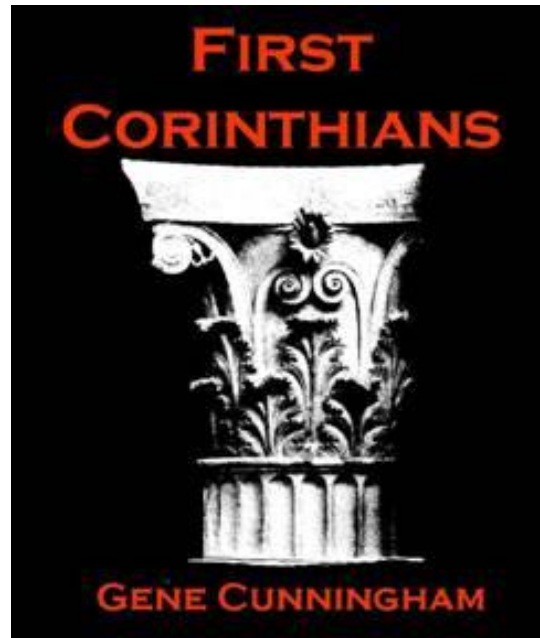


Basic Training Bible Ministries

“In Pursuit of the Character of Christ”
A Study in 1 Corinthians



*“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ
and Him crucified.” 1Co 2:2*

and

*“Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump,
since you are truly unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover,
was sacrificed for us.” 1Co 5:7*

Southern California Conference

August 23–25, 2013

In Pursuit of the Character of Christ

A Study of the Book of First Corinthians

Introduction:

The Corinthian church was a vital stronghold in the plan of God for establishing the early church. This city was one of many trade centers and crossroads of the ancient world. When we read Act 18:1–18 we see the declaration of God, *“I have many people in this city”* (Act 18:10b), for which Paul labored a year and six months (Act 18:11). The only place Paul stayed longer was in Ephesus (Act 19:8, 10).

It was in Corinth that Paul met the wonderful ministry team—Aquila and Priscilla (Act 18:2), who due to their time with Paul, were able to further instruct Apollos (Act 18:26), who later had great ministry in Corinth (Act 19:1; 1Co 1:12, 1Co 3:6). When Paul wrote First Corinthians, Aquila and Priscilla were with him (1Co 16:19).

Two possible key verses for the epistle are:

*“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ
and Him crucified.”* 1Co 2:2

and

*“Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump,
since you are truly unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover,
was sacrificed for us.”* 1Co 5:7

Note: These brief notes are not designed to explain every passage, as neither time nor space allows for such a work. It is my prayer that they may provide some framework to which serious study may be added.

I. Section One: The Problems in Corinth—1Co 1–6

In this section, Paul deals with problems that existed in the church, which had been reported to him *“by those of Chloe’s household”* (1Co 1:11), probably slaves belonging to Chloe, who were members of the church. These divisions arose due to foolish, arrogant, elitism.

A. Study One: The Problem of Foolish Divisions vs. the Wisdom of the Cross (Ch. 1–2)

The spiritual way of wisdom (God’s will as revealed in His Word) finds unity in Christ-centered living. Foolish division, however, is the consequence of self-centered living. The biblical definition of wisdom is “God’s Word alive in us” (Col 3:16).

1. In 1Co 1:1–9, Paul’s greeting reveals the blessings of the Body of Christ. Note the eight rich blessings of this church in 1Co 1:2–8, then compare 2Co 8:7, where Paul again notes seven spiritual blessings.

2. In 1Co 1:10–17, division reveals a foolish spirit of elitism that is contrary to the spirit of the cross of Christ. The divisive spirit of the Corinthians was motivated by the same attitude as displayed by the disciples in their early years (Mar 9:34; Luk 9:46, Luk 22:24).
3. In 1Co 1:18–25, the wisdom of God is foolishness to men, and the power of God is considered weakness. One of Jesus’ oft-repeated sayings, “*Wisdom is justified by her children*” (Mat 11:19; Luk 7:35).
4. In 1Co 1:26–31, only in Christ can a true perception of wisdom, power, and glory be found. Note Pro 8:1–36, where wisdom personified speaks. Wisdom is found only in Christ (1Co 1:30) for it is the mind of Christ (1Co 2:16).
5. In 1Co 2:1–5, God’s wisdom is revealed in the crucifixion of Christ. Only divine wisdom could have devised the plan of salvation! Furthermore, what decision in life contains greater wisdom than to come to faith in the work of Christ, resulting in eternal life?
6. In 1Co 2:6–9, the wisdom of God is a mystery which cannot be apprehended by human perceptive faculties. Only by regeneration (new birth) and revelation (God’s Word) can we come to know the wisdom of God. This is spiritual growth (2Pe 3:18).
7. In 1Co 2:10–16, only divine revelation, received by faith, can appropriate the catalog of spiritual provisions contained in the wisdom of God. Apart from the Spirit of God, as Revealer (Eph 1:17–23; Eph 3:16–19), there can be no comprehension of divine truth. We must understand that when we witness, if the Spirit does not give comprehension, no argument on our part can bring that soul to faith. We “plant seeds,” but only God can “give the increase” (1Co 3:6).

Application: In the Upper Room

1. The disciples entered the Upper Room arguing over who should be considered the greatest (Luk 22:24).
2. Jesus began His final session with them by humbly washing their feet, without making any distinction among them (Joh 13:1–17).
3. He then taught them a new commandment (Joh 13:34–35) and promised a new Helper (Joh 14:15–18, etc.).
4. He explained that each believer has the option of abiding in Him (spirituality, fellowship, and fruit), or of not abiding (carnality, alienation, and unfruitfulness)—each affecting our witness for Him (Joh 15:1–27).
5. He openly warned them of coming persecutions, but assured them of the Holy Spirit’s peace, power, and guidance (Joh 16:1–33).
6. He prayed for our unity in Him and in the Father (Joh 17:1–26), then went out and died, and rose again to secure it.
7. The Upper Room record is a rebuke to all division and sectarianism in the Body of Christ.

B. Study Two: The Problem of Carnality vs. Biblical Spirituality (Ch. 3–4)

The arrogance (self-exaltation) that promotes divisions also produces carnality in every area. Carnality is a mind set on the flesh, where spirituality is a mind set on the Spirit (cf., Rom 8:5–9).

1. In 1Co 3:1–4, the carnal believer tends to act and think like an unbeliever and receives only simple, basic truths of the Word (Heb 5:12–14).
2. In 1Co 3:5–10, carnality tends to put the emphasis on men, where spirituality keeps the focus on the Lord, His Word, and His plan.
3. In 1Co 3:11–15, once again, believers have an option as to how they will live their lives. But the carnal will suffer loss at the Bema Seat, while the spiritual will receive reward.
4. In 1Co 3:16–23, since believers—collectively—are the temple of God, nothing defiles that temple more than division since God’s grace embraces all who believe in Christ.
5. In 1Co 4:1–5, true spirituality is displayed in a spirit of faithful stewardship, which will ultimately be rewarded by God.
6. In 1Co 4:6–13, Paul uses sanctified sarcasm to contrast the apostles and the Corinthians and, in doing so, illustrates carnality vs. spirituality.
7. In 1Co 4:14–21, Paul affirms his love for them, urging them to imitate him, and warns that he can also return to them with disciplinary power.

Application: Jesus Christ, the Standard

1. The life of Christ exemplifies humble servitude (Mat 20:28; Mar 10:45).
2. The incarnation of Christ was an act of sacrificial service that by His loss we might be enriched forever (2Co 8:9).
3. The goal of spiritual growth and maturity is that we might lay hold of the mind of Christ, through God’s Word, in order to be conformed to His image (Rom 12:1–2; Phi 2:5–9).
4. From a practical point of view, spirituality is nothing less than Jesus Christ living in and through us (Gal 2:20–21).
5. This is what “abiding in Christ” is all about (Joh 15:4–11, 1Jo 2:6).

C. Study Three: The Problem of Self-Centered Living (Ch. 5–6)

A carnal mindset inevitably produces a selfish, self-indulgent lifestyle. Paul now addresses immorality in the church, and uses it to demonstrate another problem—that of lawsuits in the Church. He shows that they both arise from the same sinful and selfish impulse.

1. In 1Co 5:1–8, this case of immorality was considered incest in the Law (Deu 22:30, Deu 27:20), and Paul calls for church discipline.
2. In 1Co 5:9–13, by positional sanctification “in Christ” God sets us apart from the world (Heb 10:10, Heb 10:14). The practical outworking of this demands that we

choose to separate ourselves from believers involved in persistent sin. This is the personal side of church discipline.

3. In 1Co 6:1–8, for believers to go to the law (civil court) against one another outside the church is no less shameful than to seek sexual gratification outside of biblical marriage. Believers ought not to be judged by unbelievers.
4. In 1Co 6:9–14, believers are no longer categorized by their sins, but by the sanctifying work of Christ. We should therefore live for the Lord and His kingdom. Those who persist in sin will forfeit eternal rewards and loss of inheritance—but not loss of salvation (cf., 1Co 5:5).
5. In 1Co 6:15–20, Christ died on the cross to make us members of His Body. We belong to Him, not ourselves, and should live for His glory.

Application:

1. The daily reality is that sanctification is a choice (Joh 17:17–19).
2. The battle for sanctification will always involve testing and temptation (Luk 4:1–13).
3. The key to winning the battle is submission to the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Luk 3:22, Luk 4:1, Luk 4:14, Luk 4:18).
4. The goal of sanctification is “*spirit, soul, and body*” (1Th 5:23).
5. Sanctification is a work of the Spirit of God (1Pe 1:2); our part is submission and surrender—“yielding”—by faith (Rom 6:13, Rom 12:1).

II. Section Two: The Questions from Corinth—1Co 7:1–16:12

In this section, we must reconstruct the questions on the basis of Paul’s answers. Note the phrases, “*now concerning the things of which you wrote me* (1Co 7:1) ... *now concerning* (1Co 8:1) ... *now concerning*” (1Co 12:1). It is worth pointing out that, for all their faults and failures, the Corinthians were seeking answers from Paul on these questions, and therefore were positive and hungry for the truth.

A. Study Four: Questions Regarding Marriage and Meat Offered to Idols (Ch. 7–8)

Both in marriage and in membership in the Body of Christ, there is the need to consider others and exercise selflessness. This subordination of personal wants and desires for the benefit of others is what conformity to Jesus Christ is all about. It is not a matter of self-negation so others get what they want. Rather, it is the consideration of what is best for all concerned.

1. Paul qualifies his responses by four prevailing factors: “*the present distress*” (1Co 7:26); “*the time is short*” (1Co 7:29); “*I want you to be without care*” (1Co 7:32); and “*that you may serve the Lord without distraction*” (1Co 7:35). These form an historical context for his answers, and should be considered for our present applications.
2. In 1Co 7:1–9, Paul discusses general counsel to the married and the unmarried. Again, this must be seen in light of the four qualifying factors noted above. **Note:** Compare Gen 2:18 “*It is not good*” with 1Co 7:1 “*It is good.*”

3. In 1Co 7:10–16, specific instructions are given to the married. Marriage is for life. In a “mixed” marriage, the believer is not bound if the unsaved leaves.
4. In 1Co 7:17–24, he gives instructions to all: Abide in Christ, and be content.
5. In 1Co 7:25–40, counsel is given to the unmarried and to widows (cf., 1Ti 5:3–16). Of special note, see 1Co 7:27–28, where the right of divorced believers to remarry is established—contrary to most modern popular opinion.
6. In 1Co 8:1–13, the law of love is contrasted to the boast of knowledge.

Application:

1. Jesus sets forth the ideal of marriage in Mat 5:31–32, Mat 19:3–12. As with the ideal of the Christian life (Joh 8:12; 1Jo 2:6), we all fall short (Jam 3:1), and failure is to be met with compassion, not judgment.
2. Jesus exemplified and expounded on the law of love (Mat 5:43–48, Mat 17:24–27, Mat 18:6–9). The love of God is above the law of liberty (1Co 6:12) and all other laws as well. It is the standard of life in Christ. Questions regarding marriage are addressed in 1Co 7:1–40
3. Ultimately, the law of love should guide our every decision, recognizing that doing what is best for others is ultimately the best for us, 1Co 13:4–8.

B. Study Five: The Law of Love Exemplified, Explained, and Applied (1Co 9–11)

The “law of love” has been called “the eleventh commandment,” based on Joh 13:34–35. It is “the law written on the heart” anticipated by the prophets (Jer 31:33–34), and fulfilled in the New Covenant (Rom 8:1–4). Whereas the Law of Moses was “*weak through the flesh*” (Rom 8:3), the law of love is “the power working in us” by the Spirit (Eph 3:16, Eph 3:20).

1. In 1Co 9:1–27, the question is regarding balancing freedom with sacrifice. Which is better? To claim my right to freedom, or to sacrifice my freedom for the sake of greater service? Paul’s example shows us.
2. In 1Co 10:1–33, what is the motivating factor behind the law of love? In this chapter, we have answers to questions regarding the “falling away” of the believer. See Joh 8:12, Joh 11:9–10, and Joh 16:32. Staying focused on three things will protect us from this failure:
 - a. 1Co 10:1–13—focus on the love of God
 - b. 1Co 10:14–22—focus on the fellowship of God
 - c. 1Co 10:23–31—focus on the glory of God
3. In 1Co 11:1–34, Paul raises the question regarding authority and obedience. There was apparently in Corinth a “women’s liberation” movement. This is obvious here and again in 1Co 14. God has established an order of authority in every aspect of His creation: the individual, marriage, family, and nation.
 - a. 1Co 11:1–16—authority and order in the home
 - b. 1Co 11:17–34—authority and order in the Church

Application:

1. Jesus, in all His dealings with sinners (cf., Joh 4:4ff, Joh 8:1ff; Luk 19:1ff), demonstrated that *“love is the fulfillment of the law”* (Rom 13:10).
2. The law of love does not negate either authority or liberty.
3. There is evident authority and yet liberty in the Godhead.
4. Rather, love takes the sting out of authority, and the danger out of liberty. Love is where *“Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed”* (Psa 85:10).

C. Study Six: Questions Regarding Spiritual Gifts—1Co 12–14

1. In 1Co 12:1–31, the question arises regarding the source, purpose, and function of spiritual gifts.
 - a. 1Co 12:1–6—their source is the Godhead.
 - b. 1Co 12:7–11—their purpose is the edification of the Body.
 - c. 1Co 12:12–31—their function is illustrated by the physical body.
Note: God’s purpose in giving the gifts (Act 1:8; 1Co 12:7; Eph 4:7–16)
2. In 1Co 13:1–13, the question arises regarding the effective working of gifts.
 - a. 1Co 12:31—this is the *“more excellent way.”*
 - b. 1Co 13:1–3—gifts can be misused, with attendant loss of reward
 - c. 1Co 13:4–8—as in all things spiritual, love must be our motivation.
 - d. 1Co 13:9–13—temporary gifts vs. permanent gifts
3. In 1Co 15:1–40, there is a question regarding gifts and church order.
 - a. 1Co 14:1–19—the preeminence of Bible teaching in the Church. The word *“prophesy”* speaks of proclaiming the Word of God.
 - 1) 1Co 14:1–5—the benefit and blessing of proclaiming the Word
 - 2) 1Co 14:6–19—the limitations and hindrances of tongues (3 things)
 - b. 1Co 14:20–25—the prophetic and historical purpose of tongues
 - 1) 1Co 14:20–22a—as Isaiah foretold (Isa 28:9–13), tongues are a sign to unbelieving Israel of coming judgment for their unbelief (70 A.D.) (signs relate to Israel, not the Church, 1Co 1:22).
 - 2) 1Co 14:22b–25—tongues are not effective for the work of evangelism or discipleship, which is the ultimate goal for the Church (Mat 28:18–20).
 - c. In 1Co 14:26–40—restrictions on the exercise of tongues in assembly
 - 1) 1Co 14:26–28—since edification is the objective, no one is to speak in a tongue without a gifted interpreter (cf., 1Co 12:30b).
 - 2) 1Co 14:29–33—those who are *“prophets”* (i.e., Bible teachers) are to have precedence, and to speak in order, and no more than three, with each judging the words of the one speaking. **Note:** Bear in mind that the gift of prophecy (1Co 12:29, 1Co 14:29) was a temporary gift by which New Testament truths were revealed, until the completion of the N.T. text (1Co 13:9–13).
 - d. In 1Co 14:34–40, the women were to remain silent, being submissive to their own husbands, and to the authority and order of the local church.

Application:

1. Jesus Christ is in the process of building His Church, using each believer as an instrument to accomplish His masterpiece (Mat 16:13–20; 1Pe 2:4–10).
2. For God’s purpose in giving the gifts, read Act 1:8; 1Co 12:7; and Eph 4:7–16.
3. Each and every believer is given a spiritual gift as an expression of the indwelling Holy Spirit and to define their role in His Body (1Co 12:7; Eph 4:7–16).
4. Spiritual gifts fall into two main categories: teaching and serving, or ministering (1Pe 4:10–11).
5. The way to identify your gift is to grow up in your faith, serve in whatever capacity you can, and pray for guidance. In time you will see your “gift and calling” emerge supernaturally.

D. Study Seven: Questions Regarding Resurrection/Giving—1Co 15:1–16:12

The Corinthians had a real problem with the idea of resurrection. Being Greeks, they had learned all their lives that the body was evil—like a prison—and that death released them from the body. Thus some rejected the teaching of the resurrection of Christ (1Co 15:12), as well as the bodily resurrection of believers. Paul responds by writing the most extended passage in the Scriptures regarding the doctrine of resurrection.

1. In 1Co 15:1–58, questions regarding the resurrection:
 - a. 1Co 15:1–11—the gospel according to Paul; he preached it, they received it by faith, then later came to reject it.
 - b. 1Co 15:12–19—implications of rejecting the resurrection of Christ
 - c. 1Co 15:20–34—the triumph and tragedy of the resurrection. The triumph is in the victory of Christ. The tragedy is in their unbelief. The reference to those who are “*baptized for the dead.*”
 - d. 1Co 15:29—is an apparent reference to some cultish practice familiar to the Corinthians. Baptism does not save (1Co 1:17), nor has this practice ever been a part of biblical Christianity.
 - e. 1Co 15:35–49—the nature of the resurrection body will differ greatly from our present body, and will reflect our growth and service.
 - f. 1Co 15:50–58—the resurrection of Church-Age believers involves the mystery of the Rapture (1Th 4:13–18) and is our final victory in Christ.

Application on Resurrection:

1. Jesus Christ is Himself “*the resurrection and the life*” (Joh 11:25–26).
2. When we believe in Him, we receive resurrection life (Rom 6:1–14).
3. At the Rapture of the Church, all Church-Age believers—living and dead—will be physically resurrected (1Co 15:50–58; 1Th 4:13–18).

4. Old Testament and Tribulation believers will be resurrected at the Second Advent (or Second Coming) (Job 19:25–27; Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2–3; Mat 27: 52—a preview; Joh 5:24–30; Heb 11:39–40; Rev 20:4–6).
2. 1Co 16:1–12, questions regarding giving/offerings

There is much more information regarding these offerings in 2Co 8:1–9. The primary focus in all these passages was an offering for the saints in Jerusalem, hard hit by persecution and famine. However, the same principles apply for all church giving.

- a. 1Co 16:1–4—instructions regarding taking up the offering:
 - 1) To be collected on the first day of the week (Sunday), when the early church met.
 - 2) To be set aside by individual believers as God had prospered them (cf., 2Co 9:6–15).
 - 3) Not to be taken when Paul came, lest people give with wrong motives (cf., 2Co 9:1–5).
 - 4) All monies to be handled by a delegation of men who are of good reputation (cf., 2 Co 8:16–24; 2Co 9:1–5).
- b. 1Co 16:5–12—anticipation of Paul’s upcoming visit:
 - 1) He will come through Macedonia.
 - 2) He will come when he has finished his present work in Ephesus.
 - 3) He will send Timothy ahead and wanted to send Apollos, but he was unwilling to come.

Application on Giving:

Note the relationship of giving and greatness (Mat 18:1–4; Luk 22:24–30).

III. Farewell—1Co 16:13–20

- A. The all-encompassing, five-fold command (1Co 16:13–14). These five commands are a great summary to the book. Those who take them seriously will not fail to correct or avoid the pitfalls of the Corinthians, and to attain to a level of Christ-conformity.
- B. An example to imitate (1Co 16:15–18). The household of Stephanus, along with Fortunatus and Achaicus, represents the best of the fruits of Paul’s ministry among the Corinthians. He accepts their offerings, which were personally made to Paul, on behalf of the entire Church.
- C. Final greetings/farewell (1Co 16:19–20). Here we find Aquila and Priscilla again, hosting a church in their home. They are probably the greatest New Testament example of a husband/wife ministry team.

This couple moved from Rome to Corinth (Act 18:2), then on to Ephesus with Paul (Act 18:18–19), then back to Rome, again laboring for the Lord (Rom 16:3), being greeted by Paul in his epistle to the church in Rome. Finally, they were again in Ephesus with Timothy toward the end of Paul’s life (2Ti 4:19).

Conclusion

Thus ends the First Corinthian epistle. Though this was a “problem church” for Paul, how thankful we ought to be for them, for without their problems and questions, we would not have the answers and guidance provided in this wonderful letter. As with all the epistles, the challenge is to lay hold of the character of Christ. We are to be “*transformed by the renewing of [our] minds*” (Rom 12:2), and to “*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus*” (Phi 2:5).