



A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

INVERTED

INVERTED

SEGMENT I



A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

INVERTED

A COMMUNITY GROUP STUDY MADE, WRITTEN
AND
DESIGNED FOR UNION POINT CHURCH.

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INTRODUCTION

INVERTED: *put upside down or in the opposite position, order, or arrangement.*

Imagine for a moment a world view and context where fortune and wealth are not determined nor segmented by line of class or family, but are made open to every person's pursuit and awarded to those who run after it with abandon. A place where, one's dreams can become reality and all things are permissible to pursue regardless their taboo nature as listed elsewhere in society. A people who pride themselves in overlooking other's religious persuasion and deem all things relative. Where no one religious order should be proclaimed as the only way or truth, but all are seen as equal and acceptable means to finding fullness and happiness of life.

A day where sexual conduct carries no bounds and all restraint is seen as an obstacle to obtaining full human expression and satisfaction. A time when men have all they could ever want yet are driven by the need for more. Sound familiar? It may be easy to see ourselves in this descriptive and rightfully so. However, we share great commonality in this contextual perspective of the ancient city, Corinth.

In the time of Paul's visit and stay in this city, Corinth was a monolith of cosmopolitan projection. Everything about this city exuded wealth and welcomed the pursuit of religious expression and the acceptance of all things, even those of great repudiation and debauchery. What made Corinth such a

booming city, filled with industry, manufacturing and a heaping welcome of religious multiculturalism was its significance to the ancient world.

Although known as a port city, Corinth was unlike any other port around. Built on an "Isthmus" (known as a land bridge) which connected the greater Macedonian region with the Peloponnese and the area of Achaia, Corinth was the less risky option in the trade routes passing from the Aegean into the Ionian sea. Rather than making the treacherous sail around the Capes of Matapan and Maleas of the Aegean, where many sailors would meet their demise, Corinth became the viable option for providing inland trade transport. Shipping and war vessels alike would port at Corinth, unload all their cargo onto transports, including their ships, and make the 5 mile on-land journey across the Isthmus. Let that sink in. Full blown ships and their cargo transported across a 5 mile trek all made possible by paved roads and plenty of moving businesses to furnish the manpower.

These heavily trafficked conditions made Corinth a hot bed for a melting pot of peoples. As a major trade stop, this city became the sought out destination for traders of goods, ideas and religions alike. With this vast networking opportunity it is understandable why Paul would find himself in the mix of such an impressionable city. Through the use of his blue collar skills in tent mending, Paul would have the means and resources necessary to see the Gospel mission of both proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and calling both Jewish and gentile believers alike together into a family and

visual representation of the kingdom INVERSION that the true King Jesus makes possible on earth.

After establishing the church in Corinth, Paul moves on to return to Jerusalem. Evident for us in his letter back to the church is that the way of Corinth has slipped into and become a part of the church. Rather than living in the kingdom of Jesus, these believers are being drawn away by leaders seeking their own desires and benefits, the trappings of past sins, and an erosion of the full Gospel that Paul so proclaimed.

The entire letter of 1 Corinthians is Paul's passionate plea and call for the Corinthians to step into the INVERTED kingdom of God. The INVERTING power of the Gospel was to permeate every facet of their lives; how they functioned both in the world and even more importantly, within the body of Christ, the Church. Upon their receiving the Gospel, these people were to see their lives drastically rearranged by the overwhelming reality of Jesus' grace. To live in the kingdom of the world meant that one was living in opposition to the kingdom of God. To live in the kingdom of the world meant that one had resisted and inhibited the continual work of the Holy Spirit in His INVERSION efforts at overturning what once was.

We can imagine that this letter was piercing to those who were a part of the Corinthian church. Certainly Paul's words and challenges cut to the core of their hearts. Surely some were angered and enraged while others were convicted. Yet the revelation of their actions in contrast of the INVERTING

truth of God's kingdom was an effort on Paul's part to draw them back into a grace-filled and propelled existence.

Thinking back to the initial description of the city, it is easy to see great similarities in our day and time. In many ways nothing has changed. We still live in the tension of the already and not yet of God's work in our lives. Yet Paul's words and pleas are still as relevant, true and piercing for us today as they were then. His call for us to press forward in the INVERTED kingdom living of Jesus is as ever poignant for our current reality as it was for those in the days of Corinth.

The hope for this study is that our eyes would be ever opened and our hearts ever turned by the revelation of how Jesus' INVERTED kingdom should reign in our lives. Quite possibly like salve applied to a deeply planted splinter, Paul's words will draw out the places of our hearts and lives we have yet surrendered to the reign of King Jesus. The areas we continue to live as the world and areas that Jesus yet desires to completely INVERT with His kingdom reign of grace. Like Jesus' words applied to teaching His disciples how to pray, by the end of the study just maybe we will find ourselves joining in saying, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Over the next 16 weeks let's open ourselves up to and seek the truths of God's INVERTED kingdom. Let's turn loose our illusion of control in favor of seeing what Jesus will do in and through us as He INVERTS us for His kingdom's purpose and mission. Let's faithfully submit ourselves to His kingdom reign and see His INVERTED kingdom not only make us

different than the world around us, but call the world around us into His life giving grace. His INVERTED reign is meant to INVERT our lives so that our INVERTED lives will proclaim His INVERTED kingdom to a world that so desperately needs His INVERTED reign.



A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

PART I

INVERTED UNITY



A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 1

ONE KING

CHAPTER 1

ONE KING

PASSAGE

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. 4 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. 10 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. 18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." 20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to

shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-31 ESV

GRACEFULLY ENRICHED

Enriched in Jesus. These words signify, within Paul's opening remarks, how and through whom the Corinthian church can truly find and live in INVERTED UNITY. Since the infilling presence of the Holy Spirit and their faith in the Gospel, the Corinthians have been GRACEFULLY ENRICHED in Jesus. A part of this ENRICHMENT of the grace is the accompaniment of gifts. These gifts, Paul says, are a part of Jesus' reassurance and provision of sustenance while the body eagerly awaits His appearing.

Much like today, the church at Corinth found themselves in a heated debate and discussion over the gifts of the Spirit. Their debate had turned to disunity and division. Their focus had moved from extending the Gospel outward and living in the grace of Jesus' INVERTED kingdom, to a more inward quarrel over one another's placement and advancement within the church. We see this as Paul addresses the segmented body that has chosen sides and men to follow based on their teaching or gifting of ministry. "*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"*"(1 Corinthians 1:12 ESV). While the list Paul provides were men of great service to the kingdom, some unnamed men had slipped in and sought the following of others for personal gain. They were using the gifts and church as a platform for their own ego and name, rather than seeking the kingdom and all for the glory of God.

The church has been GRACEFULLY ENRICHED with all she needs in Christ Jesus. She is to be built up in Him and Him alone. All that is given, especially the gifts, are purposed solely for the glory of God and for the edification and unification of His church. No leader, no individual, no one other than Jesus alone is worthy of our allegiance and worship.

In our society today people love following men. Even in the church we find ourselves carried away with the gifts and words of men more so than the sacrificial love and grace of Jesus. We so often find ourselves divided by matters that carry little eternal significance and by our particular distinctive more than we are unified around the cross of Christ. Like in Corinth, people were accustomed to using all they had to fulfill all they wanted. This is how the world lives. In the INVERTED kingdom of God we are called to see ourselves brought low that Jesus may be lifted high. All that we are is to be leveraged for all that He desires to do. All that we have been so GRACEFULLY ENRICHED with is to point others to the GIVER of those gifts; the King of the INVERTED KINGDOM.

REFLECTION

In what ways have you been gifted by the Holy Spirit? How/do you use these gifts for the furthering of His kingdom? For the edification and building up of His church?

Who is someone you idolize more than Jesus? Who do you say you follow, not just with your mouth but your actions as well?

If you have ever experienced division in the church, how did it affect your life? Your walk? Was it in any way effective at pointing others to Jesus?

If we desire to see unity in the body, the church, where should we continually look to and point others to? How can we use our enrichment to do this?

CONFOUNDED WISDOM

In the days of Corinth, wisdom was vast and sought after. Spiritual enlightenment, academic progress and industrial smarts all carried the culture of the day. Men cherished wisdom because wisdom brought strength, wealth, standing and dignity. Eloquent ideas and speech were tools used as leverage for influence. Seeing how this permeated society, it is easy to see how the Corinthian church was attracted by the same ideas and tools within the church.

In the beginning of the passage we see that Paul is concerned because the church is divided in who follows who and over the distinctive that each carried. For some, these leaders had stepped in and drawn their focus and hearts away from Jesus by presenting them with well fashioned and polished presentations, flattering speeches, and seemingly wise ideas. They had been swept away by the wisdom of man. If something sounds good it is easy to be moved in the moment, but what Paul reminds the Corinthians, and us as well, is that what often sounds good is not always right or good.

To combat this Paul begins to unpack what the message of the cross presents. In the cross we see the wisdom of God revealed. In Jesus we see a king presented who willingly laid down His life for His people, becoming their greatest servant. This, Paul says, confounds the wisdom of men and is seen as folly. At the core of the INVERTED Kingdom of God we see a CONFOUNDED WISDOM that is unlike anything the world lives by. When people live INVERTED by the Gospel they will in many ways seem like fools to the kingdom of men. The wisdom of men is presented as a dominating force, one that establishes itself over others in great superior splendor desiring authority and accolades in exchange for their wondrous gift of intellect, presentation and abilities. To these types, service to others is inferior and beneath their so thought value. Paul is clear that in Christ's INVERTED kingdom, strength is found in the giving of one's life for another; in the sacrifice of the cross for the LIFTING of all men.

In the church today we can easily see the same devices and attitudes employed. We can find people who love the wisdom of men and refuse the CONFOUNDING WISDOM of the Lord. Like the Corinthians, in many ways we need to be reminded where the strength of the church is seen, solely present in the cross of Christ. Are you living in the CONFOUNDING WISDOM of the kingdom of God, or seeking the flattery and folly of the kingdom of men? If we claim to be citizens of Jesus' kingdom, we should see our perspective on what is wise, completely INVERTED by His servant lead reign. Only Jesus is worthy of our boasting.

REFLECTION

What are some ways you have been moved more by the words and wisdom of men rather than the words and wisdom of God?

In your life do you seek the counsel and direction of God, or do you value the counsel of men more?

How should we measure those that speak and lead within the church? Although they are imperfect, how do their lives reflect Jesus?

Based on Paul's words, what is the strength of the church? What is the strength of the Gospel?

As the church, ultimately who should we be looking to? Who is the head of the church? Why do we more often seek others to fill what only Jesus can?



A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 2

ONE SPIRIT

CHAPTER 2

ONE SPIRIT

PASSAGE

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

6 Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. 7 But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,

nor the heart of man imagined,

what God has prepared for those who love him”–

10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. 13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

*14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. 16 “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ. **1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-16 ESV***

DEMONSTRATIVE POWER

Words carry influence but true DEMONSTRATIVE POWER derails and upends the hollow projections of men. Paul continues presenting Corinth with the folly of the age in their so thought wisdom and goes even further into how it was not only the presentation of the Cross and Jesus crucified, but the power that accompanied the Gospel through the work of the ONE SPIRIT, that is the Holy Spirit. Laid bare before the people, Paul reminds them that it was not he who with cleverly devised words had shaken and transformed these people's lives. But it was ultimately the DEMONSTRATIVE POWER of the INVERTED kingdom of God as initiated by the Holy Spirit.

Those that had sought the affections of the people were not accompanied by such power. Not power mustered up as a stage act, but a power that melts the hearts of men and softens what has been hardened by sin and rebellion. DEMONSTRATIVE POWER, as Paul presents, is the power that was seen and DEMONSTRATED there on the Cross of Christ. This DEMONSTRATIVE POWER that raised Jesus from the grave was the same power that had awakened their lives and hearts. No word or wisdom of men could, or should, ever diminish this work of the ONE SPIRIT in their lives.

This DEMONSTRATIVE POWER, as Paul points out, reveals the wisdom of God that was hidden and not seen by those who had crucified Christ. Therefore, the wisdom of men only brings death and destruction and is unable to know, see, experience or carry the incredible, confounding wisdom of God. This truth was to point the people back to whom they would find true wisdom and power. Nothing men can deliver on their own holds even a candle to that which God reveals in and through His Holy Spirit.

The strength of the church is not found in the savvy of men, nor in people's ability to assimilate and rally around one person's presentation or ideas. But it is found in the unity of the ONE SPIRIT of

God. He and He alone is the one that appeals to and heals the hearts of men. It is Jesus alone that truly unifies the hearts of a people and purposes them with the wisdom of the Gospel. Anything short of this unity in Jesus and propped up by men, will have to carry the casualty and faults of men. To live in the INVERTED kingdom of God is to follow not simply men or their words, but to ultimately follow the ONE TRUE GOD as is made known through His ONE TRUE SPIRIT.

REFLECTION

How has the power of God, through the infilling of His presence and Spirit transformed your life?

Have you ever experienced division in the church? Would you say that in some ways this was due to personal preference and not in the move of the Spirit?

If we are faithful to the Gospel, how will we as the church live inverted to what the world presents? How do we maintain unity in the face of our faults and imperfections?

SPIRITUAL REVELATION

Division of the day was, in part, driven by outside “wisdom” being seen as the superior way. The core problem this presented was the people’s release of the Gospel in an effort to grasp hold of this age of wisdom. Living INVERTED means we turn from seeking the wisdom of men and look to Jesus on how we should see and handle the world we exist in. Wisdom in how we should live and exist, according to Paul, is given and provided by SPIRITUAL REVELATION.

Relativism ruled the day, every person in Corinth was in pursuit of what they determined was right in their own eyes. In the church, this thought was no different. Once Paul leaves, individuals with influence begin to proclaim other ways and wisdom crafted by men contrary to the Gospel. SPIRITUAL REVELATION, as Paul points out, is not determined by each man’s mind or understanding but is given and revealed by the ONE SPIRIT, that is the HOLY SPIRIT. The same Spirit that gives revelation in and through others will confirm it with the truth of the word and bring unity in the body.

The responsibility of the body is to be equipped with the truth of the Gospel and to test all things through the filter of the Holy Spirit. Paul is clear that the believer has no judge against them, other than God, but they are to judge and make judgements on all “wisdom” that is proclaimed and tagged with Jesus’ name. To live INVERTED in the age of wisdom and relativism is to take all things captive before the Lord; to seek out truth found in His revealed word and to test the spirits that surround the people of God.

What is clear to us in Paul’s writings, is that this SPIRITUAL REVELATION is not withheld for a select few, but is given access to all those that have been redeemed and transformed by the grace of Jesus. No man can lay claim to its origins and no man should seek personal gain with its misuse. This SPIRITUAL REVELATION is given and provided for the building up of the body of Christ, the church, and should be driven by and presented with all intents of pointing

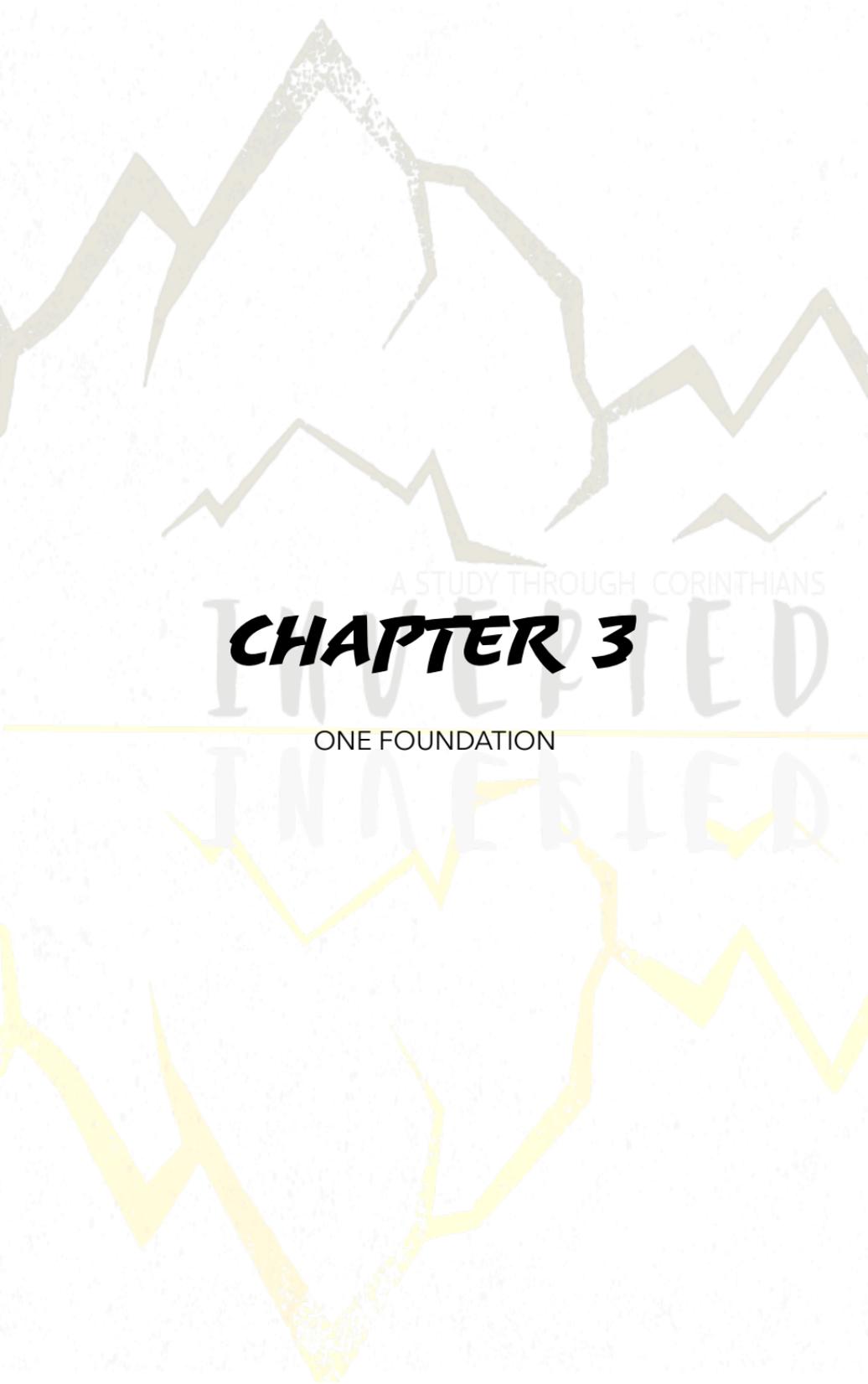
others to Jesus. Although this misuse was and still is commonly seen within the church, if we truly live out the INVERTED kingdom we will see these errors and persistently seek to see the church moved to unity in the ONE SPIRIT. Living INVERTED means we will consistently see the truth, speak truth and pursue the truth in all areas, living out this SPIRITUAL REVELATION, not with personal pretenses but with passionate love and service to God and others.

REFLECTION

Have there been areas before where you have let go of the Gospel in favor of other ideas or proposed sources of “wisdom?”

What are some “fads” of the day that seem to take away from the piercing truth of the Gospel and fool us into living like the world, rather than in the INVERTED kingdom of God?

How do we combat conflicting ideas and beliefs that are contrary to the Gospel of grace and seek to replace the wisdom of God with that of man? How do we maintain unity in the body in the face of these ideas and others that may let go of the Gospel to pursue contrary ideas?

The background features a stylized mountain range with jagged peaks. The mountains are rendered in a light beige color with a grainy, textured appearance. A solid yellow horizontal line runs across the middle of the page, positioned below the word 'CHAPTER' and above the word 'FOUNDATION'.

A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 3

ONE FOUNDATION

CHAPTER 3

ONE FOUNDATION

PASSAGE

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? 4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?

5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8 He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. 11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," 20 and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

21 So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, 23 and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-23 ESV

PLANTED

Once something is *PLANTED* it takes time to mature, to grow and to begin to produce another round of seedlings. This is something in its earliest germination process that will press through fragile periods in the transition from seedling into a fully grown and mature product. This is very much the vision and picture Paul has for the young church at Corinth. There in those early days, Paul assisted in the tending of this Gospel seedling. He had labored among them ensuring that what God was beginning in their hearts was being fostered, encouraged and nurtured. It is clear that Paul did not produce the seed of the Gospel. This work is solely that of Christ alone. But his efforts in building up the body were important.

Now since Paul has gone, this young plant of the faith is experiencing some growing pains. Pressed by the surroundings of the Corinthian way and world view, the church is seemingly being choked out by past sins and returning to their old ways of thinking. Clear for us to see is that this is not the way of the *INVERTED* kingdom. They are still of the flesh. The mind and wisdom of the Lord is still being fermented within them, and they must continue to resist and intentionally turn away from the draws of the flesh.

In this particular instance, we see that these other leaders have captured and divided the hearts of the people. With the enemy hard at work against them, they have allowed jealous thinking and division to overtake their *INVERTED* vision. This is not what was *PLANTED* among them. At an attempt to level the playing field, Paul points to the process that accompanies the growth of what has been *PLANTED*. "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor."

In the *INVERTED* kingdom of God, there are no men greater than that of Jesus. He is the Owner of the field, and we are the workers

of His harvest. No worker is greater than the Owner. What He has PLANTED should be of our utmost concern. As citizens of the INVERTED kingdom we are not the PLANTERS. We are the CARETAKERS. All that we do should be directed by a great love for the Owner of the field, the KING of this INVERTED kingdom. If we are motivated by the flesh in seeking glory for ourselves, we not only rebel against this grand INVERSION, but we bring great trial and harm to that which He has PLANTED in others.

God is PLANTING the seed of the Gospel all around us. He is fixing us on the ONE FOUNDATION. The question for us as the church today is, "How are we being kingdom caretakers over this grand INVERSION in others?" How and are we finding INVERTED UNITY?

REFLECTION

Why is it often easier to follow other men than it is to continually remain focused and rooted in Jesus' leading and guiding?

Who are some of the people in your life that have helped disciple you in this great INVERSION? How did they help to foster that which God had PLANTED in you?

As the body, as caretakers in the INVERTED kingdom, what are some ways we can point each other continually to the transformation and mind of Jesus? How can we assist in the growth of one another as we become rooted even more in the way of the Gospel? In the INVERTED kingdom?

BUILDING (START RIGHT. STAY RIGHT. FINISH RIGHT)

In the building trade, my grandfather commonly employed a statement that pointed his workers to the simple truth of construction. "Start right. Stay right. Finish right." I think we could say Paul would agree with this in the matters of the INVERTED kingdom. Shifting from the analogy of planting, Paul moves to draw our minds and hearts deeper into this work of the INVERTED. Jesus, Paul says, is the foundation. He is the cornerstone on which everything we do is BUILT ON and firmly resting in. There is no other foundation than that which is in JESUS. START RIGHT.

BUILDING on this foundation, interestingly enough, is a part of our work in the kingdom. It is a part of our care taking and ambassadorship of the INVERTED. To build well, there must be a plan and design to which all construction decisions and actions are filtered through. To deviate from this plan comes at a detriment to the entire project and compromises its ultimate purpose and intent. The plan we must follow is given and provided for us solely in the wisdom of the grand Architect and Creator of our lives. We are being made as His dwelling place, as temples built for hosting His presence. This is best witnessed and guided by seeing God's holiness and character as presented in the life of Jesus. This means resisting what the world says we should build and focusing on the guiding of the Holy Spirit in our lives, making us more like Jesus. BUILDING ON Him properly will mean that we look to Him constantly in all that we do, so that we will see His design for our lives BUILT according to His purpose and will. STAY RIGHT.

Culminating this chapter, Paul points us to the end, that final day when all will be revealed in our lives. On this day, Paul says, we will all see what has been built through the test of fire. Like the final inspection of a project, this day will put to test all that we have labored for and reveal if our BUILDING on the foundation, Jesus, went according to His plan. For some of us, we will see this through a lens of

fear and worry. Yet this is not the purpose of Paul's words. Although we should fear the Lord, as being in AWE of Him, Paul's greater concern is that we be diligent in all that we do with our lives. That we continue to abound in grace and fiercely pursue the presence of God. Paul knows that if we are seeking to be temples, we are seeking the presence of God. If we are seeking the presence of God we are BUILDING on the foundation He has provided in Jesus, according to the plans and purpose He has so set out and intended for us in His likeness, holiness and character. In the INVERTED, a constant check to see if we are staying according to His plan is to evaluate our life against the world. If we see a great difference than it is likely we are right on track in the BUILDING of INVERTED lives on the ONE FOUNDATION; the foundation of INVERTED UNITY. FINISH RIGHT

REFLECTION

Reflecting on where you have been and now are, are you building on the foundation of Jesus?

What are you currently constructing? Is it a life moved and motivated by what the world says or by the Gospel?

Having focus of "that day," as Paul refers to, how are you more inclined to see your life seeking the presence of God, being made as His temple? What does this mean for the way you should live?



A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 4

ONE SERVANTHOOD

CHAPTER 4

ONE SERVANTHOOD

PASSAGE

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

6 I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. 7 For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! 9 For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. 10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.

11 To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, 12 and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; 13 when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

14 I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. 15 For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. 16 I urge you, then, be imitators of me. 17 That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. 18 Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. 20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. 21 What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

1 CORINTHIANS 4:1-21 ESV

PUFFED UP

In this first segment of addressing divisions in the church, it is clearly seen, if we parse the words and phrasing, that Paul's character has come under attack. Certain individuals have come into the church, proclaimed physical prosperity, and challenged the Gospel preached and witnessed in the life of Paul. This manner of attack was to point to Paul's status in society as means to question his authority. In these individual's minds, wealth, prosperity and social status were a full sign of God's favor on these so proclaimed "leaders." Everything they did should produce profitable gain in their lives as visible evidence of this self proclaimed authority. Sound familiar?

In addressing these accusations, and questioning of his "credentials," Paul goes on to demonstrate how he and the apostles' way of life was like that of Jesus. Homeless, selfless, abandoned, chastised and persecuted by the world. All these things resembled and only further glorified the SERVANT KING Jesus and revealed for them and others their share in His INVERTED kingdom through uniting ONE SERVANTHOOD empowered with and affirmed by the Gospel. Becoming a servant so that others could become wealthy in grace was to resemble and share in the likeness of Christ. This ran contrary to those who were proponents of selfish prosperity, using the Gospel as a means to personal gain. These individuals, Paul says, are PUFFED UP with self, full of selfish motives and little regard for becoming the servant of many.

Because these leaders were PUFFED UP with self, they drew men's hearts and lives away from God. Away from the Gospel. Away from the truth. Division swarmed around them and only fractured the unity of the people found in the ONE SERVANTHOOD they had been called to. To boast in self or others was to take away from the glory that is due Jesus. It is poison to the church and a means to division. Paul is clear, this is not a demonstration of the INVERTED life we are called to. Rather it is only a way and means to seeing disdain brought against Jesus, by those who are watching, and the destruction of that which

Jesus paid dearly for on the cross. In this ONE SERVANTHOOD, we find strength. Not in those who speak with eloquent words or seemingly great sounding ideas, but in the truth of the Gospel lived out in the likeness of Jesus. Being PUFFED UP is never the result of being BUILT UP in or on the foundation of JESUS nor the fruit of living INVERTED by his kingdom.

REFLECTION

Through your experiences of either being involved around division in the church, or witnessing it from the outside, how did it effect the way you felt about the church at large? Did it bring glory to or disdain for Jesus' name?

Seeing how easy it is to worship men instead of Jesus, how careful does this make you in idolizing and celebrating those who lead? How should you measure their lives according to Paul?

Paul is not saying that we won't become noticed for how we live. In fact, living INVERTED will likely draw others attention. However, who should this attention point to?

If the church is to be ONE SERVANTHOOD of believers, how do we pursue unity as a people? What demonstrates to the world proof of the INVERTED kingdom?

POURED OUT

In powerful provocation, Paul reveals the PUFFED UP hearts found in the Corinthian church through drawing contrast to how they live in comparison with how he and the apostles live. Through a series of sentences Paul paints for them a picture of how they have become wealthy, powerful and in need of nothing. Paul says in many rights they have become like kings yet have missed the entire point and strength of the Gospel. In their pursuit of influence and power, they have traded the strength of the INVERTED for the weakness of the flesh. In becoming PUFFED UP with self, they have missed out on seeing how the INVERTED power of the kingdom is displayed through lives being POURED OUT in this ONE SERVANTHOOD.

To the world weakness is being a servant to others. In the INVERTED, strength is found in becoming a servant to all, being POURED OUT for the lives of others. This was the life Paul had demonstrated to the Corinthians. In his original coming to Corinth, Paul brought with him little visible sign of great power in and of himself. In his words, he had become the scum of the earth. Yet through his service to Jesus' INVERTED kingdom, God's true power was revealed by his life being POURED OUT in the ONE SERVANTHOOD of believers.

In prodding fashion, Paul pokes holes into the facades and charades of the day. The church was moving away from grabbing hold of the reality of Jesus' stature before and in the face of the culture He lived in. Paul is not railing against wealth or people having political or social influence or affluence. But rather, what He is railing against is the use and distortion of the Gospel as a means to personally gain all these things. This was not living a life POURED OUT for others. This was, and is contrary to the life Jesus had exhibited. This was contrary to the message of the cross. And in so many ways, this was contrary to what Paul had both brought and lived out among these young Corinthian believers.

Living in the INVERTED is to see a life that is called and set apart from how the world defines culture, yet establishes and demonstrates this INVERSION in the midst of the culture. It is like finally escaping an intensive firefight on the battlefield of war with your life intact, only to return in an effort to help and assist in the rescue of other wounded soldiers. Laying down your life for another, as Jesus says, is the greatest act of Love. Being POURED OUT and choosing others over yourself is to demonstrate an example of this greatest love. This is the creed of the INVERTED, the ONE SERVANTHOOD. POURED IN and POURED OUT. This is the way to true INVERTED UNITY.

REFLECTION

What are some of the ways you have had others around you pour out their lives in service to you?

If Jesus presents for us this INVERTED creed by the way He demonstrated the love of the Father for us in becoming our greatest servant, how then should we live?

Being servants in the face of secular culture is not to condone the culture, but to help see the kingdom pressed forward and be seen as the counter to it. What are some ways you have seen this attempted? How should we as believers see this kingdom INVERSION carried out in our own lives?

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A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

PART II

INVERTED SEXUALITY

The background features a stylized mountain range with jagged peaks. The mountains are rendered in a light beige color with a grainy, textured appearance. A solid yellow horizontal line runs across the middle of the page, separating the upper and lower sections of the design.

A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 5

LITTLE LEAVEN

CHAPTER 5

LITTLE LEAVEN

PASSAGE

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. 3 For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. 4 When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. 6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-13 ESV

CLEANSE

To Corinthianize was to be extremely sexually promiscuous. Maybe a badge of honor to some, this term carried undertones of negativity and scandalous associations to say the least. To use this term for another meant the person was extremely given over to the licentiousness of the flesh. All this was built upon a polytheistic world view that found a grounds of safe haven in the melting pot that was

Corinth. With temples to many and various gods, a form of worshipful offering, to some, was sexual interaction in the temples carried out with temple prostitutes. Given over to their pursuit of ecstasy, this behavior would not be confined to strictly the temples, but would be found spilling over and perpetuated in the greater portion of the city. Men were given over to their pursuit of sexual gratification and carried little to no restraint in their desires. In the midst of this culture, the church found itself in great strain and trouble to press forward in seeing a CLEANSE.

Clearly, word had gotten out that there was a man who had become intimately involved with his father's wife. Paul is greatly concerned not only because of the man, but as well because of the churches' seeming laxity in handling the blatant sin among them. In Paul's words a LITTLE LEAVEN of sin was leavening the whole lump. Failing to call for a CLEANSE, Paul says they are bringing reproach onto Jesus. How could they call others to the transforming life of Jesus, if they had someone claiming to be a believer yet living in outright blatant sin? To live in the INVERTED is to find authenticity through honest, hard conversations. This would qualify as such.

For many of us this may seem quite difficult to receive. It seems harsh for Paul to call for this man's exclusion. However, Paul is clear that this call for a CLEANSE is not for the sake of harming the man but to assist in his ultimate repentance and personal CLEANSE of sin. This LITTLE LEAVEN, if not addressed, could and would ferment and grow into something greater. Sin consumes and causes casualties. To live in the INVERTED means that we call each person to confess and repent of the LITTLE LEAVEN that threatens the whole life and existence of the lump that is the church. All this to point to the INVERTED transformation we have received through the grace of Jesus.

REFLECTION

Considering the seeming extremes Paul presents the Corinthians with in handling blatant sexual sin, how serious a threat is our sin (and in particular sexual sin) to the UNITY of the church?

From a basic Christian standpoint, why should we call people to the cleansing power of Jesus? What is the character of God?

If we live INVERTED lives, how should the Gospel shape the way we view sexuality and the way we approach sexual desire?

How do we, as the church, combat the standards and perspective the culture around us tries to press on us about sexuality? According to Paul, would allowing those who claim to be believers to remain in sin be the best way to present an INVERTED kingdom?

UNLEAVENED

Paul is a Jew. Many forget this reality when reading his writings. He saw Christianity not as simply a segment within the greater Judaeo values and monotheistic religion. Rather he saw and presented Jesus and His followers as the fulfillment and culmination of what God had promised to His chosen people. Seeing this we can identify Jewish crumbs in all of Paul's writings. Chapter 5 is no different. Speaking of a LITTLE LEAVEN and UNLEAVENED, Paul points the Corinthians, as well as us the modern day reader, back to the exodus of God's people from the oppressive clutches of the Egyptians in the great exodus. In this, Paul is presenting us with the truth that is ever revealed in Jesus. Through Jesus, in like manner of Israel's exodus from Egypt, God has made way for our exodus from the oppressive rule of sin and death.

Here in the Exodus account, the Jewish people are commanded to make for themselves unleavened bread. This was a symbol and call for the Jewish people to a new life, a life in the likeness of God, one free of sin. LEAVEN is most commonly used as a symbol for sin. This call for them to make a bread with no leaven, was to emphasize the reality that God had set them apart, and they were to experience a life completely INVERTED to that of the world that surrounded them. Here in Corinth, Paul harkens back to this truth and reaffirms the importance of seeing sin continually exiled and CLEANSED from our lives. The church is to be the very representation of the UNLEAVENED purity of God's INVERTED character and INVERTED REIGN.

Being UNLEAVENED people does not mean we quarantine ourselves away from the culture or society. It does not mean we withdraw from those that live in the LEAVENED lump that is the kingdom of man. Rather, Paul is clear, we continue to present the culture with the truth of the INVERTED in how we live among them. Our judgement is not for provoking those who are not yet in the kingdom of God, but should be employed in how we call like brothers and

sisters, like UNLEAVENED to continue abstaining from sin and pressing forward this INVERTED kingdom.

In a day of great sexual promiscuity and licentiousness, the UNLEAVENED body of Christ must in every way resist compromising the sacred and God given beauty that is the marriage bed. It is here that God is glorified by the way we honor His gift and command. It is here we present the proper INVERTED perspective of sexuality and sexual desire to the world. The way it was originally intended. To settle for anything less is to resist the INVERTED reign of the ONE TRUE king for the trappings of the LEAVENED kingdom man.

REFLECTION

Do you see great similarity to Corinth in both the church and the world we exist in today? Has the church responded in the way to which we see Paul calling for?

If someone leads a leavened life of sexual sin, whether it be sex outside of marriage, sex with the same sex, or even the use of pornography, to list a few, how can this affect people around them?

If you were not a believer and knew someone that claimed to be a follower of Jesus and found out they had committed a sexual sin, how would you view them? View Christianity?

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A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 6

SELF-DENIAL

CHAPTER 6

SELF-DENIAL

PASSAGE

When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? 2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! 4 So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? 5 I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, 6 but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? 7 To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? 8 But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!

9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

12 “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. 13 “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!

16 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” 17 But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 18 Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-20 ESV

DEFRAUD

If you simply breeze through into chapter six, it would seem Paul brings a problem to light out of no where. Here we are in the midst of a heated debate about what sexuality in the INVERTED kingdom looks like, and all of a sudden Paul shifts gear into legal matters. From Paul's response, it is clear to us that certain believers were in dispute with one another and seeking deliberation and justice to be served by issue of secular courts and officials. In our common society today we see little concern in this because of the construct of our court system as established within a representative republic. However, if we carefully unpack the system of the day, we will see that these systems were built upon a pagan worship of Caesar, and filtered through this lens. For Paul, to allow those who are not a part of the kingdom of God to deliberate on such issues brought reproach to Christ. It DEFRAUDED His name and kingdom.

In this particular instance , it is commonly thought that these individuals were both wealthy and were disputing over some form of transaction. In roman law, there was no option for a poor individual to bring suit or case against someone of wealth. Therefore, we are left to see that it is not a grand case of abuse against those who have gone without. Rather it is two individuals solely motivated and driven by their fleshly attitude to "get what's theirs." Because certain leaders had convinced the church that they were of great wisdom, Paul takes a serious jab at these individuals. "I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, 6 but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?" In simple terms, Paul is pointing out that if these guys were so smart, how is it that they have little insight on how the Spirit would lead them to guide and shepherd the body, and instead turn over these responsibilities to those who are non-believers?

At the core of this issue we find commonality with what drives sexual sin. In their lack of SELF-DENIAL, the people were moving in like manner of the culture, and sought only to fulfill their wants and desires.

They willingly DEFRAUDED others, even brothers and sisters in the family of God, because their hearts and lives were being driven by the lusts of the flesh. Paul points to the matter and refocuses our eyes on the kingdom. If we have such matters arise in the body, why not be DEFRAUDED yourself, so that the world sees a manifest presentation of the INVERTED kingdom right here on earth. After all is not being DEFRAUDED at the expense of and for the well being of another the very essence of the Gospel? Is this not the life of which Jesus lived so that we may find and receive God's grace? To live out the Gospel and live in the INVERTED is to continually live in a place of SELF-DENIAL. This is only possible through the power of the ONE who accomplished this seemingly insurmountable call.

REFLECTIONS

Relationally, what are some experiences or scenarios we have had or can see that may arise and create division if we do not continually seek SELF-DENIAL?

According to Paul, how should we view our interaction within the church? Is it simply seen as a distributor of "spiritual goods" to a group of consumers? Or would you say it is a representative body of the present INVERTED kingdom reign of God?

Have you ever willingly been DEFRAUDED for the sake of another? How does this response reveal the INVERTED kingdom to others?

APPETITES

Focusing back into addressing the cultural view of sexuality, Paul lays out a list of descriptives to provide perspective on who is an inheritor of the kingdom of God. "Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." Wait a minute Paul, that's a daunting list and in many respects extremely offensive. We can imagine a similar response to ours, upon reading this list, with those in Corinth. It leaves one to question, "Who can inherit it then?" Like a 1-2 punch Paul lays out these descriptives in an effort to point the people of Corinth back to who they were apart from Jesus, before they had received His grace and transformative love in their lives. "So were some of you."

In this statement Paul employs the past tense of were, to point the Corinthians back to the ways they misused and misfed the APPETITES of their lives. To make the contrast Paul uses the analogy of food. "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food." The common thought of the day was that, in like manner of one's APPETITE for food, men had sexual APPETITES that needed to be satisfied, and to refuse that impulse would be equal to that of starvation. This APPETITE for the flesh served up a menu of detestable misuses. Misuses of what God had made and intended for good within the monogamous expression of a covenant marriage between man and woman. Sexuality was and is not the problem. The problem was placing sexuality at the center of one's life, and believing that true satisfaction was only found in the unrestrained, unbridled and sin warped APPETITES of one's flesh.

Now living in the INVERTED, becoming made more in the likeness of Jesus and being temples of His presence, satisfaction is to be experienced and found in Jesus alone. Nothing else should define our lives. To live in sexual sin, in Paul's eyes, is to tear down the temple of God. It is to desecrate His Holy place and dwelling. If we do not

continually walk in SELF-DENIAL than we will walk in the ways of the world and not in the INVERTED. If our SELF-DENIAL does not shape our APPETITES, than the flesh will determine their misuse, and in these misuses we will turn back to the past tense of who we once were, finding little assurance and comfort in who Jesus has said we are. Living INVERTED is to see our APPETITES defined by the one who made us, and live in the SELF-DENIAL of desiring our own definition of what is best for our lives.

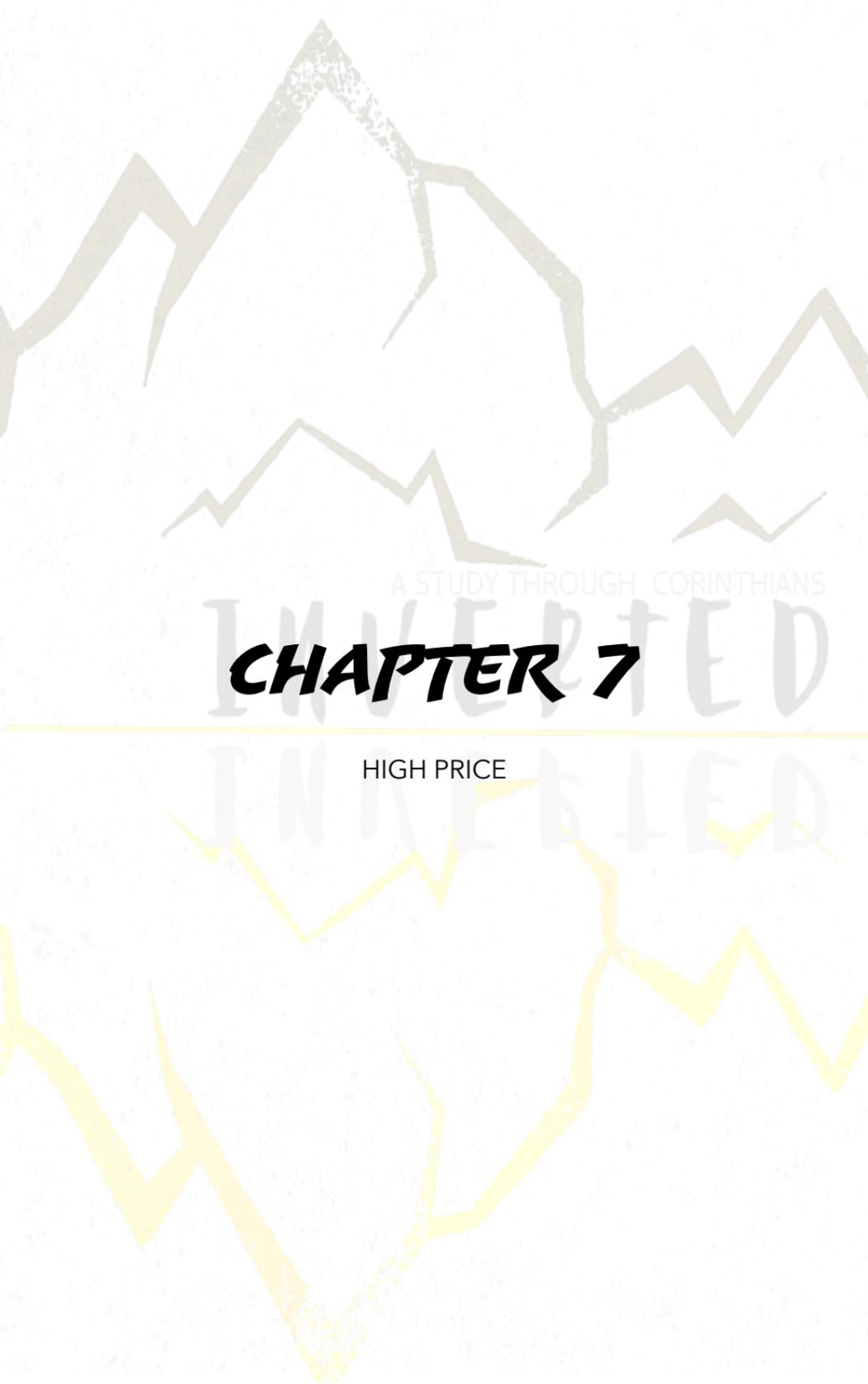
REFLECTION

How have you viewed sexuality as the purpose and identity of your life?

What ways have you seen your APPETITES driven and shaped by what you think is best instead of allowing them to be determined by the INVERTED reign of Jesus?

There will be times when we find ourselves living in the past of who we once were, making decision we know aren't best and refusing SELF-DENIAL. This is apart of our battle with sin. How do we continually walk in SELF-DENIAL? Whose strength must we lean on?

In the church, why do we view some misuses of APPETITES as worse than others? How do we point each other to the truth in love?

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A STUDY THROUGH CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 7

HIGH PRICE

CHAPTER 7

HIGH PRICE

PASSAGE

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." 2 But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. 3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

6 Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. 7 I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

8 To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. 9 But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

10 To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband 11 (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

12 To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. 13 If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. 15 But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. 16 For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

17 Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. 18 Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. 19 For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. 20 Each one should

remain in the condition in which he was called. 21 Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) 22 For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. 24 So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

25 Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. 26 I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28 But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. 29 This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, 30 and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, 31 and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. 32 I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. 33 But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. 35 I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

36 If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. 37 But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. 38 So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better. 39 A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. 40 Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God. **1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-40 ESV**

BURN

From the Corinthian perspective of sex, that of being an APPETITE needing its fill, we can make an easy correlation with how Paul speaks of this BURN in passion. The church has traded their BURN for God and living in the INVERTED for the BURN of their flesh, especially that of sexual desires. As a means and way to point the Corinthians back to the INVERTED, Paul reaffirms a biblical approach to seeing the BURN of passion controlled within the confines of covenant relationship. A good way to describe this would be the contrast of a wildfire to that of a controlled BURN.

Sexual sin does not carry with it just individual consequences. The hurt and wounds caused by the BURN of this wildfire of sin is deep and far reaching. It's rebellion comes at a HIGH PRICE for those who are affected by its clutches. As a means to address this, Paul cuts to the root of the heart. As believers living in the INVERTED kingdom our BURNing passion should be for Jesus. In likeness of Jesus, Paul goes on to talk about how it is not a bad thing to deny one's self of gratifying the BURN of sexual desire. In the kingdom it is more than acceptable to live a life that is celibate and single. This, Paul says, frees us to live completely immersed in and moved by this kingdom INVERSION. In the kingdom, choosing to live single and celibate is not viewed as a last resort, or a loss of value. Rather, it is something celebrated and encouraged for those who can live such a life and choose to be completely married to the INVERTED mission of the kingdom. It is the exchanging of one's BURN for sexual passion for the BURN of the kingdom.

Understandably so, not everyone will move in this way of life. Some will become believers after they are married. Others will choose to marry as believers. This is ok, understandable and permissible. Paul says, better to marry than to BURN with passion. Meaning, if the pull towards the desire of the opposite sex is so great, the only way to control the BURN is through the God ordained provision of marriage.

Paul also demonstrates that once this fire is lit, in the controlled BURN of the covenant marriage, it is best to keep the fire maintained. To deny one another and use this as a means of control over the other, is a selfish act and is not the call of the INVERTED to deny one's self. This is why Paul says the man is not in authority over his own body, and vice versa the woman is not over her own body, but both are in submission to one another.

The BURN of sexual desire, when not controlled within the guise of the INVERTED reign of Jesus, can quickly build and feed on the fuel of our passions. What may start out as a small match, when cast to the winds of the culture's direction, can quickly become a raging wild fire BURNING thorough the landscape of our life and causing collateral damage to all that surrounds our proximity. Along with the Corinthians, Paul reminds us that living in the BURN of the INVERTED is the only cure and extinguisher for the wild fires of sexual desire.

REFLECTION

If you are married, how does this change your view of sexual desire in the relationship?

If you are not married, how does this change your thinking as you see that the ultimate goal of living INVERTED is not marriage?

How have you seen the wildfire BURN of sexual desire consume the life of others around you? How should we as the church respond to this in means of the INVERTED?

PASSING AWAY

One thing is for certain about the *INVERTED* reign of Jesus, it will not *PASS AWAY*. Living in this assured certainty is part of what shifts the change of our focus from the short term satisfactions in the rebellion of sin, to the long term eternity. In addressing the temporary trappings of this world and the draw of sin and its *HIGH PRICE*, Paul points us to the truth that all these things are *PASSING AWAY*.

Observing the passage one might make the assumption that Paul is against marriage. However, contextually we see Paul not bashing marriage, but bringing light to the truth that living in the *INVERTED* reshapes our focus and our priorities.

In a like manner of today, the Corinthian church had begun to place *HIGHER PRICE* on their sexuality and relationships with others rather than with Jesus. Jesus himself drew the pharisees in with similar points and statements about the kingdom when asked about matters of marriage. Both Jesus and Paul make the case for living wedded to the kingdom, and if able, not feeling obligated to marry. The whole purpose of this was to help shift the paradigm from thinking marital relationships were the endgame of life. The whole meaning of life is to be wrapped up in and seen through the *INVERTED*. To live in communion with the Most High God was the full purpose of man; not marriage. The things of this earth are *PASSING AWAY*, but communion with the Father is everlasting.

In no way was Paul demeaning the value of marriage. Nor was he saying that if you were married you would never be able to fully live out the *INVERTED* call of the kingdom. Marriage is a good gift given by the Father, established by Him there in the garden narrative of Genesis. The problem of the day was that all importance was being given to things that were *PASSING AWAY*. Selfish wants and desires and the pursuit of satisfaction ruled the day. This ran contrary to the *INVERTED*, and this is exactly what Paul was calling to as he pulled the band-aid away from the gapping wound of their heart's pursuit.

Living in the INVERTED means we place focus on what matters the most; living for Jesus in everything we do. In our relationships we should be constantly seeking the heart and mind of the Father together. In INVERTED marriages both husbands and wives are committed to live with kingdom vision and make much of Jesus. When we do this the world sees the reign of God clearer, and the PASSING AWAY of this temporal is exchanged for the lasting kingdom of the eternal.

REFLECTION

Does the church today often place more priority on marriage than they do following and serving Jesus?

Maybe you are single or know someone who is single. How do we handle the topic of marriage in ways that do not demean or diminish their path and walk?

What if we raise kids who seek to follow Jesus and be wedded to His kingdom purpose and mission? Would you celebrate this decision or lament its forfeit of what could have been seen as blessings for you personally? (example, grandchildren, family...etc..etc.)

