

# 1 CORINTHIANS



*Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.*

*1 Corinthians 12:27*

## SPIRITUAL MATURITY

(12 BIBLE STUDIES)

**EXAMINATION APPLICATION**

**BIBLE STUDIES**

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## THE SMALL PRINT

THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Co

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### **Your Commitment**

I would encourage you to make a commitment to attending your group regularly. I realise that sometimes there are things that get in the way, but do prioritise studying the Bible with other. This will involve sacrifice, and effective use of your time, but I really believe that in doing so you will get the most out of studying the Bible and praying together in your small group.

### **Your Contribution**

What you put into the group is going to determine what you get out of the group. I encourage you to contribute honestly to the discussion and workings of the group. I understand people come from different backgrounds with unique personalities & life experiences. But, we all have a big part to play, so I encourage you to be fully present and take ownership of your group.

### **Your Preparation**

These materials are primarily for use in preparing and/or leading group discussions, but they will also be useful in keeping your thoughts together in one place. The materials provide you with the passage so that you can identify and highlight recurring themes and note down your own thoughts and questions. Also, the materials include questions designed to provoke thought, and help you reflect on what the passage meant, both at the time it was written, and also what it means for us now.

I would encourage you to make good use of these materials, as doing so will help you contribute and get the most out of the group discussions. The materials are, however, only “tools” – they are there to help you, and not to restrict you, or force you to think in a certain manner. I want to see God speaking to you through these passages, and if the questions or notes don't help you, simply don't use them!

I have also included within these materials an introduction to the book. Make of this what you will, but I hope that it is helpful in getting you started with these studies!

### **Your Leadership**

Here are some useful pointers in how to lead your Bible study group. Be aware that included in this study guide are more questions than you can possibly ask and/or answer in one session. They are not designed to be used rigidly, and there will rarely be a need to ask every question! Make sure that you spend some time praying at the start and ensure you read & re-read the passages as much as possible. In relation to the passages, then consider the suggested questions with an open mind. There is rarely “a single right answer” and I would encourage you to share your thoughts with your group.

I have also included a number of quotations from relevant Christian literature, most of which are readily available online if you want to do further thinking or study. My prayer is that as you study together you would grow to love Jesus and experience Him more deeply.

I would appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how to make these materials even better!

*Steve McClure  
Spring 2019*

## INTRODUCING 1 CORINTHIANS

Corinth was a very important and cosmopolitan city. It was intellectually alert, materially prosperous, but morally bankrupt. It was a prestigious centre from which the gospel could radiate out to the surrounding districts. In Corinth there was a large floating population, with merchants and travellers staying a few days and then going their way. Preaching would be sure of being circulated widely.

Paul visited Corinth on his second missionary journey as recorded in Acts 18:1-18 and visits again on his third journey retraced his steps in some of the cities he had previously visited including Corinth. During his first stint in Corinth Paul met a couple there by the name of Priscilla & Aquila (See also 1 Corinthians 16:19, Romans 16:3 & 2 Timothy 4:19). He lived and worked with them until Silas and Timothy joined him and he was then able to devote all of his time to preaching. Paul spent over a year in Corinth before sailing for Syria en-route to Ephesus. Priscilla & Aquila went with Paul and he left them working in Ephesus after a short stay. There in Ephesus encountered a learned man from Alexandria called Apollos. There he had been teaching Christianity but he only knew John's baptism. Priscilla and Aquila explained to him the way of God more adequately (Acts 18:24-26). Apollos is eager to travel to Achaia (18:27) and is encouraged to do so by the brothers. Corinth was one of the major cities in Achaia and Apollos is soon working there (19:1). In Corinth Apollos proved from the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ but while his message was the same as Paul's his style would have been quite different (2:2-4, Acts 18:24-28). The difference in presentation was enough to cause a certain partisanship with some of the Corinthians. We see the evidence of Apollos work in Corinth through his frequent mentions often in the letter of 1 Corinthians (1:12, 3:4-6, 3:22, 4:6 & 16:12).

A large part of the letter is dealing with problems in the church, and questions from the Corinthians. Chloe's household brought news of factions within the church (1:11). It seems the church had written Paul a letter (7:1), presumably brought by Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (16:17). The situation was serious and Paul decided to send Timothy to them (4:17, 16:10-11) even before he had finished the letter. The situation worsened although the nature of this serious dispute is unclear. When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians he had clearly made a visit in addition to the one when he visited the church but this was likely to have been after 1 Corinthians (4:19). Thus Paul's knowledge of recent affairs at Corinth would have been from Chloe's household (1:11-18) and from the letter the church wrote to him (7:1). The second visit was clearly painful and the tone of 1 Corinthians would not make sense otherwise. It's likely therefore that the situation implied in 1 Corinthians deteriorated after receipt of the letter and thus the painful visit became necessary. The situation remained unresolved and so Paul wrote another letter, a severe and costly letter (2 Cor 2:4, 7:8). If unsuccessful this letter (probably lost) would probably have caused a final breakdown between Paul and the church. Titus had taken the letter and he returned via Macedonia and Troas. Paul impatient to know how the letter had been received went to Troas but didn't find Titus there. Paul then crossed to Macedonia (2 Cor 2:12-13) and Titus met him with the news that all was well (2 Cor 7:6-7). Out of his great joy and relief Paul wrote 2 Corinthians and almost certainly visited the church soon afterwards.

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is packed with teaching on a whole range of issues: below I whet your appetite for some of these which are fleshed out in the studies to follow:

**(1) Divisions:** Paul was troubled by the tendency of some in the church to make the break with pagan society as indefinite as possible. This was so important to Paul that he spent six chapters dealing with

it before even touching on the issues that they had written to him about (7:1). Paul was troubled by the divisions within the church. Parties had been formed attaching themselves to the names Paul, Apollos, Peter and even that of Christ. Paul clearly regarded this as very serious. His elaborate argument in chapters 1-4 is based around the idea that all of us are instruments of God. We each have different roles (as per the metaphor from agriculture, some water, some planting & some reap) but only God gives the growth. It's easy to put leaders on pedestals but Paul says that the foundation upon which to build must be Jesus Christ. He warns that we should be careful how we build and that what we build should be worthy of the foundation. Are we building with something worldly or worthless? Or are we building with something of value, something of God that will last? The purpose of the one who plants, the one who plants and the one who reaps is the same; we each have different contributions but one purpose. Paul affirms that we are God's fellow workers; he also affirms that it's God's field and God's building. Workers and those they serve are mere instruments. All is of God and all belong to God!

**(2) Sexual Impurity:** Paul then raises the case of incest and their response to it. Some members had gone to law with others and Paul felt the need to speak into that. Paul also speaks of sexual impurity and the need to stamp it out. First and foremost 1 Corinthians is a letter focused on their conduct and his encouragement for them to live in a way that was worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**(3) Food offered to Idols:** Paul then addresses the issue of food offered to idols. Though it might sound irrelevant to us the principles he sets out here are still important. Rather than abusing their freedom Paul's wants them to use it to build others up. We are not to exercise our freedom in such a way that we cause others to stumble (8:9, 10:32). While food offered to idols may be a matter of indifference, sharing in idol worship at idol temples was not and Paul says we should be careful to flee idolatry. Paul strongly warns them (9:24-10:13) using examples from their history and tells them: *"if you think you are standing firm be careful that you don't fall"* (10:12-13).

**(4) Order and Worship:** Next Paul addresses various issues related to the Corinthian church's corporate worship: namely the role of women in the church (c11:1-16), the Lord's Supper (c10:14-22 & 11:17-34) and spiritual gifts (c12-14). The situations were a little different from what we face today but still the applications are relevant for us. By far the biggest teaching block here is on the issue of spiritual gifts. It seems that there was some kind of spiritual one-upmanship going on regarding who had the more spectacular and supernatural gifts. Paul writes to show them that it is the Holy Spirit who distributes the gifts and all are given for the common good. Indeed Paul emphasises the importance of those gifts which build others up and in chapter 14 champions prophecy over the gift of tongues.

**(5) The Resurrection:** Paul begins with the cross and ends with the resurrection. The two are fundamental to living a godly life and to addressing the issues in Corinth. Paul says that if the resurrection did not happen then their faith is futile. The resurrection is the guarantee that we too will be raised with Christ and that Jesus will come back to renew this world. This world and our bodies now are the seed of something infinitely greater to come. Life now has many disappointments, hardships and heartaches. But our hope in Christ holds out something better to come.

To God be the Glory,

Steve McClure, Spring 2019

**STUDY 1 – 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-2:5 – THE POWER OF GOD**

**INTRODUCTION:** Paul begins his letter with some introductions and thanksgiving for the grace given to the Corinthians. We soon see some of Paul's reasons for writing as he addresses divisions in the church and a stunning explanation of the foolishness of the cross of Christ.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** What is your experience of cliques and factions (either from the inside or the outside) forming within groups that you have been part of? What causes such factions (e.g. consider the personalities people follow) and what is the impact of them on the rest of the group?

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**THANKSGIVING (1:1-9):** Paul we know but who is Sosthenes (v1 & Acts 18:17)? What do you notice about how Paul introduces himself and what he says about those he is writing to (v1-3)? Why is Paul thankful for the grace given to them in Christ? Which of these truths would also apply to each of us?

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**DIVISIONS (1:10-17):** Why does Paul feel the need to appeal for agreement and unity among the Corinthians (following Chloe's report in v10)? What could have caused such divisions in the church (v11-12) around Apollos, Peter & Paul? What sort of quarrels would these have created (v11)?

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Why is Paul so glad that he did not baptise many of them (v13-16)? Paul says he did not preach with wisdom and eloquence: why might the cross of Christ have been emptied of its power if he had (v17)?

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**THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS (1:18-25):** The Corinthians apparently loved their wisdom, intelligence and philosophy: how does the message of the Cross turn all of this on its head? In what ways have you experienced the message of the cross as the power of God (v18)?

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Why was Christ-crucified a *stumbling-block* for the Jews and *foolishness* to the Gentiles (v22-23)? What are the implications of the *foolishness of God* being wiser than human wisdom and the *weakness of God* being stronger than human strength (v25)?

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**CHRIST CRUCIFIED (1:26-31):** What are the implications of why God did and didn't choose the Corinthians (v26-29)? In what ways is it natural to want to boast and why does God not want us to have this option (v31)? How do you understand Paul's incredible statement that Christ has become for us *wisdom from God, our righteousness, holiness and redemption* (v30)?

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**THE SPIRIT'S POWER (2:1-5):** How have the truths of 1:18-31 shaped the way that Paul operated amongst the Corinthians? What might it mean to resolve to know nothing by Christ crucified (v2)? What surprises you about the way that Paul describes himself, his message and his preaching (v1-3)?

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How does it encourage you that faith does not rest on how good we are at sharing the gospel but on a demonstration of the Spirit's power (v4-5)?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER:** In what ways does this passage encourage you trust in Christ alone rather than on particular leaders or human wisdom? How might this chapter help you to be bolder in sharing your faith and seeking to make disciples of others?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Talk together about the dangers associated with factions, division and disunity within our churches and communities. Pray into this and ask for unity and a focus not on leaders but on Christ. Thank God for His design to use the weak and foolish things to work out His purposes.

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 CORINTHIANS 1:25**

**STUDY 2 – 1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-3:23 – THE WISDOM OF GOD**

**INTRODUCTION:** Paul continues his teaching about the wisdom of God and how what might be perceived as foolishness is actually the wisdom of God. He transitions from the substance of the message to those who share that message as he helps us see that we co-labour with God.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** Where do you see yourself on your journey of maturity (not-yet Christian, infant, adult or parent) and why? What might be the characteristics of each stage? What things have helped (or could in the future help) you move between the different stages?

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**WISDOM FROM GOD (2:6-16):** What is the difference between the wisdom of this age and the wisdom of God? Why has this wisdom been kept a hidden mystery (v7)? What is this Holy Spirit's role in revealing this wisdom (v10), the thoughts of God (v11) and spiritual realities (v12-13)?

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How does Paul understand the difference that the Spirit makes in our lives (v14-16) in terms of how we perceive that which comes from the Spirit? To what extent can you relate to Paul's statement that if we have the Spirit then we have the mind of Christ to instruct us (v16)?

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**SPIRITUAL MATURITY (3:1-4):** On what basis does Paul say that the Corinthians were *still worldly* and *mere infants in Christ* (v1)? Why are jealousy, quarrelling and divisions evidence of their worldliness and immaturity? How would you distinguish between milk and solid food and at what stage do we need them? What is your experience of either giving or receiving such spiritual food?

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**WORKERS IN GOD'S FIELD (3:5-9):** Paul uses the metaphor of being fellow workers in God's field (v9): in what ways are God's people like a field being planted? How do you understand the different roles there are to play in helping others (i.e. planting, watering & reaping)? Why is there such freedom in knowing that only God can give growth (v6-7)?

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**BUILDING WITH CARE (3:10-15):** Paul now employs a second metaphor of a building (v9): what do you think Paul means when he says we should build with care (v10-11)? What does it look like to lay a foundation upon Christ (as opposed to other possible foundations)?

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What might Paul mean with the distinction between building with *gold, silver, costly stones* and building with *wood, hay or straw* (v12-13)? What are the consequences of building with the wrong materials (v13-15)? What are your thoughts on the concept of rewards (see also v8)?

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**A TEMPLE FOR THE SPIRIT (3:16-17):** The final metaphor Paul uses is about we ourselves being God's temple: what is the significance that the Spirit lives within us (v16)? In what ways might we destroy God's temple (v17)? How do you respond to Paul's strong warning against such people?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER (v18-23):** In these verses how does Paul draw a line under their boasting in human leaders? In what ways is Paul right in saying that "all things theirs are yours (v21)? How has this passage encouraged you to move (and help others to move) towards maturity?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Thank God that through His Spirit He has revealed spiritual realities and that which we otherwise could not understand. Ask God to help you keep your eyes on Christ rather than on human leaders or worldly wisdom. Ask God to help you to build diligently with care.

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 CORINTHIANS 3:10**

**STUDY 3 – 1 CORINTHIANS 4 – SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP**

**INTRODUCTION:** Paul is very personal here as he talks about the nature of true spiritual leadership. He says that spiritual leaders are judged by God who exposes the motives of the heart. It had not been at all easy for Paul. He urges them to remember that they have many guardians but few Fathers.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** What qualities does the world seek in a leader (e.g. world of politics, business or sport)? What would you say are the characteristics of a good spiritual leader? As you compare your answers to these questions what things were the same and what were different?

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**JUDGED BY GOD ALONE (v1-5):** How does Paul ask the Corinthians to regard them and how does this contrast with talk of division and putting leaders on pedestals (v1-2)? Why do you think Paul cares so little about how others judge him (v3)? In what ways might we also be guilty of this?

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Paul then tells us that it is the Lord who judges (v4): how is the Lord's judgment of us both a challenge and an encouragement (v5)? Why does this help Paul to get on with the task of ministry? What steps can we take to be influenced more by a desire to please God and less by trying to please others?

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**APPLIED TO PAUL & APOLLOS (v6-7):** In what ways were the Corinthians going *beyond what is written* (v6a)? How might doing so lead to us being *puffed up* (v6b) in regard to another? In their pride what were they failing to appreciate about how things really were (v7)?

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**WHO WOULD WANT TO BE A LEADER (v8-13):** Paul compares the lives the Corinthians were living (v8) and that of the apostles (v9-12): what was it about their words and behaviour that caused Paul to draw this distinction (note the words *already* and *reign* that he uses several times)?

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Why might Paul feel like God had put them on display at the end of the procession (v9)? To what extent is suffering part and parcel of living and serving Christ? How have you suffered for your faith and for your willingness to lead and serve others?

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**FATHERS & GUARDIANS (v14-17):** What is the difference between a Father and a guardian? How does Paul use the fact that they had few Fathers to urge them to imitate him (v16)? What role was Timothy (whom Paul was sending to them) to play in helping them to his way of life in Christ (v17)?

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**ARROGANT PEOPLE (v18-21):** How do you understand Paul's assertion that some of them had *become arrogant* (v18-19)? How does Paul intend to deal with such people? In what sense, is the *Kingdom of God not a matter of talk but of power* (v20)?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER:** Thinking back to where we started; what things have you learned from this passage about the nature of true spiritual leadership? What is it going to take for you to become a faithful servant leader, father and fool for Christ to those around us?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Thank God for those who have been Mothers and Fathers to you in Christ Jesus and ask Him to help you to play that role for others. Think of ways together that you could bless and encourage your leaders rather than criticise or judge them.

**MEMORY VERSES: 1 CORINTHIANS 4:15-16**

**STUDY 4 – 1 CORINTHIANS 5-6 – FREE TO HONOUR GOD**

**INTRODUCTION:** We now move from the issues of division addressed in chapters 1-4 to a number of moral issues, namely incest (5:1-13), lawsuits against one another (6:1-11) and immorality (6:12-20). In each of these issues we see the importance of being God's children and temples of the Holy Spirit.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** What kind of issues arising in the church would necessitate the use of church discipline (see Matthew 18:15-17) potentially leading to someone's exclusion? Why is this so important and what do you imagine would be the challenges in working this through?

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**THE MATTER OF INCEST (5:1-5):** The Corinthians are tolerating sexual immorality (specifically a man sleeping with his step mother): how does Paul go deal with this issue through what he says in these verses? How do you respond to Paul's claim that they should have put him out of the church?

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What do you think Paul means when he then tells them to hand the man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (v4-5)? Do you think that Paul is hoping that he will repent (5b) or that the man will suffer some consequence for his actions (destruction of the flesh)?

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**YEAST IN THE DOUGH (5:6-8):** The Corinthian were proud and happy to ignore this sin: how does Paul's illustration of the yeast and the dough help us see the contagiousness of sin? What do you think it might look like to *get rid of the old yeast* so that they could be a *new unleavened batch* (v7)? How does the reference to the Passover (see Exodus 12:14-20) help make his point?

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**DO NOT ASSOCIATE (5:9-13):** How do you understand Paul's instruction to not associate with those the sexually immoral? In what ways might this have been misunderstand how does Paul now clarify that he is talking about such people who also claim to be brothers and sisters?

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**THE MATTER OF DISPUTES (6:1-6):** Why does Paul ask whether they dare to take their disputes before an ungodly court rather than before the Lord's people (v1)? What do you make of Paul's associated reasoning about the fact that we will judge the world and even angels (v2-5)? How might taking another believer to court have a negative impact on our witness for Christ (v6)?

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Why might lawsuits be evidence that they had already been defeated (v7)? How do you respond to the list of those who will not inherit the Kingdom of God (v9-110)? What does Paul say is our new identity in Christ (v11)? How does this section fit with the section before and after?

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**THE MATTER OF IMMORALITY (6:12-20):** Finally Paul returns to the matter of immorality: how does Paul temper their assertion that we are free to do what we want (v12)? Why is what we do with our bodies so important? What steps do we need to take to free from sexual immorality (v18)? What do you understand the significance of being bought at a price and a temple of the Holy Spirit?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER:** What do these passages have to teach us about our freedom in Christ and what is beneficial for us, for the church and for those we are seeking to minister to?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Thank God that we have been transformed by the good news about Jesus. Ask God to help you deal with sin in your own life and to respond with love to others who are struggling also. Pray that God would help you to confront and take action with others where necessary.

**MEMORY VERSES: 1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20**

## STUDY 5 – 1 CORINTHIANS 7 – MARRIAGE AND SINGLENESS

**INTRODUCTION:** Paul continues writing about the subject of sex. Rather than dealing the abuses of sex (as in chapters 5-6), Paul now seeks to put forward a positive portrayal of both marriage and singleness following question raised by the Corinthians themselves.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** What would you say are some reasons why both marriage and singleness can be difficult and/or painful? What would you say is the response of the Church to marriage and singleness? How would you critique that response? What is your experience of struggling in this area?

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**A QUESTION ABOUT SEX (v1-6):** Why do you think the Corinthians wrote saying that it was better to abstain from sex (v1)? How does the word *but* (v2) help us understand the extent to which Paul agrees with them? What is Paul to be saying to those who are married about fulfilling their *marital duties* (v3-6)? Why is Paul's emphasis on *giving* rather than *receiving* important in terms of sex?

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**THE GOODNESS OF SINGLENESS (v7-16):** Paul now turns to singleness and he says that both are gifts (the word is *Charisma* which is literally a *grace gift* from God). What is the significance of this description (see usage in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 as a gift to build others up)? On what basis does Paul say that it is good to be single (v7-9)? How does this contrast with what we see in Gen 1-3 and Eph 5?

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In a world where divorce rates are ever rising and society is working hard to make divorce laws even easier how would you contrast Paul's teaching here on divorce/separation (v10-16)?

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**IDOLISING SEX AND MARRIAGE:** Our society idolises sex: why is this and how does this impact our level of contentment with being single? To what extent would you say that Jesus or Paul (both of whom did not marry) were less complete or whole than if they had married (Hebrews 4:15 & 1 Peter 2:22)?

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**THE CALL TO REMAIN (v17-24):** Three times (v17,20 & 24) Paul says that we should remain in the situation we were in when God called us: in what ways can we grow in contentment about the situation God has placed us in? How do these examples Paul uses (e.g. circumcision/slavery) illustrate this?

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**TIME IS SHORT (v26-31):** Paul says *time is short* (v29) and *the world is passing away* (v31): given that we are now 2,000 years later what does this mean for our attitude towards marriage and family? What are the principles behind what Paul is trying to say here?

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**THE ADVANTAGES OF SINGLENES (v32-39):** What does Paul have to say in these verses about what he sees as the advantages of being single? How specifically does Paul see singleness helping fulfil the ultimate aim of *undivided devotion to the Lord* (v37)?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER:** What steps can we begin to take in order to better glorify God regardless of the situation we find ourselves in? What challenges to our thinking has this passage brought up about marriage and singleness?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Whether single or married, pray for one another that you would each find contentment with the situation God has placed you in and the satisfaction that only He can give. Pray that we would embrace the *gift* that God has given to us and make the most of it for the glory of God.

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 CORINTHIANS 7:7**

**STUDY 6 – 1 CORINTHIANS 8-9 – FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS**

**INTRODUCTION:** In chapter 8, Paul deals with a question about food sacrificed to idols and whether it should be eaten. Paul focuses on *rights* which he places as a lower priority than people. He advocates that we should care for the weaker brother and do all we can to win others for Christ.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** Where do you see the key battlegrounds where people are fighting for their rights in our society? For your own life where do you see your own rights being squeezed? In what circumstances might you be willing to forgo your rights for the greater good?

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**FOOD SACRIFICED TO IDOLS (8:1-13):** In Corinth food sacrificed to idols was sold in the market places and food was often dedicated to *gods* at parties (often held at temples). To what extent can you identify with the opposing views about whether they should or shouldn't eat such food?

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**KNOWLEDGE (1b-6):** How do you understand the distinction Paul draws between knowledge (which puffs up) and love (which builds up)? What is the danger associated with knowledge (v2-3)? What are the things that Paul says *we know* about food sacrificed to idols (v4-6)?

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**LIMITING OUR FREEDOM (v7-13):** For what reasons does Paul argue we should restrict our freedom for the sake of others? If we don't how might we cause a weaker person to *sin* or be *destroyed* (v7-8)? How does Paul see exercising our freedom in this way as sinning against them (v12)?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER:** This issue might not seem relevant for us but the principles are vital: what could be equivalent issues for us? What steps can we take to grow in maturity and be more sensitive about others and how by the exercising of our God-given freedom we might cause them to stumble?

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**RIGHTS & FREEDOMS (9:1-18):** Paul talks at length about his rights as an apostle in the areas of food & drink (v4), relationships (v5-6) and finances (v7-18): how do you understand Paul's description of these freedoms and his defence of them? What impact would such choices have had on Paul?

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**FINANCES (v7-18):** How should Paul's teaching here (determine our provision for those in full-time Christian ministry (esp. v14)? For what reason is Paul so eager to lay down this right for the sake of others (compare with Phil 4:10-20)? What would it take for us to be so consumed by a desire to see the gospel spread that we were even willing to lay down such rights? How do we find a good balance?

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**USING OUR FREEDOM (9:19-23):** The impact of these verses is staggering but it was how Paul lived his life: what might it mean for you to *make yourself a slave to everyone, to win* others for Christ (v19)? Who would be *the Jews, those under the law, those without the law* and *the weak* in your lives (v20-22)? How does Paul understand that doing so will allow him to share in its blessings (v23)?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER (9:24-27):** Paul finishes the chapter with a metaphor about athletes in training for a race: as we lay down our rights how are we like such athletes? How does this section summarise the way that Paul sought to live for the sake of others and to win the prize before him?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Thank God for the example of Paul and all that he was willing to give up for the sake of others and the gospel. Ask God to give you a similar passion for the gospel and willingness to do all that it might take to help and serve others.

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 CORINTHIANS 9:19**

**STUDY 7 – 1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-11:1 – FOR THE GLORY OF GOD**

**INTRODUCTION:** Chapter 10 continues to build on the ideas Paul has developed in chapters 8-9. Idolatry and food sacrificed to idols continue to be in focus as Paul wrestles with the need to learn from our past, to stand firm against temptation and to exercise our freedom or the glory of God.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** What overriding motivations determine people's behaviour? In the last study we thought be motivated by a concern *for the sake of others*: how now do you understand the implications of living for the glory of God?

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**REMEMBERING THE PAST (10:1-5):** Paul finished chapter 9 with the challenge to run in such a way as to get the prize: why here does he not want them to be ignorant (unaware) of the lessons from their past? What things does Paul say that *all* Israel were blessed by (v1b-5)? Why then do you think that with *most* of them (only Joshua and Caleb entered the land) *God was not pleased* (v6)?

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**LEARNING FROM THE PAST (10:6-10):** What failures does Paul want us to avoid here? What steps can we take to ensure that our hearts are not set on evil things (v6), that we are not idolaters (v7), that we are not sexually immoral (v8) and that we don't test God or grumble against Him (v9-10)?

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**STANDING FIRM AGAINST TEMPTATION (10:11-13):** Paul summarises his argument in v1-10 before warning them against complacency: why are we most at risk of *falling* when we think we are doing well (v12)? How does it encourage you to know that we are not alone in our temptations (v13a)?

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To what extent can you relate to God's faithfulness to you in temptation in limiting temptation based on our capacity to endure (v13b)? Have you ever experienced God's way out (or way of escape) when you have been facing a particular temptation (v13c)?

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**THE FEAST (10:14-22):** What kind of things does the image of *fleeing from idolatry* conjure up for you (v14)? In what ways does Paul help us see that what happens at these pagan temples is not as innocent as we might think? Does this negate what Paul said in 8:4 and now here in v20?

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How might we arouse the Lord's jealousy by eating and drinking both of the Lords table and cup and what Paul describes as the table and cup of demons (v20-22)?

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**FREEDOM (10:23-30):** In these verses Paul repeats the ideas he quoted in 6:12 and again counters them with *but not everything is beneficial* (v23): how does Paul uses this principle to guide their exercise of freedom in terms of meet bought in the market (v25-26), eating at an unbelievers house (v27-30)? What examples can you give of similar question of conscience today?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER (10:31-11:1):** Arguably Paul's overriding message here comes in these verses: what do you think it might look like for us to do all things for the glory of God (v31)? How does this priority sit alongside Paul's teaching about not causing others to stumble (v32-33)?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Share together about one or two recent areas of temptation that you have faced. Ask God to encourage you and help you stand firm amidst it. Pray too into some of these thorny lifestyle issues and ask God to help you do all that you do for the sake of the glory of God.

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 CORINTHIANS 10:23**

STUDY 8 – 1 CORINTHIANS 11 – CORPORATE WORSHIP

**INTRODUCTION:** The focus now changes as we turn to corporate worship. In chapter 11 Paul deals with two issues: (1) head coverings and (2) the Lord's Supper. Some of detail here relates to the Corinthian context and so the challenge for us is to lift out principles which we can apply ourselves.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** What is the *big picture* of the issues arising in these verses with regards to head coverings (v2-16) and the Lord's Supper (v17-34)? What is your initial reaction to these things?

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**IMITATION (v1-2):** Paul asks the Corinthians to *follow his example*: how comfortable would you feel in doing that with others and why? Paul asks them to do this *as he followed the example of Christ*: what does that add to the challenge of imitation? For what does Paul praise the Corinthians (v2)?

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**HEADSHIP (v3):** How does Paul define *headship* as expressed in the three relationships mentioned here? How does headship between the Father and the Son help us understand the concept? Headship is a controversial issue (some define *head* as more like *source* but it is hard to deny the implied idea of *authority*): what is your response to headship (see also Ephesians 5:21-33)?

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**HEAD COVERINGS (v4-16):** How does Paul apply the principle of Headship with regard to covering ones head in corporate worship? How does Paul counter balance what he says in v7-9 with v11-12?

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In Corinthian culture a right relationship between a woman and her husband was shown by wearing a veil or wearing her hair up: if this command is rooted in a culture context what could be examples of equivalent practices for expressing this principle?

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**ABUSES (11:17-22):** In this section Paul has nothing to praise them for at all: what would it say if a senior leader deemed your meetings or service as *doing more harm than good* (v17)? What seems to be the issue regarding division (v18-19) and their practices of eating the Lord's Supper (v20-22)? How might difference among the Corinthians demonstrate which have God's approval (v19)?

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**PURPOSE (v23-26):** How does Paul describe the purpose and importance of why we are to celebrate the Lord's Supper? In what ways does the Lord's Supper enable us to proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (v26)? How has your experience of taking the Lord's Supper been meaningful for you?

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**A WORTHY MANNER (v27-34):** Paul now introduces the idea of eating and drinking at the Lord's Supper in an *unworthy manner*: what do you think he means by this? What might it mean to eat & drink without *discerning the body of Christ* (v29)? What is your reaction to Paul's comment in v30 that a lack of discernment has led to many among them feeling weak, ill and even to have fallen asleep?

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How often do you examine yourselves (v28 & 31) before partaking in the Lord's Supper? In light of the whole letter what kind of things do you imagine Paul would have them examine themselves in?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER:** If you take the passage as a whole what is Paul's message about what it might mean to honour God in our worship together? How has this challenged and encouraged you?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Share together about what honours and dishonours God in the context of your church or communities worship. Ask God to help you to imitate Him and express your worship with thankfulness, honour and reverence.

## STUDY 9 – 1 CORINTHIANS 12-13 – SPIRITUAL GIFTS I

**INTRODUCTION:** Paul now turns to the subject of *spiritual gifts* (grace gifts). Paul is eager to stress that these gifts are given as the Spirit determines (we each have different gifts) and always for the benefit of the body of Christ. We will also begin to see the relevance they have for us today.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** What is your understanding and experience of *spiritual gifts*? In Corinth there were 2 groups: (1) those sceptical of the gifts (non-charismatics) and (2) those who over emphasised the gifts (charismatics): how do you think this issue is divisive both for the Corinthians and for us?

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**IGNORANCE & UNITY (12:1-3):** How do you understand the purpose of Paul's test in v3 and what has it got to do with being uninformed (v1) and the fact that they had been involved in idolatry? What do you think the issue was in the church that necessitated such a test?

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**DIVERSITY (12:4-7):** How would you define a spiritual gift? What is Paul saying about the diversity of gifting and why is this so important? What are the implications of *one Spirit* being the source of the distribution of each gift? For what purpose does Paul say that spiritual gifts are given?

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**THE GIFTS (12:8-11):** How would you distinguish between the various gifts mentioned (leave prophecy & tongues until c.14)? Why are we told so little about them (lists in v28, Eph 4:11, 1 Peter 4:10-11 & Rom 12:6-8)? Are there any conclusions we should (or shouldn't) draw from these lists?

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**BAPTISED INTO ONE BODY (12:12-30):** In what sense have we been baptised by one Spirit into one body? What is the significance of the body metaphor in the area of spiritual gifts? What might be happening in Corinth to make Paul speak so pointedly about the importance of all parts of the body?

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**THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY (12:31):** Rhetorically the answer to Paul's questions in v27-30 is *no*: what is the significance of this? Why does Paul place a chapter about love between two chapters on spiritual gifts? In what sense should we *eagerly desire* spiritual gifts (v31) and what are the *greater gifts*? Why is the way of love the *most excellent way* (13:1)?

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**WITHOUT LOVE (13:1-7):** How do you understand Paul's argument that without love he is nothing (v2), gains nothing (v3) and merely a resounding gong (v1)? What would it look like to use a gift without love? How do you respond to Paul's description of the nature of true love (v4-7)?

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**PERFECTION (13:8-13):** In what sense is love superior to spiritual gifts? Will there be spiritual gifts in heaven; why or why not? What does Paul mean by *completeness* and *what is in part*? Why is love the greatest of the three virtues Paul puts forward in v13?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER:** What gifts has the Spirit distributed to you? How can you find out what your gifts are (NB: gifts look different from person to person and for example in Rom 12:6 Paul says to use prophecy *in proportion to your faith*)? How can we be more loving in how we go about exercising our gifts and ensure that their usage is about serving the body rather than personal gratification?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Talk about the implications of what you have learned about spiritual gifts from this study. Encourage one another in the part that you (with the gifting God has given you) play in the body of Christ. Pray that above all you would be characterised by love.

**MEMORY VERSES: 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12**

## STUDY 10 – 1 CORINTHIANS 14 – SPIRITUAL GIFTS II

**INTRODUCTION:** It's important to keep in mind what we have covered in chapters 12-13 as we look more closely at the gifts of prophecy & tongues (including its interpretation). We will think about how to define them and their purpose before considering the implications for their usage in the Body of Christ.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** Before you read chapter 14 have a first stab at the following questions: How would you define the gifts of prophecy (how does it compare with Old Testament prophecy) and tongues (is it more like self-controlled speech or ecstatic speech)? How do interpreted tongues differ from the gift of prophecy? How is prophecy different from teaching?

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**THE WAY OF LOVE (v1):** What does Paul mean here by his instruction to *follow the way of love* (see chapter 13) and to *eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit*? Why does Paul tell them to especially desire prophecy (v1b)? Why is the way of love vital to all that Paul is trying to say to the Corinthians here?

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**EDIFICATION AND INTELLIGIBILITY (v2-12):** What is Paul's chief concern in these verses? How do the gifts of tongues and prophecy differ in the area of building up the church? What's the link between intelligibility and edification? How should we eagerly desire (v1) and excel (v12) in gifts that build up the Church? To what extent would you describe yourself as eager for gifts of the Spirit (v12)?

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**INSTRUCTIONS FOR TONGUES (v13-19):** What instructions does Paul lay down for someone who is speaking in tongues? What does it mean to pray or sing with the Spirit (v14)? What are the implications of Paul's insistence upon intelligibility for the use of his own gift of tongues (see esp. v18-19); i.e. when is it for public or private usage and why?

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**BELIEVERS OR UNBELIEVERS (v20-25):** In what ways were the Corinthians being *childish* (v20)? How should we understand the idea of tongues and prophecy being signs to believers and/or

unbelievers? How do we explain the seeming contradiction in what Paul says here (compare v21-22 with v23-25)? How do we apply these verses to the use of these gifts in relation to unbelievers?

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**THE NEED FOR ORDER (v26-36):** In v24 & 31 Paul talks about an instance where *everyone* is prophesying: what is your response to this? How does Paul set out his instructions for order (because *God is not a God of disorder but of peace*, v32) within the Church?

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If you have experienced tongues and/or interpreted tongues in your church/community what was it like and how did it compare with Paul's instructions about order? What implications do these instructions have for us today? What ideas do you have about what Paul might mean regarding women in v34-36? Are these things specific to Paul's context or relevant today?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER (v37-40):** How does Paul conclude these chapters by way of warnings and instructions? What should our response be to all that we have looked at on Spiritual gifts in Corinthians 12-14? What needs to change in our thinking and practice regarding spiritual gifts?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Share about what God has been saying to you about the importance of intelligibility, edification and order in the usage of our God-given Spiritual gifts. Ask God to enable you to follow the way of love and eagerly desire those gifts which build up others.

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 CORINTHIANS 14:12**

*"Speaking in tongues is prayer or praise spoken in syllables not understood by the speaker. This definition indicates that speaking in tongues is primarily speech directed toward God (that is prayer or praise). Therefore it is unlike the gift or prophecy, which frequently consists of messages directed from God toward people in the church. Paul says, "One who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God" (1 Cor 14:2), and if there is no interpreter present at the church service, Paul says that someone who has a gift of speaking in tongues should "keep silence in church and speak to himself and to God (1 Cor 14:28)...we may define the gift of interpretation as reporting to the church the general meaning of something spoken in tongues." Wayne Grudem, Bible Doctrine , IVP © 1999, pg. 421-3.*

## STUDY 11 – 1 CORINTHIANS 15 – RESURRECTION

**INTRODUCTION:** The subject matter now moves from spiritual gifts to defending the truth and importance of the resurrection. Paul makes an impassioned case that without the resurrection our faith is futile and finishes by encouraging us to stand firm and give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** What makes you so sure that Jesus really did rise from the dead? How would you explain why the resurrection is so important to the Christian faith?

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**GOOD NEWS FOR ALL (v1-11):** Paul wants to remind them of the gospel that he preached to them (esp. v3-8): how does Paul describe the different elements of this gospel and how do they encourage us to confidently believe? Why do you think Paul describes himself as the *least of the apostles* (v9) and in what ways has he seen the *grace of God* at work in his life (v10-11)?

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**CENTRAL IMPORTANCE (v12-28):** What kinds of things do people believe happens to us when we die? Why do you think the Corinthians were saying that there was no resurrection from the dead (v12)? What for Paul are the implications of there being no resurrection in terms of our faith (v14b & 17), our preaching (v14-15), our sins (v17) and our hope for those who have already died (v18-19)?

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Paul is adamant however that Christ has been raised (v20a): what does Paul mean by the idea of Christ being the firstfruits of all who have fallen asleep (v20b) to be made alive (v21-23)? In what ways are you encouraged by Paul's words about Christ putting all his enemies under his feet (v24-28)?

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**DO NOT BE MISLED (v29-34):** How do we see the strength of Paul's belief in the resurrection through the kind of dangers he was willing to face (v29-32)? Why do you think Paul warns them not to be misled (v33) and to stop sinning (v34)? How does the quote from Isaiah 22:13 (i.e. *bad character corrupts good character*, v32) help give us an idea what was going on in Corinth?

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**NEW BODIES (v35-49):** Paul addresses a question from Corinth about how the dead will be raised (v35): how do you understand Paul's illustrative response to this question (v36-41)? In what ways will our new bodies be similar but different to our current bodies (v42-49)?

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**CHANGED IN A FLASH (v50-57):** What excites you about the way that Paul describes the dramatic change that will happen to us at the last trumpet (v50-52)? What encourages you about the final victory over sin and death that Paul talks about in these final verses (v53-57)?

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**STAND FIRM (v58):** Paul finishes with a *therefore*: how might all that Paul has said in this chapter encourage the Corinthians (and us) to stand firm and be unmoved? What do you think it might look like to give ourselves fully to the Lord's work? Why might some think that it had been in vain?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER:** In what ways does this chapter grow your confidence in the resurrection and understanding of how central it is for our daily lives? What changes does this extraordinary chapter demand upon your life as you seek to walk with Jesus?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Share together about what a confident hope for the future might look like and how it would shape your daily lives. Pray that God would encourage you in the present to live lives that honour Him: seeking to stand firm and giving yourselves fully to the Lord's work.

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 CORINTHIANS 15:58**

**STUDY 12 – 1 CORINTHIANS 16 – CONCLUDING MATTERS**

**INTRODUCTION:** This final chapter concerns a collection to help the people of Jerusalem (v1-5), Paul's travel plans (v6-9), various key people who had been involved in some way with the church in Corinth (v10-20) and his final greetings and challenges.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** What is your impression of the letter as a whole? What, for you, are some of the most challenging issues that Paul deals with? This chapter includes mention of a host of people who had been involved in Corinth: who are the people who have been most involved in your life?

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**THE COLLECTION (v1-5):** What impresses you about the instructions Paul gives about a regular collection for the church in Jerusalem (like the Galatian churches were doing)? What principles can we draw from these instructions and apply to the subject of our own giving?

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**TRAVEL PLANS (v6-9):** Paul (writing from Ephesus) expresses his intention to visit them after his trip through Macedonia (v6): how do you think he wants them to help him on his journey (v6)? What has prevented him from visiting (v7) and what will keep him in Ephesus for a little while longer (v8-9)?

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**TIMOTHY AND APOLLOS (v10-12):** Why might Timothy be fearful (see 2 Timothy 1:7) and why might he be treated with contempt (v11)? In what sense do you understand Paul's comment that Timothy (like Paul) was carrying on the *work of the Lord* (v10)?

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We first meet Apollos in Ephesus in Acts 18:24-28 and he is soon in Corinth also (Acts 19:1): why do you think he had been unwilling to go to the in Corinth? Given the divisions mentioned earlier in the letter what evidence is there of the relationship he has with Paul?

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**INSTRUCTIONS (v13-14):** These two verses contain lots of short instructions: why do you think Paul includes them here and how might they transform the situations Paul has been writing about in this letter and enable the Corinthians to grow in their faith?

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**HOUSEHOLD OF STEPHANAS (v15-18):** The only other mention of Stephanas is in 1 Corinthians 1:16: what do we learn about his household here (v15) and why does he want them to submit to him (v16)? How had Stephanas (along with Fortunatus and Achaicus) met his needs (v17-18)?

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**PRISCILLA AND AQUILA (v19-20):** We also meet Priscilla & Aquila for the first time in Corinth (Acts 18) and they travelled with Paul to Ephesus: how significant would their *warm greetings* have been for the Corinthians? Why is it encouraging hearing that they were running a house church in Ephesus?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER (v21-24):** In these verses what challenges and encouragements does Paul offer? What examples of the *work of the Lord* (15:58) are clear from the people named in this chapter? How would you sum up the key lessons that God has taught you from this extraordinary letter?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Thank God for the people who have been significant in your own story of faith: ask God to enable you to play a similar role for others? Ask God also to imitate the kind of giving Paul talks about here and help you take the words of v13-14 to heart.

**MEMORY VERSES: 1 CORINTHIANS 16:13-14**





# MEMORY VERSES

## STUDY 01: 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-2:5 – THE POWER OF GOD

<sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. **1 Corinthians 1:25**

## STUDY 02: 1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-3:23 – THE WISDOM OF GOD

<sup>10</sup> By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. **1 Corinthians 3:10**

## STUDY 03: 1 CORINTHIANS 4 – SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

<sup>15</sup> Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. <sup>16</sup> Therefore I urge you to imitate me. **1 Corinthians 4:15-16**

## STUDY 04: 1 CORINTHIANS 5-6 – FREE TO HONOUR GOD

<sup>19</sup> Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies. **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**

## STUDY 05: 1 CORINTHIANS 7 – MARRIAGE & SINGLENESS

<sup>7</sup> I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. **1 Corinthians 7:7**

## STUDY 06: 1 CORINTHIANS 8-9 – FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS

<sup>19</sup> Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. **1 Corinthians 9:19**

## STUDY 07: 1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-11:1 – FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

<sup>23</sup> 'I have the right to do anything,' you say – but not everything is beneficial. 'I have the right to do anything' – but not everything is constructive. **1 Corinthians 10:23**

## STUDY 08: 1 CORINTHIANS 11 – CORPORATE WORSHIP

<sup>1</sup> Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. **1 Corinthians 11:1**

## STUDY 09: 1 CORINTHIANS 12-13 – SPIRITUAL GIFTS I

<sup>12</sup> Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. **1 Corinthians 12:12**

## STUDY 10: 1 CORINTHIANS 14 – SPIRITUAL GIFTS II

<sup>12</sup> So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church. **1 Corinthians 14:12**

## STUDY 11: 1 CORINTHIANS 15 – RESURRECTION

<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain. **1 Corinthians 15:58**

## STUDY 12: 1 CORINTHIANS 16 – CONCLUDING MATTERS

<sup>13</sup> Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. <sup>14</sup> Do everything in love. **1 Corinthians 16:13-14**