that the expression, "to behave like a Corinthian" – came to be synonymous with gross immorality and drunken debauchery
That's what their city was known for
Kind of like Las Vegas being known for its sin; Or New Orleans for its parties
They were blatantly sinful, and it contributed to an increasingly corrupt culture

- Sounds familiar doesn't it? (**Summary**)
If this were a jeopardy show, the answer w/b – "What is the United States of America?"

We're strategically located in the world . . .
Surprisingly sophisticated compared to the rest; Socially divided – even in the church sometimes . . .
Openly idolatrous in all respects – materially, selfishly, religiously; And blatantly sinful
No wonder our culture is corrupt just like theirs – it's a striking similarity

And b/c of it, as a church in this culture, we require ongoing instruction to preempt the issues, and sometimes address them – just like they did
Which is why we have this letter in the first place . . .
And why we’d do well to pay attention to all that it says
That’s **Similarity #2**

And last, similarity #3, is that . . .

Similarity #3 – They were believers, just like us (1 Cor 1:1-3)

They were a new church, and so are we; Their culture was corrupt, and so is ours . . .
And they were believers, just like us
Turn back to 1 Cor 1:1-3

I’m not going to flesh all of this out right now, but I do want to point out some of the more obvious things
The first of which, is that Paul is the author of this letter

I’ve been saying it all along, and this is where it comes from – his greeting
Where he identifies himself as the sender with the very first word
And despite the musings of some, there’s nothing in this letter that would cause us to think otherwise

The syntax or grammar is consistent with his writings; The vocabulary . . .
The historical connections with the book of Acts; The issues he addresses . . .
All confirm that this was written by Paul, and not some pseudonymous writer pretending to be him

- And it was written to *believers* (v2)
People just like you and I who comprised a *local* church – the church in Corinth . . .
People who were *sanctified in Christ* – i.e. set apart fr sin by their union with him . . .
People who were *called to be saints* – i.e. called to be holy in status and behavior
And people who submit to Jesus, as Lord – *both their Lord and ours*

It was written to believers just like you and me
Who called *upon the name our Lord Jesus Christ* (2b)
They called on Jesus to save them and keep them in all his goodness and power – represented by his name . . .
And consequently, God declared them righteous and holy in his sight – *saints*
With the obvious expectation that they will live it out – that they will *be* who they are

Have you done that? Have you called on Jesus to save you?
Have you responded to *his* call on your life?
His call to be a saint – righteous and holy in his sight?
If so, be who you are; If not, the time has come, don’t you think?

- B/c 1 Cor was written to *believers* – believers in a local church, just like us
Who are holy in God’s sight, just like us; Set apart from sin, just like us
United together in *fellowship*, just like us; Following *Jesus*, just like us
And striving to live as the church in the world, without the world in the church – just like us (**Summary**)
Anything else and you’re on the outside looking in

Striking similarities, with valuable lessons