

Introduction and Division in the Church (1 Corinthians 1:1-13)

Expository Lessons from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

I. Introduction: Why Study First Corinthians?

- a. As our group has grown beyond what can reasonably fit in one living room, we look forward to meeting regularly in multiple house church locations. However, several expressed a desire to meet together while we revisit some foundational teachings of the historic Christian faith. We hope that we can thereby be better equipped to be teaching from a common understanding as we move forward in multiple meeting locations.
 - i. Rather than come up with a series of topical lessons, we thought it might be more interesting to go through **1 Corinthians** together, since so many subjects of interest are covered there.
 - ii. While we did have a teaching series going through this letter in 2016, we were a much smaller group then. Most current members of the church were not here at that time, and they asked that we go through this book again.
- b. This letter addresses several problems in the Corinthian church. It is very practical and hits a wide range of topics. Therefore, we can learn a lot here regarding both basic Christian doctrine and the Christian way of life.

II. The Letter's Audience and Their Cultural Background

- a. We will be more likely to get the most out of a letter and less likely to take things out of context, if we first understand some basic things, such as:
 - i. Who wrote the letter?
 - ii. Who was the primary intended audience for the message of the letter? What were the characteristics of the city and church to whom this letter was addressed?
 1. Was this to the leaders or to the entire church?
 2. How well did the author know the recipients of the letter?
 3. Were these people from Jewish or Gentile backgrounds?
 4. What was the culture that the Corinthian Christians were coming out of?
 - iii. What was the main reason for writing the letter?

b. Introduction to the letter.

i. Read **1 Corinthians 1:1-9**.

1. Paul is the primary author. The letter is written in the first person, "I...".
2. Paul says it is also coming from Sosthenes, who was discussed in **Acts 18** as being the synagogue ruler, who apparently came to faith.

c. Background on the church in Corinth.

i. The church had some Jews in it, but was predominantly made up of Gentiles.

1. "You know that *you were Gentiles*, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led." (**1 Corinthians 12:2**, NKJV)

ii. While the church included people from different parts of the social strata, most of the Christians were not from prominent backgrounds.

1. "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." (**1 Corinthians 1:26**, NKJV)

iii. In this letter, Paul is responding to some questions they had sent to him in prior correspondence. However, he is also addressing things he heard from others. We don't have the original questions, only Paul's responses. (Therefore, we can only attempt to reconstruct those questions.)

1. "Now *concerning the things of which you wrote to me*: It is good for a man not to touch a woman." (**1 Corinthians 7:1**, NKJV)

iv. Corinth is in Achaia, modern Greece, not far from Athens. It was a multi-cultural port city located on an *isthmus* (a narrow strip of land connected to the mainland, separating two seas).

1. Dio Chrysostom, a Greek writer and philosopher who lived in the first century the same time as Paul, described Corinth as "prosperous and wealthy". (Dio Chrysostom *Orationes* 37.36)

v. Bruce Terry did his doctoral dissertation on a linguistic and cultural analysis of **1 Corinthians**. He went back to primary sources, which he cites in his dissertation, to provide some useful background material. (This can be found at his website: bterry.com) Bruce Terry is also the author of a very good article on the **1 Corinthians 11** passage on head covering, entitled 'No Such Custom', which is posted on his website.

1. [The quotes that follow in this section of the notes, with the exception of identified passages of Scripture, are from *An Analysis of Certain Features of Discourse in the New Testament Book of 1 Corinthians*, chapter 2.4; Ph.D. dissertation of Ralph Bruce Terry, University of Texas at Arlington, May 1993.]
 - a. Link: https://bterry.com/dissertation/2_4-aspects.htm
2. Cultural influences from Corinth, which help us appreciate the challenges faced by Christians there include:
 - a. Influence of Greek philosophy
 - i. Venerating Greek philosophical ideas regarding wisdom.
 - ii. Highly valuing and associating closely with prominent teachers of philosophy.
 - iii. Humanistic perspective in rejecting the resurrection of the dead (which many Jews, including the Pharisees, did not have a problem with).
 - b. Views on Marriage and Divorce
 - i. Divorce and remarriage were very common in the Roman Empire during the first century.
 - ii. The teaching of the Christians was counter-cultural.
 - c. Influence of pagan idolatry and immorality
 - i. Temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, was located on the hill above Corinth. This was a famous center involving perhaps over 1,000 temple prostitutes.
 - ii. Consequently, the city was known for its immorality and debauchery.
 - iii. Adultery, fornication and homosexual relations were widely accepted. However, incest (sex with close relatives) was considered to be scandalous.
 1. “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither *fornicators*, nor

idolaters, *nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites*...will inherit the kingdom of God. And *such were some of you...*" (**1 Corinthians 6:9–11**, NKJV)

2. "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as *is not even named among the Gentiles*—that a man has his father's wife!" (**1 Corinthians 5:1**, NKJV)

d. Pagan idolatry and eating meat sacrificed to idols

- i. "It was common in worshiping certain Greek gods for the devotee to share the sacrifice with the god and invite his or her friends to eat the worshiper's portion at a banquet, often in the temple of the god.
- ii. "The orator Aristides relates a dream that he had in which the god Asclepius commanded, 'After this to go to the Temple and make a full sacrifice to Asclepius, and to have sacred bowls set up, and to distribute the sacred portions of the sacrifice to all my fellow pilgrims' (Sacred Tales 2.27).
- iii. "There was a temple of Asclepius near the gymnasium in Corinth (Pausanias Description of Greece, Corinth 4.5).
- iv. 'In addition, on the road to the Acrocorinthus were temples to Isis and Sarapis (Pausanias Description of Greece, Corinth 4.6), who also were worshiped with meals in their temples.
- v. "Fee (1987, 361) notes that there survive today at least thirteen papyrus invitations to cult meals."
- vi. Several papyrus invitations to dine at such temple banquets have survived. These include:
 1. "...(4) Chaeremon asks you to dine at a table of the lord Sarapis in the Sarapian [temple] tomorrow, which is the 15th, from the 9th hour (P. Oxy. 110).

2. “(5) Apollonius asks you to dine at a table of the lord Sarapis on the occasion of the coming of age of his brothers in the Thoerian [temple] (P. Oxy. 1484).
 3. “(6) Apion asks you to dine in the house of Sarapis at a table of the lord Sarapis on the 13th from the 9th hour (P. Oxy. 1755).
 4. “(7) Diogenes asks you to dine at the first birthday of his daughter in the Sarapian [temple] tomorrow, which is well-spread [*παχων*, a variant (?) of *παχεων* ‘thick’; cf. Liddell-Scott 1968, 1351], from the 9th hour (P. Oxy. 2791).
 5. “(8) The god invites you to a table in the Thoerian [temple] tomorrow from the 9th hour (P. Colon 2555).
 6. “(9) Sarapis asks you to dine at the sacred offering for the lady Isis in her [or, his] house tomorrow, which is the 29th, from the 9th hour (P. Fouad 76).”
- e. Women were in leadership roles in pagan religions.
- i. “Women often served as priestesses and prophetesses in Greek religion. The most famous oracle in all Greece was the one at Delphi, the ‘earth’s navel’ (Euripides, *Ion* line 6).
 - ii. “But the prophet there was a woman, a prophetess (cf. Euripides *Ion* lines 42, 91, 321). In describing that oracle, Plutarch (*Moralia*, The Oracles at Delphi 405c-d [§23]) tells that a maiden became a prophetic priestess. At times there was more than one prophetess there, but Plutarch (*Moralia*, *Obsolescence of Oracles* 414b [§8]) states that there was only one priestess at Delphi in his time.
 - iii. “With this in mind, the reader can understand why in a section on prophecy and speaking in tongues, Paul found it necessary to discuss the principle which the churches followed about women keeping silent in the assembly. It would

run against a Greek's upbringing to suggest that there was a time and place when a prophetess should not speak."

- d. It is important to realize that Paul's instructions to the Christians in Corinth were, in general, profoundly counter-cultural. The Christian way of life was significantly different from the dominant pagan culture in Corinth.
 - i. It is apparent that worldly ideas from the culture around them were influencing at least some of the Christians. It could have been through new converts, weak Christians, or even via leaders in the church.
 - ii. The dangers for us today: *our own culture penetrating and influencing the church, over time.*
 1. Fear of drift (over time), considering what we have seen in history.
 2. Fear of new people coming into the group, or who may come in, and the influence they may have on everyone else.
 - a. "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.'" (**1 Corinthians 15:33**, NKJV)
 3. There have been significant changes recently among professing Christians in the U.S. over the past 3 years. From the *American Worldview Inventory of 2023, Release No. 3: How the Faith of America has Shifted Since the Start of the Pandemic*:
 - a. The following changes were noted among those considered to be 'born again Christians', comparing 2020 with 2023 survey results.
 - i. Christians who believe that human life is sacred: dropped from 39% (2020) to 29% (2023)
 - ii. Christians who believe that God is the basis for all truth: dropped from 42% (2020) to 36% (2023)
 - iii. Christians deeply committed to practicing their religious faith: dropped from 60% (2020) to 48% (2023)
 - iv. Christians attending church at least once a week (in person or online) dropped from 39% (2020) to 33% (2023)

- v. Christians reading the Bible at least once a week: dropped from 37% (2020) to 33% (2023)
 - b. George Barna, director of the study, expressed shock at the degree of this change among Christians over such a short period of time. From that report:
 - i. Barna noted, “Most religious beliefs change over the course of generations, not a few years. ...However, we know that major life crises have the capacity to introduce substantial change quickly in the foundations of people’s faith....The pandemic was certainly a life crisis for our nation, so even though this magnitude of spiritual shift was not expected, it is feasible given the physical and psychological effects of COVID along with the economic, relational, and lifestyle effects of the government’s drastic policies.”
 - ii. Barna further commented, “Although some of the belief and behavior shifts seem to conflict with each other, this is precisely what happens when the prevailing worldview of the nation is *Syncretism*”.
 - 1. This term refers to the most widespread worldview choice of Americans, which entails combining beliefs from a variety of worldviews into an odd blend that is logically inconsistent, but satisfies the emotion-driven desires of the individual.
 - iii. (Link to the above-referenced release from the study: https://www.arizonachristian.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/CRC_AWVI2023_Release_03.pdf)
- 4. This highlights the dangerous situation that the church is in today. When the spiritual foundation is weakened, and Christians start blending worldly perspectives with their faith in Christ, the church is destroyed in the process.
 - a. Jesus warned: “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.” (**Matthew 5:13**, NKJV)

- b. I see so many churches today where the foundation was weak to start with. The Covid situation exposed the weakness that was there, and the perspectives of the world have flooded into the church.
 - c. In his letter, Paul used the word of God to call the Christians in Corinth to reject these worldly ways and to follow the counter-cultural teachings of Jesus.
 - d. The church is called to be a counter-cultural oasis of sanity in the midst of a crooked and depraved world that is headed for destruction. Don't blend in with the ways of the world, and do not seek the approval of the world.
5. It may be tempting for some of us to be extremely critical of the church in Corinth and to look down on the Christians there. However, if we keep in mind the culture that they were surrounded by and came out of, it may be easier for us to appreciate the challenges they faced.
- a. In some ways, we can find something encouraging in all this. Churches, even those planted by apostles, can face serious challenges. The question is, what do we do in the face of those challenges?
 - b. Paul's admonition was to fix the problems, to reject the ways of the world, and return to the foundation laid down by Jesus and the apostles.
 - c. He *did not* tell the Christians to move out of Corinth to a less corrupted location (such as somewhere in the countryside where they might be able to raise their children in a better place).
 - i. **Question:** Do you think that was a mistake or oversight on Paul's part?
 - ii. **Please Note:** I am not criticizing those who choose to live elsewhere for various good reasons (connections to other family members, financial challenges, visa challenges, job/career requirements, etc.). I am just pointing out something that seems obvious to me.
 - d. Paul invested his life in Corinth, a corrupt city, to save people's souls. He went to other cities such as Ephesus, Athens, Antioch and Rome. This was to spread the

gospel to the entire world, starting with the cities of greatest influence.

- e. Perhaps a lesson for us, when we look around and see the depravity and moral collapse around us, and are tempted to move somewhere else.
 - i. For example, this weekend in Boston was *SatanCon2023*, billed as ‘the largest satanic gathering in history’.
 - ii. The light can shine brightest in the darkness.
 - iii. If we want to bring the light of the kingdom gospel to *all of the New England region*, perhaps the most advantageous place to start is the Greater Boston area.

III. Paul’s Familiarity with the Corinthian Church

- a. Paul had spent a year and a half there on his second missionary journey. So he was writing this to a church community he knew well, one that he had a key role in founding.
- b. Read **Acts 18:1-19**.
 - i. After departing Athens, Paul went to Corinth.
 - ii. There he stayed with Priscilla and Aquila, who like him were tent-makers by trade.
 - iii. Paul first preached in the Jewish synagogue; after facing opposition there, he went to the Gentiles.
 - 1. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his household believed.
 - 2. “...many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.”
 - iv. Paul remains in Corinth for a year and six months.
 - v. Here we are introduced to “Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue”, who we presume was the same person who penned **1 Corinthians** with the apostle Paul (**1 Corinthians 1:1**). Sosthenes was beaten by the Jews who tried to get Paul in trouble with Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia.

1. As we discussed in our expository teaching series on **Acts**, from historical records we know that the time that Gallio was proconsul of Achaia corresponds to 50-51 AD.

c. Read **Acts 18:24-19:1**.

- i. Apollos, a Jewish believer from Alexandria who was “mighty in the Scriptures”, encountered Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus, but then went over to Achaia and helped the church there.
- ii. Apollos used the Old Testament to publicly prove to the Jews in Achaia that Jesus is the Christ.
- iii. Apollos was in Corinth at the same time that Paul was in Ephesus.

IV. The First Challenge: Factions and Disunity in the Church

a. Read **1 Corinthians 1:10-13**.

- i. The problem: members of the church are dividing into factions based on following prominent individuals (in this case, Peter, Paul and Apollos).
- ii. Paul will devote the first 3-4 chapters of this letter to issues related to the problem of disunity in the church. He addresses this before tackling a number of issues that some of us might consider more dire, including:
 1. Sexual immorality (incest) in the church
 2. Problems at the Lord’s supper
 3. Participating in meals involving idolatry
 4. False teaching on a foundational Christian doctrine (resurrection of the dead)
 5. Lawsuits against other Christians
 6. Questions about marriage
 7. Questions regarding the gifts of the Holy Spirit
 8. Women speaking in the church; head covering

b. **Question:** Why was the issue of *division in the church* so important to Paul that he addressed it *first*?

- i. Read **John 17:15-26**.

1. The last things Jesus prayed for, in His extended prayer in **John 17** after the Last Supper and before departing to the Garden of Gethsemane, were:
 - a. He asks that His Father would protect the apostles, who would be sent into the world, from Satan.
 - b. He then prays for us (those who would believe through the apostles), that we would be unified.
 - i. He prays that *we would be one*, as He and the Father are (a unified) one.
 - ii. This unity among the believers would be a sign to the entire world that Jesus was sent by the Father.
 - iii. Jesus also prayed that the love of the Father would be in us, and that He (Jesus) would be in us.
2. Paul was deeply concerned about unity among the Christians, because Jesus was.
 - a. They both knew that Satan would use disunity to pit Christians against one another, divide the church, and thereby severely degrade the witness of Christ to the world.
 - b. Note that Jesus' *greatest single concern for us*, looking forward, was not theological purity. It was unity.
 - c. Paul also addressed this as serious sin in **Galatians 5**.
 - i. "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (**Galatians 5:19-21**, NKJV)
 - ii. "...idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions...." (**Galatians 5:20**, ESV)

- iii. “idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties....” (**Galatians 5:20**, ASV)
 - iv. Note that the sin of creating factions and division within the body of Christ is included among sins like adultery, sorcery and idolatry. These are all identified as sins that will keep us *out of the kingdom of God!*
- c. Perhaps the hardest part of the challenge:
 - i. Jesus prays that all future believers will be unified.
 - ii. Whenever I have heard sermons about unity in the church, it is almost always focused on unity within one particular congregation or perhaps within a denomination. There is almost never any serious consideration for unity across the sectarian boundaries of the one church worldwide, a unity to encompass all believers everywhere.
- d. Today, the extent of Christian unity Jesus prays for is so hard to imagine, that most people *don't even try*.
 - i. Those who are most focused on perfect theology can be the most sectarian of all, viewing themselves as the one true, pure church.
 - ii. The Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement of the early 1800s proclaimed Christian unity as a goal, but that movement was torn between unity and purity. Eventually, the purity wing won out in the Churches of Christ, perhaps the most conservative wing of the Restoration Movement, which led to some of the most sectarian groups out there!
 - iii. **Challenge:** Where are the groups that are as serious about this teaching of Jesus as they are about all the other ones? I really don't see anyone pursuing this.
 1. In my opinion, this is *much harder* than the narrow-road teachings on nonresistance, head covering, role of women, permanence of marriage, separation from the world, baptism and conversion, etc.
 2. It is so hard, that almost no one even attempts to go there!
 3. This may be the 'Mount Everest' of all the kingdom teachings of Jesus: the most daunting peak to attempt to climb!

- e. There is another reason unity is important. In **1 Corinthians 12** Paul says the church is a body made up of many parts. If one part is cut off, the whole body suffers. I recall David Bercot saying years ago that almost every aspect of the historic faith is still held by at least one group in the Christian world. The problem is that they don't communicate with each other, so they don't learn from one another the things that they are missing.
 - i. For example:
 - 1. Anabaptists: nonresistance, permanence of marriage, head covering, separation from the world.
 - 2. Catholics/Orthodox: importance of and emphasis on the cross, the Lord's prayer, permanence of marriage (Roman Catholics at least in their teaching), and importance of works/obedience.
 - 3. Evangelical Protestants: evangelism, personal devotion to Scripture.
 - 4. Restoration Movement/Churches of Christ: baptism of repentant believers for remission of sins, obedience to the commands of Jesus, importance of persevering in the faith, etc.
 - ii. Satan has used division in the body of Christ to create spiritual 'silos' where people have parts of the historic faith but are blind to other things they miss.
- f. Failed approaches to Christian unity.
 - i. **Failed Approach No. 1:** The Roman Empire model with one emperor to rule them all.
 - 1. Turn the church into a giant pyramid organization, with one man at the top, like the old Roman Empire.
 - a. You could even locate that top leader *in Rome*, if you want.
 - b. Be unified by agreeing to be under the rule of that one man.
 - 2. Problems with this approach:
 - a. The apostles did not set things up that way.

- i. Peter, nor any other apostle or New Testament church leader, was not calling the shots and directing the church!
 - b. For an early Christian example, consider *1 Clement*, by Clement of Rome (a leader in the church in Rome who personally knew one or more of the apostles), He addressed the Christians in Corinth with a brotherly appeal, not based on claiming to have direct authority over them.
 - c. There are disputes about who that ‘one man’, the top leader, should be. Also, some claimants have been extremely corrupt, and have in many regards abandoned key aspects of “the faith once for all entrusted to the saints”. (**Jude 3**)
- ii. **Failed Approach No. 2: Watered Down Ecumenical Christianity**
 - 1. Water down the Christian faith to the point where you make anything controversial into an “opinion matter”.
 - 2. Problem with this approach.
 - a. This ‘big tent’ approach has failed big-time, leading to rapid departure from the teachings of the *historic faith* as handed down by the apostles.
 - b. Unpopular teachings of Jesus, which are ‘out of season’ in the current culture, get dropped. This leads to liberal, permissive churches where ‘anything goes’.
- iii. **Failed Approach No. 3: the Ostrich Model**
 - 1. There is an expression ‘to put your head in the sand’, which is based on the popular (but apparently untrue) belief that when an ostrich is frightened or in trouble, it sticks its head in the sand. The expression is used when people refuse to acknowledge (or deliberately ignore) a serious problem they encounter.
 - 2. Some groups deal with the significant challenge of unity, which Jesus prayed for, by pretending that they are the only Christians on the face of the earth. (They somehow discover that they are the ‘one true church’!)
 - a. Therefore, the problem of unity is greatly simplified, and reduced to keeping everyone *in their group* ‘in line’.

- b. While they may not outright say they are “the only true church”, in practice they operate that way, looking down on others who “claim” to be Christians and rejoicing when these people come to their senses, leave their compromised/lukewarm church and join the “one true church”!
 - 3. This is the ‘imaginary church’, and can lead to a cult-like model where you believe that for some reason your group is the ONLY church.
 - a. I have experience with that kind of church.
 - b. These types of churches often focus on a combination of doctrines or teachings that no one else follows (whether historic-based, made up by the leaders of that group or others, or even a combination of the two).
 - i. This ‘secret sauce’ of doctrines/teachings provides the justification that their church or denomination is ‘the one true church’, ‘God’s favorite among all the churches out there’, or something similar.
- iv. Failed Approach No. 4: Just Follow the Local Leaders**
- 1. Some groups just focus on conforming to whatever the local leaders of the church teach, including whatever rules they come up with, including rules that go beyond what is required in the New Testament.
 - 2. The man-made rules maintain at least the outward appearance of conformity within the group, but do not get to the heart of the matter.
 - 3. I see this as approach as common in some conservative Anabaptist circles where there may be tolerance, but no meaningful Biblical unity, beyond the boundaries of the local congregation.
 - 4. Reliance on this approach leads to weak Biblical convictions and creates barriers to unity that make it impossible to be unified with a group down the street that has a different set of rules.
- g. So how *DO* we move toward unity? Are there any steps we can take to advance true Christian unity?

- i. While this is something I think about all the time, unfortunately, I have *no easy answers*.
- ii. Satan has been extremely effective in fracturing the church from the beginning. If anything, it is getting worse over time.
 1. The work of unity is very hard and will require much help from the Holy Spirit, much wisdom and prayer.
- iii. A few thoughts for your consideration:
 1. In everything we do as a church, consider whether this tends to produce more unity, or more division in the worldwide body of Christ.
 - a. Whenever we impose a rule going beyond the Scriptures that someone has to follow in order to be part of the church (where people Jesus would consider to be among His true flock are thereby excluded), we are creating artificial division in the body of Christ.
 - b. Even things like a name for our church, or 'branding' ourselves in a desire to make ourselves more easily recognizable, can foster a denominational mindset.
 - i. Let us resist that temptation.
 2. We need to strive to grasp and restore the historic faith, the faith "once for all entrusted to the saints", and to build bridges of understanding with others on the same road.
 - a. Learn from others who may have grasped aspects of this that we have missed.
 - b. Consider the witness of the earliest Christians, especially those who were closest to the apostles.
 - c. Meditate on the Scriptures day and night. Pray for wisdom and understanding regarding how to put the historic faith into practice.
 3. We should rejoice whenever another church based on the historic faith is planted near us or is growing. No room for envy or jealousy. No place to tear down other groups or gossip.
 - a. "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not

the things which are of Christ Jesus.” (**Philippians 2:19–21**, NKJV)

- iv. There are some good examples from the early days of the (Stone-Campbell) Restoration Movement of the early 1800s in the U.S.
 1. A popular motto: “We are *Christians only*; not the *only Christians*.”
 2. A great example of this desire for unity among all Christians was demonstrated by Barton Stone, one of the early Restoration Movement leaders from the early 1800s, who was one of the authors of a document with a very unusual name, *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*.
 - a. Background: In 1803 there were 15 congregations in Kentucky and Ohio that had formed an alliance (similar to a denomination or convention) called *The Springfield Presbytery*. This group of churches was successful and growing.
 - b. Only a year later, in 1804 Barton Stone and the other leaders realized that the group was starting to look like a denomination that would add to the problem of disunity in God’s Church. They decided to dissolve the group.
 - c. They realized this would be troubling to many both inside and outside the group, so they drafted the *Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*.
 - i. Note that the goal was to disband the denomination; it was not to disband the church!
 - d. If only the anti-sectarian spirit embodied in this letter was present in more of our churches today!
 3. Excerpts from the *Last Will and Testament of The Springfield Presbytery*:
 - a. “THE *Presbytery of Springfield* sitting at Cane Ridge, in the county of Bourbon, being, through a gracious Providence, in more than ordinary bodily health, growing in strength and size daily; and in perfect soundness and composure of mind; but knowing that it is appointed for all delegated bodies once to die; and considering that the life of every such body is very

uncertain, do make and ordain this our last Will and Testament, in manner and form following:

- b. "First, We will, that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large; for there is but one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling.
- c. "Item. We will that our name of distinction, with its Reverend title, be forgotten, that there be but one Lord over God's heritage, and his name one.
- d. "Item. We will, that our power of making laws for the government of the church, and executing them by delegated authority, forever cease; that the people may have free course to the Bible, and adopt the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus....
- e. "Item. We will, that the people henceforth take the Bible as the only sure guide to heaven; and as many as are offended with other books, which stand in competition with it, may cast them into the fire if they choose; for it is better to enter into life having one book, than having many to be cast into hell.
- f. "Item. We will, that preachers and people cultivate a spirit of mutual forbearance; pray more and dispute less; and while they behold the signs of the times, look up, and confidently expect that redemption draweth nigh.
- g. "Item. We will, that our weak brethren, who may have been wishing to make the *Presbytery of Springfield* their king, and not what is now become of it, betake themselves to the Rock of Ages, and follow Jesus for the future.
- h. "Item. We will, the *Synod of Kentucky* examine every member who may be suspected of having departed from the *Confession of Faith*, and suspend every such suspected heretic immediately, in order that the oppressed may go free, and taste the sweets of Gospel liberty....
- i. "Item. Finally we will, that all our sister bodies read their Bibles carefully, that they may see their fate there determined, and prepare for death before it is too late.

- i. "Springfield Presbytery, June 28th, 1804,
 - ii. ROBERT MARSHALL,
 - iii. JOHN DUNLAVY,
 - iv. RICHARD M'NEMAR,
 - v. B. W. STONE,
 - vi. JOHN THOMPSON,
 - vii. DAVID PURVIANCE
 - viii. Witnesses."
4. Three years after the *Last Will and Testament* was issued, the leaders of the Springfield Presbytery wrote *Observations on Church Government*, building on New Testament teachings. Excerpts from the *Observations on Church Governance* (conclusion to the work):
- a. "But seeing Christians are one and have fellowship with the Father and the Son by one spirit, it is the most unreasonable thing in the world for them to be separated in their external communion. This separation has been the work of the devil, and it is by his means that it is continued in the world.
 - b. "Let Christians look back to the history of primitive Christianity, as recorded in the New Testament. Let them take a view of the plain and native simplicity which shines out there – the beautiful equality that reigned among the apostolic churches – and let them pant to breathe that native air.
 - c. "They were all brethren and sisters – met together with one accord – united in one mind and one judgment. They ate their meat with gladness and singleness of heart – they went from house to house, from one love feast to another – were strictly forbidden to call themselves by the name of Paul or Apollos, etc. And such as did, were pronounced carnal, sensual, having not the spirit.
 - d. "View the churches scattered abroad, planted and visited by the Apostles and others: They had all access to each other, and communion together. And that one

spirit of God which lives in every Christian, has made no provision for acting otherwise, till the end of time.

- e. "The evangelists went out two and two or in larger companies, and in every place where the word was gladly received, those who gave public testimony of their faith, were baptized, received the Holy Ghost, and were set in order for the admission of others who might afterwards believe. As Christ commanded, go and do likewise. "

V. Closing Thoughts

- a. Let us diligently pursue the desire of Christ, that all Christians be unified.
- b. However, this should be a unity based on all following the historic faith, the faith handed down by the apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- c. May we cast off the sectarian spirit that has plagued so much of Christian history, and gain some encouragement from the spirit of the early Restoration Movement, to restore and advance the simple Christian faith.