

The Quest for Understanding Christian Relationships
Intro to 1 Corinthians

I. Relationships.

A. The Cultural Quest for Understanding Relationships

1. The dictionary defines relationships as “the way in which two or more concepts, objects, or people are connected, or the state of being connected.”
2. Today, a simple Google search will call up 742,000,000 articles on the net regarding relationships.
 - a. There are articles about
 - (1) how to enter a relationship,
 - (2) how to maintain a relationship,
 - (3) how to evaluate the health of a relationship,
 - (4) how leave a relationship,
 - (5) how to avoid unwanted relationships.
 - b. Everyone wants to know about relationships and apparently there is an entire industry built entirely on providing advice related to relationships.
3. Other cultural expressions of interest
 - a. News stories cover the relationships of politicians and policies to constituents and communities.
 - b. Books fill the shelves.
 - c. Oprah and Dr Oz are making millions exploring and describing, and in many cases , prescribing, strategies for broken relationships.
 - d. Sitcoms revel in the fluidity of human relationships
 - e. Recently Senator Bernie Sanders asserted that a political nominee in the Trump administration was unfit to serve because the candidate maintained an active and personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
 - f. Stories about relationships are everywhere.
4. Public Debate
 - a. The debate over same-sex marriage is a quest to understand and define relationships.
 - b. The relationship between individual people, between people and the state, between people and the culture, between people and the environment, and between people and God are explored in a billion different ways every day.
 - (1) Men want to know how to be better husbands to their wives, better dads to their kids, better employees for their boss, better leaders in their church. Each of these is a quest to understand and improve relationships.
 - (2) Women ask many of the same questions.
 - (3) Children wonder how to get along with their parents, their siblings, their friends, and the influential people in their lives.
 - (4) Politicians work at maintaining constituent approval levels and peer influence.
 - (5) Marketing professionals and environmental activists both seek

ways of maneuvering and manipulating public opinion to their advantage. Their efforts, for good or for bad, embrace the effort to understand and utilize relationships.

B. Christians and the Quest for Understanding

1. Christians have this in common with the people of the world in general.
 - a. We understand and share the need for competency in the relationships to which we are called and committed.
 - b. Our first priority is our relationship to God and to Jesus Christ, but **every other relationship counts, every context requires we understand something of the nature of relationships from a biblical, faithful, God-honoring, Christ-exalting position.**
2. The focus question
 - a. The question for us might be asked something like this:
 - (1) How do I, as one related by faith in covenant with God,
 - (a) relate to the world
 - (b) To my family and work
 - (c) To my church
 - (d) To God
 - (2) In keeping with the spiritual reality of my relationship with God.
 - b. In other words, **how does being a follower and disciple of Jesus effect every other relationship in my life?**
 - (1) As a Christian, how should I think about every relationship I encounter?
 - (2) As a Christian, how should my relationships be different than relationships I had when I was a lost sinner enslaved to the ways of the world?
 - (3) As a person who embraces the Person and teaching of Jesus as normative for my life, as one who lives by faith in the will and word of God, as one empowered and led by the indwelling Spirit of God, how should I treat
 - (a) People?
 - i) fellow believers?
 - ii) Sinners?
 - iii) Family?
 - iv) Co-workers?
 - v) Strangers?
 - (b) Church?
 - i) Worship?
 - ii) Ministry?
 - iii) Leaders
 - (c) Government?
 - i) Policies
 - ii) Persons
 - (d) Intimate relationships
 - i) Marriage

- ii) Singleness
- iii) Business relationships
- (e) Life
 - i) Love
 - ii) Death
 - iii) Eternity

c. **What should my private orientation and public conduct look like as I relate to God, people, and the world around me as a Christian?**

II. 1 Corinthians and the Quest for Understanding Relationships

A. The nature of the letter

1. Paul addresses the question of personal response to relationships
2. First Corinthians is a letter about relationships and how to have them now that we are followers of Jesus and filled with His Spirit.

B. Getting Started

1. A relationship with Jesus
 - a. If we really want to understand the point and personal impact of this letter, we have to start with understanding and embracing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
 - (1) All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
 - (a) We begin with an unhealthy relationship with God and that has to be fixed first
 - (b) Our relationship with God, outside of faith, is a relationship of rebellion that makes us enemies of God and subject to His judgment
 - (2) The wages of sin is death
 - (a) God's justice demands and requires punishment in keeping with the crime
 - (b) The smallest sin is still as big as the least infinite expression of God's holiness
 - (c) Therefore the punishment for any sin must equal the purity of God's glory
 - (3) Total depravity
 - (a) There is nothing we can do to save ourselves.
 - (b) Righteousness as filthy rags
 - i) Holy war against the infidels will not save us
 - ii) Yoga, meditation, and Tai Chi will not save us
 - iii) Prayers to idols or simply darkening the door of a church from time to time, declaring oneself Christian, will not save us
 - (4) Jesus alone paid the penalty of sin by His death on the cross and one through faith in Him, Christ alone, can we be saved.
 - (a) Faith in Jesus Christ is the only effectual means of personal salvation
 - (b) Faith in Jesus is the only avenue for a genuine, life-changing, eternal life-granting relationship with God

2. Genuine Christians are those who have sold out to Jesus, surrendered their lives to Him, trusting His work on the cross on their behalf and acting in faith to conform their lives to His.
 - a. Christians are forgiven by God and filled with His Holy Spirit.
 - b. They have a real relationship with God, personal and powerful, that changes the way they relate to everyone and everything else in their lives.
 - c. We cannot truly grasp the impact of 1 Corinthians until we have a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - d. Only in relationship with God can we understand and embrace the message of this inspired New Testament letter.
 - (1) It is a letter to Christians
 - (2) For Christians
 - (3) About how to be Christian in the world

C. Congregational Relation to The Letter

1. Everyone in this room stands in one of these positions relative to this letter.
 - a. Either you stand as a sinner who needs to repent and embrace a relationship with Jesus in order to get from this letter what God has for you
 - b. Or you stand as a redeemed sinner, forgiven by the grace of God through personal faith in Jesus Christ, and as one who needs to wholeheartedly and faithfully adopt the inspired revelation and teaching of this letter for yourself.
2. No one gets to remain neutral.
 - a. The key verse to this entire book is found in chapter one verse 10: *I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.*
 - b. **To reach the place where all agree and all are united in the same mind and the same judgment requires each of us rally spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and behaviorally around Jesus in deeply personal and practical ways.**
3. Paul's letter specifically directs us to some of the relational developments required of all believers on the journey of faith to spiritual maturity.

III. Final Word

A. Jesus and the Call to Follow

1. Jesus found four men in a boat, fishing. He said to them, "Come, follow me." It was an invitation, a calling and a command that they learn of Him and from Him and grow more and more like Him, conforming eventually to His own relationship with God and with the world.
2. Paul simply advances the very same call to discipleship and expresses what Christian discipleship looks like under certain conditions.

B. Are you ready for this adventure in following Jesus, becoming like Him in His relationship with His Father, His disciples, and the world He came to love and save?

1. A relationship with Jesus
2. A commitment to discipleship

3. An expectation of glory

C. Procedure

1. Begin reading 1 Corinthians as much and as often as you can.
2. Let God begin to prepare your mind and spirit for His word and His work as He endeavors to unite us in the same mind and the same judgment as Jesus Himself.