

When You Come Together

8 studies in
Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians



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Preface

This study is written for people who have personal experience of the Christian faith. We are looking at a letter written by the apostle Paul to Christians in the first century AD whose lives changed when they chose to follow Jesus. If you haven't heard the good news about Jesus yet, this study is not the best place to start. Instead it would be really good for you to read the four accounts of Jesus' life in the New Testament of the Holy Bible, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. You can access these accounts for example through <http://www.biblegateway.com>. If possible, you could join a course like Christianity Explored, or find a Christian church and ask questions of the people you meet there. Or perhaps you would like to study the Bible using previous eBooks in this series, "The Bible from Start to Finish" or "What Christians Believe". You can download both of these free via <http://www.bibleview.co.uk> or directly from the publisher <http://www.smashwords.com> by searching for the author Freda Hawkes.

After the four accounts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection at the beginning of the New Testament there is a book entitled in English "Acts". It is an account of the beginnings of the Christian church, the acts of Jesus' followers who were sent by him as his witnesses into all the world to preach the good news. After Acts, all but one of the books in the New Testament are letters. As you look at the first sentences of each letter you will see that, except for Hebrews and the 3 letters of John, all start by identifying the writer(s) and the people to whom the letters were sent, then sending a greeting. These letters, written in the first century AD, were obviously valued by their readers, copied and shared, and over several centuries were recognised by church leaders as authoritative and consistent with the teachings of the Old Testament and of the Lord Jesus. By about AD 400 when the New Testament was compiled, the letters were arranged firstly by author (the first 13 letters are by Paul, the rest by other authors) and secondly by length (longest to shortest). Paul's letters are further ordered into those written to groups of people and those written to individuals. So the letters were not ordered chronologically.

Why are letters so important in the New Testament? These letters give personal news, advice, teaching, encouragement and warning from respected Christian leaders to followers of Jesus in the first century AD. The letters explain how believers in Jesus should behave towards God, towards each other and towards their everyday world, the reasons for their new lifestyle and worldview, and the powerful resources available to them. The letters were written, valued, recognised as authoritative and placed in the New Testament so we too can learn how to live as believers in today's world.

The New Testament was written in the common Greek language of the 1st century Roman Empire – you will be reading a translation based on many copies of the original manuscripts. The main chapter divisions you will find in each of the books of the bible and the subdivisions into numbered verses were added to the text by scholars in the 13th to 16th century AD, making reference easy.

This study assumes some knowledge of the book of Acts. If you would like to know more about Acts you could use another eBook in this series, "How the Church Began" downloadable free from <http://www.bibleview.co.uk> through <http://www.smashwords.com>. Acts covers the period from Jesus' resurrection (about AD 30) to approximately AD 62.

Introduction

Paul's Background

We first meet Saul, who we know as the apostle Paul, in Acts chapter 7 verse 58 to chapter 8 verse 3. An educated, confident young Jewish man with obvious leadership qualities, he was (in his own words) convinced that he should do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This included house-to-house searches of Jerusalem, dragging off men and women who followed Jesus and putting them in prison. Jesus' appearance to Saul in blinding light on the road to Damascus is a famous story told in Acts 9:1-22. For the next three days Saul was blind and did not eat or drink, just prayed and waited for Jesus to tell him what to do. Fully knowing that Saul had come to Damascus with written authority to arrest all who called on Jesus' name, a believer named Ananias bravely obeyed the Lord and went to Saul. Ananias placed his hands on him, called him "brother Saul" and said he had been sent by Jesus so that Saul could receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Immediately Saul could see and was baptized. The Lord Jesus had told Ananias his plan for Saul: "This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles (non-Jews) and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name". At once Saul began to teach in the synagogues (Jewish meeting places) that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ, God's Anointed One, God's chosen king predicted in the Old Testament. Saul's amazing change of heart took place only a few years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus had told his disciples to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Saul's persecution of the believers scattered them from Jerusalem into the neighboring areas of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1-4) and further into the eastern Mediterranean, telling the message only to Jews (Acts 11:19). Before Acts 11:19 we only read of two occasions when non-Jewish people were told the good news of Jesus. On both of these occasions (Acts 8:26-40 and Acts 10) the Lord sent a church leader to speak to a specific non-Jewish individual. The apostle Peter and the Jewish believers in Jerusalem learnt from this experience that God had granted even non-Jews repentance and life (Acts 11:18). However, it took perhaps another 10 years before believers spontaneously told non-Jews the good news about Jesus. This happened in a city near the modern Turkish-Syrian border, Antioch (Acts 11:20), and many non-Jewish people believed. Saul's Jewish friend Barnabas (his name means son of encouragement, Acts 4:36) went to Saul's home town Tarsus, about 150km away, to bring Saul to Antioch to teach them. The believers were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26).

Paul's Journeys

After at least a year of teaching in Antioch, in about AD 47, the leaders of the Antioch church were instructed by the Holy Spirit to send Barnabas and Saul away (Acts 13:1-3). So began the first of the journeys for which Saul became famous. Saul changed from his Jewish family name to a Greek name, Paul, meaning small, see Acts 13:9. We know from Acts of four major journeys that Paul made through countries we now call Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Greece, the Balkans, Italy and perhaps beyond. For more information see the free eBook *Places Paul Knew* (Hawkes, Dennis 2014). All the time Paul preached the forgiveness of sins through Jesus for everyone who believed, Jews and non-Jews. You can read a summary of his working methods in Acts 20:17-36.

People who believed met together as churches – in the New Testament “church” does not mean a building but an assembly of people. The churches had no buildings of their own but met in a public place or in someone’s home. Paul stayed in touch with the new churches by letter (such as the one we are going to read) and through reports from visitors or from co-workers who Paul specifically sent to the area. Paul continued to care for the new believers, constantly remembered them in his prayers at all times, and described feeling the daily pressure of his concern for all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:28). See the free eBook *Church- the Early Years* (Hawkes, Dennis 2014).

In Damascus at the start of Paul’s life as a believer, Ananias learnt of Paul’s job description in the words of Jesus which concluded: “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name”. After powerfully proving to the Jews in Damascus that Jesus is the Christ promised in the Old Testament, they wanted to kill Paul (Acts 9:23). On his first journey from Antioch with Barnabas, Jewish people in the city of Antioch in Pisidia (in modern Turkey) persecuted Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their region (Acts 13:50). In the next city, Iconium, both Jews and non-Jews made a plot to ill-treat and stone them (Acts 14:5). Soon afterwards a non-Jewish crowd stoned Paul until he seemed to be dead (Acts 14:19).

Paul’s next journey, with new companions, Silas and Timothy, took him to Macedonia (to the north of modern Greece) (Acts 15:36 to 16:15). In the city of Philippi Paul and Silas were brought before magistrates and accused of throwing the city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for Romans to accept or practice (Acts 16:20-22). They were severely flogged and thrown into prison, but a violent earthquake about midnight resulted their freedom and in the jailor and all his family becoming believers. After this event we learn that both Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, a privileged legal status (Acts 16:37-40). Roman law required people in the Empire to worship the Greek and Roman gods who were thought to protect the Empire, and to worship the Emperor and members of his family who were classed as gods. Judaism was legally recognized as a religion and Jewish people throughout the Empire were permitted to worship the one God. Could Christians also be covered by this ruling?

Having been forced to leave Philippi, Paul, Silas and Timothy continued south to Thessalonica. Here Jews officially accused Paul, Silas, Timothy and the new believers of defying Caesar’s decrees by saying there was another king, Jesus (Acts 17:6-7). Paul and his companions quickly left that night for another city, where many Jews, a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men believed. But Jews from Thessalonica arrived to cause trouble. Again Paul left quickly, this time protected by some of the new believers, and the group took a ship south to Athens, probably a 3-day voyage. Paul was left on his own in Athens, where hundreds of years earlier the famous Greek thinkers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle had developed political and ethical philosophies. The philosophers of Paul’s time were not impressed with his reasoning and asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” You can read in Acts 17:16-34 a summary of Paul’s speech to the Greek philosophers when they brought him before the legal council of Athens. Paul pointed out that the one God who made the world is not like a gold, silver or stone image and that God now commands everyone to repent, for he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. God has given proof of this to everyone by raising that man from the dead. Paul’s message had a very mixed reception.

How the Church in Corinth Began

Still without companions, Paul travelled the 80 or so kilometres from Athens to Corinth in AD 50 or 51. You can find the modern city of Corinth on a map of southern Greece, near the narrow strip of land (an isthmus about 6km wide) which connects southern Greece (the Peloponnese) to mainland Greece and the continent of Europe. The ancient city of Corinth is nearby. Because of its special geography, Corinth had an east and a west facing port (Cenchrea (Kenchreai) and Lechaion (Lecheum)), so cargoes unloaded in one port could be transported by land to the other, saving a dangerous 700km sea journey around the Peloponnese. The well-engineered west-facing harbor at Lechaion is currently being investigated by archaeologists.

The city of Corinth collected taxes from the import-export trade and was a busy, prosperous commercial trading hub of the Roman Empire. The old Greek city had been destroyed by the Romans in about 146 BC and rebuilt by Julius Caesar around 46-44 BC with a modern infrastructure and many large public buildings. It was the capital city of the Roman province of Achaia, and citizens of Corinth had the additional privilege of Roman citizenship. The Isthmian Games held in Corinth every second year attracted tourists from across the Roman Empire. With the added advantage of stable local government, the city was a good place to do business. See the imaginative, informative account of *A Week in the Life of Corinth* (Witherington, Ben 2012).

Paul's visit to Corinth is described in Acts 18:1-18. Importantly he met a Jewish married couple recently expelled from Rome by the Emperor Claudius (this expulsion dates to AD 49 or 50). Aquila and his wife Priscilla shared the same work of making tents. Paul stayed and worked with them. We do not know if they believed in Jesus when Paul met them, but they certainly did afterwards. On his day off, the Sabbath, Paul reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament. Eventually Paul's companions Silas and Timothy caught up with him. Paul, Silas and Timothy wrote the letter to the church in Thessalonica we know as 1 Thessalonians (see 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 3:1-6) and Paul settled into full-time preaching in Corinth, speaking to both Jews and non-Jews. Following abuse and opposition from members of the Jewish synagogue, Paul began preaching in the house next door. Crispus the synagogue ruler and his entire household believed, and many Corinthians believed and were baptized. Crispus was succeeded as synagogue ruler by Sosthenes.

It seemed like Paul's work in speaking about Jesus in Corinth was going well. But one night the Lord spoke to him "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no-one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10). For the Lord to give him this message Paul must have feared physical violence but, encouraged by the Lord's promise, he stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God. During that time Paul was once again charged by his Jewish opponents with persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the Roman law. In Philippi, a year or so earlier, a similar charge had led to a severe beating for Paul and Silas and a night in prison. This time the Roman proconsul, Gallio, rejected the case, saying it involved unreasonable questions about words and names and Jewish law. He concluded, "Settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things". And he had them ejected from the court (Acts 18:14-16). This ruling grouped the new Corinthian Christians with Judaism as permitted under the Roman religious law. The believers in Jesus were free to meet, learn and worship together. However, Sosthenes the new synagogue ruler was beaten by Paul's Jewish opponents in front of the court and Gallio showed no concern whatsoever. From an inscription of a letter by the Emperor Claudius that mentions proconsul Gallio, the date was AD 51 or 52.

Paul left Corinth by ship to return to his home church of Antioch in Syria. Aquila and Priscilla went with him as far as the city of Ephesus (modern south west Turkey) where they stayed. Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos came to Ephesus. He was a native of Alexandria on the North African coast, famous as the city where, about 300 years earlier, the Old Testament had been translated into Greek (the Septuagint version) for the ancient library. Apollos was an intellectual with a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament who spoke very passionately and accurately about Jesus in the synagogue. However there were gaps in his knowledge – for example he did not know that Jesus had instructed the apostles to baptize believers in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Priscilla and Aquila heard him and invited him home so they could explain more. Apollos wanted to go to Achaia (the province containing Corinth) and the believers in Ephesus wrote a letter introducing him to the church. We know there was a church in Corinth; there was also a church in the west-facing port of Cenchrea (Romans 16:1). Apollos was a great help to the believers in Achaia (see Acts 18:18-26 and 19:1).

Why Paul Wrote 1 Corinthians

Paul left his home church of Antioch on another journey through what is now Turkey. His object was to strengthen the believers in the churches already established as a result of his travels with Barnabas and Silas (Acts 18:23). While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul arrived at Ephesus, home of Aquila and Priscilla, maybe in AD 54. Paul stayed in Ephesus for 3 years (Acts 20:31). Corinth was about 300 km away from Ephesus by a direct sea voyage.

1 Corinthians was probably written from Ephesus in about AD 55. What we call Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians was actually his second letter to them. In 1 Corinthians 5:9 Paul said "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people...". We also know that before Paul wrote 1 Corinthians the Corinthians had written to Paul - he said in 1 Corinthians 7:1 "Now for the matters you wrote about...". Stephanas (one of the first people in Corinth to believe) with two other men, Fortunatus and Achaicus, had made the journey to Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:15-17), maybe taking the letter that the church at Corinth had written to Paul. Perhaps Paul wrote 1 Corinthians while the men from Corinth stayed in Ephesus so they could take it home. But Paul had another reason to write to the Corinthian church – he had heard personal reports of their problems from at least one other group of visitors to Ephesus – see 1 Corinthians 1:11, 5:1, 11:18.

Paul seems to have dictated his letters to a scribe and signed them in his own handwriting (see for example 1 Corinthians 16:21). We can imagine him talking to the Corinthians, 300 km away, while his scribe patiently wrote down his words. So his style was direct (often extremely direct) and personal (you... I...). However, the letter was not just from Paul. 1 Corinthians begins: "Paul.... and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God in Corinth...". Except when including other believers, Apollos or Barnabas and other apostles (1:23, 2:6-16, 3:6-9, 4:1-13 and 9:4-12) Paul talked in the first person (I ...). So who was Sosthenes and why was it important that the letter we call 1 Corinthians also came from him?

The only other Sosthenes named in the New Testament is Sosthenes who replaced Crispus as the synagogue ruler after Crispus believed. In front of the court presided over by proconsul Gallio, Sosthenes was beaten by the Jews, presumably from his own synagogue, who had made a united attack on Paul (Acts 18:17). Did Sosthenes then become the second synagogue leader to believe? Did he then have a position of responsibility in the church of God at Corinth? Had Sosthenes come to Ephesus to find Paul at the same time as Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus? If so, Sosthenes showed that he fully supported everything that Paul wrote, as he allowed Paul to use his name as a letter writer.

As you read the letter you may be surprised at the bad state of the church of God in Corinth. Why did Paul bother to write this letter? It contained much personal emotion and cannot have been easy to write. Jesus had spoken to Paul in Corinth "...I have many people in this city". The church of God in Corinth belonged to Jesus. Paul did not give up because the church had problems. He loved them. When it was read out loud to the church in Corinth, parts of it cannot have been easy to listen to. If you come from a culture where things are said and understood indirectly, you will be shocked. But Paul, Sosthenes and the church did not cover up the problems. The letter was kept, copied, valued and passed on to us.

Why Read 1 Corinthians?

All of the letters in the New Testament are necessary and useful for us. 1 Corinthians is one of the longest letters. To read it all through takes about 90 minutes. It is a letter to people who had believed in Jesus and come together as church for only about 3 years. Some like Crispus, and we guess Sosthenes, were Jews who knew the Old Testament well. Some had been pagans, worshipping the Roman gods. Some were slaves with low social standing; others were slaves with professional abilities and management responsibilities. The skilled scribe who carefully wrote down Paul's complex letter to the Romans, believed to be written while Paul was visiting Corinth in about AD 56, was called Tertius (Romans 16:22). Phoebe, a woman who had been a great help to Paul and many other people, was a servant or deaconess of the church in Cenchrea, the east-facing port of Corinth and had travelled to Rome (Romans 16:1-2). In Romans 16:23 Paul sends greetings from Gaius, a man with money and a big house "whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy". Probably Erastus, mentioned by Paul in 2 Timothy 4:20 and Romans 16:23, was Corinth's Director of Public Works. Archaeologists have found an inscription in Corinth from the period with this name and title. For an interesting and scholarly view of life in Rome and Corinth when Paul was writing see Phoebe: a Story (Gooder, Paula 2018).

The varied group in Corinth had trouble getting on with each other and had little experience of church life. People in the church were hurting each other by the selfish way they behaved when they came together. One of them was suing a fellow believer in the Roman law courts. A church member was actually living such an immoral life that even non-believing pagans were shocked. There were people in the church who publicly expressed their very poor opinion of Paul. If fellow believers could give each other such stress, was meeting together important? If it was important, why? What should happen when they met together? Would you be part of a church like that?

From Acts 18 and the two letters in the New Testament from Paul to the church in Corinth we learn more about the life of this church than any other. We learn a great deal too about Paul himself and his relationship with this church. How did the church react to the letter we are about to study? How did Paul's relationship with them develop? As you follow the story of Paul and the church at Corinth, you will want to read 2 Corinthians too.

What do you write in a letter to such a church? In it Paul wrote words we use at funerals to describe our hope of resurrection; words we use at weddings to describe love; words we often use when we take the bread and wine together. Paul told them about God's plan for believers to live together in the church, each contributing the gifts the Holy Spirit gave them to a growing body. He answered practical questions in their letter about marriage and about how to live with their pagan neighbours. He made them face up to the ugliness of their problems. Parts of this letter are controversial and uncomfortable. Even the apostle Peter found some things in Paul's letters hard to understand (2 Peter 3:15-16). By reading it all, not just the highlights, we will find parts which speak directly to us now and prepare us for situations we will face in future.

How to use these studies

To use these studies you need to have a bible, either a printed copy or on line, obtainable for example at <http://www.biblegateway.com>. The English translation now often used in the UK is the New International Version (NIV). The questions in these studies are based on the NIV translation. The subheadings in the NIV are modern additions. Some editions of the NIV have helpful footnotes, shown in the text by superscript letters. For example, footnotes show you the bible references for direct quotations from books of the Old Testament. Sometimes the footnote gives only an abbreviation of the bible book's name, usually the first 3 or 4 letters. Some of the quotations are poetry. The New International Version distinguishes lines of poetry from normal text by indenting the start and end of the line.

You can use these studies as an individual or as a small group. Each study could take you about an hour. The introduction to each study should help you remember what Paul said previously and introduce the letter to any group member joining part way through. The study notes will help you understand the context and the unusual words. The questions can be answered from the text, unless they are questions that ask, "what do you think?". The questions should help you see what the apostle Paul said, why he said it, what it meant to the believers in Corinth and what it means for us today.

Study 1 Christ Crucified: God's Power and Wisdom 1 Corinthians 1 and 2

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Q 1. How did Paul describe:

- himself (1:1)?
- the believers in Corinth (1:2, 5, 7)?

Q 2. What had the believers been called to (1:2, 9)? What encouragement did Paul give them as he started his letter?

Notes:

- Sanctified and holy (verse 2) are related words meaning regarded as special, separate, set apart or dedicated to God. The words are related to the word saints.
- Fellowship (verse 9) means caring and sharing, related to the words participation, partnership, contribution.

Q 3. In these 9 verses it is noticeable that Paul used words such as "God", "Christ Jesus", "Jesus Christ our Lord" repeatedly. What do 1:1-9 tell us about:

- God?
- Jesus Christ?

Q 4. After these opening words were read to them, what do you think the church of God in Corinth expected Paul to say next?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Notes:

- In verse 10 Paul called the Corinthian believers his family members or his brothers and sisters, a word which he repeated throughout his letter (see for example 1:11, 26, 2:1, 3:1, 4:6).

- Apollos was the gifted Jewish preacher who visited Corinth after Paul left (Acts 18:24-19:1). Cephas is the name Peter in the Aramaic language. Crispus was the synagogue ruler in Corinth who became a believer in Jesus (See Acts 18). Gaius must have owned a big house in Corinth, because he gave Paul and the whole church hospitality (Romans 16:32, believed written from Corinth). Stephanas and his household were among the first to become believers and Stephanas was one of the people who visited Paul in Ephesus before this letter was written (1 Corinthians 16:15-17).

Q 5. Look at the 3 shocking questions Paul asked the church in verse 13. What do you think was Paul's aim in writing these questions?

Note: The believers had been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – see Matthew 28:19.

Q 6. From verse 17, what had Christ sent Paul to do? See also Paul's explanation to King Agrippa of what Jesus had sent him to do in Acts 26:15-18

Notes:

- 1:1 and 17. The words apostle and sent are related.
- 1:17. Gospel means good news.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, 2:1-5

Note: Paul proclaimed the shameful cross of Christ (1:17, 18, 23), a scandal to Jews who knew anyone hung on a tree was under God's curse (Deuteronomy 21:23). Jews opposed the Roman occupation of Judea and were expecting the Messiah to be God's king (Messiah in Hebrew and Christ in Greek mean God's Anointed). The cross of Christ was foolishness to Greeks, who supported the Roman Empire and knew crucifixion was the Roman death penalty for rebellious slaves and criminals.

Q 7. Our faith does not rest on human wisdom but on God's power (2:5). How does Paul describe God's power in 1:17-18 and 23-24?

Q 8. Paul wrote about the wisdom of wise people/the world (1:17, 20, 21, 25, 2:5). How is human, worldly wisdom different from the wisdom of God (1:23-24, 30)? How do you think God's wisdom could help the church in Corinth overcome the problem described in 1:10-12?

Note: The wisdom that comes from God, especially knowing how to speak and act in all situations, is very valuable. When you have time, see for example the Old Testament book of Proverbs, especially chapter 8, and the New Testament letter by James 1:5, 3:13-18.

Q 9. Paul wrote that:

- no-one is being saved just by being intelligent, or a scholar or philosopher (1:18-20)

- not many of the people in Corinth who had been called to be holy and have fellowship with Jesus Christ were wise by human standards or influential or noble (1:26, although Crispus, Sosthenes and Erastus were influential)
- those who tell others about the gospel (the good news) do not need to use eloquence, superior wisdom or wise and persuasive words (2:1, 4).

Why are these 3 statements good news? See 1:27-31 (especially verse 29) and 2:4-5.

Note: In 1:19 and 31 Paul said, “it is written...” meaning it is written in the Hebrew scriptures (now called by Christians the Old Testament). There are 2 more quotations in 2:9 and 2:16. Paul expected both the Jewish believers and the non-Jewish believers to know the Old Testament and to learn from it. It is always useful, when you have time, to look at the context of quotations from the Old Testament. The people who wrote the New Testament had memorized most of the Old Testament. They would have the whole passage in their mind as they chose their quotation. For more information about the quotations in chapters 1 and 2, see Appendix Study 1.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

Q 10. What do these verses tell us about

- God’s wisdom? (2:7, 9-10, 16)
- the rulers of this age? (2:6, 8)
- the Spirit of God? (2:10-14)

“We have the mind of Christ” (2:16). Paul chose to confront the Corinthian Christians with their bad behavior and tell them the problem behind it – they were using human wisdom, the wisdom of the world. Although the Spirit of God made it available to them, they were not using the mind of Christ. To sum up this study, read what Paul later wrote to what may have been his favourite church, in Philippi, in Philippians 2:1-11. Ask God that his Spirit will teach us these spiritual truths.

Study 2 Do Not Deceive Yourselves 1 Corinthians 3 and 4

Paul had lived in the Greek city of Corinth for a year and a half in about AD 50 and established the church there. After Paul left Corinth, Apollos, a gifted teacher of the Old Testament scriptures, visited the church. In about AD 55 Paul, now living in Ephesus (in modern Turkey), heard of serious divisions in the church at Corinth. He also received a letter from them with questions that needed a reply.

In the first two chapters of his letter to them, Paul introduced many of the ideas he planned to write about. He said the believers in the church of God in Corinth did not lack any spiritual gift as they eagerly waited for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed (1:7). He appealed to them to agree with one another and be perfectly united in mind and thought (1:10). They needed to see that the message of the cross of Jesus Christ, weak and foolish by human standards, was actually the power and wisdom of God (1:18-25). God chose the weak, not the strong, so no-one could boast before Him (1:26-31) or rest their faith in their own wisdom (2:5). No-one understands God by using worldly wisdom (1:21) but God reveals his thoughts to us by his Spirit, who teaches us spiritual truths (2:9-14). Paul backed up his statements by quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures, often introduced by the words “it is written...” (1:19, 31, 2:9, 16).

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Q 1. From 3:1-4, what was Paul's opinion of the believers in Corinth:

- in the past?
- In the present?

Q 2. From 3:5-9:

- how was the church of God in Corinth like God's field?
- how were Apollos and Paul serving God in God's field?
- what lessons can we learn from these verses?

Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-23

Notes:

- The “you” in verses 9, 16 and 17 is plural.
- When Paul wrote this letter the beautiful temple in Jerusalem, which represented God's presence and where God was worshipped, was still standing.

Q 3. From 3:9-17 how was the church of God in Corinth like God's building? How was each one in the church contributing to God's building? How do you think someone in the church in Corinth could destroy God's building (3:17)?

Q 4. What serious lessons can we learn from verses 10-17?

Note: For more information on 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, see 2 Corinthians 5:9-10.

Q 5. Think of examples of wisdom by the standards of this age (verse 18) which are foolishness in God's sight (verse 19).

Notes:

- 3:18-20 Wisdom can be defined as the ability to use your knowledge to make good decisions and to speak and act in the best way in all situations. For followers of Jesus, the best way is the way that pleases God. A Christian who was killed while taking the good news of Jesus to the jungles of South America wrote: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot loose” (Jim Elliot, 1927-1956).
- 3:19 The quotation is from Job 5:13 (Job is classified as Wisdom Literature) where one of Job's comforters described the powerful who are “wise” in a bad way, crafty and wily.
- 3:20 The quotation is from Psalm 94:11, where the writer described proud evildoers killing helpless poor people and saying “God does not see”. The writer said “you fools, when will you become wise? The Lord knows all human plans; he knows they are futile”.

Paul showed the church of God in Corinth in chapter 3 of his letter that their jealousy and quarrelling proved they were infants in Christ, not adults (verses 1-4). Those who thought they were wise were deceiving themselves (verse 18). He wanted them to understand how much they had been freely given (see 2:12): they were God's field, God's building, God's temple, and the world, life, death, the present and the future were all theirs in Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-6

Q 6. How did Paul describe himself and Apollos in 3:5-9 and 4:1-2? From 4:3-5 what do you think the believers in Corinth might have thought about Paul?

Notes:

- 4:1 Paul described himself as a steward, a slave trusted with management responsibility for the secret things, or mysteries, of God. Paul wrote more about God's mysteries in, for example, Ephesians 3:3-6 and 1 Timothy 3:16.
- 4:3 We know from Acts that Paul had experience of human courts by the time he wrote this letter. In Acts 16 Paul and Silas were brought before the magistrates in Philippi and unjustly sentenced to flogging and imprisonment. In Acts 17 Paul was brought to a meeting of the Areopagus, Athens' legal council. In Acts 18 Paul was brought to court in Corinth but the case was literally thrown out by the proconsul of the province of Achaia, Gallio.

Q 7. In 4:6 Paul ended the discussion of himself and Apollos begun in 1:10. What have you learnt from Paul's discussion of himself and Apollos?

Note: The saying "do not go beyond what is written" (4:6) means we should know what is written in the Old Testament. Paul expected non-Jews to know and use Old Testament scriptures. This is so much easier for us than for the Corinthians, as we can read our own copy of these words. Presumably Paul expected them to memorize Isaiah, Jeremiah, Job, Psalms etc. from listening to readings from the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament when they came together.

Read 1 Corinthians 4:7-21

Q 8. From 4:7-8, what did the Corinthian believers think about themselves?

Q 9. In 4:9-13, how did Paul describe his life at "this very hour", "this moment"? What do you think life was like for Paul in Ephesus when he was writing this letter?

Notes:

- 4:9 Paul described the Roman custom of a triumphant public procession awarded to a victorious army general on his return to Rome, with prisoners at the end of the procession who will die in an arena such as the Coliseum.
- 4:12 As he wrote, Paul in Ephesus was working hard with his own hands. Later Paul reminded the elders of the church in Ephesus of the hard manual work he did while he was with them in order to provide for his own needs, the needs of his companions and to help the weak (Acts 20:34-35).

- 4:17 Paul's first meeting with Timothy was described in Acts 16:1-3. Timothy travelled with Paul and arrived in Corinth soon after the first people there believed (Acts 18:5). In prison expecting death, Paul wrote the very last of his letters to Timothy. When you have time, read 2 Timothy to learn more of the close relationship between Paul and his "son" Timothy.
- 4:21 Paul shockingly talked of disciplining the arrogant people in the church of God in Corinth by coming with a rod or a stick, another example of Paul's use of picture language. We will find at the beginning of chapter 5 another reason why Paul felt so strongly. Clearly he hoped that by the time he visited them he would find changed people and be able to come in love and a quiet spirit.

Q 10. From the first 4 chapters of his letter, what impression do you get of the church of God in Corinth?

To Think About:

What do you think the believers in the church of God in Corinth felt like as they heard the words of 4:16 read out to them "Therefore I urge you to imitate me"? Paul wrote in 4:17 that his way of life in Christ Jesus (described in 4:9-13) agreed with what he taught everywhere in every church. Do we want to imitate Paul – and Christ (1 Peter 2:21-23)?

Remember that, although the church of God in Corinth had been taught by Paul and Apollos, they had only this letter and Paul's earlier letter to them. They had no New Testament (it was still being written), no Old Testament that they could take home and read (handwritten books were very expensive) and little experience of life together as believers. Give thanks to God for the people who told you about Jesus, the bible you have, the believers you know and the resources available which help you grow in Christ.

Study 3 Is Everything Permissible? 1 Corinthians 5 and 6

Paul was the first to preach the good news about Jesus in the city of Corinth. He stayed for a year and a half, encouraged by a direct message from the Lord ... "Keep on speaking, do not be silent... I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10). So Paul knew the believers in Corinth well. A few years later Paul wrote this letter to the church of God in Corinth from Ephesus, about 300km away from Corinth by direct sea voyage. Paul had already written to them about how to live as a Christian (see 1 Corinthians 5:9) so the letter we call 1 Corinthians was at least his second letter. They had also written to him with questions and were expecting his reply.

Paul did not begin by answering their questions. He had heard reports of a serious problem in the church from visitors who came to Ephesus from Corinth. "Some from Chloe's household" told Paul of the problems we read of in 1:10 through to 4:7: splits, jealousy, boasting and quarrels in the church over who they followed – Paul, Apollos, Peter – or even Christ. In chapter 3 Paul told them they were infants in Christ, using the world's wisdom not God's wisdom. He warned them to be careful how they built on the foundation of Jesus Christ - God would test their work with fire.

The Corinthian believers had such a high opinion of themselves that they thought they were kings (4:8). In 4:9-13 Paul contrasted their boasting about what they had with his own current experience. He told them with brutal clarity about the physical hardships he and other apostles were suffering as servants of Christ: hunger, thirst, rags for clothes, brutal treatment, homelessness, hard manual labour, adding “When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly”. As he ended chapter 4 he urged them to imitate him; he was their father in Christ. He warned them he would visit them soon and find out if the arrogant believers were all talk or if they really knew the power of the kingdom of God. He hoped to come, not as a father to children who needed discipline, but as a father with love and a gentle spirit. Then he started to write about the second problem that had been reported to him.

Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Q 1. Describe what you think people in the church of God in Corinth felt like when they heard chapter 5 read out for the first time.

Q 2. From what we have learnt about the church of God in Corinth so far, why do you think they chose to put up with the actions of the man who had done this?

Q 3. How did Paul tell the church of God in Corinth to act towards the man who had done this? See verses 2, 4-5, 11 and 13.

Note: For Jesus’ instructions about dealing with someone in the church who has sinned, see Matthew 18:15-17. Paul instructed the Galatians “If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore that person gently. But watch yourself, or you may also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).

Q 4. How would the actions in verses 2, 4-5, 11 and 13 help:

- the man who had done this?
- the church?

Notes:

- 5:6-8 Leaven (a microbial raising agent, most commonly yeast) was used by Jesus as a picture of something that spreads – either bad (see Matthew 16:5-12 and Luke 12:1 where Jesus talked of the hypocritical teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees) or good (see Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:20-21 where Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven/kingdom of God to yeast which a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked its way through the whole dough). Paul also wrote the words in 1 Corinthians 5:6 in Galatians 5:9 “a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough”, referring to someone who had persuaded the church to stop obeying the truth.

- In 5:7-8 Paul referred to the Passover story in Exodus 12, when families who put the blood of a perfect lamb on their doorposts were protected from the death of the firstborn. The Lord passed over their houses. On Passover night they were set free from being slaves and were forced to leave Egypt quickly. They ate flat bread because they had no time to wait for bread to rise. This event in about 1200 BC is still celebrated every year as Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread by Jewish families in every Jewish community across the world. Before the celebration the house is cleaned very carefully to remove any fermented products made from grain, even small crumbs of bread. Jesus was celebrating Passover at the Last Supper (see for example Luke 22).

Q 5. From 1 Corinthians 5:7-8, what does Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread mean to believers in Jesus?

Q 6. From verses 9-13, can believers associate with people who are sexually immoral, greedy, swindlers, slanderers, drunkards or idolaters? Explain your answer.

Note: Paul's quotation in 5:13 is from Deuteronomy where the command "Purge the evil from among you" is used 7 times, referring to offenses against the community similar to those Paul listed: idolatry (Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and 17:2-7), slander in court (Deuteronomy 19:16-19), a rebellious, disobedient and drunken son (Deuteronomy 21:18-21), sexual immorality (Deuteronomy 22:20-24) and kidnapping and slavery (Deuteronomy 24:7). The punishment in New Testament terms is expulsion from the church community (see also Matthew 18:17), presumably until the person changed their behavior (1 Corinthians 5:5). Leviticus 18:8 and Deuteronomy 27:20 forbid a man from having sexual relations with his father's wife. Paul expected the Corinthian non-Jewish believers to know this law of God and to obey it.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

Unlike problems 1 and 2 (1:11 and 5:1) Paul did not say he had received a report about problem 3 but from 6:6-8 it is clear Paul knew this bad situation was actually happening in the church of God in Corinth. Although Paul started chapter 6 with "If..." he really meant "When..."

Q 7. In 1 Corinthians 5:12 Paul told believers to judge those inside the church. In 6:1-5 Paul expected believers to be wise enough to judge disputes between believers. When is it right for believers judge each other and when is it not right? (See also Matthew 7:1, Romans 14:4, 10-13 and 1 Corinthians 4:3-5)

Notes:

- The term "the Lord's people" or "saints" in 6:1-2 comes from the word sanctified which Paul used to describe the believers in the church of God in Corinth in 1:2 and 6:11. It means set apart to God or holy.
- The wording of verse 3 suggests the dispute was about an ordinary matter of everyday life. Verse 7 suggests it involved cheating, perhaps swindling (see 5:10-11, 6:10). So it was a civil, not a criminal, case. Historical records show most cases brought to civil courts in the Roman Empire were brought by the wealthy against poorer people. Verse 8 suggests that the person bringing the case was also cheating and doing wrong.

To Think About: Give thanks to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for the truth of 1 Corinthians 6:11. Remember that the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7-9).

Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Notes:

- 6:12. The repeated “Everything is permissible/lawful for me” is in some English versions translated “I have the right to do anything”. Maybe this statement was a quotation from the Corinthians’ letter to Paul - see 7:1. Or perhaps it was a saying Paul remembered from his 18 months living with them.
- 6:13. The issue of what food could be eaten would be a big difference between Jewish Christians in the church in Corinth such as Crispus (and we assume Sosthenes) and the majority non-Jewish Christians. Jewish food laws are given in Leviticus 11. The early church leaders in a meeting in Jerusalem decided non-Jewish believers did not have to be circumcised or keep the laws of Moses. However, all believers were to abstain from food offered to idols, sexual immorality, eating strangled animals and blood (Acts 15:20, 29).
- It seems believers in Corinth were saying “Because God gave me a stomach, I can eat anything with no limits”, and, although Paul does not say so, they may also have thought “Because God gave me a body, and my sexuality, I can use them in any way with no limits”.
- 6:14. Paul wrote a long discussion based on this sentence, 1 Corinthians 15.
- 6:15. “Members” means parts of a body, not members of a club.
- 6:16 quotes from Genesis 2:24. Jesus quoted the same verse when asked about marriage and divorce (Matthew 19:3-6).
- 6:19-20. Unlike 3:16-17, the “you” in 6:19-20 is singular.

Paul repeated the phrase “Do you not know...?”:

6:2 Do you not know the saints will judge the world?

6:3 Do you not know that we will judge angels?

6:9 Do you not know that the wicked (the unjust, unrighteous, wrongdoers) will not inherit the kingdom of God?

6:15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?

6:16 Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body?

6:19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?

He also used the phrase in:

3:16 Do you not know that you yourselves (plural) are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?

5:6 Do you not know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?

These are all important statements of truth, some positive, some negative. When you read chapter 9, look out for another “Do you not know...?”

Q 8. Are there any of these “Do you not know...?” statements from 1 Corinthians 6 that you did not know before? If so, how will knowing this new truth influence the way you think and behave?

Q 9. What can we learn about our relationship to the Lord Jesus from 6:13-17? See also Ephesians 5:29-32.

Note: In 6:16 and Ephesians 5:31 the quotation is from Genesis 2:24.

Q 10. In 6:12-20, what reasons did Paul give us to “flee” from sexual immorality?

To Think About:

Are the reasons Paul gave strong enough to make us “flee sexual immorality”?

Many people in our cultures today would say “Everything is permissible for me”. What does verse 12 mean for you personally?

Study 4 Relationships 1 Corinthians 7 and 8

We see from 5:9 that this is not the first letter that Paul wrote to the church of God in Corinth, but this was the first letter that was kept, valued and passed on as God’s word to us. It is amazing that Paul, Sosthenes or the Corinthians preserved this letter for other believers to read, as the first 6 chapters show us that the believers in Corinth were behaving badly. There were quarrelsome splits over which teacher they were following (Paul, Apollos, Peter or Christ – see chapters 1 and 3). They clearly did not understand what God had freely given them and were still operating on human wisdom. They were immature, but they thought they already had everything they wanted - they were rich, they were kings! Some of them were arrogantly thinking Paul would not dare to discipline them (chapter 4).

And that was just the start. Paul had heard of a shocking problem in Corinth, a believer committing extreme sexual immorality. The church in its pride had ignored this situation even though Paul had already written to them saying they should not associate with sexually immoral people. Further, a believer who had been cheated by another believer was suing him or her in the Roman courts. The believer bringing the lawsuit was now cheating a fellow believer in return. Chapter 6 repeats a key phrase that seems characteristic of the church in Corinth “Everything is permissible for me”. Paul responded that not everything is beneficial and he would not be mastered by anything. The final warnings Paul gave the church as he ended chapter 6 were not to visit prostitutes and to flee from sexual immorality.

The first 6 chapters of 1 Corinthians must have been painful to write and painful to hear. In the next chapters Paul moved on to answering the questions the Corinthians had written to him. Their questions were very interesting. We can be glad that the Corinthian believers had the confidence to write to Paul about these very practical and personal matters. 1 Corinthians is the only place in the New Testament where we have such detailed discussions of everyday life.

Read 1 Corinthians chapter 7

Paul was not married and Paul had asked the Corinthians to imitate his life (4:16). Paul may have never been married, or his wife may have died, or his Jewish wife may have rejected him when he believed in Jesus. Any of these possibilities imply there had been a difficult period in Paul's life over the issue of marriage – Jewish society would have expected a leader like Paul to be married. In the culture of the time in the Roman Empire, girls could marry aged 12. Widows and widowers were expected to remarry within a year. Divorce was easy and women as well as men could initiate it. From the contrast between 6:12-20 and 7:1, maybe there was a division in the church over sexual permissiveness and sexual abstinence. Reading chapter 7 is rather like hearing one side of a phone conversation. In some cases we cannot be sure what Paul had in mind, for example 7:36-38 which could refer to either a man's fiancée or daughter.

Q 1. From verses 1 to 7, what question do you think the Corinthians had asked Paul? What was his answer and what reasons did he give?

Q 2. What advice did Paul give in 7:8-9 and 7:12-16? In 7:14-16, what reasons did Paul give?

Q 3. What command from the Lord Jesus is given in 7:10-11? See Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:9 and Mark 10:11-12.

Q 4. What rule did Paul lay down in all the churches? See 7:17, 20 and 24. Why do you think Paul gave this rule to the believers living in Roman society? How do you think this rule applies to us today?

Note: Note the repetition of "called" in 7:15-24. In 1:1-2 Paul said he was called to be an apostle by the will of God, and the church of God in Corinth was called to be holy.

Q 5. In what situations did Paul have no command from the Lord but gave his own judgement as one who by the Lord's mercy was trustworthy and one who had the Spirit of God? See 7:25-38, 40. What reasons did Paul give?

Notes:

- 7:25 the word "virgins" is not gender specific and refers to men or women who have not yet married.
- 7:29, 31 may refer to the Lord's return or to some disaster like a famine. We know for example that in AD 70 disaster came on Jerusalem and the people there. Maybe when Paul expressed his own opinion in this chapter, it was influenced by the unstable time in which he was writing.
- 7:36-38 could refer to either a man and his fiancée or to a man and his daughter of marriageable age. If your bible does not show these alternative translations, for information see the NIV footnote for these verses at <http://www.biblegateway.com>
- Unlike previous chapters there is no mention of the community life of the church, and only one mention of the word "church" as "in all the churches" in 7:17. Paul was trying to help couples and individuals take decisions about their personal relationships.

Q 6. What have you learnt from this chapter?

Read 1 Corinthians chapter 8

In 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 Paul had explained to the church of God in Corinth that it was normal for believers to associate with non-believers who were, for example, idolaters. As he said in 6:9-11 “that is what some of you were”. Probably social and business events in Corinth took place in temples to Greek and Roman gods and goddesses, as these were large public buildings. So the food served at such events had been offered to these idols. See 8:10 “...if anyone sees you... eating in an idol’s temple...what has been sacrificed to idols...”. Remember the Jerusalem church leaders’ council attended by Paul in about AD 49 had written to non-Jewish believers in Jesus asking them only to abstain from sexual immorality and eating food offered to idols, strangled animals and blood (Acts 15:22-29). So should Corinthian believers go to these social events but refuse the food?

Q 7. From 8:4-10, what question do you think the believers had asked Paul? What arguments do you think they used in their letter to Paul to support their point of view? See verses 1, 4-6 and 9.

Q 8. From the second part of verse 1, verse 2 and verses 7-13, what was Paul’s answer to their question and why?

Q 9. What sin did Paul describe:

- in 8:11-12? Who has sinned?
- in 8:13? Who has sinned?

Q 10. Do you think it would it be right to eat food sacrificed to idols in an idol’s temple if no other believers were present? Give reasons for your answer from this chapter of 1 Corinthians.

Note: Paul wrote more practical advice on eating food offered to idols in chapter 10, which we read in the next study.

To Think About:

In your culture it may be normal to go to an idol’s temple for social events where food is served. What you do may affect your family relationships and your career. Do as the Corinthians did and ask a wise Christian for advice. Consider carefully what Paul wrote in 8:9-13.

Or in your culture you may think you will never be in an idol’s temple as part of your work or family responsibilities. Again, consider carefully what Paul wrote in 8:9-13. You may find yourself in this situation and you need to know before it arises what it is right for you to do.

Paul asked the stronger, more knowledgeable believer to respect the weaker, less knowledgeable believer so the weak are not destroyed. What does this mean for us?

Study 5 Do All for the Glory of God 1 Corinthians 9 and 10

Paul had bought the good news about Jesus for the first time to people in the city of Corinth in about AD 51 and was writing at least his second letter to them (we call it 1 Corinthians) in about AD 55 from Ephesus. Although the Corinthians had replied to his earlier letter with questions, Paul did not answer these at the start of 1 Corinthians. First he addressed serious problems he had heard of in their church; splits about who to follow (chapter 1); tolerance of, and even pride in, gross sexual immorality by someone who called himself a believer (chapter 5) and a believer taking another believer to the Roman court over a case of cheating. In 6:12 Paul used a phrase the Corinthians had probably said or written: "Everything is permissible for me", but he responded that not everything is beneficial and he would not be mastered by anything. It seems that some in the church of God in Corinth had a very tolerant attitude to sexual immorality and used prostitutes. Paul wrote: "Flee from sexual immorality" (6:18).

Paul began chapter 7 "Now for the matters you wrote to me about..." (7:1). While some in the church of God in Corinth were sexually permissive, it seems others were suggesting it was good to abstain from sexual relations entirely. Paul gave believing married couples his counsel on their marital duties (7:1-7) and a command from the Lord on divorce (7:10-11) followed by a realistic solution for couples where one partner became a believer (7:12-16). He gave a rule for everyone that he laid down in all the churches (7:17-24) and his own careful judgements on situations in which believing individuals and couples had to make decisions about personal relationships (7:8-9 and 25-40).

In chapter 8 Paul started to answer their question about eating food sacrificed to idols, especially eating in the idol's temple, a public building (8:10). The Corinthians were probably at a disadvantage in their social and business life if this was banned. Paul acknowledged that an idol is nothing at all in the world as there is only one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ. This may have been the argument the Corinthians gave Paul to support their wish to eat in an idol's temple. Paul's conclusion on eating food in an idol's temple that had been sacrificed to idols was "Be careful that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling-block to the weak". If another believer saw them and joined in idol worship, the stronger believer would have sinned against their weaker brother or sister and sinned against Christ. Paul ended by stating what he would do in that situation: "If what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again".

Read 1 Corinthians chapter 9

Q 1. In 9:1-15, what point did Paul particularly want the Corinthians to understand? See particularly verses 12 and 15.

Q 2. In 9:7-10 and 13-14, what arguments did Paul use to prove he had the rights described in verses 4-5 and 11-12?

Q 3. From 7:12b and 15-18, why had Paul not used any of these rights?

Notes:

- In 8:9 and 9:4, 5, 6, 12, 18 and 8:9 the same word is used, translated "right" or "freedom", meaning the power or authority to act.
- 9:9-10. This quotation from Jewish civil law is from Deuteronomy 25:4. Paul said when God gave this law, He had us in mind. Paul expected the non-Jewish believers in Jesus in Corinth to know the Old Testament scriptures and learn lessons from it.

- In 9:13 the temple is the temple of God in Jerusalem. Regulations about eating the grain offering and sin offering are given in Leviticus 6:18, 26 and 29. In Deuteronomy 18:1 Moses summarized the arrangement: “The priests... shall live on the food offerings made to the Lord, for that is their inheritance”. Paul expected the Corinthians to know this.

For more lessons we can learn from 9:1-14, see Appendix Study 5.

Q 4. Explain the connection between Paul’s answer to the Corinthians’ question about eating in an idol’s temple in 8:9-13 and Paul’s description of his own behavior in 9:12-22. See the note above on the word translated “rights” in 8:9, 9:4 etc.

Q 5. The first 13 verses of this chapter contain 15 or more questions. Why do you think Paul chose to write in this style?

Note: 9:24-27: The Isthmian games, a version of the Olympic Games, were held in Corinth every 2 years, where individuals, not teams, competed. The winner received a garland or wreath of leaves. Paul spoke of a crown that will last forever – see what Paul said to Timothy and to us about this in his final letter in 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

Q 6. What does this chapter tell us about Paul’s motivation for preaching the good news about Jesus and the way he did this?

Read 1 Corinthians chapter 10

Q 7. From 1 Corinthians 1-10:

- what did all of the Israelites experience? (verses 1-4)
- what happened to most of them? (verse 5)
- what did some of them do? (verses 7-10)
- what should we NOT do? (verse 7-10).

Notes:

- 10:1. Paul called the people God rescued from slavery in Egypt “our ancestors/ forefathers”, showing the non-Jewish Corinthian believers their connection to God’s people in the Old Testament.
- 10:1-5. Paul was referring to events after God had freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. In the desert God guided and protected all of them by a moving cloud, parted the Red (or Reed) Sea so they could cross and escape from Pharaoh’s army, provided daily bread from heaven (manna) and water from rocks. However, when most of them refused to believe that God could lead them into the land he had promised, that generation of unbelievers died in the desert during the next 40 years.
- In 1 Corinthians 10:6-10 Paul gave examples of some of the Israelites in the desert setting their hearts on evil things: they asked Aaron to make a god for them, a golden calf from their jewelry; Israelite men were involved in sexual immorality with local women who invited them to sacrifice to the local idols, and the people spoke against God and Moses saying “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!”. In each case, disaster followed.

For more information on these events in Jewish history, see Appendix Study 5.

Q 8. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-14:

- why did Paul want the Corinthian believers to know the Old Testament scriptures? See especially 10:1, 6 and 11.
- what encouragement is there for us?
- what can we learn about temptation from 10:12-14?

Q 9. From 10:1-24, give the reasons the Corinthian believers must “flee from idolatry”.

Notes:

- 10:14. In 6:18 Paul also wrote “Flee from sexual Immorality”.
- 10:18. See 9:13 and Leviticus 7:5-7, 28-31.
- 10:23. See the note on 6:12 where Paul also wrote ““Everything is permissible for me” – but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me” – but I will not be mastered by anything” in connection with sexual immorality.

Q 10. From 10:14-33, can a believer eat food offered to idols? Explain your answer.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:1

Q 11. What example has Paul set us in 1 Corinthians 9 and 10?

To think about: “Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God”.

Study 6 We Who are Many are One Body 1 Corinthians 11 and 12

Paul began his letter by thanking God for the believers in the church of God in Corinth. However, in chapters 1 to 6 he had to address four serious, sinful situations in the church. He had called the believers in Corinth “the church of God in Corinth” (1:2), “God’s field”, “God’s building” (3:9) and “God’s temple” (3:16) but from chapters 1-6 it sounds like they were pulling themselves apart. Paul then answered questions the believers had written to him, about personal relationships between men and women (chapter 7) and eating food offered to idols (chapters 8 to 10). In his answers, Paul gave some principles important for our own individual lives and for our lives together as the church of God. He spoke of the fellowship we have with each other as we take the cup of thanksgiving and break the bread together – “Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body” (10:17) and wrote “Nobody should seek their own good but the good of others” (10:24). **Read** a summary of his teaching to us in **10:31-33**.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:1-16

Are there currently customs in your culture on men and women’s hair length and the wearing of hats or other head coverings? What were these customs like 100 years ago? Do you know any reasons for such customs?

Notes:

- At present, practicing Jewish men and married women use some form of head covering. There is no commandment in the Old Testament for all Jews about head covering or hair length.
- The word translated “teachings” in verse 2 can also be translated “traditions”.
- In NIV editions with footnotes there is an alternative version of verses 4-7 where “covering” is translated as “long hair” or “covering of hair”. You can see the NIV footnote for these verses at <http://www.biblegateway.com>
- 11:8-9 refer to Genesis 2:21-23.

Q 1. What do you think the Corinthian believers did about head covering and hair length after Paul’s letter was read to them? What will you do about these issues after reading 1 Corinthians 11:1-16? Why will you do this?

Q 2. Did Paul expect men and women to pray and prophecy (11:4-5)? Do you think this means when the believers met together, or privately? Why do you think this?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Q 3. What had Paul heard the believers were doing wrong as they came together to eat the Lord’s supper (11:17-22, 27-34)?

Notes:

- Paul used forms of the verb “to come together” five times, in 11:17, 18, 20, 33 and 34. In 11:18 Paul wrote “When you come together as a church...”. The word “church” in Greek is derived from the words “to call” and “out from”. The first use of the word to refer specifically to believers in Jesus meeting together is in the Greek translation of Jesus’ statement to Peter “on this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). The word “church” as used in the New Testament in this sense is the church of God, an assembly or congregation of people called out to God.
- The Lord’s Supper is described in Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25 and Luke 22:7-20. The atmosphere of the meal is described by John (John 13:1-17). Jesus lovingly served his disciples by washing their feet, saying “I have set you an example” (John 13:15). Paul told the church of God in Corinth “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (11:1)
- 11:20-21, 33-34. In a large, wealthy Roman home it was the custom for guests to eat in different areas of the house according to social status. The entrance areas were open to callers of lower social standing, while guests of the same social standing as the host family were invited into the interior of the house. The formal dining room itself would often take only 9 people. There is historical evidence showing different menus were served to guests in each area. See Hays, Richard (1997) and Thiselton, Anthony (2006).

Q 4. Paul described the sharing of bread and wine at the Lord’s table in the previous chapter – read 10:16-17. What additional information did Paul give about the Lord’s supper in 11:23-28? Why should we eat the bread and drink the cup with other believers?

Q 5. How can believers eat the bread and drink the cup in a worthy manner?

To Think About: Are there changes I need to make in the way I think about the Lord's supper and the way I act at the Lord's supper?

Read 1 Corinthians 12

Some people believe that because of the similarity between 7:1 ("Now for the matters you wrote about"), 8:1 ("Now about food sacrificed to idols") and 12:1 ("Now about the gifts of the Spirit") these are all issues about which the Corinthians had written to Paul.

Q 6. What do verses 3-6 tell us about God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

Q 7. What gifts of the Spirit are listed? (verses 7-10 and 28-30).

Note: In 12:4, 9, 28, 30 and 31 Paul used a word for "gift" that is derived from the Greek word for "grace" – they are gifts we do not deserve. For more information on gifts of the Holy Spirit to the body of Christ, see 1 Peter 4:8-11, Romans 12:3-9 and Ephesians 4:11-16. Paul discussed prophecy, speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues more fully in 1 Corinthians chapter 14.

Q 8. From 12:7, what is the purpose of the gift the Spirit gives to each one of the believers who come together as a church? From verses 4-13, what is the same for all believers and what is different?

Q 9. From 12:12-31:

- what is the body Paul spoke of? (see verse 27)
- what can we learn about God's plan for Christ's body, the church?

Q 10. How do you think Paul's teaching in 12:24-26 could correct the church's problems he wrote about in 1:10-13 and 11:17-22?

To Think About:

Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:16 "From him (Christ) the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work". Am I taking my part in Christ's body? What is the gift God has given me in his grace? What is my contribution to the working of the body? What gifts do I need others to share with me in the body? Do I have equal concern for other parts of Christ's body (verse 25)? Do they have concern for me? Can I encourage others to use their gift for the common good, just as God has arranged (verses 7 and 18)?

If you are not sure what gift the Spirit has given you to use for the good of other believers: ask God to show you; ask a wise believer for help; try using what you think is your gift to see if others recognize it too.

Study 7 Love Builds Up 1 Corinthians 13 and 14

From the earlier chapters of this letter, it does not sound as if the meetings of the church of God in Corinth were happy occasions. The church thought they were doing well (4:8), but from the issues Paul dealt with in chapters 1-6, they sound disorderly and divided. At the start of his letter Paul appealed to the church of God in Corinth to agree with one another, so that there may be no divisions among them and that they would be perfectly united in mind and thought (1:10). They were competitively comparing their favourite role models – Paul, Apollos, Peter, even Christ (chapters 1 to 4:6), were tolerating shocking immorality (chapter 5), had lawsuits within the fellowship (chapter 6), some used prostitutes and some were being arrogant and judgmental about Paul (4:18, 9:3). In answering questions from their letter to him, Paul gave the general principle “Nobody should seek their own good, but the good of others” (10:24) and illustrated this from his own lifestyle (chapter 9).

The Corinthian church seemed to have a range of opinions on sexual morality, singleness and marriage (chapters 6 and 7) and on eating food offered to idols on public occasions and when dining with their pagan friends (chapters 8 and 10). Paul quoted four times what may have been a favourite phrase of the believers in Corinth “Everything is permissible” (6:12, 10:23), answering that not everything is beneficial or constructive. He reminded them their bodies were members of Christ himself (6:15). Their sharing of the bread and wine to remember the death of Jesus should have reminded them that they were one body (10:17). Paul wrote of the divisions that showed up in their behavior at the Lord’s Supper (11:18-34). They were humiliating those who had nothing (11:22) and many were not recognizing the body of the Lord (11:29-30).

In chapter 11 Paul wrote about the church’s meetings and used the verb “to come together” 5 times (11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34). Paul continued to write about the church as it met together as a body in chapter 12. It is likely they had asked Paul about spiritual gifts, possibly asking which were the most desirable. Paul wrote that the Holy Spirit gave different gifts just as he determines, to be used for the common good (12:7). The different parts of the body are all useful and necessary. God has combined the parts of the body so that there should be no division in the body but that its parts should have equal concern for each other (12:24-25). To summarise, **read 1 Corinthians 12:27-31**.

Q1. When the person reading the letter from Paul to the church of God in Corinth reached the sentence we now call chapter 12 verse 31, what do you think the church expected Paul to write next?

Read 1 Corinthians 13

Q 2. Which of the gifts on Paul’s lists in 12:8-10 and 27-30 are included in 13:1-3? If people have these gifts and have no love, what is the result?

Q 3. From 13:1-7, find 7 things love is or does, and 8 things love is not or does not.

Q 4. Take any example of bad behavior in the church of God in Corinth (try 1:11-12 or 3:1-4 and 18-21 or 4:8-10 and 18-21 or 5:1-6 or 6:1-9 or 6:15-19 or 11:17-22) and describe how the situation would change if they followed Paul’s teaching in 13:4-7.

Q 5. In 13:8-9, what three things will end? From verses 10-12, why will they end? What three things will remain (13:13)?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:1-25

Notes:

- In 14:3 Paul wrote: “Everyone who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening...” and in 14:12 “Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church”. The two related Greek words translated in the NIV as “strengthening” and “build up” in 14:3, 12 and 26 are also translated in 14:4, 5 and 17 as “edifies/edified”. Paul introduced the idea of building up in 8:1 “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” and used the word again in 10:23 “not everything is constructive”. The noun literally means “a building” (Paul used it in 3:9 “you are God’s building”) and the verb means “to build a house”.
- The noun “tongue” (used in 1 Corinthians 14:2 and throughout the chapter, also Acts 2:1-12, 10:42-46 and 19:6, the start of Paul’s stay in Ephesus) pictorially means another language and can also mean the literal tongue (e.g. Luke 1:64). A different Greek noun, “language/s”, is used in 14:10, in 14:8 where it is translated “sound” and in 14:11, translated “meaning”. If you enjoy finding out the meaning of Greek words, try <http://www.biblehub.com> and choose Interlinear from the menu.

Q 7. Explain what you think Paul meant by:

- speaking in a tongue or tongues (See 14:2, 4, 6-11).
- prophecy (See 14:3-4).

Q 8. Paul wrote in 12:7 that “to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good”. From 14:6-19, explain how speaking in tongues can be not for the common good. What do you understand by 14:13? See also 14:5.

Note: 14:21 is from Isaiah 28:11-12. Isaiah warned the Northern Kingdom (Israel or Ephraim, Isaiah 28:1) that the Assyrian army was coming but the unbelieving people seemed too drunk to understand the danger. They told Isaiah he was talking to them as if they were children (Isaiah 28:9). The quotation is God’s reply. The Assyrians, people with foreign lips and strange tongues, destroyed the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC. There is no record of the people of the Northern Kingdom repenting or returning from exile. God used the foreign speech of the Assyrians to speak to unbelieving people.

Q 9. How does Paul’s quotation from Isaiah in 1 Corinthians 14:21 help explain the negative effect of tongues without interpretation on unbelievers who will not listen to God? When used in the church, how is the gift of prophecy a sign for unbelievers who will listen to God?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

Note: Verses 34-35. The Greek word for “Keep quiet/stop speaking/silence/silent” is used in 14:28, 30 and 34. The word for “speak” is used in 14:29, 34, 35, 39. The meaning of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 (and of 1 Timothy 2:11-15) has been debated by Christians for nearly 2000 years. Paul spoke of women praying and prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11:5. In his letter to the believers in Rome, most probably written during a visit to Corinth, Paul showed how he valued Phoebe, a deaconess or servant of the church in Corinth’s port of Cenchrea (Romans 16:1-2) and Priscilla and her husband Aquila, Paul’s fellow workers in Corinth and Ephesus, who risked their lives for him and instructed Apollos in their home (Romans 16:3-4, Acts 18:26). Paul praised and greeted other women in Rome who worked hard for the Lord, including his dear friend Persis (Romans 16:6, 12). Please consult the wisdom of others on 1 Corinthians 14:35-36, (e.g. Hays, Richard (1997), Taylor, Mark (2014) and Thiselton, Anthony (2006)), but spend most of your time studying the instruction and encouragement in the rest of 1 Corinthians chapters 13 and 14.

Q 10. If the church of God in Corinth carried out Paul's instructions in 14:26-33 and 40, describe what their meetings would be like. Who would speak? (see especially 14:26, 31 and 11:4-5). Who should choose not to speak and why? (see 14:28, 30-33).

Q 11. What command of the Lord (14:37) has Paul written in 1 Corinthians 14 to anyone who thinks they are a prophet or spiritual?

To Think About: The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Are we living by the Spirit and not being conceited or provoking and envying each other (Galatians 5:25-26)? Do we value meeting together, gaining strength, encouragement, comfort and instruction from people who are gifted by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:3, 31)? Are we following the way of love and eagerly desiring gifts of the Spirit which build others up? Pray about these things.

Study 8 God Raised Jesus, He will Raise us Also 1 Corinthians 15 and 16

In his letter to the church of God in Corinth Paul spoke of the day when Christ will come and of God's judgement. In his introduction (1:7-8) Paul wrote: "You do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ". They were like builders who should carefully choose building materials because the Day would test the quality of each person's work (3:10-15). When the Lord comes, he will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of our hearts. At that time, each will receive his or her praise from God (4:5). The church looked forward to the Lord's coming every time they shared the Lord's Supper (11:26).

In chapter 5 Paul rebuked their pride in a scandalous case of sexual immorality in their fellowship. He told them to discipline the man involved so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord (5:5). It was their responsibility to discipline people inside the church; they should leave God to judge those outside the church (5:12-13). It was also their responsibility to settle lawsuits between people in the church; Paul gave a surprising reason for this - believers will judge the world and judge angels (6:1-3).

Immediately before his arrival in Corinth, Paul had addressed philosophers and lawyers in Athens, saying God "has set a day on which he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all people by raising him from the dead." When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered..." (Acts 17:31-32). Many Greek philosophers taught that the spirit (or soul) of a person was more important than the body, since the body decayed at death but the spirit lived on. But Paul emphasized the importance of our bodies now and in the future "The body is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also" (6:13-14).

Early in his letter (4:6, 18-19, 5:2) Paul used the Greek word for "puffed up" (also translated arrogant or proud) to describe the Corinthians. They thought they were different from all other believers - Paul said "For what makes you different from anyone else?" (4:7). It seems the Corinthians were fond of saying "Everything is permissible for me" (6:12, 10:23). Paul knew that some believers in Corinth were contentious and wanted to develop their own practices (11:16). He instructed them on their behaviour when meeting together, ending by saying "Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command" (14:36-37). Next Paul dealt with the most serious change which some of the Corinthian believers wanted to make to the message about Jesus.

Some worldly believers in Corinth were changing the biblical message to suit their Greek culture, saying we will not have resurrection bodies (15:12). We can be thankful that Paul heard of this bad mistake, since there is much we can learn from Paul's response to their error in 1 Corinthians 15.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-34

Q 1. What had Paul preached to the Corinthians when he was with them, what had the other apostles preached (15:1-7, 11) and what had the Corinthians believed (15:1-2,11)?

Notes:

- 15:3-6. The first importance of Christ's death for our sins, that he definitely was dead and definitely was resurrected and appeared to believers and that this was predicted in the Old Testament is clear from the first day the good news was proclaimed in the Holy Spirit's power – see Acts 2:29-38, Acts 3:12-19, Acts 4:8-12, Acts 5:29-32 and Acts 10:39-43.
- 15:6-7. We would not have known that the Lord Jesus appeared to 500 people at once, or to James, unless Paul had told us, as these appearances are not recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. We understand James here to be the eldest of Lord's brothers (Mark 6:3). Just months before the resurrection Jesus' brothers did not believe in him (John 7:5); after the resurrection they were among the early believers in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14). James became a leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17, 15:13).
- 15:3. Paul emphasized he was passing on good news about Jesus that he had received. In 11:23 Paul also said "For I received from the Lord what I passed on to you..." when talking about the Lord's Supper. In 11:2 Paul praised the Corinthians for "holding on to the traditions (or alternatively teachings) just as I passed them on to you".

To Think About: We have received the teachings of the Lord and the apostles passed on to us in the New Testament. We have the New Testament passed on to us in our own language because of the work of other believers. Probably you believed in Jesus when other believers passed the good news on to you. Are we passing on the truths that we learn from the bible to others?

Q 2. From 15:12, what were some of the Corinthian believers saying? If what they said was true, what would be the results? See 15:13-19.

Notes:

- 15:20 and 23. Firstfruits are the part of the harvest which ripens and is gathered first, showing that more will be harvested when ripe. In the Old Testament, firstfruits were offered to God – see Appendix Study 8.
- 15:21-23. For more on the comparison between Adam and Christ, see Appendix Study 8.
- 15:25, 27-28. Psalm 8:6 and Psalm 110 :1 tell us it is God's plan to put everything under Jesus' feet. Middle Eastern kings were pictured with their foot on their enemy's neck to demonstrate authority. For more on these verses, see Appendix Study 8.

Q 3. From 15:20-28, summarise God's plan as written in the bible from Genesis chapter 3 to Revelation.

To Think About: When you have time, read Ephesians 1:19-23 and 2:1-10. God raised Jesus and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion. God's power in us who believe is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ. God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church. We too were dead but God made us alive with Christ, raised us up and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus - and there is more to come! This is grace.

Notes:

- 15:29. People have discussed the meaning of this verse for nearly 2000 years. The phrase the NIV translates "what will they do" can also be translated "what good will it do them". Paul did not say whether this practice was good or bad, just that some people did it. The Corinthians knew what Paul meant; we are not sure.
- 15:32. Paul was quoting Isaiah 22:13. Through Isaiah God asked the people in Jerusalem to repent of their idol worship and self-reliance, and warned them the Assyrian Empire would attack Jerusalem. The people responded "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!".
- 15:33. Paul was quoting a Greek proverb.

Q 4. From 15:30-34:

- how did belief in the resurrection affect Paul's behaviour?
- why had some in the church of God at Corinth decided that there is no resurrection of the dead, do you think?

What can we learn from this?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-58

Q 5. From verses 35-53, what will our resurrection body be like?

Q 6. From verses 51-57, how will this happen? See also what Paul wrote to the believers in Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and the Lord's word in Matthew 24:30-31.

Notes:

- 15:40-41. The word translated "splendour" in the NIV is the word "glory", as in 15:43.
- 15:45. The "last Adam" is Jesus - see 15:21-22. The quotation is from Genesis 2:7 "the Lord God formed the man (Adam) from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being". See also John 5:21-27 where Jesus explains that just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. Jesus said "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).
- 15:49. The word for image or likeness (eikon) is the word used in the Greek translation for image in Genesis 1:27 "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them".

- 15:54-55. Paul referred to an amazing prophecy of Isaiah written in Jerusalem in about 700 BC (Isaiah 25:7-8): “On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever” and also of Hosea (Hosea 13:14) “I will deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?”.

Q 7. The last enemy to be destroyed is death (15:26). Then the saying that is written will come true: “death has been swallowed up in victory” (15:54). What does this mean to us?

To Think About: When you have time, read Isaiah 25:6-9 and Revelation 21:1-5. Surely this is our God. Let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.

Q 8. From 15:58, how (and why) should belief in the resurrection affect our behavior?

Read 1 Corinthians 16

Q 9. From verses 1-9, what were Paul’s plans for the future?

Notes:

- 16:1. The words “Now about...” as in 7:1, 25, 8:1 and 12:1 suggest Paul was replying to a question they had asked.
- 16:1-4. We know that about 10 years earlier Paul and Barnabas had taken money from one non-Jewish church (Antioch in Syria) to help the believers in Judea (Acts 11:27-30). Later, when Paul and Barnabas saw the church leaders in Jerusalem, James, Peter and John asked Paul and Barnabas to continue to remember the poor, and Paul was eager to do this (Galatians 2:1, 9-10). The collection mentioned in 16:1 was ambitious, with donations from many non-Jewish churches in what are now Turkey and Greece for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Paul, probably writing from Corinth, described this collection in Romans 15:25-28: “for if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings”. A few years after writing 1 Corinthians, Paul was arrested when he and some Gentile believers took the money collected to Jerusalem (Acts 24:17).
- 16:8. Pentecost falls between mid-May and early June. It was safe for shipping to commence operation in the Mediterranean in May.
- 16:10. Paul had already told them Timothy was coming to Corinth, calling him “my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church” (4:17).
- 16:15. Corinth was the capital of the province of Achaia.

Q 10. From verses 10-18, what can we learn about Timothy, Apollos, Stephanas and his household, Fortunatus and Achaicus? What attitude should the church of God in Corinth have to these people?

Notes:

- 16:19. Ephesus was in the province of Asia. Aquila and Priscilla had been part of the church of God in Corinth at its beginning (Acts 18:1-3), and they were now in Ephesus (Acts 18:19, 26).
- 16:21. We assume Paul used a secretary to write down the letter as he dictated it. For more information see Appendix Study 8.
- 16:22. The word for curse (anathema) was also used in 12:3 “No-one speaking by the Spirit of God says “Jesus be cursed””.

Q 11. From what you have read in this letter, why do you think the church of God in Corinth needed to be on their guard (verse 13)? Why did Paul need to tell them “stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong”?

To Think About: Despite the problems in the church, Paul finished “My love to all of you in Christ Jesus”. 15:14 summarises the whole letter. Do everything in love. We have read some sad things in this letter that happened when believers met together and did not do everything in love. From this letter, think what it would be like when believers met together if they did everything in love. Do we meet with our brothers and sisters and do we do everything in love?

Epilogue

There are many things in this letter that are controversial or difficult to understand. For example, Christians have been discussing aspects of chapters 7 and 14 and the first part of chapter 11 for a very long time. But there is much more that we do understand clearly; many beautiful passages, especially chapters 13 and 15, and passages full of practical information about meeting together with details found nowhere else in the bible (for example chapter 11:17 to 12:30 and 14:1-33). We can be grateful to the church of God in Corinth for asking Paul how to live in a society where idol worship was normal, and about relationships between men and women. Even their failure to do everything in love can help us, as we can learn from their mistakes. Presumably Paul, or Sosthenes, or the church of God in Corinth, kept this letter and did not hide the church’s problems. Paul’s letter encourages us to see that a church with faults is still Christ’s body and God’s church.

So what happened next? You will want to read 2 Corinthians. How did the church respond to Paul’s letter? Did they learn to discipline believers who behaved badly? Did the people who criticized Paul change their attitude, or did they still think other visiting teachers were better than Paul? How was Paul affected by the hardships in Ephesus which he described in 1 Corinthians 4:11-13 and 15:31?? Had he written them another letter that we do not have? How did Paul’s travel plans work out? Had Paul visited Corinth a second time? Did he have to discipline them or did he come in love with a gentle spirit? Did the Corinthians get the collection ready? See if the answers are in 2 Corinthians.

Appendix

Study 1

1 Corinthians 1:19 quoted Isaiah 29:14. In Isaiah 29:13 God said to Israel “These people come near me with their mouth and honour me with their lips but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught”. Jerusalem in Isaiah’s time was threatened by the Assyrian Empire. Instead of trusting God, the leaders used their own wisdom and made an alliance with their old enemy Egypt (Isaiah 30:1-3).

1 Corinthians 1:31 quoted Jeremiah 9:23-24 “Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me...”. Jeremiah prophesied that Israel would be taken captive by the Babylonian Empire because Israel followed gods (Baals) of other nations (Jeremiah 9:12-16). In 10:1-16, Jeremiah explained how foolish it is to worship worthless idols rather than God who founded the world by his wisdom.

1 Corinthians 2:9 quoted Isaiah 64:4 in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, which the Greeks would have used. In a prayer that started in 64:1, Isaiah asked God to act in ways no-one expected. “Since ancient times no-one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you who acts on behalf of those who wait for him”. God answered in 65:1 “I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said “Here am I, here am I”. Paul quoted those words in Romans 10:20 to show God’s plan, which no-one expected, to call people from other nations as well as the Jews.

1 Corinthians 2:16 quoted Isaiah 40:13-14 in the Septuagint. In Hebrew, Isaiah 40:13 says “Who has understood the Spirit (or “mind”) of the Lord?”. Isaiah 40 teaches us we cannot understand the everlasting God. Paul quoted Isaiah 40:13 again in Romans 11:34 as part of a poem we can use to praise God for his wisdom.

Study 5

9:1. The word apostle means sent out with authority to do a special task. It applied particularly to men who had been with Jesus all the time from his baptism by John to his ascension to heaven and who were witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection (see Acts 1:21-26). Paul had seen Jesus our Lord on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-6, 1 Corinthians 15:3-7). The Lord spoke to him in a vision while Paul was in Corinth (Acts 18:9). Paul was certainly a powerful witness to Jesus’ resurrection.

9:5. From this verse we learn Peter took his wife (see Mark 2:30) with him as he travelled, and the Lord’s brothers and other apostles also had believing wives. The Corinthians knew this already.

9:6. We learn that Barnabas also worked for a living; though once he had owned a field, he had sold it and given the money to the apostles (Acts 4:36-37). Paul had not taken any money from the church of God in Corinth for his own support. At first he had worked with Priscilla and Aquilla at tent making (Acts 18:1-5). He probably received a gift from the church in Macedonia, Philippi, brought by Silas and Timothy (Acts 18:5, Philippians 4:14-18 and 2 Corinthians 11:8-9). As he wrote the letter, Paul was still working to supply his own needs and those of his companions in Ephesus. See Acts 20:17, 24-25.

9:13 is the 9th “Do you not know...?” question (see Study 3 Notes on 6:12-20). Paul expected the Corinthians to know from scripture about the arrangements for sharing sacrificial offerings in the temple in Jerusalem, over 1000 km away.

9:14 may refer to the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:10 when sending the 12 apostles out to preach and heal in Palestine with no money: “The worker is worth his keep”. Jesus gave similar instructions to the 72 disciples he sent to go in advance of him “Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages” (Luke 10:7).

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-5 Paul was referring to events in the desert after the Israelites left Egypt:

- 1 Corinthians 10:1-2. God guided the Israelites away from Egypt by a moving cloud (Exodus 13:21-22), protected them from Pharaoh’s army by the cloud (Exodus 14:19-20) and parted the Red (or Reed) Sea so they could cross and escape (Exodus chapter 14).
- 1 Corinthians 10:3. God provided daily bread from heaven (manna) for 40 years (Exodus 16). Jesus said he was the true bread from heaven, the bread of life (John 6:31-33, 48-51, 57-59).

- 1 Corinthians 10:4. On two occasions God provided water out of rocks (Exodus 17:1-7, Numbers 20:1-13). Jesus referred to himself as the provider of living water (John 4:10-14 and 7:37-39).
- 1 Corinthians 10:5. Everyone over 20 years who refused to believe that God could lead them into the land he had promised died in the desert during the next 40 years instead of entering the promised land (Numbers 13 and 14, especially 14:29). The writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 3:16 to 4:2 used the same incident to warn us not to follow their example of disobedience (Hebrews 4:11).

In 1 Corinthians 10:6-10 Paul gave lessons from other events in the desert:

- 1 Corinthians 10:7. Forty days after promising to obey all God's commands, the people asked Aaron to make a god for them and Aaron made a golden calf from their jewelry. About 3,000 people were killed that day (Exodus 32 especially verse 6).
- 1 Corinthians 10:8. Local women invited Israelite men to the sacrifices to the local idols, to eat the sacrifices and to be sexual immoral. 24,000 people died of plague (Numbers 25:1-9).
- 1 Corinthians 10:9. The people spoke against God and Moses saying "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!". The Lord sent venomous snakes and many Israelites died. When they repented, the Lord told Moses to make a bronze snake and lift it up on a pole; anyone who was bitten and looked at the bronze snake lived (Numbers 21:4-9). Jesus quoted this incident in John 3:14 saying "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life".
- 1 Corinthians 10:10. It is not certain which of the many times the Israelites grumbled that Paul had in mind. Possibly it is the event in Numbers chapter 16 when over 250 community leaders members challenged the authority of Moses and Aaron, saying the whole community was holy and that Moses and Aaron were setting themselves up and lording it over the community. Moses became very angry and said he had not taken so much as a donkey from them. God sent fire to destroy the community leaders. Then the whole community grumbled against Aaron and Moses. 14,700 people died of plague before Aaron could make atonement for them.

In each case, setting their hearts on evil things after experiencing God's salvation, guidance, protection and provision and promising to obey Him led to severe punishment. Paul wrote twice (1 Corinthians 10:6 and 11) that these things happened to them as examples for us. Paul expected both the Jewish and non-Jewish believers - and us - to know Jewish history and to learn lessons from it.

Study 8

15:20 and 23. Firstfruits are the part of the harvest which ripens and is gathered first, showing that more will be harvested when ripe. In the Old Testament, the firstfruits of the spring grain harvest were offered to God as a special gift on the day after the Sabbath (our Sunday) during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover (Leviticus 23:4-14). Paul wrote that Jesus is our Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7). In 1 Corinthians 15:20 and 23 he said that Christ's resurrection is like the offering of firstfruits on the first day of the week after Passover. Christ was raised on the first day of the week after Passover (Mark 16:1-2). When Christ comes, those who belong to him will be resurrected-it is our turn (15:23).

15:21-23. Paul compared the action of the one disobedient man who represents humanity, Adam, and brought us death and the one obedient man who brought us life in Romans 5:12-21, ending "just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord".

15:25. Psalm 110 :1 says “The Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”. This verse was quoted by Jesus (Matthew 22:41-46), Peter (Acts 2:32-36) and the writer of the letter to the Hebrews (Hebrews 1:13), so we know David was writing a prophecy about Jesus.

15:27. Psalm 8:4-6 says: “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the work of your hands; you put everything under his feet”. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews quoted this verse to explain that Jesus shared our humanity and now is crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death (Hebrews 2:6-9).

16:21. We assume Paul used a secretary to write down the letter as he dictated it. From Romans 16:22 we know the name of the man (Tertius) who wrote down the letter to the Romans, most likely written by Paul from Corinth on one of his visits. Paul referred to his distinctive handwriting in Galatians 6:11, Colossians 4:18 and 2 Thessalonians 3:17, where he called it “the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write”.

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