



Bible Studies for Ashfield Presbyterian Church
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INTRODUCTION:

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 the apostle 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 the apostle 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. Merchants 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 Peloponnesus, 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 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16: GOD'S ORDER IN GOD'S CHURCH

In this next section of his letter (Chapters 12-14) Paul zooms in on what the Corinthians do at church. He has probably heard of their practices from Chloe's people (1:11) or from Stephanas (16:17).

His message in these verses is that God wants his church to submit to the order he designed. Men are to submit to Christ and women to Christ by submitting to their husbands. This submission is to be represented symbolically.

Although these words seem quite foreign in our culture, if we hold the Bible to be truly God's word then we must wrestle with them, and not just dismiss them as a cultural irrelevancy.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

1. What do the Corinthians seem to be doing wrong?
2. Look at v2. Paul has presumably given the church other teachings to hold onto than those he mentions here. He doesn't mention the ones they have understood and are practicing properly. What might some of these have been? See for example 1 Corinthians 15:1-8.

Three notes on translation:

Man/ Woman: The words for 'man' and 'woman' can have two meanings. 'Man' can mean 'male' or 'husband'. 'Woman' can mean 'female' or 'wife'. Greek has no separate words for husband and wife. In my opinion, these verses primarily discuss a husband-wife situation, rather than a man-woman one. Verses 8-9 are discussing the marriage relationship of Adam and Eve. Verse 11 describes the reciprocal nature of marriage as Paul has already described in 7:3-5.

Head: Paul uses 'head' in at least two ways. In v3 he is using 'head' to mean 'the one in the position of headship'. Verse 4 refers to a man or woman's literal, physical head being covered or uncovered. It also refers to their spiritual 'head' ie Christ, or husband.

Covered/ uncovered: Most likely refers to the arrangement of one's hair. Men typically had short hair, while women had long hair. For dignified women this long hair was typically arranged 'up' often with a partial cloth cover. A woman with short hair was probably trying to pass herself off as a man, and this was a matter of shame (v 6). Hair arranged neatly up was probably a cultural symbol of dignified wifely domesticity. To not do so was to present oneself as unmarried, and to dishonour one's husband.



Minoan fresco in Knossos, Crete

3. List Paul's four-fold hierarchy of 'headship' from v3. Is man the head of EVERY woman?
4. If we are right in reading 'husband' and 'wife', within what sphere of relationship is man's headship to occur? Does this mean that a man is the 'head' of another man's wife?
5. Describe the type of 'headship' of husband over wife that Paul had in mind. See Eph 5:25-32, 1 Peter 3:7.

"By submission Paul and Peter appear to mean that a wife is to respect her husband's God-given 'role' or 'office' in the ordering of human affairs in that most important of human associations, the family. For their part, husbands are to prove themselves worthy of this high calling by following the example of Christ's sacrifice for his people." (Paul Barnett, *1 Corinthians*, p199-200)

6. The amazing thing about the marriage relationship (according to Eph 5:32) is that it represents the relationship between Christ and the church. How might this truth affect Paul's determination that husbands and wives accurately represent God's order in marriage?

Note: It seems likely that while teaching and preaching were the regular roles of the (male) elders, the church meetings also provided opportunity for prophesying and praying. Since the Spirit had come to both men and women, He had gifted EVERYONE in a variety of ways for the building up of the body. Prophesying was the Spirit-inspired application of Scripture or teaching given to both men and women. It seemed that individuals would do so on an occasional, rather than regular, basis.

7. It seems that women were praying and prophesying with their hair down (v5-6). Why was this a problem for Paul? What is the appropriate way for a woman to pray or prophesy in church?

8. What was the appropriate way for a man to pray or prophesy? Why?

Note: Paul is NOT forbidding women from praying or prophesying. Nor is he teaching that certain hair styles or coverings are wrong, or required. He is saying that when married women prophesy in church with uncovered or "down" hair, they could be making a statement about their relationship with their husband, and their own authority to prophesy. They were acting as if they were unmarried, and no longer under their husbands headship - thus dishonouring their husbands.

9. Verses 7-10 reflect on Adam and Eve's 'marriage' relationship. Man is God's glory because he comes from God, and serves him. In what sense is woman the glory of man? Read Gen 2:20-24.

10. A man's bare physical head should point to his 'head' – God, the One of Whom he is the image and glory. The woman's covered physical head should reflect submission to her metaphorical head – her husband. This seems to be the point of v10. A woman who prophesied with her head covered did so under the authority of her husband. In our culture, the sign of that authority may be different. How can women today show they are under their husbands authority? SHOULD they?

11. How can churches make sure women are given opportunity to prophesy?

12. How might v11-12 be a corrective against a male-dominated misunderstanding of his teaching in verses 3-10? What does he teach in these verses?

13. In verses 13-15 Paul concludes his argument by referring to a different authority. What is his point in these verses?

14. God has created men and women with identifiable differences in appearances, roles, and other strengths and weaknesses. In marriage these differences are perfectly complementary according to God's design. How can both men and women today ensure that these sexual differences are maintained, rather than confused?

15. What do we learn about the Christian churches in Paul's time from v 16?

Prayer Points:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-34: BODY LANGUAGE

At Corinth, the Lord's Supper had become a time of disunity rather than unity. There was a failure to discern the body – other members of Christ. Paul soundly rebukes the Corinthians for not caring for each other.

1. Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. How does Paul's introduction in v 17 differ from that in 11:2? What is different here?
2. What is the big problem? How does this show itself?
3. Why does there HAVE to be SOME differences among them? (v19)
4. Why does Paul say it's NOT the Lord's Supper they eat when they come together? (v 20)
5. Who does Paul seem to be addressing in v 22?
6. Why does Paul stress that his teaching comes from the Lord (v 23)?
7. Was this a new teaching for the Corinthians? Why does he remind them of the purpose of the Lord's Supper now?
8. From the context, what does it mean to eat and drink in an unworthy manner (v27)?
9. From the context, what should a man be looking for when he examines himself before eating and drinking?
10. From the context, what do you think it means to recognise the body of the Lord? (There are two options – look at 11:27, and 12:27)
11. What has been the result of the sin of some in the Corinthian church? Why has this happened? (See 11:30-32)
12. What is Paul's conclusion? (v32-34)
13. Remembrance (v24-25), proclamation (v 26), participation (10:16), and unity (10:17) are four realities of the Lord's Supper. How can you make sure you achieve each of these when you take the Lord's Supper?
14. What can we learn from this passage about the things we do when we meet together?

Prayer Points:

1 CORINTHIANS 12: BODY PARTS

The Corinthians had the ability to value the spectacularly-gifted people and under-value the supposedly less important gifts. Paul rebukes them for this lack of unity.

1. Read 1 Corinthians 12. There seems to be a dramatic break at 12:1. Paul has moved onto a new topic. But there are similarities. What are the points of similarity between Ch 12 and Ch 11?

Note: The word translated "spiritual gifts" is literally 'spirituals'. This could be translated as either 'spiritual things', or 'spiritual people'. The rest of Ch 12 describes various spiritual gifts, Ch 13 describes the attitude of love that's required when using gifts, and Ch 14 contrasts prophesying and tongues-speaking. Speaking in tongues is the big problem, and the climax of this section.

2. The message of verses 4-11 is that one Spirit produces a range of gifts. What do verses 2-3 teach about the Spirit?
3. In v4-6, how is the diversity of gifts related to the unity of the Father, Son (Lord), and Holy Spirit? Can you see any significance in the different names of gifts from each person of the Trinity? (gift, kind of service, kind of working)
4. Since the Corinthians tended towards spiritual pride (1:12; 4:8; 5:2), how might verses 7 and 11 surprise them?
5. What is the purpose of the gifts (v7)?
6. In verses 12-13, in what ways does Paul stress the unity of the believers? What other points does this body image convey (verses 14-20)?
7. How does Paul counter their tendency toward spiritual pride in verses 21-26?
8. Who are we to honour in the body? Why?
9. Can you give an example of how verse 26 works in the human body? What about in our church?
10. What categories of gifts do you find in the lists in verses 8-10 and verses 28-30? Do you think either list is meant to be all-inclusive? Why?
11. Is there any significance in his ordering them as 'first', 'second' etc in v28? If so, what?
12. From Paul's rhetorical questions in verses 29-30, what do you see as another problem in this church?
13. What are your gifts? Are you using them? What gifts do you appreciate in those in your group? Tell them. Are there people in your group who aren't using their gifts? How can you encourage them to do that?

Prayer Points:

Spend some time thanking God for his Spirit, his church, and his gifts.

1 CORINTHIANS 13: WALKING THE TALK

Although this passage is a favourite at weddings, we mustn't take it out of its context. Love for our Christian brothers and sisters must motivate and direct the use of our gifts in the church.

In the middle of his discussion on spiritual gifts, Paul describes the "more excellent way" of love. After first emphasizing the importance of love (1-3), he then defines love by what it is and what it does (4-8a). Ending with love's quality of "permanence", Paul contrasts it with the temporary nature of spiritual gifts. Though such gifts fulfilled an important function, the time would come when they would cease, while qualities like faith, hope, and love would remain (8-13).

1. Read 1 Corinthians 13. How do the first two gifts mentioned in verses 1-2 serve to tie this chapter into the context of Chs 12-14?
2. Provide a heading or summary for each of the sections in this chapter.
V 1-3
V 4-7
V 8-13
3. What is necessary for any service that we may render to be of value? (1-3) What is Paul saying to the two groups (or more) who are arguing about which gifts are more important?
4. What is the main difference between love and spiritual gifts? (8)
5. What is "the imperfect" or "the partial" in v10 that will disappear? See v9, as well as the gifts mentioned in v2.
6. What do you think "perfection" (completion/ culmination) in v10 refers to? See also v12. What is the knowledge like that we will have then? (12)
7. What two illustrations does Paul use to show the temporary nature of spiritual gifts (11-12)
8. What will remain after spiritual gifts cease? (13)
9. Why is love greater than faith and hope? See Gal 5:6, Colossians 1:4-5
10. How can I show love to my brother or sister?
11. Spend some personal time reflecting on v4-7, confessing your own lack of love, and asking that God might fill you with his love which will overflow through you to others.

Prayer Points:

1 CORINTHIANS 14: TALKING THE TALK

In this chapter Paul concludes his discussion of spiritual gifts. In comparing the gift of prophesying with that of speaking in tongues, he points out that prophesying excels when it comes to the edification of the church (1-5). In fact, unless the speaking of tongues provides a new revelation or teaching, and is properly interpreted, it does little good (6-19). Designed to convince unbelievers, improper use of speaking in tongues in the assembly can even bring reproach on the church (20-25).

Therefore Paul regulates the proper use of spiritual gifts in the assembly with a series of instructions, including commandments from the Lord about the place of women (26-40).

1. Read 1 Corinthians 14:1-25. How does v1 tie into Ch 13?
2. Why is the desire to prophesy the loving thing to do? See v1-5
3. What is the value of prophesying? (3)
4. What is Paul's measure of "greatness" in v5? Why?
5. What do we learn about tongues from the following verses?

V2

V4

V5, 19

V6

V9

V14

V15

V18

6. What was wrong with how the gift of speaking in tongues was being used in Corinth? See v2, 4.
7. What is necessary for speaking in tongues to be of value in the assembly? (6)
8. Read 1 Corinthians 14:26-40. What two basic principles govern the assembly of the church? See v26, 31, v40
9. In what had the Corinthians been thinking like children (20)? See verses 21-25.

Note: Verse 22 is often taken to be teaching that tongues in church are convincing proof for non-Christians of the truth and power of God. But this then means that verses 23 contradicts v22.

The key is found in the Old Testament quote. The quote from Is 28 says that, because Israel had refused to listen to God, through his prophets, God will "speak" his judgment on Israel through the strange tongues of foreign invaders. This doesn't mean that the tongues convey content, but simply that they serve as a negative sign of judgment.

In the same way, tongues are a sign of unbelief. Verse 23 outlines the process of that unbelief. A non-Christian will think Christians are out of their mind, and their unbelief will be reinforced (as in the Isaiah quote).

By contrast, prophecy is a sign for believers. That is, it has the effect of producing or affirming belief. Verse 24 outlines how this occurs.

10. What restrictions does Paul place on speaking in tongues in the assembly? (27-28)
11. What restrictions does Paul place on women in the assemblies? (34-35) How does his advice in 1 Corinthians 11:5 (where women are permitted to prophesy and pray in public) qualify this prohibition?
12. How are verses 36-40 a summary of chapters 11-14?
13. How can we, in our meetings, make our message clearer? How do we distract, or confuse, the message?

Prayer Points:

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11: PASS THE PARCEL

In this chapter Paul deals with problems the Corinthians were having concerning the resurrection of the dead. Evidently there were teachers at Corinth claiming there would be no resurrection. Paul answers this false doctrine by reminding them of the certainty of the gospel which they received and which proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (1-11).

1. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. Is there a smooth transition from Ch 14 to Ch 15, or does Paul start a completely new idea?
2. Why does Paul want to remind them of the gospel he preached to them? (Look at v12) How serious do you think this problem is compared to the others he has mentioned in the letter?
3. How does he introduce the content of the gospel in verses 1-2? Why?
4. Why is it so important to hold firmly to the gospel they first believed? Can we ever move beyond "the basics"?
5. From whom did Paul receive the gospel message (v3)? See Galatians 1:12,16-18; Acts 9.
6. What things are "of first importance"? (3-8)
7. What types of proof are offered for the resurrection of Jesus? (4-8)
8. How does Paul fit into the company of eyewitnesses (8)?
9. The word for "abnormally born" normally refers to a pre-mature birth or a miscarriage – that is a birth BEFORE its time. In what sense does Paul witness Jesus BEFORE anyone else?
10. How does Paul describe himself in v9-11?
11. What motivates Paul to work so hard?
12. How does Paul summarise this section (v11)? Put this verse in your own words.
13. How do you describe yourself? How do you FEEL about who you are before God, and what he's done for you? What motivates YOU to work for God?

Prayer Points:

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-58: JESUS' RESURRECTION: SO WHAT?

Paul continues his defense of the reality of Jesus' resurrection. He uses several different lines of argumentation (12-34). The last half of the chapter is devoted to answering anticipated questions concerning how the dead will be raised and with what body will they come (35-58).

1. Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-34. What is the basis for Paul's confidence in the resurrection of the dead (v12)? How have we seen that confidence in 15:1-11?
2. Why might some of the Christians at Corinth have been saying that there is no resurrection from the dead? (15:12) What modern equivalents are there to these views?
3. What seven essentials are lost if we deny the truth of the resurrection of the dead? (13-19)
4. What is Paul's conclusion if it is true that there is no resurrection of the dead? (v19)
5. We are living between the time of Christ's resurrection and his return (the end/ when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father –v24). How does Paul describe the things that are happening in this time? (v24-27)
6. What will happen at the time of Jesus' return? (v22-28)
7. What does Paul refer to when he speaks of "baptism for the dead"? (29)

Of the many different explanations that have been offered, the one making most sense to me is that Paul is speaking of the inconsistency of those who deny the resurrection while at the same time practicing a form of "vicarious baptism" (one person being baptised for another). Notice that Paul refers to "they" who were doing this, not "we" (i.e., the apostles). Paul in this passage is neither openly condemning or justifying the practice. He simply uses the practice of others to demonstrate the inconsistency of such practice when denying the resurrection of the dead. Whether we should practice such a rite as "baptism for the dead" today must be determined from passages elsewhere. All we find elsewhere concerning baptism is that it requires faith and repentance of the one being baptized. This would preclude the practice of "vicarious baptism."

8. What is Paul's argument in v31-32? How does the resurrection help us face suffering?
9. What final words does he have to those who are tempted to listen to the false teachers? (v33-34)
10. Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-58. Paul seems to be answering the question of those who denied the resurrection – what will the resurrected body be like? Perhaps they were ridiculing the idea of a decomposed re-animated corpse walking around. But Paul says it is they who are foolish. There is as much difference between the old body and the resurrected body as between a seed and a wheat plant (37). What other examples and descriptions does he give in v38-44?

11. Draw up a table of characteristics from v45-49 comparing the first Adam with the last Adam (Jesus)

First Adam

Last Adam

12. How does Paul describe our final resurrection in v50-57? What two groups of people does he mention in 51-52? (See also 1 Thess 4:14-18)

13. How does Paul conclude? (v57-58)

Prayer Points:

1 CORINTHIANS 16: MORE THAN JUST SAYING "G'DAY!"

In this final chapter, Paul discusses one last subject before making his concluding remarks - the collection for the saints. Paul gives instructions about how the funds are to be gathered and then sent to Jerusalem (1-4). He then writes briefly of his plans to see them and makes a few comments concerning Timothy and Apollos (5-12). His final exhortations, greetings and solemn warning are marked with a tone of love: the need to love one another, a warning to love the Lord, and a declaration of his love for them (13-24).

1. Read 1 Corinthians 16. What impression do you get about Paul as you read? About his friendships? Ministry style? Personality?
2. What do we learn about the practices of the early church from this letter?
3. What principles for giving does Paul encourage here? Look at Rom 15:25-27 for some background.
4. What different Christian congregations are mentioned here? What do we learn about them?
5. List the various Christian workers whom Paul works with. What do we learn about each one? In the third column add any command Paul gives for how the Corinthians should treat these workers. See also 1 Tim 4:12; Acts 18:1-4; Acts 19:24-28; 1 Corinthians 1:16

<u>Christian worker</u>	<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>How they should be treated</u>
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6. What other commands does Paul give them? (13, 20)
7. How does Paul close this epistle which is filled with so much rebuke for the error that existed in the church at Corinth? (24)
8. What would a church look like who took on the attitudes and actions that Paul is describing? How can our church do it better?

Prayer Points: