

Corinthians: Context

*Our heavenly Father, it is good to know that You are present with us, to know that You have been walking before us this day. When we have deviated from Your ways, You have been grieved, and yet Your faithfulness is much greater than anything that we can imagine, and so we praise You this evening that we do have free access to Your throne of grace, that there is refreshing love in Your presence, and that wherever we are at this moment, we can come to You. We can find reconciliation with You on the basis of the finished work of Your Son and our Lord. And so we pray, Lord, that You would bless us, that we would listen attentively to Your Word, that we would get what we need to hear and that You would shape our lives, our minds, our purposes, and our wills in such a way that we would conform to You, for that is our glory and our design: that we would not pursue our own glory or our own design, but that we would live and think and act to Your glory. Father, we praise You. Thank You for Your presence, we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.*

I do not know if you still remember the little illustration, or the image, that I have been using for moving out of the book of Acts into the Pauline Epistles. The illustration I used is that of a plowman who goes with the Gospel into different fields. As he preaches the Gospel, as he plows through that ground, he turns up all kinds of things, mostly rocks: small ones, big ones, sharp ones, round ones, etc. He has to work his plow through that ground to make it fertile and useful for the Gospel, not so much so that the seed would be planted, but so that the seed would grow. The Pauline Epistles are catechism; they are instruction; they are aids for growth. As much as the speeches in Acts are presentations of the truth of the Gospels, so the epistles are instruction for growth. I think it is quite correct to think of the epistles in this way as we read them and study them in this course, but also in our individual study. Here we have instruction for growth, instruction to move from point A to point B. This instruction is always toward the goal of becoming mature in Christ, for us and for those who are entrusted into our care, whom we counsel, whom we disciple, with whom we are involved, before whom we preach, and for whom we lead a Bible study or just have a simple conversation about the Christian faith. That is always the point. So when we go to the different epistles, we go to different fields and we pick up different stones.

I come from south Germany, as I have already mentioned a few times, and I have not said a lot of good things about the German mentality. Well, here is another negative illustration, not about the German mentality, but about a certain soil. In south Germany, there is a mountainous area that spans east to west that is called the Alb. These mountains are actually pre-Alpine mountains. If you go farther south, you come to the Swiss Alps, but if you come to this area called Alb in southwestern Germany, and you look through the fields, they are literally littered with rocks. The reason why you see them so well is that most of the rocks are white and the soil is fairly dark, and so you see the rocks immediately. Here is a field and you think, "This is a hopeless task; I cannot believe that farmers actually work those grounds," because basically what they turn up every year is more rock. It seems like the supply of little stones and things from beneath the ground is incessant. The big boulders get thrown to the side and you see certain stone guards around the field and the farmers actually plant their crop in those fields, picking up those stones. Well, if you come to a particularly bad field that has a lot of those rocks, you really wonder if there is going to be any growth in that field.

As we move to Corinth, think of such a field. Paul should have never gone to Corinth. It is bad enough to go to Athens. It is difficult enough to work with the Thessalonians. It is challenging to work with the Ephesians and to move into the hinterland in Asia Minor with the Artemis cultists and various pagan religions, but Corinth is really the worst imaginable place—the worst imaginable field. That is why, when Paul plows through the Corinthian church and works with them in his first pastoral letter, 1 Corinthians, he has to turn up one rock after the next and say, "Now look at this. How do you still have

room in your life for that with Christ?” Just imagine the Corinthian church, particularly at the time of the first letter, but also at the time of the second, and Paul’s pastoral relationship to the Corinthian church as being filled with stones. Paul actually uses this image in 2 Corinthians, saying that he wishes not to put any stones or obstacles in their midst, but that he wishes to conduct his ministry to them in such a way that they grow. That is a wonderful comfort, and I want to start with the comfort first, before we begin to deal with the many problems that beset the Corinthian church.

I would claim that, if the Gospel is applicable to the Corinthian church, then there is hope for us. There is hope for all of us if Paul, as the messenger of God to the Gentiles, would not turn his back and say, “The Gospel reaches everywhere, but there is a little enclave where it cannot reach and that is Corinth. It is just too bad; it is just too difficult. Those people are completely twisted in their minds and conduct. There the Gospel cannot apply.” If Paul said that, we might have some reason to doubt the general applicability of the Gospel. However, you see that Paul, as the apostle to the Gentiles, does not avoid relating to these difficult people in these difficult circumstances, and he actually has a genuine Gospel hope for the Corinthians. If that is true, you cannot exclude yourself or your church. You may have been involved in a church that split. You may have been involved in painful loyalty questions in your church. You may have been exposed to situations in your church where there were power struggles and strife. You may have been in a church where immorality was rather rampant, although it was kind of under cover and not clearly dealt with. You may be participating in a church where there is a marked division between rich and poor and no one is doing anything about it. You may be in a church where the fellowship of the believers is defined by status. If you then add ten more terrible problems, you are close to the situation at Corinth. And yet Paul deals with them as children of God, as those whom God has called, as those with whom God has begun and is certainly not finished. Paul deals with the Corinthians as those who need great help, challenge, and work, and that is what he is doing. He rises to the occasion.

I would like to speak about the Corinthian epistles, particularly 2 Corinthians, but 1 Corinthians to a certain degree as well, as the highest degree of Paul's involvement with the church. Paul is extremely involved; he places a great deal of energy into these letters. It is very apparent in 1 and 2 Corinthians that Paul meets the great challenge of the church with immense devotion and dedication. You could nearly get a feeling of burnout if the Corinthian letters, particularly 2 Corinthians, did not speak about the great resources that Paul knows he has in working in that church. It is very important to discover that.

So by way of introduction, Corinth is a highly stony field. The stones Paul digs up are enormous. Every chapter of 1 Corinthians digs up another major boulder, and you do not know what to do. You feel discouraged with the first one and there are seven or eight more to come. Paul deals with them, saying, “Look at this; think about it—how does that relate to Christ? Where are we? Where do we need to go? Let us move.”

Just so that you are not becoming euphoric and idealistic, there is a very sober note about the Corinthian church. One of the things that I will be drawing your attention to as we get a little more into the details of the Corinthian church, and particularly as Paul deals with them in 1 Corinthians, is the matter of disunity, strife, and power struggle—I am sure that this sounds familiar to some of you. The Corinthians had an enormous amount of politics. Paul deals with the theme of reconciliation in 1 Corinthians and also in 2 Corinthians, and I will certainly give you a more detailed understanding of that. However, Paul sees a church that is torn in all kinds of ways and the disunity is virtually visible.

Paul writes to them, and I believe certainly some individuals and some parts of the church are responsive to his call. They mature, grow, soften, and become strong for the Gospel. Unfortunately, though, as far

as I can see from the other historical sources we have that make reference to the Corinthian church, it is not really characterized by any kind of a lasting health. The reason why I can say that is because, in 96 A.D., a bishop from Rome wrote a letter to the Corinthian church. His name is Clement of Rome and he wrote a letter that is known as 1 Clement, the first letter of Clement, bishop in Rome, to the Corinthian church, in 96 A.D. If you date the Corinthians epistles at around 50 A.D., then you have about 45 that elapse from the time when Paul deals with the Corinthian church to the time when Clement of Rome deals with the Corinthian church. You may be surprised to hear what happened in 96 A.D. The young people in the church had thrown out the entire group of elders. Clement of Rome wrote a pastoral letter from Rome (not a papal letter, you understand) at the end of the first century, appealing to these young, certainly promising and enthusiastic leaders, to turn away from their rebellious ways of disunity, to bring the godly eldership back into the church, and to resolve their difficulties together. Obviously, that is easier said than done. I can think that, of many churches today where there is an enormous challenge between two generations of people—an older generation that is highly traditional, and a rather modernistic, progressive group of younger people—there is enormous tension; so this is obviously nothing new and it has happened in many churches since. And as a result, Clement of Rome appealed to these leaders, and the total church in Corinth, in A.D. 96 to turn away from their divisive ways and to seek what is biblical from the Old Testament and the New Testament.

That is a somewhat discouraging note before we go into seeing what Paul is doing as the apostle of the Gentiles and the messenger of God and what the Word of God speaks into the Corinthian situation. It seems that there is perhaps partial fruit but not complete and lasting fruit. Obviously, the generation Clement addressed is not the same generation that Paul is speaking to. They are the children of these people to whom Paul wrote, or perhaps their grandchildren, depending how fast the generations turn over. Normally the turnover was a little slower than it is now. We can see that perhaps Paul's generation turned, and yet there was so much fermentation in the Corinthian church of disunity and self-seeking that it certainly re-emerged in the next generation.

As a side comment, I said that 1 Clement is a pastoral letter of a bishop in Rome. It is interesting, for those of you who are interested in the beginnings of Roman Catholicism and the papal authority in Rome, that this successor of Peter—perhaps there were one or two other bishops between Peter and Clement in Rome—does not appear in this letter as a pope. He does not write as the *primus inter pares*, the primary among many, the one who sits in the central authoritative place in Rome and writes to the Corinthians. He writes more as one bishop writing to another church. Certainly he was in Rome, but still the tone of his letter is that of appeal to Scripture and to the Gospel. The wording of this letter is pastoral, not at all heavy-handed. It is a wonderful piece of early Christian writing that is a part of the writings of what we call the Apostolic Fathers, written in Patristic Greek. So this letter is really an appeal; it is very interesting to see how he writes to the Corinthian church at the end of the first century.

We can also learn from Clement of Rome how far Scripture had become authoritative. It is quite instructive how many references Clement of Rome makes to the New Testament. For those of you who are interested in how the New Testament came to be accepted as canon, it is instructive to see that there was apparently not a lengthy process of acceptance, but rather, even at this early stage, Clement of Rome makes reference to Scripture, and to 1 Corinthians among others. I will read that to you from his letter.

Clement of Rome, around 96 A.D., writes to the Corinthians, "Take out the epistle of the blessed apostle Paul. What did he write to you first of all in the beginning of the Gospel? Of a truth he charged you spiritually concerning himself and Cephas and Apollos, because even then you had formed parties." So you see, he says, "Even then, even at the time of Paul, you already had your parties and your

divisiveness. You still have it now, but listen to what the apostle Paul wrote to you, to your fathers, to your older generation in your church. See the root of the problem.” What is amazing, though, is that here already is a bishop who alludes and refers to 1 Corinthians with the names Paul, Cephas, and Apollos as a letter generally known and accepted as an apostolic letter, and he makes reference to that, reminding them of what Paul wrote to them. I find that instructive in many different ways, but I tell you this so that you will have an historical context in which to read the plowing of Paul and the turning up of so many stones in Corinth. It is highly sober and sobering. It is very realistic. It is partially disheartening, and yet, underneath it all, there is a wonderful encouragement, namely: God is working with the Corinthian church and God is working with you. After you hear this lecture, you may think that your life is more connected with the problems going on in Corinth than perhaps with the wonderful heights of soaring among the Philippians who seem to have kicked into a high level of maturity right after conversion (which is probably not really true), but God is working with you nevertheless. If you need some realistic common ground for your problems, 1 Corinthians will provide it for you. It will encourage you that the challenges that you may face in association with your churches are not beyond the reach of God's grace.

However, the work is cut out for you. The work is cut out for Paul, and you see that he does not just sit back and say, “Praise God for His grace—may the Corinthian church sometime, someday, somehow become mature.” You see how Paul’s suffering, compassion, hard work, and involvement with the Corinthian church are certainly means that God uses. God uses Paul to help these very young and confused Christians in Corinth to learn the beginnings of the Gospel. By way of introduction, then, this is what we have before us: a sober assessment and yet great hope, and also perhaps a little warning right from the outset: “Respond to the call of the Gospel. Soften your heart; do not harden yourself to that call to turn and to conform to that to which God is calling you.” The more you can identify with the Corinthians, the more you need to hear the call to grow toward the Gospel. That is an important point, not to become lazy, because we do see that at least a certain group among the Corinthians of Paul’s day, and also the next generation, fell exactly back into that trap that Paul so eagerly sought to bring them out of.

We could ask why the Corinthians seemed to have so many more problems than other churches. Perhaps I can try and answer that by taking you on a brief tour of Corinth. We do need to go to Corinth and see a little of what was going on there. Obviously, Corinth is not the only place where these things took place—they happened in other places as well—but in Corinth there was a particularly extreme concentration of the things that were wrong with the Hellenistic world. That is probably what makes the Corinthian situation so formidable. There were partial elements of these problems in Ephesus, in Alexandria, and certainly in Rome, but in Corinth they seem to be particularly concentrated. We see that in the western world as well. I think it is no secret that Amsterdam in the Netherlands is a particularly fallen place in terms of immorality, drugs, and the decadence of western society. Although obviously you would find many of the same things in Frankfurt, New York, and Los Angeles, there is a particular concentration in Amsterdam. That is really how you should see Corinth—as particularly bad, particularly fallen.

Let us look at Corinth a little bit. You know that it is situated on the small isthmus that connects the mainland of Greece with the Peloponnesus, as it is called. The city of Corinth was well-known in the ancient world. The wealth and significance of Corinth is mentioned by writers as far back as Homer, who writes about wealthy Corinth in his *Iliad*. Far back in Greek history, Corinth appears to be a flourishing, significant city, particularly because of its location—it had a very nice port connection with the entire Mediterranean world. If you want to understand commerce and the cultural life of the ancient world, you look at the cities that border the Mediterranean Sea. A lot of sea commerce occurred there, and so it is quite natural that the city of Corinth grew.

When Rome appears on the map in 146 B.C., you see that there is basically an incision in the history of Corinth and that is very fatal to cities. And that incision is so stark that the history of Corinth has to begin over again. Citizens were killed in the destruction of Corinth in 146 B.C., and many people who were not killed were sold into slavery. The entire culture that had developed in Corinth was basically eradicated in 146 B.C. The territory became public land of the Roman Empire, and Corinth was only rebuilt in the time of Julius Caesar, the first emperor of the Roman Empire, in 46 B.C. Between the destruction and the rebuilding there were essentially 100 years of “no man's land”—certainly there were small settlements, but there was widespread destruction, no history, and a low economic life. Out of that destruction grew, in 46 B.C., a new city established by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony. That is the Corinth that Paul is relating to. It is only 100 years old; it is a young city. St. Louis has more tradition and more history than Corinth. And that says something, if you compare it with some cities that have a 2000-year history. It is important to see that, in Corinth, we have an uprooted, newly immigrated, newly established society that has no roots. This city is basically searching for identity, and the identity they find is shallow and superficial. There is no sense of any driving purpose or motivation. People are seeking some kind of an identity in commerce and in relationships with people, and that is the kind of superficial life that grows successfully because it still holds charm and attraction from its basic locality. And so Greeks return to Corinth, and not only Greeks, but also Jews, as we know from various sources. One source is an inscription that speaks about the “synagogue of the Hebrews,” and so we know for sure that Jews established there a house of prayer, a house of reading, a house of learning, and a house of worship. In Corinth the Jews established the Diaspora Jewish institution called a synagogue. Although we cannot go into details here, the synagogue was basically the outpost and the identity center of Jewish people outside of Palestine. And in addition to Greeks and Jews, there were certainly others who moved there as well; some other indigenous people and also certain Romans came into this Roman colony.

Thus, what we have in Corinth is a cosmopolitan, interracial and interethnic town that has been cut off from its historical roots and is sort of swimming around with its new economic prosperity and its new cultural exchange. The name “Corinth,” then, becomes synonymous with immorality, decadence, and the decay of human society. Please understand me correctly: Corinth is not exclusively to be exposed as a wicked city over against all other cities, but I would say there was certainly a degree of concentration of wickedness there.

Paul was aware of that. First Corinthians 2:3, Paul’s first impression of Corinth, seems to allude to that, and he says he has nothing there to preach but Christ crucified. But we see that Paul moves into this church. Let us take a moment to look at where we are in Paul’s journeys, Paul’s ministry and his sojourn in and out of Corinth. At the point of Paul’s first ministry in Corinth, we are in the second missionary journey. That is the first stay, for about 18 months, in Corinth, at which time the Gospel is being preached both among Jews and Gentiles and a church is established in this difficult territory. I will describe that further, but first let us look at what Paul finds. He finds people who are, from the start, fighting against each other. It is kind of a rough, “fight-for-yourself” society. So there is an inability to collaborate, to work together, and to seek each other's good—I think those were fairly foreign words among the Corinthians as they became Christians. They are reconciled with the living God, they believe in the Gospel of grace, and then—in some ways, although I’m exaggerating a little—they continue to please themselves in the patterns of the past. That is the point at which Paul engages them as he writes to them.

What do they have? They fight for themselves in terms of position, authority, and influence. They have certainly earned their own wealth, and so they will not share with those who have little or nothing. The attitude is, “I am a self-made man; why should I give to this person who has not worked or who is not a

self-made man?” There is a sense of pride and superiority that goes into this very immature, young Christian church. If there was strife, they would certainly go to a lawyer. That is not very fashionable in Christian circles in the United States today, but at that time, they simply got their attorney right from the start. They chose to go to a lawyer rather than sit down and say, “Whose mercy are we recipients of? What is our identity in Christ?” That was a truth that was claimed for their personal lives, but then the way they acted among each other was very different: “I have to fend for myself, and I am going to get a lawyer, and I am going to get out of you what is mine.” Also, there is rampant, notorious immorality. I believe that the reason immorality continues in Corinth is a neo-platonic way of thinking. I have gone into that a little, but I want to just say two or three sentences about that because it is so important for us to detect neo-platonic thought in our modern world. I do not think the immorality was caused solely by the sins of the Corinthians saying, “I want pleasure, and if Paul robs me of pleasure, I don't want him.” I think the cause was a little different, and it was that the philosophical atmosphere among the Corinthians—and particularly in Greece—was this: there is a difference between mind and body. What we do with our bodies has nothing to do with our minds. They are separate compartments. They do not affect each other. My sexual conduct does not affect my mind and my mental life, and the Christian faith is mental; it is “spirit life.” It has nothing to do with the body. There I am forgiven before the unseen living God. I am forgiven, and I live a reconciled life in my mind, but I still continue to hold this division between mind and body, so what I do with my body does not matter. It only matters that I think rightly, confess rightly, believe rightly, and talk rightly. All of that must be orthodox. But what I do with my body—who cares? That is separate, anyway.” Plato taught this division between that which is ideal and mental and that which is physical. Actually, a common denominator of various philosophies at the time was that the body really needs to be overcome. Remember what I told you about the Stoic philosophy and Epicurean philosophy. There is neo-platonic thought in stoic philosophy.

When the Gospel is preached, you find a philosophy of life and creation that is diametrically opposed to this neo-platonic division between mind and body: namely, “Use your body and your mind to the glory of God.” The Gospel says, “What you have done thus far is to use your body and your mind to your own purposes, your own lusts, your own designs. Now everything, the whole person—body, mind and soul—is dedicated to God.” That is a major change. And I believe that many in the Corinthian church had a very difficult time accepting this part of the Gospel—that God is the creator and Savior of the whole human being, and therefore the body needs to be saved as well. What I do with my body is extremely important because God is the creator of both body and spirit, and He does not look down on that which is physical. It has equal value to that which is mental. God made this world good. He loves the physical element of His creation. He is Lord of all His creation and He is claiming it all back, so that both the physical and the mental—the intellectual, the unseen part of God's creation in man—would give Him glory. Thus the Gospel that Paul preaches will not allow any separation of these worlds. This is a difficult concept to get across.

The same is true about what Paul teaches about marriage, as you look at 1 Corinthians 7. Also, as I have already mentioned with this theme of disunity, the Corinthians have a great problem with any form of authority. I believe the Corinthian church had a sense of immediate resistance to any authority because they thought they needed to resist the beginnings of authority. They needed to fight for themselves and defend themselves because authority meant that their lives were somehow being narrowed and they did not want that. Thus they rejected any authority, but Paul has this to say: “The reason you do not like human authority—even if it is good, wholesome and not abusive authority—is because you really still have an independence from God in your mind. If you were just rejecting human authority that would perhaps be okay. But there is something deeper in you and that is that you want to be your own masters.” Paul exercises a kind, well-measured, careful, non-abusive form of authority to help the

Corinthians submit to the authority of God. Sometimes he tells them, “You must do this,” just to mature them to the point of submitting to the authority of God.

Obviously, all of what I have said thus far has a great deal of relevancy for modern life because we have all of these problems. We have problems with resisting any form of authority just as the Corinthians did. I want to make clear that there is a correct resistance to abusive authority. Considering the history of German abuse of authority, I am not one to advocate that authority is always good. However, I must also say that if you are allergic to any form of authority, you probably have a spiritual problem. You probably resist that God has a will for and in your life; you will have no part of that. God can be God. You can worship Him, you can confess Him, but He had better not meddle in your business. Now if some gentle leader comes in and asks you to look in this area and you reject that person, then you know you have a problem. Have you ever had a person who reacted like that to you—who refused to listen and then simply disappeared? See how Paul has that pastoral hand as he deals with the Corinthians in 1 and 2 Corinthians. That is why he speaks about the problem they have in accepting his apostolic authority. I can assure you he is not a pathological person who needs affirmation and pouts about the horrible way that the Corinthians do not accept his apostolic authority. For their sake, he has to show them that he has rightful claims and they had better accept him. He sees that, as they reject his apostolic authority, they are really rejecting something much deeper. It is for their good that he needs to exercise some form of benevolent, useful, mature authority. I am quite aware that this can be abused. You have to be a very healthy person if you exercise authority over another person. You must know in your heart that you are not trying to promote or justify yourself, that you are not trying to set the record straight and make it clear who is in charge, or anything like that. If you have these motives, you are in for a big challenge. However, if you know in your heart that you really do not need to deal with the Corinthians for your own sake, but for their sake, you will stay and work with them. If you measure what you do carefully so as not to overreact and overburden them, then you can learn a lot in the school of Paul. Corinthians shows how he deals with a rebellious, anti-authority church that is characterized by disunity. The Corinthians are just so resistant to anything that says they may have to be under the authority of Christ.

There is much to be learned, but there is also much to be careful about. You and I have both seen people who have a lot of psychological problems, and they project those psychological problems and say, “Paul did it and I have to do it, too.” They do not see that Paul took himself out of the whole thing. He was very careful, so that they could not say, “Look at Paul, look at what he does. He does a lot of things wrong, so why should we try to do them right?” If that were to happen, everything would fall apart in anarchy. Instead, Paul is careful so they cannot point to him and say, “Look at him—he lives off of our support; he does not work; he gets our money; he just wants to be a respected leader all over the world, so why should we listen?” He is very careful that they know that he has no reputation, and that he is willing to suffer, to have sleepless nights, and to be beaten. He wants them to see that he is working very hard with his own hands so as not to be a burden to them. He is very careful not to receive money from them, but only to have them to be gracious and give something to Jerusalem. He does this so that they have no excuse to disregard his authority, and so that his authority is be a godly authority. So the measure of guidance and leadership that Paul provides for the Corinthians is a wonderful model. If you read 1 and 2 Corinthians, paying attention to how Paul leads these people, it is wonderful and highly instructive. However, you must be careful that as you minister you do not project your own unresolved feelings and insecurities into the equation. That really makes the situation very messy—when you cannot take yourself out and take a step back and say, “Wait a minute. They don’t respect me; they reject my authority. Am I going to pout? Am I going to retaliate? What am I going to do?” I think Paul spent many nights “sleepless,” as he says in 2 Corinthians, reflecting on how he was going to respond and who he was in Christ. The wounds and the hurt that he had received from the Corinthian church, he had to resolve in his own prayer chamber, maybe with some other believers, and come to a point of

clarity so that he could look the Corinthians in the eye and say, “I forgive you. I hold no grudges against you, but now you need to develop and mature in Christ.” This is wonderful leadership.

This is all still very introductory. I have not gotten into 1 Corinthians yet, but I think that is the important general understanding of what is going on here and what Paul is pursuing with them. I think that should be good enough in regards to the first question of occasion. Let me say a few words about the purpose, then, particularly of 1 Corinthians.

What purpose is Paul pursuing? You can already deduce it from what I have said. In 1 Corinthians, I believe that Paul’s purpose is that he desires to bring the Corinthian church to a place of unity, morality, and reconciliation. The reconciliation theme is much more prominent in 2 Corinthians, but we can still say that these three themes characterize the Corinthian letters.

Let us turn to 1 Corinthians in preparation for the next lecture. You see that Paul has obviously left Corinth. He is on his third missionary journey from A.D. 52 to 57, and he has made Ephesus his main base. He stayed in Ephesus for quite a while: 52 to 55 A.D. During that time of staying in Ephesus, he wrote 1 Corinthians probably around 54 A.D. What we can surmise here is that after Paul left Corinth in 52, he received various reports. He had correspondence and interactions with the Corinthian church and then about two-and-a-half or three years later he wrote back to the Corinthian church. He saw the things that were challenging to them, and that was the purpose for his writing: to bring them to a certain point. Obviously, we cannot totally exhaust the ramifications and the applications that come out of Paul's ministry to the Corinthians. As painful as it was, so much of it is fruitful for us because Paul addresses so many themes and areas.