



SAINTS

Under Construction

A Study of 1 Corinthians

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. (1 Corinthians 3:10)

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INTRODUCTION

The apostle Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from the city of Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia (16:8, 19), most likely within the period between Passover and Pentecost (16:8; cf. Lev. 23), and therefore in the Spring of the year. It is unclear whether this was the Spring of A.D. 53, 54, or 55. He wrote, in any case, near the end of his three-year ministry in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:5-9; cf. Acts 19:1-22) during his third missionary journey.

The city of Corinth sat on the isthmus connecting the Greek mainland with the Peloponnesian peninsula. This location made it a flourishing crossroads for sea traffic between the Aegean region and the western Mediterranean. It was a place where many cultures and religions mingled. Since it was a Roman colony, Roman law and customs were important, particularly among the upper classes, but many “gods” and “lords” found a home in Corinth (8:5). The worship of these gods was fully integrated into governmental affairs, civic festivals, trade guilds, social clubs, and everyday life in general. Corinth was also a destination for traveling professional orators who charged a fee for attendance at their entertaining rhetorical displays and advised people on how to advance socially.

Into this environment, Paul brought the gospel of Jesus Christ, and soon a church was established. He was aided in his work by two new-found friends from Rome, Priscilla and Aquila, who, like Paul, were displaced Jews and tentmakers by trade (Acts 18:1-4, 18-19, 24-28; Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19). Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila spent 18 months in Corinth in the early 50s and then, after a brief trip to Judea and Syria, Paul traveled to Ephesus. Priscilla and Aquila were already there (Acts 18:19; 1 Cor. 16:19) and, by the time Paul arrived, they had already met the skillful Christian apologist Apollos, who had also been in Corinth (Acts 18:24-19:1; 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4-6, 22; 4:6; 16:12).

Paul settled in Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:31) and at some point wrote to the Corinthians the otherwise unknown letter that he mentions in 1 Corinthians 5:9. It is not known what prompted the letter, but it dealt with sexual immorality, a persistent problem for the Corinthian church (5:1-13; 6:12-20). Sometime later, Paul received an oral report indicating that the Corinthians had not only misunderstood his first letter (5:10) but were plagued with serious problems of division, sexual immorality, and social snobbery (1:10-11; 5:1; 11:18). Around the same time, a letter arrived from the Corinthians that displayed considerable theological confusion about marriage, divorce, participation in pagan religions, order within their assemblies, and the bodily resurrection of Christians (7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 15:12, 35).

In response to these troubling developments, Paul felt compelled to write a substantial letter to Corinth, making the case that much of their conduct was out of step with the gospel. What we have as 1 Corinthians is that letter.

Despite the often stern tone of the letter (4:18-21; 5:2; 11:17, 22; 15:36), Paul was thankful to God for the Corinthians (1:8) and felt a deep, personal affection for them (16:24). Because of this love, and for the purpose of God’s glory (10:31), Paul wanted the Corinthians to become a well-constructed dwelling place for God’s Spirit (3:12, 16) and to be “guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:8).

SESSION #1
As We Build, There Must Be No Divisions Among Us
1 Corinthians 1:1-3:23

1. Carefully read Paul's description of the first-century Christians in Corinth (1:2). What sort of practical effect should these descriptions have on Christians of any age?

2. Knowing what you know of the Corinthians and their problems, how significant is it that Paul "gives thanks to God" (1:4-9) for them?

3. Why is it vital that brethren agree, that there be no divisions among us, but that we be united in the same mind and in the same judgment (1:10)? How is such even possible?

4. In your own words, summarize the "power of the cross" as described by Paul in 1:17-25.

5. How are God's people sometimes guilty of shameful boasting (1:26-31), and what sort of deteriorating effect does it have on the unity our Lord expects from his subjects?

6. What is Paul's point in 2:1-16?

7. Practically speaking, what does it mean to be "of the flesh" (3:3) or "merely human" (3:4)?

8. In your own words, summarize Paul's message in 3:10-15.

9. We get the impression that what Paul is saying in 3:16-17 is extremely important, but *what* is he saying?

10. In what way does Paul expect me, even today, to "become a fool" (3:18)?

SESSION #2
As We Build, We Must Not Go Beyond What Is Written
1 Corinthians 4:1-21

1. In what ways were the apostles “stewards of the mysteries of God” (4:1)?
2. What is Paul’s point in 4:1-4?
3. In 4:5, Paul moves from the “stewardship” of the apostles to a “Therefore” point-of-application for the Corinthians. In your own words, what is Paul’s message in 4:5?
4. What sort of dangerous tendencies do men and women (even those who claim to be followers of Jesus) have when they “go beyond what is written” (4:6)?
5. We get the sense that Paul is rooting the warning of 4:6 in a reason elaborated upon in 4:7. What is that reason?
6. Carefully read 4:8-13. What is Paul getting at in this paragraph of comparisons and contrasts?
7. In what way were the Corinthians Paul’s “beloved children” (4:14-15)?
8. What qualifies Paul to urge Christians to “be imitators of me” (4:16)?
9. What can we learn from Paul’s reference to his established practice of teaching the same things “in every church” (4:17)?
10. In 4:21, Paul cites the possibility of his coming to Corinth “with a rod” or “with love in a spirit of gentleness.” How are both approaches, at times, necessary for the sake of the gospel, continued growth, and personal holiness?

SESSION #3
As We Build, The Church Must Be Kept Pure
1 Corinthians 5:1-13

1. When we read of “sexual immorality” (5:1) in the New Testament, what is being referenced?
2. Why is immorality among saints that is not tolerated even among pagans a big deal?
3. In what way can brothers and sisters be guilty of “arrogance” (5:2) and “boasting” (5:6) in relation to the sins of others?
4. Why is “mourning” (5:2) a much more appropriate response to sin within a church? What will such mourning, practically speaking, look like?
5. What qualified Paul to “pronounce judgment on the one” who was guilty of sexual immorality (5:3)?
6. Why did Paul tell the Corinthians to take action when they were “assembled” (5:4)?
7. What does it mean to “deliver” a man “to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (5:5)?
8. What does Paul mean in his reference to “leaven” (5:6)?
9. We get the impression that there are rich Biblical roots behind Paul’s reasoning in 5:7-8. What do these sentences mean?
10. In your own words, summarize Paul’s point in 5:9-13. What can we learn from this paragraph? What sort of bearing should it have on our own interaction as a church?

SESSION #4
As We Build, We Must Learn To Get Along
1 Corinthians 6:1-11

1. Paul addresses the presence of “grievances” among brethren in first-century Corinth (6:1). Have grievances ceased to exist within the church? If not, *why* do they continue to exist?
2. Why was Paul appalled that a brother in Christ would “dare to go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints” (6:1)?
3. What does Paul mean that “the saints will judge the world” (6:2)?
4. What is revealed about these “cases” in 6:2 when Paul describes them as “trivial”?
5. What does Paul mean that saints “are to judge angels” (6:3)?
6. In your own words, summarize Paul’s point in 6:4-6:6.
7. “To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you” (6:7). In what way?
8. What should we make of Paul’s admonition in 6:7—“Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?”
9. What will it mean to “inherit the kingdom of God”(6:9)? Why even bring the point of “the unrighteous” not inheriting the kingdom of God up to these Christians? What does 6:9-10 teach us about the nature of the Christian life?
10. What is Paul’s ultimate point in 6:11? What does it mean for the Christian to be “washed”? “Sanctified”? “Justified”?

SESSION #5
As We Build, We Must Use Our Bodies To Glorify God
1 Corinthians 6:12-20

1. In 6:12, Paul asserts, “All things are lawful for me.” What does he mean by that statement?
2. Why does a spirit of maturity take a principle like “all things are lawful for me” and attach it to the recognition that “not all things are helpful” (6:12)?
3. In what way can a “lawful” thing “enslave” a child of God? Does that happen today?
4. How do men and women live as if the body is “meant for sexual immorality” (6:13)?
5. Paul’s powerful point is that the body is meant “for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (6:13). What does this mean?
6. Why bring up the idea of resurrection in 6:14?
7. In what way are our bodies “members of Christ” (6:15)? How will consistently reminding ourselves of that fact alter and govern our conduct?
8. What Old Testament statement is Paul citing in 6:16, and why would he reference it?
9. What should we make of 6:17? What does it mean to be “joined to the Lord” and become “one spirit with him”?
10. In your own words, summarize the Spirit’s admonition in 6:18-20.

SESSION #6

As We Build, We Must Lead The Lives That The Lord Has Assigned 1 Corinthians 7:1-40

1. In 7:17, one of Paul's conclusions is, "Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him." What does he mean?
2. In your own words, summarize Paul's point in 7:1-5.
3. When Paul delivers a statement "as a concession, not a command," what is he doing? (7:6)
4. Taking the message of the entire chapter into account, why would it be "good" for the unmarried and the widows to remain single?
5. When Paul qualifies a statement with "not I, but the Lord," what does he mean (7:10,12)?
6. What should we make of Paul's charge in 7:10-11?
7. In what way is the unbelieving husband "made holy because of his wife," and vice versa (7:14)?
8. What does Paul mean by, "In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved" (7:15)?
9. In your own words, summarize the Spirit's instructions in 7:17-24.
10. In 7:25-31, Paul gives his "judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy." His judgment is shaped "in view of the present distress" (7:26) and the fact that "the present form of this world is passing away" (7:31). What should we make of this paragraph?

SESSION #7
As We Build, We Must Guard Against Pride
1 Corinthians 8:1-13

1. In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul specifically addresses “food offered to idols.” Why would this have even been a point of controversy in 1st-century Corinth?
2. In what ways can “knowledge” easily and destructively “puff up” disciples of Christ (8:1)?
3. In contrast, how does love “build up” (8:1)?
4. In your own words, rephrase Paul’s message in 8:2-3.
5. Paul is laying the foundation of his argument in 8:4-6. What are the platform points of his theological foundation?
6. “However, not all possess this knowledge” (8:7). Why must Christians even bring that point under consideration?
7. In your own words, summarize the dilemma swirling around the hypothetical person of 8:7.
8. What should we, as modern disciples, make of the truth contained in 8:8.
9. How can we discern between “the weak” and “the strong” in modern-day matters of conscience?
10. Paul’s conclusion is contained in 8:13. Summarize his conclusion below. How should this conclusion shape our own thinking as 21st-century followers of Jesus? Is it mandatory? Optional only for “the strong”?

SESSION #8

As We Build, We Must Not Put Obstacles In The Way Of The Gospel 1 Corinthians 9:1-27

1. When Paul refers to himself as “an apostle” and references his “seal of apostleship,” what does he mean (9:1-2)?
2. In your own words, summarize the “right” Paul is defending in 9:6-14.
3. In what way could the exercising of this right of Paul “put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ” (9:12)?
4. Can you rephrase Paul’s message in 9:15-18 in your own words?
5. What should churches of the 21st-century take away from this inspired text as it relates to the financial supporting of those “who proclaim the gospel”?
6. In what way was Paul “free from all” (9:19a)?
7. In what way had he made himself “a servant to all” (9:19b)?
8. Read carefully Paul’s rationale in 9:20-22. Is this the approach of a hypocrite? Or a manipulative deceiver? Why was Paul taking this approach?
9. “I do it all for the sake of the gospel” (9:23). Does this continue to be a worthy motivation? If so, why? And how do we sometimes lose sight of this gospel-centered motivation for the sake of other motivating factors?
10. In your own words, summarize Paul’s point in 9:24-27.

SESSION #9
As We Build, We Must Adamantly Avoid Idolatry
1 Corinthians 10:1-33

1. “For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ” (10:4). This seems to be a profound point, but what exactly is the Spirit of God revealing in this statement?
2. In your own words, summarize the message of 10:6-11.
3. Why do we have such a tough time consistently living within the shadow of the warning contained in 10:12?
4. Break down the wonderful truths contained in 10:13. Why are they so precious and formative for our faith?
5. “Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry” (10:14). Do we still need to pay careful heed to this warning as modern disciples, or is this an archaic piece of disconnected history? If we do need to pay careful heed, why? Where is the danger today?
6. We get the sense that Paul is making a powerful point in 10:15-22. What is that point?
7. “All things are lawful” (10:23a). In what way?
8. “But not all things are helpful” (10:23b). In what way?
9. In your own words, describe the strategy Paul is prescribing when it comes to eating the meat that was sold in the Corinthian markets (10:23-30). Why was this even an issue?
10. We reach a conclusive statement in 10:31-33. What should we, as modern followers of Jesus, take away from Paul’s conclusion?

SESSION #10
As We Build, We Must Respectfully Remember Our Head
1 Corinthians 11:1-34

1. Describe what life will be like when we adopt 11:1 as our personal motto.
2. When Paul references “the traditions” in 11:2, what does he have in mind?
3. In what way is (11:3):
 - ▶ Christ the head of every man?
 - ▶ Her husband the head of a wife?
 - ▶ God the head of Christ?
4. In 11:9, Paul writes that woman was created “for man.” What does this mean?
5. Why are the lessons that nature can teach us worthy of being considered (11:14-15)?
6. What should we, as modern disciples, take away from 11:2-16?
7. We live in a religious climate where many reason like this: “As long as we come together and are sincere in what we do, that’s what really matters.” In 11:17, Paul writes, “when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse.” What did he mean?
8. In your own words, what is Paul saying in 11:19?
9. Two times in this context (11:22, 34) Paul brings up the Corinthians having houses to eat and drink in. He draws a contrast between the Lord’s Supper that was observed “when you come together” (11:17) and the common meals eaten in individual homes. What can we learn from this inspired text?
10. The situation described in 11:30 certainly sounds serious. What does Paul mean?

SESSION #11
As We Build, We Must Ground Our Motives In Love
1 Corinthians 12:1-14:40

1. Paul writes that “there are varieties of gifts” (12:4). In your own words, what was:
 - ▶ the utterance of wisdom (12:8) -
 - ▶ the utterance of knowledge (12:8) -
 - ▶ faith (12:9) -
 - ▶ gifts of healing (12:9) -
 - ▶ the working of miracles (12:10) -
 - ▶ prophecy (12:10) -
 - ▶ the ability to distinguish between spirits (12:10) -
 - ▶ various kinds of tongues (12:10) -
 - ▶ the interpretation of tongues (12:10) -

2. What sort of lessons can we learn from Paul’s illustration of the one body (12:12-31)?

3. Why is love “a still more excellent way” (12:31-13:13)?

4. What does Paul mean when he says that love (13:4-7):
 - ▶ is patient -
 - ▶ is kind -
 - ▶ does not envy -
 - ▶ does not boast -
 - ▶ is not arrogant -
 - ▶ is not rude -
 - ▶ does not insist on its own way -
 - ▶ is not irritable -
 - ▶ is not resentful -
 - ▶ does not rejoice at wrongdoing -
 - ▶ rejoices with the truth -
 - ▶ bears all things -
 - ▶ believes all things -
 - ▶ hopes all things -
 - ▶ endures all things -

5. Paul seems to be relaying an important point in 13:8-13. What is that point?

6. Paul repeatedly returns to the idea of “building up the church” (14:5, 12, 19). What does this teach us about the purpose behind the miraculous gifts that Paul is describing?

7. In your own words, summarize Paul’s conclusion of this context in 14:26-40.

SESSION #12
As We Build, We Must Steadfastly Labor Unto Death
1 Corinthians 15:1-16:24

1. Paul's introduction of a new point in what we have as chapter 15 begins with a powerful reminder. Summarize, in your own words, 15:1-2.
2. Why are the elements that Paul has delivered in 15:3-8 "of first importance"?
3. Why does Paul place so much vital importance on the resurrection of Jesus (15:12-18)?
4. When Paul refers to Christ as "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (15:20), what does he mean?
5. Admittedly, 15:29-34 is a difficult paragraph. What do you think Paul is saying?
6. Some had asked, "How are the dead raised?" Summarize Paul's inspired answer (15:35-49).
7. "The sting of death is sin" (15:56). In what way?
8. "The power of sin is the law" (15:56). What does this mean?
9. Rephrase Paul's encouragement in your own words:
 - ▶ Be steadfast -
 - ▶ Immovable -
 - ▶ Always abounding in the work of the Lord -
 - ▶ Knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain -
10. What should we, as modern disciples, take away from Paul's instructions "concerning the collection for the saints" (16:1-4)?