

“GOD’S WORK IN US” (Series: Mission&Vision, why we all need one)

1CORINTHIANS 1:1-31

INTRODUCTION:

[It's \(Past\) Time for a Charismatic Reformation](#)

In honor of Reformation Day, here are some complaints I'm nailing on the Wittenberg door.

Long before there was an Occupy Wall Street, Martin Luther staged the most important protest in history. He was upset because Roman Catholic officials were promising people forgiveness or early escape from purgatory in exchange for money. So on October 31, 1517, Luther nailed a long list of complaints on the door of a church in Wittenberg, Germany.

Luther's famous 95 theses were translated from Latin into German and spread abroad. Like a medieval Jeremiah, Luther dared to ask questions that had never been asked, and he challenged a pope who was supposedly infallible. Through this brave monk, the Holy Spirit sparked the Protestant Reformation and restored the doctrine of grace to a church that had become corrupt, religious, dysfunctional, political and spiritually dead.

I am no Luther, but I've grown increasingly aware that the so-called "Spirit-filled" church of today struggles with many of the same things the Catholic church faced in the 1500s. We don't have "indulgences"—we have telethons. We don't have popes—we have super-apostles. We don't support an untouchable priesthood—we throw our money at celebrity evangelists who own fleets of private jets.

In honor of Reformation Day, I'm offering my own list of needed reforms in our movement. And since I can't hammer these on the Wittenberg door, I'll post them online. Feel free to nail them everywhere.

1. Let's reform our theology. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He is God and He is holy. He is not an "it." He is not a blob, a force, or an innate power. We must stop manipulating Him, commanding Him and throwing Him around.

2. Let's return to the Bible. The Word of God is the foundation for the Christian experience. Any dramatic experience, no matter how spiritual it seems, must be tested by the Word and the Holy Spirit's discernment.

Visions, dreams, prophecies and encounters with angels must be in line with Scripture. If we don't test them we could end up spreading deception.

3. It's time for personal responsibility. We charismatics must stop blaming everything on demons. People are usually the problem.

4. Stop playing games. Spiritual warfare is a reality, but we are not going to win the world to Jesus just by shouting at demonic principalities. We must pray, preach and persevere to see ultimate victory.

5. Stop the foolishness. People who hit, slap or push others during prayer should be asked to sit down until they learn gentleness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

6. End all spiritual extortion now. Christian television ministries must cease and desist from all manipulative fundraising tactics. We must stop giving platforms to ministers who make outlandish claims of supernatural financial returns, especially when Scripture is twisted, deadlines are imposed and the poor are exploited.

7. No more Lone Rangers. Those who claim to be ministers of God—whether they are traveling evangelists, local pastors or heads of ministries—must be accountable to other leaders. Any who refuse to submit their lives to godly discipline should be corrected.

8. Expose the creeps. Churches should start doing background checks on traveling ministers. Preachers who have been hiding criminal records, lying about their past marriages, preying on women or refusing to pay child support should be exposed as charlatans and shunned if they do not repent.

9. Stop faking the anointing. God is God, and He does not need our "help" to manifest Himself. That means we don't sprinkle glitter on ourselves to suggest God's glory is with us, hide fake jewels on the floor to prove we are anointed or pull chicken feathers out of our sleeves to pretend angels are in the room. This is lying to the Holy Spirit.

10. **Let's return to purity.** We've had enough scandals. The charismatic church must develop a system for the restoration of fallen ministers. Those who fall morally can be restored, but they must be willing to submit to a process of healing rather than rushing immediately back into the pulpit.

11. **We need humility.** Ministers who demand celebrity treatment, require lavish salaries, insist on titles or exhibit aloofness from others are guilty of spiritual pride.

12. **No more big shots.** Apostles are the bondslaves of Christ, and should be the most impeccable models of humility. True apostles do not wield top-down, hierarchical authority over the church. They serve the church from the bottom up as true servants.

13. **Never promote gifts at the expense of character.** Those who operate in prophecy, healing and miracles must also exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. And while we continue to encourage the gift of tongues, let's make sure we don't treat it like some kind of badge of superiority. The world needs to see our love, not our glossolalia.

14. **Hold the prophets accountable.** Those who refuse to take responsibility for inaccurate statements should not be given platforms. And "prophets" who live immoral lives don't deserve a public voice.

15. **Let's make the main thing the main thing.** The purpose of the Holy Spirit's anointing is to empower us to reach others. We are at a crossroads today: Either we continue off-course, entertained by our charismatic sideshows, or we throw ourselves into evangelism, church planting, missions, discipleship, and compassionate ministry that helps the poor and fights injustice. Churches that embrace this New Reformation will focus on God's priorities.

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The first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians is a very, very important letter for us because it so thoroughly captures the problems that we face as moderns living in this modern age. The reason is, of course, that Corinth was the most American city in the New Testament---it was a resort city, the capital of pleasure in the Roman Empire.

If you remember your geography you know it was located on the Peloponnesian peninsula, and the conditions under which the Corinthians lived were very much like the conditions under which we live, or to put that the other way, the conditions under which we live today are Corinthian conditions. Corinth was a beautiful city, a lovely city of palms and beautiful buildings, the center of pleasure for the whole empire, and it was devoted to two things---the pursuit of pleasure (largely passion), and of wisdom. It was a Greek city, and its inhabitants loved to philosophize, and they were given to what Paul calls, "the wisdom of words."

So the two major forces that were active in this city, creating the atmosphere in which the Corinthian church had to live, were these: intellectualism and sensualism. This was a city devoted to the worship of the goddess sex. That is why I speak of it as so like modern conditions today. In the city of Corinth there was a temple that was dedicated to the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite, and part of the worship of the Greek goddess was the performance of certain religious ceremonies that involved sexual relationships; therefore, the priestesses of this temple were really prostitutes, and there were some 10,000 of them attached to the temple. The city was openly given over to the practices of licentiousness; it was regarded as a normal, proper part of life and no one ever thought twice about it. If we think we are living under conditions where sensualism is rampant and worship of sex is widespread, these conditions do not yet approach those of the Christians who had to live in Corinth.

Furthermore, they were continually assaulted by the doctrines, dogmas and ideas of men following the great philosophers. This city was the heir of the great thinkers of the Golden Age of Greece---Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all had their followers within the city of Corinth. And as in every Greek city, they loved to gather in the public plazas and debate these issues endlessly. They were people given over to the love of wisdom.

Now into this city comes the apostle Paul. You remember the story from the book of Acts; he had come down through Thessalonica and had been driven out of that city by an uprising of the Jews against him, had gone for a brief time to the little city of Berea and then had come down into Athens.

There in Athens, as he walked about the city alone, he noted the many temples and was finally taken up to preach to the Athenians on Mars Hill. When he left Athens at last, he came down across the little isthmus into Corinth. There he stayed for a period of about a year and a half to two years, preaching the gospel and making tents for a living.

He had found a couple who had come from Rome named Aquila and Priscilla, who were also tent makers, and he stayed with them and led them to Christ. He formed a church in their home and gradually the gospel spread throughout the city and many of the Corinthians on hearing it, we are told, believed, and were baptized and became members of this church.

That was the church to which Paul wrote this letter, and as you read it, you see that it was a church in trouble; it was the biggest problem church in the New Testament. But although there were a great many things wrong about it, there were some things that were right, too. As Paul began his letter to them, he recognizes some of these things that are right. First, he calls them "saints"; he says, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints," then his eyes lift to the horizon of both geography and time, and he sees even us and he says, "together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:" and then his usual greeting, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." ([1 Cor. 1:2, 3](#))

Were there conflicts in the Corinthian church? Yes! Those conflicts would inevitably rob people of the peace that God intended us to have. They pit friend against friend and people who once sang about being one in the spirit suddenly are plotting against each other. Many have been scarred by some kind of conflict or division in their past. You understand those who say, "I love Jesus, but I hate the church". This is not the way our Lord intended things to be.

When Jesus prayed His High Priestly prayer on the night he was betrayed (recorded in John 17) he repeated a simple request: **“May they be one; may they be brought to complete unity” (John 17:11, 20, 22, 23)**. Four times Jesus mentioned this desire for the people of the church to work together.

The reason we are starting this new series in 1 Corinthians is to avoid those divisions that were destroying the church at Corinth and find the unity that our Lord prayed for.

In Acts 18 we read some of the background of the founding of the church in Corinth. We read that Paul began the church and spent a year and a half teaching them the Word of God. (Acts 18:11) Paul faced opposition in Corinth and eventually left town. There is an interesting sidelight in Acts 18:17. The Jews had brought charges against Paul and when they were dismissed we are told that the Jews beat up the synagogue ruler, a man by the name of Sosthenes. In verse one of 1 Corinthians we are told that the letter has come from Paul and “our brother” Sosthenes. It is likely that this is the same man; he would have been someone the church in Corinth would have known.

In his opening remarks Paul expresses gratitude that the Corinthians had been enriched by God, came behind in no gift, and were eagerly waiting for the revelation of the Lord (1-9). He immediately begins dealing with the first problem, that of division which manifested itself in what we might call "preacheritis" (10-17). Discerning that the underlying cause concerns the exaltation of human wisdom, Paul demonstrates the folly of boasting in such (18-31).

I. THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD BRINGS GIFTING (Vv.1-9)

A. GREETINGS FROM PAUL AND SOSTHENES (Vv.1-3)

1. To the church at Corinth, and those who in every place call on the name of Jesus (V.2)

2. Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus (**V.3**)

B. THANKSGIVING FOR GOD'S GRACE TOWARDS THEM (Vv.4-9)

1. Enriching them in all knowledge, even as Christ's testimony was confirmed in them (**Vv.5-6**)

2. Coming short in no gift as they eagerly await the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ (**V.7**)

3. Who will confirm them so they may be blameless (**V.8**)

4. For God is faithful, who called them into the fellowship of His Son (**V.9**)

II. THE FAILURE OF MEN CREATES DIVISION (Vv.10-17)

A. AS REPORTED TO PAUL (Vv.10-12)

1. His plea for unity (**V.10**)

2. For those of Chloe's household have reported contentions among them (**V.11**)

3. Evidently involving "preacheritis" (**V.12**)

B. PAUL'S INITIAL REACTION (Vv.13-17)

1. Rhetorical questions to illustrate the absurdity of what we would call "preacheritis" (**V.13**)

2. Gratitude that he personally baptized few of them (**Vv.14-17**)

a. Lest any should accuse him of baptizing in his own name (**Vv.14-15**)

b. Administering baptism was not his chief calling anyway (**Vv.16-17**)

III. THE FOLLY OF BOASTING IN HUMAN WISDOM (Vv.18-31)

A. GOD WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE (Vv.18-25)

1. Granted, the message of the cross is foolish to some, but not to the saved (**V.18**)
2. But God will the destroy the wisdom of the world (**Vv.19-20**)
3. God chose to use His foolishness and His weakness to save those who believe (**Vv.21-25**)
 - a. Because the world through its wisdom knew not God (**V.21a**)
 - b. So God chose to save mankind through a "foolish" message about Christ crucified (**Vv.21b-24**)
 - c. But even God's "foolishness" and "weakness" is wiser and stronger than men (**V.25**)

B. THE CORINTHIANS' OWN CALLING DEMONSTRATES THIS TRUTH (Vv.26-29)

1. Not many of them were "wise, mighty, or noble" (**V.26**)
2. But God has chosen those things that are "foolish, weak, base, despised, and which are not", so that no flesh should glory in His presence (**Vv.27-29**)

C. INSTEAD, BOAST IN THE LORD (Vv.30-31)

1. He provides for us the true wisdom, plus righteousness and sanctification and redemption (**V.30**)
2. We should glory only in Him (**V.31**)