

**REAL PROBLEMS**

# **GOSPEL SOLUTIONS**

A STUDY IN 1 CORINTHIANS

# Table of Contents

Introduction: What Do We Know About Corinth?

Summary 1

1 Corinthians 1:1-17

## **Week 1 True Wisdom**

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Summary 2

1 Corinthians 2:1-13

## **Week 2 Unity in Christ**

1 Corinthians 3:1-23

## **Week 3 Christian Humility**

1 Corinthians 4:1-21

## **Week 4 Engaging a Broken World**

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

## **Week 5 The Same Gospel For All**

1 Corinthians 6:1-11

Summary 3

1 Corinthians 6:12-7:40

## **Week 6 Not Everything is a Hill to Die On**

1 Corinthians 8:1-13 & 10:23-11:1

## **Week 7 True Freedom**

1 Corinthians 9:1-27

Summary 4

1 Corinthians 10:1-22

Summary 5

1 Corinthians 11:2-34

## **Week 8 You Are Gifted**

1 Corinthians 12:1-26

## **Week 9 Loving People Is Hard Work**

1 Corinthians 12:27-13:13

Summary 6

1 Corinthians 14:1-39

Summary 7

1 Corinthians 15:1-34

## **Week 10 A New Creation is Coming**

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

Summary 8

1 Corinthians 16:1-24

## INTRODUCTION

This study is intended to be used along with the sermon series at Oviedo City Church on Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. That series is titled Real Problems, Gospel Solutions, and can be found on the OCC website, [www.oviedocity.church](http://www.oviedocity.church), under the tab titled Listen, then Sermons.

In the sermon series, we covered ten major portions of the letter but not every verse in the letter. The ten sermons deal with significant themes in 1 Corinthians, and each week of the study goes into greater depth and discussion on that week's sermon passage. The portions of the letter not covered in the sermons and weekly study are covered in summary form in the chapters between various weeks. It is important to read those summary chapters in order to have a good sense of the flow of Paul's arguments in the letter and have a more informed discussion during the Bible Study portion.

While it is certainly acceptable to watch the sermons and do the study on your own, we highly recommend being part of a group to discuss what you have heard and learned. Christian growth best happens in community where we are able to share ideas, experiences, and questions with one another. As we will see in what Paul has to say in this letter, we need one another as valuable members of the Body of Christ, and we are impoverished when we fail to engage in real Christian community.

## WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT FIRST-CENTURY CORINTH?

By the time Paul arrived in Corinth on his second missionary journey in 50AD, the city was a major center of Roman commerce due as much to its geographical location as anything else. Corinth was a harbor town sitting on the western shore of a thin isthmus between the Aegean and Ionian Seas. As such, it provided a major shortcut across Greece, allowing ships to avoid the 200-mile trip around the storm-buffed peninsula, making it safer and easier for goods and people to travel between Rome and the eastern portion of the empire. Being the key commercial hub between Rome and the East meant the Corinthians enjoyed far greater wealth than other cities and certainly more than people living in the countryside.



*First-Century Mediterranean World*

<https://enterthebible.org/map/first-century-mediterranean-world>

Beginning with the reign of Augustus, the emperors poured vast amounts of money into building projects in Corinth. As a Roman Colony, the aim was to make it a miniature representation of Rome itself. It was a wealthy and cosmopolitan city. One of the highlights of the cultural life of Corinth was the hosting of the Isthmian Games every two years. These games were second only to the Olympic Games in ancient Greece and help explain Paul's use of athletic illustrations in his letters to Corinth.

Similar to Athens, there was an acropolis that the city was built around. That acropolis, or Acrocorinth as it is known, is a massive mountain that towers 1,500 feet above the city. In Paul's day, it dominated not only the city skyline but its religious and cultural life as well. It had major temples to Aphrodite, Apollo, and Poseidon, as well as altars of other Greek and Egyptian gods. Temple prostitution was rampant, with life revolving around the worship of the gods and the Emperor, with sacrificial meals taking place in the temples, and everyone in the city being a devotee of one or more of the gods.

As a Roman colony, there was great pride on the part of the citizens of Corinth. Being a Roman colony afforded them privileges not available to most people. Even though Corinth is in Greece, they saw themselves as an outpost of Roman life, culture, and power. The official language of the city was Latin though most people would have been bilingual and also spoken Greek. All of this served to make Corinth a thoroughly cosmopolitan city that was steeped in pagan culture and Roman ideals. It was also marked by the very wealthy and the middle class, and the poor, all living in close proximity to one another.

The Jewish population was sizable enough to have a synagogue erected in the city proper. This is where Paul first preaches the Gospel in Corinth. (Acts 18:4) Under Roman law, Judaism was a *Lex Religio*, or Legal Religion recognized by the state. This gave Jews the right to gather for worship and also allowed them to offer prayers FOR the Emperor in place of prayer and offerings TO the Emperor. During the founding of the church in Corinth, Christians would have been viewed as a sect of Judaism and could function under the *Lex Religio*.

In order to gain an understanding of the founding of the Church in Corinth, take a few minutes to read Acts chapter 18. Take note of the conflict that develops between Paul and some of the synagogue rulers, as well as the accusations made about Paul and how the matter is resolved by the Roman court. In the second half of the chapter, you will meet Priscilla and Aquila, who become important partners in the Gospel with Paul. You will also meet Apollos, who becomes significant in the splits that develop in the church, which Paul addresses in this letter. The events of Acts 18 most likely took place in 51 AD during Paul's second missionary journey, with the letter being written in 55 AD.

## SUMMARY 1

### 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-17

Paul begins his letter in the typical fashion of ancient letters by identifying himself and greeting the recipients of the letter. In his greeting, he includes “our brother Sosthenes”. It is likely that Sosthenes is the same person whom you would have read about in Acts 18:17, the ruler of the synagogue who was beaten in front of Gallio the Proconsul. It is possible that Sosthenes was beaten by both the Jews and the Greeks together since Luke tells us, “they all seized Sosthenes”. The Jews because he was a leader of the synagogue who had come to faith in Christ, and the Greeks because Paul was a Roman citizen and should not have been touched, and so Sosthenes became the target.

While Paul is clearly the senior partner of the two, Sosthenes is his brother and partner in the Gospel. Early Christians referred to one another as brothers and sisters due to their strong sense of being one family who together called God their Father. It is a good lesson for us today to strive for unity with other Christians because we are ultimately one family with one father through Jesus Christ.

He next addresses the recipients (1:2-3) by referring to them 1) as the church, 2) as those who are sanctified in Christ, and 3) as those who, with all the saints everywhere else, call upon the name of Jesus.

By calling them the church, Paul is reminding them that they have been called by Jesus. The Greek word, *ekklesia*, is what we translate as church and from which we get ecclesiology, the study of the church. It literally means those who have been called out or called together. It points to an essential aspect of being a follower of Jesus, and that is, each one is called to gather together with other followers of Jesus for worship, encouragement, training in righteousness, and corporate witness to the world, demonstrating who Jesus is.

Identifying the Corinthians as those who are being sanctified, Paul is saying that they are being made more holy because of and through Jesus. To be sanctified comes from the Latin word for holy, *sanctus*, from which we get the word sanctuary or holy place. So followers of Jesus are to become progressively more holy the longer they follow Jesus.

The third identification Paul gives to the Corinthians is that they call upon the name of Jesus, along with every other follower of Jesus, everywhere. This reminds the Corinthians that it is Jesus to whom they are looking as their ultimate Lord, and they are united with every other person who calls upon

Jesus. It does not matter if those people are other Corinthians, if they are Roman citizens or not, if they are rich or poor, if they are city dwellers or people who live in the countryside. Because we are all in the same position of being helpless without Jesus, and we are all calling upon Him for grace and mercy. In verse 3, Paul pronounces a blessing on them to receive exactly what they are calling upon the Lord to deliver.

As is also typical in ancient letters, Paul has a section about giving thanks for the Corinthians. Generally speaking, Paul is thankful for the fact that they have received the gospel and that it is having an impact on their speech and knowledge. He is thankful that God has poured out His gifts on them, so they are lacking nothing that they need in order to grow in Christ.

But all is not well in Corinth. Paul has received reports that in spite of the many blessings they have been given, the church is being torn apart. The unity that Paul has already alluded to is fracturing in the Corinthian church. Verses 10-17 expose the reality that the Corinthians have divided into cliques based on who their favorite preachers are. The situation is so bad that Paul says there is quarreling among them. This is not a simple matter of people having personal preferences in terms of preaching styles. They are arguing vociferously with one another and splitting the church apart.

It has nothing to do with the content of the preaching, as Paul, Apollos, and Peter are all preaching the Gospel. The issue is more about spiritual pride, which is evident because of a group that claims to be the “true” followers of Jesus. It is also about cultural pride. The Greeks highly prized a certain style of rhetoric, public speaking. Apparently, Apollos had that style, but Peter didn’t, and Paul even less so. In spite of Paul being the founder of the church and their spiritual father, some have turned against him because he doesn’t fit the cultural image of a great speaker. We see this in verse 17 when Paul reminds them that eloquent words and style are not what matters, but it is the preaching of the Cross that matters.

It is an important lesson for us today not to get caught up in the celebrity of pastors and Christian leaders. Far too often, that celebrity is based more on our cultural and worldly standards of what entertains us and grabs our attention than upon the preaching of the Gospel.

What You Need To Know:

As the fountainhead of Western Philosophy, the Greeks took great pride in what they considered to be their preeminence in the area of wisdom. They also took pride in the great public speakers and rhetoricians of Greece. Even though Corinth was a Roman colony, it is still steeped in Greek culture and thought. The two main philosophical schools that we come across in the Bible are the Stoics and the Epicureans. On the surface, they appear to be very different. The Stoics are a “take life as it comes to you” group of people. If you are suffering, you must endure it. If life is wonderful and easy, don’t get too comfortable or get used to it. The Epicureans looked to experience as much pleasure as they could in life.

While they seem to be diametrically opposite, they have the same foundational idea, the world of the physical doesn’t really matter. It is the world of the immaterial, the spiritual, that matters. The Stoics take the position they do because this life doesn’t matter, so your suffering or your ease is not important. The Epicureans decide that since the material world does not ultimately matter, you may as well live for all the pleasure you can.

The message of the Cross puts great stock in the physical life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They have eternal significance. To the Greeks, that seems foolish in light of their view of the material world. How could the death of a Jew in Palestine have any benefit to them for eternity?

As a Roman colony, the Corinthians would also place a great deal of importance on power, wealth, and status. There was a definite caste system in ancient Rome, with members of the old Roman families at the top of the system. Average Roman citizens had greater standing than non-citizen freedmen, who had greater standing than slaves. Barbarians, those outside the influence of the Empire, were even lower.

All of this cultural baggage is not easily discarded simply because one comes to faith in Christ and will have an ongoing impact on the life of the Corinthian church.

## COMPREHENSION

1. What are the various groups or designations of people that Paul mentions in verses 18-31?
2. How does Paul describe the Corinthians before they came to faith in Christ?
3. What do the Jews and Greeks demand, and how do they react to the message of the Cross?
4. What is different about the Cross for the Jews and Greeks who come to faith in Christ compared to those who do not come to faith in Christ?

## INTERPRETATION

1. Wisdom and power are two major themes in this passage and the entire letter. How does God's wisdom and power compare to the Greek understanding of those two things?
2. How does the Cross turn the thinking of the Greeks on its head as it relates to wisdom and power?
3. Why is the idea of a crucified Messiah a scandal to the Jews? Can you think of any passages from Scripture to support your idea?
4. How is it that a crucified Messiah actually demonstrates the power of God?

## APPLICATION

1. In the Roman understanding, there were two groups of people, Romans and Barbarians. The Jews divided everyone into Jews and Gentiles. Paul delineates two groups of people, and this eliminates all other ways of designating and dividing people. He says there are those who are perishing and those who are not. What should our reaction be to the fact that there are those who are perishing?
2. In the current political and cultural climate, there is a great deal of discussion about power, and people clamoring for more power. In light of the crucifixion and what Paul says here about power, what should be the Christian posture when it comes to power?

## SUMMARY 2

### 1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-13

This section begins with Paul reminding the Corinthians of the Gospel that he preached. It was as counter-cultural as a message could possibly have been in the Roman world. It was a message that highlighted a crucifixion as the most earth shaking and powerful event in the history of the world. For us today, the cross has become a symbol of loving sacrifice on our behalf, of forgiveness for all our wrongs, and of an eternal torment avoided for all who trust in Christ of the Cross. For anyone else in the Roman world, the cross and the crucifixions that took place around them, was perhaps the most grotesque of fate for the one crucified. The cross was the most shameful thing that could be done to a person.

Crucifixion was so hideous that Roman citizens were not simply exempt from it, but it was forbidden to crucify a Roman citizen. It was a punishment that polite people hesitated to even mention in mixed company. The Roman Orator, Cicero, put it this way in the first century B.C. *“Wretched is the loss of one’s good name in the public courts, wretched, too, a monetary fine exacted from one’s property, and wretched is exile ... But the executioner, the veiling of heads, and the very word “cross,” let them all be far removed from not only the bodies of Roman citizens but even from their thoughts, their eyes, and their ears ... the mere mention of them [is] unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man.”*<sup>1</sup>

Among Jews it was no different, cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree. For first century Jews that included the cross. Yet Paul is saying that is the heart of the Gospel and his preaching focused on the Cross and on Jesus the crucified one.

Paul’s message was the opposite of what the culture valued. Not only that but his way of delivering that message did not measure up to the Greco-Roman standards of lofty oratory, and personal strength and dynamism. It did not fit the wisdom of the world. It was a higher wisdom with a greater power, even though the world considered it to be foolish, unwise, and weak.

The wisdom and power of God is not readily evident to the wisest and most powerful of this world. There is an understanding of the ways of God that can only come through the work of the Holy Spirit speaking to our hearts and minds. Paul is reminding the Corinthians of that fact. They experienced that when he was first with them and planted the church. However, they have since been getting sucked back into the wisdom of the world which included a desire for earthly power. What they are doing verged on denying the Gospel.

There is a lesson for us in this. The Corinthians were most likely not even aware of the fact that they were sliding back into the wisdom of the world. The simple reason is that the dominate thinking of the culture before coming to Christ was about power and human wisdom. That continued to be the culture they lived in after coming to Christ. Without a regular, nearly daily reminder of the counter-cultural nature of the Gospel, they would inevitably slip back into what seemed familiar and made sense. They did this without even thinking about it. It just felt natural and right because it was what it meant to be Roman.

You have grown up in a particular culture. In the USA, and much of the western world, there have been many Christian values and ideas that have shaped the culture. But there are also many values, like power, that may not necessarily fit with the Gospel. The way the world seeks to bring about change through protest and boycotts and polarizing confrontation, while seeming to make sense in the moment, runs counter to the message of the Cross that actually sees victory coming through weakness and sacrifice.

The world perceives weakness and sacrifice as the way of losers. Yet, it was weakness and sacrifice on the part of Jesus, when he had ten thousand angels at his disposal, that won the greatest victory in all of history, the victory over both sin and death. To the world the cross is folly, but Paul reminded the Corinthians that the Holy Spirit has shown them a different way, a deeper truth.

In order to understand wisdom from God's perspective it is essential to be in tune with the Holy Spirit. That requires being regularly in prayer, in the word, and critiquing the wisdom and ways of the world in light of the truth of God. Sometimes that will result in the realization that what we have thought to be true, because it is the culture we live in, may not be true after all. Rarely will it show itself to be 100% false. Rather, the wisdom of the world will often be a mixture of God's wisdom and man's ideas. We end up baptizing worldly wisdom and claim it to be Christian when it is really a distortion of it. This often shows up in the way we make our political agenda into "the" Christian position. We do it with economics, with how we handle our money, and time, and leisure as well.

What You Need to Know:

One of the issues that Paul deals with in this section is the future testing of the things we have done in this life. In verses 13-15 he speaks of The Day and what will happen in The Day. He is referring to the day of judgement when all our works, deeds, will be tested by God. It is important to understand that he is not talking about a judgment that leads to salvation or punishment, but rather a judgment of the things that Christians have or have not accomplished in their lives.

There will be a separating of the sheep and goats as Jesus taught in Matthew 25. That is a determination of who and who is not His. But there is a further judgement that happens among the sheep. It is a determination of what you have done for Christ and what your heavenly reward will be. That is what Paul is speaking of in these three verses. We know these because he speaks of what had been done by building on the foundation of Christ. As a Christian, you are called to serve Jesus. That is the building on the foundation part. How faithful and diligent you are in serving Him, is illustrated by Paul with what materials you built with. If you served well and faithfully then your efforts will be seen as precious material that will survive the fire. If your service has been half hearted or negligible, then it is like building something with hay and stubble and it will not survive the trial by fire.

In much of Christian teaching we rightly focus on salvation by grace alone. However, there is a component of Christian truth that is often forgotten or even rejected. That is, once you have eternal life through faith in Christ, there are levels of heavenly reward that are based on your faithfulness to the Lord in this life. The opposite is also true, some people will experience greater punishment in their disobedience than others. Jesus said that it would be better on the day of judgment for the people of Sodom than for the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida, because their sin was worse. Matthew 11:21, Luke 10:13

## **COMPREHENSION**

1. How does Paul need to address the Corinthians and how would he prefer to address them?
2. What illustrations does Paul use to show the Corinthians that they are to be united and not divided as followers of Jesus?
3. What is the foundation for our unity?
4. What are the reasons for discord among Christians?

## **INTERPRETATION**

1. What things would be considered spiritual milk, and what things would be considered spiritual meat? Read Hebrews 5:11-14 for insight on this.
2. When Paul says, “You are the Temple of the Holy Spirit,” he uses the first person plural. How does that impact your interpretation of what he means when he says that?
3. In light of the above question, what would be meant by destroying the Temple?
4. What do you think Paul means in verse 22 when he says, “all are yours”?

## **APPLICATION**

1. How would you assess your spiritual diet? What needs to change in it, and what steps could you take to make that happen?
2. In what ways do we destroy God’s Temple, especially in light of what Paul is saying in this chapter?
3. What are examples of Christian boasting that are not helpful?

What You Need to Know:

While there is a chapter break between 3:23 and 4:1, there is a continuation of an idea presented in chapter three. Paul reminded the Corinthians that their works, their service of the Lord would be judged for its faithfulness in the next life. He continues the topic of judgment of ones service to the Lord but shifts the focus to his work and the work of the other apostles, like Apollos. The topic is related to the divisions in the church and the Corinthian habit of judging people, ministry, wisdom, and strength on the basis of Greco-Roman values and not that of the Lord.

The Roman culture was highly patriarchal. Fathers of families had absolute authority over members of the family, including the right to arrange marriages, force divorces, and even sentence a family member to death. Paul often uses the language of being a spiritual father to those who came to Christ in the Greco-Roman world as a result of his ministry. The language of fatherhood, of spiritual parenting seems to replace the language of disciple that was used in the Hebrew culture as the Gospel moved into the Greco-Roman world.

## **COMPREHENSION**

1. Paul uses the technique of comparing and contrasting the values of the Roman world that the Corinthians are adopting with those of Christ. What are the comparisons Paul makes between the ways of the Corinthians and the ways of true servants of Christ?
2. Paul also lists qualities and experiences of servants of Christ without any specific contrast. What are those qualities and experiences?
3. How would you define humility and how does the world define it?
4. Why does Paul say he writes these things to the Corinthians?

## **INTERPRETATION**

1. Why is humility such an important quality for a follower of Jesus?
2. If the Kingdom of God is not in boastful words, but in power, what does that power look like?
3. How does the shift in language from “disciple maker” to “spiritual parent” shape your understanding of what it means to be a disciple maker?

## **APPLICATION**

1. Given the cultural climate of polarization that we live in, how can humility make a difference in our ability to reach people with the Gospel? What would Christ-like humility look like?
2. Has there been someone in your life who functioned like a spiritual parent or mentor? What did they do that helped you and how can you follow them like Paul called the Corinthians to follow him?

What You Need to Know:

In the Roman world, sex was rampant. It was all about power. Those in positions of power, especially male Roman citizens of wealth or strength, were expected to have sex with whomever they wanted. There was no cultural value of consent. If a man wanted to have sex with someone who was their social inferior, then they could, no questions asked, no consent needed.

For a man to sexually dominate another person was a sign of the times and the culture. It was seen as a simple act of meeting a need. In fact, the Roman word for “orgasm” and “urinate” were the same. A man was simply relieving himself at the expense of another. It didn’t matter if it was another man, a woman, a boy, or a girl. If they were his social inferiors, then it was perfectly acceptable.

To have sex with your social superior or the family member of a social superior was not acceptable. It was a matter of honor and disgrace. If a man of lesser rank had sex with the wife or daughter of a man of higher rank or social standing, that was unacceptable. When Paul says that a Corinthian man having sex with his father’s wife, probably his stepmother, he condemns it as something even the Romans found disgusting. It clearly wasn’t because they had Puritan scruples about sex, clearly. But because it violated social standing and honor.

The Corinthians had completely misunderstood what it meant to have freedom from the Law because of Christ. They thought a relationship between a stepson and stepmother was perfectly acceptable. Paul was scandalized by the acceptance of such sin and was especially concerned that it would ruin the Gospel witness of the church.

The Corinthians did understand that they needed to flee from immorality. Yet, somehow they had gotten the idea that they should completely cut themselves off from the non-Christian world because of the world’s immorality, while at the same time, they found a way to excuse the immorality in their midst.

## **COMPREHENSION**

1. What was the attitude of the Corinthians regarding the sexual relationship mentioned, and what did Paul say their attitude should be?
2. What action is Paul demanding the Corinthians take regarding the man?
3. What other sins does Paul warn the church against harboring in its midst?

## **INTERPRETATION**

1. How would the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:15-20 relate to the situation in Corinth?
2. Jesus says to treat the unrepentant brother or sister like an unbeliever. In what way does Jesus' treatment of unbelievers inform what that should look like for us?
3. What does it mean to turn someone over to Satan?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 for the rest of the story about this young man.
5. What do you think happened that Paul had to urge them to forgive him? What does this say about the purpose of church discipline?

## **APPLICATION**

1. How has the church and how have Christians typically responded to unbelievers and sinners in the world, and how should that change in light of this sequence of events?
2. How do you deal with the presence of obvious sin in the world?
3. There have been numerous scandals of many kinds within the wider Christian community. What can we do to recover our witness to the world in light of all our shortcomings?

What you need to know:

The ESV puts these 12 verses under the single heading of *Lawsuits Against Believers*. Once you read the passage, you may wonder how verses 9-12 fit with lawsuits when Paul gives a list of sinful behaviors that do not seem to have anything to do with lawsuits. The title of the section might better be called: *Examples of Unrighteous Living*, and the term unrighteous is used for those engaged in lawsuits against other believers and the list of sinful behaviors mentioned.

This list is not the only place in the New Testament like this. Romans 1:26-32 is another place where Paul lists sinful behaviors that keep someone from eternal life. Take a moment to read those verses before going on to answer the questions.

One other point of information is to understand what Paul means when he speaks of righteousness. This is not the same thing as perfection. The Bible is clear that none of us are perfect in this life. Only Jesus came into the world sinless and remained perfectly so throughout his life. The Greek word for righteous is also translated as just and justified. This points us in the direction of receiving, not creating, our righteousness. It is faith in Christ that results in God declaring that a person is now righteous or made just in His sight.

Being declared righteous by God means that our relationship with Him is intact. Whatever had been done in the past to break the relationship has been made right through Christ and faith in Him. No one who is made righteous by faith in Christ is in a position to feel spiritually superior to anyone else. The unrighteous are those who have not yet come to faith in Christ and are in bondage to their sin. They are in need of faith in Christ for their forgiveness and salvation, the same as anyone who previously came to faith in Christ.

## **COMPREHENSION**

1. What is the basic issue Paul deals with in verses 1-8?
2. What alternative outcome does Paul offer instead of going to court against a fellow believer?
3. What does he say will be the role of saints related to angels in eternity?
4. How does Paul describe the lives of the Corinthians before they came to faith in Christ?
5. What changes have taken place in the lives of the Corinthians since coming to faith?

## **INTERPRETATION**

1. What are Paul's reasons for not going before the secular courts in a dispute with a fellow Christian?
2. Why do you think Paul goes from talking about court cases among believers to a list of sins that the unrighteous are guilty of?
3. What do you make of the fact that Paul includes such seemingly different types of sins like men who practice homosexuality, and Idolaters with revilers, and the greedy in the same list?
4. How does the Gospel apply to the various sins on this list and the one in Romans 1:26-32

## **APPLICATION**

1. How does this passage impact your understanding of your own sin before and since coming to faith in Christ?
2. How does it impact the way you interact with people who have not yet come to faith and are caught in their sin?
3. In what way does this passage expand your understanding of and appreciation for the Gospel?

## SUMMARY 3

### 1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-7:40

In this chapter and a half, Paul deals with a number of issues that have raised a great deal of controversy and confused interpretation. Yet, with a little bit of background information and an appreciation of Paul's sarcasm, it is possible to gain a helpful understanding of his meaning. The ESV publishers have inserted four subject headings into the letter in an attempt to make it easier to understand Paul's intent. They are *Flee Sexual Immorality*, 6:12-20; *Principles for Marriage*, 7:1-16; *Live as You Are Called*, 7:17-24; and *The Unmarried and the Widowed*, 7:25-40.

#### *Flee Sexual Immorality*

You may recall from the introduction that Corinth was rampant with idolatry due to the many temples to various gods and goddesses and the temple prostitution that went along with a number of them. Additionally, the fact that Corinth essentially sat between two harbors full of sailors and that Roman culture saw sex as the right of any male of standing, this created a very sexualized culture in which the church attempted to thrive.

It seems that there were those within the church who had a very skewed understanding of what it meant to no longer be under the law. This was most likely combined with their Platonic understanding of the physical world as being of no consequence, and the world of the spiritual or of the immaterial ideal was what mattered. As a result, they treated sex much like the eating of food. It was a natural thing and really did not matter spiritually.

Paul makes the case that we are a unified whole body, mind, and spirit and that what happens in one aspect of our nature impacts the others. There is a union that happens on a psychological and even spiritual level when our bodies engage in various activities, including sex. Interestingly, modern psychology and biology have tended to support this idea by showing how certain behaviors cause actual physical changes in the brain, which in turn impact us emotionally and spiritually.

The idea the Corinthians had that sex outside the covenant of marriage is just a natural physical act with no negative repercussions, is also a widely held view in our culture, in spite of the fact that study after study shows this not to be the case. Paul's urging to flee from such things is well taken. There is a different level of impact on us when we engage in sexual sin than with other sin. It disturbs something deep within us.

Instead, we are to remember that our physical bodies are actually the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, and we should use our bodies in ways that honor the Lord. It is through the indwelling Spirit that we are united with Jesus. Not only that, but when Jesus gave his life to purchase our salvation, he not only purchased our soul but all of us as a complete package, body, mind, and soul.

### *Principles for Marriage*

The Corinthians had written a letter to Paul asking for clarification and instruction in a number of areas. One of those was on marriage and sexual relationships within marriage. We are not sure of the exact question in this case, but Paul's answer is clear. There is nothing wrong with sex per se; however, it is only appropriate within the context of marriage between one man and one woman. Not only is it appropriate, but couples should be sure to do all they can to meet one another's needs sexually and see it as a way to love and care for one another. While there may be agreed times of abstinence in the marriage, it is for the purpose of prayer and should be treated similarly to fasting from food and not for long.

Paul goes on to give instructions to those who are not married. Interestingly, he says that this is his best advice, but he is not claiming that he has a word from the Lord on this. Still, it is the apostle Paul, and his wisdom is well taken. In verse 8, Paul says to the married and widows. The Greek language did not have a word for widower. Paul seems to be using married for a widower in conjunction with widow. He includes himself among the unmarried, meaning that he is, in all likelihood, a widower. This would make sense since, as a Pharisee, he would have surely been married at one point. His advice is to remain single if possible in order to be free from domestic concerns and be able to more fully serve the Lord. However, if they find that it is too difficult to live a celibate life, then by all means, marry.

Paul's words about remaining single and the value of it for ministry should have a bigger impact on the place churches give to those who are single. Too often, the church has focused only on families with children and not created space for the ministry of single Christians.

Paul urges in verses 10 and 11 that Christians do all they can to remain married to one another. If there is a separation or divorce, that is not necessarily the end of the story, and there should be efforts to reconcile if possible. This is in keeping with the nature of the Gospel and forgiveness and reconciliation. However, Paul understands that it is not always possible, and the statements about being single in the previous section would apply.

In verses 12 to 16, Paul addresses the situation of someone who is married to a non-Christian. Given the fact that the Christians in Corinth would have been converted out of either Judaism or Paganism and not be born into it, there would have been married individuals who came to faith when the spouse did not. This is obviously a difficult situation, and people wanted to know if they were permitted to leave the marriage and remarry. Paul's advice at this point was that if the non-believer was content to stay in the marriage, then the Christian should remain in order to impact their spouse and family with the Gospel. In fact, Paul seems to indicate that the immediate family of the believer is positively affected and sanctified by the marriage relationship. If, however, the non-believer wants out of the marriage, the Christian is free to leave and remarry.

### ***Live as You Are Called and To the Unmarried and Widowed***

We have a strong tendency as human beings to be discontent with our lot in life and always want something we do not have. Paul urges Christians to focus more on how they can serve the Lord in whatever state they find themselves in and not be so concerned with achieving or becoming something else. In the Roman world, where social status was everything, Paul is calling for people to find their identity in Christ and not in their position on the social ladder.

Paul continues this advice in the next section for the unmarried and widowed when he combines it with what he has already said about marriage and singleness. He goes into greater detail, urging people to focus on serving the Lord and not being distracted by world affairs if at all possible. This is due to Paul's sense at this time in his life that the time is short for reaching people with the Gospel and thinking it is possible that the Lord could return at any moment. Even though it is 2,000 years since he wrote this letter, that still holds true.



**1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-13 & 10:23-11:1**

What You Need to Know:

A common practice in the various pagan temples in Corinth was to offer sacrifices of animals to the gods. A small portion of the sacrifice would be dedicated to the god or goddess. The rest of the animal would be consumed by the priests and other temple workers in their regular meals. What they could not eat was sold in the markets. Because only the best animals were sacrificed, the meat was highly prized.

This common practice of buying meat that was offered in worship to pagan gods caused such an ethical dilemma for the Corinthians that they wrote to Paul, asking for guidance. Part of the issue was that some felt it was no big deal since the pagan gods were not real. Others were deeply offended by this and were concerned that they were somehow contributing to the worship of false gods by either buying or eating the meat. It became further complicated when Christians would receive invitations to dine at the home of a non-christian. Should they go? Should they eat the meat if they knew it was offered to an idol? Should they even ask?

## COMPREHENSION

1. Who are the “spiritually strong” ones and the “spiritually weak” ones in this chapter?
2. What are the benefits of knowledge and the dangers of knowledge, according to Paul?
3. What is Paul willing to never do again if that would help another believer?

## INTERPRETATION

1. How does the fact that we have one God and one Lord in Jesus, through whom all things are made, impact what Paul says about meat offered to idols?
2. How does the behavior of some Christians cause a stumbling block for others?
3. How is it possible that sinning against your brother is also sinning against Christ?

## APPLICATION

1. What would be a current situation that compares to the issue of meat sacrificed to idols, and how might a Christian approach it in light of what you have learned in this chapter?
2. What current theological issues cause divisions among Christians that might be included under the umbrella of *Not a Hill to Die On*?
3. What lessons could we learn from Paul’s willingness never to eat meat for the sake of another believer?

**What You Need to Know:**

In the ancient world, it was common for people to be traveling philosophers and teachers. It was even more common for them to stay for extended periods, even a lifetime, in one city. One of the debates that surrounded these teachers/philosophers was the appropriate way for them to be financially supported. There were four basic positions on this. They could have a patron who supported them; they could be supported by a group that made offerings; they could work with their own hands; they could beg. Each position had its supporters and detractors who were at times vehement about the appropriateness of their position and the degrading nature of the other three.

At times in his ministry, Paul made use of patrons, like Lydia in Philippi, who supported his ministry. By the time he gets to Corinth, it appears that he has decided to work alongside Priscilla and Aquila in their common profession as tentmakers in order to support his ministry. This is the origin of the term tentmaker for pastors or evangelists who have a job that supports their ministry. It seems that a number of people in Corinth saw this as beneath the dignity of a true apostle and thus questioned the legitimacy of Paul's apostleship.

The question of financial support for Paul gets connected to the debate in Corinth over the legitimacy of his apostleship. You may recall from earlier in the letter that Paul dealt with the divisions in the church as people claimed to follow Peter, or Apollos, or Paul. It seems that the knock against Paul, in spite of the fact that he founded the Corinthian church, was that he was not a legitimate Apostle. In this section, he replies to the arguments used against him that show he is not like the other Apostles. Paul's response to the arguments against his apostleship focus on the question of the rights of an Apostle and the authority of an Apostle.

Because Paul makes extensive use of rhetorical questions in this passage, it can be quite confusing as to just what issues he is addressing. His comments about food and drink lead some to think he is still talking about food sacrificed to idols. The question of him being married or not leads people to connect this to what he has already said about marriage and singleness. It is best to see this chapter as focusing on the legitimacy of Paul's apostleship, and the discussion of food and drink and marriage are related to his rights and authority as an Apostle and not directly connected to what he has said on those topics previously.

## COMPREHENSION

1. What are the questions Paul asks in verses 1-6?
2. What are the questions he asks in 7-12
3. What does Paul say about his motivation for preaching the Gospel?
4. What does Paul say about his methodology for making the Gospel known?

## INTERPRETATION

1. What is Paul's point when he speaks about not muzzling the ox or the hope of the plowmen and the thresher?
2. What does Paul mean in verse 17 when he says he has been entrusted with a stewardship related to the Gospel?
3. Paul ends this section with some athletic imagery about running and training and not being disqualified. What does he mean that we might be disqualified if we do not train and run well?

## APPLICATION

1. What are common rights that we highly value today?
2. How might Paul's willingness to give up his rights for the sake of the Gospel change the way you approach your "rights" for the sake of the Gospel? What "rights" would you be willing to give up so others might know Jesus?
3. How does what Paul says in this section impact the way you think about supporting ministries of the Gospel?
4. How does the idea of being a Jew to the Jews, and a Greek to the Greeks, and being all things to all people that some might believe, shape the way you can live to reach others with the Gospel?

## **SUMMARY 4**

### **1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-10:22**

Paul is back on the topic of food offered to idols, but only in a secondary way. The focus of this section is more directly on participation in idol worship. It is one thing to be invited to the home of a pagan for dinner and end up eating food that was offered to the idols. It is another thing altogether to go and participate in the worship of those idols in the temple meals and rituals. He previously made this point in 8:7-13 but now goes into further detail on the subject.

Paul uses the example of the Israelites in the wilderness and their struggles with idolatry as a warning to the Corinthians. Specifically, Paul points to the time when they received miraculous bread in the form of manna (Exodus 16:4-30) and water from a rock (Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:2-13). He points out that the Israelites received food and drink from the Lord and that the bread and water actually pointed to Christ. In spite of what they received from the Lord, the Israelites still turned to idolatry.

The Corinthians have received even more from the Lord in that they have participated in the Body and Blood of Christ. They need to take great care that they do not resort to idolatry. Going to the temples in Corinth and participating in the meals had ritual and worship significance. It is completely inconsistent with their experience in Christ for them to also participate in the ritual meals in pagan temples.

Verse 13 gives people encouragement to be able to resist temptation to idolatry or any other sin. Paul wants them to know that their temptations are not unique, others have faced them, and God has made it possible to overcome them. There is no temptation that is so strong that giving in is inevitable. Fleeing from idolatry and situations that would tempt one to idolatry is the first step. Fleeing to Christ and His Word and the fellowship of the saints is the direction to flee.

Idolatry is not only participation in a pagan temple, something few of us have to face, but it is looking to anything to supply what only God can give. Taking good things and making them ultimate things is idolatry. Paul mentions sex in this passage as one of those things, but anything can become an idol, fame, comfort, security, or self-image; even Christian things like crosses and Bibles can become replacements for a real relationship with God.

## **SUMMARY 5**

### **1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-34**

There are two issues that Paul deals with in this section. While both of them relate to practices within public worship gatherings, they are of two very different flavors. While both of them were controversial for the Corinthians, only one of them is of any real controversy today. In verses 17-34, Paul deals with abuses that are taking place during times of celebrating the Lord's Supper; the less controversial. issue in our day. In verses 2-16, he deals with the issue of head-coverings for women in worship, a practice that is nearly nonexistent today but the subject remains highly controversial depending on what we think the practice signified in the first century.

Verses two through sixteen are one of the most debated, researched, and argued over sections in all of Paul's letters, if not in all of the Bible. Even a brief survey of what scholars have written on this passage will lead you to conclude that we really don't understand clearly what Paul is addressing. There are debates over the meaning of the words used, especially for head, covering, and authority. Paul makes use of metaphorical understandings of the terms that are not always clear. He is also addressing a concern raised by the Corinthians that we do not have clarity on since we don't have their letter, and Paul does not explicitly state their question. On top of all that, he seems to be addressing some cultural issues regarding shame and the proper attire for women that we have no historical record telling us what they were.

What we can conclude from this passage is the following:

1. It is concerned with what takes place in public/corporate worship, particularly when women pray or give prophecy in worship. Prophecy, at this point, was the common practice of teaching and expounding what God wanted the church to know. It is clear that women are praying and giving prophecies in church with men present. Paul takes no issue with this. This is important when we get to chapter 14, verse 33, when Paul seems to forbid women to speak church. His concern at this stage is with the proper appearance of women when they preach or teach.
2. The cultural concern seems to be around the blurring of the distinction between men and women, not so much in their roles but in how they present themselves. The case can be made that in looking to the age to come when Jesus said we would not be given in marriage but would be like the angels, some in Corinth were trying to promote the fulfillment of that in this life and thus making no distinction between men and women. This blurring may have been especially evident when they gathered for worship and women were trying to appear more and more like a man.

3. A literalistic wearing of a hat or some other covering of the head on women does not address what the first-century concern was. No one today, seeing a woman without something covering her head, would see that as scandalous or shameful. This is one of the times in scripture when there was a practice that fits the culture that is no longer a valid concern today.

If you want to explore this further, I would suggest the commentary by Gordon Fee on 1 Corinthians in the New International Commentary on the New Testament, a series published by Eerdmans, pages 542-586. The number of pages involved should be your first clue that there is massive debate about this passage.

The second issue that Paul addresses concerning the Lord's Supper is far more straightforward. In the early church, the celebration of the Lord's Supper was closer to a full-on meal than what is typically practiced in churches today. This should not be surprising since the Last Supper was the Passover Meal, and the church continued the meal as a regular part of worship. The problem with the Lord's Supper in Corinth was the ever-present divisions in the church. In this case, it was an economic disparity. Wealthy people who brought lots of food to eat were not sharing it with those who had little. On top of that, some folks were having way too much wine with the meal.

Paul reminds them of what he taught them about the nature and significance of the Lord's Supper, what he himself passed on to them. Because of the significance of the Lord's Supper and the fact that it should be something that demonstrates their unity in Christ, Paul chastises them for actually dishonoring Christ in their worship by their unworthy participation in the Lord's Supper. It is such a serious issue that some of them have gotten sick and died as a result of their sinfulness. We don't know exactly how that came about but it does point to the importance of The Lord's Supper as a spiritual event that should unify Christians.



**What You Need To Know:**

Each person who comes to faith in Christ does so by the work of the Holy Spirit in their life, drawing them into a relationship with Christ. The Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Jesus and unites them with Christ. There are **not** two classes of believers in Jesus, ones with the Holy Spirit and ones without the Holy Spirit. It is this mutual indwelling of the Holy Spirit that also unites all believers in Jesus into one Body of Christ.

Every follower of Christ is likewise given some measure of gifting by the Holy Spirit. While this should have been something that united the Corinthian Christians in a common mission to fulfill the Great Commission, it actually became another source of division among them. Chapters 12, 13, and 14 are all dealing in one way or another with what life in the Spirit should look like and the proper place and understanding of spiritual gifts.

Keep in mind that spiritual gifts are different from innate talents or developed skills that you may have. Spiritual gifts are empowerments given by the Holy Spirit that you did not possess before coming to faith in Christ. However, it is also possible that the spiritual gift or gifts you have are aligned with abilities God has given you before coming to faith. But they can just as easily be something that is clearly a result of your faith and the Spirit and not something you ever exhibited a talent for prior to coming to faith in Christ.

## **COMPREHENSION**

1. Make a list of the gifts Paul mentions in the section
2. Make another list of the gifts he mentions in Romans 12:4-8
3. What are the criteria for how the Holy Spirit distributes gifts?
4. What metaphor does Paul use to affirm the unity that we have in Christ?
5. How does Paul say we are to treat the “less honorable” members of the Body?

## **INTERPRETATION**

1. Given what Paul has said about the distribution of spiritual gifts, where would you rank speaking in tongues in importance?
2. What is the purpose that God has for giving each follower of Jesus a gift or gifts of the Spirit?
3. What do you think Paul means by the relationship between the less honorable parts being treated with greater modesty and God giving greater honor to the parts that lack it?

## **APPLICATION**

1. Take time in your group to share with one another the ways that you see God has gifted others in the group for His service. It may not be in terms of specific gifts listed but could be expressed in the ways you see God using one another to make a difference in people’s lives.
2. How could you, as a group, encourage one another to better discover, develop, and deploy your gifts for ministry?
3. How do you see the various gifts in your group being able to function together as the Body of Christ, supporting what each does in ministry?

What You Need To Know:

While spiritual gifts are important and help us fulfill the mission of Jesus, Paul is deeply concerned with what he calls a more excellent way. It is the way of love. The divisions in the Corinthian church have been exacerbated by the way they exhibit pride over their spiritual standing and gifts. Paul wants them to see that the higher calling is not the use of their gifts but to truly love one another. In this section, he gives perhaps the most profound statement on the nature of love and its defining qualities that has ever been written.

Paul uses the Greek word *agape*, for the word love. It is one of a number of words in Greek that speak of different aspects of love. The other two most common ones are *eros*, which has to do with erotic, sensual love, and *phileo*, which is a more collegial love between friends. The city of Philadelphia is known as the City of Brotherly Love, with *phileo*, being the root of the first syllable, Phila. *Agape* is a deep, sacrificial, godly love. It is the love that motivated Jesus to go to the Cross and the love that we experience from the Father. It is the kind of love that is to be evident among Christians as Jesus prayed that we would love one another as He has loved us. (John 13:34-35)

It is important as you study this passage not to dismiss it too quickly out of familiarity with the text. You have probably heard it read at weddings more times than you can count. There are some deep and challenging things said in this passage on the nature of love. Take the time to truly look into your heart and life to ask honestly how well you are being the loving person that Paul writes about.

If you want to dig deeper into what love is and 1 Corinthians 13, read *Charity and Its Fruits* by Jonathan Edwards. Written in 1738, it has an old English style to it, making it a little difficult to work through. However, if you take the time to read a chapter a week, you may find that it is challenging but also motivating and will help you be a more loving person.

Another book that you may also find to be helpful is *The Four Loves* by C.S. Lewis. He deals with the various terms for love and how they each play out in daily life. While some of his illustrations make sense in England from 60 or more years ago, the way he explains the different types of love that the various Greek words indicate is one of the best treatments you will find.

One controversial portion of this passage has to do with the perfect passing away. Some scholars have contended that “the perfect” is the Bible, and now that we have it, the miraculous spiritual gifts are no longer necessary and have passed away. While there are other reasons people have for holding to this position, which is known as cessationism, that is not a correct understanding of this text. The perfect to come is pointing to the return of Christ and the perfection that God will bring to a redeemed world. This is evident by what Paul says in verse 12 when he speaks of now and then. What we will experience then, when the perfect comes, is to fully understand and to see face to face and be fully known. Even with the Bible for the past 2,000 years, we still know in part and see in part. But on the day of Christ’s appearing, that will all change, and the veil will be lifted from our eyes.

### **COMPREHENSION**

1. What does Paul say love is?
2. What does he say it is not?
3. What actions are meaningless without love?
4. What are the four actions that connect love to “all things”?

### **INTERPRETATION**

1. Pick one of the things love is and give a description or example of what that looks like
2. Pick one of the things that love is not and describe how that looks in real life.
3. How do you define faith and hope, and why do you think Paul says that love is the greatest of the three?

### **APPLICATION**

1. What is one of the things love is that you struggle with and how can you get better at it?
2. What is one of the things that love is not that you struggle with and how can you get better at that?
3. Can you give an example of a person who exemplifies a 1 Corinthians understanding of love?

## **SUMMARY 6**

### **1 CORINTHIANS 14:1-39**

Paul goes back into a detailed discussion of the place of spiritual gifts in the life of the church. It appears that there were people within the Corinthian church who developed a strong sense of spiritual pride because of the gifts that had been given by the Holy Spirit. In particular, it was people with a gift for speaking in tongues that were at issue. While speaking in what was a language they did not know and was given them by God was certainly a dynamic and eye-catching experience, Paul points out that it is more important to speak in ways that people understand.

There is much debate over the nature of the gift of tongues that Paul is speaking of in this passage. In Acts chapter 2, we get an example of one type of speaking in tongues when the 120 from the Upper Room were filled with the Holy Spirit. They went out into the street and began to preach, and the diverse crowd all heard the Gospel in their own various languages. This is one example of the gift of speaking in tongues and is the most clear in its purpose.

Paul seems to be dealing with a worship service in which multiple people are speaking in tongues, and no one understands what they are saying. That is why he urges that prophecy would be better as it benefits and edifies all who hear it, while an unknown language being spoken only causes confusion. In spite of what Paul has to say about prophecy/preaching/teaching being more desirable than speaking in tongues, there are still many Christians today who wrongly believe speaking in tongues is the ultimate sign of spiritual maturity or even of being saved.

One of the damaging aspects of what is happening in their worship gatherings is mentioned in verse 23. If everyone is speaking in tongues, and all at once on top of that, an outsider who happens to come in, will think they have lost their minds. Paul wants instead for there to be orderly teaching of the Word of God so that when outsiders come in, they will be convicted by the holy Spirit and worship the Lord. This is a great reminder for Christians today that what we do in worship services should not be so “insider” focused that unbelievers cannot relate to or understand what is going on. This is a great reminder to us today that it is easy to function with “insider” language, using terms and having practices that long-time Christians may understand, but the unchurched and dechurched who may be trying once again to return to church will not understand.

Beginning in verse 26, Paul focuses on the confusion that this has caused in worship services. He wants them to be far more orderly so that people can actually benefit from what is said. In verses 33 to 35, Paul makes a statement that has caused no small amount of consternation in churches, “women

should keep silent”. In light of what Paul said earlier about the head coverings when women pray and prophecy in church, he cannot mean that women are forbidden to ever have any words cross their lips in church. The whole point of that section was to teach what their demeanor and practice should be when they DO pray or prophecy in the church. Working on the principle that the Bible does not contradict itself and that surely Paul is not contradicting himself only a few pages later, what is meant by verse 34?

Context is always critical in these questions. The larger context of this chapter is the confusion that is taking place in worship services because so many people are speaking at once under the guise of using their spiritual gifts. Things are apparently very chaotic. Adding to the confusion are women speaking out and asking their husbands about things that should be left for the conversation at home. Calling them in verse 35 to ask their husbands about these things when they get home indicates that some women were speaking out during the teaching times in ways that were disruptive.

There is an added context for this in that it comes on the heels of verses 32 and 33 and the judging of prophets in the midst of worship services. It was an expected thing that if someone spoke the Word of the Lord through prophecy, or what we would call preaching, the other respected prophets/preachers had the responsibility to make sure what they said was in line with the truth. There seems to have been some turmoil over this practice from some of the women in the congregation who were not recognized as prophet/teachers and should not have been challenging or questioning the teaching.

It should be kept in mind that much of this is speculation as we try to piece together what Paul is saying in this letter with the cultural context as we know it. It is the main reason why there is so much debate over these passages and why we need to hold our positions on what it means, somewhat loosely.

## **SUMMARY 7**

### **1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-34**

These verses are some of the most important for making the case for the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Paul makes it clear that there are numerous eyewitnesses to the risen Jesus. The total is more than 500 people. Not only that, but he appeared on several different occasions. Additionally, Paul points out that many of those people are still alive and can be questioned about what they experienced. His emphasis on the resurrection comes in the midst of reminding them of the content of the Gospel they received. The resurrection of Jesus is central to that Gospel, that Good News.

This testimony from Paul removes two objections to the resurrection. First that it was something that was made up by a small group of disciples. There are too many people involved for this to have been some sort of conspiracy. For conspiracies to hold, the fewer who are in on it, the better. Secondly, it could not have been some sort of mass hallucination. Hallucinations do not involve massive numbers of people at different locations and at different times. This has led even the most skeptical of scholars who doubt the historicity of the resurrection to admit that something significant happened that these 500-plus people experienced.

In Corinth, there were people who denied that we would be resurrected to new life one day. They most likely were being influenced by Greek philosophy that saw the shedding of the physical world and our physical bodies as the ultimate goal. Paul points out two problems with their thinking. One is a contradiction between what some of them are practicing, and the other has implications for the resurrection of Jesus. In both cases, he is challenging their logic.

First, there is the implication of their belief on the resurrection of Jesus. Verse 16 cuts right to the heart of the matter. If the dead are not raised, then Jesus is not raised. After all, he was dead. If Jesus was not raised, then why are we even bothering to follow him? Paul understands that everything hinges on the resurrection and that if it is not true, we should not follow Jesus and should stop lying about God, claiming that he raised Jesus from the dead. However, the fact is, the historical resurrection of Jesus is a foreshadowing of the promised resurrection we will have when we trust in him.

The second problem with their belief that there is no resurrection from the dead has to do with the strange practice they have of being baptized on behalf of the dead. Paul is saying that it is illogical to be baptized on behalf of the dead if you don't believe they will be resurrected to new life. We need to be clear on what Paul is saying and doing at this point. He is NOT endorsing their practice of being baptized for the dead. He is simply pointing out that some of them are doing this and that practice is

inconsistent with believing the dead are not raised.

The Later Day Saints, commonly known as Mormons, have a practice of being baptized for the dead. It is the reason behind their massive genealogy studies. This is a case of looking at a practice that someone did in the Bible and deciding that we must also do that when the Bible makes no such claim. This is the difference between what is prescriptive, meaning a prescribed or commanded practice, and what is merely descriptive, meaning telling us something that someone did. For instance, polygamy was practiced by many people in the Old Testament. It is described that they did this. It is not prescribed that we should do the same. In fact, a fuller understanding of the nature of baptism would lead to the conclusion that this is not a practice we should duplicate.

What You Need To Know:

Paul continues his teaching on the resurrection from earlier in the chapter. In verse 35, he is posing a question that the Corinthians probably submitted to him or that he anticipated them asking based on his knowledge of the philosophy behind their beliefs. They cannot picture what a resurrected body could possibly be like.

This leads Paul into a discussion about the way the resurrection is the focus of our assurance of the victory we have over death when we are found with faith in Christ. We have that victory, as he says, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **COMPREHENSION**

1. What analogies does Paul use to help the Corinthians understand the process that we go through from death to resurrection?
2. What are the several sown in/raised in comparisons that Paul makes?
3. Paul speaks of two images we all will bear. What are they, and who originally demonstrated those two images?
4. At the resurrection, what two things do we put on?
5. In light of the promise of the resurrection for those in Christ, what does Paul urge by way of our behavior?

## **INTERPRETATION**

1. What does this passage tell you heaven will be like after the resurrection?
2. What do you think Paul is getting at when he talks about the different kinds of glory of the various bodies?
3. What does this passage teach you about our relationship to Adam and our relationship to Christ when we come to him in faith?
4. How does Jesus give us the power over the sting of death and over the power of sin?

## **APPLICATION**

1. How has this passage changed your perspective of what heaven will be like in eternity? How would you describe that to someone else?
2. In what way has the passage strengthened your faith and outlook for the future?
3. Paul ends the chapter by reminding the Corinthians that in light of the promise of the resurrection, their labor is not in vain. In what ways would you say you are laboring for the Lord?

## **SUMMARY 8**

### **1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-24**

Paul ends the letter in a customary way of giving final instructions, some idea of his plans for the future, and commending others who are laboring for Jesus. A unique feature of this letter is that he is letting them know of his plans for them to contribute to an offering to help the Christians in Jerusalem who are facing a potential famine. It is also noteworthy that Paul indicates that this offering should be taken when they gather for worship on the first day of the week. Already the church has moved from a Saturday to a Sunday Sabbath. This is in direct response to the fact that Jesus rose on a Sunday.

What we see in this chapter, between the commending of other workers and the offering being taken for the church in Jerusalem, is that the early Christians had a bond that superseded their ethnic, cultural, or geographic differences. They saw themselves united in Christ and in the Gospel that Paul reminded them of at the beginning of chapter 15.



