

1 CORINTHIANS

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OZARK CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

1 Corinthians NextLevel Handouts

Session 1 – Introduction and 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Summary: 1 Corinthians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Corinth, Greece. This church was well-known and loved deeply, but it becomes clear through this letter that this church had a lot of issues. Division, immorality, lack of love, disorder, and false teachings all characterized this new Christian community. Out of his love and concern for these brothers and sisters in Christ, Paul writes a challenging and thorough letter to urge the Corinthian believers to live a holy life.

Corinth was a diverse and prosperous city. The issues the Corinthian believers were dealing with could have been influenced by their cultural environment and their human nature needing to be transformed.

Despite all the problems the church in Corinth had, Paul begins his letter with a celebration of God's grace.

Clues to later themes found in 1 Corinthians:

- Verse 5 -
- Verse 6 -
- Verse 7 -
- Verse 8 -

A core idea in Paul's introduction that sets the stage for the whole letter: made holy to live holy.

Out of what God has done in saving us in Christ, we live dedicated to him.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-What comes to your mind when you hear the word "holy"?

-What does it mean that, regardless of our behavior, in Christ we have been made holy?

-What are some ways you can live a more holy life?

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Session 2 – 1 Corinthians 1:10-31

Summary: The dominant theme of at least the next several chapters, if not the whole book, is unity.

The issue in particular the Corinthian believers faced was divisions and competition with one another based on their associations with different Christian leaders, namely Paul himself, Apollos, and Cephas (Peter).

The antidote to this disunity will be to focus on the core Christian message of grace and a series of reflections on how that message works itself out in a community.

The message of the Gospel is Christ crucified, which is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. But for those who believe, it is the power and wisdom of God.

Stay humble by reflecting on the message of the Gospel.

Therefore there is nothing for anyone to boast about. Paul ends this section by quoting Jeremiah 9:24, "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-What are some faulty ways that Christians divide themselves from one another?

-In what ways could you be tempted to think of yourself as better than other believers?

-How does the message of the cross eliminate any place for disunity?

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Session 3 – 1 Corinthians 2

Summary: Chapter 2 continues the theme of the unity the Corinthian believers and all believers everywhere should have. In chapter 1 the emphasis was on the work of Christ on the cross. The emphasis in chapter 2 is the work of the Holy Spirit within believers.

In the same way that the core message of grace should unify, the spiritual reality of the one Holy Spirit in all believers should unify.

While there are different levels of maturity, every believer has equal access to the Holy Spirit.

- Verse 14 - The person without the Spirit
- Verse 15 - The person with the Spirit

The universal availability of the Spirit and how that empowers believers to the mind of Christ should further reinforce the actual experience believers have with one another.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-How often do you think about the fact that, as a believer, you have the Holy Spirit within you?

-How does it impact your outlook on others to consider that they have the same Spirit as you?

-What does it mean to have the mind of Christ?

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Session 4 – 1 Corinthians 3

Summary: Though all the Corinthian believers have the Holy Spirit, as Paul highlighted in chapter 2, their disunity means they are not acting like people with the Spirit.

- Verse 3 - acting “fleshly” vs. “spiritually”

Since a key factor in the disunity of the Corinthian believers is oriented around their association with Apollos and Paul, Paul used their ministries as an object lesson to consider the absurdity of their disunity.

- Verses 6-9 - planting analogy
- Verses 10-15 - building analogy

“Only one life ‘twill soon be past, Only what’s done for Christ will last.” C.T. Studd

Not only that, but each person’s work will be evaluated by God. So each person should consider what they are doing for the Lord and what they are contributing to the others, since it is God whose opinion matters, not other people’s.

The passion God has for his people should encourage unification instead of division.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-Who are some of the people who have contributed to your spiritual journey?

-How does it differ to thank God for the people he has used in your life rather than to contribute to disunity by associating too strongly with particular Christian leaders?

-How are you contributing to the unity or disunity of the church?

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Session 5 – 1 Corinthians 4

Summary: To drive home his point about the absurdity of the Corinthian believers being competitive with each other based on their association with him or Apollos, Paul describes the difficulty of his life as a messenger of God.

Paul uses two keywords to describe the work he and Apollos do to highlight humility:

- Servants (hupéretés) – literally “under rower”
- Stewards (oikonomos) – household manager

Paul feels certain that his work as God’s messenger will end in his death. (verses 8-13)

After four chapters of arguments about the spiritual unity of the church and the humility of its leaders, there should be no room for competition between brothers and sisters in Christ.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-How does Paul’s description of himself as a servant who is destined for martyrdom differ from the image of a minister in your context?

-What would it look like for you to embrace a view of yourself as a servant?

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Session 6 – 1 Corinthians 5

Summary: In chapter 5, there is a sharp transition to the subject matter to address a specific case of sexual immorality in the church in Corinth. While that issue itself is important, this section also serves to further help the Corinthians and all believers see themselves as a spiritual community with a responsibility toward one another.

Paul uses the provocative image of handing someone over to Satan as a way of talking about removing this man from the church. The goal of Paul's instructions here are:

- the salvation of the man who is being immoral
- the purity of the church

Paul says that not only is this for the man's good but for the good of the community.

- the imagery of yeast (verses 6-7)
- the imagery of Passover (verses 7-8)

Paul warns against associating with someone who claims to be a believer and disregards God's law. (verses 9-11)

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-Have you ever seen a process take place to ban someone from remaining a part of the church?

-If not, what keeps people from practicing these instructions?

-Is there anyone in your life who claims to be a believer that you need to confront about active sin?

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Session 7 – 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

Summary: The first half of 1 Corinthians 6 addresses another very specific threat to the stability of the Corinthian church: lawsuits among believers. Like material before and after this, the specific topic gives fuel for deeper understanding for the Corinthians and all believers regarding how they should relate to each other in general.

Paul says it would be better for a person to be wronged and cheated than to win a public lawsuit against a brother or sister in Christ. He says that conflict should be worked out within the community of faith.

Those in Christ will reign with him (verses 2-3)

- Also see 2 Timothy 2:12, Revelation 5:10, and Revelation 22:5

In the end, God will judge those who do wrong. Paul lists a number of things that God will judge. He mentions two words that indicate homosexual behavior. These don't stand out in the list as particularly egregious, but since there is debate in the modern world about the nature of homosexuality, it is helpful to define these words.

- Malakos – “soft”
- Arsenokoites – a compound of “male” and “bed”; same as 1 Tim 1:10

Paul ends this section with a celebration of God's grace, reminding us that all believers were washed, sanctified, and justified.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-Can you think of a time recently you have been wronged?

-How did you respond to being wronged?

-What comfort is there in knowing that God will judge wrongdoing in the end?

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Session 8 – 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Summary: In the second half of chapter 6, Paul returns to the subject of sexual immorality. Since the new community of believers in Corinth comes from a background with very different sexual norms than the Christian vision, he further clarifies how they and all believers should see sexual morality.

To help explain the holy use of the body, Paul describes believers with two powerful images: the body of Christ and the temple.

1. Body (verses 15-17)- The body of a believer is spiritually united with Christ to such a degree that Paul says we are members of his body (melos – limb or organ of the body). So we should not use a part of Jesus' body for sinful activity. Even that he was raised from the dead and that our bodies will be raised from the dead should inform our use of the physical body.
2. Temple (verses 19-20)- The Old Testament temple, when the Israelites were following God's Law, was meticulously maintained to be consecrated to God. Similarly, the church should be holy as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore honor God with your body.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-How does the biblical vision of holy sexuality differ from the culture you grew up in?

-How does it shape your self-understanding to think of yourself as part of the temple of God?

-How does it shape your self-understanding to think of yourself as part of the body of Christ?

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Session 9 – 1 Corinthians 7

Summary: In most contexts, it is hard to imagine what it would be like for a church community made up of entirely new believers. But in Corinth, that was the case. So understandably, there were still very practical issues to understand from a Christian perspective.

In chapter 7 Paul gives pastoral guidance about how to navigate marriage, singleness, remarriage in the case of the death of a spouse, and matters of choice of all these in light of the return of Christ.

- Marriage is good, but so is singleness.
- Divorce is inappropriate, even when one of the members of the marriage is not yet a Christian.
- The single or widowed person should try to remain single to live a life dedicated to God.

Whatever choice someone makes about marriage and singleness, they should do so with a view toward eternity.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-How does 1 Corinthians 7 differ from ways people in your cultural context envision marriage and singleness?

-If you are single, do you think you could remain single in order to be totally focused on service to God?

-How does the content of this chapter shape your understanding of divorce?

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Session 10 – 1 Corinthians 8

Summary: Chapter 8 introduces a running theme that will continue through chapter 14, love should be seen as the guiding principle for the use of knowledge and freedom.

The issue in particular discussed in chapter 8 is food sacrificed to idols. With new believers from a background of Greek idolatry, it is understandable that this question would emerge since people ate food that was offered to idols regularly.

Paul makes it clear that the food offered to an idol is not in any way tainted or spiritually dangerous. That being said, some people might mistake the eating of sacrificial food as a sign that it is okay to continue to practice idolatry as a Christian. Some people would rather play it safe and avoid eating the food offered to an idol.

Paul says that whatever choice someone makes with regard to eating this food, they should do so with the spiritual wellbeing of others in mind.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

- What is your personal feeling about the spiritual power of food offered to a false god?
- How does what Paul says in chapter 8 agree or differ with how you feel about it?
- What are ways that you could yield a right you have for the benefit of others?

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Session 11 – 1 Corinthians 9

Summary: Flowing out of his argument in 1 Corinthians 8 that knowledge and rights should be utilized in consideration of others, Paul uses his ministry as an example in 1 Corinthians 9.

Paul reminds the Corinthians of his time among them and how he was not supported financially by them. He argues that it would have been just fine for him to receive payment from them. He uses the analogies of those who benefit from the work they do. (verses 7-11)

- A soldier
- A vineyard worker
- A shepherd
- An ox - Deuteronomy 25:4

But after arguing strongly for how appropriate it would be for him to have gotten paid by the Corinthians, Paul reminds that he did not make use of this right. His aim was that nothing would hinder the Gospel message from getting spread. (verses 19-23)

Paul reminds the Corinthians that our impulses should not have control of us, but they should work to control their bodies. (verses 24-27)

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-Who are some people you can think of who have served God sacrificially?

-How has their sacrifice inspired you?

-How can you be more sacrificial in your service to others?

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Session 12 – 1 Corinthians 10

Summary: Paul uses the narrative of the Israelites in the wilderness after leaving Egypt as a framework to talk about the new covenant people of God.

Paul reminds the readers of several negative examples of the Israelites and warnings about the consequences that followed their disobedience.

- Verse 7 – Idolatry referencing Exodus 32
- Verse 8 – Sexual immorality referencing Numbers 25
- Verse 9 – Testing God referencing Numbers 21
- Verse 10 – Grumbling against God referencing Numbers 16

While there is great freedom to choose one's way of life, there are still moral guidelines for the believer that should keep them in the mindset of being fully dedicated to God.

Love for others and a desire to glorify God should guide the rest of the believer's behavior.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-What do you feel when you consider the stories from Exodus and Numbers that Paul mentioned about disobedience and God's judgment?

-How do these stories prompt you to live a certain way in response to God's grace?

-Are there any behaviors or attitudes you need to turn away from right now?

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Session 13 – 1 Corinthians 11:1-16

Summary: Paul's discussion of head coverings and the distinction between men and women.

Though the first half of 1 Corinthians 11 is a difficult passage to interpret, there are a few ideas from the context that can help frame up our thoughts.

1. Come to the passage with humility
2. 1 Corinthians 14:33 says, "God is not a God of disorder but of peace."

While culturally distant from many modern cultures, a head covering of some kind was normal feminine apparel in Greek culture in the time of 1 Corinthians. Perhaps because of the new freedom people were experiencing as believers, there was some level of distraction happening in the community of faith because these normal customs were being discarded.

By eradicating gender distinctions, even in cultural forms like a head covering, the Corinthians were missing some of God's intentions in creating men and women as image-bearers. The order of creation and distinction in the genders extends the glory of God in the universe. If the women were to act like men, there would be some sense of loss of the glory God intended for humanity.

While the message of the cross is foolishness, Paul is encouraging a manner of presenting ourselves that does not look foolish to the onlooking world. In this way, we are to be "normal" so that our abnormal message comes across clearly.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-What are some ways that masculinity and femininity are expressed in your cultural context?

-What are ways we can celebrate God's intentions with creating humanity male and female?

-What might it look like for you to embrace the gender God made you as some of his specific design in how you can glorify him?

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Session 14 – 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Summary: The Corinthians have made a mess of many things, including Communion.

It's probably no surprise that even something sacred like Communion (also known as the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper) could be impacted by dysfunction. There was a flippancy and selfishness that had taken over how Communion was practiced.

Rather than taking Communion together as a collective acknowledgment of the sacrifice of Christ, people in Corinth had turned it into an individualist act.

- some not even being able to celebrate Communion because the supplies had run out
- the act losing some of its meaningfulness as pointing to the corporate body of Christ, the church

Paul reminded the Corinthians that Jesus introduced this meal with his disciples and drew attention to the gravity of it as a symbol of his body and blood. This corporate and symbolic nature should shape the practice of Communion by the church.

Each person should examine themselves and acknowledge those around them when they take Communion. When the church rightly practices this act, they are together announcing the message of the cross in anticipation of his return.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-What are ways that Communion can help us consider those around us?

-What do you look forward to about Jesus returning?

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Session 15 – 1 Corinthians 12

Summary: The focus of 1 Corinthians 12 is on the right use of one's spiritual gifts.

All spiritual gifts have the same source: the Holy Spirit. So there should be no pride or discouragement in what gifts one does or doesn't have. Besides, the gifts are not given for the benefit of the one who receives them. They are to be used to benefit others.

It is intentional on God's part to distribute diverse gifts. Just like a natural human body has many different parts with many different functions, the believers in the body of Christ are given different roles. But the spiritual union that believers have should inform our thoughts and feelings to such a degree that we celebrate with the joys and mourn the difficulties of others. We are bound together, and we each have something to contribute.

As with all the matters discussed in the several chapters leading up to this one, the guiding principle for the exercise of one's gifts should be love.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-Are there gifts you have that you have taken inappropriate pride in?

-Are there gifts in others that you have experienced envy about or disappointment that you aren't capable of those things?

-What are some ways you can contribute more to the body of Christ with the gifts you have been given by the Holy Spirit?

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Session 16 – 1 Corinthians 13

Summary: Chapter 13 is a crescendo emphasizing the nature of love.

1 Corinthians 13 is likely the most familiar section of the book for most people. Seeing this chapter in the context of the flow of thought in 1 Corinthians hopefully only helps it be more meaningful for us.

On the one hand, it is not new or strange for love to be talked about as the pinnacle of human behavior.

- Deuteronomy 6:4-5 - there is one God. Love Him.
- Leviticus 19:18 - love your neighbor.

Both of these commands are reaffirmed by Jesus as the most important commands.

On the other hand, for the Greeks in Corinth, this might be a different emphasis than what they were taught growing up when thinking about virtue. The cardinal virtues in classical Greek thought are:

- prudence/wisdom
- justice
- fortitude/courage
- temperance

Love is also eternal in its relevance. After faith and hope finish their usefulness, love is still our aim for eternity.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-Was love emphasized as the ultimate virtue (or most important command) when you were growing up?

-What are some concepts of morality that may have been overemphasized to you in your formative years instead of love?

-What are some ways you can love more?

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Session 17 – 1 Corinthians 14

Summary: God wants peace among his people, not disorder. The gathering of believers should build up the group rather than draw attention to individuals or divide the group and God's intentions for having diversity in the church.

Several things are less clear in this passage:

- Prophecy seems to be a timeless truth that is applied to particular people in particular situations. It will never contradict the words of Scripture, and whenever someone speaks in the church, others should discern if what is being said does or does not contradict this truth. Speaking should be done in an orderly and peaceful way.
- Tongues are a gift of language and should also be used for the benefit of the church. In a multilingual context like Corinth, the ability to speak a language that one otherwise doesn't know is a powerful sign of God's work. However, the content should still be useful for the strengthening of the group by being translated so all can understand.
- Sharp instruction for women to be quiet. The keyword for "speaking" here, regarding what women are told to not do, is rarely used in the New Testament or outside of it in other ancient documents to refer to public speaking, such as teaching. That means that what is being forbidden here is not likely women prophesying in gender-appropriate ways (1 Cor 14:5) but chatting in a distracting way while others are speaking.

In all, this chapter reinforces the theme that everything should be done in a way that honors God and helps others.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-Have you ever experienced something distracting during a worship service?

-Are there ways you could be tempted to distinguish yourself in the church community rather than focusing on the good of others?

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Session 18 – 1 Corinthians 15:1-34

Summary: The resurrection is vital to the Christian faith.

1 Corinthians 15 starts with a reiteration of the core message Paul preached, i.e., “the Gospel.” Like 2 Timothy 2:8, where Paul also states his message, the emphasis is on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In the context of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul seems to be saying this because some in Corinth are wondering if there may be no such thing as resurrection.

When Paul preached in Athens in Acts 17, the idea that caused people to scoff at him was the idea that Jesus was resurrected. The dominant outlook for the Greeks on the physical body is that it was a negative feature of human life, as compared to the soul and the possibility of being freed from a body. So resurrection seems like regression instead of progress.

But Paul strongly reinforces the idea that the resurrection of Jesus is the linchpin of the Christian message. If Christ has not been raised, there is no freedom from sin and there is no hope after this life. But through Christ’s resurrection, the story is one of hope beyond death. The Christian practice of baptism symbolizes this move from death to life.

Paul emphasizes that it is a big deal for this core idea to be threatened in the Corinthian church. They, and all believers like them, should be vigilant in guarding against the risk of losing this important concept.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-What is the vision of the ideal destiny for a human in your cultural context?

-Is the vision of that ideal destiny in your cultural content primarily about success in this life or after death?

-Has the concept of the resurrection been as significant in your own thinking as Paul describes that it ought to be in 1 Corinthians 15?

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Session 19 – 1 Corinthians 15:35-58

Summary: Jesus' resurrection is a foreshadowing of the body every believer will have eventually.

Those who are dead when Christ returns will be raised with an indestructible body. Those who are alive when Christ returns will be transformed to have a body like his.

Through his death and resurrection, Jesus made this all possible. He undid the destructive power of death in humanity that was set into motion by Adam. As a new and final Adam, he brings a new indestructible life to humanity.

The final enemy of God's people to be defeated is death. But eventually, that final victory will be achieved. Therefore, the incredible amount of hard work it can take to be a faithful believer is worth it. The hope that comes from knowing our destiny does not end in death can enable us to stand firm and be diligent in serving God.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-Have you tended to conceive of the afterlife as a bodily resurrection or a disembodied heavenly existence?

-How does 1 Corinthians confirm or differ from how you've thought of the return of Christ?

-Are there any challenges you are facing right now that the hope of the resurrection can help empower you to endure?

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Session 20 – 1 Corinthians 16

Summary: The final chapter is a reminder that this is a real letter from a pastor to a church that he dearly loved.

1 Corinthians ends with final greetings and travel plans. This is a reminder that while extremely important theological themes have been discussed in this letter, such as the nature of the Gospel message, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the nature of the church, and other issues, it all plays out in the context of normal life.

Paul intends to travel to Corinth and wants them to participate in financially helping the believers in Jerusalem. While each congregation has its challenges and priorities, this reminds us that all believers worldwide are spiritually connected. When some of the family of God are in need, those who can should help generously.

Paul makes no mention of the Old Testament tithe, which is telling considering how he used the community life of the Israelites as instructive in 1 Corinthians 5 and the narrative of Israel's wilderness journey as the spiritual heritage of the New Testament believers in 1 Corinthians 10. The new way is that of sacrificial generosity, as Paul will further discuss in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. This generosity should not be done under compulsion or begrudgingly but with thought and joy.

Paul gives a final exhortation to be on guard, stand firm, be courageous and strong, and do everything in love.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

-How connected do you feel to congregations outside of your immediate geographic location?

-How does the example of 1 Corinthians 16 inform your outlook on the interconnection of believers worldwide?

-How can you be more generous to help brothers and sisters in Christ who are in need?

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