

A MODEL OF THE PRACTICAL CHURCH LIFE IN 1 CORINTHIANS

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Most Bible readers would perhaps hesitate to consider the recipients of the first Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians as a pattern to be followed. Indeed, it was the many problems in this church that seem to have motivated the apostle Paul to compose and send his correspondence. Nevertheless, we must thankfully acknowledge that, as a result of this extant apostolic response to such a local church, we have key elements of a scriptural template, a model, for the proper church life as the practical local expression of the universal Body of Christ. First Corinthians describes the church in terms of her divine and human constituents, universal inclusivity and local practicality, organic nature and practical expression, unique ground of oneness, and meetings as a model of a corporate human living in the context of the divine economy.

The Constituents of the Church—God and the Sanctified Believers

The church contains both the divine and human elements. The church is composed of both God and the saints, which saints are believers “who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” to be saved (1 Cor. 1:2; 14:33; cf. Rom. 10:13-14). Hence, the church has the element and nature of divinity and humanity.

The humanity constituting the church is a justified, sanctified, and redeemed humanity. First Corinthians 1:30 refers to an ongoing process of God’s salvation, which involves the believers’ entire tripartite being. Christ became to us, the believers, our righteousness in our past experience through His justifying death that we might receive the divine life in our spirit (John 3:6; Rom. 5:18). He continues a present sanctification process by which our soul, with its mind, emotion, and will, is renewed and transformed by the divine life (1 Thes. 5:23; Rom. 6:22; 12:2, 10). Furthermore, we await a hopeful future, the redemption of our body (8:23), a resurrected “spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:42-44) conformed to “the body of His glory” (Phil. 3:21).

The modifier *of God* in 1 Corinthians 1:2 connotes both the ownership and element of the church. In terms of ownership, Paul identifies the declaration “I am of Paul,” or “of Apollos,” or “of Cephas” (v. 12) as the outward manifestation of divisions among the Corinthians (vv. 10-11). To divisively claim, “I belong to or follow a certain person,” is tantamount to declaring, “I don’t belong to Christ.” However, Paul also considers that declaring, “I am of Christ,” in a way that excludes the apostles and their teaching or excludes other genuine believers is similarly divisive. Later, Paul implies that such declarations are expressions of jealousy and strife that issue not from spiritual men; rather, they have their source in fleshly, even fleshy, men (3:1-4). This perspective—that the church is *of God* (1:2)—indicates that the church should not be of any person, any practice, or any doctrine (e.g., Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist), much less any culture, region, or nationality (e.g., African, American, Anglican, Greek, Roman).