Growing in Grace, Growing in Community

*Life Lessons on Maturity with the Corinthians*

***Who were the Corinthians and why do they matter? --* 1 Corinthians 1:1-9**

***The Surprising background of this immature church. . .***

 It is well known that the Corinthians were the “problem children” of the Apostle Paul. He spent more time with them, and wrote more to them, than any other church. But the relationship was strained, at best, since the church showed many signs of dysfunction and immaturity. This is why the book is a perfect study in what spiritual maturity is and isn’t, and how individuals–and churches–can live up to their calling in Christ.

❖The Corinthians lived in a dynamic, diverse, commercially-driven culture–-like our own.

❖ The Corinthians lived in a time of moral decay and strong secular/cultural influences-–like our own.

❖ The Corinthian church was founded by the Apostle Paul himself, who spent over eighteen months teaching and establishing it in the faith. Acts 18:1-18

❖ The Corinthian church was strengthened and taught by the eloquent Apollos. Acts 18:24-28

❖ The Corinthian church was a genuine and undisputed church of Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:2

❖ The Corinthian church had been blessed by God’s grace and was in possession of all of the resources necessary for its own welfare, the spread of the Gospel, and the glory of God.

***Key Question:***

***With all of these spiritual benefits, how was such a church***

***still immature, divided, and plagued by so many problems?***

**Growth Principle #1: We grow in grace only when we lovingly apply God’s grace and gifts by faith to our present moments and in our ongoing relationship.**

 We know this because in spite of their having been, in Jesus, “enriched in every way,” and that they did not “lack any spiritual gift,” they had myriad problems, all of which stemmed from spiritual immaturity:

Disunity (1:10–2:5)

Worldly thinking (2:6–3:4)

Sexual immorality (5:3-13; 6:12-20)

Quarreling (6:1-11)

Warped attitudes towards marriage (7:1-40) Self-centeredness (8:1-13)

Lack of self-discipline (9:1-27)

Spiritual arrogance (10:1-33)

Disregard of creation order (11:1-16)

Disrespect for the Church (11:17-34)

An independent spirit (12:1-31)

An unloving spirit (13:1-13)

Misuse of spiritual gifts (14:1-39)

Defective doctrine of the Resurrection (15:1-58)

***What if Paul were to write to Lownes Free Church, or “The Church in Philadelphia” or Springfield? Would he have to deal with some of these same issues? Others?***

1. A church’s maturity must not be judged by how it is gifted, but HOW those gifts are being used.

Are we good stewards?

2. A church’s maturity must not be judged by its past, but its present. Are we building well on our historic, solid foundations?

3. A church’s maturity must not be judged by what it knows, but rather what it applies. Are we wise?

4. A church’s maturity must not be judged by having the Truth, but applying and speaking that Truth in love. Are we loving?

***Going Deeper--For Growth Groups:***

1. Mature churches do exist! Contrast what Paul says in this letter with his comments to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:1-10; 2 Thess. 1:3, 4). What qualities does Paul say that they exhibited that were absent in 1 Corinthians 1:1-9? For example, compare 1 Thess. 1:3 with 1 Corinthians 13:13.

2. What are the practical signs and acts of a loving church? How do you think we are doing?