

11 STUDIES FROM 1 CORINTHIANS 1-7

wholly for God



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'And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord"'

1 Corinthians 1: 30-31

Introduction

Toward the later stages of his second missionary journey, the apostle Paul set out from Athens for the city of Corinth.¹ Corinth had previously been a Greek city, but was destroyed in 146 BC after a conflict with Rome. Resettled as a Roman colony by Julius Caesar in 44 BC, the city was initially home to Roman soldiers and freedmen. Corinth was strategically situated on a narrow neck of land at the base of a small but steep mountain known as the Acrocorinth. Barely nine kilometers wide at its narrowest point, this slim piece of land in southern Greece acted as an intersection for business and trade, connecting north and south and east and west (see figure 1).² By the time Paul arrived in around 50 AD, Corinth was a bustling and prosperous hub of trade, tourism, business, and manufacturing. As Anthony Thiselton notes:

'Corinth... had everything that it needed: the Peirene Fountains provided an almost inexhaustible water supply; Acrocorinth could provide a citadel for defense if necessary; trade between east and west and north and south was abundant and assured; manufacturing and exports prospered; the Isthmian Games (held every two years and second only to the Olympics) brought in more consumers than could readily be supplied; the natural resources of clay, marl, and limestone were abundant; employment in multiform variety was available; trade and production flourished; it was a provincial center for rhetoric; it drew people from all parts of the Eastern Empire to admire its facilities and spectacles'.³

It was here, amid the proud, affluent, competitive, self sufficient, religiously pluralistic climate of Corinth, that the apostle Paul brought the gospel of Jesus and founded the Corinthian church. Following his usual practice, Paul began in the Jewish synagogue, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the promised Jewish Messiah. While some of the Jews believed – including Crispus, the leader of the synagogue – most rejected the message and so Paul turned his attention to the Gentiles.⁴ Paul was assisted in his work by Priscilla and Aquila, fellow tentmakers who had come to Corinth after being displaced from their home in Rome.⁵ As they partnered together, the church continued to grow, mostly through Gentile conversions as people heard the good news of Jesus and turned

¹ Acts 18: 1.

² Anthony C. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2006), p. 1.

³ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, p. 11.

⁴ Acts 18: 4-8.

⁵ Acts 18: 2-3.

to God from idols.⁶ However, there were also times of real difficulty for Paul in Corinth. So much so that Jesus intervened and came to Paul in a dream, strengthening and encouraging him to press on in the work of making the gospel known. Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth – his second longest stay in any city – establishing the church and building it up.⁷ He then left Corinth in AD 51 and travelled briefly to Syria and Judea, before settling in Ephesus.⁸ The work of the gospel continued in Corinth through the ministry of others, including Apollos, who was a gifted preacher and apologist from Alexandria.⁹ Peter, too, appears to have spent some time in Corinth.¹⁰

During his three-year stay in Ephesus, it seems that Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians, which preceded the two New Testament letters we know as 1 & 2 Corinthians.¹¹ In it he warned the Corinthians not to associate with sexually immoral people. It is possible that this letter – which has not survived – was written in response to news Paul had received from Apollos or others, but we cannot be sure. Sometime later, messengers from the household of Chloe came to Paul in Ephesus with alarming reports that the Corinthians had not only misunderstood his first letter, but were beset with several other problems such as divisions, immorality, civil litigations against one another, social snobbery and the abuse of the Lord's Supper.¹² In addition to this, others also came – Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus – carrying a letter that the Corinthians had written to Paul, seeking his counsel on a number of difficult pastoral issues impacting the church. The issues touched on very practical aspects of the Corinthians' day-to-day lives as follower of Jesus, including marriage and singleness, eating food that had been sacrificed to idols, the proper use of spiritual gifts, providing financial assistance to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who were in need, and their desire to see Apollo return to Corinth.¹³

It was in response to these troubling reports and pastoral issues that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus in around 54 or 55 AD. His purpose was multifaceted. He wrote to clarify misunderstandings from his previous letter, to respond to the reports from Chloe's household and the matters raised in the Corinthians' own letter, to prepare the way for Timothy's upcoming visit to Corinth, and to inform the Corinthians of his own desire to visit them after passing through Macedonia.¹⁴ Primarily, however, Paul wrote to correct the root problem that lay at the heart of the Corinthians' troubles. The Corinthians had been saved through the cross of Jesus by the grace and mercy of God.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 12: 2.

⁷ Acts 18: 9-11.

⁸ Acts 18: 18-23; 19: 1.

⁹ Acts 19: 1; 1 Corinthians 1: 12; 3: 4-6.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 1: 12.

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 5: 9-10.

¹² 1 Corinthians 1: 11, 5: 1; 6: 1-8; 11: 18.

¹³ 1 Corinthians 7: 1, 25; 8: 1; 12: 1; 16: 1, 12 (note the repeated 'Now concerning...').

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 16: 5-11.

They had been set apart by God and called into the fellowship of his Son to live new and holy lives together – they now belonged to him.¹⁵ And yet, the Corinthians continued to be marked by divisions and factions, one-upmanship and social snobbery, sexual immorality and drunkenness, arrogance and self-centeredness. In other words, the members of the Corinthian church were living as though they still belonged to the city.¹⁶ Therefore, Paul wrote to urge them to stop following the wisdom of the world and to walk in step with the gospel of Jesus, being a united and pure people who live 'Wholly for God'.

Figure 1:¹⁷



¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 1: 2, 9.

¹⁶ Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (PNTC: Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2010), p. 6.

¹⁷ <http://www.esvbible.org/resources/esv-study-bible/introduction-to-1-corinthians/>

STUDY 1 / 1 Corinthians 1: 1-17

Blessed but Divided

1 Corinthians 1 sets the scene and lays the foundation for the remainder of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 1: 1-3, we are introduced to Paul and the Christians in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 1: 4-9, Paul reminds the Christians of what Christ had done, and of his return. This lays the foundation for the remainder of the letter. In 1 Corinthians 1: 10-18, Paul addresses the first of a number of concerns in the Christian community in Corinth.

Setting the scene (1 Corinthians 1: 1-3)

We may be tempted to gloss over Paul's greeting to the church in Corinth. However, it is worth taking a deeper look at Paul's greeting, and to consider whom the focus is on, what we learn about the author, and the recipients of the letter.

Paul:

- 1) What statement does Paul make about himself?
- 2) Who is our focus drawn to in Paul's statements about himself?
- 3) How may Paul's understanding of himself have influenced his spiritual leadership of the Corinthians?
- 4) How may Paul's statements of himself have influenced the Corinthians' relationship with Paul?

The Corinthians:

- 5) Whom is our focus drawn to in Paul's statements about the Corinthians?
- 6) What is the significance of the statement "to the church of God" to the Corinthians?
- 7) What does it mean for the Corinthians to be "sanctified in Christ"?
- 8) What is the significance for the Corinthians to be called "saints ('hagios' – often translated as 'holy' in Greek) together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"?

In Paul's greeting, we see that what God did through Jesus Christ was central to Paul's and the Corinthians' spiritual identity and status.

Paul was *an apostle* – a messenger of Jesus Christ – *by God's calling*. Likewise, the Christians in Corinth were *saints* – a holy people to bring God glory – *by calling*. Paul was an apostle *of Christ Jesus*. The Corinthians were sanctified – set apart for God's purpose – *in Christ Jesus*. Paul was an apostle *by the will of God*. The Corinthians were *the church of God*.¹⁸

It was because of what Christ had done, that the Corinthians were recipients of God's grace and peace (1 Cor 1: 3).

The foundation for the rest of Paul's letter (1 Corinthians 1: 4-9)

In 1 Corinthians 1: 4-9, Paul gave thanks to God (always!) for the Corinthians because of the grace of God that was given to them in Christ Jesus. He also reminded them of Christ's return. This set the foundation for the remainder of Paul's letter, which essentially dealt with a range of concerns. Let us examine more closely how the Christians in Corinth were blessed.

9) How did God's grace manifest in the Corinthians? Paul made two statements about them (v. 5-7).

10) What else did God do for the Corinthians (v. 8-9)?

¹⁸ The term 'church of God' (v. 1) would have evoked in the original readers an understanding that they had a place in God's cosmic plan, as God's elect people. 'Sanctified' (v. 2) carries connotations of being set apart for God's special purpose and use, just as the utensils in the temple, the priests, etc. 'Saints' (v. 2 – in NT Greek 'hagios') is regularly translated as 'holy' (God's people) and is one of Paul's favourite designations for all Christians (cf. 2 Cor 1: 1; Rom 1: 7). The term derives from Exodus 19: 5-6, where Israel is called 'a holy nation'. See Ciampa & Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, p. 56.

Think/Grow/Live

- If you are a Christian, how does Paul's description of the Corinthians affect how you view yourself?
- How does Paul's description of the Corinthians challenge your views about other Christians, particularly those you may have difficulties with?
- Reflect on what you thanked God for this week. How do Paul's "thanksgiving points" challenge us about our priorities?

Addressing the issue of disunity (1 Corinthians 1: 10-17)

Now Paul addresses the first of a number of concerns amongst the Corinthians.

11) Why was there disunity amongst the Corinthians (v. 11-13)?

12) Why did Paul say that Christ did not "send him to baptise" (v. 13-17)?

13) What was Paul's appeal to the Corinthians in relation to the divisions in their community (v. 10)?

14) How could unity be possible for the church in Corinth (v. 10, v. 13)?

Think/Grow/Live

- How are Paul's instructions to the Corinthians helpful in maintaining unity in church?

Prayer Points

Pray that God will give us a deeper understanding of His grace poured out on our lives.

Pray that as a Christian community, we will be the church of God.

Pray that as Christians, we will live lives that are sanctified.

STUDY 2 / 1 Corinthians 1: 18-31

Foolishness of the Cross

1) Discuss some of the ways people seek salvation.

Throughout the Bible, God often chooses those whom the world considers as lowly, foolish, unworthy and despised – such as Zacchaeus the chief tax collector,¹⁹ the robber who cried out for mercy when crucified alongside Jesus,²⁰ and the poor widow who gave out of her poverty²¹ – to inherit His eternal blessings and be part of His kingdom. They were saved by God's grace through their faith in Jesus, who is the wisdom and power of God.

In 1 Corinthians 1:17-3:23, Paul contrasts the world's wisdom – which is based on human reason and standards alone and rejects the message of the cross as foolishness – with God's wisdom – which is revealed in His great plan to redeem the world through Jesus and centers on the message of the cross. Today, many seek wisdom exclusively through knowledge, experience, logic, reason and science, and try to use these things to disprove the existence of God and challenge God's way of salvation. In the eyes of many, these ways may appear to be right, but in the end they lead to death.²² In the same way that God judged Adam and Eve for disobeying His word and pursuing wisdom apart from him,²³ God will one day judge human wisdom that rejects the knowledge of Christ as the Son of God and only savior.

As we've seen already, the church in Corinth was a troubled church – with people divided around different leaders. In 1 Corinthians 1: 18-31, Paul shows that division has no place in the church because of the nature of the gospel itself. God isn't dependent on

¹⁹ Luke 19: 1-10.

²⁰ Luke 23: 42-43.

²¹ Mark 12: 41-44.

²² Proverbs 14: 12.

²³ Genesis 3.

the giftedness of leaders and He hasn't saved us because we're particularly smart or important. It is Jesus and the message of the cross that is powerful to save.

Human wisdom leads to condemnation (1 Corinthians 1: 18-25)

- 2) What was Paul trying to address in the Corinthian congregation? Provide evidence to support your answer (1 Corinthians 1: 17, 26-28; 3: 18-21; 4: 6-7, 18-21).
- 3) What is the "message of the cross" (Acts 2: 22-39)?
- 4) What are the two attitudes one can have towards the cross (v. 18, 23-24)? How do these attitudes impact one's eternal destiny?
- 5) What warnings are there for those who rely on human wisdom (v. 19-21)?
- 6) How does God bring salvation to those He chooses (v. 21 cf. Romans 10: 13-17)? How do these verses encourage and challenge you to evangelise to others?
- 7) Why was the message of the cross rejected by the Jews and Greeks (v. 22-24)? How are these reasons similar to and different from the world's rejection of the message today?
- 8) In your own words, explain how Jesus is the power and wisdom of God (v. 24, 2: 6-10; Romans 1: 4, 16; Philippians 3: 10).
- 9) Can you think of specific examples of worldly wisdom or power that lead people away from God? How could you respond in order to direct people towards God's power and wisdom in each of these examples?

God's choice of ordinary people for salvation (1 Corinthians 1: 19-31)

- 10)** How does Paul describe those people chosen by God for salvation (vv. 26-29)? How does this “fly in the face” of what the world values and esteems?
- 11)** Why does God choose ordinary people for salvation (vv. 19, 31)? What comfort or encouragement does this bring to you?
- 12)** What blessings are received by those who put their faith in Christ (v. 30)?
- 13)** How does this passage help you in your struggle against pride?

Prayer Points

- Pray through the truths of this passage using the acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication).
- Pray for our global partners.

Proclaiming Christ and Him Crucified

1) What are the marks of good preaching? Discuss.

In recent history, talent shows have abounded on Australian television. Whether it's Australian Idol, The X Factor, Australia's Got Talent, or The Voice, contestants seek to wow both the audience and judges with unforgettable performances in order to secure their position in the competition, build their status and reputation, and hopefully build a platform from which to launch a career in the entertainment industry.

In Paul's day, Corinth was a city marked by a concern for status, recognition, competition and self-promotion. And just as we love it when a 'diamond in the rough' is unearthed through talent competitions, the competitive Corinthians loved the show surrounding a certain kind of rhetoric. Rhetoric – the art of using language to persuade and inform – was part and parcel of the Corinthians' world. Public speakers would search for applause and approval as they attempted to secure their reputation through rhetoric and showmanship. However, there were different types or schools of rhetoric in the ancient world.

Classical rhetoric, which can be traced back to Aristotle, was concerned not simply with persuasive speech alone, but with the effective communication of truth. Sophist rhetoric, on the other hand, was more concerned with showmanship, performance and winning the argument, even if it came at the expense of truth. As one writer notes, the chief aim of the sophists was to win approval and applause, while to present truth persuasively and clearly was the aim of the more classical rhetoricians.²⁴ Unlike the sophistic rhetoricians of first century Corinth, the apostle Paul was not a mere people pleaser, but a faithful servant of Christ Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 2: 1-5, Paul shows how

²⁴ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, p. 15.

the cross of Christ not only provided the content of his teaching, but also shaped the manner in which he taught.

Read 1 Corinthians 2: 1-5

- 2) How do these verses connect with what has preceded (cf. v. 1: 18-31)?
- 3) What characterised Paul's own proclamation of the gospel among the Corinthians (i.e. what was absent and what was present [cf. 2 Corinthians 10: 10])?
- 4) Discuss why this passage ought not to be used to suggest that Paul was somehow against education or eloquence or forceful and persuasive speech (cf. Acts 19: 8-10; 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13, 15: 12-19).
- 5) Paul says that he decided to know nothing among the Corinthians 'except Jesus Christ and him crucified' (v. 2). Remember that Paul spent 18 months in Corinth establishing and building up the church. Answer the following:
 - a. Explain what Paul means by only proclaiming Christ and him crucified (cf. 1: 10-4: 17).
 - b. How would you respond to someone who claimed that, given all the practical day-to-day issues facing the Corinthians, Paul's focus was too narrow and not practical enough?
- 6) What explanations might there be for Paul's coming to the Corinthians in weakness and in fear and much trembling (v. 3 cf. Acts 18: 9-11; Galatians 4: 13-14; 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10, 6: 16-7: 1)?

7) What does Paul have in mind when he refers to the Spirit's power being demonstrated among the Corinthians (v. 4 cf. vv. 1: 17-18, 22)?

8) What did Paul hope would result from his manner of proclaiming Christ (v. 5)?

Think/Grow/Live

- In what ways might we be tempted as individuals and as a church to use techniques which manipulate and distract people from the cross of Christ?
- Do you think it's more important to be clear or clever in evangelism? What does your actual practice of evangelism indicate?
- List three things you can do as a cell group to become more effective at proclaiming Christ faithfully.
- How should Paul's model of proclaiming Christ and him crucified shape the way you minister to and encourage others at CrossCulture?

Prayer Points

- Pray through the truths of this passage using the acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication).
- Pray for our global partners in their proclamation of Christ.

STUDY 4 / 1 Corinthians 2: 6-16

The Wisdom of God

- 1) Have there been instances in your life where you lacked wisdom in handling a problem or difficult decision? Discuss.

Read 1 Corinthians 2: 6-16

- 2) In verse 6, Paul emphasises imparting wisdom among the "mature". What does it mean to be a mature and immature Christian (1 Corinthians 3: 1-3; Hebrews 5: 12-14; 1 Peter 2: 1-3; Ephesians 4: 11-14)?
- 3) Explain what Paul means by the "wisdom of God" (v. 6-9)?
- 4) How does God reveal wisdom and His glory to us (v. 10-13)?
- 5) What are the characteristics of the Spirit of God? How is this different from the Spirit of the world or men (v. 10-13 cf. John 14: 16-17, 26)?
- 6) How does the Spirit of God help us in understanding the thoughts of God (v. 10-13; John 16: 13-14)?
- 7) Who does the "natural man" in verse 14 refer to? Why is he deemed unwise?
- 8) In contrast to the "natural man" in verse 14, what does the spiritual man do and have (v. 15-16)?

Think/Grow/Live

- Discuss a time when you relied on self or the world for wisdom rather than on Christ.
- Paul applies the work of Christ to everyday situations (e.g. 1 Corinthians 5: 7, 6: 20). Describe a time when you have relied on and followed the wisdom of God.
- How can we better apply God's wisdom to everyday life – from relational challenges, to making decisions, to dealing with problems, etc.?
- We are called to proclaim Christ and this requires wisdom in our responses. How can this passage help you in dealing with the challenging topics brought up by new believers and non-Christian family and friends?

Prayer Points

- Pray through the truths of this passage using the acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication).
- Pray for our global partners in their proclamation of Christ.

STUDY 5 / 1 Corinthians 3: 1-23

Faithful Servants

In the first two chapters of his letter to the believers in Corinth, we have seen that Paul has begun to address a serious issue of pride and boasting in the church that is leading to the exaltation of man. This, he states, creates disciples of men rather than God.²⁵ His approach is to preach “Jesus Christ and him crucified”²⁶ in a “demonstration of the Spirit and of power”²⁷, so that their faith would not rest in the wisdom of men “but in the power of God”²⁸.

Read 1 Corinthians 3: 1-23

- 1) What prevented Paul from speaking to the Corinthians as to spiritual people (v. 1-4)?

- 2) What are some of the causes of division within the church (v. 18-23)?

- 3) Factionalism tends to place our focus on human achievement. What is wrong with this, particularly within the church?

- 4) What are some appropriate attitudes we should develop that will help us avoid such divisions (v. 5-9, 18-19, 21-23)?

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 1: 10-16.

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 2: 2.

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 2: 4.

²⁸ 1 Corinthians 2: 5.

- 5) What type of work is required in a field or a farm (v. 6-7)? In what ways are the tasks required to build a building different?

- 6) List some of the tasks that you can think of that help build the church and contribute to its growth. Who should carry out these tasks (v. 6-9)?

- 7) Which of these workers is to be considered most important (v. 5-7)?

- 8) Who brings about growth in the church and makes ministry fruitful (v. 6-7)?

- 9) What is the foundation that must form the basis for all Christian work (v. 10-11)?

- 10) Discuss with your group some examples of what this should mean in practice.

We are not saved by good works. Rather, every Christian has been “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”,²⁹ and is to bear “fruit in every good work”.³⁰ Paul warns us that the quality of our work will be tested.

- 11) What is the main difference between the building materials that Paul uses to illustrate work that survives the test and work that does not (v. 12)?

²⁹ Ephesians 2: 10.

³⁰ Colossians 1: 10.

12) Discuss with your group the implications for this in terms of our motives, conduct and the use of our spiritual gifts in carrying out Christian work.

13) What does Paul mean by "suffer loss" and "saved, but only through fire" (v. 15)?

14) What does Paul's strong language in verse 17 show about God's concern for believers around the world?

Prayer Points

- Pray through the truths of this passage using the acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication).
- Pray for our global partners.

STUDY 6 / 1 Corinthians 4: 1-21

Gospel Ministry

1) Have you ever felt misjudged or maligned by others? Share your experience.

Read 1 Corinthians 4: 1-21

- 2)** How does Paul suggest Christian leaders ought to be regarded (v. 1 cf. 3: 5-9)?
- 3)** What must we seek to be in the tasks God gives us (v. 2)?
- 4)** According to Paul, as we fulfil these tasks whose judgement and perspective is most important (v. 3-4)?
- 5)** When will this be made known (v. 5)?
- 6)** What does Paul mean by "not to go beyond what is written"? (v. 6 cf. 1: 31)?
- 7)** How were the Corinthians doing this (i.e. going beyond what is written)?
- 8)** Contrast the way the Corinthians behaved against the realities the apostles faced (v. 8-13).
- 9)** Why does Paul contrast himself with the Corinthians in this way (v. 14-15)?
- 10)** Paul urges the Corinthians to imitate him. How does he help them do this (v. 16-17)?

Think/Grow/Live

- Would it be fair to say that the basis of our criticism of others is usually human wisdom and pride? How ought this passage transform our judgements of ourselves and others?
- How would living with an awareness that God's perspective matters most, and in light of his coming judgement, shape the following:
 - your faithfulness to the tasks God calls you to (e.g. in the home, workplace, church, etc.)?
 - your attitude towards and evaluation of leaders?
 - times when you're misjudged and maligned?
- Which examples of faithfulness are you seeking to imitate in your Christian life?

Prayer Points

- Pray through the truths of this passage using the acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication).
- Pray for our global partners.

STUDY 7 / 1 Corinthians 5: 1-13

Get Rid of the Leaven!

- 1) Can you think of an example of a scandal within a contemporary Christian church, where the actions of those within the church would not even be tolerated by atheists?

Every so often, we hear of a Christian scandal that sickens both Christians and non-Christians alike, allowing Christ's church to be brought into disrepute. However, the ramifications can be far worse if the problem is not promptly addressed. 1 Corinthians 5 presents a case that is abhorrent. Although Paul is not a medical doctor, he understands that unrepentant sin is a disease that can infect the church. Today we will look at Paul's spiritual diagnoses of the disease and the appropriate treatment.

Read 1 Corinthians 5: 1-13

- 2) What was the nature of the sin that Paul was so concerned about (Leviticus 18: 7-8)?
- 3) What could have motivated the man to enter the illicit relationship? Was it for theological, personal, or perhaps financial reasons?
- 4) What does Paul mean by insisting "you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (v. 5, 13 cf. 1 Tim 1: 20)?
- 5) Why did the Corinthian church fail to discipline him (v. 2, 6 cf. 4: 8, 18-19)?

- 6)** What is the symbolic meaning of the effect of leaven? (v. 6 cf. Exodus 12: 15; Matthew 16: 6)?
- 7)** Why is this symbolism so relevant to this instance (1 Corinthians 3: 16-17; 2 Chronicles 29: 5, 7-8; 1 Timothy 5: 20)?
- 8)** Do you think church discipline is appropriate in our current culture (Matthew 18: 15-18; 2 Thessalonians 3: 14-15)?
- 9)** If you think church discipline is appropriate, when should discipline be initiated (v. 11)?
- 10)** Are we guilty of filling our diaries with Christian events and activities to the extent that we don't know any non-Christians well enough to engage in any meaningful kind of friendship evangelism? If so, what can we do about this (v. 10)?
- 11)** Why does Paul differentiate between judging those inside the church compared to those outside the church (v. 12-13)? How can we apply this guidance to our lives?
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Prayer Points

- Pray through the truths of this passage using the acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication).
- Pray for our global partners.

STUDY 8 / 1 Corinthians 6: 1-11

Christian Conciliation

- 1) Have you ever had a dispute with someone else in church? How did you resolve it?

Read 1 Corinthians 6: 1-11

- 2) Who are the “unrighteous” Paul refers to (v. 1)?
- 3) What motivated the Corinthian believers to file lawsuits against one another (v. 10)?
What type of lawsuits were they (v. 7-8)?
- 4) What alternatives does Paul suggest in dealing with such disputes between “brothers” (v. 2, 4, 7)?
- 5) Why do you think Paul was so concerned about members of the Corinthian church taking one another to Roman courts?
- 6) What makes the saints more qualified to handle such cases above a secular judge (v. 1-3 cf. Daniel 7: 22)?
- 7) What is Paul’s basis for insisting disputes be handled internally within the church (Exodus 18: 21-22; Deuteronomy 1: 9-18)?
- 8) How does Paul’s instructions in this passage echo that of Jesus’ (cf. Matthew 18: 15-17)?

- 9)** How can verses 9-11 be seen as both a warning and encouragement to the Christians in Corinth?
- 10)** What gives the Corinthian church hope (v. 11)?
- 11)** In Matthew 5: 9 Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God". How does Paul's instruction here help your understanding of what it means to be a peacemaker?
- 12)** Most of us have never had lawsuits filed against us, or filed a lawsuit against someone else. What are some changes we can make in how we interact with family, friends, church members and work colleagues in light of Paul's teaching?
- 13)** The Corinthian church was noticeably absent in the process of handling conflict between believers in the congregation. How can we as a church ensure we are equipped to handle internal disputes that arise between members?

Prayer Points

- Pray through the truths of this passage using the acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication).
- Pray for our global partners.

STUDY 9 / 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20

Glorify God with Your Body

1. If someone were to ask you, “what do Christians think is more important, the physical or the spiritual?”, how would you answer?

In the 1960's, Australia, along with other parts of the western world, experienced a period of rapid change in sexual ethics. Known as the “Sexual Revolution”, it was a time when traditional values and codes of behaviour were challenged and reshaped. Today, the revolution marches on, as sexual ethics continue to be reshaped at a rate unparalleled in history. Behavior that was once thought sexually promiscuous and harmful is now considered normal and celebrated as good. Yet for all the challenges and changes in so-called “traditional values” sexual immorality is nothing new.³¹

Like a Saturday night in the city of Melbourne after sundown, the Corinth of Paul's day was marked by sexual immorality and promiscuity. However, through the ministry of Paul and others, the light of the gospel of Jesus had penetrated the dark streets of Corinth. The Corinthian Christians, some of whom had lived lives marked by sexual immorality, had come to trust in Jesus and were now forgiven, cleansed of their sins, and set apart to live for God. But it can take time for the gospel of Jesus to renew our minds and transform our lives.

In first century Corinth, many believed the common Greek dualistic idea that the material world is temporary, bad and destined for destruction, while the spiritual world is good, eternal and what really counts. Consequently, some thought that what we do with our bodies has little or no impact on us spiritually, as though we can do just about anything on a physical level and it would carry no significance spiritually. In 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20, Paul applies the gospel of Jesus to sexual ethics and shows that

³¹ Ecclesiastes 1: 9.

what we do with our bodies matters. As members of the body of Christ, we are to glorify God with our bodies.

Read 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20

2. Verse 12 begins with two quotes (or repeated statements Paul anticipates) from the Corinthians – probably from those who felt that they had the freedom to do whatever they liked with their bodies. Answer the following:
 - a. What are the statements?

 - b. In your own words, explain how Paul responds.

3. “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food – and God will destroy both one and the other”,³² is likely another quote or slogan from the Corinthians expressing the belief of some that what we do with our bodies has no moral or spiritual consequences. How does the relationship between food and the body differ from the relationship between sexual immorality and the body (v. 13-14)?

4. In verses 15-17, what reasons does Paul give to avoid sexual immorality?

5. How is sexual immorality different from other sins (v. 18)?

6. How should a mindfulness of God dwelling in you effect how you view sexual sin and pursue purity (v. 19)?

³² In the Greek, quotation marks were not used so the reader has to judge when a phrase or sentence is a quotation. Contra the ESV, the NIV is probably correct in its decision to include ‘and God will destroy both one and the other’ in the Corinthians’ slogan.

7. What is Paul's basic response to the claim that we as Christians have the right to do anything, i.e. "all things are lawful for me" (v. 12 cf. v. 20)?
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Think/Grow/Live

(You may want to break into gender specific groups for this section)

- What do you find most difficult in your fight to remain sexually pure?
 - What practical things do you do to actively fight sexual sin?
 - How might Paul's teaching on the following help you in your fight against sexual sin:
(You don't have to discuss them all, perhaps focus on those that you think will be most helpful to you)
 - our bodies as members of Christ?
 - the unique nature of sexual sin?
 - our bodies as a temple of the Holy Spirit?
 - our being purchased by Jesus' blood and belonging to him?
-

Prayer Points

- Take time to quietly confess any unconfessed sexual sin and ask God for forgiveness.
- Ask God to help you to glorify him with your body.
- Pray for our global partners

Christian Marriage

Up to this point in the letter, Paul has been dealing with several difficulties reported to be known in the Corinthian congregation. In chapter 7, he begins to address the questions about which the Corinthians had written him, including marriage. It is important to keep in mind that Paul is replying to definite questions. He is not spelling out a complete “theology of marriage” in one chapter. It is necessary to consider as well what the rest of the Bible has to say about marriage. However, this passage gives valuable lessons on Christian marriage as Paul gives counsel to various marital statuses.

Marriage and Christian purity (1 Corinthians 7: 1-7)

- 1)** Marriage is brought up here by Paul as part of his earlier discourse on fleeing from sexual immorality. What has marriage to do with Christian purity (v. 1-2)?

- 2)** In a marriage, the husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. What do you think this implies (v. 3)? Why do you think Paul said this (v. 4)?

- 3)** In the Greco-Roman world of Paul’s time, there was a debate raging about whether it was appropriate to enjoy sex for pleasure, or if it was only appropriate when engaged in for procreation. In other words, recreation sex versus procreation sex! How would you engage in this debate in the light of this passage?

- 4)** What lessons can you draw from this passage in relation to polygamy (having more than one wife) and adultery (having a sexual relationship with someone other than your husband or wife)?

To be married or not? (1 Corinthians 7: 8-9)

- 5) Two contrasting words are used by Paul in these two verses: it is good to remain single and they should marry (if they cannot control themselves). What are the implications of these two words?

- 6) What is the co-relation of this passage with the above passage?

Marriage and divorce (1 Corinthians 7: 10-11)

- 7) What do you notice about the tone of Paul's instruction in verse 10 as compared to earlier in verses 1, 6 and 7?

- 8) Jesus' teaching on divorce is recorded, among others, in Mark 10: 2-12 and Matthew 19: 1-12. What are the key lessons from Jesus' teaching on divorce?

- 9) What conclusions can we draw in relation to divorce as a result of this study?

Marriage and unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7: 12-16)

- 10) Paul is responding to some believers who had concerns about purity, arguing that the believer is defiled through sexual relations with their unbelieving spouse. How does Paul answer the concern of these believers (v. 14)?

- 11) What does Paul mean by the unbeliever is made holy by the believing spouse (v. 14)?

- 12) What is Paul's instruction to a believer in relation to his/her unbelieving spouse? What principles can we draw from this instruction?

Live as you were called (1 Corinthians 7: 17-24)

13) What principle or rule does Paul lay down for Christians in verses 17-24?

14) What is the essence of this principle and how does it apply to our Christian life?

Paul tells the Corinthians that no matter what circumstances they find themselves in – married or single, circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free – to conduct their lives in service to God for His glory. In essence, he tells them to bloom where they are planted! We are prone to think that a change in circumstances is always the answer to a problem. But the problem is usually within us, not around us. The heart of every problem is the problem in the heart.

Prayer Points

- Pray through the truths of this passage using the acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication).
- Pray for our global partners.

STUDY 11 / 1 Corinthians 7: 25-39

Advice to Singles

In February 2009, Victoria experienced one of its harshest fire seasons and the most affected areas were Kinglake and Marysville. At that time, I doubt any real estate agent would have advised buying property in those areas, not because the property wasn't valuable, but because of the risks involved due to fires. In a similar manner, Paul's advice to single Christians in the congregation in Corinth came at a time when an acute grain shortage had just struck the city, causing famine and social distress. One could call this a *crisis*. The purpose of this study is to understand Paul's advice to the single Christians in Corinth, and to responsibly apply his counsel to our own lives.

Read 1 Corinthians 7: 25-39

1. How is a *command* different from an *advice*? Why would Paul start his response to the Corinthians' inquiries with such a line (v. 25)?³³
2. In light of Corinth's current situation,³⁴ why would Paul advise against getting married or divorced? Which worldly troubles would he like to spare them (v. 27-28)?
3. Why might some have wrongly thought that getting married would be a sin? Why would it not be sinful (v. 28 cf. Genesis 2: 24)?
4. In verse 29, is Paul referring to the quantity of time remaining until Christ's return, or is he talking about the character and quality of time in a believer's life?
5. What's Paul's main point in verses 29-31? How do these verses relate to Jesus' teaching in Luke 17: 33?

³³ "the betrothed" translates for "virgins" in Greek (plural of "parthenos" for "virgin").

³⁴ crisis caused by famine.

6. Why does Paul say that a life of singleness (celibacy) will *secure one's undivided devotion to the Lord*? Can you think of any anxieties that might be avoided by remaining single (v. 32-35)?
7. What reasons does Paul give when he says that it would be better to remain unmarried (v. 32-38)?
8. What condition does Paul give in the case of a widow remarrying (v. 39)? Does this condition apply only to widows or Christians in general?

Think/ Grow/ Live

- Throughout this section, Paul does not give absolute moral commandments, but pastoral recommendations for a particular situation. The distinction is not between right and wrong, but between "right" and "better" (v. 38). Why shouldn't we take Paul's advice lightly (cf. 2 Corinthians 4: 1; Galatians 1: 15-16; 1 Corinthians 4: 1-2)?
- In this chapter, Paul is not advocating for a withdrawal or renunciation from the world, but a relativising of the importance of the worldly things in light of eternity. What relationships or ties with the world should you prioritise in light of salvation?
- Paul commends marriage in many of his epistles, but centres his advice in 1 Corinthians 7 on promoting the benefits of being single in light of their current situation and their lives as appointed followers of Christ. After listening to Paul's advice, how would you encourage a brother or a sister in Christ that is single?

"We cannot love what is eternal unless we cease to love what is temporal... Learn to dismiss it before you are dismissed by it" - Augustine

Prayer Points

- Pray through the truths of this passage using the acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication).
- Pray for our global partners.

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