



Bible studies on  
1st Corinthians, chapters 1-7  
Major Series 3, 2010





# An introduction to studying 1st Corinthians

1 Corinthians is the first of two letters to the Corinthians written by Paul that is preserved for us. It is the fourth letter of Paul's that we have preserved, following Galatians (49-50 A.D.), and 1 & 2 Thessalonians (51 A.D.). At the time of writing Paul is in Ephesus on his third missionary journey, somewhere around A.D. 54 or 55 (1 Cor. 16:8).

Corinth had been occupied as a city since before 2000 B.C. It was strategically located on an isthmus that joined the southern part of the Greek peninsula with the mainland to the north. At Corinth, the isthmus was only about 6 miles wide. From 350-250 B.C., Corinth was the largest and most prosperous city of mainland Greece. The city was destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. For 100 years, the city was left desolate. In 44 B.C., Julius Caesar rebuilt the city and settled it with Roman colonists. Corinth became the capital of Achaia and the seat of the Roman government. It surpassed Athens as a center of science and culture and as the hub of the area.

The city was known and identified as a city of evil, immorality, and frivolousness. The Greek word "Corinthianize" came to be used to mean "to practice immorality." The main worship of the city centered around Aphrodite, and the temple dedicated to her held 1000 female priests who engaged in prostitution.

It was into this Roman/Greek city that Paul came in 51 A.D. (Acts 18:1-18) and stayed for 18 months (Acts 18:11). During this time he exhibited the Spirit of God and power to them (1 Cor. 2:1-5). Many were saved, but Paul purposely only baptized a few (1 Cor. 1:14-17). Nevertheless, he was the founder of the church.

Sometime after this, Apollos, a powerful speaker and instrument of God, who came from Alexandria, Egypt, and was sent to Corinth by the believers at Ephesus, appeared and provided great support to the church. There were also some in the church that apparently had been converted under Peter's ministry.

After leaving Corinth, Paul wrote an epistle back to Corinth, of which we know very little, except there was a warning not to associate with sexually immoral people (1 Cor. 5:9). While in Ephesus, he wrote a second letter, which we know as 1 Corinthians, to correct problems that he heard from the house of Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11).

Thereafter, on a journey that is not recorded in Acts, Paul left Ephesus and travelled to Corinth. This was known as the painful visit (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2). Obviously, this was not a pleasant visit for Paul.

Paul then returned to Ephesus and wrote a painful letter (2 Cor. 2:4; 7:8) probably in the early part of 56 A.D. This letter was apparently carried by Titus to Corinth (2 Cor. 12:13). Paul then went to Troas to find Titus and hear the news but Titus did not come (2 Cor. 2:12-13). Paul crossed over to Europe and found Titus, who relayed the good news of the Corinthian acceptance of and repentance over Paul's third letter (2 Cor. 7:5-16).

Paul then wrote a fourth letter (A.D. 56), which we know as 2 Corinthians, to express his thankfulness and to prepare the Corinthians for his third visit. He arrived in Corinth and apparently spent the winter there (Acts 20:3; 1 Cor. 16:6).

153 times in this epistle of 16 chapters Paul mentions Jesus Christ. He is mentioned in every chapter except chapter 13, the love chapter. Paul's Christianity revolves around Jesus Christ. He writes to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus (1:2) and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus (6:11). Paul sees his victory as coming through Him (15:57). Christ provides grace (1:4) and enrichment in everything (1:5). Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1:24); He is the righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1:30). He is the foundation of our lives (1:11).

The epistle deals with a series of problems, from divisions to immorality, to legal fights, to marriage, to tender care, to idolatry, to the Lord's Supper, to gifting, to the resurrection, to giving. Interestingly, some 40 years later, some of the same problems existed in this church. In one of the earliest preserved writings of the Christian church, the church at Rome in 95-96 A.D. wrote to the Corinthians reminding them of Paul's words in this book and telling them to repent from rebellion against the presbyters (Letter of the Romans to the Corinthians, ¶ 47).

The city of Corinth and its church continued well into the Middle Ages when in 1458 the Saracens captured it. In 1858, a tremendous earthquake destroyed the city. It has since been rebuilt about 3 miles from the former site.

Structure:

After an introduction, Paul deals immediately with problems in the church in chapters 1-6. Thereafter, beginning in chapter 7, he introduces other matters of instruction with the words "Now concerning ..." or similar words (7:1; 8:1; 11:2; 12:1; 16:1). This phrase is used also at 7:25 and 16:12, though these introduce concepts closely related to previous ones and therefore I do not separate them.

## I. Introduction 1:1-9

- Salutation 1:1-3
- Thankfulness to God for them 1:4-9

## II. The Problems 1:10-6:20

- Divisions 1:10-4:21
  - There are divisions 1:10-17
  - But not because of the gospel 1:18-31
  - Nor because of my presentation 2
  - But because of your carnality 3:1-4
  - Straighten up, your works will be tried 3:5-17
  - Don't glory in men 3:18-23
  - Don't puff yourself up 4
- Gross immorality 5
  - When immorality affects the church, it is serious 5:1-8
  - You must deal with it 5:9-13
- Legal suits 6:1-11
  - Disputes between believers should be settled in the church 6:1-6
  - Be righteous and accept wrong 6:7-11
- Sexual impurity 6:12-20

## III. Other Matters of Instruction 7:1-16:12

- Marriage 7
  - General principles 7:1-9
  - Don't leave your spouse 7:10-16
  - Live as God has called you 7:17-24
  - If you are unmarried, listen 7:25-40
- Christian Liberty 8:1-11:1
  - Don't use your knowledge to destroy your brother 8
  - Follow the example of service shown by Paul 9
  - Don't think that you are above falling 10:1-13
  - Flee idolatry 10:14-22
  - Do all to the glory of God 10:23-11:1
- Church practice 11:2-34
  - Men and women should behave differently 11:2-16
  - Do not permit the church to be a place of shame 11:17-22
  - Celebrate the Lord's Supper worthily 11:23-34
- Spiritual Gifts 12-14
  - The Spirit gives them out 12:1-11
  - But they are not divisive 12:12-30
  - Love is the greatest way 12:31-13

- But do not forget gifts, especially prophesy 14
- Resurrection 15
  - The gospel in a nutshell 15:1-11
  - There is a future resurrection 15:12-34
  - Christ has risen 15:12-19
  - In Him we raise 15:20-28
  - I am foolish if there is no resurrection 15:29-34
  - Our bodies will be different 15:35-49
  - It will happen in a moment in time 15:50-58
- Giving 16:1-4
- Future visits 16:5-12 1. I plan to come and stay awhile 16:5-9 2. Timothy may come first 16:10-11 3. Apollos will come when it is convenient 16:12

#### IV. Conclusion 16:5-24

- Final instructions 16:13-18
- Final greetings 16:19-21
- Final warning 16:22
- Final blessing and love 16:23-24

from <http://truthsaves.org/outlines/icorinthians.shtml>

# Welcome to the third major study series for 2010

## *Set Free: 1st Corinthians, chapters 1-7*

On Sundays we worship together, study God's Word, pray and enjoy being a church family. In small groups we are able to delve deeply into the Word together, to take time to develop relationships so that we can encourage and challenge and support our brothers and sisters in Christ, to pray and to spur each other on in ministry.

Study	Passage
1	1 Cor 1:1-17
2	1 Cor 1:18-31
3	1 Cor 2:1-16
4	1 Cor 3:1-7
5	1 Cor 4:1-13
6	1 Cor 5:1-13
7	1 Cor 6:1-18
8	1 Cor 7

This program will match the studies with the sermons. If your group prefers a different schedule - go for it! Some groups like to take 2 weeks per study, others to do the study before the sermon.

Some helpful guidelines for you to think about in your small group:

- We will treat no question as stupid.

Some people will have more experience in Bible study than others, but everyone must feel free to say what they think without fear of being ridiculed.

- We will remain focused throughout the study. We will always attempt to find a good balance between studying the Scriptures, sharing our news and praying for each other.
- We will remember that we gather together in a small group to grow in our knowledge of God and use our gifts to build each other up in the faith. We hope and expect that the Holy Spirit will perform a transforming work in our lives as we study God's Word and share together.
- We will be aware of what is going on in each other's lives and listen with empathy and concern instead of judgement or ridicule.
- We will agree to disagree in love. Open discussion is an adventure full of danger. People will differ. None of us will know the whole truth or be right all the time. We will respect and love and try to learn from each other even when we think the other person is wrong.
- We will make every effort to attend and participate faithfully in all small group meetings.



# 1 Corinthians

## 1:1-17

### Getting started

Do you think the 'perfect' church is possible? What would it look like?

### DISCUSS...

1. Paul describes the believers in Corinth 'sanctified' (already made holy) but also calls them to be holy (present tense) (v2). Is he contradicting himself? Why do you think he includes both descriptions?
2. What does it mean to 'call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ' (v2)?
3. What has God done for the church in Corinth, and what is he continuing to do? (v5-8)
4. What is the first cause of division in the Corinthian church (v10-12)? Why do you think Paul talks about this before other issues?
5. 'Words of human wisdom' can 'empty the cross of its power' (v17). How do you think this happens?

My notes...

## Explore some more...

*In the Old Testament:*  
Isaiah 29:12-16; Joel 2:28-32;

*In the New Testament*  
Acts 2:21-41, 18; Romans 15:5-7; Galatians 2:11-14

## Making an impact...

- ‘Church should be a place where people who have no other natural reason for associating with each other come together in love [of Christ]...’ How do you see this at our church? How does our diversity enrich our community?
- How can we as a church strengthen ourselves and be prepared for differences which could lead to divisions amongst us?
- Is Paul saying that denominations are wrong? What warnings are there for the wider

church today about creating divisions?

## A thought...

“...it is worth holding onto this amazing truth - it was God’s grace and mercy that drew us to Christ in the first place...God’s grace and mercy established a church in your neighbourhood and in the nation in which you are living. In spite of the church’s imperfection, in spite of your own, thank God for his gift of faith - your own and that of other Christians.” M. Derham, *Encounter with God in 1 Corinthians*, 26

## Pray...



# 1 Corinthians

## 1:18-31

### Getting started

Can you think of a time when God's way didn't seem to make any sense? What happened?

### DISCUSS...

1. In what ways can the gospel of Jesus sound foolish?
2. Is Paul saying that searching after wisdom is ungodly? Compare his words with some of the words of wisdom literature ( Proverbs 2:1-11; 4:5-7; Job 28) - what is the difference between what God wants and what the Corinthians were searching for?
3. How does the message of the cross destroy any pride or boasting in human wisdom?
4. How does trusting in Jesus bring us God's wisdom, righteousness, holiness and redemption (v30)?

My notes...

## Explore some more...

*In the Old Testament:*

Isaiah 29:14, 55:8-9;  
Jeremiah 9:22-23

*In the New Testament*

2 Cor 5:21; Colossians  
2:2-3; 1 Thessalonians  
4:3-7; 1 Peter 1:18-22

## Making an impact...

- How do you see the power and wisdom of God through people that the world might consider weak or lowly?
- ‘Corinthians were connoisseurs of rhetoric; Paul renounced it. Corinthians loved playing with ideas; Paul preached straightforward truth.’ What do you think our culture is proud of? How does the gospel keep us humble?

## A thought...

“The crucifixion of Christ reveals just who the Master of the universe is, humble, self-giving, tender-hearted, suffering for and therefore with creatures made in his image... The cross continues to be regarded by many as ‘offensive’ and ‘stupid’. Yet in reaching down to save and reveal himself in the crucified One, God has identified with sufferers and the suffering in the world. The Creator of the universe is no stranger to suffering, weakness and humiliation. ” P. Barnett, *1 Corinthians, Holiness and Hope of a rescued people*, 36

## Pray...



# 1 Corinthians

## 2

### Getting started

Who do you think our culture considers wise? What makes them 'wise'?

### DISCUSS...

1. Paul writes that he avoided eloquence and superior wisdom (v1). Is he saying that we should avoid being 'intellectual' when we share our faith with others?
2. How is God's wisdom different from the wisdom of 'this age' (v6-10)?
3. How does having the 'Spirit who is from God' impact the life of a Christian (v12)?
4. How does this chapter show us that we are freed through the wisdom of God?
5. What does it mean to 'have the mind of Christ' (v16)?

My notes...

## Explore some more...

*In the Old Testament:*  
Isaiah 40:13, 64:4, 65:17

*In the New Testament*  
Romans 1:14-17;  
Philippians 2:5-8; 1 Peter  
1:10-12

## Making an impact...

- Share with the group about someone you respect for their spiritual maturity. How does their maturity impact their life?
- How have you been aware of the Spirit's power in your life and/or our church?
- How can we as a church encourage people to become more mature in their faith?

## A thought...

“ Christians must concentrate on what is going right (1:1-9) and on Christ and him crucified (1:18-2:5) - now Paul advocates that they focus on true godly wisdom (2:6-16)... Paul uses numerous technical terms that the Corinthians employed to justify their spiritual elitism ('wisdom', 'mature', 'secret', 'spiritual') and readiness them so that they include that which is available to all believers.' C. Bloomberg, *1 Corinthians NIV application commentary*, 65.

## Pray...



# 1 Corinthians

## 3

### Getting started

Share with the group about the person who first told you about Jesus.

### DISCUSS...

1. Even though the Corinthians had the Spirit, why couldn't they be considered spiritual (v1-4)?
2. What different pictures of the church do we get from Paul's metaphors of the church as a field (v5-9) and a building (v10-15)?
3. How does this chapter reveal the work of the trinity in the life of the church?
4. How does this chapter continue Paul's message in chapters 1 & 2?
5. What lessons are in this chapter about how Christian should relate to God, to one another and to those they serve?

My notes...

## Explore some more...

*In the Old Testament:*  
Exodus 18:13-24; I Kings  
8:10-13

*In the New Testament*  
Acts 6:1-7; Romans 12:4-  
5; Ephesians 2:19-10;  
Hebrews 3:1-6

## Making an impact...

- How does this chapter reveal the freedom we all have to be God's people? In what ways does this freedom also bring responsibility?
- The language used about being God's temple is corporate - talking about the whole church. What does it mean that our church is a place where God dwells?
- What can we do for each other to encourage us to become mature in our faith?
- Who are you sharing the gospel with? In what ways can you plant or water God's word

in people's lives?

## A thought...

"We do not blame a three-year old for not carrying on a mature conversation, but the same argument cannot be made about the Corinthians. They had had every opportunity to grow much in Christ...The Corinthians had received enough teaching to know better than to have the kinds of division they were having. They were living by the secular norms of Corinth, and their jealousy and quarrelling proved it." M. Dever, *Twelve challenges churches face*, 32

## Pray...



# 1 Corinthians

## 4

### Getting started

Can you think of a time when you did not live up to the trust someone had in you?

### DISCUSS...

1. In contrast to the hero worship in Corinth, how do Paul and his coworkers wish to be regarded (v. 1-2)?
2. Do you think it's possible to have a clear conscience and not be innocent? What do you think Paul means by this (v4)?
3. Paul fears the Corinthians are moving "beyond what was written"—probably a reference to the Old Testament Scriptures. How might going beyond the authority of Scripture result in taking "pride in one man over against another" (v. 6)?
4. What tone does Paul take in verses 8-13? Why do you think he writes this way?
5. What similarities can you see in verses 12-13 and what Jesus says in Matthew 5:1-12?

My notes...

## Explore some more...

*In the Old Testament:*  
Lamentations 3:45-47

*In the New Testament*  
John 13:12-17; 1 Tim  
3:16; 2 Tim 3:16-17

## Making an impact...

- What does this chapter say about the importance of our character? What do you need to cultivate in your own life to be free to serve others? (Maybe look forward to chapter 13 to get some ideas.)
- What do you feel would need to change in your life before you would feel really confident to tell people to imitate you in Christ (v16)?

## A thought...

“The Corinthian Christians, however, were strong on the ‘already’ but weak about the ‘not yet’. It appears that having been made ‘rich’ in Christ in ‘all speech’ and ‘all knowledge’ ...the Corinthians have persuaded themselves that the ‘kingdom of God’ has, somehow, ‘already’ come..” P. Barnett, *1 Corinthians, Holiness and Hope of a rescued people*, 67.

## Pray...



# 1 Corinthians

## 5

### Getting started

Did you ever get in trouble in school? What happened?

Do you think you were treated justly?

### DISCUSS...

1. What made the sexual problem in the Corinthians church especially loathsome to Paul?
2. What link is there between the Corinthians' boasting and their toleration of immorality (v6)?
3. How do you reconcile what Paul says in this chapter and what he has said about judging people in 4:3-5?
4. In what ways can discipline bring restoration to a community and to an individual?
5. What important reminder does Paul include in verses 12-13?

My notes...

## Explore some more...

### *In the Old Testament:*

Exodus 12:17-20; Leviticus 18:8; 2 Sam 12; Isaiah 53:7-12

### *In the New Testament*

Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 6:1-14; Galatians 6:1-5

## Making an impact...

- How does this chapter challenge you to take sin more seriously - in your life? in the lives of your fellow Christians?
- How has your Christian life brought you freedom morally?
- What does a church community need in order to be a safe and welcoming place *and* a place where sin is addressed and taken seriously?

## A thought...

“It is not Paul’s role, but God’s, to judge those who are ‘outside’ in the world, including those who public lifestyle is blatantly evil. But it is Paul’s part and the Corinthians’ and ours as believers to judge those who are ‘inside’, that is the *known* brother and sister whose evil is explicit, extreme and overt. This is not a matter of being ‘judgmental’, but of merely being aware of the moral reality within our churches.” P. Barnett, *1 Corinthians, Holiness and Hope of a rescued people*, 87.

## Pray...



# 1 Corinthians

## 6

### Getting started

Do you like shows like 'Judge Judy' - where people meet in court and have it televised? Why/why not?

### DISCUSS...

1. What commands and guidelines does Paul give for settling disputes between Christians (v. 1-8)?
2. How do verses 9-11 illustrate the power and grace of the gospel to remove our guilt and shame?
3. What does Paul teach about our body in verses 13-17?
4. What is so distinctive about sexual immorality?
5. Paul has already called the church God's temple and now highlights that this as an individual truth (v18-20). How does the biblical view of the body presented here contrast with society's values and opinions?

My notes...

## Explore some more...

*In the Old Testament:*  
Exodus 23:1-9

*In the New Testament*  
Matthew 18:15-22; John 8:1-11; Romans 12:1; 1 Cor 10:23-33; Hebrews 13:4.

## Making an impact...

- Do you agree that it is better to be cheated by a fellow Christian than take them to court?
- Is there ever a time when it might be right to involve civil courts?
- What does it mean for you to know that 'you are not your own; you were bought at a price' (v19-20)?
- How have you seen God restore the honour of those who have been shamed through sexual immorality?

## A thought...

"By God's grace our churches will oppose sin's cruel ways in people's lives. To neglect to discipline sinners is to neglect our proper business, to act to ruin the church for which Christ died, and to harm the person caught in sin. To refuse to judge sin in the church is to obscure the gospel, harm ourselves, especially the weakest and most vulnerable among us - those trapped in their sins - and to dishonour God himself."  
M. Dever, *Twelve challenges churches face*, 63.

## Pray...



# 1 Corinthians

## 7

### Getting started

What do you think are the biggest differences between what Christians believe about sexuality and what is portrayed in society?

### DISCUSS...

1. How does this chapter connect with what Paul has already said in 1 Cor 6:18-20?
2. How was Paul's advice different to the normal Roman law that gave men most of the rights in marriage?
3. Summarise what practical advice Paul gives in this chapter about being married.
4. What does Paul say are some benefits of remaining single? Are these still relevant reasons today?
5. What do you think Paul means when he talks about unbelieving spouses and children being 'holy' (v12-14)? In what ways can families be blessed through the belief of just one member?
6. What is the 'present crisis' in v26? Are Paul's views still relevant?

My notes...

## Explore some more...

### *In the Old Testament:*

Genesis 2:18-25; Psalm 16; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Song of Songs 3:1-5;

### *In the New Testament*

Philippians 4:10-13; Colossians 3:5-17; 1 Peter 4:7-11

## Making an impact...

- How does this chapter encourage you to make priorities in life that will 'please the Lord'?
- What principles in this passage could help you care for others at church who are struggling in their marriage, or struggling because they are unmarried?
- Paul highlights a broader concern about a Christian's place in society (v17-24). What does this teach us about diversity and unity in the church? How does that apply to us today?

## A thought...

"From Paul we see marriage and celibacy as divine gifts fitting into God's mysterious plan, and fitting into God's church. Reflecting again on the gifts of the church, Paul will later state that all gifts are for 'building up the church' (14:12)." V.P. Branick, *First Corinthians, building up the church*, 68.

## Pray...