

1 Corinthians 1–8

New Life in Christ

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INTRODUCTION

What happened in Corinth, stayed in Corinth. Well, not exactly. The apostle Paul's "first" letter (1 Corinthians 5:9) to the believers in Greece's ancient sin city—the good, the bad, and the ugly—has been divinely preserved for all the world to read.

In First Corinthians Paul addresses a church that is a mess—not because the congregants are not saved but because they are not spiritual. Paul implores them to abandon their worldly ways and to fully embrace their new life in Christ, including its moral and ethical implications. The Corinthian believers were living according to the so-called "wisdom of this world." This term or "the wisdom of man" is a common New Testament phrase that refers to all man-made philosophies or ideologies and their derivatives that believe that man, not God, defines what is true and moral and that he is solely responsible for human advancement. Paul exposes the spiritual bankruptcy of the wisdom of man and reminds the Corinthians that their union with Christ has given them access to the supernatural wisdom from God—wisdom that non-Christians cannot understand (1 Corinthians 2:14).

THE CITY OF CORINTH

Ancient Corinth was located on a narrow isthmus that connects northern mainland Greece with southern Greece (aka Peloponnese). The city of Corinth stood on a broad plain on the southwestern end of the isthmus and under the shadow of the towering Acrocorinth, a 1,886-foot rocky peak on which a fortress was built to protect the city.

Sea captains who sailed between the western Gulf of Corinth and the eastern Saronic Gulf were reluctant to navigate the 200-mile, six-day journey through the storm-tossed waters around southern Greece. In the seventh century BC, Periander, the leading political figure in Corinth, planned to construct a canal to transport ships from one gulf to the other, but he settled for the construction of a dedicated stone road that he called the *diolkos*. Smaller ships were dragged along this paved road on a rolling platform, but larger ships were unloaded and the vessels and their cargos were transported across the *diolkos* before they were reloaded.

Roman emperors Julius Caesar, Caligula, and Nero tried to build the canal, but they failed. Finally, in the latter part of the nineteenth century (1881–93),

more than 2,500 years after Periander had originally proposed the canal's construction, French engineers and Jewish slaves constructed the Corinth Canal. Today, only smaller boats and enthusiastic tourists navigate this seventy-foot-wide, four-mile waterway.

Corinth's unique location contributed to the city's financial affluence. The steady payment of tolls and fees to transport the ships and cargos across the *diolkos* contributed to Corinth's ever-increasing wealth. While the ships and the cargo were being transported, crew members often indulged in the decadent delights of the city's vices, including cavorting with the prostitutes who lived in the temple of Apollo located on the Acrocorinth.

BACKGROUND

On Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 15:36–18:22), he and a Christian worker named Silas traveled through southern and western Asia Minor (modern Turkey) where they were joined by Timothy (Acts 16:1–3). The three missionaries crossed the Aegean Sea into Europe and preached God's Word in the Grecian cities of Philippi (Acts 16:11–13), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1–9), and Berea (Acts 17:10–13). When they faced intense persecution, it was determined that Paul, since he was perceived to be the leader, should go to Athens (Acts 17:14–15) where he would reunite with Silas and Timothy. When Silas and Timothy did not come to Athens as planned, Paul left Athens and walked fifty-one miles west to the wealthy, licentious city of Corinth (Acts 18:1).

OUTLINE

During Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 18:23–21:17), representatives from the church at Corinth (**those of Chloe's household**, 1 Corinthians 1:11) informed the apostle that problems had developed in the church after his departure. In addition to a written list of issues, the delegation had additional concerns they wanted him to address. Paul responded to the additional concerns in chapters 1–6 before he addressed the written list of problems the church was facing (chapters 7–16). The phrase **now concerning the things about which you wrote to me** (1 Corinthians 7:1) identifies the transition from the verbal report to the written inquiry. The repetition of the abbreviated phrase (**now concerning**, 1 Corinthians 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1) indicates that Paul is beginning to address a new problem or issue.

SPIRITUAL VALUE

There is an old saying that helps us understand the message of 1 Corinthians. The original saying goes like this, “You can take the boy out of the country, but you can’t take the country out of the boy.” An individual’s childhood love for the simpler ways of rural living often remains with him throughout his life. With a slight adaption, the saying can read “You can take an individual out of the world (through salvation), but it is hard to get the world (false values, worldly thinking) out of the believer.”

First Corinthians is a virtual gold mine of practical wisdom for those who are serious about finding answers to the many questions that confront Christians living in a secular world. First Corinthians teaches you how to recognize the lure of the so-called “wisdom of man” with its subtle enticement to find meaning and fulfillment in the temporal values and passing pleasures of this world. As you learn the difference between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of man, you’ll be convinced to abandon all humanistic thinking and fully embrace God and His Word as your rule for life.

First Corinthians also presents you with a composite profile of a true follower of God. You will learn how to handle disputes between believers and how a church should handle unrepentant sin in its midst. You will learn what God’s Word teaches about marriage, divorce, and singleness and the important difference between (Christian) liberty and license. You will learn what God’s Word teaches about spiritual gifts and the nature of the believer’s resurrection. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians will help you escape the lingering effects of a sin-scarred past and the conforming pressures of a godless culture. It will enlighten your spiritual understanding and help you walk more closely with God in the details of life.

ONE

WHEN SAINTS ACT LIKE SINNERS

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1–17;
other references as given.

In this first lesson the apostle Paul greets the Corinthian believers (verses 1–3) and expresses gratitude for the grace that God has given them (verses 4–9) before he rebukes them for their divisive spirit that is causing disunity in the church (verses 10–17). Rather than keeping their eyes on Jesus, the Corinthian believers had separated into factious groups. Paul confronts their ungodliness with undeniable directness.

In this lesson you will learn why you should not allow yourself to become a blind follower of any earthly spiritual leader. Before you begin each lesson in this study, ask God to reveal Himself to you through His Word and to transform you into the image of His Son.

1. Paul introduced himself as an **apostle of Jesus Christ**. The Greek word for apostle (*apostolos*) means “one sent or commissioned to represent the authority of the sender.” In this case Paul was sent by Jesus Christ to proclaim God’s message to the world.
 - a. What words and phrases does the Bible use to describe the believers in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2)?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



Lombardi Time Principle

When the leader arrives 10-15 minutes early, he or she has time to pray, prepare the room, and greet the participants personally.

ADD GROUP
INSIGHTS BELOW

1 Corinthians 1–8: New Life in Christ

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

- b. If you are a Christian, do these words/phrases apply to you (Ephesians 2:19; 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:23)?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I am not sure.

Why? _____

2. Paul often expressed gratitude for other Christians (Romans 16:4; Ephesians 1:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:2), and he also encouraged believers to be grateful to God for who He is and what He has done (Ephesians 5:4, 20; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 1:12; 2:6–7; 4:2).

- a. For what was Paul thankful in the Corinthians' lives (1 Corinthians 1:4–7)?

- b. The objects of a person's gratitude are often an indication of what he or she values most. For what are you the most grateful?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

3. a. What was the first problem Paul addresses in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:10–12)?

- b. List three negative results of the Corinthians' partisan behavior (1 Corinthians 1:10–12).

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. *Do you think* the existence of the various church denominations violates God's command for Christians to be united in Christ?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I am not sure.

Why? _____

5. God commands believers to **keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace** (Ephesians 4:3), but He also expects them to stand for the truth (Acts 20:20; Ephesians 4:15; Titus 1:9; 2 John 4; 3 John 4; Jude 3) and separate from other believers if necessary (1 Corinthians 5:1–13, 2 Thessalonians 3:6–12). How can a Christian stand for the truth and seek unity with other believers at the same time (Ephesians 4:15)?

6. Some Bible commentators believe the factions or cliques in the Corinthian church (“I am of Paul,” “I am of Apollos,” “I am of Cephas [Peter],” “I am of Christ”) represent four ministry perspectives that their advocates emphasized to the point of strife and division. According to this interpretation, those who said they were “of Paul” believed that grace was the only thing that mattered. Those who were “of Apollos” believed the preaching should be emphasized above all else (Acts 18:24). Those who said they were “of Cephas” (Peter, the apostle to the Jews, Galatians 2:7–8) believed that the old Jewish traditions should be preserved in the church. Perhaps those who were “of Christ” reacted to the other factions and regarded themselves as the super-spiritual ones in the church. Regardless of the origin of these factions, Paul condemns all four for their divisive spirit. What did Paul do to help the Corinthians see their error (1 Corinthians 1:13)?



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ADDITIONAL
INSIGHTS

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

7. Those who said that they were “of Paul” believed they were right because they had been personally baptized by the apostle. List three truths this passage teaches about the gospel and its relationship to baptism (1 Corinthians 1:14–17, Matthew 28:19)?

1. _____ (v. ____).
2. _____ (v. ____).
3. _____ (v. ____).

8. German theologian Rupertus Meldenius (1582–1651) is credited as the author of the timeless statement “In essentials, unity; in doubtful (nonessential) things, liberty; in all things, love.” His words were written during the Thirty Years War (1618–1648), a bloody time in European history in which religious tensions played a significant role. His saying has found lasting favor among many notable Christians, and at least two Christian denominations have adopted it as their ministry motto. In the phrase “In essentials, unity,” Meldenius meant that all believers should agree on the essentials or fundamentals of the Christian faith. By “nonessentials,” he meant God’s Word provides personal freedom or latitude on the non-fundamentals (Romans 14:1–5). Place an “E” (essential) if you believe the statement below is an essential doctrine or fundamental of the Christian faith and an “NE” (nonessential) if you believe a Christian or church has the liberty to exercise personal freedom in this area.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ___ Divine inspiration of the Bible | ___ Worship styles in church |
| ___ Christ’s bodily resurrection and return | ___ A specific chronological view on the End Times |
| ___ Salvation by grace alone | ___ Jesus’ divine nature |
| ___ Music styles in church | ___ Christ’s Virgin Birth |
| ___ Working on Sunday | ___ Serving in the military |
| ___ Taking communion | ___ Drinking alcohol |

- ___ Observing religious holidays
- ___ The continuation or discontinuation of the spiritual gifts

9. a. Jesus told His disciples to **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”** (Mark 16:15), and Paul said Christ sent him to **preach the gospel** (1 Corinthians 1:17). What precisely is the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1–4)?

- b. Throughout church history, various religious groups have attempted to alter the gospel message by adding to it and subtracting from it. What did Paul say to the Galatian believers about altering the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:6–9)?

10. Jesus said **Go and preach the gospel** (Mark 16:15), and in a parallel passage in Luke 24:46–47 where He said **repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations**. First Corinthians 15:1–4 provides the *content* of the gospel. Luke 24:47 provides the *call* (man’s response) to the gospel which is repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. If an individual is convicted by the Holy Spirit of his sin (John 16:8) and the consequences (eternal separation from God) and believes/trusts that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again according to the Scriptures for his sin, he receives remission (complete forgiveness) of sins and is saved. Do you believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, and have you received/accepted it by faith?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I am not sure.

If you answered “no” or “I am not sure,” turn to the back of this study guide and read the Final Exam. It will explain how you can be born again (saved) according to the Bible.



Using table tents will help visitors feel more comfortable when they attend the group. If you are meeting online, encourage the participants to “rename” themselves if necessary.

ADDITIONAL
INSIGHTS

1 Corinthians 1–8: New Life in Christ

ADDITIONAL
INSIGHTS

11. Identify two important truths you learned from 1 Corinthians 1:1–17.

1. _____

2. _____

LEADER'S GUIDE

Lesson 1: When Saints Act like Sinners

1.
 - a. 1. The church or the church of God. b. Saints. c. Those sanctified in Christ Jesus.
 - b. Yes. Paul said the Corinthians were **called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ.**
2.
 - a. He was thankful for the grace God that had given them (1 Corinthians 1:4) and for the spiritual gifts that they had received from the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:5–7).
 - b. Answers will vary.
3.
 - a. Factions or deep schisms had developed in the Corinthian church. The immature Corinthian believers had self-identified with various spiritual leaders (Paul, Apollos, Peter, etc.), and they had forgotten that they were called to be followers of one leader, Jesus Christ. Paul pleaded with them as brothers in Christ to be united because they were one spiritual family. They were to be of the same mind (the mind of Christ) and judgment. The problem had become so pronounced that the groups had become contentious with one another (1 Corinthians 1:11).
 - b. 1. Divisions (v. 10). 2. Contentions (v. 11). 3. Misguided devotion (from Christ to man, v. 12).
4. Answers will vary, but there is a significant difference between what happened in Corinth and the existence of the Christian denominations. The disunity problem in the Corinthian church was causing strife among believers and causing them to take their spiritual focus off Jesus Christ. Regarding the denominations, God gives believers the freedom to disagree on the non-fundamentals of the faith (Romans 14:1–8), and the Holy Spirit gives the various spiritual gifts and different ministries (1 Corinthians 12:1–7; Galatians 2:7–10). This often leads to different ministry perspectives and eventually different denominations. A Christian, a church, and a denomination, however, can fall into the “Corinthian error” when they believe they are the only ones who believe the right way or do ministry

the right way and everyone else is wrong. This inevitably leads to a critical spirit toward other believers and churches. Jesus dealt with this temptation when He responded to the apostle John's misguided statement, **"Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us."** But Jesus said, **"Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side"** (Mark 9:38–40).

5. Believers are commanded to speak the truth in love. Believers must stand up for the truth, but to fulfill this command they must know God's Word and be able to distinguish between the essentials or fundamentals of the faith and the nonessentials. They must also be radically committed to speaking the truth in love. Oftentimes the battle for truth is won or lost by *how* a believer delivers the truth—perhaps not at the beginning, but in the end.
6. Paul reminded the Corinthians of their unity in Christ. It was Jesus who died for them—not Paul, or another spiritual leader. The Corinthians would have been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19), not in the name of some human spiritual leader. As for those who were saying that they were personally baptized by Paul, he said that he could not even remember who he had baptized. Paul wanted them to realize that it was not a big deal who baptized them without undermining the importance of believers' baptism as a public testimony of their faith in Christ.
7.
 1. The gospel does not include baptism (v. 17, **Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel**). In this verse, the gospel is distinct from baptism. This is the clearest passage in the New Testament that distinguishes the gospel of Jesus Christ from the act of baptism.
 2. Baptism is important, but it is not as important as being saved (v. 17). In Paul's statement (**Christ did not send me to baptize**), he is not saying that new converts should not be baptized or that spiritual leaders should not baptize new converts. Paul is saying that God's commission to him was to focus on the proclamation of the gospel rather than doing follow-up ministry work such as baptizing new converts.

3. Converts to Christ are baptized in the name of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) because Jesus was crucified for them (Matthew 28:19). Individuals are not baptized in the name of a spiritual leader or a church (Matthew 28:19).
8. Essentials/Fundamentals: Divine inspiration of the Bible, Christ's bodily resurrection and return, Salvation by grace alone, Jesus' divine nature, Christ's Virgin Birth.

Nonessentials: Worship styles in church, Drinking alcohol, Music styles in church, Observing religious holidays, The continuation or discontinuation of the spiritual gifts, Working on Sunday, Serving in the military, Taking communion, A specific chronological view on the End Times. Even though some things are nonessentials, and a believer has the liberty to choose to engage in a certain activity, that does not mean that a believer would be wise to do so.

9. a. The gospel of Jesus Christ is God's plan to save or redeem man. The gospel was revealed in the Old Testament (Psalm 16:10; Isaiah 42:1–4; 53:4–12) and manifested in time when Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, died on the cross to pay the complete price for man's sins (1 Corinthians 15:3). Jesus was buried and He rose again on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:4). In the truest sense, this is the gospel. Those who believe/trust/accept the gospel message receive eternal life and forgiveness for their sins. Jesus said, **“Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”** (Luke 24:46–47). Those who are convicted of their sin and receive the gospel (repent of their previous unbelief) receive forgiveness for their sins. Those who do not accept the gospel of Jesus Christ are lost and separated from God forever.
- b. No one has the right to change the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul said that if he or an angel from heaven changed the message of the gospel they should be accursed (Greek: *anathema*—meaning damned forever). It is a serious offense before God to alter the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

10. Answers will vary.

11. Answers will vary.

Lesson 2: Wisdom of God, Wisdom of Man

1.
 - a. **“If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”** In other words, make your choice and stick to it. Don’t be a double-minded believer with one foot in the world and one foot living for God. Choose who you serve. Decide!
 - b. Paul said that he possessed mighty weapons (likely a reference to the indwelling Holy Spirit and the Word of God and the armor of Ephesians 6:10–18) that were able to tear down worldly arguments and every high thing (humanistic theories, philosophical arguments, etc.) that contradicted God and His Word. These weapons enabled him to bring all errant thoughts into full obedience to Christ. These mighty weapons are available to every believer.
2. Answers will vary.
3. Answers will vary, but they could include the following:
 1. Some Christians are like the Corinthians, fleshly and worldly-minded, which causes them to live in defeat.
 2. Some Christians don’t know God’s Word or how to live by faith (life in the Spirit).
 3. Some Christians may not want to look strange to their unsaved family and friends.
 4. Some Christians are not able to overcome the pressures of the world to conform to its values. Other answers could apply.
4.
 - a. The unsaved are in a present state of perishing. They are not just going to perish when they die; they are already in a state of perishing. This is a profoundly sobering reality and one that should motivate all Christians to pray and do everything they can to reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - b. Just as the lost are in a state of perishing, the redeemed are in a state of being saved. The Bible pictures salvation from three perspectives: believers have been saved (Titus 3:5), believers are being saved