

A STUDY OF

# 1 Corinthians





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# 01

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# INTRODUCTION

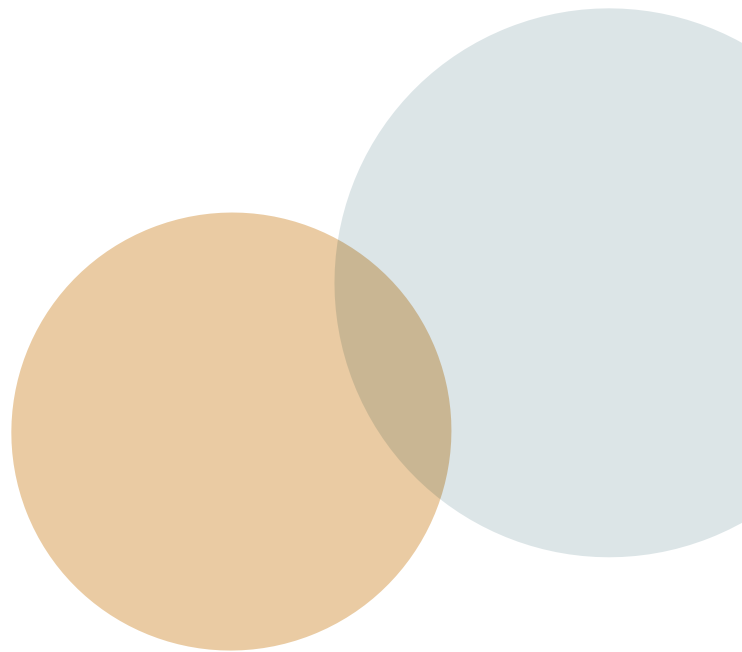
# Paul the Apostle

Our study of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians requires that we initially get to know the author and his audience. The Apostle Paul was a first-century Jew who grew up between two worlds. Even his name points to this reality. He goes by both Saul and Paul. Experienced readers of the Bible will have encountered people with two names before: Abram/Abraham, Sarai/Sarah, Jacob/Israel, Simon/Peter. However, Saul/Paul is a different story. Those other examples all involved a dramatic moment in which God gave them a new name to represent a new call on their lives. Paul's two names do not come from a dramatic call moment, rather they come from his background. Paul was a Jew and a Roman citizen. Like so many other people who belong to two worlds and language groups, the apostle had a name for each group: a Jewish name (Saul) and a Roman name (Paul).

Paul grew up in Tarsus, a city in what is now modern-day Turkey. He was born a Roman citizen, which granted him great privilege and status in the empire. It was a rare honor for people living in the provinces of Rome and likely points to his father or grandfather performing some great service to the empire, perhaps military service. This meant that Paul "belonged" in the Roman world. He was an insider.

However, there is another half to Paul's life, or perhaps it is better to say Saul's life. Though his ancestry is in Tarsus with Roman citizenship, Paul was raised for a significant portion of his life in Jerusalem and was educated under one of the finest Jewish Rabbis of his day, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). There was no finer pedigree for proving one's commitment to Jewish faith and heritage than to be trained by a famous Rabbi in Jerusalem. Paul became a passionate religious leader at an early age. He was passionate about suppressing what he saw as a "heretical" new Jewish sect. That group claimed that a man, accused and crucified as a criminal, was actually the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.

This Messiah executed by men appeared to Paul very much alive, even resurrected from the dead. Paul's life was turned upside down when Jesus showed Himself to Paul on the road to Damascus. The sect he had been persecuting was actually central to God's promised redemption. Paul found new purpose in extending this movement to the ends of the earth rather than trying to suppress it. He recognized that God had prepared him for a special role in this movement. As a man of two worlds, he was uniquely suited to bring the good news to gentile people—the Jewish Messiah was the King of the whole world. Paul could easily move between discussing the Jewish Torah and the Greco-Roman athletic games, showing how both worlds can be connected to Jesus. Salvation for the Jews meant salvation for all.



# Corinth the City

When reading New Testament letters, it is helpful to have a basic understanding of the culture in which the letter was received. For example, we would have a different expectation for a letter written to the people of Las Vegas, Nevada, compared to one written to Charleston, South Carolina. Each city is unique with its own strengths and challenges.

The ancient city of Corinth was located at a vital isthmus in Greece. The city had previously been destroyed by Rome but was rebuilt as a Roman colony in 44 B.C. by Julius Caesar. By the time of the New Testament, Corinth was the Roman capital of Greece. Once reestablished, masses of people moved there for new opportunities. The city was financially prospering, leading to many merchants with newfound success. Many of them were former slaves building a new life, desperately wanting to prove they belonged. The Corinthians were spending their wealth to demonstrate that this city deserved to be named as one of the great cities of the empire. Part of this attempt at belonging was the building of temples for worship much like those found in Rome. The desire for prestige and social recognition drove the culture. With rapid growth and wealth came vulgar immorality and gross materialism. Corinth was legendary in Rome for its sexual corruption.




# The Church in Corinth

Paul's missionary work in Corinth is recorded in Acts 18. Paul was coming from serious difficulties and disappointments. In Philippi, he had been beaten, jailed, and run out of town (Acts 16). A riot broke out around Paul's preaching in Thessalonica (Acts 17), and though he had only been with that young church for a short time, he was again run out of town. After a brief stint of ministry in Athens, Paul came to Corinth likely tired and discouraged. In fact, Paul says that he came to the Corinthians "in weakness with great fear and trembling" (1 Corinthians 2:3). He went to the Jews first, telling them in their synagogue that their Messiah had come to Jerusalem, died and rose again. Again, Paul was rejected. So he turned to the non-Jews of Corinth with the gospel message.

Then something special happened. Many Corinthians believed in Jesus. In fact, Paul was able to stay with the new church in Corinth for 18 months, gathering in homes and teaching them about Jesus. (It is probable that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians during this time.) Many of these new believers likely had little familiarity with the God of Israel. They were living a Roman lifestyle—chasing wealth, significance, and pleasure. Paul taught them about a new way of life, walking in the grace of Jesus, in the way of the cross, and in the power of the Spirit. Then he entrusted the church to local leaders and began his journey back to Jerusalem. A young preacher named Apollos, after some training in Ephesus, would be sent to Corinth to help pastor the church (Acts 19:1).

# The 1st Letter to the Corinthians

After Paul left Corinth, he arrived in Ephesus and spent three years ministering in that city. But Paul's heart never left any of the churches he helped start. He continued to pray regularly for them (1 Corinthians 1:4). Prior to the writing of 1 Corinthians, there had been back-and-forth communication between Paul and church leaders. Two events occurred that spurred Paul to write a letter back to the Corinthian church. First, a group of people from "Chloe's household" came to Paul and told him about divisions growing within the church (1 Corinthians 1:11). Corinthian believers were divided based on which leader they chose to follow. Then, Paul also heard about a case of sexual immorality among them and deep arguments within the church. 1 Corinthians 1-6 addresses this report, critiquing the pursuit of pride and significance within the church. Apparently, the Corinthians had allowed the ways of the city of Corinth to infect how they approached life together in Christ. Paul wrote to remind them that the wisdom of the cross is entirely different.



At some point in his time at Ephesus, Paul also received a letter from the church with a series of pastoral questions. By the time 1 Corinthians was written, the teacher Apollos had joined Paul in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:12). Perhaps Apollos or some other leader brought the letter to Paul with a series of specific questions. 1 Corinthians 7 begins with “Now concerning the matters you wrote about...” (ESV). Chapters 7-14 address several practical questions the church sent to Paul concerning marriage, worship, and spiritual gifts.

Finally, in chapter 15, Paul reminds the church what is most important, the gospel of Jesus. He reminds them of Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, and the future hope they have in Him. In chapter 16, Paul makes personal requests for generosity to the poor and sends his pastoral greetings.

1 Corinthians is a special letter for the Christian church because it shows us that the good news about Jesus should shape every aspect of how we live. It should inform and transform the way we see the world and approach life. It is deeply practical and relevant to aspects of morality, community, humility, worship, and hope. Every facet of the Christian life must be shaped by the life of Jesus and the wisdom the Spirit brings. To that end we study Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians.

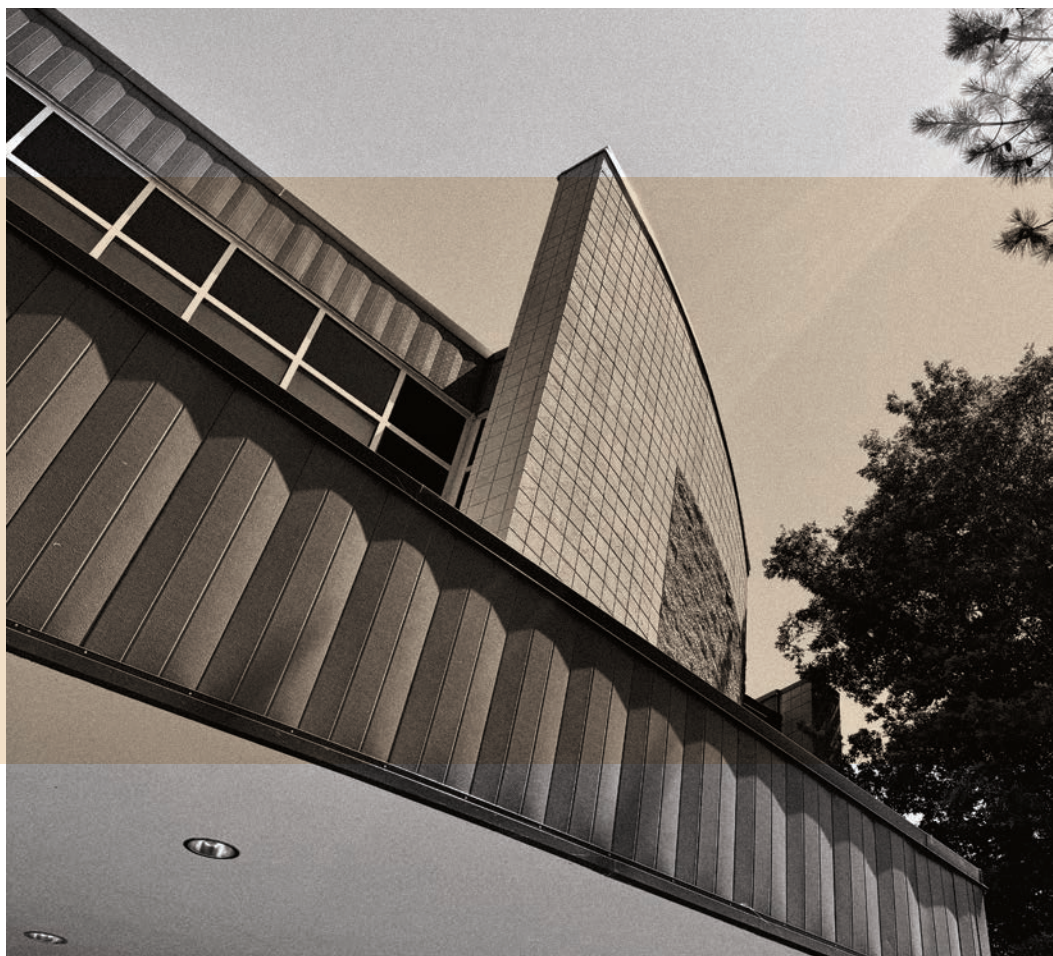
# How to use this Study Guide

The 1 Corinthians Study Guide is laid out in weekly sessions with resources for daily engagement to help us grow together.

Each session includes the following:

- daily readings to guide your study throughout the week
- contextual introduction to aid in the study of the week's passage
- scripture passage for the week
- discussion questions to help you process the passage in personal and small group settings

Use this guide wherever you study 1 Corinthians—in your personal time with God, in small group meetings, and in corporate worship. Discover how Paul's instruction and encouragement to the church at Corinth can guide and encourage you today.





## NEED HELP?

This study guide and included bookmark are designed to help you understand and apply the Scriptures accurately to your life. The Inductive Bible Study Method is an effective tool in accomplishing that goal. This method equips you to make key observations in a passage of scripture, interpret it within its proper context, and then apply it to daily life.



For a brief introduction to the Inductive Bible Study Method, The Training Center of Fellowship Bible Church has prepared helpful videos to get you started. You can watch them at **[fellowshipnwa.org/1corinthians](https://fellowshipnwa.org/1corinthians)** or simply scan the QR code with your smart phone camera to access the link.

Additionally, The Training Center offers Personal Bible Study, a class that goes much deeper into this method of study. If you have not yet taken this class, we encourage you to do so to experience the riches that come from intentional exploration of God's written Word.

Visit **[trainingcenternwa.org/events](https://trainingcenternwa.org/events)** to sign up for the next available Personal Bible Study class or contact our Training Center team at **[training@fellowshipnwa.org](mailto:training@fellowshipnwa.org)** for more information.

# A Visual Exploration of 1 Corinthians

The 1 Corinthians Study Guide explores a visual narrative that merges the ancient world with the contemporary, portraying the theme—*between two worlds*. The use of black and white imagery intersecting dual-color design elements is intended to symbolize the connection between past and future, foundation and the structure built upon it. The central ideas of wisdom and holiness are represented by incorporating photography of libraries, museums, and churches. The typography and layout, inspired by the midcentury Bauhaus design style, reflect the interconnectedness of historical and contemporary worlds. Each chapter unfolds a visual progression, building upon a color palette that transitions and evolves. Through the interplay of ancient and local imagery, this study guide invites the audience to consider how the lessons of Paul's letter to the Corinthian church can be applied to the modern culture of Northwest Arkansas.

PHOTO SUBMISSIONS: special thanks to Andrea Darby, Denise England, Spencer Theobald, Carly Allen, Brandon Jennings, Justin Kraning and the Fellowship Spectra Arts Ministry ([fellowshipnwa.org/spectra](http://fellowshipnwa.org/spectra)).





## Daily Readings

- 01 Acts 18:1-6
- 02 Acts 18:7-8
- 03 Acts 18:9-11
- 04 Acts 18:12-17
- 05 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- 06 Hebrews 4:12
- 07 2 Timothy 2:15

### DISCUSSION GUIDE SUGGESTIONS

This guide helps small groups engage in discussion. Use discretion in determining which questions will work best and be most beneficial. You will likely find a few questions for each lesson that will prompt your group into deeper discussions. You can even create questions of your own. The prompts begin with broad “getting to know one another” questions and lead into deeper observations of the passage, quotes, application thoughts, and prayer suggestions. Blessings to you and your group as you journey with Paul through the complexities of 1 Corinthians.



## GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER

Introduce yourself to the group, providing current information, (family, where you work, etc.); then share an interesting fact that hardly anyone knows about you.

Share the following with the group: Around people I don't know well, I am often... (choose two)

- \_\_\_ a little shy and uneasy
- \_\_\_ extroverted and confident
- \_\_\_ a little insecure
- \_\_\_ eager to meet new people
- \_\_\_ comfortable
- \_\_\_ curious
- \_\_\_ sometimes too loud

## SHARE YOUR STORY

Share the following with the group. Answer truthfully... except for one. Have the group determine which is false.

- a. My favorite pastime as a kid...
- b. What I wanted to be when I grew up...
- c. My favorite musician/band in high school...
- d. My favorite hobby today...

Give a brief overview of your spiritual journey. Include three to four interesting facts about it and how you have seen God work in your life.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

## GOING DEEPER

What inspires you about the life of the Apostle Paul?

What do you think the city of Corinth may have been like? What were some challenges Christians living in Corinth may have faced?

What are things you know about the first letter to the Corinthian church?

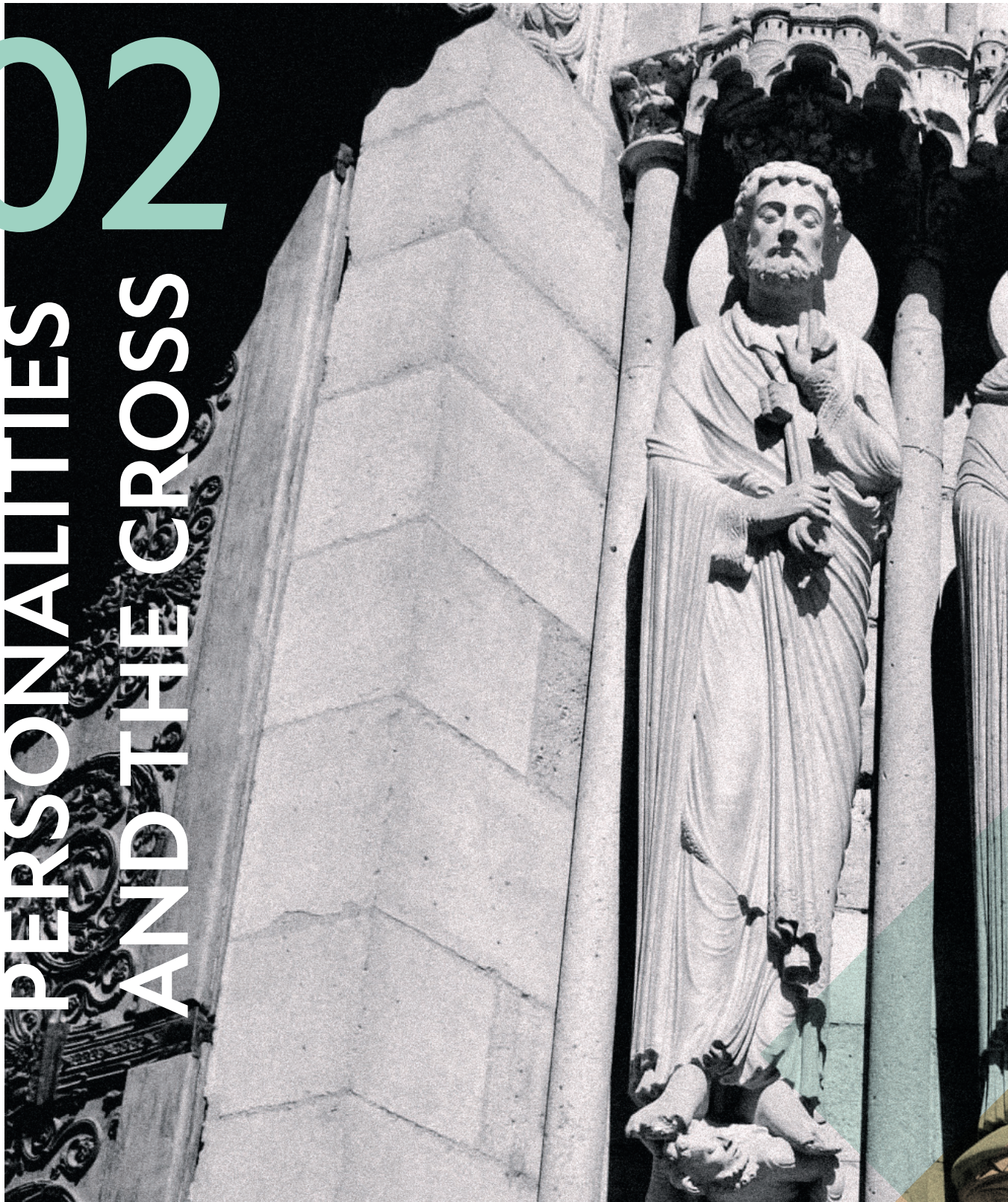
What are you hoping to learn from the study of 1 Corinthians?

## COMMIT TO PRAY

Prayer is an essential part of growing together as a group. What is a prayer concern you would like the group to pray for regularly?

# PERSONALITIES 02

## AND THE CROSS







1 Corinthians 1:1-17

## Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 1:1-9
- 02 1 Corinthians 1:10-17
- 03 Philippians 1:9-11
- 04 2 Corinthians 13:11-14
- 05 Philippians 1:27
- 06 Ephesians 4:1-10
- 07 Ephesians 4:11-16



## WEEK 2

# Personalities and the Cross

The letter opens with three main sections: a greeting (1-3), a thanksgiving (4-9), and an appeal (10-17). The greeting highlights the writer and the recipients, providing context for the whole letter. Paul is an apostle by God's will, and the readers are those who are made holy in Christ and called to be His holy people. Holiness means to be set apart for a special purpose. This letter gives direction from God's chosen leader on how a church can engage culture as God's chosen people. The church of Corinth is to be different than the surrounding culture because they belong to Jesus.

Paul is thankful to God for the Corinthians' giftedness, but he is concerned about their division. They are aligning with personalities, championing which leader they will follow. This is inconsistent with how holy people live. They are behaving like the rest of the city and world. This division threatens to undercut everything God is doing in the church. What matters is not personalities or personal agendas, but the gospel.



Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,<sup>2</sup> To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

<sup>3</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

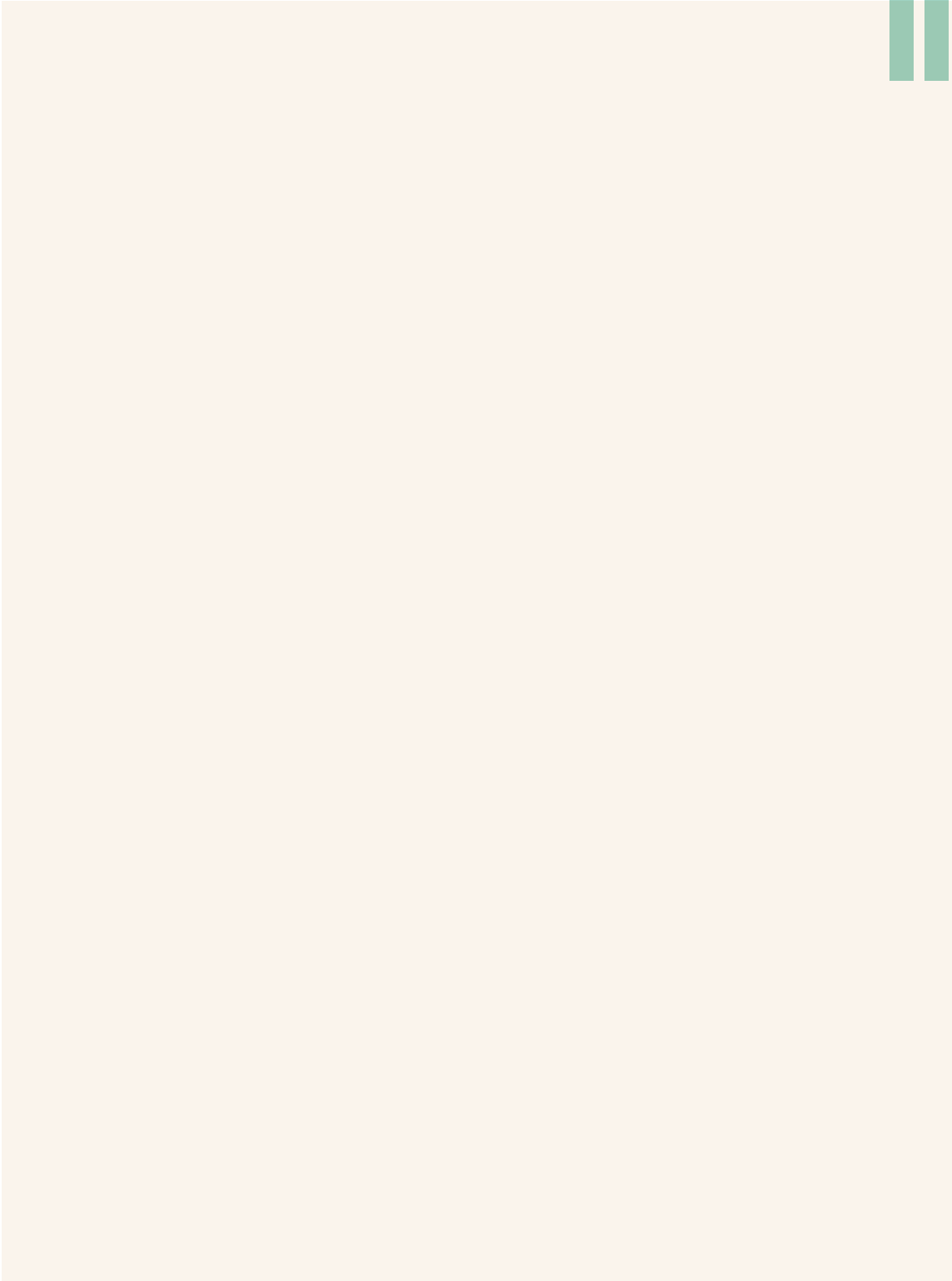
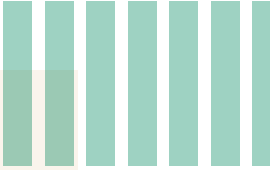
### THANKSGIVING

<sup>4</sup> I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. <sup>5</sup> For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— <sup>6</sup> God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. <sup>7</sup> Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. <sup>8</sup> He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

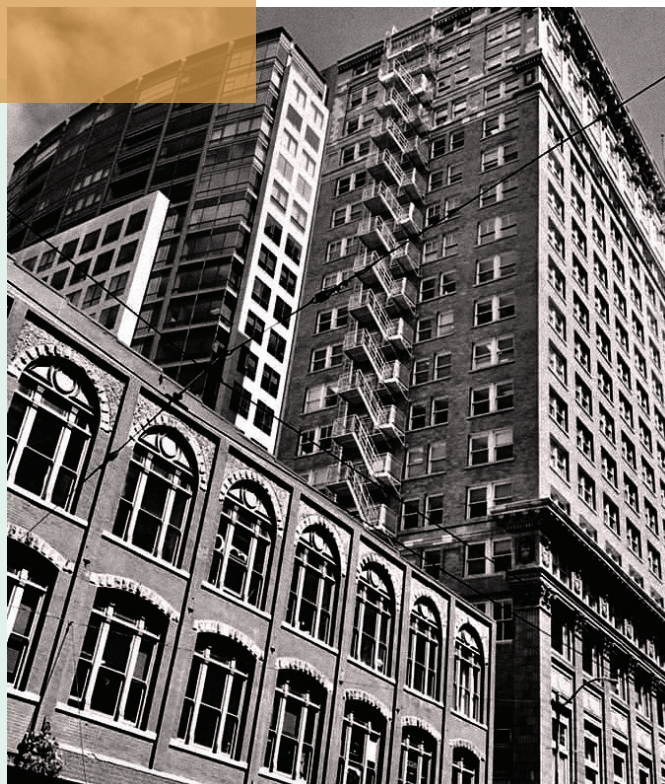
### A CHURCH DIVIDED OVER LEADERS

<sup>10</sup> I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. <sup>11</sup> My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. <sup>12</sup> What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.”

<sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup> I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup> so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup> (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.) <sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.



# Discussion Guide



Do not answer a fool according to his folly,  
or you will be just like him.

PROVERBS 26:4

CONTEMPORARY ADAPTATION:

“Don’t argue with an idiot. He will drag you down to his level  
and beat you with experience.”

ANONYMOUS

## WARM UP

Which imaginary superhero was your favorite as a child, and why did you pick that one?

Even superheroes had sidekicks who helped them accomplish their mission; they were a team. Name some of those sidekicks who were indispensable to heroes.

Who have been essential teammates in your life, helping you accomplish tasks and goals?

Have you ever considered the importance of “team” where the church is concerned? How important are relationships and teamwork to the church?

## EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-17

In verse 2, Paul identified the Corinthian church as “those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people.” Does that description apply to us? If so, how do we live that out practically?

In verse 3, Paul brings up the subject of spiritual gifts which we will explore in more depth later in this study. What do you think your spiritual gifts may be and how does it fit in the context of the church?

In verses 10-17, Paul addresses a concerning issue in the Corinthian church – division. Have you ever been part of a church struggling with disagreements and discord? Was the ministry of the church negatively affected?

Paul addresses the dangers of personality-driven ministry. What are some pitfalls of emphasizing personalities, rather than God?

## APPLICATION

What are some ways you can be a more effective teammate (church member), using your spiritual gifts to edify and encourage others?

Identify at least one way you can more purposefully pursue holiness this week.

Engage in conversations where both parties can seek truth together. Don’t argue.

## PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group.



# 03

1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5







# THE WISDOM OF THE CROSS



## WEEK 3

# The Wisdom of the Cross

What is wisdom? One simple definition is that wisdom is knowing how to live in the world. It is a practical kind of knowledge. In the opening of the letter, Paul critiqued the divisions that were growing in the church, particularly around the personalities of different leaders. In today's passage, Paul exposes and admonishes the bad thinking that led to those divisions. The people had embraced the wrong kind of wisdom.

Paul refers in verse 18 to the "message of the cross" which is "foolishness" to some. What is this message of the cross? To begin with, it is the message that Jesus the Messiah was crucified. But how could this be foolishness? The Cross of Jesus is not only a historical event about what God did for us, but it is also a kind of wisdom. The cross shows an approach to living life, as He called His people to take up their own crosses and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). The New Testament presents the good news about the cross and calls people to live the way of the cross.

However, in the Roman world strength was wisdom. The people of Corinth would want to project importance and power, aligning themselves with the important. Apparently, they had brought this thinking into the church, substituting cultural significance with Christian significance. But this is a contradiction of the gospel itself. God doesn't save people because they are significant or important. He saves people because they are needy and broken. Paul is challenging people to make sure their approach to life and community corresponds to the life Jesus lived and the cross He bore. He calls them to a cross-shaped wisdom, which looks crazy to the world but leads to eternal life.

# Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 1:18-29
- 02 1 Corinthians 1:30-2:5
- 03 Isaiah 29:14-16
- 04 Jeremiah 9:23-24
- 05 Romans 3:21-24
- 06 Romans 3:25-28
- 07 1 Corinthians 12:7-11



## CHRIST CRUCIFIED IS GOD'S POWER AND WISDOM

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;  
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

<sup>20</sup> Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

<sup>26</sup> Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. <sup>28</sup> God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no one may boast before him. <sup>30</sup> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. <sup>31</sup> Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

**2** And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. <sup>2</sup> For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup> I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. <sup>4</sup> My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, <sup>5</sup> so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.



# Discussion Guide

## WARM UP

A smart person can access and retain a wide breadth of knowledge. A wise person can apply knowledge appropriately to life. Who is one of the smartest people you have ever known? Who is one of the wisest?

At what point in your life did you realize that your parents were wiser than you once imagined?

## EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-2:5

Remember the Corinthian church is quarreling unnecessarily over petty issues, such as what leader they preferred. Read 1:17 and 2:1-5. Does Paul claim that his message to them was persuasive because of his wisdom and eloquence? What was powerful about his message?

The Gospel (good news) is simply this: Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead. Those who wish to follow Christ humbly accept this truth as the gracious gift of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). How is it that so many stumble over the simplicity of this truth?

In verses 1:19-21, Paul teaches human wisdom and intelligence will not lead to salvation. He is not diminishing the need for education but makes it clear that human effort does not save us. Why are we so prone to rely on self-efforts for salvation?

In verses 1:22-25, how does Paul compare the wisdom of man to the wisdom of God? If we can never achieve God's wisdom on our own, how important is it that we seek Him?

## APPLICATION

We often argue because of pride. We want to win! In verses 1:26-31, Paul asks the Corinthians to reflect on their own lives. What is the point being made in this guided reflection and what does he ask them to do? How might our lives change if we embraced the wisdom of the cross by living in humility?

## PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group.



I counted dollars while God counted crosses.  
I counted gains while He counted losses.  
I counted my worth by things gained in store.  
He sized me up by the scars that I bore.  
I coveted honors and I sought degrees.  
He wept as He counted the hours on my knees.  
I never knew till one day by the grave,  
How vain are the things that we spend life to save.

AUTHOR UNKNOWN







# THE WISDOM OF THE SPIRIT

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

# Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 2:6-10
- 02 1 Corinthians 2:11-16
- 03 Proverbs 28:4-5
- 04 Isaiah 40:12-14
- 05 1 Peter 5:8
- 06 Romans 11:33-36
- 07 Ezekiel 20:41-42





#### WEEK 4

## The Wisdom of the Spirit

Paul argues that wisdom comes from God. This wisdom shaped by the cross leads to a different way of life than what the world offers. This life shaped by the cross confounds the wisdom of the world which was embraced by the people of Corinth. This leads to obvious questions—why do so many seemingly wise people reject God’s wisdom if it leads to a better way of life? Why do the intellectuals, the wealthy, and the powerful look down on this kind of life as foolishness?

Paul addresses these questions, teaching that it takes a different kind of mind to see God’s wisdom—a mind shaped by God’s Spirit. People don’t live neutral lives; they ultimately live in right relation to God or live separated from Him. This affects how they see and understand reality. The gift of the Spirit comes from Christ to those who trust Him. The wisdom of God’s Spirit working in us allows us to see and accept things we would not have otherwise.

## GOD'S WISDOM REVEALED BY THE SPIRIT

We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.<sup>7</sup> No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.<sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.<sup>9</sup> However, as it is written:

“What no eye has seen,  
what no ear has heard,  
and what no human mind has conceived”—  
the things God has prepared for those who love him—

<sup>10</sup> these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.<sup>11</sup> For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

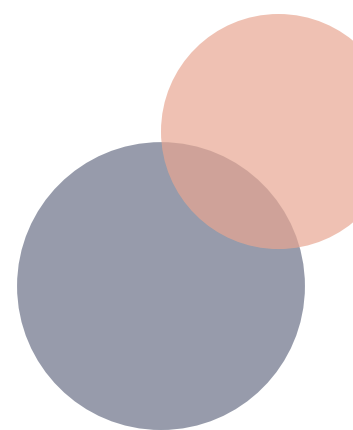
<sup>12</sup> What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.

<sup>13</sup> This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.<sup>14</sup> The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

<sup>15</sup> The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments,<sup>16</sup> for,

“Who has known the mind of the Lord  
so as to instruct him?”

But we have the mind of Christ.



“After the initial break with sin that the Holy Spirit brings about in our lives at conversion, he also produces in us growth in holiness of life. He brings forth the “fruit of the Spirit” within us (“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control,” Galatians 5:22-23), those qualities that reflect the character of God. As we continually “are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another,” we should be reminded that “this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). Sanctification comes by the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2; cf. Romans 8:4, 15-16), so that it is “by the Spirit” that we are able to “put to death the deeds of the body” and grow in personal holiness (Romans 8:13; see 7:6; Philippians 1:19).”

WAYNE GRUDEM | *SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY*





## WARM UP

Choose one vehicle that best describes you. Then choose a vehicle that best describes other members of your group.

- ☐ Sports Car
- ☐ SUV (4-wheel drive, offroad)
- ☐ Suburban or Minivan
- ☐ Low-rider with a loud subwoofer
- ☐ Electric Vehicle
- ☐ Antique Car
- ☐ Pickup Truck
- ☐ Luxury Car
- ☐ Good used car (low mileage, dependable)
- ☐ Other

Have you ever been given sage advice that you ignored and lived to regret it? Be prepared to share this with your group.

## EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-16

What are a few differences between human wisdom and the wisdom of God? Do you feel pity for those who have no regard for God's wisdom?

Verses 6-10 remind us that the plan of salvation was initiated by God the Father, implemented by His Son, and revealed to us by the Spirit. The culmination of God's blessing of salvation is found in verse 9. Does this verse foster a sense of hope and assurance within you? Have you shared this verse with others?

According to the Scriptures, we receive the Holy Spirit when we trust Christ as our Savior. Do we fully recognize and access the true power of the Holy Spirit within us? Why not? How do we become more sensitive to the guidance and power of the Spirit within us?

What do verses 14-16 convey concerning the Holy Spirit's role in applying God's wisdom?

## APPLICATION

This week, seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you distinguish between human wisdom and the wisdom of God in the situations you face.

## PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group.

# THE WISDOM OF LEADERSHIP THAT LASTS



1 Corinthians 3:1-22



05



## WEEK 5

# The Wisdom of Leadership that Lasts

As Paul continues his critique of the divisive community in Corinth, he directly addresses the nature of leadership in the church. The believers in Corinth have incorporated a cultural understanding of leadership. In this worldly understanding, the community is a giant social ladder with leaders at the top. They respected the leaders that showed the most skill and influence. They also tried to align with their favorite leaders, hoping that such an alignment would advance their own social standing within the church. It seemed completely reasonable. That was how social life worked in Corinth.

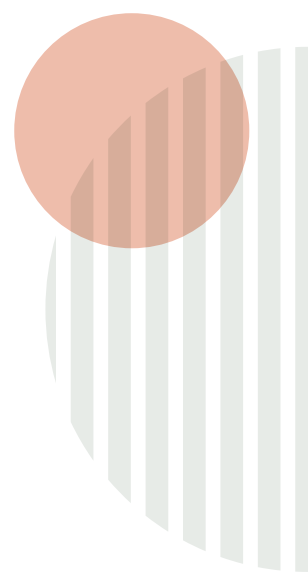
However, Paul teaches that Christian community is upside down from that of the surrounding culture. This is because it is ultimately God who accomplishes the work (verse 6). Leaders in the church are laborers in God's field. If there is prestige in getting your hands dirty working for God, it is only before God Himself, not others. The approval to be earned in Christian service is only approval before God, and He assesses that work according to His standards (verses 10-15). The pursuits of approval among other people will burn up and amount to nothing. Work done to please God will last.

In reading this week, consider how your own view of leadership and service might be shaped more by the world than by Christ. How does Paul invite us to rethink the church leadership and where we seek approval?



## Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 3:1-9
- 02 1 Corinthians 3:10-17
- 03 1 Corinthians 3:18-23
- 04 Hebrews 5:11-6:1
- 05 1 Peter 2:1-8
- 06 1 Corinthians 6:18-20
- 07 Romans 12:1-8



### THE CHURCH AND ITS LEADERS

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ.<sup>2</sup> I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.<sup>3</sup> You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?<sup>4</sup> For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings?

<sup>5</sup> What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task.<sup>6</sup> I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.<sup>7</sup> So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.<sup>8</sup> The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor.<sup>9</sup> For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.

<sup>10</sup> By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care.

<sup>11</sup> For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which

is Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup> If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,<sup>13</sup> their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.<sup>14</sup> If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward.<sup>15</sup> If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

<sup>16</sup> Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? <sup>17</sup> If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

<sup>18</sup> Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise.<sup>19</sup> For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness";<sup>20</sup> and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."<sup>21</sup> So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours,<sup>22</sup> whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours,<sup>23</sup> and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

## WARM UP

What is your idea of a great vacation plan?

- \_\_\_ Spending time at the beach
- \_\_\_ Snow skiing in the mountains
- \_\_\_ Hiking or cycling
- \_\_\_ Visiting National Parks
- \_\_\_ Visiting historic or interesting places
- \_\_\_ Exploring overseas destinations
- \_\_\_ Taking a cruise
- \_\_\_ Visiting relatives
- \_\_\_ Staycation
- \_\_\_ Other

Who is the most authentically spiritual person you have ever known and how did they influence you for Christ?

## EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-23

Remember that the Corinthian church had factions who were quarreling with one another. How do you think they might have received verses 1-4? Paul suggests that their maturity is stunted because of jealousy and strife. What effect does such behavior have on a church's mission?

In verses 5-9, Paul assesses the true role of Christian leaders. Does this minimize the importance of their roles as leaders or elevate their responsibility to walk in humility? How should we respond to this truth in our contemporary setting? Should we put Christian leaders on pedestals or attribute celebrity status

to them? Consider Hebrews 13:7-19 and four responsibilities concerning Christian leaders:

1. They are to live lives that are worthy of imitation.
2. They are to hold to right doctrine.
3. They are to care for those under their charge.
4. Those under their charge are to respect the authority God has given them.

According to 1 Corinthians 10-15, God's impending judgment will reveal the quality of work we do on the foundation of Christ. How should this inspire us?

The phrase "don't you know" is used ten times in this letter and is always followed by a definitive statement. Looking at verses 16-17, what statement does he make? What is the significance of this statement?

How does Paul conclude this chapter? What points does he reiterate?

## APPLICATION

How does your work build on the foundation that Christ laid?

## PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group.

Pray for the Elders and leaders of your church.





*On the ride home from a church service, a little boy sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car. His father asked him three times what was wrong. Finally, the boy replied, "That preacher said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, and I wanted to stay with you guys."*

# 06

## THE WISDOM OF LEADERS WHO SERVE

1 Corinthians 4:1-21







# Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 4:1-7
- 02 1 Corinthians 4:8-13
- 03 1 Corinthians 4:14-21
- 04 Matthew 18:15-17
- 05 1 Peter 3:8-18
- 06 Ephesians 2:8-9
- 07 Philippians 3:17-21



## WEEK 6

# The Wisdom of Leaders who Serve

The people of Corinth were used to evaluating great leaders and speakers. Did they like this one better or that one? Did they impress people socially? People in Roman Corinth often participated in this kind of social theater. No wonder they had approached their leaders much the same way—as entertainers to be assessed and fought over.

Paul will have none of it. He argues that no one on earth has the right to judge him. That right is reserved for Christ alone. But this does not make Paul puffed up and arrogant, because he understands Christ's standard, which is the standard of the cross. The irony of the situation is that none of the leaders the Corinthians celebrate are playing their game. Neither Peter, nor Apollos, nor Paul. Certainly not Christ! While the Corinthians are chasing fame and success, the Apostles are being beaten for Jesus.

1 Corinthians 4 brings to a grand conclusion the entire argument of chapters 1-4. Paul began by calling out the ridiculous divisions, and then he highlighted how the cross should shape our perspective and the Spirit should transform our minds. Finally, the example of the Apostles is one worthy of imitation. Rather than one that ascends the ladder of prestige for praise, it is one that descends the ladder of humility for service.

## THE NATURE OF TRUE APOSTLESHIP

This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed.<sup>2</sup> Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.<sup>3</sup> I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself.<sup>4</sup> My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.<sup>5</sup> Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

<sup>6</sup> Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other.<sup>7</sup> For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

<sup>8</sup> Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you!<sup>9</sup> For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings.<sup>10</sup> We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!<sup>11</sup> To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless.<sup>12</sup> We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it;<sup>13</sup> when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment.

## PAUL'S APPEAL AND WARNING

<sup>14</sup> I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children.

<sup>15</sup> Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

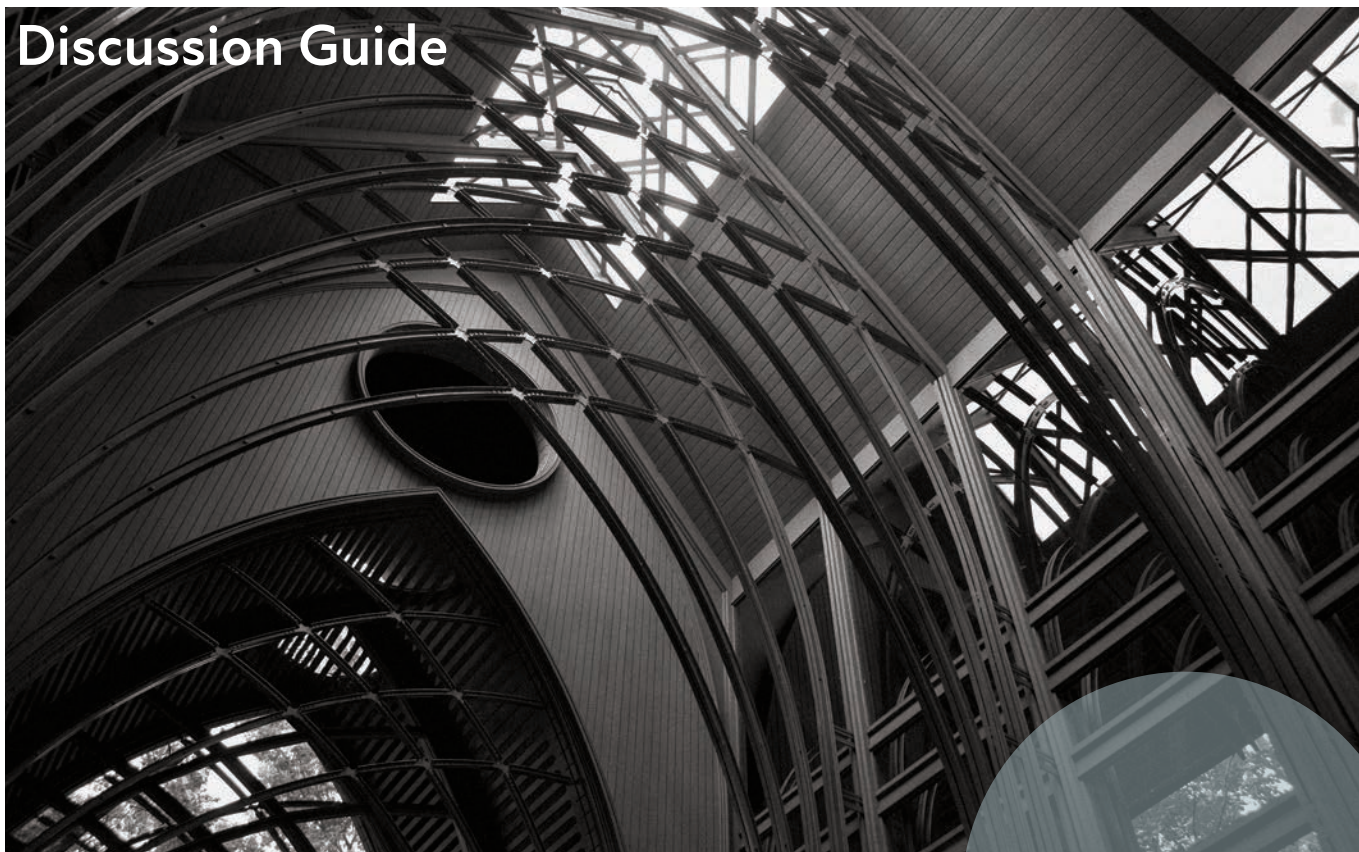
<sup>16</sup> Therefore I urge you to imitate me. <sup>17</sup> For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

<sup>18</sup> Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you.

<sup>19</sup> But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. <sup>20</sup> For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

<sup>21</sup> What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?

# Discussion Guide



GRATITUDE TO GOD IS MOST BEAUTIFULLY EXPRESSED  
IN SERVICE TO OTHERS.

“Every Christian should select his church because he is convinced that within its particular structure, he will find the greatest opportunities for spiritual growth, the greatest satisfaction for his human needs, and the greatest chance to be of helpful service to those around him.”

BILLY GRAHAM



## WARM UP

What was the first important responsibility that someone entrusted to you, and how did you do?

Were you ever entrusted with an important task, and you blew it? (Only share the funny ones!)

## EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 4:1-21

Once again, we find Paul addressing the issue of their quarreling. As believers, we are accountable to one another (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5). What is Paul's point about not feeling the need to be approved by others?

If a believer is faithfully seeking to follow God, whose approval should matter most? Read 1 Samuel 16:7. What does the Lord tell Samuel concerning God's perspective?

When it comes to serving others, how important is it that our motivation is pure? What is the result of actions done without the right motives?

In verses 6-13, Paul addresses the pride of the Corinthians that has caused division among them. They boast of the leader they follow while the leader exhibits service and humility. There seems to be a bit of sarcasm in his assessment. How important is it for us to lead (and follow) in a spirit of humility? What are the benefits of a humble spirit? What are the dangers of a prideful spirit?

Paul encourages the Corinthians to imitate his way of life—his good example. Consider Paul's life and how his priorities changed following his conversion. When you became a follower of Christ, how did your life change?

Our society seems to have a growing disdain for authority. Paul demonstrates in verses 18-21 his God-given authority in dealing with matters of the church. How important is it for the church to be under the guidance of Biblical authority?

## APPLICATION

How can you demonstrate service to someone in your sphere of influence this week?

Do you need to repent of a spirit of arrogance in any area of your life?

## PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group.

# 07

1 Corinthians 5:1-13





# THE WISDOM OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE





## WEEK 7

# The Wisdom of Church Discipline

Chapter 5 continues Paul’s response to the “things he has heard” about the Corinthian church. In this case, Paul’s rebuke addressed a case of sexual sin taking place among people within the church. The problem is not only the sin taking place, but the failure to condemn it. The focus of the passage is not on sexual sin per se but how the church community ought to respond to such behavior. Notice that Paul does not address the man who is sinning; he addresses the community.

As you read, take note of the difference between the direction given in verses 1-5 and the direction given in verses 9-13. Paul expects the church to hold its members accountable and to represent Christ to the outside world. However, it is not the job of the church to hold the outside world accountable. There is an understood boundary here. Paul is defining a community that is responsible to each other. The unaddressed sin of individuals will negatively affect the entire community (verse 6). As a result, it is important to consider the role of the church in the lives of the individual members.



# Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 5:1-13
- 02 Ephesians 5:1-20
- 03 Romans 1:24-27
- 04 Galatians 6:1-6
- 05 Matthew 7:1-5
- 06 James 4:16
- 07 Exodus 12:1-30

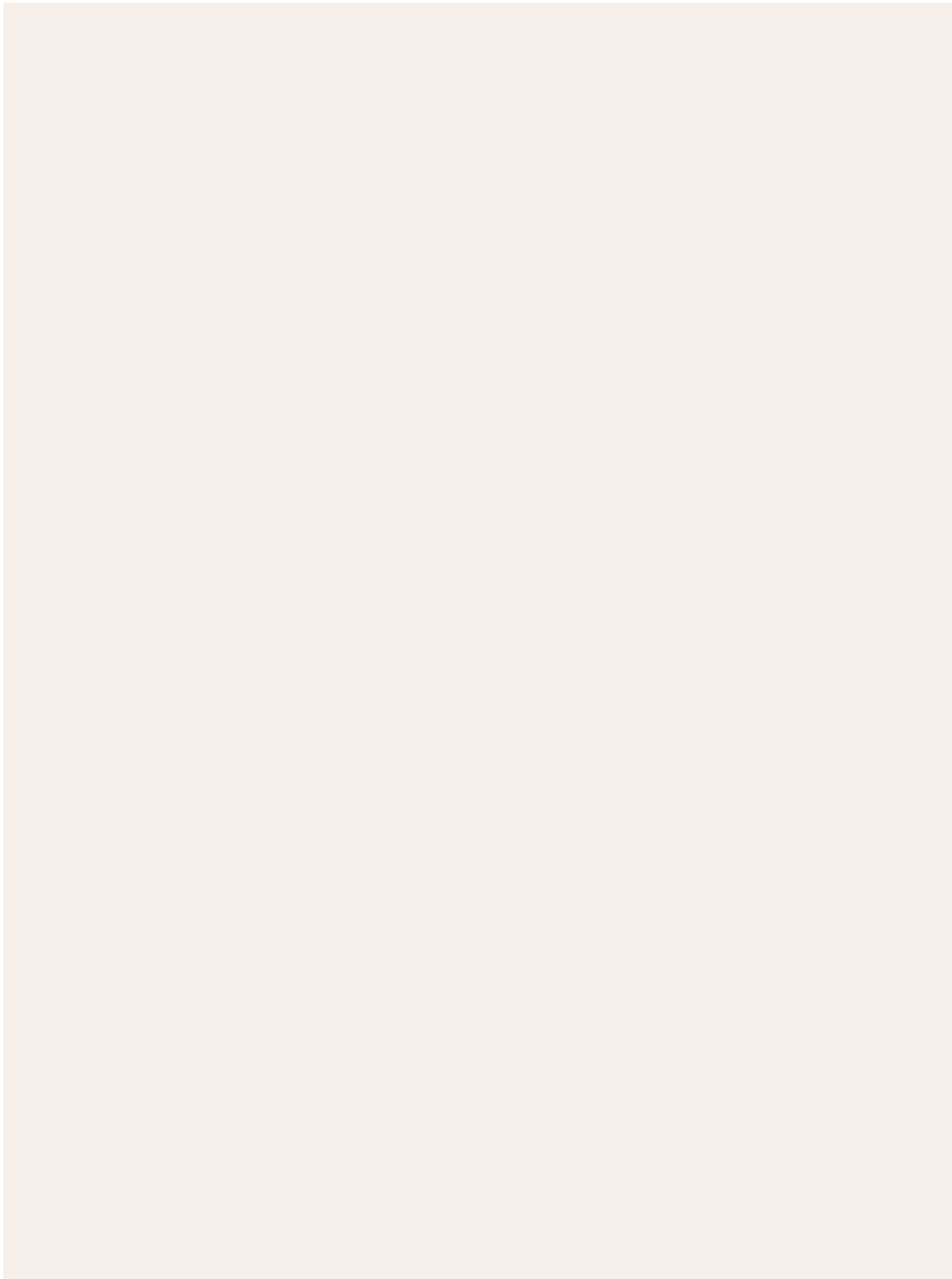
## DEALING WITH A CASE OF INCEST

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife. <sup>2</sup> And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this? <sup>3</sup> For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this. <sup>4</sup> So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, <sup>5</sup> hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.

<sup>6</sup> Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? <sup>7</sup> Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup> Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

<sup>9</sup> I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— <sup>10</sup> not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. <sup>11</sup> But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

<sup>12</sup> What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? <sup>13</sup> God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked person from among you."



# Discussion Guide

## WARM UP

All of us have been the recipient of discipline, or correction, at some point in our lives. Is there a particular instance in your life that immediately comes to mind?

What is the most beneficial discipline, or correction, that you have ever received?

## EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-13

The sexual sin the Corinthians are permitting in their church, which was not even allowed by the Romans, was unacceptable to Paul. Why do you think the church had not dealt with this sin appropriately?

How do you think something like this could happen? Had sin become so prevalent in Corinth that they were indifferent and unconcerned?

According to verse 2, what element is missing in their response to this sin? Does prevalent sin in the body of Christ cause you to mourn?

Read verses 6-8. How does prevalent sin affect the health of the church? Should sin be dealt with or ignored, hoping it will somehow go away? Do we really love someone if we aren't willing to confront their sin and help restore them?

How does Jesus instruct believers to deal with sin between brothers and sisters in Christ in Matthew 18:15-18?

The Scriptures are clear that repentance is the pathway to restoration with God and health within the church. However, if someone is persistent in willful disobedience to God, how should the church respond? Consider Galatians 6:1-6.

## APPLICATION

In Matthew 7, Jesus reminds us to remove the log from our own eye before trying to remove the splinter from someone else's eye. Are there "logs" that you need to remove from your life?

## PRAYER

Pray for someone this week who is struggling in their walk with God.

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group.



“Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.”

JOHN OWEN, *OF THE MORTIFICATION OF SIN IN BELIEVERS*

After the publication of the Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis was asked how he knew so much about temptation. He replied, “I just look into my own mind and heart.”





# 08







1 Corinthians 6:1-11

# WISDOM IN CONFLICT



## WEEK 8

# Wisdom in Conflict

Paul brings up another example of embarrassing behavior among the Corinthians. This stands in contrast to the situation described in chapter 5. Paul has heard that the Corinthians are going to courts of law to settle their disputes rather than working it out amongst themselves. Today, some have pointed to 1 Corinthians 6 to argue that Christians should not go to the police or the courts in cases of violence or lawbreaking. This is not Paul's point. In Romans 13, Paul affirms the role of government in punishing lawbreakers. The situation Paul is addressing in this case is that of a civil court—a petty disagreement in which one party sues the other. The irony here is that the Corinthians are willing to overlook blatant sexual sin in the community but are not willing to overlook being wronged in some smaller matter.

The problem, once again, comes down to how the church represents Christ to the outside world. Paul declares in verse 7, “The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?” In the earlier chapters, Paul has argued that spiritual wisdom is shaped by the way of the cross—the willingness to lay one's life down for another. This sort of wisdom should be guiding how the church handles conflict. Even if some members lack this wisdom, the larger community should recognize this and settle the disputes. Two Christians going to non-believers arguing for their rights and privileges proves that the way of Christ is not being practiced in the church. Even if they “win” their case, they “lose” for the cause of Christ.



# Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 6:1-11
- 02 Matthew 18:15-17
- 03 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
- 04 Galatians 5:13-25
- 05 Genesis 13:7-9
- 06 Romans 8:31-39
- 07 Titus 3:3-7

## LAWSUITS AMONG BELIEVERS

If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? <sup>2</sup> Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! <sup>4</sup> Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church? <sup>5</sup> I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? <sup>6</sup> But instead, one brother takes another to court—and this in front of unbelievers!

<sup>7</sup> The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? <sup>8</sup> Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters. <sup>9</sup> Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men <sup>10</sup> nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.



## 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

# Discussion Guide

Anger is an acid that does more harm to the vessel in which it is stored, than to anything onto which it is poured.

ANONYMOUS





## WARM UP

Recall a dispute you had with a classmate in elementary school. Does it seem as significant to you now as it did back then? Why? Are there disagreements that cause you to lose sleep today that might seem trivial twenty years from now?

What are practical ways you have found to let go of differences and repair relationships with others?

## EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-11

Discuss the circumstances in verses 1-6. Notice Paul's series of rhetorical questions. He seems *really* frustrated with the Corinthians over this issue. Why?

How is our Christian witness diminished when there are lawsuits among believers? How does this affect the reputation of Christ's church in our community?

What is Paul's conclusion in verse 7? Is Paul suggesting that it would be better to be wronged than to discredit our witness publicly? Considering this, should we not pursue every avenue possible before taking disputes with other believers to civil courts?

What do verses 9-11 tell us concerning the amazing grace of God? How do these verses connect with the previous rebuke (5:1-2)?

What is the significance of the three words listed in verse 11—washed, sanctified, and justified?

Why is it important to be washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of Jesus and by the Holy Spirit? Is there another name or spirit who can declare us righteous before God? (Note: We are not “made” righteous, but “declared” righteous through the atoning work of Christ.)

## APPLICATION

Spend time this week considering how God, the Righteous and Holy Judge, has imparted His grace, and mercy to you. Contemplate Romans 8.

## PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group.

Is there a believer who has wronged you to whom you need to extend forgiveness?

# 09

1 Corinthians 6:12-20



# WISDOM IN SEXUALITY





## Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 6:12-14
- 02 1 Corinthians 6:15-20
- 03 Romans 8:5-8
- 04 1 Peter 1:13-21
- 05 Romans 12:1-2
- 06 Colossians 3:1-8
- 07 Galatians 5:13-25



## WEEK 9

# Wisdom in Sexuality

In this passage, Paul is confronting distorted ideas about sexuality. In verses 12-13a, Paul quotes two slogans, “I have the right to do anything” and “food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The NIV adds “you say” to confirm these are quotes. However, others believe the whole saying is simply Paul’s wording. Whether they are Corinthian slogans or merely Paul’s own words, he is clearly stating one idea and then adding a balancing truth.

These little proverbs have the ring of wisdom. They acknowledge the freedom we have in Christ and the temporary nature of things like food. However, Paul balances that insight with further spiritual wisdom. Freedom in Christ is not meant to make us slaves to sin. The particular sins Paul is concerned about are sexual immorality and prostitution. He clarifies that the purpose of our freedom is not to indulge ourselves but to glorify God.

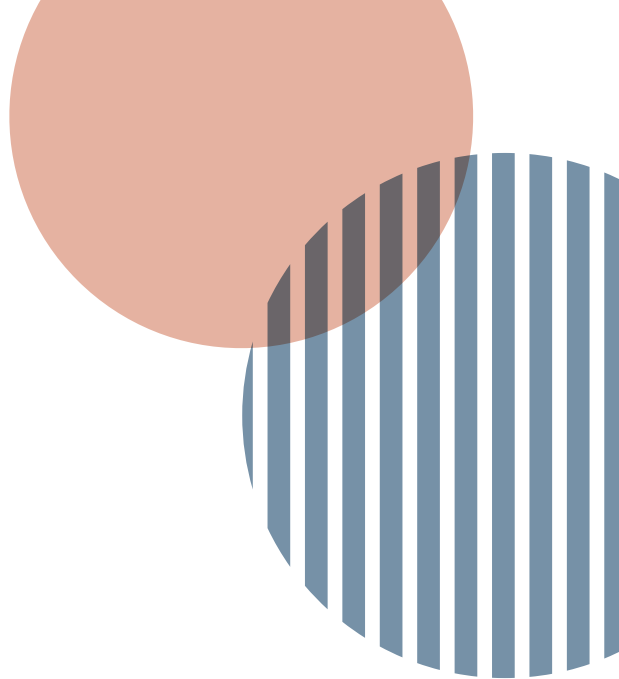
# 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

## SEXUAL IMMORALITY

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. <sup>13</sup> You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. <sup>14</sup> By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. <sup>15</sup> Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! <sup>16</sup> Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” <sup>17</sup> But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

<sup>18</sup> Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. <sup>19</sup> Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.





# Discussion Guide

If we live, we live for the Lord;  
and if we die, we die for the Lord.  
So, whether we live or die,  
we belong to the Lord.

ROMANS 14:8



## WARM UP

Do you remember the first time you were made aware you had “rights?” Share your experience and how others may have helped you understand that certain rights are important.

What are a few beneficial rights? (e.g. – “the right to remain silent.”)

## EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-20

Paul quotes a popular Corinthian phrase in verse 12, “I have the right to do anything.” How does he counter that phrase twice in this verse? Can the abuse of a right gain mastery over us?

Warren Wiersbe wrote the following: “They (the Corinthians) treated sex as an appetite to be satisfied and not as a gift to be cherished and used carefully.” Just as they were gluttons of food, they were gluttons of improper relationships. When people disregard sexual purity, what are some consequences?

What conclusions do you draw from the questions Paul asked in verses 15-16?

How does being “united with the Lord” make a difference in the life of believers?

Read Genesis 39 and consider Joseph’s circumstances. How did he live out Paul’s exhortation from 1 Corinthians 6:18? How did Joseph honor God through his actions in Genesis 39:12?

How have we been “bought at a price” (verse 20)? How does it make you feel to realize that you are not your own? What affect does this have on your personal choices?

What is Paul’s final command to the Corinthians in this section?

## APPLICATION

Spend time reflecting on the fact that “we are not our own.” Consider the benefits of abandoning ourselves to God.

## PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group.





1 Corinthians 7:1-16; 25-40





# 10

## HOLINESS IN MARRIAGE AND SINGLENES



## WEEK 10

# Holiness in Marriage and Singleness

Chapter 7 marks a major transition in 1 Corinthians. Chapters 1-6 have been a response to a report brought to Paul concerning the church. In chapter 7 Paul turns his attention to “the matters you wrote about.” Paul has received a letter with a laundry list of questions. However, chapter 7 does not mark a hard break in Paul’s thought. Chapter 6 ended with the charge to “flee from sexual immorality” and to “honor God with your bodies.” This challenge seems to have been the cue in Paul’s mind to turn to their questions about sex and marriage. Apparently, the Corinthians have misinterpreted either Paul or some other teacher to be claiming that all sex is to be avoided. Paul seeks to correct this misunderstanding with a more robust view of marriage in view of the Kingdom of God.

The primary principle of this section is articulated in verse 24, “Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.” The idea here is contentment and focus on the Kingdom. The debate about whether it is more spiritual to marry or not to marry is misplaced. Paul says that our spirituality is not defined by our marital status. Singleness has a special usefulness for Christ, and marriage has a special usefulness. Everything has been reshaped by Jesus. If one wants to marry, great! If one wants to be single, great! In all things, glorify God with your life.

## Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 7:1-9
- 02 1 Corinthians 7:10-16
- 03 1 Corinthians 7:25-40
- 04 Matthew 19:1-9
- 05 1 Peter 3:1-7
- 06 Romans 13:11-12
- 07 Ephesians 5:21-33





# 1 Corinthians 7:1-16

## CONCERNING MARRIED LIFE

Now for the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”<sup>2</sup> But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.<sup>3</sup> The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.<sup>4</sup> The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife.<sup>5</sup> Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.<sup>6</sup> I say this as a concession, not as a command.<sup>7</sup> I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

<sup>8</sup> Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. <sup>9</sup> But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

<sup>10</sup> To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. <sup>11</sup> But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

<sup>12</sup> To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her.

<sup>13</sup> And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. <sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

<sup>15</sup> But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. <sup>16</sup> How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

## CONCERNING UNMARRIED

Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.<sup>26</sup> Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is.<sup>27</sup> Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife.<sup>28</sup> But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.

<sup>29</sup> What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; <sup>30</sup> those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; <sup>31</sup> those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

<sup>32</sup> I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord.<sup>33</sup> But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—<sup>34</sup> and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is



## 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. <sup>35</sup> I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

<sup>36</sup> If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. <sup>37</sup> But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing. <sup>38</sup> So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better.

<sup>39</sup> A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. <sup>40</sup> In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

“If you read history, you will find out that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in.’ Aim at earth and you will get neither.”

C.S. LEWIS, *MERE CHRISTIANITY*



## WARM UP

What word best describes your disposition?

- ☐ happy
- ☐ serious
- ☐ spontaneous
- ☐ encouraging
- ☐ matter of fact
- ☐ shy
- ☐ contemplative
- ☐ grumpy
- ☐ contentious
- ☐ indifferent
- ☐ other

Think about the following and how it applies to you:

“When I arrive at the place where all that I want is all that God desires for me, it is there that I find true peace and contentment.”

UNKNOWN

Note a few individuals and/or couples, married and single, who have inspired you in their devotion to God.

## EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-16; 25-40

Sexual immorality was an issue in Corinth and had, evidently, spilled over into the Corinthian church. Our culture has unhealthy views of sexuality, too. What are some ways we can avoid allowing immorality to become acceptable practice?

Paul asserts the importance of intimacy in marriage and the responsibility of both parties in making the relationship healthy. How does intimacy contribute to the emotional health and well-being of a marriage? Note that Paul says that Satan will exploit a relationship devoid of healthy intimacy.

Paul celebrates the blessing of singleness—even pointing out his own present circumstance (verses 8-9). How does he encourage the Corinthians to determine whether they should be married or remain single? Why?

How evident is it in verses 10-16 that Paul is committed to the sanctity of marriage? He acknowledges exceptions for divorce, as Jesus did (Matthew 19:9), but he encourages stability of marriage relationships, even if a believer is married to an unbeliever.

In verses 25-35, how does Paul celebrate the unmarried individual's devotion to the Lord, while not condemning marriage?

## APPLICATION

Make a list of the present blessings in your life and thank God for each one. You may discover that things you once considered difficulties have become blessings.

## PRAYER

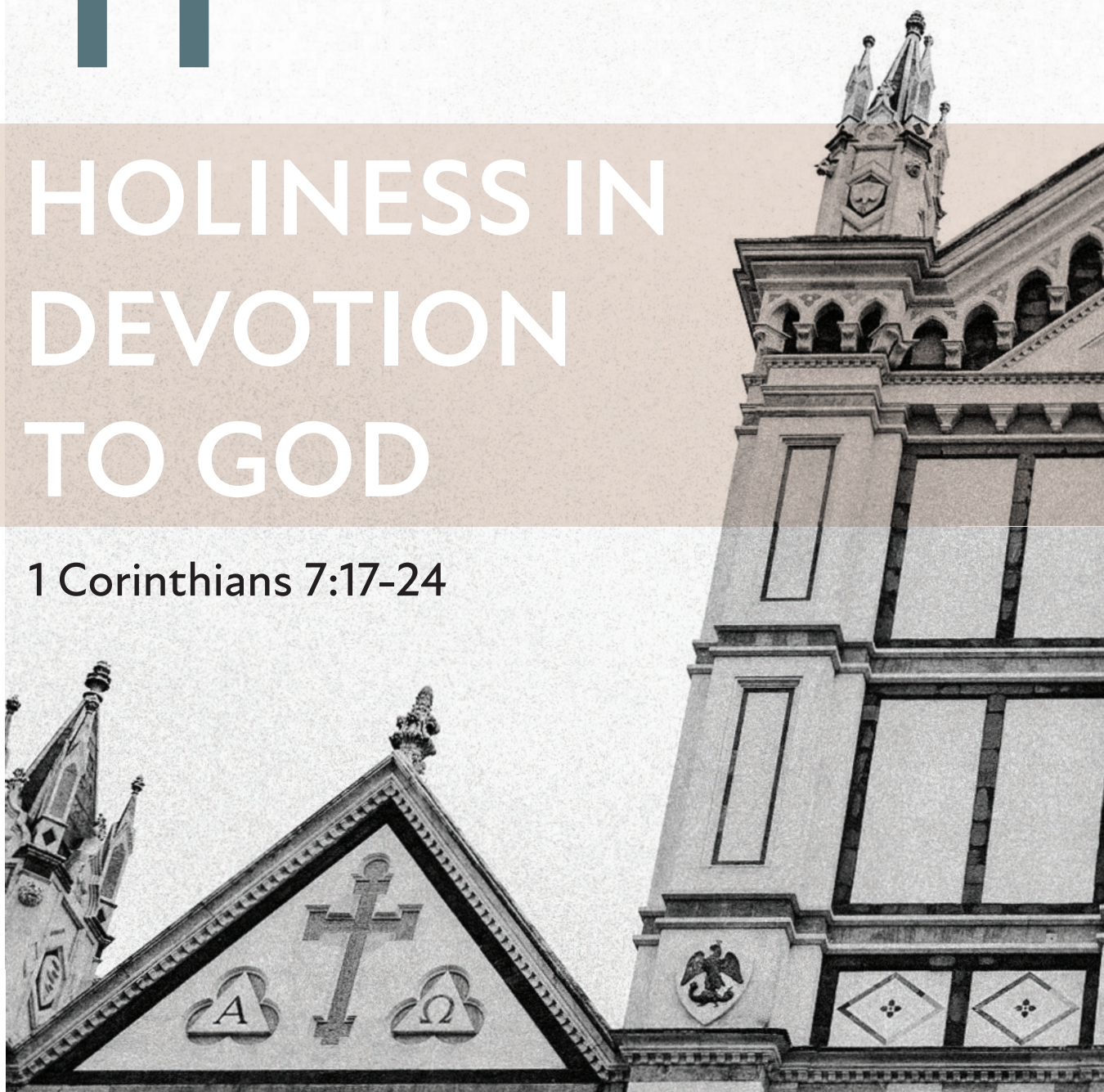
List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group.



# 11

## HOLINESS IN DEVOTION TO GOD

1 Corinthians 7:17-24







# Daily Readings

01 1 Corinthians 7:17-24

02 Acts 15:1-11

03 Romans 3:21-26

04 Colossians 3:1-17

05 Galatians 3:23-29

06 Mark 12:28-34

07 Galatians 5:1-6



## WEEK 11

# Holiness in Devotion to God

This passage is a reflection of the larger principle Paul teaches on marriage—being content where God has you. Paul acknowledges the principle of contentment holds true for many other circumstances: cultural, socio-economic, national origin, etc. It is a mistake to think one must “advance” socially to please God. This does not mean moving, changing, or advancing is wrong. If you can get to a better situation, by all means, do so! However, Paul warns against thinking these circumstances are the essence of spirituality. Remaining faithful in our current circumstances is essential.

# 1 Corinthians 7:17-24

## CONCERNING CHANGE OF STATUS

Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.<sup>18</sup> Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised.<sup>19</sup> Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.<sup>20</sup> Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

<sup>21</sup> Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so.<sup>22</sup> For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave.<sup>23</sup> You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings.<sup>24</sup> Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.





## WARM UP

What are some responsibilities or disciplines that you resented as a child but appreciate now? (Practicing a musical instrument, putting things back where they belonged, making your bed and cleaning your room, others?)

Do you remember an instance in life where you learned the importance of acting honorably toward others?

## EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 7:17-24

Paul challenges the Corinthians to be faithful in their walk with God regardless of social status. What does it mean for you to live as a follower of Christ, remaining faithful to God in your current situation?

Read verses 22-24. Paul encourages slaves, as well as free, to glorify God in their present circumstances. (Note: Paul is not endorsing the practice of slavery. See 1 Timothy 1:8-11.) If one's present circumstance is difficult, how is it possible to glorify God? Can you list examples of people who have done so?

In the book of Philemon, we find the story of Onesimus. He was once a slave, but his newfound relationship with Christ gave him a new position as a "fellow man and brother in the Lord." What does this tell us about God's view of us when we are in Christ?

What does Paul mean when he tells the Corinthians that they were "bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings (verse 23)"? Who purchased us? In our context, what are some ways we become enslaved to others?

## APPLICATION

List the benefits and blessings of being "in Christ."

## PRAYER

Ask your group for prayers in areas where you feel you are in bondage to anything that keeps you from serving Christ with your whole heart.

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,  
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,  
Christ where I lie, Christ where I sit,  
Christ where I arise,  
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,  
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks to me,  
Christ in every eye that sees me,  
Christ in every ear that hears me.  
Salvation is of the Lord.  
Salvation is of the Christ.  
May your salvation, Lord, be ever with us.

THE PRAYER OF ST. PATRICK, CHRIST BE WITH ME









12

**HOLINESS  
IN FREEDOM:  
THE WEAK**

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

# Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 8:1-13
- 02 Romans 14:5-22
- 03 1 John 4:20-21
- 04 Psalm 115:1-8
- 05 Colossians 1:15-20
- 06 Titus 1:10-16
- 07 Galatians 5:13-26

## WEEK 12

# Holiness in Freedom: The Weak

Paul now turns his attention to an issue of concern for first century believers. It was common in ancient temples to offer sacrifices of meat to the gods. Israel did this with their own offerings. The people would come to the temple, make their offering and then feast on the meal together. It should have been evident that a follower of Christ should not visit a pagan temple and partake in an offering to a false god.

However, meat in the marketplace often came from these pagan offerings. It was difficult to be certain that what was bought in a marketplace or offered in a non-believing home had not originally been part of a pagan offering. Many faithful Jews would have had their own marketplace, refusing to eat in a Gentile home to avoid potential compromise. Should members of the church take the same approach? The marketplace and the dinner table were primary sources of social interaction. Was a total separation with the surrounding culture required for a clear conscience?

As is often the case in 1 Corinthians, Paul elevates the discussion to higher principles. First, the pantheon of gods is not real. They have no power to contaminate food. Christians should not actively participate in false worship or fear their food is tainted. However, another principle is at work: love for one's neighbor. If another brother or sister is bothered by the potential of spiritual corruption, indulging one's freedom at the expense of the neighbor's conscience fails at Christian love. This principle of concern for others becomes a grounding Christian ethic for decisions where the answer is less clear.



## CONCERNING FOOD SACRIFICED TO IDOLS

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that “We all possess knowledge.” But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. <sup>2</sup> Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. <sup>3</sup> But whoever loves God is known by God.

<sup>4</sup> So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that “An idol is nothing at all in the world” and that “There is no God but one.” <sup>5</sup> For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), <sup>6</sup> yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

<sup>7</sup> But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. <sup>8</sup> But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

<sup>9</sup> Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. <sup>10</sup> For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol’s temple, won’t that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? <sup>11</sup> So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. <sup>12</sup> When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.



# Discussion Guide

## WARM UP

If you find yourself in a dispute, which of the following best describes you?

- a. Do your best to convince others you are right.
- b. Work to find a compromise.
- c. You give in because you hate confrontation.
- d. Kindly, agree to disagree.

Have you ever been involved in what seemed, at the time, to be a huge disagreement, only to later realize the issue wasn't that big of a deal?

## EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-13

The issue in this passage concerns eating food previously sacrificed to idols. In verses 1-3, is Paul more concerned about the acquisition of knowledge or expressing love to others? How can this principle be readily applied in our lives?

In verses 4-8, what is Paul's decision on whether one should eat food sacrificed to idols? How does Paul exercise good leadership in this situation?

What is Paul's warning to those who have a deeper understanding of this issue? What are some stumbling blocks, areas of divisiveness, that Christians encounter today?

1 Corinthians 8-11:1 addresses Christian liberty in various circumstances. What is Paul's final statement on the exercising of liberty in verse 13? Regarding issues where you have been on the "weak" side, how did you feel toward those who ignored your concerns (values, money, clothing, alcohol, music, lifestyle, etc.)?

## APPLICATION

Consider areas where you may be strong, or other areas where you may be weak. Are there steps you need to take to make course corrections?

Is it absolutely necessary to "win" every argument, regardless of the cost?

## PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group.

Where do you have differences of opinion with others where a measure of restraint is needed? Ask your group to pray for you regarding those areas.

“Of what use is it to discourse learnedly on the Trinity,  
if you lack humility and therefore, displease the Trinity?...  
I would far rather feel contrition than be able to define it.”

THOMAS À KEMPIS, THE IMITATION OF CHRIST





