

# Growing Together



## 1 Corinthians 1:1-7:40

### *Bible Study/Sermon Series Guide*

*‘For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ’*

1 Cor. 3:11

September 13, 2015- November 2015

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Imagine a society that advanced self-gratification and unrestrained freedom; valued strength, wisdom, and competition; idolized wealth and power. Does any of this seem familiar? Perhaps your mind was drawn to the world in which we live even though I was talking about the city of Corinth some 2000 years ago.

The book of 1 Corinthians was written to a church facing many of the same pressures that the church today faces: the expectation to conform to society's norm, the call to compromise central beliefs, the ridicule and mocking for believing something so 'foolish.' These pressures had made their way into the church and were being accepted as normal practices which was threatening the unity of the believers in Corinth.

There is much that a church like ours, facing similar realities, can learn from an in-depth study of 1 Corinthians. The basic question we will be grappling with over the next 8 months is **“What is the church?”** And more specifically, **“What does a church grounded on Christ look like in the face of pressure to conform and compromise?”**

This letter to the Corinthians encourages a struggling church to remain grounded on Christ while glorifying God with their life. The church is being reminded that it must keep the main thing central—that Jesus is salvation, redemption, hope, and life—everything else must be ordered around the supremacy of this truth.

These are words that we as the church need to be challenged by as we allow the Holy Spirit to shape us into a united people under Christ who are light-bearers in this dark world. As we are challenged, may we also be encouraged with the sure hope of God's love for us in Jesus Christ which binds us to each other and to our God Himself.

May God be glorified in our church and in our lives as we sit under and are shaped by His Word together.

*Pastor J-M*

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## **Background to 1 Corinthians**

**The city of Corinth and its people:** Corinth was a cosmopolitan Roman city strategically located on a narrow stretch of land joining Northern and Southern Greece. The city developed into a centre of commerce as it was located on a major North/South trade road and on a portage route as sailors dragged their boats between the Aegean and Ionian seas. This brought people and wealth to the city.

Corinth originally existed as a Greek city before Rome destroyed it in 146 B.C. The strategic geographical location meant that it was re-established as a city in 44 B.C. and was resettled by soldiers, merchants, and slaves though it soon became an attractive city for immigrants looking to make money with new business ventures.

The bi-annual Isthmian Games, a close parallel to the Olympics, had a tremendous influence on the culture of the city. It drew a wide range of people to the city and drove the economy. Its impact on the city is evident throughout the book of 1 Corinthians.

The ‘flavour’ of the city can be summarized as “prosperous, cosmopolitan, and religiously pluralistic, accustomed to visits by impressive, traveling public speakers and obsessed with status, self-promotion, and personal rights.”<sup>1</sup> This influenced the church, its witness, and its work.

**Author and Date:** The Apostle Paul (1:1) wrote this letter around AD 55, 2 years after his first visit to the city.

**Literary Genre/Occasion:** 1 Corinthians is a **letter** written by Paul to the church in Corinth. Given the content of the letter, it is believed he wrote in response to a letter he received from someone inside the church about the problems in the church.

### **Key Themes**

Wisdom is presented in a counter-cultural way in that Paul encourages the church to seek Christ and only Christ as opposed to pursuing the ways and pleasures of the world—the things the world proclaims as strengths.

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<sup>1</sup> Ciampa, Roy E. & Brian S. Rosner. *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 2010. 3.

Unity in the body is perhaps the central theme of this book as all of Paul's arguments exhort the church to live together under Christ. Much of the letter is spent speaking against living in ways that divide human relationships within the church and that divide the church's relationship with God.

Christ the Foundation: Christ is the key to 1 Corinthians as Paul continually points to Christ in his witness and life. Christ is the model for the church's life together and is its only hope for life. The grace and mercy of God through Jesus is readily present throughout the letter.

The Glory of God: This is the ultimate aim of the life of the church and everyone in it. Life is to be focused and centred around God and not primarily on self, as it often is.

**Structure**: There is some debate as to how 1 Corinthians should be ordered as it does not have an easily discernible outline. This is how we will work through the letter:

- I. Greeting and Thanksgiving (1:1-9)
- II. Division in the Church: Conforming to the world (1:10-4:21)
  - a. In following Leaders or Christ (1:10-2:16)
  - b. In the Church's Foolishness (3:1-4:21)
  - c. In sexual Immorality (5:1-13)
  - d. In lawsuits Among Believers (6:1-11)
  - e. In sexual Immorality (6:12-20)
- III. Freedom in the Church: Exercising control as a free believer (7:1-11:1)
  - a. In Marriage (7:1-39)
  - b. In Cultural Customs (8:1-13)
  - c. In Surrendering Rights (9:1-23)
  - d. In Remembering Past Sin (9:24-10:22)
  - e. In Living for God (10:23-11:1)
- IV. Unity in the Church and Worship: Honouring God (11:2-14:39)
  - a. In Worship (11:2-16)
  - b. In coming to the Lord's Supper (11:17-26)
  - c. In using spiritual gifts (12:1-31)
  - d. In showing love (13:1-13)
  - e. In using spiritual gifts (14:1-40)
- V. The Central Truth of the Church: The Resurrection (15:1-58)
- VI. Conclusion (16:1-24)

**Week 1: 1 Cor. 1:1-9**

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage (look for repeated words)?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for similar words and themes)?

To whom is the letter written and to what does Paul encourage them?

For what does Paul give thanks?

What work are you being called to by God? What work is our church called to?

How is God speaking to you personally? What is He saying to our church?

Notes: 1 Cor. 1:1-9

**Week 2: 1 Cor. 1:10-17**

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage (look for repeated words)?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for similar words and themes)?

What does it mean/look like to agree with one another?

What divisions existed within the Corinthian Church? What exists in our church?

How is God speaking to you personally? What is He saying to our church?

Notes: 1 Cor. 1:10-17



**Week 3: 1 Cor. 1:18-31**

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage (look for repeated words)?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for similar words and themes)?

How does the world define power? What does Paul say power is?

Whom did God choose? Based on what qualities?

How is God speaking to you personally? What is He saying to our church?



### Week 4: 1 Cor. 2:1-16

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage (look for repeated words)?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for similar words and themes)?

Are we (individually and collectively) guilty of proclaiming the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom? In what ways?

What does it look like (in your life and in the church) to know nothing but Christ?

What do we learn about the Holy Spirit?

How is God speaking to you personally? What is He saying to our church?

Notes: 1 Cor. 2:1-16

**Week 5: 1 Cor. 3:1-23**

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage (look for repeated words)?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for similar words and themes)?

Over what was the Corinthian church divided? Where do you see division in the church today over similar issues?

What are the parts of the building that Paul uses as an image of the church? How do they correspond to the work of the church?

How is God speaking to you personally? What is He saying to our church?

Notes: 1 Cor. 3:1-23

## Week 6: 1 Cor. 4:1-21

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage (look for repeated words)?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for similar words and themes)?

Think of someone who is a model for your faith. What is it about them that you wish to emulate? How are you growing because of their example?

Why does Paul devote so much time comparing himself to the people in the church?

How are you being called to move beyond the 'talk' of faith to put your faith into action?

How is God speaking to you personally? What is He saying to our church?

Notes: 1 Cor. 4:1-21



### Week 7: 1 Cor. 5:1-13

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage (look for repeated words)?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for similar words and themes)?

What is Paul 'calling out' concerning the practices of the church?

How does Paul encourage the church to deal with this issue? Why is he so forceful with his words?

Think of the church in general and ours specifically. Do they tend to be places exclusively for the 'pure' (a holy-huddle) or overly tolerant?

How is God speaking to you personally? What is He saying to our church?

Notes: 1 Cor. 5:1-13

## **Week 8: 1 Cor. 6:1-11**

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage (look for repeated words)?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for similar words and themes)?

What behaviour(s) is Paul encouraging the Corinthians to reject?

To what does Paul encourage the church instead of practicing these behaviours?

How is God encouraging you to live as a washed, sanctified, and justified person in Jesus?

How is God speaking to you personally? What is He saying to our church?

Notes: 1 Cor. 6:1-11

**Week 9: 1 Cor. 6:12-20**

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage (look for repeated words)?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for similar words and themes)?

How do you hold together freedom and being bought as a slave to Christ?

Why does it matter how we as Christians live, if in fact we are free?

In what ways are we tempted to glorify our bodies in ways that are not pleasing to God?

How is God speaking to you personally? What is He saying to our church?

Notes: 1 Cor. 6:12-20

**Week 10: 1 Cor. 7:1-16**

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage (look for repeated words)?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for similar words and themes)?

What does a marriage relationship based on mutual care, concern, and love for the other practically look like?

Are there ever grounds for divorce? When or why?

Why do you think Paul encourages a believer to remain married to his/her unbelieving spouse? What impact might that have on the family?

How is God speaking to you personally? What is He saying to our church?

Notes: 1 Cor. 7:1-16



**Week 11: 1 Cor. 7:17-24**

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage (look for repeated words)?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for similar words and themes)?

How do you think of your work: in terms of self-fulfillment or as part of God's call in your life?

Have you ever found yourself envious of another Christian's spirituality?  
What does Paul say about this in this passage?

How can you make the best of every situation instead of longing for something different?

How is God speaking to you personally? What is He saying to our church?

Notes: 1 Cor. 7:17-24

**Week 12: 1 Cor. 7:25-40**

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage (look for repeated words)?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for similar words and themes)?

What distracts you from whole-hearted Christian faith, life, and service?

We are warned about the pressures of the world (society). How are we as Christians to respond to societal pressure?

Have you ever felt pressure to do the right thing or identify the one 'good' thing according to God's will? How does Paul address this?

How is God speaking to you personally? What is He saying to our church?

Notes: 1 Cor. 7:25-40