

BE ON YOUR **guard**

STAND **firm** IN THE FAITH

BE **courageous**

BE **strong**

DO EVERYTHING IN **love**



SANTA BARBARA
COMMUNITY CHURCH
1 corinthians
2020-2021

SBCC'S VISION FOR HOMEGROUPS

What is a homegroup?

Homegroups meet weekly in groups of 6-18 to:

- Read and study Scripture along with the sermon series
- Pray and worship together
- Build friendships, encourage and care for one another
- Encourage each other in ministry, service and evangelism

Our vision for homegroups is that as we do these things, members will experience:

Minds shaped by the Word of God

- Ongoing growth in the knowledge, understanding, and love of God's Word
- Increasing understanding of the person of God, the glory of God, humankind's need for grace, and the "grand narrative" of the biblical story

Hearts shaped by the character of God

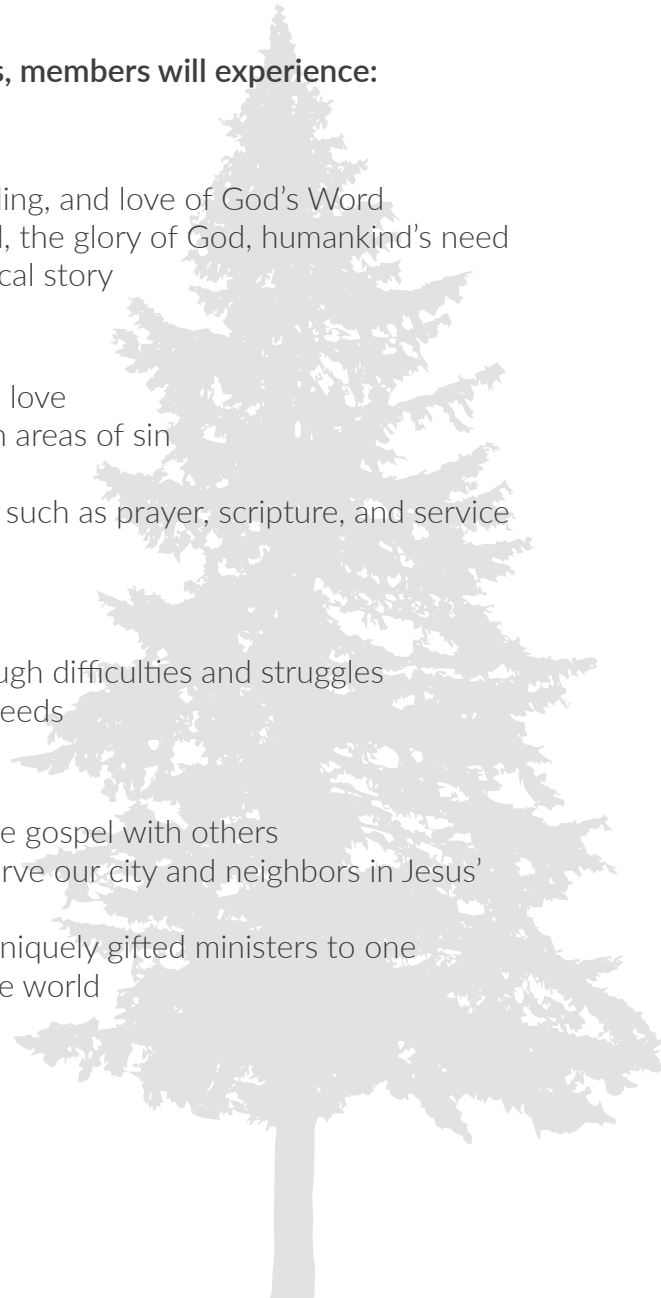
- Deepening faith and joy in God's salvation and love
- Spiritual growth, maturity, and accountability in areas of sin
- A growing love for others
- Deepening commitment to spiritual disciplines such as prayer, scripture, and service

Relationships shaped by the kingdom of God

- The joy of sharing life with other believers
- Safety and acceptance to share and grow through difficulties and struggles
- A place to give and receive help with various needs

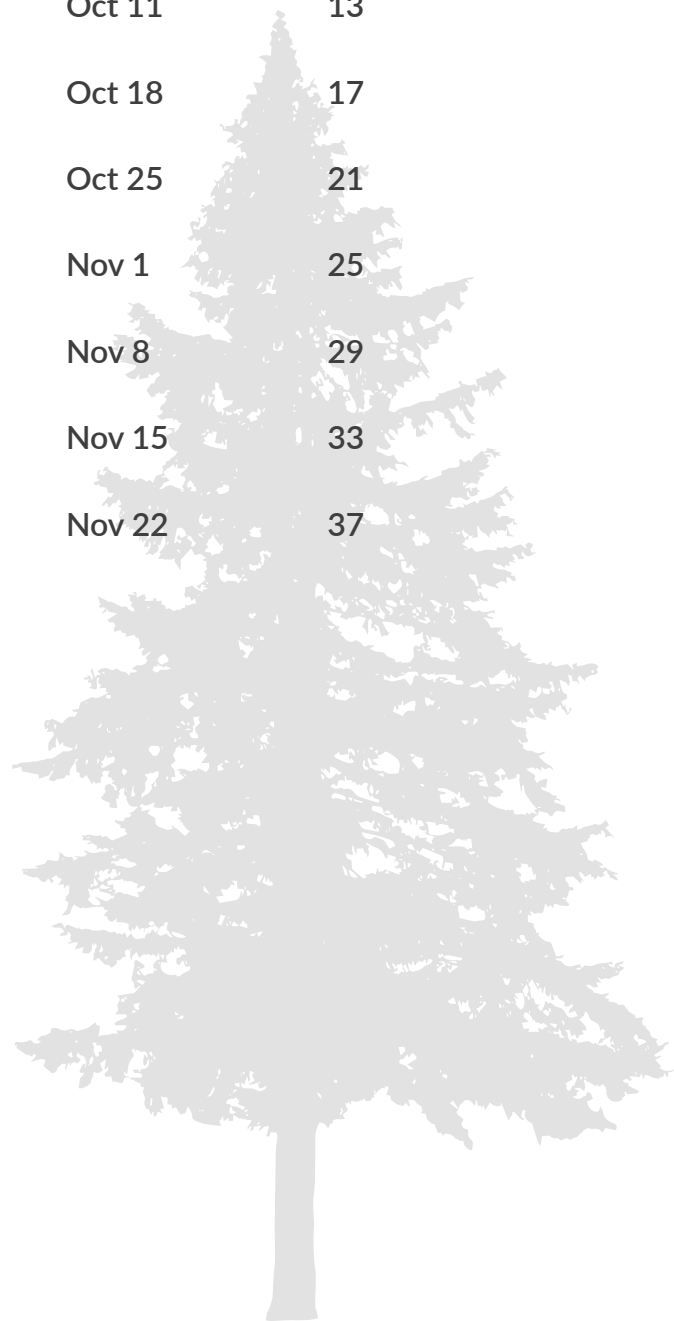
Priorities shaped by the mission of God

- The increasing desire and ability to proclaim the gospel with others
- The increasing desire and ability to love and serve our city and neighbors in Jesus' name
- Growth in our understanding of ourselves as uniquely gifted ministers to one another, to the larger body of Christ, and to the world



Calendar

Study Week of	Study No.	Passage	Sermon	Page
September 21	1	1 Cor 1:1-17	Sept 27	5
September 28	2	1 Cor 1:18-2:5	Oct 4	9
October 5	3	1 Cor 2:6-16	Oct 11	13
October 12	4	1 Cor 3:1-23	Oct 18	17
October 19	5	1 Cor 4:1-21	Oct 25	21
October 26	6	1 Cor 5:1-13	Nov 1	25
November 2	7	1 Cor 6:1-11	Nov 8	29
November 9	8	1 Cor 6:12-20	Nov 15	33
November 16	9	1 Cor 7:1-40	Nov 22	37



Sources and Abbreviations

Barclay	William Barclay, <u>Letters to the Corinthians</u> , Westminster, 1954.
Barrett	C. K. Barrett, <u>A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians</u> , A. & C. Black, 1968.
Blomberg	Craig Blomberg, <u>1 Corinthians The NIV Application Commentary</u> . Zondervan, 1994.
Bruce	Bruce, F. F., <u>Paul, The Apostle of the Heart Set Free</u> . Eerdmans, 1977.
Calvin	John Calvin, <u>1 Corinthians</u> Eerdmans, 1960 (originally published in 1546).
DNTT	<u>Dictionary of New Testament Theology</u> , ed. Gerhard Kittel. Eerdmans, 1976.
Fee	Gordon Fee, <u>The First Epistle to the Corinthians</u> , Eerdmans, 1987.
Hodge	Charles Hodge. <u>1 Corinthians</u> . Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1972.
KJV	King James Bible
MacArthur	John MacArthur, <u>1 Corinthians</u> , Moody Press, 1984.
Mare	Mare, Harold W. 1 Corinthians, volume 10 of <u>The Expositors Bible Commentary</u> . Zondervan, 1981.
Morris	Leon Morris, <u>The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians</u> , Eerdmans, 1958.
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIDNTT	<u>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</u> , ed. Colin Brown. Zondervan, 1975.
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
Prior	David Prior. <u>The Message of 1 Corinthians</u> . Inter Varsity Press, 1985.



...We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1Corinthians 1:23-24

Listen carefully and you will hear, from time to time, a yearning among twenty-first-century Christians to go back to the early church. The first-century church is often idealized, romanticized and held up as the model to emulate. However, Paul's correspondence with the Corinthian church should cure any illusions we might have about the perfection of the New Testament church. Here we find a church torn by divisions, affected by sexual immorality, and involved in intra-church lawsuits. The Corinthian church lacked discipline, had a sizeable anti-Paul contingent within the membership, and included those who showed up drunk for public worship. There also appears to have been a questioning of the doctrine of the resurrection and, perhaps, a loveless spirit among the rank and file of this body of believers.

1 Corinthians is a pastoral letter—i.e., an open letter from the apostle to all members of the church that he established on his second missionary journey in about March of 50 A.D. As far as we can tell, Paul spent about eighteen months in Corinth before moving on to Jerusalem and then to Ephesus for an extended stay lasting for about two and a half years.

It was during his time in Ephesus that Paul wrote four letters back to the Corinthian church. Our Bibles contain the second and fourth of these letters. 1 Corinthians is a letter of deep pastoral concern. Paul sees the threat to Corinthian church life as coming from within the church itself. The Corinthian believers were in trouble at almost every imaginable level. They had come to know Christ in the context of an exceedingly decadent society and, not surprisingly, they brought much of their former way of life into the church. Our letter contains the loving yet firm urgings of a missionary-pastor who is desperate to restore the spiritual life of a particular body of believers.

Corinth

Corinth was a strategically located city with a colorful history. Look at a map and you'll notice Greece is divided into two parts. In the south is the Peloponnesus, which is attached to the north by a four-mile-wide isthmus. Corinth was located on this isthmus, with all overland traffic passing through. Time and danger also made Corinth a bustling seaport, as ships would avoid the treacherous waters to the south and save 250 miles of sailing by pulling into one side or the other of Corinth. There they would unload their cargo, carry it across the isthmus and reload it on another ship. Smaller vessels would be dragged across on rollers. So dangerous was the long way around the peninsula that mariners had a saying, A sailor never takes a journey around Malea until he first writes his will.



Corinth had been destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. After a one hundred-year period of dormancy the city was rebuilt by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony in 44 B.C. By the time of our letter, the city of Corinth contained a population of about 250,000. Corinth was populated by former slaves who had attained their freedom and was truly a Greco-Roman city. It had Roman laws, culture and religions, yet Greek influences were present in these same areas. Corinth was a wealthy city which “lacked a landed aristocracy” (Fee 2); it was a city of opportunity, a place to go and make money.

As a center for trade, travel, entertainment and cultic practices, Corinth was the San Francisco, Los Angeles or London of the ancient world. With the hustle and bustle came vice and degeneracy. Aristophanes coined the term *korinthiazō* (= to act like a Corinthian) to describe those whose life was characterized by fornication. Though the oft-quoted statistic that Corinth had one thousand prostitutes serving at the temple of Aphrodite is probably in error, this city boasted a decadence in public life which would make most of us blush.

J. C. Pollock sees Corinth as a strategic city from a missionary point of view.

Corinth was the biggest city Paul had yet encountered, a brash new commercial metropolis.... It squeezed nearly a quarter of a million people into a comparatively small area, a large proportion being slaves engaged in the unending movement of goods. Slaves or free, Corinthians were rootless, cut off from their country background, drawn from races and districts all over the empire...a curiously close parallel to the population of a 20th Century “inner-city”...

Paul had seen a Christian church grow and flourish in the moderately-sized cities he had found in Macedonia. If the love of Christ Jesus could take root in Corinth, the most populated, wealthy, commercial-minded and sex-obsessed city of eastern Europe, it must prove powerful anywhere.¹

The Church

In this cosmopolitan context Paul planted a church which, in one way or another, reacted to its immediate cultural and religious surrounding.

[F]resh from their immersion in the many pagan religions of the community, most of the Corinthian Christians had not adequately broken in numerous ways from the immorality of the prevailing culture that surrounded them. And, although this culture

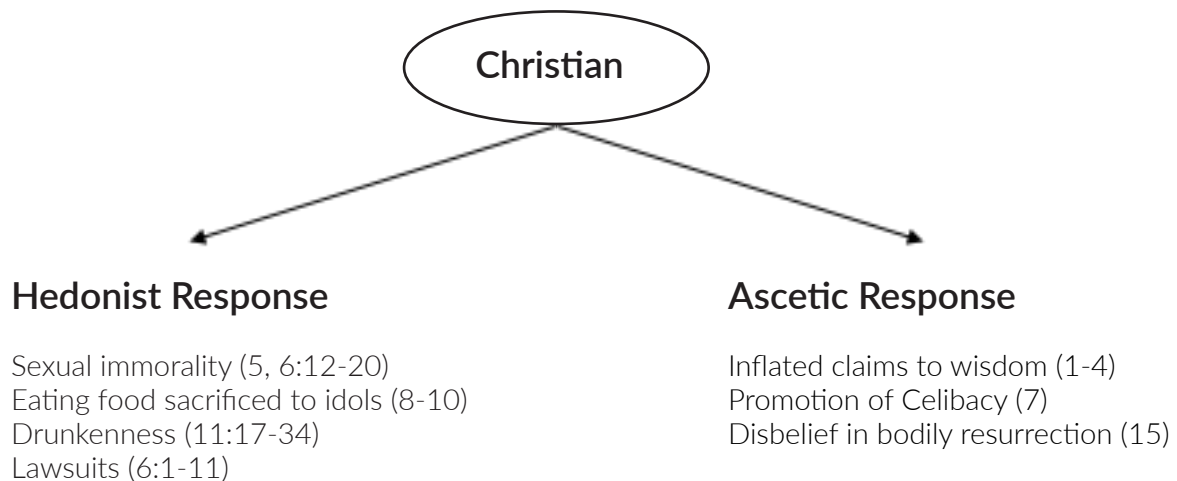
and these religions reflected stunning diversity, certain perspectives predominated across the board in the Greco-Roman world. (Blomberg, p. 24)

¹ J. C. Pollock, *The Apostle*, cited in Prior, p. 13.

The most important of these perspectives is called dualism. This Greek philosophy held the world of matter to be inferior and therefore evil. The world of spirit was good and to be sought after. This worldview led to two views of one's bodily appetites. First there were the hedonists (pleasure seekers) who said, Since the body doesn't mean anything, pursue any pleasure which feels good. At the other extreme were the ascetics who sought to deny the body any and all of its cravings.

Many in the Corinthian church brought their Greco-Roman orientation to life with them after they became believers.

All of the major problems of the Corinthian church can be viewed as stemming from one or the other of these two outworkings of dualistic thought—either asceticism or hedonism. (Blomberg, p. 25)



Gordon Fee, in his massive (880 pages) and magnificent commentary on our letter, argues that Paul's posture in this epistle is combative. The letter shows, perhaps more acutely than any other in the New Testament, the conflict inherent in a people who profess faith in Jesus, yet live as pagans. However, to some extent, the Corinthian church had turned on Paul. Accordingly, the apostle has to reestablish his spiritual authority as a basis for addressing the behavior of these new Christians. But beyond correcting sinful attitudes and actions, as Fee observes, Paul is ever concerned with addressing the theology which gives rise to inappropriate behavior. (Fee, pgs. 6-7)



Outline

- Introduction (1:1-9)
- Paul's Response to Reports from Chloe's Household (1:10–6:20)
- Paul's Response to a Corinthian Letter (7:1–16:12)
- Concluding Comments (16:13-24)

Ancient direction for the contemporary church

In many ways, life in ancient Corinth closely parallels life in increasingly post-Christian 21st century America. Do not be surprised to find great contemporary relevance in this letter to a beloved-but-often-struggling Christian community seeking to figure out the implications of faith in Christ in the midst of a culture gripped by other narratives and living along different trajectories. It is our hope that over the coming months as we investigate this letter to a church marked by doctrinal error, interpersonal conflict, and divided hearts, we will have our own hearts turned afresh to the God whose kingdom of love, grace, wisdom, and power reigns supreme in places like Corinth and—even more significantly—in the hearts of those who belong to his family by grace through faith in Jesus.

As you embark on your time in 1Corinthians, receive this blessing from the Apostle Paul:

...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: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1Corinthians 1:2-3).

Study One

1Corinthians 1:1-17

Before reading ahead in this study, read through the passage slowly and attentively. Pray for a heart that is open to receiving whatever God has for you here. Jot down any initial observations and questions you have of this chapter.

The beginning of this letter contains what may appear, at first glance, to be some pretty stark contrasts. An affectionate greeting, a warm expression of gratitude and blessing, and a rebuke.

The Greek words Paul chose in this last section are instructive. The apostle had heard there were “divisions” in the church. The Greek word he employs is schismata, the plural of schism. Paul longs for the church to be perfectly united; that is, made complete or mended in unity.

Paul mentions four factions in the church: the Paul clique, the Apollos clique, the Peter clique and the Christ clique. Commentators speculate as to the emphasis of each group.

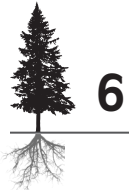
The Paul group emphasized Christian liberty.

The Apollos group emphasized sophisticated preaching, rhetoric and logic.¹

The Peter group emphasized the Jewish character of the Christian faith.

The Christ group de-emphasized human leadership. *We trust Christ and Christ alone... He tells us what to do! We love Jesus!*

¹ Apollos was from Alexandria, Egypt. He was well educated and an excellent orator. See Acts 18:24-28. He was one of the teachers of the church in Corinth (cf. Acts 19:1).

**Consider...**

1. Read the greetings in the first three verses again. What is he reminding his readers about their identity?
2. Notice how the words “call” and “called” are repeated in verses 1, 2, and 9. What can we learn from the repeated use of this word?
3. Read 1:4-9 carefully. Before Paul begins what must have been a difficult letter to write, insofar as it is loaded with criticisms and corrections, he affirms God’s role in the Corinthian church. What affirmations are here concerning God’s work in the Corinthians?
4. What promises do you find which would have given the original hearers assurance for the future?
5. How do the affirmations of verses 4-9 form the basis of the appeal in verses 10-17?

6. Take a look at verse 10, the plea *that all of you agree*. Does this mean we can't have different opinions? Why or why not?

7. Cults generally have great success in being united. A totalitarian leader sets the agenda; diversity of ideas or opinions are not tolerated. But members of healthy churches may regularly disagree about various things and still remain united in worship and faith. What kinds of things might we expect to have healthy disagreements about?

8. This week, in your various interactions and conversations with other believers on controversial topics, how could you build and affirm unity in Christ even when you disagree? Be as specific as you can to your own context.

Pray 1Corinthians 1:1-17

- Revere the sovereign God who called Paul and calls us (1:1-2). Consider the work of God in your own conversion and life story. Praise God for taking the initiative in your life!
- Thank God that He has called us to be holy! Ponder all the sinful ways from which He has delivered you. Ask Him to grow you and your homegroup in holiness (1:2) and keep you blameless on the day of Christ Jesus (1:8).
- Thank God for the grace given to your homegroup in terms of spiritual gifts (1:4-7)! Bless one another by giving thanks for the gifts you see in each other.
- Confess, silently or out loud, the divisions that remain in the body of Christ. Confess how we follow people (1:12) instead of Christ.
- Pray for unity in the church and for powerful, cross-centered gospel preaching (1:17).



STAND **firm** IN THE FAITH

Sermon Notes

Study 2

1Corinthians 1:18-2:5

Before reading ahead in this study, read through the passage slowly and attentively. Pray for a heart that is open to receiving whatever God has for you here. Jot down any initial observations and questions you have of this chapter.

'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'

Isaiah 55:8-9

It is all too possible for modern believers to speak of “the cross” in a casual manner. We may find ourselves wearing a golden cross around our neck or putting a cross bumper sticker on our car. We probably sing about the cross each week, oftentimes forgetting the scandal of the crucifixion. But crucifixion was the most cruel form of capital punishment ever devised. The idea was to kill the victim as slowly as possible. It was probably invented by the barbarians in northern Europe and then adopted by both the Greeks and the Romans. Cicero, a Roman statesman who was a contemporary of Jesus, called crucifixion, *crudelissimum taeterrimumque supplicium*, “a most cruel and disgusting punishment.”¹ He was so horrified of this form of capital punishment that he said, “The very word “cross” should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen, but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears.”

In our passage this week, Paul is addressing the ways in which different cultural backgrounds influenced new believers’ understanding of what the crucifixion of Jesus was all about. The Jewish mind appreciated the physical horror of the cross and coupled this with the “curse” of God. Deuteronomy 21:23 says that *anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse*. It was simply inconceivable to the Jew that God’s chosen one would die on a cross.

For the Greeks, the idea of Christ’s suffering on the cross was folly.

¹ Cited in John Stott, The Cross of Christ, (IVP, 1986), p. 24.



To the Greek idea the first characteristic of God was *apatheia*...; it means total inability to feel.... A God who suffered was a contradiction in terms.... God of necessity was utterly detached and utterly remote. (Barclay, pp. 20-21)

Certainly, this week's passage would have been a shock to both the Jewish and the Greek mind. As Paul begins this letter, he holds up the cross of Christ as the ultimate expression of God's power and wisdom. As you examine this section, notice the extremity of our options (vv. 22-25). The message of the cross is either *foolishness* or *the power of God*.

We might be tempted to understand this section of 1Corinthians as merely an affirmation of Christian wisdom when contrasted with the surrounding Jewish and Greek ways of thinking. Paul's concern goes deeper. He is upset with the way in which the Corinthians were seduced by worldly wisdom. C. K. Barrett writes,

It is not the world's false boasting in its wisdom and ability that caused Paul to write 1Corinthians, but the same false boasting in the church..., where Christians were glorying in men and wrongly evaluating their gifts. They can only do this because they have forgotten that their Christian existence depends, not on their merit, but on God's call and the fact that the Gospel is the message of the Cross. (Barrett, p. 40)

Consider...

1. What repeated words do you notice in this passage? What are the contrasts being set up?

2. Read 1:22. It describes the longings embedded in two different cultures in their search for God. Looking around at your peers, what are some of the deep longings you are aware of as people search for meaning in life?

3. Examine your own heart and mind (motivations, goals, aspirations, habits, etc.). Where do you think your life reflects the wisdom of God, and where might it reflect the wisdom of the world?

4. Take a look at verse 30. Make an effort to define each of these terms: righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Use the following verses and a dictionary if you need to: 2 Corinthians 5.21, Hebrews 10.10-14, 1 Peter 1.18-19. Compare notes with your group.

Righteousness

Holiness

Redemption

5. Chapter 1 concludes with a quotation from Jeremiah 9. Read it below in its context and try to rephrase it with your own words.

Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord.'

Jeremiah 9:23-24 (ESV)

6. Look at 2:1-5. What point is the text making here, and why?

Study 3

1Corinthians 2:6-16

Before reading ahead in this study, read through the passage slowly and attentively. Pray for a heart that is open to receiving whatever God has for you here. Jot down any initial observations and questions you have of this chapter.

The *isms* of history ultimately prove to be disappointing. Communism, socialism, fascism, consumerism, secularism. These and a host of other worldly philosophies fail to answer life's basic questions: Who am I? What is my real problem? What is the solution to that problem? What is the purpose of my existence? Paul announces to the Corinthians and to us the grand purpose of God who gives our life purpose and splendor.

As Paul continues his letter he grapples with these questions. He wants the puffed-up Corinthians, so enamored of worldly wisdom, to understand their salvation entirely as a gift from God! Paul wants this church to see that without the enabling work of the Holy Spirit, the cross would make no sense, the things of God would be alien to their thinking and they would be forever lost in their sin (1:18).

Two words warrant attention:

Mature in verse 6 should not be understood as a reference to a spiritual elite among the Corinthian church. Mature (*telios*) can mean "perfect" (KJV) or "complete," but can also refer to a person who has full membership in a group, one who is fully initiated. Here Paul uses this term in the same way it is used in other forms by the writer of Hebrews (6:1; 10:14) to refer to salvation. *Those who are mature* are those who are redeemed and are completely trusting in Jesus Christ. (MacArthur, p. 60) On the other hand, "maturity" is the goal of Paul's discipleship ministry. He longs for every believer to grow up into Christ (Colossians 1:28).

Secret in verse 7 is the Greek word *musterion* from which we get our word "mystery". In the New Testament this word generally refers to that which was once hidden but now is revealed. A crucified messiah to the Old Testament Jew was an unthinkable concept. But the cross is the revelation of God's "secret wisdom," which has been destined for our glory before time began.



Consider...

1. Take a look back at last week's passage. After all the discussion of folly and worldly wisdom versus Godly wisdom, the theme is continued here. What does this passage say about...

- What true wisdom is?
- What God wants to give his children?
- How we acquire true wisdom?

2. Notice the sustained contrast in verses 14-16. Make a list of the differences between the person with the Holy Spirit and the person without the Spirit.

“Spirit Person”

“Natural Person”

3. This passage (especially vv. 14-16) presents a sharp distinction between the person who is in Christ, and the person who isn't. Choose one (or both!) of these two marvelous passages that describe what it's like to pass from death to life in Christ. Soak up the profound richness of these words!

- Ephesians 2:1-10
- Romans 5:1-11

4. What comes to mind when you think of a “spiritually mature” Christian? Describe that person.

5. Now read Ephesians 4:11-16. What do these verses say that a “mature” Christ-follower is like?

6. Consider your own spiritual maturity. If you have given your life to Christ, you have the Holy Spirit living in you and teaching you (v. 13). Is there a “next step” you are being invited to take as you learn and grow in your faith? Share with your group and pray for one another.

Pray 1Corinthians 2:6-16

- Praise the God who opens our eyes and ears and reveals mysteries to us. Marvel that we are privy to the mystery of the cross, that even the rulers and wise men of this age could not anticipate or understand. Praise God for His Holy Spirit who lives in us and illuminates our understanding of these things (2:12).
- Confess the ways that we and the wider body lack maturity (2:6), remaining prone to worldly methods and worldly thinking.
- Pray for homegroup members by name, that they may take every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:5) to the mind of Christ (1Corinthians 2:16). Ask God to open our eyes more and more to the beauty and genius of the Cross, the hope of the gospel, and the riches of our glorious inheritance in the saints (Ephesians 1:18).



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STAND **firm** IN THE FAITH

Sermon Notes

Study 4

1Corinthians 3:1-23

Before reading ahead in this study, read through the passage slowly and attentively. Pray for a heart that is open to receiving whatever God has for you here. Jot down any initial observations and questions you have of this chapter.

Maturity in the Christian life should be the goal and growing reality of every believer. When we yield to Christ, his Holy Spirit dwells within us. This empowering presence of God should, to be redundant, empower us. Our lives ought to reflect the transformation of our hearts. Sadly, the Corinthian church was all too un-transformed. Paul spent 18 months with this church and now writes them three years after his departure, *I'd like to speak to you like grown-ups, but you are still babies!* (3:1). The church's tendency to be hero worshipers, to divide into different camps (Paul, Apollos, Peter, Christ), is evidence of their lack of maturity.

The task of growing into Christian maturity can seem formidable. When we trust in Christ, God's Spirit empowers us, but we still wrestle with the influence of the world and our own human nature. At times each of us feels like we are losing the battle.

In these early chapters of 1Corinthians, Paul presents a sustained contrast between worldly wisdom and Godly wisdom. The former is filled with pride and produces no benefits. The latter is based on the scandalous teaching of a crucified Messiah who is the wisdom of God (1:24).

At the end of chapter 2, Paul drew a contrast between the saved and the unsaved, between the spiritual and the natural, between those who are able to understand the things of God and those who cannot grasp the things of God due to their fallen nature. At the beginning of chapter 3, Paul's contrast is between believers who are yielding to the Holy Spirit and believers who are not. The former he calls "spiritual" and the latter he calls "worldly" (NIV) or "of the flesh" (ESV).

Verses 10-15 entreat us to build our churches and our ministries on the foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this we are "fellow workers" with God, called to serve his purposes. He will judge our work examining its eternal durability! Sunday School teachers, homegroup leaders, those who disciple other believers, those who pick up the phone to encourage another believer, each of these is involved in a profound work of God.

5. Consider verses 10-15. Paul calls believers to spend themselves for the gospel. Where in your life do you see evidence that your priorities are being shaped by the mission of God? Consider relationships you're investing in, how you're using your money, your prayer life, your gifts and more.

6. Take another look at verses 13-15. It doesn't teach that your work will affect your salvation; Paul goes out of his way to point out that believers are secure. But consider the idea that God will judge your work. What is your reaction to this idea? In what ways might it motivate you?

7. In verse 16, what is it that the Corinthians should know? How do these verses connect to the paragraph that comes before?

8. How do verses 18-23 complete the argument which began in 1:18?



9. Go back and read this whole chapter again. Sum up the big picture of Christian maturity described in this chapter in your own words. In other words, what does a mature Christian do? ...know? ...avoid? Are there any specific encouragements or challenges here for your pursuit of maturity?

Pray 1Corinthians 3:1-23

- Rejoice that we can plant and water the seed of faith, but it is only God who makes things grow. Thank him that *we are God's fellow workers...God's field, God's building* and that he allows us to have a part in this great work of turning hearts to himself (3:6-9).
- Thank God that he has called us his own—that we are God's sacred temple, housing the very Spirit of God (3:16-17)!
- Confess our tendency to follow Christian leaders or personalities instead of God alone. Repent of our jealousy, quarreling and divisions, both in the local church, between denominations, and in the larger body of Christ worldwide.
- Pray that we would build on no other foundation than Jesus Christ. Pray that on that Day, God would be pleased with the building materials we have used (3:10-15), and that we would hear "Well done!" from Him.

Sermon Notes

Study 5

1Corinthians 4:1-21

Before reading ahead in this study, read through the passage slowly and attentively. Pray for a heart that is open to receiving whatever God has for you here. Jot down any initial observations and questions you have of this chapter.

The believer is a person caught “between the times.” On the one hand we live with the blessings of the cross. We live in the age of the Holy Spirit. We enjoy what the New Testament writers call the fullness of Christ (e.g. John 1:16; Romans 15:29; Ephesians 1:10). On the other hand, Christians wait. They suffer, they are persecuted, their families fall apart, they lose their jobs, they contract diseases. Accordingly, those who love Jesus long for his return and for his power to be completely manifest on earth as it already is in heaven.

The Corinthians, it appears, had become a bit too comfortable in Corinth. They had an inflated view of their own spirituality which was coupled with the idea that the entire blessing of the Messianic Age had arrived. Verse 4:6 goes to the heart of the Corinthian problem– arrogance. Paul uses this word four times in this section (4:6, 18, 19; 5:2). The word means to puff up, to inflate, or to blow up. The Corinthians had become “full of themselves” to the extent that they no longer felt the need for Paul’s instruction or authority. But as Paul reminds them forcefully, *What do you have that you did not receive?* Augustine claimed that these words summarize the Bible’s teaching about grace and Barclay comments, “The basic fault of the Corinthians was that they had forgotten that they owed their souls to God” (Barclay, p. 44).

Verses 8-13 are scathingly sarcastic as Paul addresses the worldly values of the Corinthians in contrast to the values of the kingdom of God. Gordon Fee issues a challenge to those of us living a comfortable Christian life.

We need to become more aware of the Corinthian side of this text than we tend to. That is, we try desperately to identify with Paul, when in fact we are probably much more like the Corinthians than any of us dare admit.... Perhaps if we were truly more like our Lord, standing more often in opposition to the status quo with its worldly wisdom and more often in favor of justice, we too would know more about what it means to be scum in the eyes of the world’s “beautiful” or “powerful” people. In any



case, we greatly need to recapture Paul's eschatological [future] perspective so that neither wealth nor want tyrannizes us. (Fee, p. 182)

Consider...

1. How does Chapter 4 fit into the overall flow of thought up to this point in 1Corinthians?
2. Consider the words Paul uses to describe himself and Apollos in verses 1 and 2. What can they teach us about spiritual leadership?
3. Stop and dwell on verse 7. As you grow older in your Christian faith, how has your awareness of God's grace changed? Why might an "older" Christian be tempted to forget the truth of 1Corinthians 4:7?
4. What events in your life, or what habits, have been helpful to you in cultivating humility?



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STAND **firm** IN THE FAITH

Sermon Notes

Study 6

1Corinthians 5:1-13

Before reading ahead in this study, read through the passage slowly and attentively. Pray for a heart that is open to receiving whatever God has for you here. Jot down any initial observations and questions you have of this chapter.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor-theologian during the rise of Adolf Hitler. As a Lutheran, Bonhoeffer was shocked at the complacency of the church in the midst of Hitler's atrocities. He wrote a book entitled *The Cost of Discipleship*, which challenged the idea of the believer fitting comfortably into his or her world. Bonhoeffer criticized the notion of "cheap grace."

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession...Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.... Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves.¹

When Christ calls us, Bonhoeffer argued, he calls us to "come and die."

The Corinthian church liked drinking from the cup of cheap grace. It appears they wanted all of the Jesus that fit into their prior way of life. They wanted the gospel, provided the gospel didn't want them. They wanted grace without repentance.

We find two concerns in this chapter. First, there is the immorality itself. A man who calls himself a Christian is engaged in sinful sexual behavior. Second, Paul is concerned about the blasé attitude of the church toward this man's sin. Paul couples the most common word for sexual immorality (*porneia*²) with the comment that the Corinthian case is of a variety *which does not occur even among the pagans*. This is saying a good deal in the context of the sexually-saturated society of Corinth. Demosthenes captured the spirit of the age when he wrote,

1 *The Cost of Discipleship*, Macmillan, 1937, 47

2 *Porneia* literally means "resorting to prostitutes." In the New Testament it is the most generic word for sex outside of marriage and is often translated "fornication," or in the NIV, "sexual immorality." Hodge writes, "The word is used in a comprehensive sense, including all violations of the seventh commandment." (Hodge, p. 53)



We keep mistresses for pleasure, concubines for the day-to-day needs of the body, but we have wives in order to produce children legitimately and to have a trustworthy guardian of our homes.

In other words, the church had to go a long way to outdo the paganism of their era.

In verse 5, what is Paul suggesting? Fee explains that what Paul was desiring by having this man put outside the believing community was “the destruction of what was ‘carnal’ in him, so that he might be ‘saved’ [in the end].” (Fee, p. 212) Often, we think of church discipline as the heavy-handed lowering of the boom on some wayward soul. Notice the corporate dimension of 1Corinthians 5. Paul never addresses the leadership of the church. To the contrary he addresses the entire church! It is not the responsibility of a few leaders to “do” church discipline. The responsibility falls upon the entire church.

Notice the NASB translation above of 5:8. There we find the words “leaven” and “unleavened” as opposed to the NIV translation “yeast.” The latter is probably misleading. Or at least it fails to capture the nuance of Paul’s thinking. There is a difference between bread made with yeast and bread made with leaven. Yeast is always fresh. Leaven was a part of a prepared batch of dough which was held back for the future batch of dough. This fermented dough would permeate the new batch and make another portion of bread.

Although the OT does not expressly so specify, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as well as being a religious celebration, was probably a health provision. Because of the fermentation process, which week after week increased the dangers of infection, the Israelites were commanded once a year to purge their homes of all leaven (Exodus 12:14-20). During the Feast they would bake only unleavened bread, from which dough they would then start up the process again after the Feast. Thus, in the NT leaven became a symbol of the process by which an evil spreads insidiously in a community until the whole has been infected by it (cf. Mark 8:15). So it was in Corinth. Their problem was that they were not taking this matter seriously, either the evil itself or their danger of being thoroughly contaminated by it. (Fee, p. 216)

Consider...

1. Notice again the problem of pride (arrogance and boasting) in the church. Read these verses carefully. What do you think the church was proud of?

2. Look at verse 8. What do these words tell us about the way in which the church should deal with sin? Compare this with the teaching of Jesus in John 3:19-21.

3. Church discipline, i.e., the notion of breaking off fellowship with one who calls himself or herself a believer but insists on maintaining a lifestyle contrary to God's revealed will, sounds quite harsh to some of us. Consider the following passages. How do they fill in the purpose and methodology of corrective church discipline?
 - Matthew 18:15-20

 - Acts 5:1-11

 - 1 Timothy 1:19-20

 - 2 Thessalonians 3:10-14

 - 2 Corinthians 2:5-11¹

4. Have you seen church discipline operate in your life and in the church? (Examine the Matthew 18 passage carefully. You may have seen and experienced more church discipline than you immediately realize).

¹ Many think this is a reference to the same man mentioned in 1Corinthians 5. The supposition is that the man had repented of his sin and now Paul is instructing the church to welcome this person back into the fellowship of the larger body of believers.



5. The church in Corinth boasted of what the text insists ought to have caused them great shame v. 2). What safeguards help prevent a church from so losing its way?

6. When and how have you seen the family of faith come alongside you to challenge you toward greater faithfulness to Jesus?

7. What kind of engagement is the church called to in verses 9-11? How might his perspective help give shape to your own gospel-encounters with your world?

8. What good news can be found in this passage?

Pray 1Corinthians 5:1-13

- Spend some time grieving the sexual sin in the American church, in our church, and if appropriate, in your own life, whether it be in thought or deed. Confess our frailty in this area. Repent either silently or out loud.
- Pray that sexual sin may be revealed, exposed and dealt with in the churches of Santa Barbara, before the leaven affects the whole lump of dough (5:6).
- Pray for Biblical church discipline to be taken seriously and exercised as appropriate in our church and the churches of Santa Barbara (5:4-5). Pray that this might have a redemptive effect that sparks revival.

Study 7

1Corinthians 6:1-11

Before reading ahead in this study, read through the passage slowly and attentively. Pray for a heart that is open to receiving whatever God has for you here. Jot down any initial observations and questions you have of this chapter.

If ours is a litigious society, Corinth was more so. Going to court was virtually a form of entertainment for the Greeks.

If there was a dispute in Athens [or Corinth] the first attempt to settle it was by private arbitrator.... If that failed to settle the matter there was a court known as The Forty. The Forty referred the matter to a public arbitrator and the public arbitrators consisted of all Athenian citizens in their sixtieth year.... If the matter was still not settled it had to be referred to a jury court which consisted of two hundred and one citizens for [small cases] and four hundred and one for cases involving [large sums of money]. There were indeed cases where juries could be as large as anything from one thousand to six thousand citizens.... It is plain to see that in a Greek city every man was more or less a lawyer and spent a very great part of his time either deciding or listening to law cases. (Barclay, p. 56)

Paul is shocked and deeply upset that the Corinthian church is acting like their unsaved neighbors in Corinth. Friedrich Nietzsche, the famous atheistic philosopher who proclaimed, "God is dead," once said of the church, "I would believe in their redeemer if they acted as if they were redeemed."

Paul is calling the church to more. He is urging us, yet again, to be different from the culture around us. Beyond public lawsuits tarnishing the reputation of the church (though a very important issue), there are deeper reasons for Christians not to sue other Christians. A civil court can settle matters on paper, but it cannot address the issues of the heart. The gospel of Jesus is not about rights, but about reconciliation. And so, Paul urges arbitration within the church, where the heart issues can be addressed. (Fee, p. 40)



One phrase that may jump out at you as you read this is about “judging angels.” What does Paul mean by this? One author ventures a guess:

One cannot be dogmatic, but I am inclined to think that glorified believers will help judge the fallen angels and exercise some rule over the holy angels. If Christ was exalted above all the angels (Ephesians 1:20-23), if we are in Him and are like Him, and if we are to reign with Him, it must be that somehow we will share in his authority. (MacArthur, p. 138)

Paul’s point is that because of our high position in Christ, we should be able to settle earthly disputes within the family of God.

Notice the tension in verses 9-11. Paul issues a very strong warning to the Corinthians: *Do you not know, people who sin like this won’t inherit the kingdom of God!* Then we have a list of sins which are exclusionary. In verse 11 the apostle comes back to affirming the Corinthians’ standing before God because of what Christ has done for them. Fee sheds some light on this:

For Paul there is to be the closest possible relationship between the experience of grace and one’s behavior that evidences that experience of grace. Paul himself is as concerned as anyone that the latter (right behavior) should not be perceived as coming first or as leading to the former (the experience of grace). But those who concern themselves with grace without equal concern for behavior have missed Paul’s own theological urgencies. (Fee, p. 248)

Consider...

1. Look again at verses 6-8. What is Paul upset about? Summarize in your own words.

2. What do you make of verse 7’s rhetorical questions? What argument do you think Paul is trying to make?

3. In verses 2-3, believers are reminded of their high position and calling. Consider your high position as it is described in the following verses:
- Romans 6:4-11
 - Ephesians 2:4-10
 - Matthew 19:27-28
4. One scholar says verse 5 contains “the most biting sarcasm found in the letter.” Why? What is the key word in the sarcasm? Think back over what we have learned in the early chapters of 1Corinthians.
5. Look up James 4:1-3. How do these verses shed light on the root cause of what’s happening in the Corinthian church?
6. Describe a time when you experienced or witnessed conflict among believers. Was the dispute taken to a public forum in a way that might have damaged the reputation of the church? Was it handled in a way that brought about reconciliation? Reflect on the situation in light of this passage.



7. What would be the potential implications –either positive or negative– if the church consistently adopted the mentality that we are called to in verse 7?

8. Lists of sins like those found in verses 8-10 make us uncomfortable, and Paul intends them to! But don't miss verse 11, which is the climax of this whole section. How does verse 11 color the entire passage?

Pray 1Corinthians 6:1-11

- Consider the array of sins listed in 6:9-10, along with the sin of believers going to court against one another, described in 6:1-8. These sins are still present in the churches of today. Confess how we, who are destined to judge the world and even angels (6:2-3), fall woefully short of God's intentions for us.
- Pray for repentance, revival, and holiness in the church, particularly with respect to the sins named in this chapter.
- Pray for believers you know who are at odds with one another. Pray for Biblical reconciliation and wise counselors (6:4) from among the body of Christ who can facilitate this reconciliation.
- Consider and rejoice in the fact that if we know Christ, our present sins are not the end of the story. Give thanks that we are washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of Christ by the Spirit (6:11)!

Sermon Notes

Study 8

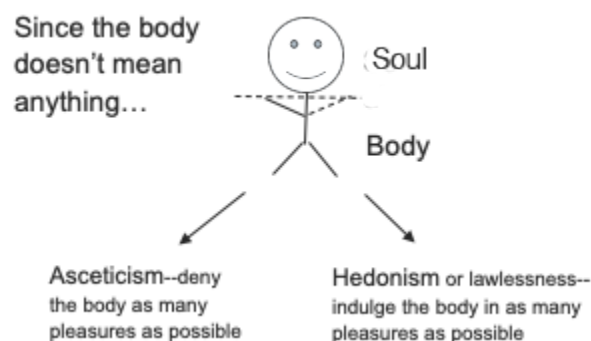
1Corinthians 6:12-20

Before reading ahead in this study, read through the passage slowly and attentively. Pray for a heart that is open to receiving whatever God has for you here. Jot down any initial observations and questions you have of this chapter.

In 1960s America, a widespread social cry rang out seeking liberation from the sexual norms of previous generations. These cries were met with success and by the 1970s the sexual revolution was in full bloom. Birth control and abortion separated sex from procreation.

In such a climate it is no wonder that even in the church many are seduced by our culture's understanding of sex and sexuality. We might hear someone say, "Hey, be realistic; no one saves sex for marriage anymore. As long as everyone is a consenting adult and I'm being responsible, don't judge what I do with my body."

The Corinthians had an even more elaborate justification for sexual immorality. The Corinthians were, apparently, deeply influenced by Greek philosophy which taught that the body is unimportant while the spirit is supreme. One thinker, Epictetus said, "I am a poor soul [spirit] shackled to a corpse." A proverb in circulation said, "The body is a tomb." A view of people which includes a low view of the body and a high view of the spirit leads in one of two directions.



As we come to the end of chapter 6, Paul will address the lawless crowd in the Corinthian church. In the early verses of chapter 7 the apostle will address the ascetics.



Paul uses two popular slogans in verses 12-13. The first, interestingly, may be a perversion of Paul's own teaching. Paul is often called "the apostle of liberty" (see Galatians 5:1). Here, the church may have abused the liberty which Paul taught. F.F. Bruce explains the inclusion of the slogan about the stomach.

This too may have been part of the libertine argument: since food and stomach alike will pass away, why attach religious importance to either—or, for that matter, to sexual relations? Paul agreed that food and drink and the like were *things which all perish as they are used* (Colossians 2:22); in respect of them the conscience of the Christian was subject to no man's judgment (Romans 14:3; Colossians 2:16). But sexual relations were on a completely different footing: they affected the personality of the parties involved as food did not. (Bruce, p. 63)

It would be a severe mistake to think of this passage only in reference to sex with prostitutes. To the contrary Paul's words invite us to hold high a Christian view of sex which sees the activity as good and honorable in God's eyes, yet as an activity which is reserved for marriage.

Paul's quotation of Genesis 2:24, *The two shall become one flesh*, is the foundation of all biblical sexual ethics. In sexual intercourse two people are being united in a profound way. The "one fleshness" of the sexual union is paramount.

Consider...

1. Read 1Corinthians 6:12-20 carefully. Before going on in this study try to articulate (in writing) the argument being made. What is the main point in this section?

2. This passage contains some of the most important material in the New Testament with regard to a Christian's view of the body. What view of the body is presented?



7. Imagine yourself in a conversation with someone who has a very different sexual perspective than what is outlined in this passage. How might you summarize what is written here?

8. In verses 12-13 we are encouraged toward a willing restraint on freedom for the sake of a higher ideal. Can you think of other examples –outside of the realm of sexuality– in which such a perspective might be important for the sake of glorifying God?

Pray 1Corinthians 6:12-20

- Praise God for the marvelous truths about our identity, emphasized in this passage: that we are members of Christ's body (6:15), that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (6:19), that we are not our own but were bought with a price (6:19-20), and that God will raise us from the dead (6:14)!
- Confess, silently or out loud as appropriate, the ways in which we have devalued our bodies and have used them for sin instead of offering them to God as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:13).
- Offer your bodies to God as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1) and commit yourself to fleeing from sexual immorality. Pray for our children and youth to flee from sexual immorality, and to be attracted to holiness.

Sermon Notes

Study 9

1Corinthians 7:1-40

Before reading ahead in this study, read through the passage slowly and attentively. Pray for a heart that is open to receiving whatever God has for you here. Jot down any initial observations and questions you have of this chapter.

With chapter 7, the letter turns a corner. *Now for the matters you wrote about....* The apostle begins to respond to questions he received from this struggling church. Each of these sections begins with the formula, *Now about....* Chapter 7 contains Paul's instructions on marriage, divorce, Christian vocation, singleness, and widowhood. Some of this will be a bit embarrassing to discuss. Some of it may be painful to discuss.

Obviously, some were questioning marriage in light of their commitment to Christ. The first half of this chapter deals with those who are married while the second deals with the yet-to-be-married.

A careful look at each of the parts as outlined above indicates that in both sections there has been some considerable pressure within the church to dissolve or abstain from marriage. Paul's response on both sides is the same: "Stay as you are." (Fee, p. 269)

Paul wants the members of the church to live out their God-given vocation. Some of the supposed super-spiritual believers in the church were teaching that, because of their great spirituality, all earthly relations should change. No more sex in marriage (7:1); perhaps even marriage itself should go (7:10-16). Paul puts the brakes on such thinking in the latter half of this chapter by teaching the Corinthians about Godly vocation. He wanted the Corinthians to see themselves as called to serve Christ in every area of life.

In verses 25-35, Paul speaks about "virgins". There is some debate as to what Paul means. Three views are possible; the NET Bible note summarizes them this way:

(1) The term could refer to virgin women who were not married. The central issue would then be whether or not their fathers should give them in marriage to eligible men. (This is the view which has been widely held throughout the history of the Church.)



(2) A minority understand the term to refer to men and women who are married but who have chosen to live together without sexual relations. This position might have been possible in the Corinthian church, but there is no solid evidence to support it.

(3) The view adopted by many modern commentators (see, e.g., Fee, Conzelmann, Barrett) is that the term refers to young, engaged women who were under the influence of various groups within the Corinthian church not to go through with their marriages. The central issue would then be whether the young men and women should continue with their plans and finalize their marriages.¹

This third view answers the most questions with the fewest problems. Paul speaks of “virgins” six times and of “getting married” eight times in 7:25-40. Clearly, he is finishing his answer to those in the church who said, “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman” (7:1).

A theme to be aware of in this chapter is Paul’s eschatological (end times) perspective (7:26, 29, 31). Clearly Paul expects persecution for the church as they await Christ’s return. “The apostle writes to the Corinthians as he would to an army about to enter on a most unequal conflict in an enemy’s country, and for a protracted time.” (Hodge, p. 77)

Rodney Clapp offers a good summary of Paul’s teaching in this chapter.

Marriage and parenthood are chosen limitations. Singleness is for many Christians an unchosen limitation. Yet Paul can find freedom in the ordinary, nitty-gritty qualities of all these limitations: Are you single? Then live as a Christian in that state. Are you married? Then live as a Christian in that state. Are you a slave? Are you circumcised or uncircumcised? “In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God” (7:24). For Paul, vocation is no towering mystery, It is simply the condition in which “you were called.”²

Consider...

1. As you read these forty verses attempt to get the big picture. Think of what we have studied with regard to the Corinthian church. Make a list of the main ideas here. Share this list with your group.

1 For further discussion, see G. D. Fee, *First Corinthians* (NICNT), 325-28.

2 Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, (IVP, 1993), p. 112.



7. These instructions about divorce may seem harsh from the perspective of secularized 21st-century Americans, but in this passage, he is picking up the baton from Jesus. Read Matthew 19:1-9. How do Jesus' words to the Pharisees complement Paul's words to the Corinthians?

8. This wide-ranging passage contains some very difficult and potentially personal instruction about a variety of topics. What attitudes and experiences did you grow up with which might make some of this teaching difficult for you?

9. How might we as a church family walk well with each other through the difficult seasons and situations of life?

Pray 1Corinthians 7:1-40

- Consider the wide range of marital situations which existed in the Corinthian church. These included singles tempted by sexual immorality (7:2), marrieds neglecting their sexual relationship (7:3-7), the divorced or separated (7:11), the engaged who want to be married or the engaged wanting to remain single (7:37), and unequally yoked marriages, in which some were willing to stay together (7:13-14), and others in which the unbelieving partner has left (7:15-16). Praise and take comfort in the God who offers hope, wisdom, and practical counsel in whatever situation we find ourselves (7:20).
- Pray for marriages in our church to stay together, to flourish in every way, and to reflect the glory of Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:22-33).
- Pray for singles, widows and widowers, and those experiencing the pain of divorce, that they may find wise counsel and genuine community in our church. Pray that those who desire marriage may find Godly spouses.
- Pray for contentment in whatever place we find ourselves, not only maritally, but in every circumstance of life (7:20). Pray that we might eagerly anticipate the world that is to come (7:31).