

1 Corinthians 1-10

Life in the Local Church



Corinthian columns at Corinth in south-central Greece. The remains of the ancient city lie about 80 km west of Athens at the eastern end of the Gulf of Corinth

western blacktown presbyterian church
...growing followers of Jesus



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A set of Bible studies for
**western blacktown
presbyterian church**
...growing followers of Jesus

Background to Corinth

Corinth was ancient Greece's most important trade city (Acts 18:1; 19:1; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1,23; 2 Tim 4:20). Ideally situated on the Isthmus of Corinth between the Ionian Sea and the Aegean Sea, Corinth was the connecting link between Rome, the capital of the world, and the East. At Corinth Paul established a flourishing church, made up of a cross section of the worldly minded people who had flocked to Corinth to participate in the gambling, legalized temple prostitution, business adventures, and amusements available in a first-century navy town (1 Cor 6:9-11).

Although Paul did not establish the church in Corinth until about A.D. 51

(Acts 18:1-18), the city's history dates back to 10,000 B.C., when ancient tribesmen first settled the site. Always a commercial and trade centre, Corinth was already prosperous and famous for its bronze, pottery, and shipbuilding nearly 800 years before Christ. The Greek poet Homer mentioned

"wealthy Corinth" in 850 B.C.

In the following centuries Corinth competed for power with Athens, its stronger neighbour across the isthmus to the north. And in 146 B.C. invading Roman armies destroyed Corinth, killing the men and enslaving the women and children. Only a token settlement remained until 44 B.C., when Julius Caesar ordered the city rebuilt. Not only did he restore it as the capital city of the Roman province of Achaia; he also repopulated it with freed Italians and slaves from every nation. Soon the merchants flocked back to Corinth, too.

The city soon became a melting pot for the approximately 500,000 people who lived there at the time of Paul's arrival. Mer-



Prayer Points

12. As in Ch 8, Paul brings two principles to the question of eating food offered to idols; v24 & v26. Which principle applies to the question of simply eating such meat?

How is the situation complicated when you eat with others?

13. Why does Paul offer advice which seems to be contradictory (v27-30)?

Note: V28 could be a Christian or non-Christian. If a Christian, the situation is the same as 8:9-13. Perhaps preferable is that it describes a non-Christian. Once he mentions where the meat came from, eating may affirm his belief in the reality of the gods to whom the meat was sacrificed. This puts a stumbling block in his way for salvation.

14. In 10:29b-30 Paul uses strong language. He asserts that his decision to eat, or not to eat, is his choice. Perhaps Jewish Christians were denying his right to eat. Paul says that his freedom isn't constrained by Christians, but he may choose not to eat for the sake of non-Christians.

What is Christian freedom?

15. How does Paul sum up his attitude to life (10:31-11:1)? What is his advice for the Corinthians?

16. In what ways are these principles for life a summary of his teaching in the first ten chapters?

chants and sailors, anxious to work the docks, migrated to Corinth. Professional gamblers and athletes, betting on the Isthmian games, took up residence. Slaves, sometimes freed but with no place to go, roamed the streets day and night. And prostitutes (both male and female) were abundant. People from Rome, the rest of Greece, Egypt, Asia Minor—indeed, all of the Mediterranean world—relished the lack of standards and freedom of thought that prevailed in the city. These were the people who eventually made up the Corinthian church. They had to learn to live together in harmony, although their national, social, economic, and religious backgrounds were very different.

Perched on a narrow strip of land connecting the Peloponnese, a peninsula of southern Greece, with central Greece and the rest of Europe, Corinth enjoyed a steady flow of trade. The city had two splendid harbour cities—Cenchreae, the eastern port on the Saronic Gulf; and Lechaemum, the western port on the Corinthian Gulf. The city itself was enclosed by walls ten kilometres in circumference. Most of the daily business was conducted in the marble-paved agora, or marketplace, in the central part of the city.

South of the marketplace were the butcher stalls that Paul mentioned in 1 Cor 10:25. Corinthians purchased their meat from these butcher stalls. The meat was often dedicated to pagan idols before being sold. This presented a cultural problem for the Christians in Corinth (1 Cor 8).

Today the Temple of Apollo, partially in ruins, towers above the ancient marketplace. Rising 457 meters (1,500 feet) above the city itself and to the south is the acropolis, or citadel. From there, the acropolis at Athens, about 73 kilometres (45 miles) away, can be seen. Also, the infamous Temple of Aphrodite (or Venus) was located on top of this fortified hill. This pagan temple and its 1,000 "religious" prostitutes poisoned the city's culture and morals. For this reason, the apostle Paul sometimes had to deal harshly with the converts in the Corinthian church. Most of the Corinthians had lived in this godless society all their lives, and the idea of tolerating incest had not seemed so terrible to them (1 Cor 5).

In spite of Corinth's notorious reputation, God used the apostle Paul to establish a vigorous church in the city about A.D. 51 (Acts 18:1-18).

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1 Cor 1:1-9: The Perfect Church



1. Read about Paul's prior experience in Corinth in Acts 18:1-18. Where was Paul writing this letter from? (See 16:5-9; Acts 20:31)
2. Who else had been involved in ministry in Corinth? See Acts 18:24-28; 19:1. How might he have influenced some of the thinking in Corinth?
3. How does Paul describe himself? (v1) Why might he stress this?
4. What is significant about the way Paul describes the church? (v2) Why might he remind them that they're just part of a much larger group who follow Jesus?
5. What is the basis for Paul's thanks for the Corinthians (v4-5)? What was the (human) cause of their "richness" (v6)?
6. This richness (v5) was in terms of speaking and knowledge. In fact, the Corinthians weren't lacking any spiritual gift (v7). Although these are good things for the church, what condition will Paul add later to these gifts? See 13:1-3.
7. What is the connection between the two halves of v7. How is "rich speaking" affected by hope for Christ's return (7)? How is living in light of Christ's return a sign of "rich knowledge"?

5. What is a contemporary parallel of how these examples and warnings apply to you?
6. What temptations do you most consistently have to face? Hence, does v13 encourage or frustrate you?
7. Read 10:14-22. It is a direct application of the preceding passage. Reading between the lines, it seems the Corinthians thought they could eat at the Lord's Table, and at idol temple feasts (v 20-22). They somehow believed that the sacraments of baptism and communion protected them from spiritual harm. Paul warns them against such complacency.

How is eating and drinking participation in Christ's blood and body? (see also Lk 22:19-20; Jn 6:53-57)
8. Why is Paul's point about participation in Christ's body and blood crucial to his argument in v14-22?
9. Reading 8:4-5 might lead us to think that idol-temples are harmless. While it is true that there are no other gods except the one God, why does Paul warn against participating in such sacrifices?
10. What was Jesus' attitude to demons? See verse 22, and Mk 3:27; 5.
11. In v23 Paul repeats his quote of their slogan "Everything is permissible" (see 6:12). How does his own slogan in v24 answer their slogan.

What modern similarities are there to the Corinthians' assertion of their freedoms and rights?

- Paul develops the self-discipline of an athlete so that he won't be disqualified ie lose his salvation. Calvinists and Arminians argue about whether it is possible for a true Christian to fall away for eternity. The true faith of God's children is reflected in the self-discipline of the Christian life. Look at some of the following verses which promise assurance of salvation; Jn 6:37; 10:27-30; 17:12; 1 Peter 1:3-4
- Are there matters for which you need to exercise particular self-discipline? Spend some time praying for each other.

1 Corinthian 10-11:1: The Dangers of Freedom

- Read 10:1-5. After reminding them of the discipline needed to "run the race" (9:24-27), Paul cites this example of Israel's past. Why were these reminders necessary?
- To what "sacraments" is he pointing by the example of Israel? What point is Paul making in showing that these "sacraments" failed to protect Israel from God's anger?



Paul appears to be casting back the signs of the new covenant (baptism and communion) onto the people under the old covenant. Elements from the old are repeated and superseded in the new. Notice, also, how it is Jesus who is the source of their spiritual nourishment – even then! God's grace to Israel was also because of the perfect sacrifice to be offered by Jesus still to come!

- Read 10:6-13. How do the four examples from Israel's past relate to the Corinthian situation?
- What is the "moral" of this teaching (v12-13)?

- What assurances does Paul give us about living as we wait for the end (8-9)?
- God has called "you" into fellowship with his Son (9). It's a plural "you" ie youse, or you-all. He has called individuals, but he has also called whole churches. How does/should our life together reflect that fellowship with his Son?
- List what things the Corinthians have done which they can be proud of. List what things God has done for the Corinthians which they can be thankful for.
- To consider: Am I prone to thinking as an individual rather than as a member of the body of Christ?
- How is God gifting our Church as we live for Christ's return? What things can we thank him for?

1 Cor 1:10-17: Cliques at Corinth



- What situation is behind Paul's words in these verses? See v 11
- Why does Paul stress unity? How does the theme of unity resurface later in the book?
- In v10, Paul contrasts divisions (ripping/ schisms) with being perfectly united (knit together - like a net. In Mk 1:19 the same word is used for mending nets). What does such unity involve? Is everyone supposed to think the same about everything?

4. What does it mean to appeal in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? What did Jesus say about unity in the church? See Jn 17:20-23. What is Jesus' purpose for such unity?
5. What were the quarrels and divisions about? (v11-12)
6. What do we learn about Apollos from Acts 18:24-28; 19:1? How might his characteristics have contributed to the problems in Corinth? Look for example through Chapters 1-4.
7. What do we learn about the ministry of Peter/ Cephas from Gal 2:7-9? See also Acts 15:1-21. What group of people may have looked to Peter's leadership in the Corinthian church? Why?
8. Paul asks, "Is Christ divided?" What is his point? If Christ is present in (all of) his church on earth, does this mean he is in some individuals more than others?
9. Paul's second and third questions reflect the twisted logic of those who side with him as leader. There is no such division when only Christ has been crucified for all, and only in his name have all been baptised. What is Paul thankful about in v14? Why?
10. What is Paul's priority (v17)? Why? Is he saying baptism is unimportant? How can maintaining such priorities help a church facing internal problems?
11. What does v17 suggest about Paul's method of evangelising? (More details will be revealed in the next chapters!)
12. To consider: To what extent is my faith bound up in a particular minister? If that person wasn't around, would it affect my relationship with Christ?
5. Why does Paul "boast" in not using his right to be paid?
6. How does Paul, in v15-18, emphasise the seriousness of his decision?
7. The net affect of not claiming his rights is that Paul is "free" (v19) from people's expectations and demands. But Paul is no selfish renegade. What is his life's goal?
8. How does he achieve this goal? (v19-23)
9. Does this mean he is two-faced? When we witness, in what sense are we to be something we're not, and in what sense are we to be ourselves?
10. How can we tell what things are secondary and not to be insisted on with unbelievers as opposed to those which are primary and non-negotiable?
11. In v24-27 Paul draws on the image of the athlete. The athletic games at Olympia (to the south of Corinth) and Isthmus (near Corinth) were the two most well-known contests of that time. They included chariot races, foot races, wrestling, jumping, boxing, javelin, and discus hurling. They were spectacular events involving thousands of competitors.

Who is the "runner" in Paul's picture? What is the prize?

What should our attitude be in the Christian life? Why?

The temple culture was so comprehensive, these Christians had difficulty believing the gods and idols were only lumps of wood or metal. Whenever they ate sacrificed meat they felt they were being joined to the false god. Thus their understanding was "defiled". It was not the eating, or the food itself, which made them defiled, but the wrong understanding of what they were doing.

7. In v9-13 Paul describes how such lack of knowledge can result in sin. Who is Paul speaking to? What was he warning them against doing? Why?

How is this an application of the principles of v1-3?

8. Can you think of examples where we care for the consciences of "weak" Christians?

1 Corinthians 9: Freedom to be a Slave:

Paul's personal reference in 8:13 seems to lead into a discussion of his rights as an apostle. It seems some not in the church at Corinth were doubting whether he was a "real" apostle (v3). This may have been based on three points; he wasn't an original disciple (cf 1c), he didn't accept payment like the other apostles (5-6), and he didn't follow food regulations like the other (Jewish) apostles (19-23).



1. What evidence does Paul present in v1-2 for the reality of his apostleship?
2. In v3-14 Paul asserts his right to a living. What arguments from life does Paul present?
3. Read v15-18. Although Paul has the right to a living, he doesn't use that right (v12b, 15). Why? How is this principle similar to that in Ch 8?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 11:4-15. How does this shed light on Paul's motivation for preaching the gospel for free?

1 Cor 1:18-2:16: A Ship of Fools



1. How does this section link with the previous section? What is the logic of the argument?
2. Why is the message of the cross foolishness to those perishing (18)? (See also v22-23)

Crucifixion was unspeakably ugly, and off-limits in polite conversation. Cicero said that 'the very word cross should be far removed from the lips, thoughts, eyes and ears of a Roman citizen.'

Christians were ridiculed right from the start. This is a first century Roman piece of graffiti which laughs at the message of a crucified leader and king. It is a picture of a foolish looking youth worshipping a crucified man with an ass's head. The caption reads, "Alexamenos worships his god."

3. What two groups does Paul identify among those perishing? What characteristics do they have? See v20-25.
4. What means did God use to make his foolishness known (v21)? What was the result? Is this a comfort, or a discouragement, to evangelists?
5. What points does Paul make in v26-31? Is this discouraging, or encouraging? Do we think of ourselves in this way? Why has God chosen people like the Corinthians (27-29)?
6. List the ways Jesus is described in v23-31.

7. Is Paul against ALL wisdom and speaking? See 1:5; 14:20.
8. How does Paul describe his own ministry in Ch 2?
9. Look at v2. Does this mean Paul ONLY preached about Christ's death? Why might he specifically mention the crucifixion? What do we learn about Paul's gospel from 1 Corinthian 15:1-8?
10. Does Paul's description of his own preaching (3-5) mean that preachers should not spend a large quantity of their time on preparing sermons? How are we tempted to focus on "wise and persuasive words" in our tradition as evangelicals? Is this the same as good, solid teaching?
11. What does v7-8 suggest as the reason why God kept his plan of a crucified Messiah hidden?
12. What do we learn about the work of the Spirit from v9-16? Might this be "the demonstration of the spirit's power" in v4? What room does this leave for boasting? Does this section serve a similar purpose to 1:26-31?
13. To consider; How can the foolishness of Christ crucified be better reflected in our lives?

1 Corinthian 3-4: The Prince of Fools

1. How does Paul describe his original ministry in Corinth (3:1-2)? Why was such a strategy necessary?
2. What evidence does Paul present for his judgement that the Corinthians are still worldly (1-4)? He thus returns to his argument from 1:10-17.



1 Corinthians 8: Freedom and Sensitivity:

Corinth was a city full of idols. The pagan temples were the centre of civic life. Questions of the Christian's attitude to the temple was of crucial importance. In Ch 8-10 Paul addresses three questions. The sacrifice of offerings to idols, the eating of meat that had been sacrificed, and buying such meat.

1. Look at v1-3. The topic of sexual ethics has finished and now Paul moves onto another question from the letter – that of food sacrificed to idols. What is the place of 8:1b-3? Is it just a digression, or is it connected to his argument? Why does Paul repeat the topic in v4?

Verse 1b-3 seems to be a general principle which Paul then applies to the question of idol-food. Knowledge ABOUT God is crucial (3:16; 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19), but it can lead to pride. True knowledge (of God and self) leads to building others up. Yet God actually hides himself from the proud (Mt 11:25; Is 57:15; Psalm 34:18)

2. What things are you tempted to become proud about?
3. How has your knowledge about God, and the Christian life, changed over the years?
4. Paul returns to the topic in v4. How does the summary differ to v1?
5. What knowledge does Paul describe as being relevant to this question (v4-6)? What do Christians believe about other "gods"? About God?

How would this Christian knowledge affect the Corinthians attitude to life? How might this compare with those around them?

6. Read v7-8. Paul describes Christians of weak conscience. What knowledge didn't they have? How did this cause them harm?

9. How does the nature of his advice in v10-11 differ from that which follows (v12f)? Why does Paul make the distinction?
10. A situation which makes sense of Paul's commands involves Christian women abstaining from sexual relations with their non-believing husbands because they felt that they would become unclean, or because the world was perishing and such relationships were no longer needed.

How do both Jesus' words, and Paul's own advice (v10-13), address this situation?

Imagine you were one of the women who wanted to leave your unbelieving husband. How would you have received Paul's words?

11. How does v 14 answer their misunderstanding?

This verse is NOT saying that unbelieving husbands and children will be saved. The probable idea is that they come under greater exposure to the gospel. The language can perhaps be explained as Paul's response to the Corinthians' question.

12. Verses 29-31 have been understood in various ways. Paul sums up with a series of contrasts between this age and the age to come, or perhaps describes how the present should be viewed in terms of the future. In everything we do, we should remember that "this world in its present form is passing away" (v31).

How are v32-35 an application of this principle?

How should this truth affect our attitude to work, relationships, possessions, priorities, ministries etc?

13. Verses 36-38 seem to be addressed to fathers with unmarried engaged daughters. The NIV is misleading. NASB has "towards his virgin daughter". Perhaps the indecision was caused by the "present crisis" v26. The situation is unclear, but Paul's solution is not. There is no right or wrong as long as the man has thought the situation through. How is this a further application of the principle in v38?

3. Some would suggest that fleshly/ worldly Christians become spiritual by a second experience of the Holy Spirit. What is Paul's solution for the Corinthians to become spiritual? Note, interestingly, that Paul's instruction that follows is "milk" for the babes!
4. How does Paul describe himself and Apollos in 3:5-9? What is God's part? What is the relationship between Paul, Apollos and God (9)?
5. In 3:10-15, Paul changes metaphors from farming to building. How does he describe his work? What part does God play? What about others' work?
6. What does Paul say about the foundation that someone else was actually building on (11)?

The rest of the building has to be based on a foundation of Jesus Christ. The list of building materials can be grouped into those that will survive judgement, and those that won't. If the work stands the test, the worker will be rewarded. This reward has been variously understood. The best way to make sense of the whole Bible, is that the reward is a "Well done, good and faithful servant" from Jesus. (See 4:5)

If the work doesn't stand, the Christian teacher/ leader "suffers loss" They make it to heaven - just - but they miss out on the commendation of Jesus. They're left to rue for eternity a lifetime of wasted ministry opportunity. What a depressing thought! Life is no dress rehearsal for something else. Make the most of your opportunities now!

Note: "Reward" and "loss" isn't talking about our salvation, which is certain, and depends only on Christ's work for us.

7. The preciousness of the work of building God's house is emphasised in 3:16-17. The church is God's temple because God's Spirit lives in individuals within the group. From the context, how is God's temple destroyed?

8. How does Paul describe himself in 4:1-2? What is his motivation (4:2-5)?
9. Why does Paul emphasise that God, rather than the Corinthians, judges him? (4:4-5)
10. What is Paul's purpose in writing? (See 4:6-7) The saying may mean something like, "Don't get too big for your boots!"
11. Paul continues the theme of pride and boasting in 4:8-21. What is the tone of v8?

Paul mimics the spiritual self-satisfaction of the Corinthians. They assume that because they have spiritual gifts they are already living in the fullness of all that God's kingdom offers. This overemphasis on the 'already' of God's kingdom is called *over realised eschatology*.

However, the reality is that, although God has begun to reign "now" because Jesus has defeated sin and death, the kingdom has "not yet" fully arrived because Christ has "not yet" returned.

Thus, for the Biblical Christian there is a tension between the "now" and the "not yet". Christ has fully won the victory *now*, and we see that victory in some things, but we must wait for complete victory in other areas (like moral perfection and complete physical well-being) until Christ returns.

12. How does Paul's description of the life of the apostles provide a corrective to the Corinthians misunderstanding? (9-13)
13. Paul's tone of irony returns in v10. What is his message in this verse?

4. Is Paul's emphasis on "rights" or "duties" in v3-7? How does this compare to modern views of marriage?
5. How do the duties of marriage relate to combating the immorality of the time v2-7)?
6. Why might prayer have been mentioned (v5)?
7. Why does Paul merely give advice rather than a command (v6-9)?
8. To "remain" or "stay" is a big theme in these verses –see v17; 20; 24. It is possible that Corinthian misunderstandings arose concerning the coming of the kingdom of God. Some aspects of God's kingdom had begun with Jesus' death and resurrection, but others were still to come. The end of the ages had begun, but God's kingdom hadn't fully arrived yet. Christians need to remain, and live for that day.

What are the different situations that Paul is encouraging them to "remain" in through this chapter?

8:

10-14:

18-19:

21-23:

25-26:

39-40

15. Paul says that such a teaching has the wrong focus. It concentrates on things of this world rather than the world to come. What is the right attitude to this world (v12-14)?
16. What is the connection between the Christian and Christ? What are the ethical consequences of this? (v14-20)
17. In what way is sexual sin different from other sins? What is wrong with the thinking of some that sex is just an appetite which needs to be satisfied?
18. What does it mean in practice that "you are not your own" (v19)?

1 Corinthians 7: Married and Single

(1 Corinthians 8 is a shorter study. If you don't finish Ch 7, you may choose to do the remainder next week before Ch 8.)



1. There is an obvious break here at the start of Ch 7. On the other hand, what connections are there between Ch 6 and 7?
2. The Corinthians had obviously written to Paul with some questions. Looking behind Paul's answer, what do you think the question was?
3. In what way is it "good" not to marry? See v32-35. Why then does Paul advocate that both men and women should marry?

14. Paul has corrected wrong thinking. In v14-17 he seeks to provide direction for right thinking and behaviour. What is his strategy?
15. In 4:18-21 Paul focusses in on his target. They are "arrogant" or puffed-up. What sort of "talking" is he criticising? What type of "power" is important?
16. To consider: How are we, as a church, tempted to follow the example of the Corinthians rather than Paul?

1 Corinthians 5-6: Flee fornication:

1. What has Paul's aim been in the first four chapters? How does Ch 5 connect with these chapters?
2. What is the tone of Paul's introduction in vv1-2?



The unusual wording probably means the sin involves a sexual relationship between a man and his step-mother. The word for the sin is *porneia* which refers to any sexual sin outside the boundary of marriage. This includes pre-marital intercourse, post-marital unfaithfulness, incest, same-sex relationships, or bestiality.

3. What differences do you see between Paul's view of this situation and that of the Corinthians?
4. What procedure should they have followed? (v2-5). (To hand over to Satan means to expel from the church)

Note that the discipline must take place during a church assembly. Why? What reasons does Paul give for such a process (v4-5 and v6-8)?

What else can we learn from 2 Cor 2:6-8; Gal 6:1-5?

5. Paul quotes a proverb about yeast and applies it to the situation (v6). How does the proverb apply?
6. How does Paul move from the proverb to ethical exhortation in v7-8? (For other references to Christ as our sacrificial lamb look up Jn 1:29; Rev 5:6,9; 1 Pet 1:19, Is 53:7)

What is the relationship between Christ's sacrifice and our behaviour? Paul seems to be saying in v7 that we should become what we already are. What does he mean?

What does it mean to keep the festival (v8)?

7. Verse 9 refers to a previous letter of Paul's concerning similar problems. They perhaps misunderstood him to mean that they were to have nothing to do with any non-Christian. What does Paul say about such an intention? How does he correct their misunderstanding? What distinctions does he draw (9-13)? What action does he advise?
8. What does he say about the behaviour of those outside the church (v10)? What is the correct attitude of Christians to their behaviour? How might this work itself out practically?
9. Are there people you know who have been excluded, or who have withdrawn, who you could profitably contact?

10. What themes continue in Ch 6? How does Ch 5 connect with Ch 6?
11. What situation is Paul responding to (v1,6)? Why is he indignant? What is his argument (2-3)? What is his advice (v4-5)?

Note the irony of v5 – they thought they were so wise, but Paul says they can't even find anyone wise enough to judge a simple case!

Note the NIV text note alternative translation for v4. I prefer that translation (also the translation of the RSV, NASB, GNB) for two reasons.

1. It fits the argument better. I.e "It makes no sense to appoint worldly judges who aren't esteemed by the church".
2. "men of little account" is too soft for "those who are despised". It seems unlikely Paul would refer to Christians in this way (see 12:21-25)

12. What two monstrous situations does Paul outline in verse 6? What does this indicate (v7)? What is a better option (v7)?
13. In v9-11 Paul reminds them of what they were once like, and what they are like now. How does this contribute to his argument?
14. In 6:12-13 Paul seems to be quoting the false teachers. What might they have taught? How might this have related to the pride and boasting in immorality of 5:2,6?

What is Paul's argument against these proverbs?